From KPI to Anthem: A Practice-Based Case Study of Compositional Judgement, Lyric Adaptation, and AI Integration in the Uitm 2030 Theme Song

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ABSTRACT

This practice-based case study examines the compositional and editorial decisions behind "Unggul Bersama UiTM2030" (Together in Excellence: UiTM2030), the official theme song for Universiti Teknologi MARA's 2030 strategic vision. It asks how a Malaysian composer turned a raw, AI-assisted lyric draft into a performable and institutionally acceptable anthem, and it analyses the previously unavailable Suno-generated demo that shaped the client's expectations. Three concerns motivate the inquiry. The first is translating corporate key performance indicators into affective musical material. The second is exercising human compositional judgement alongside generative artificial intelligence. The third is adapting lyrics under duration, language, and singability constraints. The qualitative design centres on a two-part semi-structured interview with the composer. This is supplemented by textual analysis of the original and revised lyrics and observational analysis of a Logic Pro session. The Suno demo is treated as an additional data source. The findings show that structural compression, principally the removal of the pre-chorus, served memorability and temporal economy at once. Shifting the historical framing from two decades to seven decades anchored the 2030 vision in a longer institutional heritage. AI functioned as a time-saving accelerant rather than a creative substitute. It accounted for approximately forty percent of production, yet its output required extensive human editing. The study contributes a first-person account of compositional judgement rarely captured in Southeast Asian popular music research. It also offers an empirically grounded framework for understanding how AI tools are used within professional Malaysian music production. Its claims are qualitative and limited to the single case examined.

Keywords: AI-assisted music, practice-based research, compositional judgement, lyric adaptation, Malaysian music

INTRODUCTION

University theme songs occupy an ambiguous position in contemporary Malaysian musical life. They are commissioned as strategic communication artefacts and evaluated as branding instruments, yet expected to function as songs—affective objects capable of moving listeners with no professional stake in the institution's key performance indicators. This tension has grown as universities adopt the vocabulary of corporate strategy. They position themselves as "high-impact" or "premium" institutions competing within national and regional higher education markets. Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Malaysia's largest public university, exemplifies this trend. Its UiTM2030 strategic vision was translated into a commissioned theme song, "Unggul Bersama UiTM2030" (Together in Excellence: UiTM2030), produced under the coordination of the Transformation Unit (Unit Transformasi Universiti, TRU) [13]. The song was composed by Amanina Alwani Badaruddin, a faculty member of the Faculty of Music, whose account of the creative process forms the empirical core of this study.

The commission unfolded within a broader institutional and aesthetic landscape. Malaysian corporate and government theme songs form a recognisable genre. It was shaped historically by Radio Televisyen Malaysia (RTM) orchestral compositions and, more recently, by anthems such as "Malaysia Madani Rakyat Disantuni" (Malaysia Madani: People Cared For, 2025) and "Gemuruh Jiwa" (The Roaring of the Soul, 2007) [6]. These works set audience expectations for melodic contour, vocal delivery, and production quality, and they act as implicit benchmarks for new commissions. Meanwhile, generative AI platforms such as Suno have altered the commissioning ecology. Clients may arrive at a briefing with an AI-generated demo already in hand, as occurred in this case. That demo becomes an invisible reference point against which the composer's work is judged [3]. The meeting of institutional strategy, genre convention, and generative technology makes the theme song a useful site for studying contemporary compositional judgement.

This study makes three contributions. First, it documents a first-person account of compositional and editorial decision-making rarely captured in Southeast Asian popular music scholarship, where production processes often remain opaque [8]. Second, it offers an empirically grounded framework for understanding how AI tools are actually used within professional Malaysian music production—as accelerators whose outputs require extensive human selection, editing, and integration [2]. Third, it demonstrates how strategic communication objectives are sonically encoded through structural and lyrical choices, and how those choices are received by institutional stakeholders.

Four research questions guide the inquiry: (RQ1) What compositional criteria does a professional composer apply when converting institutional prose into a singable hook, and how are these criteria articulated and justified? (RQ2) How does the composer negotiate the tension between a contemporary pop sound and the risk of a generic institutional aesthetic? (RQ3) What is the division of labour between AI-generated material and human editorial intervention across lyric writing, arrangement, and production? (RQ4) How do structural decisions—such as removing the pre-chorus—serve memorability and temporal economy?

The remainder of the paper reviews the literature on institutional theme songs, Malaysian popular music, and AI-assisted creativity. It then describes the qualitative case study design, presents and discusses the findings, and concludes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on institutional and corporate music has recognised that commissioned songs operate as both aesthetic objects and instruments of organisational communication. The theme song functions as an "affective artefact," condensing abstract strategic objectives into memorable sonic form [11]. Studies of national anthems and institutional songs show that such works encode collective identity through melodic, rhythmic, and lyrical conventions, and that their effectiveness depends on balancing official messaging with emotional resonance [4]. In the Malaysian context, this genre has been shaped by RTM's orchestral traditions and, more recently, by pop anthems commissioned for national campaigns [6]. The compositional labour behind these works—decisions about structure, key, and lyrical compression—remains largely undocumented, a gap that practice-based research is positioned to address [9].

The literature on Malaysian popular music production offers valuable but partial insights into the creative process. Ethnographic studies of the local recording industry have examined producers, arrangers, and session musicians, revealing a collaborative ecology where technical and aesthetic judgements are distributed across multiple actors [8]. These accounts tend to focus on commercial releases rather than commissioned institutional works, and they rarely capture the moment-to-moment reasoning of a single composer negotiating a client brief. The specific challenge of lyric adaptation—fitting words to an existing melodic contour under strict duration constraints—has received limited scholarly attention in the Southeast Asian context, despite its centrality to producing singable, memorable hooks [10].

A growing body of research addresses generative AI in music creation. Platforms such as Suno and Udio have enabled users to produce complete musical sketches from textual prompts, raising questions about authorship, originality, and the division of creative labour [3]. Much of this literature frames AI as either a disruptive threat or a democratising tool [2]. More nuanced accounts emphasise "co-creativity," where human and machine

contributions are interwoven through iterative cycles of generation, selection, and refinement [7]. Within professional production workflows, AI tools function as accelerants—generating drum patterns, suggesting harmonic voicings, or producing rough mixes—while composer agency remains essential for editing and contextualising the output [5]. This perspective aligns with broader findings suggesting AI typically augments rather than replaces expert decision-making [1].

This study extends these strands by examining a case where AI assistance, client expectations, and genre conventions intersect within a single commissioned work. Unlike studies that treat AI and human creativity as opposing forces, this analysis documents their concrete division of labour across lyric writing, arrangement, and production. Where existing research on institutional music analyses finished artefacts or reception, this study foregrounds the composer's articulated criteria and rejected alternatives, illuminating the tacit knowledge that guides professional judgement. The study's significance lies in integrating three normally separate literatures—organisational communication, Malaysian popular music, and AI-assisted creativity—within a practice-based framework that captures how a corporate KPI is transformed into a singable anthem. From a broader theoretical standpoint, the study also engages with the concept of *institutional isomorphism* [15], wherein universities adopt standardised branding mechanisms (such as anthems) to signal strategic legitimacy. Furthermore, it contributes to the discourse on *computational co-creativity*, highlighting how the AI operates as a generative partner while the human practitioner retains the role of the curator who selects, edits, and contextualises the output [16].

METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative, practice-based case study design centred on the composer's reflective account of the creative process behind "Unggul Bersama UiTM2030." A case study approach was chosen for two reasons. Compositional judgement exercised under institutional, temporal, and technological constraints is not readily observable through surveys or experiments. In addition, the research questions concern how decisions were made and justified, not how often particular techniques appear in a corpus [14]. The unit of analysis is a single commissioned work. The primary informant is the composer, Amanina Alwani Badaruddin, who served as lyric adapter, arranger, performer, and producer, working with recording, mixing, and mastering engineer Yus Hakimi. This concentration of roles makes the case well suited to documenting the full arc of decision-making, from the institutional brief to the final master.

The study adopts a collaborative practitioner–researcher model. The first author designed the study, conducted the interviews, and carried out the analysis independently. The second author is the composer, whose creative practice constitutes the case, and who reviewed the manuscript for factual accuracy. This arrangement gives access to tacit compositional reasoning that is rarely documented. The authors acknowledge that the composer's dual role as informant and co-author introduces a risk of self-presentation bias. This risk was mitigated by checking her account against the original and revised lyric texts, the Logic Pro session, and the Suno prompt material. Furthermore, while the absence of interviews with production collaborators and commissioning stakeholders limits the triangulation of institutional reception, the study compensates for this by prioritising a granular, practitioner-led analysis of the compositional process itself, rather than claiming to represent the views of the commissioning body.

Data Collection

The principal data source is a two-part semi-structured interview conducted on 18 September 2026 and 28 September 2026, totalling approximately four hours. Both sessions were conducted online via Google Meet and transcribed verbatim. The protocol was developed collaboratively by the research team around eight thematic clusters: the commissioning context and institutional brief; the composer's musical references and target audience; the definition and avoidance of "old RTM" stylistic markers; the use of AI in lyric generation and production; structural editing and lyric adaptation; recording, mixing, and mastering workflow; the balance between AI-generated material and human decision-making; and stakeholder reception. The semi-structured format allowed the interviewer to pursue unanticipated lines of inquiry. One was the composer's spontaneous comparison with the 2006 theme song "Membaca Gaya Wawasan" (Reading: A Vision Lifestyle) by Kusham, which was not in the original protocol.

Supplementary data comprise three categories. The first is the original lyric text supplied by TRU together with the composer's revised and final lyric, in which deletions, substitutions, and reorderings are marked in red. The second is a screen-shared demonstration of the Logic Pro session captured during the first interview, providing observational evidence of the Session Player function and the parameters manipulated during arrangement. The third consists of contextual materials referenced by the composer. These include the original Suno-generated demo, which was subsequently obtained and is analysed below, together with the guitar stems recorded by a collaborator identified as Rizal Zulkifli Tony (hereafter Rizal Tony). The Suno demo comprises two prompt-generated outputs titled "Rise Beyond 2030" and "Membina Hikmah, Mencipta Impak" (Building Wisdom, Creating Impact), both dated 18 June 2026, and includes the client's prompt text and an excerpt of the generated lyric. Written clearance for the reproduction of these institutional materials for academic publication was obtained from the Transformation Unit (TRU). The guitar stems remain unavailable, and their absence is noted where relevant. The final recording was released publicly on the UiTM Channel [12].

Analytical Procedures

The analytical approach is interpretive and inductive, following established conventions for practice-based research in music [9]. The interview transcript was coded thematically, with attention to three types of utterance: moments where the composer explicitly articulates a compositional decision, moments where she justifies rejecting an alternative, and moments where she describes a negotiation with the client or with technology. Coding was conducted manually, and emerging categories were refined iteratively across repeated readings of the transcript.

The lyric comparison was conducted as textual analysis. Each modification between the TRU draft and the final text was mapped against the composer's stated rationale, and modifications were grouped into four analytical categories: temporal reframing, lexical refinement, structural compression, and rhythmic realignment. This mapping permits reconstruction of an editorial decision trail in which each surviving line can be traced to a specific justification. The Logic Pro demonstration was analysed as a procedural artefact. The researcher recorded the parameters manipulated (complexity, intensity, voicing, and movement range) and the composer's commentary on the limitations of AI-generated parts and the perceived "sunken" quality of virtual instruments relative to live guitar and vocals. The study does not employ statistical analysis; its claims are qualitative, grounded in the composer's reflective practice, and not intended to generalise beyond the case under examination.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings are organised around the composer's progression from initial concept to finished master, tracing how institutional requirements, genre conventions, and technological affordances were negotiated at each stage. Each subsection addresses one cluster of decisions before a summary of key findings and additional observations drawn from the interview transcripts.

Song Concept, Identity, and Musical References

This section addresses RQ1 and RQ2, examining the compositional criteria and aesthetic negotiations that shaped the song's identity. The conceptual foundation of "Unggul Bersama UiTM2030" was established during an initial briefing between the Faculty of Music and TRU, which the composer characterised as a negotiation of institutional expectations rather than a conventional artistic commission. Three fixed parameters constrained the song's identity: the work was to be monolingual (either Bahasa Melayu or English, not bilingual); the phrase "UiTM2030" was to function as the central hook; and the overall projection was to position the university as a "high-impact, premium" institution. These parameters transformed the composer's task from autonomous artistic creation into the sonic encoding of strategic messaging [11].

The composer's articulation of the song's identity was audience-centred. She identified the primary listeners as the university's students, staff, and alumni, reasoning that the song needed to appeal across generational boundaries while remaining contemporary. This dual orientation—towards institutional stakeholders and towards a youth-oriented listenership—generated the central aesthetic tension of the project. She measured

potential success against the 2006 theme song "Membaca Gaya Wawasan" and its simple line, "Everybody take a book and read to gain knowledge." She cited it as a commissioned work that still has cultural traction nearly two decades after its release. This benchmark matters because it shifts the evaluative criterion from immediate stakeholder approval to long-term memorability.

For musical references, the composer drew on a varied set of contemporary works. She cited Teesh RS and Aubrey Suwito's "Gemuruh Jiwa" (2007) and Tulus's "Manusia Kuat" (Strong Human, 2016), presented at the 2018 Asian Para Games. Both served as models for the direct verse-to-chorus transition that later justified removing the pre-chorus. She also referenced the 1998 Commonwealth Games anthem "Standing in the Eyes of the World" (by Wah Idris/Gates) for its comparable structural economy [6]. The "Malaysia Madani Rakyat Disantuni" anthem was acknowledged as a stylistic touchstone, though the composer sought to avoid its repetition patterns. This selective use of references shows a clear strategy. She placed her work within a recognisable contemporary Malaysian pop idiom while setting it apart from the nearest institutional comparator. The choice of C major followed the same audience-centred logic, as it accommodates both male and female vocal ranges. The Suno prompt, obtained later, confirms that "Gemuruh Jiwa" was not only the composer's personal reference. It was named explicitly in the client's AI generation request, which indicates that this benchmark was institutionally sanctioned rather than individually selected.

Lyric Creation and AI Integration

This section addresses RQ1, RQ3, and RQ4, tracing the melody-first compositional process, the role of AI-generated material, and the structural decisions that produced the final hook. The lyric-writing process began with melody, a sequencing decision the composer described as foundational to everything that followed. She spent several days searching for a catchy melodic contour before shaping any lyric to fit it. This melody-first approach inverts the conventional lyric-first workflow. As a result, the words become tightly coupled to the musical phrase rather than existing as independent poetic material [10]. The method was iterative. She would sing a provisional phrase, adjust the words to align with the rhythmic contour, and repeat until the two were mutually reinforcing. The final lyric is therefore not a text subsequently set to music but a text generated through the act of singing.

The raw material supplied by TRU had itself been produced through a hybrid human-AI workflow. The TRU team had fed keywords and a draft lyric into Suno and received a generated demo, which they subsequently edited before approaching the composer [3]. The composer was never shown this demo. When she presented her own composition, the TRU team expressed surprise at how different it was from what they had heard. This exposes an epistemic gap in the commissioning process. The client's evaluative reference point was an AI-generated artefact that the human composer never heard, and her work was assessed against an invisible baseline.

The Suno demo, which was subsequently obtained by the composer after project completion for her records and shared with the research team, provides direct evidence of the client's intended reference frame. The English-language prompt for "Rise Beyond 2030" specifies a genre of "epic power pop, stadium rock, inspirational, motivational lyrics emotional build up stadium sing along chorus." The prompt further specifies thematic content—"strategic plan high impact premier university nurturing wisdom empowering impact celebrating achievements from 2001–2025 and launching a bold journey toward 2030"—and a temporal framing from 2001 to 2025 that the composer would replace with "tujuh dekad" (seven decades). The second prompt, in Bahasa Melayu, repeats these instructions and adds "inspirasi semangat seperti lagu gemuruh oleh Pop rock, Alternative rock" (inspiration and spirit in the manner of "Gemuruh Jiwa," Pop rock, Alternative rock), confirming that "Gemuruh Jiwa" functioned as a shared reference point for both client and composer.

The generated lyric excerpt provides further evidence of the AI's compositional tendencies. The opening lines of "Rise Beyond 2030"—"Twenty-five years of dreams in motion, / Building futures across the nation, / From every challenge, every mile, / We shaped tomorrow with courage and pride"—display the conventional structure and predictable rhyme scheme that the composer implicitly criticised when she described AI-generated text as generic. The lyric is grammatically coherent and thematically appropriate, but it lacks the compressed, hook-driven economy she identified as essential for memorability. Its temporal anchor ("Twenty-five years") also conflicts with the seven-decade heritage framing she substituted. The output was therefore not only generic but

also misaligned with the institution's preferred historical narrative. The second Suno output's lyric excerpt—"Dari sejarah yang gemilang terbina, / Dua dekad pencapaian menjadi warisan" (From a history built with brilliance, / Two decades of achievement become a legacy)—is identical to the opening of the TRU draft supplied to the composer, confirming that the draft was generated directly by Suno rather than merely assisted by it. A systematic comparative analysis of the Suno text and the final lyric reveals clear structural and rhythmic divergences. The AI output follows a highly conventional, unbroken metrical structure with predictable end-rhymes ("motion/nation," "mile/pride"). In contrast, the composer's final lyric introduces deliberate rhythmic realignment and internal rhymes to fit the melodic contour. Thematically, the AI's generic temporal anchor ("Twenty-five years") and abstract phrasing ("courage and pride") were entirely replaced by the composer's specific historical reference and compressed into a hook-driven format. While a full melodic and harmonic analysis of the audio stems remains outside the scope of this paper, this textual comparison demonstrates the composer's systematic reworking of the AI's structural conventions.

This material confirms and extends the epistemic gap identified earlier. The composer was evaluated against an artefact whose prompt explicitly encoded the same musical references she herself cited, yet whose output she could not hear and whose lyric she was not shown. Both were generated in response to the same brief, but only one was produced through the embodied, iterative process of singing and revision. The Suno demo functioned as a parallel solution to the same problem; its existence shaped the evaluative context without providing a legible standard of comparison [2].

The composer's editorial interventions on the TRU draft can be grouped into four categories, as summarised in Table 1. The most consequential was temporal reframing, achieved through the replacement of "dua dekad" (two decades) with "tujuh dekad" (seven decades). The original text had dated the university's trajectory from the start of its strategic planning. The composer argued the song should honour the institution's broader heritage, dating back seventy years to its origins as the Rural and Industrial Development Authority (RIDA). This substitution transforms the lyric from a forward-looking corporate projection into a statement of inherited legacy. Lexical refinement addressed lines judged aesthetically weak, for example by introducing "Menggapai kejayaan penuh kebanggaan" (reaching for success with great pride). Rhythmic realignment adjusted word order to align with the melodic contour. Structural compression, discussed below, was the most extensive category of intervention.

Table 1. Categories of lyric adaptation applied to the Transformation Unit draft

Category	**Example**	**Composer's rationale**
Temporal reframing	"dua dekad" → "tujuh dekad" (two decades → seven decades)	Honour institutional heritage dating to RIDA origins
Lexical refinement	Replacement with "Menggapai kejayaan penuh kebanggaan"	Strengthen aesthetic quality of the line
Structural compression	Removal of pre-chorus; excision of two to three stanzas	Accelerate transition to hook; fit temporal constraint
Rhythmic realignment	Reordering of words within lines	Align text with melodic contour

The removal of the pre-chorus is the most important structural decision in the lyric adaptation. The composer justified it by reference to three benchmark songs, "Gemuruh Jiwa," "Manusia Kuat," and "Standing in the Eyes of the World," all of which move directly from verse to chorus [6]. She said this structure produces a faster "hype" and avoids the sense of delay that clients had previously reported in her work. A temporal constraint reinforced the decision. The original lyric contained too many words for the available musical space, so she cut approximately two to three stanzas. The final lyric is a heavily reduced text in which the "UiTM2030" hook is the primary mnemonic device, its repetition compensating for the excised narrative content. This finding complicates the assumption that institutional songs need extensive verbal exposition of strategic objectives. Here, memorability was achieved through verbal reduction.

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The outcome of these interventions is shown in Table 2, which presents the final lyric with a line-by-line English translation. The verse-to-chorus structure contains no pre-chorus, and the "UiTM2030" hook recurs at the head of each chorus and in the closing coda. Music and arrangement are by Amanina Alwani; the lyric is jointly credited to Pejabat Transformasi Universiti (University Transformation Office) and Amanina Alwani [12].

Table 2. Final lyrics of "Unggul Bersama UiTM2030" with English translation by S. F. S. Mohammed

Bahasa Melayu (Malay)	**English Translation**
Rangkap 1 Dari sejarah gemilang terbina Tujuh dekad hasil menjadi warisan Menyerlah potensi membentuk masa hadapan Menggapai kejayaan penuh kebanggaan	**Verse 1** Built upon a glorious history Seven decades of achievement become our heritage Potential shines forth, shaping the future Reaching for success with great pride
Korus 1 UiTM 2030, UiTM… Universiti Premier, Berimpak Tinggi, Ayuh mara bersama Bumiputra unggul di persada dunia	**Chorus 1** UiTM 2030, UiTM… a premier university, high in impact, Come, let us march forward together Bumiputera (indigenous Malaysians) excelling on the world stage
Rangkap 2 Kita melangkah dengan tekad yang satu Melangkah menuju ke ufuk baharu Menyemai hikmah membentuk bangsa dan masa depan Demi generasi berilmu dan berdaya	**Verse 2** We stride forward with a single resolve Striding towards a new horizon Sowing wisdom to shape the nation and its future For a generation that is knowledgeable and empowered
Korus 2 UiTM 2030 UiTM… obor harapan Negara Bersatu hati, melakar visi Menjulang aspirasi terus unggul untuk selamanya	**Chorus 2** UiTM 2030, UiTM… the torch of the nation's hope United in heart, charting a vision Upholding our aspirations, excelling forever.
Bridge Langkah demi langkah kita satukan Memperkasa bakat, inovasi dan teknologi Menjadi kebanggaan negara Malaysia Universiti premier berimpak tinggi	**Bridge** Step by step, we come together Empowering talent, innovation and technology Becoming the pride of Malaysia A premier, high-impact university
(Ulang Korus 1 & 2)	*(Repeat Chorus 1 & 2)*
Hook UiTM2030. UiTM2030 UiTM2030.	**Hook** UiTM2030. UiTM2030 UiTM2030.

The division of labour between AI-generated material and human editorial intervention at the lyric stage was uneven. AI contributed the initial draft and the Suno demo, but every subsequent decision—temporal reframing, lexical substitutions, structural compression, rhythmic realignment—was made by the composer through an embodied process of singing and revision. The value of the AI contribution lay in overcoming the blank-page problem, not in supplying material for the final text. Most of the AI-assisted draft was either rewritten or discarded. This pattern aligns with findings in creative industries research suggesting that AI augments rather than replaces expert decision-making [1]. What the case adds is a clear account of where the boundary falls: AI

was useful for generating raw verbal material and for producing a demo that could orient client expectations, but it was not permitted to determine the melodic contour, the structural architecture, or the final wording of the hook.

Music Production and Creative Control

This section addresses RQ3, documenting how the division of labour between generative tools and human decision-making operated across the arrangement and production stages. The transition from lyric to arrangement shifted creative control, as the composer moved from adapting client-supplied verbal material to generating the instrumental architecture within Logic Pro. Her screen-shared demonstration revealed that she assigned chord progressions to a global track and then deployed the Session Player function to generate drum, bass, and keyboard parts, manipulating parameters for complexity, intensity, voicing, and movement range. The composer offered a retrospective estimate that this AI assistance accounted for approximately forty percent of the instrumental production workflow. It is important to clarify that this figure is not a quantitative measurement of the final audio, but a subjective estimate of the time saved on basic programming. It refers primarily to the foundational instrumental bed (drums, bass, and keyboard) that would otherwise have required manual performance and then underwent extensive human editing and arrangement. However, she qualified this figure, describing the Session Player's output as "basic playing" requiring extensive cleanup—cutting, aligning, and humanising the generated parts. Note-level editing of the Session Player's material was difficult because the generated content is continuous and interconnected; the best she could achieve was manipulation of macro-level parameters. This limitation suggests that generative tools are bounded not only by output quality but also by the granularity of control they permit. That constraint directly affects the composer's ability to impose a personal stylistic signature on the arrangement [5].

The composer's account of creative control extended to the broader question of how authority was distributed across the production chain. As arranger and producer working closely with the recording engineer, she had considerable latitude in determining the song's sonic identity. Yet this latitude was exercised within constraints imposed by stakeholder feedback. Virtual instruments generated by the Session Player tended to sound "sunken" in the mix compared to live-recorded guitar and vocals, requiring compensatory mixing decisions. This asymmetry complicates the notion of seamless human-AI co-creativity: the integration of AI-generated material involves an ongoing evaluative labour in which the composer continually assesses and adjusts the boundary between the machine's contribution and her own [7].

The composer's reflections on the TRU's Suno demo further illuminate the dynamics of creative control. Although she never heard it, her awareness of its existence shaped her approach, and her curiosity about it indicates she regarded the AI artefact as a meaningful comparator. The TRU team could not articulate specific differences between her composition and the Suno demo. This points to a broader epistemic asymmetry. When evaluators cannot identify the decisions that differentiate human from machine output, the composer's exercise of creative control becomes invisible to those who commissioned the work, and the value of her judgement is consequently difficult to communicate [2]. The composer's insistence on retaining authority over melodic contour, structural architecture, and final wording can thus be read as a strategic response—an attempt to preserve a domain of decision-making legible as human authorship even when the surrounding process is heavily automated.

Recording, Mixing, and Vocal Arrangement

This section addresses RQ2 and RQ3, examining how live performance elements were used to counteract the perceived deficiencies of AI-generated material and reinforce the song's contemporary aesthetic. The recording and mixing stages consolidated the division of labour between human performance and AI-generated material established during arrangement. As producer, the composer retained close creative oversight of the recording and mix, working close with the recording engineer. This differs from the more distributed production ecologies documented in ethnographic studies of the Malaysian recording industry [8]. Stems were sent to Rizal Tony, who recorded guitar parts with a "rock flavour" inspired by "Gemuruh Jiwa," and these were subsequently integrated into the session. The decision to commission live guitar was compensatory. The Session Player's virtual instruments tended to sound "sunken" in the mix, and the live guitar supplied the textural presence and

transient definition the generated parts lacked, functioning as an anchor around which the AI-generated substrate could be balanced.

Vocal arrangement was the domain where human decision-making was most concentrated and AI played almost no role. Four backing vocalists were recorded. Their voices were layered across low, middle, and high registers to simulate the thickness of a larger choir. The composer recorded her own lead vocal only after the backing vocals were in place—a sequencing decision she justified on the grounds that singing with backing vocals already present produced a more energetic performance. This ordering inverts the more common practice of recording the lead first and building harmonies around it, treating the backing vocals as a performative context rather than accompaniment. The process itself was spontaneous and time-constrained: rather than writing out the arrangement in score form, the composer directed the singers verse by verse, accepted their suggestions, and built the layers incrementally, completing the entire backing vocal recording in approximately two hours.

The mixing stage became the site where stakeholder feedback was negotiated. Ts. Dr. Elmi Alif Azmi, TRU's project lead, felt the drums and bass were insufficiently prominent and the overall mix lacked the solidity of a fully live recording. Another criticism was that the early demo lacked "hype," which prompted the composer to request rock-flavoured guitar from Rizal Tony. These interventions targeted the elements generated by the Session Player, suggesting that stakeholders registered the AI-generated substrate as a qualitative deficit even when they could not name its source. The remediation strategy—reinforcing the low end and importing live guitar—rebalanced the human-machine ratio in favour of performed material, demonstrating that the boundary between AI and human contributions is not fixed at the point of generation but remains negotiable throughout mixing. The Vice-Chancellor's remark on the frequency of the "UiTM" repetition registered the hook's mnemonic success rather than any production concern. This confirms that the song's effectiveness was evaluated along two axes: catchiness, attributed to compositional and lyrical decisions, and production quality, attributed to the mix.

Key Findings Summary

The findings converge on six interrelated outcomes. The lyric was deliberately confined to a single language and calibrated to a duration under three minutes, a constraint that rendered verbal economy a compositional necessity [10]. Within this compressed temporal frame, the phrase "UiTM2030" was repeated as the principal chorus element, carrying the communicative burden formerly borne by the excised narrative stanzas. AI was deployed across three distinct junctures—initial ideation, demo generation, and virtual instrument programming—yet in each instance its output served as raw material for human refinement [5]. The lyric structure was condensed around the university's seven-decade heritage, converting a forward-looking corporate projection into an assertion of inherited legacy. The mix required reinforcement of drums, bass, and guitar, targeting the elements generated by the Session Player and rebalancing the human-machine ratio in favour of performed material. The vocal recording enlisted four backing singers whose voices were layered across registral strata, concentrating composer agency in the domain least touched by automation.

Taken together, these outcomes suggest that the composer's authority was exercised not through the rejection of AI but through the strategic allocation of decision rights across the production chain. The elements that stakeholders subsequently identified as deficient were those most closely associated with generative assistance; the elements that secured the song's reception—the hook's memorability and the vocal performance—were those over which the composer retained direct control. The boundary between human and machine contributions is neither stable nor self-evident; it is actively managed through mixing decisions, and its perceived location may diverge from its actual location in the workflow [7]. The case therefore reframes the question of AI's role in creative industries from a binary of substitution versus augmentation towards a more granular inquiry into which specific decisions remain legible as human authorship, and how that legibility is preserved when the surrounding process is heavily automated [1].

Collectively, these findings answer the four research questions as follows. RQ1 is addressed through the composer's articulation of the melody-first workflow, the selection of C major for vocal range, and the use of iterative singing as the primary compositional method. RQ2 is addressed through the strategic selection of contemporary references—particularly "Gemuruh Jiwa," "Manusia Kuat," and "Standing in the Eyes of the

World"—and the decision to import live guitar to overcome the "sunken" quality of programmed instruments. RQ3 is addressed by the finding that AI contributed approximately forty percent of production yet determined none of the core compositional decisions—melodic contour, structural architecture, or final wording. RQ4 is addressed by the analysis of the pre-chorus excision, which simultaneously reduced the word count to fit the temporal frame and accelerated the hook's arrival.

Additional Observations from Transcripts

Beyond the structured thematic clusters, several incidental remarks illuminate aspects of the composer's practice that resist easy categorisation. One concerns her own uncertainty about the scope of the research. Midway through the second session, she remarked that she did not know how much of a particular segment would be used in the study—a comment that reveals reflexive awareness of being observed, which may have shaped the granularity of her subsequent explanations. The resulting account is co-constructed rather than merely reported [9].

A second observation concerns the composer's repeated return to the original lyric text as a comparative artefact. She described the TRU draft as "panjang" (long) and offered to facilitate a side-by-side comparison of the lyric versions, indicating she regarded the textual transformation as the most demonstrable evidence of her editorial labour. This suggests the composer located her authorship primarily in the verbal domain, even though her technical contributions to arrangement and mixing were arguably more extensive. The decisions most legible to non-specialist stakeholders involve words; decisions involving timbre, balance, and texture remain comparatively invisible [2].

A third thread concerns the distribution of stems before recording commenced. The composer sent all stems to Rizal Tony prior to the recording sessions, indicating the guitar parts were conceived in relation to the existing programmed arrangement rather than recorded independently and subsequently fitted. This workflow suggests the AI-generated substrate, despite its perceived deficiencies, functioned as a structural scaffold that conditioned the contributions of human performers, inverting the conventional assumption that live performance supplies the foundation upon which programmed elements are layered [5]. The guitar was intended to add a "rock flavour" rather than replace the programmed parts, positioning the human contribution as a corrective overlay.

Finally, the transcripts contain an exchange about the composer's interest in the Suno demo. When asked whether she wished to obtain it, she affirmed that she did, and noted that a comparison of the lyrics would be possible once the material was available. She regarded the AI artefact not as a competitor but as an object of analytical interest, and her willingness to subject her own work to comparative scrutiny suggests a professional disposition that treats AI output as a legitimate reference rather than a threat [7]. The subsequent acquisition of the Suno demo partially fulfils this comparative ambition. The demo's prompt reveals that the client had already encoded the composer's reference points—"Gemuruh Jiwa," stadium rock, motivational uplift—into the AI generation request, suggesting that the composer's aesthetic instincts were shared by the commissioning team rather than idiosyncratic. What the AI could not supply was the specific melodic contour that made those references singable, the structural compression that made them memorable within three minutes, and the lyrical substitution that aligned them with institutional heritage rather than corporate projection. The comparison clarifies where the composer's distinctive contribution lay: not in the selection of references, which were pre-specified, but in the translation of those references into a performable, hook-driven form.

CONCLUSION

This case study set out to examine compositional and editorial decision-making behind "Unggul Bersama UiTM2030" and to trace how a Malaysian composer converted an AI-assisted institutional draft into a performable anthem. The findings confirm that structural compression—principally the excision of the pre-chorus—served memorability and temporal economy simultaneously, while the substitution of "tujuh dekad" for "dua dekad" recast a corporate projection as an assertion of inherited legacy. AI operated as a generative accelerant whose output demanded extensive human selection, editing, and integration, accounting for roughly forty percent of production yet never determining melodic contour, structural architecture, or final wording. The study contributes a clear account of where that boundary actually falls, and of how it is actively managed through

mixing decisions rather than fixed at the point of generation. The case therefore challenges the substitution-versus-augmentation binary that dominates creative industries discourse, and it extends practice-based musicology by documenting a Southeast Asian commissioning context in which authorship is negotiated under institutional, temporal, and technological constraint. As a single-composer, single-institution case study, these findings are context-sensitive and are not intended to be generalised to all AI-assisted music production. Rather, they offer a qualitative framework that future comparative studies of institutional commissions may build upon.

The Suno-generated demo that oriented the client's expectations was subsequently obtained, and its analysis confirms that the client's prompt explicitly encoded the same musical references that the composer independently cited. This convergence suggests that the composer's aesthetic judgement was aligned with, rather than opposed to, the client's stated preferences; her distinctive contribution lay in the translation of those shared references into a singable, compressed, and institutionally grounded form. A fuller comparative analysis of the Suno demo and the final composition would further clarify how evaluators distinguish human from machine output when they lack the vocabulary to name the difference. Future research might also examine whether the epistemic asymmetry observed here—where the composer's judgement remained invisible to those who commissioned the work—reproduces itself across other institutional commissions, and whether the legibility of authorship in the verbal domain, as opposed to the sonic, holds beyond this single case. Longitudinal study of the song's cultural traction would test the composer's own benchmark of five to ten years of relevance. Such inquiries would situate this case within a broader account of how creative judgement is exercised, communicated, and recognised when generative tools are woven into professional practice.

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