Multimodal engagement through transmedia storytelling assessments for undergraduate students

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ABSTRACT

Transmedia storytelling has great potential in the field of education and research on its applications and benefits in teaching and learning is growing. This paper explores the use of transmedia storytelling as a multimodal pedagogical tool for tertiary students. This paper explicates the design and application of a transmedia storytelling assessment in increasing multimodal engagement for undergraduate students from various faculties. A case study of a transmedia storytelling campaign conceptualised and produced by undergraduate students from a Malaysian public university is analysed for evidence of transmedia storytelling engagement. Students' assessment output including campaign pitches, campaign designs and artefacts that include scripts, storyboards, posters, photos and videos submitted via digital formats were collated and analysed. Post-assessment reflections submitted by students were also analysed. The finding of the case study revealed that the conceptualisation and production of a transmedia storytelling campaign consisting of a short film, book and social media page enabled students to engage with multiple modalities and develop various skills and competencies. Analysis of campaign artefacts and student reflections found that the use of this novel pedagogy enabled students to engage with visual and spatial, linguistic, audio, gestural and technical digital modes of meaning as well as develop literary competencies and creative thinking skills through this assessment. This paper paves the way for further exploration of the use of transmedia storytelling as a multimodal pedagogical tool to develop various literacies, educational competencies as well as 21st century skills amongst tertiary students.

Keywords: multimodality; transmedia; storytelling, pedagogy; assessment.

INTRODUCTION

Teaching and learning practices across the globe have begun to shift from using primarily language-based pedagogies to multimodal ones in order increase learner engagement and reflect 21st century technological and communication trends. As observed by Nouri (2018), students today are mobile and flexible learners who use the affordances of different technologies to construct knowledge and meanings through different semiotic modes. These digital natives use media that provide meaning through not only language, but also other modes such as visual, aural, gestural and musical in their learning experiences (Toohey et al. 2015). However, many educational institutions have yet to fully tap into and develop the potential and skills that these learners possess by providing them with learning experiences that offer multimodal engagement. The emphasis still firmly remains on reading and writing texts in 21st century teaching and learning contexts although other skills and mediums are slowly being

recognized (Suraini et al. 2018). Efforts to increase students' engagement with multimodal texts have been limited even in tertiary education environments as multimodal assignments can challenge traditional notions of what counts as academic work (Bowen, 2017).

Fortunately, more educators and policy makers have become aware of the need for multimodal engagement in education and action is being taken to make learning more multimodal for students. Researchers and practitioners have begun investigating how to move education beyond print-based practices to become more multimodal and digital after recognizing "that access to combinations of modes for meaning making have shifted with the availability of digital tools like the Internet and personal computing, so that, for example, even children can produce multimodal text that integrates images, hyperlinks, video, audio, and so on" (Toohey et al. 2015, p.464). However, having access and exposure to multiple modes of meaning and media does not necessarily mean these students have the ability to view and use the multimodal representations critically and skilfully (Lim & Tan, 2018; Zammit, 2007). Appropriate teaching and learning practices can provide multimodal engagement for students that can help them expand their repertoire of making sense of complex multimodal ensembles in a skilful and critical manner (Serafini, 2014, p.2). It is therefore vital that educators have the knowledge of and access to suitable theoretical, curricular and pedagogical frameworks that would enable them to provide an engaging multimodal learning experience for their students (Lim & Tan, 2018; Serafini, 2014).

This paper explores the applications of transmedia storytelling as a multimodal pedagogical tool in higher education contexts. This paper details the use of transmedia storytelling as an alternative assessment for a Literature and the Media course to increase multimodal engagement in undergraduate students from a public university in Malaysia. It will focus on the students' engagement with multimodality, i.e., their interaction with and use of visual and spatial, linguistic, audio, gestural and technical and digital modes of meaning in the conceptualization and production of a transmedia storytelling campaign. The following sections will discuss transmedia storytelling and its applications in education.

TRANSMEDIA STORYTELLING

Transmedia storytelling (henceforth referred to as TS), is a form of storytelling that unfolds a narrative across multiple media channels and seeks to provide audiences, especially the digital native generation with the engagement and interaction they seek. TS is possible due to the technological advancements of the 21st century that have elevated the art of storytelling and allowed for stories to be created and disseminated through multiple modes of meaning. TS therefore, embodies 21st century multimodal communication and provides much multimodal engagement for both the producers and users. In a multimodal text, meaning is created when multiple modes of meaning are "simultaneously present and operating within a communicative context" (Kress et al. 2001, p.43). The same applies to multiplatform storytelling such as TS, where meaning is created through the combination of all the modes and platforms operating within one core narrative or storyworld.

In TS, a narrative of a story is dispersed in a seamless manner through different platforms (Kalogeras, 2014). It is important to note that TS is not a mere retelling of a story in a different medium or platform. The film adaptation of a book which presents the narrative of the book in motion picture format is not TS. In TS, each platform contains different elements of a narrative (such as new plots, characters and point of view) and the entire narrative unfolds across multiple media platforms where it can continue to grow and evolve. A key characteristic of a transmedia narrative is that any of the platforms can act as an entry point into the storyworld by the reader or audience. Other characteristics include the potential of the

storyworld for seriality, multiplicity and to provide immersive experiences for the audience (Pratten, 2015). In recent years, the applications of TS have gained recognition in the field of education as a versatile pedagogical tool to develop multiples skills and competencies in diverse fields and disciplines of study. The following section discusses applications of TS in education.

TRANSMEDIA STORYTELLING IN EDUCATION

The core elements of TS which are storytelling and multimodality, appeal to both teachers and students of all levels. According to Kalogeras (2014), TS has led to the evolvement of narratives and learning through stories, which are central to new pedagogical modes. The application of TS as a multimodal pedagogical tool or transmedia learning is gaining recognition and various research is being done on its application and benefits in various education contexts (Bidarra & Rodrigues, 2018; Fleming, 2013; Kalogeras, 2014). According to Fleming (2013), "transmedia learning is the application of storytelling techniques combined with the use of multiple platforms to create an immersive learning landscape which enables multifarious entry and exit points for learning and teaching" (p.371).

TS's multiplatform feature enables the combination of both traditional and digital learning tools which makes it a versatile pedagogical tool for educators to apply in diverse learning environments. As noted by Fleming (2013), "educators can draw upon the strengths of and maximize the power of individual platforms" that TS offers in designing their teaching methods and resources (p.371). A variety of TS teaching methods and materials that include modules, e-modules, games, creative productions and projects and branding campaigns have been designed by educators and researchers in order to reap and maximize the educational benefits that TS can offer learners.

TS's versatility and wide-ranging applications have allowed educators in language classrooms to use it to develop language acquisition, multiple literacies and other educational competencies in students. Rodrigues and Bidarra (2016), studied the use of transmedia projects as an educational strategy in the context of ESL- English as a Second Language learning. These projects "used a multi-layered combination of audio-visual elements within a storyworld to shed light on the topics: media culture, multiculturalism, linguistic diversity and use of technology" (Rodrigues & Bidarra, 2016, p.57). Kalogeras (2014) designed an e-module that utilized a multimodal approach and incorporated TS as a pedagogy for tertiary students. The e-module outlined a "different perspective through the use of narratives in different modes and mediums in order to interact with transmedia content which enhances multimodal and digital literacies in students (Kalogeras, 2014, p.186) .

The use of TS in teaching and learning has had many benefits and contributed to the development in various skills and competencies in students. TS offers a multimodal approach to teaching that also benefits a student in terms of development of higher-order skills including critical thinking, analysis and problem-solving (Kalogeras, 2014). Gambarato and Dabagian (2016) found that transmedia strategies are learner centred and help students be motivated and develop "multiple digital literacies, interpersonal communication skills and knowledge in various fields" (p.230). In ESL learners, transmedia strategies facilitated the acquisition, development and improvement of ESL skills and promoted social skills such as interactions, collaboration and networking amongst learners (Rodrigues & Bidarra, 2016).

TS provides students with a variety of media channels and an immersive learning experience that build on their existing skills and encourages collaborative problem solving (Pence, 2012, p.136-137). It allows learners to actively and freely express themselves using various modes of meaning and media channels. Students with differing learning styles and

levels of literacies can choose the type of media and mode of meaning that they are most comfortable with to begin their learning process and then move on to other media platforms to develop their knowledge and skills. Through TS's multiple platforms, "students with varied learning styles have multiple opportunities to revisit a story and reinforce skills of analysis and expression over sustained periods of time" (Herr-Stephenson et al. 2013, p.367).

Herr-Stephenson et al. (2013) used transmedia play which involved experimentation with and participation in a transmedia experience to help learners develop media literacy. Students who engaged in transmedia play were able "to find, assemble, and reassemble information dispersed across various knowledge communities" and do "creative and collaborative reworking of media content" (Herr-Stephenson et al. 2013, p.366-367). Martinez and Albaladejo-Ortega (2018), employed TS through an innovative teaching project "to improve the acquisition of transversal and disciplinary educational competencies" among university media students (p.52). The project was found to also develop creativity and boost learning motivations in students. Transmedia projects enabled students to employ various modalities and technology through storyboard drawing, script writing, use of camera, video shooting, narration recording, video editing and sharing that helped learners master the basic skills, concepts, and use of digital media (Chan et al. 2017). Chan et al. (2017)'s study reflects the focus of this paper which is to demonstrate how the various elements and tasks in a TS assessment provides multimodal engagement for students.

As discussed previously, multimodality is at the core of TS and TS pedagogies. The use of various modes of meaning to construct and disseminate a narrative is what sets TS apart from other forms of storytelling. The use of TS as an alternative assessment for a course enables students to have an active and immersive engagement with multiple modes of meaning instead of merely being passive consumers of a multimodal text or ensemble. The next section discusses the different modes of meaning that make up multimodal texts and communication that provides the framework for the analysis of the students' TS campaign in this study.

MULTIMODALITY

Multimodality attends to meaning as it is organized and configured through sets of semiotic resources for meaning making known as modes (Jewitt, 2008). The precise definition of what constitutes a mode varies but "what makes a mode mode-like is its availability as a resource for making signs in a social-cultural group" (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2002, p.346). Jewitt and Kress (2003), explain that a mode is perhaps best understood as a "regularised organised set of resources for meaning-making, including, image, gaze, gesture, movement, music, speech and sound-effect" (p.1).

The New London Group (2000) identified five modes of communication which are visual, linguistic, spatial, aural and gestural. This categorisation and description of the five modes were adapted and expanded upon in Perry (2018) and Periasamy et al. (2016) and the technical and digital mode of meaning (animation, image transitions, hyperlinks, shot types, camera angle) was included to recognise digital texts that are produced using digital tool and are composed of interactive elements. As digital forms encompass a key element on 21st century storytelling, interaction with technical and digital mode of meaning are vital in transmedia storytelling. Hence, the multiple modes of meaning described in this paper are categorised as visual and spatial modes, linguistic modes, gestural modes, audio modes, and technical and digital modes (Perry, 2018; Periasamy et al. 2016). These analysis of the TS assessment in this study is based on the modes described above. The elements that make up each category of mode is discussed in further detail in the following sections.

VISUAL AND SPATIAL MODE

The visual and spatial mode is the visual composition and physical arrangements that make up a text such as objects, spaces (environmental and architectural), images, people, symbols and their colour, layout, size, shape and position (Arola et al. 2014; Jewitt, 2008; The New London Group, 2000). As described in Serafini (2014), elements of visual composition include colour, size, scale, position, motifs, symbols, representations, narratives and point of view and "creating any visual image or multimodal ensemble requires the designer or artist to make decisions not only about what to represent, but also how to represent it." (p.62).

Visual narratives are constructed through images that depict narrative elements such as participants, objects, settings and actions and compositional structures refer to "how various elements relate to one another, how they are organized spatially, and their relative position are referred to as composition" (Serafini, 2014, p.65). In a short film for example, the visual narrative is constructed through the actors (participants), props (objects), locations (settings) and movements (actions) carried out by the actors on screen. The compositional structure in a film is often planned by the production team and visually represented through a storyboard. A storyboard visually and spatially depicts information on actors, their costumes, props and setting and objects and how they are positioned and presented within a shot and scene in the film and aids the production process for all involved in the filming of a scene (Serafini, 2014). Social media pages or profiles such as Twitter, Instagram and Facebook include elements of visual and spatial mode such as colour, layout, profile pictures and logo which play a big role in how users recognize and understand the contents in these pages (Arola et al. 2014, p.6).

LINGUISTIC MODE

The linguistic mode plays an important part in a transmedia storytelling storyworld, especially if it includes a short film and a book. The linguistic mode usually refers to spoken and/or written and printed words (Arola et al. 2014). Elements of the linguistic mode such as language, writing, speech, dialogue and vocabulary will also be analysed in this study (Jewitt, 2008). The linguistic mode also refers to elements of typography such as font and bold and italics which also play a visual role in adding meaning to a text (Alvarez, 2016).

AUDIO MODE

Audio mode as described in this study refers to elements such as voice, tone, accent, sound, sound effect, ambient sounds (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009). Background music in films, sound effects, songs, and alerts, beeps, and buzzing, whirring and white noises made by digital devices and apps also communicate a meaning and signal to users.

GESTURAL MODE

Elements of gestural mode include body physicality, body language, posture, facial expression, hand gestures and interaction and proximity between people (Arola et al. 2014; The New London Group, 2000). These elements are used in face to face interactions between people and by actors in a short film and also in photographs, art and images of people, animals and animated characters. More recently, facial expressions and gestures are also found in digital communication in emoticons, emojis and GIFs.

TECHNICAL AND DIGITAL MODE

Technical and digital modes refer to meanings that are constructed through the use of technical and digital equipment, devices and tools. Elements such as camera angle, distance (close up, aerial view) and brightness which are composed in a text through the use of cameras, video cameras, lights and other film and recording equipment make up the technical and digital mode of meaning. Other elements include animation and editing elements including visual effects that are used to produce texts in a meaningful and interesting manner through digital devices and software are also considered to be elements of the technical and digital mode. The following section will discuss the detailed design and methodology of the TS assessment conducted at a public university in Selangor, Malaysia.

DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

CONTEXT OF STUDY

TS was first introduced at the Malaysian public university where the research was conducted in 2017 as a topic in the Literature and the Media course. Literature and the Media is an elective *Citra* (liberal) course at the university under the language, communication and literacy domain which is open to students from all faculties and years in the university. The course aims to develop students' knowledge and competencies in English Language and literary and media studies. The teaching and learning approach used for the Literature and the Media course is largely influenced by the multimodality and multiple intelligences theory.

The Transmedia Storytelling Campaign (henceforth referred to as TSC) was designed as an alternative assessment for the course due to its core elements of incorporating multiple and multimodal platforms in the creation and delivery of a narrative. TS, was thought to be an excellent concept to increase multimodal engagement in undergraduate students. The transdisciplinary nature of TS that incorporates literary, media, marketing, branding and digital technology also made it a suitable subject for a course comprising of undergraduate students across faculties. The following section will explicate the details of the TSC assessment including the sample population and execution of the different stages of the assessment including the input provided by the lecturer to the students.

TSC CASE STUDY AND PARTICIPANTS

Over the years, students have produced many TSCs for the Literature and the Media course at the university. For the purpose of this paper, only one TSC, *Hope and Home* (2018) has been selected as a case study. As each TSC consists of at least three different platforms through which a storyworld unfolds, only one TSC could be chosen for analysis to limit the scope of this paper.

The *Hope and Home* (2018) (henceforth referred to as *H&H*) TSC was selected from four TSCs produced by a class comprising of 30 students from the university's Faculty of Education, Faculty of Science and Technology and Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities. The class was divided into four groups for the TSC assessment which each group consisting of 7-8 members. The *H&H* campaign was produced by a group of students who called themselves Le Bien Production. The group comprised seven 2nd year students from the Faculty of Education majoring in Teaching of English as a second language (TESL). The group consisted of six females and one male student who were all aged between aged 21-24 years old. *H&H* was selected as it was an exemplary TSC in terms of quality, design, execution and presentation

out of all the TSCs presented by the students in that class. The *H&H* TSC materials and artefacts were also meticulously documented, compiled and submitted in digital format to the lecturer as instructed allowing for convenient data gathering and analysis.

In the following sections, the Transmedia Storytelling assessment design, instruments of the study, i.e. the TSC assessment, its implementation and evaluation criteria will be described in detail.

TRANSMEDIA STORYTELLING CAMPAIGN (TSC) PRE-ASSESSMENT INPUT

Students were given three weeks of pre- assessment input in the topic of TS. Interactive lectures and workshop sessions were conducted on the basics of business storytelling and core principles of TS. Case studies of effective and successful TSCs as business storytelling conducted by various organizations and brands were used to help students understand the principles of TS and learn strategies of conceptualizing and implementing TSC. In preparation for the TSC assessment, students were tasked to conduct a case study of a brand or organization that has used TSC in their business storytelling strategy for branding and marketing. Through this task, students had to identify the principles of TS that are evident in the TSC of their chosen brand and compile a short report on their case study. This helped prepare them towards conceptualizing their own TSC for the university brand as specified in the task.

TRANSMEDIA STORYTELLING CAMPAIGN (TSC) ASSESSMENT INSTRUCTIONS

The students, in their groups of 7- 8 people were asked to conceptualize and create a TSC for the purpose of marketing and branding for the university. This added an element of business storytelling to the task, an aspect of storytelling that the students had been taught earlier in the course. The university brand was selected for the purpose of this assessment as it was a brand that the students were considered to have a deep understanding of. Furthermore, if they needed more information and material on the brand, they could access it easily from various sources on campus.

As TS is essentially multiplatform storytelling, for the TSC, students were asked to create a storyworld that is disseminated through three platforms with short film being a compulsory platform they had to complete in its entirety. The short film was chosen as a compulsory component because short film production assessments were found to develop multimodality and other 21st century skills (Perry, 2018). The findings on skills and competencies developed through short film assessments described in Perry (2018) informed this choice in the TSC assessment design.

Students were given the freedom to choose and decide what other two platforms their narrative could unfold through. Novels, social media pages, events, news articles, websites, apps, or immersive spaces were cited as possible options. Unlike the short film component, students had to only produce a concept and design for these two other platforms and not produce a complete product.

Since the short film was a compulsory element in their TSC, a short workshop on short film production was conducted for students where they were exposed to basic steps in film production. Students were exposed to resources and digital tools related to digital scriptwriting, storyboard creation, film music, sound editing and film editing. In addition to lectures, tutorials and workshops on TS, each group also had at least one compulsory private consultation session with their lecturer to further refine their ideas and proposals for the story and platform for the TSC. Students also had access to regular discussions via email and text message with their lecturer for further guidance on various aspects of their TSC throughout the entire process from start to completion of their assessment.

TRANSMEDIA STORYTELLING CAMPAIGN (TSC) CONCEPTUALISATION AND DESIGN

Students' work on their TSC assessment was conducted through discussions with their respective group members during and outside of class hours. Students also conducted field work to scout for locations for the filming of their short film. Midway through the planning process of the TSC, students attended a pitching session where the groups pitched their campaign ideas to their peers and the lecturers. The aim of the pitch is to "provide students the experience of concept or advertising pitching that is done in the media world" and "students have the opportunity to seek ideas and get feedback on their creative decisions from the lecturer and other groups in the class so that they can further make adjustment to their plans and improve their project" (Perry, 2018, p.222).

In total, the students were given six weeks to conceptualise, design, pitch, execute, complete and present the assessment. In that that time they were requested to document and compile all artefacts (notes, scripts, storyboards, presentation slides, photographs, images, posters, short film video, etc) in digital format. After presenting their completed TSC to the lecturer and peers at the end of semester, students had to submit their compiled TSC artefacts to the lecturer via the course Google Classroom site. Finally, students had to submit a reflection on their TSC assessment experience through an online Google Form provided to them by the lecturer after completion of the assessment.

DATA COLLECTION METHOD

The data used for this study comprised students presentations, TSC campaign notes, materials and artefacts and student post- assessment reflections. Student presentations include campaign pitching, and final presentations. TSC campaign artefacts include scripts, storyboards, rough notes, sketches, presentation slides, photographs, screen shots, posters, social media pages, film trailers, short films and videos.

Data was collected through observation of in class student group discussions of their TSC campaign ideas, pitching presentations and campaign presentations, as well as taking observation notes, photographing, video recording of these presentations. The TSC artefacts were collected in digital format from students using the Google Classroom site.

Data was also collected of students' reflection on the TSC assessment via an online Google Form that for designed by the lecturer. The Google form was sent to the students via a hyperlink. The students' reflection was done after the completion of the project upon which they could reflect on the learning goals that they had achieved through the project and also evaluate their strength and weakness and recognize opportunities to improve themselves for the future. The student reflection was conducted to also promote reflective and critical thinking in the students. As noted by Tang (2016), "students' process of finishing a digital storytelling project" such as the TSC campaign, "helps to develop a new understanding of the world around each student by means of critical self-reflection" (p. 573).

DATA ANALYSIS METHOD

The data collected in this study was analysed for evidence of students' engagement with multiple modes of meaning in their completion of various tasks as part of the TSC. Observation notes, photographs and video recordings of students TSC output in the form of pitching, campaign presentations and TSC artefacts were collated and analysed for evidence of interaction with and use of visual and spatial, linguistic, gestural, audio and technical and

digital modes of meaning. This was done by noting down students' explanations and elaborations on planning and tasks executed towards the completion of the TSC.

For the analysis of the TSC artefacts, firstly, the type of platforms or media (short film, book, social media page, etc.) used in the TSC was identified. The campaign artefacts submitted by the students including scripts, storyboards, posters, presentation slides and images, photographs, video recordings, screen shots, webpages and short films where then analysed to recognise the use and operation of multiple modes within the artefacts. For the short film, the script, storyboard, props, symbols and digital element evident in the artefacts were analysed and discussed.

In addition to analysing the artefacts, the various tasks involved in the conceptualisation, design and production of each platform and the elements in each platform was identified and listed. Every task conducted for each platform such as the pre-production, production and post-production stages in the short film production, the design, images and captions in the book and social media platform was identified, charted onto a table format, analysed and described. The findings of this analysis were charted in a matrix to present a summary students' engagement with multimodal elements in the production and execution of a TSC assessment.

Finally, the reflections submitted online via Google Form by the students were collated, coded and analysed to reveal students' views on the skills and knowledge obtained through execution of a TSC. The reflections of the students who produced the *H&H* TSC were read, and comments about the TSC tasks were selected and analysed. Key points raised by each student including the skills and knowledge gained and perception of TS were interpreted, identified and presented in table format.

In the next section, I will present the findings of the selected case study of the TSC conceptualised, designed and produced by the students (Le'Bien Productions) entitled, *Hope and Home* (2018).

FINDINGS OF *HOPE AND HOME (2018)* TRANSMEDIA STORYTELLING CAMPAIGN

HOPE AND HOME SYNOPSIS AND STORYWORLD

The *Hope and Home* storyworld revolves around the character of Ayu Ajma'in, who was raised by her grandfather, Tokwan, after her parents died in a car accident when she was a baby. The public university has a special place in Ayu's heart because it was the alma mater of both her parents as well as the place where they both met and fell in love. Ayu then begins to dream of securing a place to pursue her tertiary education at the university but also is concerned about leaving her elderly and unwell grandfather behind to pursue her studies. Ayu finally does become a student at the university but finds life away from home quite challenging at first. As an only child raised by her grandfather in a village, she has difficulty making friends and is bullied. She starts to regret leaving home and the death of her grandfather sends her over the edge and she sinks to severe depression. She is rescued by friends who care for her and she realizes that she is not alone. Surrounded by good and supportive friends, her university life gets better and she does well in her studies and eventually graduates. In her Instagram page, she shares the ups and downs of her life in university with her followers. After graduation, Ayu becomes a writer and motivator to young adults. She publishes a self-help, motivation diary for young adults, using anecdotes and life quotes that helped her get through tough times. She later discovers the love letters her parents wrote to each other while they were in university and publishes a book Dear Love that chronicles her parents' love story. The synopsis of this story

was also presented in a visual form by the students during the pitching session as seen in Figure 1.
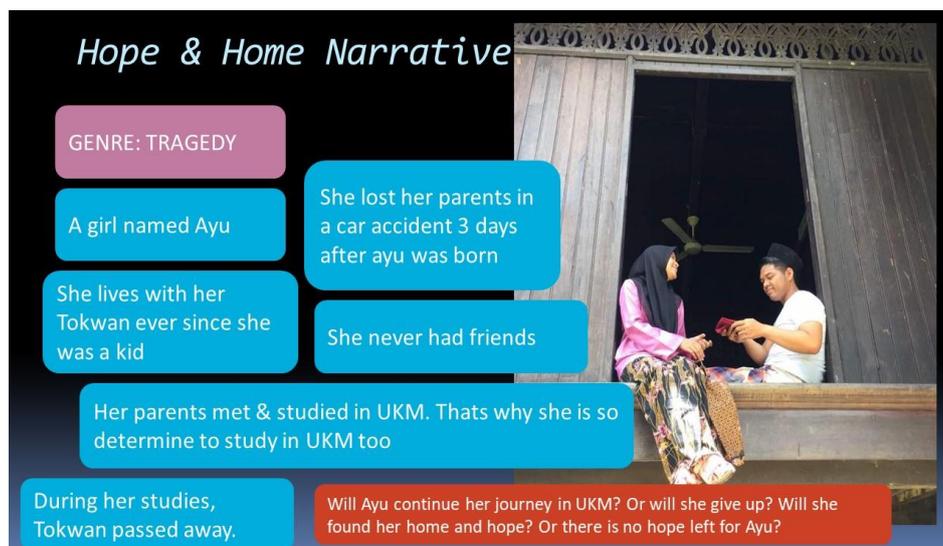

FIGURE 1 .Students' graphic visualization of *Hope and Home* narrative.

HOPE & HOME TRANSMEDIA NARRATIVE PLATFORMS

The *H&H* campaign is made up of three components or platforms as seen in Figure 2. As per the requirement of the task description, a short film was a compulsory component. In addition to the short film, the students had to conceptualise two other platforms of their choice through which they could tell their story. However, it is important to note that only the short film was a full-length production while the other two platforms were merely proposed concepts and not produced in entirety. In the case of the *H&H* campaign, in addition to the short film, the students chose to extend their narration of the story world through books and social media platform.

FIGURE 2. *Hope and Home* transmedia storytelling campaign platforms.
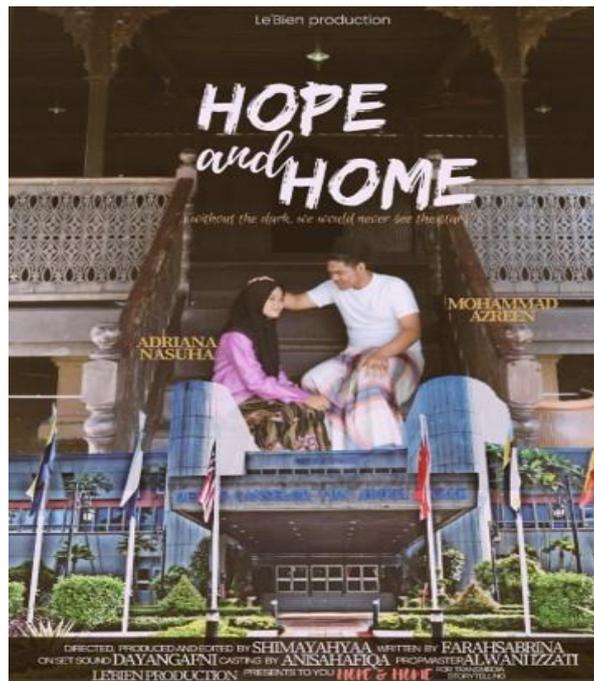
SHORT FILM

FIGURE 3. *Hope and Home* short film poster designed by students.

The short film component of the TSC portrays Ayu's life with her grandfather and her dreams of getting in to her parents' alma mater and subsequently her journey as she begins a lonely and challenging life as a university student and how she overcomes these challenges. Figure 3 shows the poster that the students created for the short film. The short film was produced and made available in digital form and can be found at the YouTube platform (Shima, 2018).
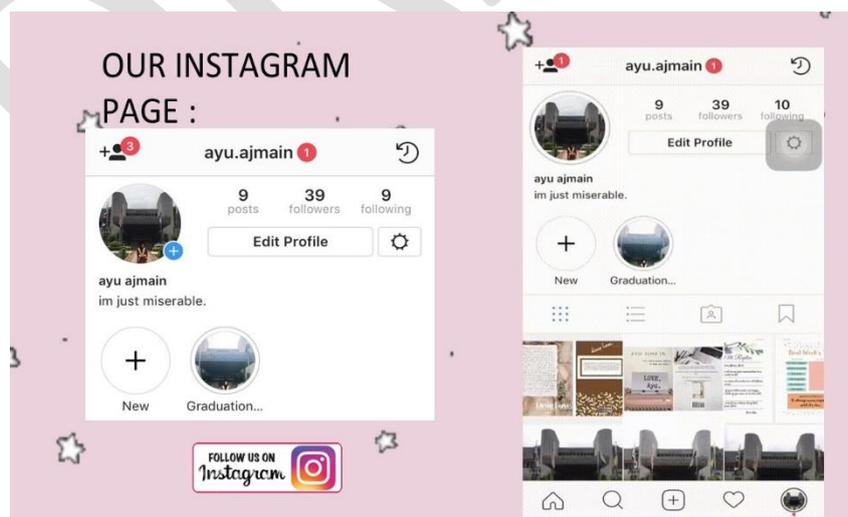
SOCIAL MEDIA PAGE

FIGURE 4. Screenshot of Ayu's Instagram Page.

The social media page was another platform that the students proposed and conceptualized. The students created a mock Instagram account, complete with images and captions as seen in

Figure 4. In the social media page, Ayu shares the ups and downs of her life in university and her happy moments with her friends in her Instagram page with her followers. The Instagram page narrates Ayu's life in university after she finds her way following her breakdown after losing her grandfather and her way in life. The Instagram page chronicles her experiences up to her graduation day.
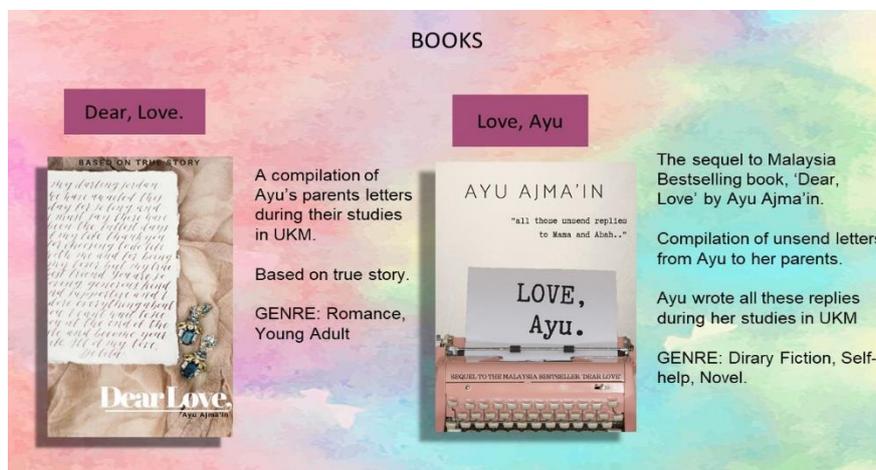
THE BOOKS

FIGURE 5. Screenshot of Ayu's Books.

The books are the third platform in which the storyworld of *Hope and Hope* unfolds through. The books present Ayu's life journey after she graduates. After graduation, Ayu becomes a writer and publishes two books. The first book she publishes *Dear Love.* As described by the students the genre of the *Dear Love* was romance for young adults. *Dear Love* is based on the true story of Ayu's parents. The book consists of a compilation of love letters that her parents exchanged while they were university students. This book provides a glimpse into lives of Ayu's parents, specifically their romantic relationship they shared with each other and acts like a prologue to Ayu's story in the *H&H* storyworld.

The second book is Dear Ayu, a self-help diary/journal that contains life lessons, motivational quotes from Ayu. Ayu taps from her own experiences and life journey to write this book.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

TASKS AND MULTIMODAL ENGAGEMENT IN SHORT FILM PRODUCTION

The short film production process is made up of three phases which consist of pre-production, production and post-production. The pre-production phase of the assessment involves the conceptualization of the story for the short film, scriptwriting, and casting, selection of film location, and general planning of the film shoot process and schedules. In the production phase, "students need to have identified a suitable location for the scene and the props and costumes needed" and gather all the needed equipment, props and people and shoot their short film. (Perry 2018, 224). In the post-production phase, students edit the film and also create a poster for their short film.

The development of the *H&H* short film involved all these phases. After having conceptualized the storyworld for the TSC, the student began pre-production tasks where they developed a script for the short film aspect of the campaign.

PRE-PRODUCTION: SCRIPT/SCREENPLAY

The development of the script or screenplay involved having a clear idea of the film's genre, identifying the setting for the various scenes of the film, designing the plot and identifying characters needed in the film. Below is an excerpt from the *H&H* short film script written by the student.

1 #AYU'S OFFICE *1*
  The camera focus on her family's picture in the frame
    AYU: This is Mama and Abah. Their smiles are
    the biggest blessing in my life.
    I really love them. But God loves them ₘₒᵣₑ…

2 PARENTS INVOLVED IN AN ACCIDENT *2*
    AYU:Mama and abah got into a car accident ₃ ₐₐᵧₛ
    after I was born. Tokwan said, it was a miracle.
    it was impossible for me to survive in ₜₕₐₜ ₒₐᵣ ₐₒₒᵢₐₑₙₜ.
    But I did.
    I don't know if that was a good thing.

3 PADDY FIELD & TOKWAN'S HOUSE *3*
    AYU:Fragile, frail but fiery
    That's what described me as a whole
    My life was once a wreckage.
    It's like a storm passed through.
    Not even a tiny bit of mercy was left.
    Mama and Abah were gone.

The excerpt of the *H&H* short film script demonstrates how students have produced a film script to present the story and its characters effectively. In doing so, they are seen to be actively engaging with linguistic mode of meaning and developing their writing skills. In the script, settings and locations for the scenes in the film such as Ayu's office, paddy field and Tokwan's house have been identified indicating engagement with visual and spatial modes. In selecting suitable locations and spaces for the narrative in each scene, students have put a lot of thought into the visual and spatial modes of meaning. The note in the script about that detail the camera's focus in *1# AYU'S OFFICE scene* demonstrates students' knowledge and ideas on elements of the technical and digital mode for the filming of the scene.

PRE-PRODUCTION: PROPS AND SYMBOL

The creative and critical decisions about objects, props and symbols to include in the short film demonstrates a high level of engagement and understanding of visual modes of meaning by the students. Observation and analysis of students' presentations at the pitching revealed that the students have chosen to incorporate specific visual elements in the short film to communicate specific meanings within the narrative to enhance the storytelling and reinforce the branding aspect of the TSC. Students chose to include buildings (university main hall) and symbols such as the red university scarf and the acceptance letter which have special significance to the character Ayu in the film to evoke the intended emotions in viewers. As described by Serafini (2014), the use of visual elements such as symbols and images demonstrate the students' engagement with the visual mode. Additionally, students also displayed competency of literary

devices in their understanding and effective use of symbolism in the story. Figure 6 shows examples of symbols used by students in the short film.

FIGURE 6. Symbols used in *Hope and Home* short film.

PRE-PRODUCTION: STORYBOARD

After developing the script and deciding on the visual compositional structure including setting and symbols for the short film, the *H&H* team developed a storyboard for the short film in order to help the entire production team visualize the different scenes in the film. The storyboard helps the director, actors and crew understand the scene, their positions and also help crew know where the props should be in each scene. The *H&H* team developed a storyboard using a demonstration version of an online digital storyboarding app called *Storyboard That* and presented it during the pitching to peers and the lecturer.
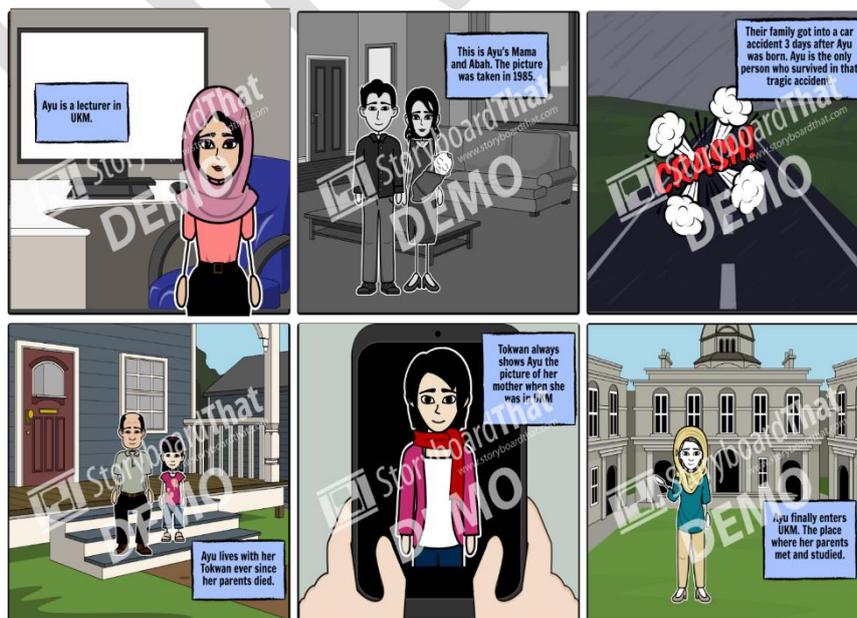
Create your own at Storyboard That

FIGURE 7. *Hope and Home* storyboard created by students for the short film.

Observations and analysis of the short film storyboard presented by the students showed that students engagement with digital tools such as storyboard apps. The storyboard also showed engagement with visual and spatial modes through the visualization of shots and scenes in the film. The clear and informative captions in each frame showed effective use of the linguistic mode.

PRODUCTION: DIRECTION, ACTING, MAKE-UP AND COSTUME

Analysis of the short film revealed that the short film directors' high level of engagement with visual and spatial, linguistic and gestural modes to ensure each scene of the films was enacted by the actors and crew in the way the director envisioned it to be. To communicate her vision to the crew in an effective manner, the director would have to use the right words, tone of voice, gestures and facial expressions. The short film was found to have a variety of shot types and angles which reveals the director understanding of technical and digital modes of meaning as well as the skills of the camera and technical crew to film the scenes in accordance to the directors' instructions.

The acting in the short film was well done revealing actors effective use of visual, linguistic, audio and gestural modes to deliver their dialogues and communicate emotions, tone and mood and emotions needed for each scene. Similarly, make up, costume and props crew employ were found to have engaged with visual and spatial and gestural modes in ensuring the actors and scene looked appropriate for each scene.

The overall production quality of the short film in terms of cinematography, brightness and sound was found to be very good. The camera, light and sound crew demonstrated engagement with visual, spatial, audio, gestural and technical and digital modes in operating the various image and sound recording equipment, software and devices needed to ensure the scene and actors are captured in accordance to the script and directors' instructions.

POST PRODUCTION: EDITING & POSTER DESIGN

The completed short film submitted to the lecturer contained all the elements found in a motion picture such as opening credits which contained the Le Bien Production name and the film title *Hope and Home* (Shima, 2018). The film included suitable sound effects and background score music to elicit the appropriate emotions and feelings towards the story from viewer. The choice of sounds and music inserted at appropriate parts of the film reveals a high degree of knowledge of audio mode of meaning (ibid). All the scenes in the films were edited seamlessly. These aspects of the film demonstrates students engagement with technical and digital mode through the use of film and sound editing software. The use of subtitles throughout the film and acknowledgements in the closing credits reveals use of linguistic mode of meaning via digital tools (ibid).

The analysis of students' short film poster seen earlier in Figure 3, showed their engagement with digital modes and various visual elements such as colour and font and linguistic elements to choose the most suitable titles and quotes to include in the poster. The analysis of different tasks conducted by the student to produce the short film and artifacts for the short film revealed that students had engaged with various modes of meaning. The table below presents a summary of all the various tasks involved in the various stages of short film production and the multimodal modes that they had engaged with through this task.

TABLE 1. Summary of Tasks and Literacies involved in Short Film Production.

SHORT FILM	
Tasks	**Multimodal Literacies Developed**
Pre-production	
Story	Visual/Spatial, Linguistics, Audio, Gestural, Technical/Digital.,
Pitching	Linguistic, Visual, Gestural,
Script/Screenplay	Linguistic, Visual/Spatial, Technical/Digital, Gestural, Audio.
Location and Set	Visual, Spatial
Props	Visual/Spatial
Storyboard	Visual, Spatial, Digital, Gestural, Linguistic
Production	
Direction	Visual/Spatial, Linguistics, Audio, Gestural, Technical/Digital.
Acting	Visual/Spatial, Linguistics, Audio, Gestural
Make up and Costume	Visual/Spatial, Gestural
Camera	Visual/Spatial, Gestural, Technical/Digital
Post-production	
Film Editing	Visual/Spatial, Linguistics, Audio, Gestural, Technical/Digital.
Sound Editing	Visual/Spatial, Linguistics, Audio, Gestural, Technical/Digital.
Film Poster Design	Visual/Spatial, Linguistics, Technical/Digital.

TASKS AND MULTIMODAL ENGAGEMENT IN BOOK PRODUCTION

As mentioned, as part of TS, the storyworld of *H&H* is also presented through books. For the book component of the TSC task, students presented the book concept, genre, design and sample excerpts. In producing the book concept, design and excerpts, students were found to have engaged with visual, linguistic and digital modes. Analysis of the students' book cover and content design and excerpts, revealed students' understanding of visual mode conventions of book cover styles and genre. Narrative elements and images in the book cover showed engagement with linguistic and visual modes of meaning. Students has used digital software to design the book covers, choosing the right images, colours, title and quotes to represent the style of a book cover for the right genres. The engagement with visual, digital and linguistic modes is evident through the analysis of the book covers design and sample excerpt from the book produced by the students shown in Figure 8.

FIGURE 8. Cover design and excerpts of *Love Ayu* books.

Table 2 below summarizes all the modes developed by the students through the book component of their TSC narrative.

TABLE 2. Summary of Tasks and Literacies involved in Book Concept and Design.

BOOK	
Tasks	**Multimodal Literacies Developed**
Story	Visual/Spatial, Linguistics, Audio, Gestural, Technical/Digital.
Book Cover & Content Artwork and Design	Visual/Spatial, Linguistics, Technical/Digital
Book Excerpt	Linguistics
Layout Design	Visual/Spatial, Technical/Digital

TASKS AND MULTIMODAL ENGAGEMENT IN INSTAGRAM SOCIAL MEDIA PAGE DESIGN

The third platform for the *H&H* narrative chosen by the students was the social media page. Students created an Instagram account and designed a page where Ayu's character posted images and accounts of her university life. The students demonstrated the digital, visual and linguistic literacy through the use of Instagram to present the narrative of *H&H*. As digital natives, students tapped into their own knowledge and experience as social media users and presented the story of Ayu through posts and Instagram stories to be consumed digitally by followers. This evident in the screen capture of the Instagram page shown in Figure 9.

FIGURE 9. Screen shots of Ayu's Instagram posts

The literacies developed through the creation of a social media page for the TSC is summarized in Table 3 below.

TABLE 3. Summary of Tasks and Literacies involved in Social Media Page Concept and Design.

SOCIAL MEDIA PAGE	
Tasks	**Multimodal Literacies Developed**
Account set up	Digital Technical, Visual, Linguistic
Images/ Photos/Videos	Visual/Spatial, Gestural, Audio, Technical/Digital
Captions/Posts	Linguistics, Digital/Technical
Story	Visual/Spatial, Linguistics, Audio, Gestural, Technical/Digital.

The observation and analysis of the *H&H* TSC which was chosen as a case study of TSCs by students for the Literature and the Media course conducted at a Malaysia public university has revealed the students are able to engage with multiple modes of meaning. In accordance to Chan, Churchill and Chiu (2017) observations on benefits of TS for developing multimodal literacy, the university students were able to engage with visual and spatial, linguistic, gestural, audio and technical and digital modes through the different tasks they conducted as part of their TSC assessment. Table 4 below summarizes all the modes of meaning that students have engaged with in the completion of every task in the TSC assessment.

TABLE 4. Matrix for Multimodal literacies developed through transmedia storytelling campaign assessment.

MODES OF MEANING **TRANSMEDIA STORYTELLING PLATFORMS & TASKS**	VISUAL / SPATIAL	LINGUISTIC	GESTURAL	AUDIO	TECHNICAL / DIGITAL
SHORT FILM					
Story	X	X	X	X	X
Script/Screenplay	X	X	X	X	X
Location	X				
Acting	X	X	X	X	
Camera	X		X		X
Direction	X	X	X	X	X
Costume and Make up	X		X		
Film Editing	X	X	X	X	X
Sound Editing	X		X	X	X
Pitching	X	X	X	X	X
Poster	X	X			X
BOOK					
Cover and content artwork and images	X	X	X		X
Book excerpts		X			X
Content layout	X	X			
SOCIAL MEDIA					
Instagram account set up	X	X			X
Instagram Posts	X	X			X
Instagram Photos	X	X	X	X	X
Instagram Videos	X	X	X	X	X

Table 4 shows the multiple modes of meaning students had engaged with through the different tasks performed to conceptualise, design and produce all platforms in the TSC. Students had highest engagement with visual and spatial, linguistic and technical and digital modes of meaning in all three platforms. They had lesser engagement with gestural and audio modes as the book and social media platform employed less of these modes compared to the film platform. The TSC assessment had therefore provided an engaging multimodal learning experience for the students as revealed in the analysis of their tasks and completed work.

POST ASSESEMENT STUDENT REFLECTIONS

As outlined earlier, student reflections on the TSC assessment was collected by the lecturer through the use of a customised reflection form using the Google Form template. These reflections were submitted online by the students using the provided hyperlink. The analysis of student reflections provided an insight into multimodal engagement they had as well as other knowledge and skills they developed through the TSC assessment.

The reflections from students who produced the *H&H* TSC is presented in a table. Table 5 contains the comments of the students in the left column and the finding of the analysis of students' comments on the right column. The right column comprises the interpretation of the knowledge and key points and skills they have developed through the TSC based on the analysis of their comments in the right column.

TABLE 5. Findings based on Students' Reflection on TSC Assessment.

Student Comments	Key Point and Skills Identified
I will never view in the same after taking this course as I am likely to search for every single thing that contributes to meaning.	Understanding of multimodal construction of meaning in media texts.
I think Transmedia storytelling can be used as a multiliteracies teaching strategy where we can attract students to learn literature in a fun way.	Recognition of TS as a pedagogy for multiliteracy to engage learners.
I think students can learn better through this kind of approach as it is more fun and enjoyable.	TS as a fun and enjoyable teaching tool.
I think it benefits me as a student as I can use various kinds of modes to engage with literature text.	Able to use multiple modes of meaning to read and understand literary texts.
Transmedia Storytelling as a teaching tool is great for teacher to explore and share the content with the students effectively. Creating transmedia storytelling is entertaining and educational and this is a creative and active teaching method that creates critical thinking and empowers the students.	TS is an effective, active learning teaching tool and promotes creativity, critical thinking and learner autonomy.
Different people use different method of study so by engaging multimodal literacies, it could help students to find it more engaging through their own method of study	Multimodal pedagogies benefit all learners with diverse abilities and learning styles.

Analysis of students' comments reveals that students had experienced multimodal engagement through the completion of the TSC. As the students in the case study comprised of 2nd year students from the Faculty of Education, their comments revealed their appreciation of TS an effective multimodal pedagogical tool. Students also found TS to be an active learning tool that is fun, enjoyable and suitable for all kinds of learners. The analysis of student reflections reinforces the findings based on the TSC artifacts that the TSC enabled students to engage with multiple modes of meaning as well as develop various other skills and competencies.

CONCLUSION

This paper has detailed the use of a TS as a pedagogical tool for multimodal engagement for undergraduate students. The case study demonstrates students engagement with multiple modes of meaning and media in producing a TSC using short film, book and social media as

narrative platforms. TS is found to be an effective pedagogical tool that can be applied as an alternative assessment to enable tertiary students to critically and skilfully engage with visual and spatial, linguistic, audio, gestural and technical and digital modes of meaning. This study has revealed that a comprehensively designed TS assessment can be a holistic learning tool that can also develop creativity, critical thinking and provide an active, fun and engaging learning experience for students. The findings of this paper hope to pave the way towards identifying and understanding the diverse applications and potential contributions of TS pedagogies in 21st century higher education contexts. Future applications of TS pedagogies can focus on more holistic development of learner such as character building and physical, mental and emotional well-being in learners.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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