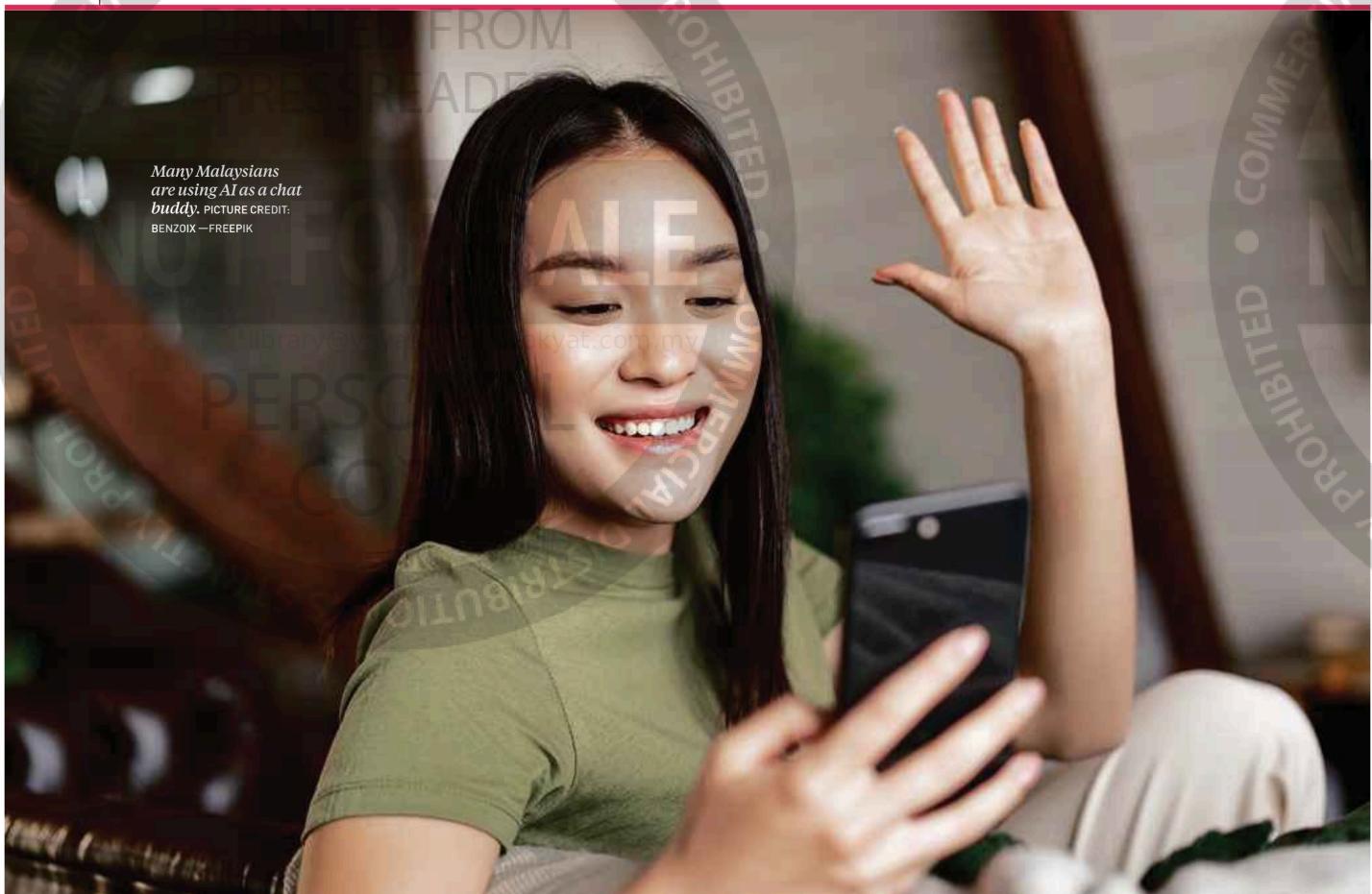


Many Malaysians are using AI as a chat buddy. PICTURE CREDIT: BENZOIX — FREEPIK



**A**RTIFICIAL intelligence is becoming more than just a digital helper during the holiday season. Research by cybersecurity firm Kaspersky shows that for a growing number of users, AI is also emerging as a form of emotional support, particularly among Gen Z and millennials.

This trend is evident in Malaysia.

The study, conducted ahead of the 2025/2026 year-end holidays, found widespread AI use during the festive period.

Globally, 74 per cent of respondents said they planned to use AI-powered tools during the holidays, rising to 86 per cent among those aged between 18 and 34.

In Malaysia, enthusiasm was higher, with 79 per cent of respondents saying they would rely on AI as an assistive tool during the holidays.

While AI remains popular for practical tasks, such as planning and shopping, the research suggests its role is broadening, and, in some cases, becoming more personal.

#### IDEA GENERATOR

More than half of AI users plan to use the technology to search for recipes (56 per cent) or find restaurants and accommodation (54 per cent), highlighting its appeal as a time-saving

# Talking to AI when holidays get lonely

research tool.

AI is also gaining traction as a creative tool.

Half of respondents said they would turn to AI to brainstorm gift ideas, plan celebrations or getting tips on festive decorations.

A similar proportion would rely on it for suggestions on how to spend their free time.

Shopping remains another major use case.

About half of respondents view AI as a shopping assistant that can help generate shopping lists, compare prices and analyse reviews.

Younger users were more open to AI as a budget planner, with 50 per cent of those aged 18 to 34 open to this function, compared with just 31 per cent among those aged 55 and above.

In Malaysia, respondents reported

using AI most frequently to search for restaurants and accommodation (62 per cent), find the best shopping deals (60 per cent), discover cooking recipes (56 per cent) and manage budgets (54 per cent).

#### BETTER COMPANION?

Beyond planning and productivity, the research uncovered a more unexpected trend—using AI as a chat buddy to seek emotional support.

Globally, 29 per cent of respondents who use AI during the holidays said they would consider talking to it when they feel unhappy.

This behaviour is most pronounced among younger users, with 35 per cent of Gen Z and millennial respondents expressing interest in AI-powered emotional support.

In contrast, only 19 per cent of

those aged 55 and above said they would turn to AI when feeling upset.

In Malaysia, the proportion is slightly higher than the global average, with 31 per cent of respondents indicating they would talk to AI when they feel low during the holiday period.

#### PRIVACY AND SECURITY

While AI chatbots may feel personal and private, Kaspersky cautioned that users should remain mindful of data privacy and security risks.

Most AI services are operated by commercial entities with their own data collection and processing policies, raising concerns about how personal conversations may be stored or used.

Users are advised to review privacy

policies carefully, avoid sharing sensitive or identifying information and stick to reputable AI platforms with strong security track records.

There is also a risk of malicious or fake AI bots designed to extract personal data for fraud or phishing, making the use of security solutions with AI-based threat detection increasingly important.

"As large language models rapidly evolve, their potential for engaging in meaningful dialogue with users grows as well," said Kaspersky AI Technology Research Centre group manager Vladislav Tushkanov.

"However, it is important to remember that they learn from vast amounts of Internet data, which means they can also reproduce errors and biases from their training sources."

"Users should approach AI suggestions with a healthy dose of scepticism and avoid oversharing personal information."

The study was conducted by Kaspersky's market research centre in November and involved 3,000 respondents in 15 countries, including Malaysia, the United Kingdom, China, Germany and the United Arab Emirates.



#### Bots

By Izwan Ismail