

Universities Beyond the Immediate of Covid 19 and Infographic Analysis: UiTM

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Abstract

The opportunity to seek knowledge is presented whether in fortunate or adverse time. Covid 19 is the most appropriate time to exemplify this. Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), one of Malaysia public higher education providers has shown various initiatives in managing, teaching and learning during this adverse time. These initiatives are presented via infographics, among others. Thus, the objectives of this article is to present infographic analysis of the efforts taken by UiTM in deliberating Covid 19 and what goes beyond. The findings are presented via the acronyms of UiTM - U (Unpredictable, unlearn), i (ingenuity), T (technology) and M (management). It is concluded that the many lessons learnt during the pandemic are valuable in their own way. The practical implication of this research, limitations and recommendations for future studies are shared.

Keywords: Infographic Analysis, Universities, Covid 19, UiTM.

Introduction

The nature of university and higher education providers (HEPs) in general are disrupted by the pandemic. COVID-19 has given a jolt to the world. It has posed adversities as well as opportunities. The variety of efforts carried out by universities and HEPs are applaudable for they provided proof that despite the disruption, they were and are still functioning at the most efficient and effective level possible. However, all these efforts are not nearly done. They are merely the tip of the iceberg. What is of utmost importance is - what goes beyond this COVID-19 pandemic? In deliberating this query, Universiti Teknologi MARA's efforts were analysed. Infographic analysis method which looks into the first impression, the story, the data and the strategy (Readysetresearch, 2022) was chosen. The findings of this study are presented using the acronyms of UiTM - U (Unpredictable, unlearn), i (ingenuity), T (technology) and M (management). The following sections are to present the findings.

U for Un ... unpredictable and unlearn

The first antonym is U for the prefix "un". It is chosen for the prefix could represent the pandemic's core values in higher education – "unpredictable" and "unlearn". The prefix "un" as defined in the online dictionary could mean not, opposite of, to reverse or undo the result of a specified action, to deprive of or remove a specified thing, to release, free or remove from and used as an intensive. In this context, only two definitions are used: the first is where

“un” is used as an intensive in “unpredictable” and second, in “unlearn” where “un” is to mean reverse or undo the result of a specified action.

Unpredictable encompasses COVID-19 for history has proven that a pandemic could have that effects on the world. The complicated nature of a university where it provides a wide variety of functions to diverse stakeholders needs to be considered. It is thus important for UiTM, being the biggest university in Malaysia with its many campuses to be a role model in predicting this unpredictability. This could serve as a benchmark to continue functioning in a more mature way.

One of the ways to look into this is via a “Nerve Centre”. Pablo Illanes, Jonathan Law, Ana Mendy, Saurabh Sanghvi, and Jimmy Sarakatsannis (2020) state that the nerve centre framework’s “overall goal is for the institution to be capable of getting ahead of events, and to react skillfully and strategically”. It is also “to create an organization that can ensure safety and keep essential operations going, while establishing more effective and strategic decision-making systems for the future.” This approach could aptly be embedded in predicting what is to take place in time of major, fast-moving, and disruptive crises. This framework works based on the 4D principles: Discover (forming an accurate view), Decide (decide what to do promptly), Design (design a portfolio of actions), Deliver (deliver solutions in a discipline, efficient ways). On top of the 4D, for universities intending to adopt and adapt this framework in addressing unpredictability, four additional guiding principles are added. They are bringing an equity lens to every decision, staying in close touch with students, faculty, and alumni, thinking beyond your walls and acting with urgency, but with perspective. Figure 1 shows the areas of responsibilities in a nerve centre, where working together is imminent.



Figure 1: Integrated Nerve Centre Framework

Unlearn is the second “un” for “U” analogy for UiTM in addressing COVID-19 ongoing related issues. The lessons learned thus far in facing the pandemic is varied and immense. There are many unfamiliarity that require for a robust approach, especially in a university where learning and teaching are the core business.

Unlearning in the common context of learning is related to forget or undo something. However, the concept is given a more in-depth outlook by (O'Reilly, 2018). He proposes a framework for unlearning where unlearn is seen as a transformative system that could help people to keep ahead. Unlearn "is a powerful system that make you rethink your strategies and retool your methods; mind sets and behaviours so you can thrive in a fast-changing world". The rethinking and retooling are important in dealing with the challenges posed during and the COVID-19 pandemic. This powerful unlearn system works in three stages:

1. Unlearn the behaviours and mind-sets that keep us from moving forward.
2. Relearn new skills, strategies, and innovations that are transforming the world every day.
3. Break through old habits and thinking by opening up to new ideas and perspectives while achieving extraordinary results.

On top of these three, there are other strategies that could be embedded in to make unlearning better. Margie Warrel (2020) suggests that unlearn should incorporate the following approaches:

- Challenge your mental maps
- Ask more questions, trade cleverness for curiosity.
- Be humble. If think you're rather smart, even more so.
- Practice 'De Vuja' and consult your 'future self'
- Embrace the discomfort of change

These myriad of stages and approaches are just the tip of the iceberg, with many more to discover. The main thing is for all of us to see all of these as a mean to an end. What are we trying to achieve and what are we trying to unlearn? Some that could be unlearn are designs, methodologies, technology, approaches, skills, knowledge and many more. However, unlearning the fundamental concept of learning should take place prior to the others. Stodd (2018) suggests that the reality of learning has changed to match the more recent time as seen in Figure 2.

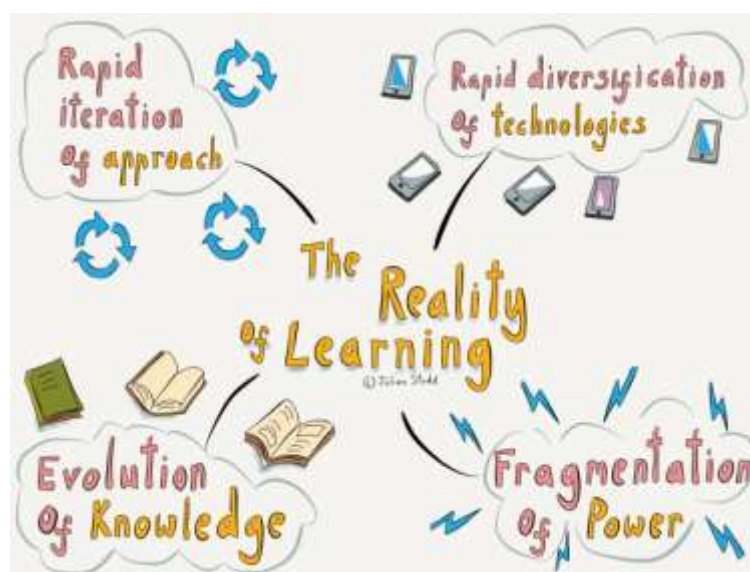


Figure 2: the reality of learning

The constituent of learning is no more of mundane, similar, whole, and regressing. It has changed to be more rapid, diverse, fragmented and experiencing evolution. To match this reality of learning, unlearning is imminent.

Unlearning the reality of learning is exemplified clearly in the Malaysia Educational Blueprint (Higher Education) 2015-2025 on page E7 (Figure 3).



Figure 3: Unlearning the reality of learning in Malaysia Educational Blueprint (Higher Education) 2015-2025

Part of UiTM way in addressing COVID-19 as shown in the various infographics are based on MEB (HE). The next step in action is to strengthen these unlearning so positive effects of things learnt from COVID-19 are fully utilised. The many webinars available in UiTM and over the net is just one example of initiative that could be explored to enhance unlearning and relearning.

Unlearning, when adopted, is not only useful for the students but for all in UiTM system. The unlearning could render a helping hand in achieving what is best for everyone.

Ingenuity

The unprecedented time of COVID-19 has shown that real right or wrong way of dealing with things are blurred. The immediacy for solutions has encouraged for the development of different inventions and innovations of tangible and intangible objects, plans, ideas, ways of work and others. This is not a new culture in UiTM for ingenuity is seen as a source of solving problems. Ingenuity is the word to represent the second acronym “i” in UiTM.

The word “ingenuity” is defined as “the quality of being clever, original, and inventive, often in the process of applying ideas to solve problems or meet challenges” (Lexico Dictionaries, 2020). This is apt in the present time for it provides ample opportunities for ingenuity to prevail. The trust that alternative solutions are always around the corner enhances our positivism that combatting COVID-19 in UiTM specifically and the world generally could be won. There are many instances of ingenuity in UiTM as presented in the previous chapters, from the various materials used to produce PPE’s to various methods of learning, teaching and meeting online.

Ingenuity is a concept that is closely related to creativity. Rita Gilbert, the author of “Living with Art” suggested eight common characteristics of creative people. Having the number of staff (17,706 as of June 2020) with those characteristics to come up with several ingenious results.

1. Analytical ability: allows us to identify problems, recognize important information, and coordinate data to make the right decisions.
2. Fluency: ability for prompting the creation of new ideas spontaneously and quickly.

3. Sensitivity: the faculty by which we perceive external stimuli through our senses. These tell us about the things surrounding us and provide us with diverse information.
4. Flexibility: ability to switch from one idea to another, giving a variety of answers and modifying or shaping our ideas as well as overcoming our own limits.
5. Originality: ability that allows us to contribute new ideas, that are distinct, unique, and break with the established lines of thinking.
6. Optimism: ability to perceive bad situations as opportunities and challenges for growth and ultimately learn from mistakes.
7. Productivity: ability to generate new ideas and put them into practice efficiently.
8. Organizational ability: that allows us to position the factors in the right order to reach our final goal.

The encouragement to develop ingenuity in UiTM never come shorts. There are various platforms to channel and showcase these ingenuities. Invention Innovation & Design Exposition (IIDEX) is an annual International Exhibition and Competition organised by UiTM in cooperation with the Research Management Institute (RMI). This yearly event is awaited by many groups and individuals, students, and scholars, from within UiTM as well as outsiders. The norm in yesteryears, up to 2019, is for IIDEX's participants to present their ideas or products in persons (Figure 4).



Figure 4: IIDEX 2019 F2F IIDEX 2021 Virtual

The year 2021 is the year of a difference. Presentations for IIDEX2020 are to be held virtually (Figure 4). This example of ingenuity is encouraged not just at UiTM level but at branches and faculty level as well



Figure 5: iVEDIIC2022 Virtual Live Presentation

Another platform to share ingenuity in objects, ideas and plans is via publications in journals. UiTM have a range of journals, of which many are internationally recognised with some indexed in high ranking like SCOPUS and ISI. In total, there are 49 active journals titles from the various discipline of research published by UiTM Press. Three journals are listed in Scopus (JMechE, AJUE and MAR), one in Emerging Source Citation Index (APMAJ), two in Excellence in Research Australia (MAR and APMAJ), five in ASEAN Citation Index (JMechE, AJUE, JEESR, JEEIR and JTHCA), twenty in Malaysian Citation Index (MyCite), and thirty-eight in MyJurnal. UiTM Journals are categorized in four subject areas of (i) Arts & Humanities, (ii) Business, Management & Accounting, (iii) Science, Technology & Engineering, (iv) Social Science (as of May 2020). The list of journals could be accessed at <https://journal.uitm.edu.my/ojs/>. Furthermore, the many available official websites in UiTM ranging from branches, faculties, administrative offices, Institutes & Centres, Academic Centres and Centres of Excellence (CoE) provide another platform in sharing ingenious outcomes.

COVID-19 is a crisis and ingenuity can overcome it and make it better. Trust in the ingenuity of all is pertinent in fighting this pandemic.

Technologically Savvy

When the Covid-19 pandemic hit Malaysia, the entire educational ecosystem in UiTM evolved. Initially, almost every warga UiTM, particularly those involved in the teaching and learning process, were struck by panicgogy. 'Panicgogy' is a coined term by Sean Michael Morris (as cited in Kementez, 2020) from the School of Education and Human Development

at the University of Colorado, Denver. The term panicgogy basically refers to students' excessive fear of not achieving the intended learning outcomes due to limitations or obstacles that are beyond their control (Kamenetz, 2020). In this case, the coronavirus outbreak has caused uneasiness among UiTM students who began foreseeing that their learning would experience major disruptions.

As education is UiTM's core business and the students are the main stakeholders, UiTM needed to act fast to ensure the smooth-running of its operation during this global pandemic. To embrace the sudden changes, the whole of warga UiTM must accept that learning must now take place remotely and on digital platforms. For that matter, UiTM needs to grow into a population that is technologically minded. In other words, the pandemic has driven them to search for solutions which are technological in nature due to the restrictive movement during the outbreak. There seemed to be no other way but to integrate ICT into all of UiTM's educational process. Although UiTM has long but partly adopted technology into its operation, apparently now UiTM has started to fully utilise it in its educational system. Therefore, warga UiTM needs to embrace this new norm of becoming tech-savvy so that they won't be left behind. Technologically savvy is the word to represent the third acronym of "T" in UiTM. The capital "T" is definitely to highlight the importance of being tech-savvy in today's circumstances.

It is during this epidemiological threat that UiTM has successfully pooled its resources and expertise to ensure that teaching and learning continue with much ease. More specifically, UiTM's quick transformation and adaptation to online learning mode indicate its continuous effort in providing a healthy learning environment to its students despite teaching and learning are taking place off-campus. Such organisational cultural change has witnessed its academicians, staff, and students being innovative as a result of their productive use of the technology via e-learning. At UiTM, methods of online teaching and learning were not merely employed but improvised for effectiveness.

Although the sudden change was initially troublesome to most lecturers, the technological advancement and perpetual sharing by the learning providers and expert mentors have helped ease the process. Technology is now seen as an integral part in both teaching and learning in UiTM. According to Professor Janor (2020) "Our main objective is to cultivate digitally led thinking throughout the institution—from educators and staff right down to the students. Hence, we needed a creative platform that was both accessible and effective in offering the future skills our students needed".

One of the ways is by adopting global standard creative tools. To meet this purpose, Adobe Creative Cloud was selected after considering its cost and benefits, as well as the return on investment for UiTM, with the approvals from UiTM's executive level, the Ministry of Finance, and the Ministry of Higher Education. Interestingly, this Creative Cloud provides students with access to the entire Adobe desktop and mobile apps tools. In fact, according to Professor Ir. Dr. Abdul Rahman Omar, UiTM's Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research & Innovation), "Overall, Adobe solutions instil more confidence among our students. Adobe Creative Cloud also supplies our educators with the necessary resources to provide training that makes a real impact on their future careers." Hence, with the adoption of the latest industry software, UiTM is now one step ahead of other universities in preparing students for the industry.

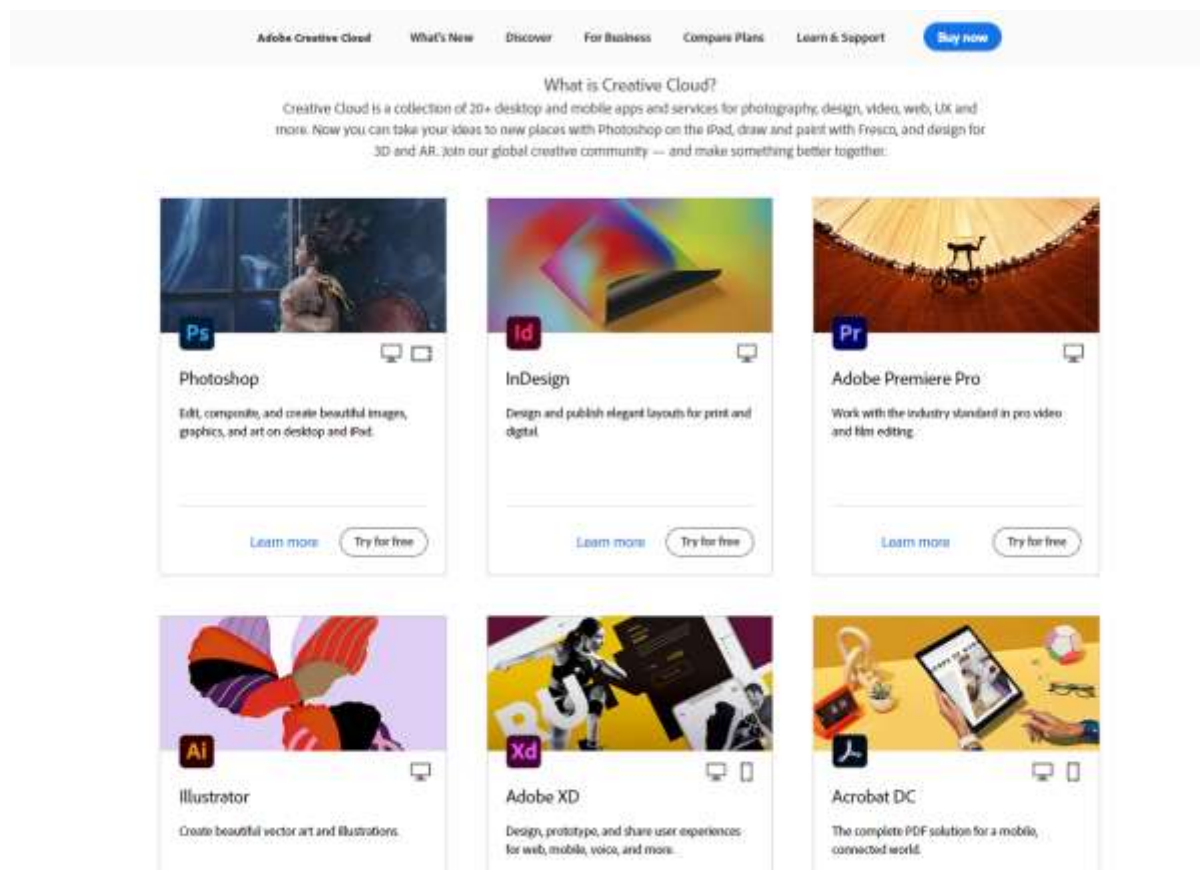


Figure 6: Adoption of industry software

Another aspect that can be learnt from the Covid-19 experience is that UiTM is also very keen at providing its students and staff with post-Covid advantages. UiTM inspires to become “a one-stop centre in ensuring online borderless learning, teaching and human capital development, while maintaining the quality of course contents and programmes offered” (Noor, 2021). Besides that, despite UiTM’s educational landscape that has become vastly different with the adoption of technology, it does not diminish the importance of human factor. Undeniably, technology might augment UiTM lecturers’ role, but it did not replace the lecturers entirely. Lecturers were still needed to deliver the lectures in videos or live sessions and interact with the students even though the teaching platform had changed from physical classes to online entirely.

Apart from that, by taking up the ‘human touch’ approach in its post-Covid higher-education learning, UiTM is deemed to educate and assist its students based on trust, friendliness, and empathy. Even though some students were found to experience issues due to stress and time management as learning at home for them could be difficult as they dealt with domestic demands, this new normal of online learning offers students’ freedom and flexibility and eventually the empowerment of their own learning. With wider array of online communication channels, UiTM students were not hindered from being guided, mentored, and inspired by their lecturers despite they were learning in the isolation of their own homes. UiTM lecturers are encouraged to become creative lecturers in employing various possible channels online like Facebook, Twitter, email, WhatsApp group; compassionate by making

the students aware that they will receive the necessary help (social-emotional learning); and plan generative solutions for the students during the pandemic outbreak.

Multi-tasking

In view of the UiTM's acronym, 'M' stands for Multi-tasking. From this report, evidently the management of Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) has shown how well they have managed the university under abrupt and challenging conditions such as Covid-19. Despite the many and huge challenges, UiTM management has always adopted a multi-tasking approach via their continuous commitment to ensure its staff's health and safety are taken care of. Not only that the management managed to provide critical guidance and support from various aspects, but they also showed commendable efforts at treating important and arising issues with care and urgency during the outbreak. Quick information sharing by the management has also helped ease decision-making in this difficult time. Undeniably, the outbreak has posed huge challenges to students, lecturers, and staff at all levels, healthcare professionals, centers, departments, and branches.

Nonetheless, the outbreak has unfailingly brought its warga together and closer. This could be seen not only from the voluntary efforts in manning operations during the Movement Control Order confined within the university's ground, but also extended to the wider society. The many social responsibility initiatives by warga UiTM are concrete evidence of how everyone can help the country in dealing with the outbreak.

Realising that the current situation has imposed new challenges to community engagement, the Community Network Centre of UiTM Industry, Community and Alumni Network (ICAN) hosted a webinar entitled "Community Engagement Post COVID 19: What are the New Norms?". Researchers, professionals, and civil society should engage together on the humanitarian education to create innovative ways on community engagement. The speakers at the webinar agreed that society should be well-informed on how to reduce and manage risks during catastrophe and empowered with projects for the marginalised, children, and the poor. Hence, there is a need to design socially protected institutions and strengthen multi-sectoral coordination frameworks for social policy post-COVID -19.



Figure 7: Beyond the university, to the community

One of the university's post-Covid community engagement efforts included the provision of RM3.55 million worth of grants to encourage high-impact researches among the university staff in coming up with solutions to generally assist the country in solving community issues and particularly combat the coronavirus pandemic. The grants are aimed

at high profile researchers and visiting researchers, especially for those who have recently completed their Doctor of Philosophy and post-doctoral studies. The provision of grants is through the Education Excellence Fund and Endowment Fund, which is one of the initiatives under UiTM Strategic Plan 2025. By fostering a culture of translational research, it is hoped that the industry, society, and the nation can benefit from it. The contributions of the grants came from its alumni, staff, and the corporate sector. The focus is on six areas of research at the university, namely health and wellness, social and innovation, cyber technology and energy and environment.

Aside from research, UiTM has also stepped up to provide support in terms of social security and health services via the contributions of the alumni, academicians, and staff. This learning experience can be used by UiTM itself or other universities in facing any future outbreaks, such as in producing proper virus testing and developing protective equipment to stop or contain the spread. Through the current experiences, one of UiTM's efforts involved the Special COVID-19 Laboratory with the aim of reducing the Ministry of Health's (MOH) burden to perform Covid-19 virus testing. The second one was COMBAT (Coronavirus Mobile Test Unit), a mobile screening unit that was developed by a group of UiTM alumni called DDEC19MY (Doctors and Design Engineers against COVID-19 Malaysia), in collaboration with HUiTM. The COMBAT which initially catered to a patient population was aimed to be employed for future public mass screening. Another effort could be witnessed through UiTM joint effort with Universiti Teknikal Malaysia Melaka (UTEM) in producing PPE for the frontliners (Figure 8).



Figure 8: The collaborations with different entities

Conclusion

In facing future pandemic, hopefully UiTM will be more prepared in equipping not only the university but also the nation. The Covid-19 experience has demonstrated how UiTM was able to function to the best level possible. It is hoped that from this experience of Covid 19 via the acronyms of UiTM - U (Unpredictable, unlearn), i (ingenuity), T (technology) and M (management), lessons are learnt, and solutions are shared, nationally and internationally. Many more researches are needed to exemplify, share and learn of the many Covid 19

infographics availability. Finally, Freire argues that “Error is the opportunity to seek knowledge.” To quote him:

“One of the most beautiful characteristics of a teacher is to testify to his or her students that ignorance is the starting point for knowledge, that making mistakes is no sin, that it is part of the discovery process. Error is an opportunity to seek knowledge. Error is precisely what makes us learn. Do not be embarrassed at not knowing.” (31)

That is the way forward.

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