

INCLUSIVE TECHNOLOGY

Malaysia can lead regional AI direction



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BEFORE a paycheck even lands, suggestions flood in from online — trending gadgets from TikTok, timed discounts on Shopee, dessert ads aligned with late-night cravings. These aren't coincidences.

Artificial intelligence (AI) is quietly influencing choices and drawing attention to products in real time.

This is no longer about the future. AI has settled into daily life. It's part of how content is consumed, services are used and purchases are made.

Digital experiences are now crafted, not stumbled upon. Efforts such as the National AI Roadmap and the National AI Office position Malaysia as a leader in digital transformation.

But as algorithms become more embedded, deeper issues emerge. Convenience comes at a cost. Every interaction is tracked, yet the logic behind decisions often remains hidden. Without visibility, trust starts to thin.

AI doesn't just echo existing behaviour — it guides it. When systems rely mostly on input from urban, younger users, the result can be narrow and unrepresentative.

Older populations, rural residents, and minority communities are often left out of the data

loop. That absence creates algorithmic blind spots, reinforcing divides under the guise of personalisation.

Technical success alone isn't enough. If AI is to shape Malaysian life, it must do so with integrity. The Madani framework — founded on values like compassion, respect, innovation, sustainability, prosperity and trust — offers more than policy.

It sets a direction. True respect means guarding against exploitative data use. Real compassion means ensuring that digital tools don't only serve the fluent or connected.

And trust? That grows when systems are transparent and accountable, not hidden behind lines of code.

AI is already choosing what's seen, offered and ignored. The question is no longer whether it works but whether it works fairly and for whom.

Government action can help. Independent algorithm audits and transparency reports should be encouraged. People deserve to understand how their data is used and why certain content or products are prioritised.

A few lines of code can influence public opinion, spending habits, or even social attitudes.

Globally, algorithm-driven platforms have raised concerns around misinformation, surveillance and polarisation. In a diverse nation like Malaysia, responsible AI governance is not optional — it is essential.

Language inclusivity is another concern. When platforms neglect Bahasa Malaysia and use Manglish or regional dialects, large segments of the population may be excluded.

Inclusivity must be intentional, not assumed.

There are encouraging signs.

One local beauty brand recently used an AI chatbot to resolve a customer complaint — offering a prompt, personalised apology and a voucher. The interaction felt efficient and sincere, showing that responsible AI can enhance human connection.

Yet, many small and medium enterprises remain at early stages of adoption. While interest in AI is growing, implementation remains limited. Many



Data server components containing the latest artificial intelligence chips made by Nvidia displayed at a software conference in San Jose, California in March. REUTERS

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businesses, especially in rural areas, need clearer guidance and support.

This is where public-private partnerships can make a difference. Agencies working with tech platforms can lead AI awareness campaigns, especially in rural schools and community centres.

Digital literacy is the first step toward digital fairness.

Such efforts could be supported by a national AI ethics code for marketing — providing clear principles around fairness, inclusion and accountability. Policy-makers would do well to bring this to the forefront of digital governance discussions.

Looking ahead, Malaysia has a chance to lead. As Asean chair in 2025, we are in a unique position to shape the region's direction on responsible technology.

The Asean Digital Economy Framework Agreement may

serve as a platform to align data governance and strengthen digital cooperation.

AI is here to stay — but how it is used remains a choice. A trustworthy digital future depends not just on clever code, but on shared values, clear guardrails and inclusive dialogue.

This means engaging all stakeholders — industry, policymakers, civil society and the public. Through openness and collaboration, AI can serve the public good rather than narrow interests.

Because in this algorithm-driven age, those who build with care won't just capture attention — they'll earn lasting trust.

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