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The Straits Times says

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Skyrocketing rates of usage of information communication devices around the world is a trend of economic and social significance that matters to Singapore. Indeed, strategists here have staked the city-state's future partly on the digital economy. Singaporeans love gadgets too and spend hours daily on them. So, do they think the nation is equipped to play in the digital big league?

Assuringly, an Ernst & Young study shows that over half of digitally active Singaporeans believe the nation is advanced in this area. That is confirmed by its top ranking on the World Economic Forum's Network Readiness Index which measures the ability of nations to exploit information technology opportunities. Among the key drivers

of this metric are the policies and rules that shape the business and innovation environment, and the economic and social impact of the digital environment (for example, the presence of a culture of embracing technology across sectors).

Yet, many are not satisfied with the cost of digital access here. The cost of mobile data is deemed unreasonable by 44 per cent of people, according to the Ernst & Young survey. A third of Singaporeans say the cost of fixed Internet access is unreasonable, and a quarter think they already spend too much on digital. Affordability matters as this could hinder digital enterprise, notes the study. The hope was for the fourth telco to provide competitive services but the winning bid

of TPG Telecom has been described as "overly aggressive". There is cause to fear that consumers might wind up picking the tab for this, as well as for the huge sums paid at the auction for premium airwaves - up to six times the reserve price.

While the usage of gadgets (in some cases bordering on an obsession) boosts interest in technology, what matters more in developing a digital economy is the cultivation of a range of digital skills. Unfortunately, these are in short supply. In cyber security, data analytics and development and network infrastructure, for example, there could be a shortage of 30,000 IT professionals by 2020. A Singapore Management University and JP Morgan study notes that there are insufficient

training schemes and entry routes for mid-career professionals. In cyber security in particular, which is a dominant concern of digitally active Singaporeans, there is an acute shortage of Singapore talents and little progress has been made to narrow the skills gap, according to the report.

To retain the top spot in network readiness and reap economic benefits from it, Singaporeans will have to go beyond being devoted users of gadgets and become producers of digital services too. For example, more could be done to digitally leverage another passion: shopping. Ernst & Young sees "significant opportunity" in integrating bricks and mortar with the virtual world to create a "seamless, omnichannel experience".

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