

What makes us Malaysian in the digital space?



**FARLINA
MD SAID**

IN the first five phases of the Movement Control Order (MCO), Malaysia used technology in specific ways.

Among the most prominent was to highlight specific groups for contact tracing efforts through applications such as MySejahtera, to control the movement of people on platforms like Gerak Malaysia and to cope with work-from-home endeavours where the Malaysia Digital Economy Corporation and private sector companies such as Microsoft provided tutorials on video conferencing and adopted digital means of conducting operations and delivering services.

While the conversation can ex-

pand to discuss data policies, privacy and cyber hygiene, the use of the Internet to cope with movement restriction demonstrated the possibility of an utterly digital Malaysia.

In a situation where many Malaysians were confined to their homes, digital connectivity offered access to information, avenues for companies to continue running their businesses as well as to evoke a sense of community.

Malaysia has been on the positive trajectory of a digital nation. This year, more than 80 per cent of Malaysians will have access to the Internet, whether by the speeds offered by Malaysia's fibre optics or mobile data access. However, the concepts of a digital nation are still unfolding.

In some parts of the world, the notion of a digital nation is linked with productivity. Estonia's E-Estonia focuses on developing digital as an identity, where services — from e-ambulance to online voting — of the government and the private sector connect Estonia's 1.3 million population.

Interpretations of a digital na-

tion can also be associated with data management processes to dispense online IDs such as with India's Aadhar.

Other ideas include empowering citizens with digital and functional skills while being mindful of civic interactions, such as the Council of Europe's reference for democratic culture.

In such views, digital citizenship is seen as a form of social participation that articulates democratic values such as defending and promoting human rights, democracy and the rule of law as well as preserving values in a culturally diverse society. Thus, the products of digital citizenship can be political forums or the organisation of political movements.

Technology is not a tool easily defined for the purpose of nation-building. Technology on its own rarely sparks collective memory, nostalgia or promotes a nation's image-building.

If developing kinship is based on propagating certain narratives, imagination and resources would be needed to repurpose in-

ventions into tools that could fashion the idea of a nation.

During the MCO and throughout the management of Covid-19, Malaysia has not been devoid of national consciousness.

Hashtags such as #KitaJagaKita and organising efforts to deliver food items, masks or Personal Protective Equipment indicate the capability of Malaysians to galvanise cyberspace to provide comfort while practising civic duties during the pandemic.

However, #KitaJagaKita also reared an interesting perspective when online discourse of migrants demarcated definite distinctions in the "we" of "Kita".

As such, the online Malaysian has a certain identity with political values.

The sense of community online during the initial phases of the MCO displayed possibilities for discussions on a digital nation beyond just e-government processes and GDP-contributing productivity.

One aspect of nation-building is about galvanising a sense of

community while another could be about exploring civic education. Challenges to the first can be closing the digital gap, seeking ingenuity to reproduce ideas of nationhood online and leveraging universal values to bolster a local sense of identity.

For the latter, normalising values for civic behaviour online could be sharpened by laws on hate speech and discrimination. Conversation of its relevance, particularly in digital spaces, could be considered.

With a newly-minted National Unity Ministry, conversations on national unity should not disregard digital spaces.

As the remainder of this year will be spent under the MCO, the number of Malaysians going digital is not expected to flag.

As Malaysia heads for a digital future, the question of what makes us Malaysians online can be probed further.

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