

UJ positioned as a leader in 4IR

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The one thing the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns, implemented around the world, have revealed is the need for educational institutions to embrace the fourth industrial revolution (4IR) and digital technologies as remote learning becomes the order of the day.



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Not only is 4IR changing future workplace career options at a rapid rate, but it is also having a profound impact on the world of learning and the demands being made of universities.

One institution that has reaped the reward of a long-established focus on 4IR technologies is the University of Johannesburg (UJ). The university initiated Cloudebates to lead the conversation as far back as 2018. Cloudebates include academics and specialists as panellists and focus on different research and topics, with an emphasis on 4IR. Students, post-graduates, alumni, internal UJ staff and members of the public are encouraged to listen and participate in the interactive debates via both above the line and below the line platforms. The recent lockdowns have seen UJ offer an increased number of virtual Cloudebate Webinars.

According to research conducted in late 2019 by strategic brand and communications agency, HKLM, it is perhaps no surprise that UJ is perceived to have a strong focus on 4IR and technology. The research revealed that UJ is considered to be a unique higher learning institution delivering quality education. In addition to being highly rated in terms of its academic standards, the university is regarded as innovative, futuristic, a trendsetter and a disruptor.

HKLM's research aimed to measure certain variables linked to UJ's brand and to track changing market perceptions over time in order to allow the agency to develop a benchmark and tracking measure to assess perceptions in the future.

As a result of these findings, HKLM has shifted the university's positioning to 'The Future. Reimagined' in order to reiterate and emphasise its position as a forerunner and innovator in the 4IR space. The university's communication strategy will drive this single-minded positioning statement by educating potential undergraduate students about the impact 4IR is likely to make on the future of work and create a common understanding of 4IR via a multi-channel marketing campaign to highlight life-changing 4IR stories, explains Tracy McCoy of HKLM.

Different messaging, tactics and media platforms will be used to communicate with UJ's various audiences, she adds.

"Social and digital media platforms, out of home and regional radio stations, for example, will be used to explain 4IR and its link to the new world of work to undergraduates with a campaign centred around 'Imagine That', in the process positioning UJ as a leader in the 4IR space. Mature markets and alumni, on the other hand, have been targeted with digital, print and

commercial radio stations with the key message being that ‘The future belongs to those who imagine it.’”

In addition, an online magazine - *Beyond Imagining* - is live while the university’s website, including a fully-fledged microsite, will be refreshed in line with the new positioning.



While 4IR is an exciting - albeit daunting - prospect for universities, it will require that the way they deliver teaching and learning will become more agile, interactive and collaborative. Hastened by Covid-19, 4IR is primed to be the defining moment of this era, points out McCoy. “No longer is the world we know guaranteed, nor is the future we imagined likely to be a reality. The rate of change has accelerated exponentially with 4IR changing our lives as individuals, and the nature of the societies we live in, beyond recognition.”

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