Poor digital awareness and skills are a barrier to internet use in Sri Lanka

Access to the right devices (internet-enabled smartphones), affordable internet services, relevant content in a language known to the user, and the appropriate skills to make use of these digital services are collectively seen to be important to ensure economic and social development.

AfterAccess survey data shows that 62% of aged 15-65 Sri Lankans have heard of the internet but just 37% (just over half of those aware) say they use it. Low use of the internet points to inadequate digital skills, literacy and awareness among Sri Lankans aged between 15-65. This is particularly true for women, older, rural, less-educated and low-income communities. Furthermore, the online experiences of those without appropriate digital skills is vastly different compared to those that do.

Failure to address this growing digital divide online – beyond simple access – can have long-term repercussions on Sri Lanka's potential for effectively participating in and contributing to an increasingly digital world.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Integrate necessary digital skills into primary and secondary ICT curricula across all schools

2. Target digital skills and awareness programmes for rural, female and the elderly

3. Conduct public campaigns to promote healthy online behaviour and social media use, particularly on online privacy, security, safety and ethics

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Low levels of digital literacy and awareness
- 61% of non-internet users state that they do not know what the internet is or what it has to offer and 6% do not know how to get online or make use of the internet.
- 58% of those who do not own a mobile phone state that they do not need a mobile phone and 11% state that they do not know how to use a mobile phone.

Internet users do not go beyond browsing on social media
- 60% of internet users spent most of their time on social media or entertainment related activities when online; only 40% say they spend the majority of their time on activities related to education, work, job search and online shopping and so on.
- 70% of internet users do not make use of e-government services; of that 42% say they do not know how to access these services, and 30% find no value in doing so.
- E-commerce use is low in Sri Lanka and 22% of internet users who are *aware* of such services but do not use, say that they do not know *how* to.

Internet users do not really understand online risks/harms
- Sri Lankans have the highest concern about online risks (among all the Asian countries studied) but were also most willing to share their personal information online.

About LIRNEasia

LIRNEasia is a pro-poor, pro-market digital policy think tank. Its mission is catalyzing policy change through research to improve people's lives in the emerging Asia Pacific by facilitating their use of hard and soft infrastructures through the use of knowledge, information and technology. LIRNEasia has been active in the Asia Pacific since 2005, conducting both demand and supply-side research as well as advocating for policy changes in the ICT sector on issues ranging from universal service policy to open data, gender, big data and more.