Digitalisation and e-waste

THE Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of digitalisation. Dobrica Savic wrote in his paper, "Covid-19 and Work from Home: Digital Transformation", that the global spread of Covid-19 forced businesses to innovate and change their business practices. Working from home suddenly became mandatory and the importance of office spaces has waned. This sudden need to work from home is speeding up the digital transformation of the workplace. Since the outbreak of the pandemic, widespread adoption of telecommuting has become a business necessity.

Furthermore, movement restrictions have caused more people to purchase and sell products and services digitally, further speeding the digitalisation process. Food ordering and grocery shopping systems, as well as fintech networks are all expanding, signalling that the world is shifting towards electronic solutions.

According to a news article, after the movement control order went into effect in Malaysia, sales at a local online shopping portal increased across the country, including rural areas.

The growth in online transactions shows that many people are now comfortable making purchases online – this is a critical component of the transition to a fully digital economy. In addition, the availability of online payment systems

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has made it easier for companies to access the digital economy.

Furthermore, digital currency, also known as cryptocurrencies, has grown in popularity. Many people have been drawn to invest in digital currencies as a result of the pandemic. This was demonstrated when the valuation of one of the most popular digital currencies, Bitcoin, skyrocketed. For the first time in history, Bitcoin's price surpassed US$50,000 (RM200,000) on Feb 16, 2021. Acceptance of digital currency is yet another positive step towards digital transition.

The Malaysian government recognises the value of investing in digital technology. This is mirrored in the 2020 Budget, which allocated RM1bil to support digital transformation in the areas of cybersecurity, connectivity, Internet of Things, and creative talent.

The budget stresses the advancement of high-quality digital infrastructure, with an emphasis on bolstering digital information, promoting digitalisation, improving e-commerce, and facilitating the usage of 5G technologies. The Malaysia Digital Economy Blueprint (MyDigital) and Jalinan Digital Negara (Jendela) are two policies that the government has implemented to speed the country's digital transformation.

All of this means that more and more people will be living digital lives and using a wide range of technology and electronic and electrical items. And therein lies one of the negative consequences of digitalisation: e-waste.

Electrical appliances that are defective or old/outdated are referred to as "e-waste". It is increasingly becoming a global issue. According to the Department of Environment Malaysia, e-waste carries hazardous substances that can harm humans, animals and the environment. If e-waste is not handled properly and simply thrown out with the garbage, it will end up in landfills where it poses a risk to both human health and the environment.

As a consequence of the growing need – and also popularity – of working from home, people are buying the tech devices they need, including smartphones, tablets, computers and printers among other related items. However, if such items are not properly disposed of, human health and the environment will be affected.

In Malaysia, especially in Sabah, e-waste is still not properly disposed of. In addition, unlike Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah has no clear legislation requiring citizens to separate their household waste. Hence, the state government must develop a comprehensive and specific strategy to deal with the issue of e-waste in order to promote sustainable development as well as a "clean" digital transformation.

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