

# Double-edge effect of communication technology

*While ICT boosts economic growth, it also gives rise to issues such as cyberbullying, cyber scams: Expert*

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**PETALING JAYA:** Malaysia's information and communication technology (ICT) explosion is a double-edged sword with positive and negative aspects, said experts.

Malaysian Employers Federation president Datuk Dr Syed Hussain Syed Husman said in the employment landscape, ICT has ushered in new job opportunities, escalating the demand for advanced technical skills.

"The accelerated adoption of digital infrastructure, telecommunications and software solutions has facilitated enhanced connectivity and driven efficiency across various industries.

"Simultaneously, the thriving e-commerce ecosystem has emerged as a key driver of economic growth, transforming consumer behaviour and business operations," Syed Hussain said.

He added that online transactions and digital platforms have spurred domestic e-commerce growth and positioned Malaysia as a competitive player in the global digital marketplace.

This could be seen from the Statistics Department Report 2022, which stated the combined contributions of ICT and e-commerce amounted to RM412.3 billion, which constitutes 23% of the national economy. This marked a significant growth of 14.8% compared with the RM359.3 billion recorded in 2021.

Syed Hussain said the widespread adoption of ICT has triggered a surge in demand for new skill sets across diverse job sectors and necessitated a commitment to continuous learning.

"We have emphasised the importance of fostering a culture of continuous learning within the workforce to ensure that employee skills remain aligned with the evolving needs of employers."

He added that such a proactive approach has addressed the immediate demand for high-tech skills and positioned the workforce to adapt and thrive in an ever-changing landscape to promote sustained employability.

Syed Hussain stressed that employers need to make upskilling and reskilling efforts a priority to meet changing needs, close employee skill gaps and maintain competitiveness in the rapidly changing job market.

He said integrating ICT skills into the higher education curricula is critical to providing equal access to job opportunities in the rapidly evolving ICT sector.

Recognising the tech-savvy nature of youths who often seek new job opportunities and value flexibility, Syed Hussain said employers face competition from the gig economy to attract and retain talent.

"Approximately 4.5 million individuals are self-employed and the number is rising.

"Formal sector employers must adapt by offering appealing work structures that emphasise ICT skills development," he said.

On the flip side, Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris social communication lecturer Dr Siti Nor Amalina Ahmad Tajuddin said while the rise of ICT, especially the internet, has transformed the dynamics of communications, it has its drawbacks.

She said the reliance on digital means of communication has resulted in fewer face-to-face encounters, which contributes to feelings of loneliness, particularly among the elderly.

"The rise of the gig economy, remote work and digital transactions have conspired to create this situation. Additionally, ICT has given rise to prevalent issues like cyberbullying, impacting both children and adults. Because online communication is anonymous, it has facilitated deceptive practices such as 'catfishing' and cyber scams and provided a platform for predators to target vulnerable users."

Siti Nor Amalina said while ICT enhances connectivity, it also poses challenges to the authenticity and well-being of contemporary social relationships.

"Achieving the ideal balance is essential to building an informed and highly interconnected society, which in turn fosters a more aware and cohesive community," she stressed.