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Post-Aristotelian Story Paradigm and its Influence on Malaysian Computer-Animated Television Series

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Abstract

The storytelling model is an essential element in the story-building process and serves as a guide for constructing the story's plot, order, conflict, and direction. There are numerous story structures available, and the storytelling model employed in the story-building process serves as the guiding principle for structuring the story. Aristotle's three-act structure developed thousands of years ago, is regarded as the most fundamental and is still used today as a guide for structuring a story. This paper examines the influence of the post-Aristotelian story paradigm on the storytelling development of computer-animated television series produced in Malaysia between 2010 and 2019. In order to comprehend the storytelling development, the utilisation of the storytelling model and story arc approach were identified. Qualitative indirect observation and purposive sampling were employed to select local animated television series. Forty episodes of the local animated television series were subjected to empirical analysis, and ATLAS.ti 8 was used to analyse the data. The findings of this study suggest that the post-Aristotelian story paradigm significantly influences the development of storytelling and will serve as the foundation for proposing a storytelling model for computer-animated television series in Malaysia.

Keywords: Computer-Animated, Narrative, Post-Aristotelian, Storytelling Model, Television Series

Introduction

The utilisation of a storytelling model in the process of story-building is an essential element of storytelling. A storytelling model or narrative structure is the framework upon which a story is constructed and is used as the basis for structuring the narrative of a story through the order and direction of the plot (Huntley, 2007; Mou, 2015; Huang & Grizzard, 2022). In order to effectively tell a story, the story structure or storytelling model plays a critical role and serves as the framework for shaping the story for time-based media. The storytelling model serves as a structure for organising the manner in which a story is told using the storytelling elements of story and narrative (Cohn, 2016; Cutting, 2016; Kim et al., 2018; Qiang et al., 2017). In recent years, numerous narratologists and storytelling experts have debated the importance of story and narrative in the utilisation of storytelling models. There have been

numerous claims that story and narrative are synonymous. However, few scholars concur that story and narrative are opposed in the storytelling application and are essential to the story development process (Akleman et al., 2015; Amerian et al., 2015; Cohn, 2013).

From the perspective of narrative development through the use of a storytelling model, narrative components are viewed as an integral aspect of animation story development. The use of narrative in story construction is predicated on the ability to plot events in the story's chronology, which organises the story's plot and events. The narrative also depicts the story's progression through time and space, as well as its presentation. In contrast, French structuralist Gene Genette has examined the relationship between time and narrative by employing the three categories of order, duration, and frequency. These narrative elements are essential to the animation story-building process and are utilised to plot the story's events using the appropriate storytelling model. The plotted events of the story may include single or multiple narratives. In order to structure these narratives into a story, a storytelling model is applied (Field, 2013; Ghazali & Ghani, 2019; Huntley, 2007; Kim et al., 2018; Kim & Kim, 2016; Tong et al., 2018; Shah et al., 2022).

This paper examines the influence of Aristotle's three-act structure over the post-Aristotelian story paradigm on the storytelling development of computer-animated television series produced in Malaysia between 2010 and 2019. The trend and utilisation of the post-Aristotelian story paradigm are identified in order to comprehend which storytelling models were utilised and applied during the story-building process. In addition, the approaches towards the application of story-arc in the story-building process were determined to understand further the approach towards the use of a storytelling model within a single episode, multiple episodes, or an entire season for the storytelling development of local computer-animated television series.

Aristotle's Three-Act Structure
Over the years, many narratologists, storytelling experts and theorists have developed numerous storytelling models for structuring the story and narrative for animation and film. The earliest available storytelling model is Aristotle's (Poetics), the three-act structure (refer to Figure 1), which dates back to circa 335 BC (Brütsch, 2015). Aristotle, a renowned Greek philosopher and poet, devised the three-act structure and established that a story is composed of three parts (Cutting, 2016). The three parts are *Protasis* (beginning), *Epitasis* (middle) and *Catastrophe* (end). Aristotle initially developed this approach for use in drama and Greek theatre, but it has since been adapted for numerous time-based media. In Greek theatre, the beginning of the story introduces the characters and setting. The middle part of the story provides action leading up to the climax. The end of the story provides the audience with the story's climax and final resolution.
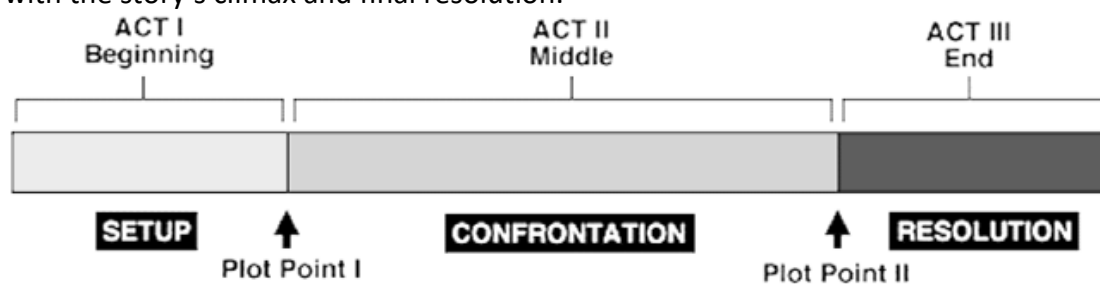

Figure 1: Three-Act Structure by Aristotle (c. 335 BC)

Similarly, the three-act structure has been widely used to develop stories for time-based media for a considerable amount of time. This is evidenced by the fact that all animated and feature-length films use this fundamental structure to structure and tell their stories. Previous studies have concluded that the three-act structure is a traditional storytelling model for story-building and plot development (Adams et al., 2003; Cohn, 2013; Mou, 2015; Shah et al., 2021, 2022). However, the three-act structure remains relevant today and has contributed to the emergence of numerous new storytelling models. Numerous narratologists and storytelling experts have developed various storytelling models over time. The fundamental structure of Aristotle's three-act structure is seen as the guiding principle for establishing the premise of the newly developed story structure based on the three acts as the structural foundation. Nonetheless, many storytelling experts and narratologists concur that every story should have a beginning, middle, and end as a fundamental approach to the story structure (Cohn, 2016; Cutting, 2016; Shah et al., 2021, 2022).

Post-Aristotelian Story Paradigms
Huntley (2007) concluded in a comprehensive analysis of various existing storytelling models that the majority of available storytelling models can be classified into two broad categories. These are the post-Aristotelian and the hero's Journey story paradigms. Most of the post-Aristotelian story paradigm (storytelling models) was derived from the work of Lajos Egri (the art of dramatic writing, 1946). Lajos Egri's works were fundamentally based on the three-act structure, but he significantly expanded the characters' roles and the story's conflict. The characters' psychological motivations (character profiles) strongly influence their story roles. On the contrary, the story's approach to conflict took two distinct forms. Lajos Egri expanded on the conflict approach by examining how conflict can develop within each character and how it should naturally evolve as the story progresses rather than being imposed. Several post-Aristotelian story paradigms that were developed were the *paradigm* by Syd Field (1979), the *central plot* by Robert McKee (1997), the *beat sheet* by Blake Snyder (2005) and *the six-stage plot structure* by Michael Hauge (2013) (Huntley, 2007; Miller, 2011; Mou, 2015; Phillips & Huntley, 2001; Vidakovic, 2021; Alfieri, 2022).

In 1979, Syd Field invented the paradigm (refer to Figure 2) as a model for storytelling (screenplay, the art of screenwriting). Like Aristotle's three-act structure, the paradigm promotes a three-act structure with a more detailed plot point within the storytelling model. This storytelling model is widely regarded as the most dominant structure for developing stories in Hollywood (Simmons, 2017). Paradigm is divided into three acts: the setup, the confrontation, and the resolution. Within each of the three acts, different plots are structured into the story structure. Field included two plot points in act one (setup): the inciting incident and plot point one. In act two, there are four plot points: pinch one, midpoint, pinch two and plot point two, and in act three, there is only one plot point: the climax, which ultimately results in the story's resolution.
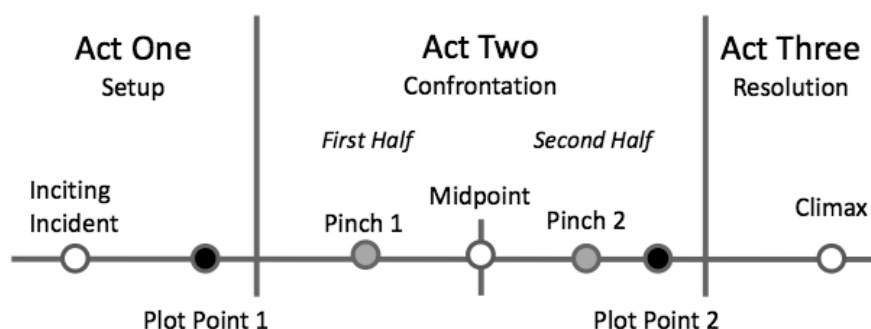
Figure 2: Paradigm Storytelling Model by Syd Field (1979)

Act one introduces the story's central characters and establishes two critical plots early in the story's setup stage. On the contrary, Field's act two is divided into two distinct sections with four significant plots. The two sections are the first half and second half of the story. Conflict is introduced within the structure of the story's first half, in pinch one, before it reaches the midpoint. Following the midpoint, in the second half of act two, a twist is introduced to the conflict. Act three brings the story to a climax before presenting a resolution that will bring the story to an end. The setup, conflict, twist, and climax play critical roles in the story's structure, as the structure binds their relationship.

However, a few previous studies have asserted that the *paradigm* storytelling model is a four-act story structure disguised as a three-act structure. The character undergoes four stages of development: setup, inciting incident, climax, and resolution, resulting in a more four-act structure than a three-act structure (Huntley, 2007). Numerous debates exist regarding the number of acts within the paradigm storytelling model, but most narratologists and storytelling experts support it as a three-act structure. Given the above, the paradigm storytelling model serves as a continuation of Aristotle's three-act structure. It is regularly used as part of the storytelling and story-building process in structuring the story (Amerian et al., 2015; Rafik et al., 2020; Mou et al., 2013; Shah et al., 2021, 2022).

Since the development of the *paradigm* by Syd Filed (1979), two additional storytelling models that use the three acts as their structural basis have been identified. The *beat sheet* developed by Blake Snyder (2005) is comprised of fifteen-story beats. The first nine-story beats are organised within the first act, the following four-story beats make up the second act, and the final two-story beats are organised within the third act (Milles, 2012; Hellerman, 2020). In contrast, Michael Hauge's (2013) *six-stage plot structure* is comprised of a three-act, six-stage structure that employs the inner and outer journey story-building approach. Stages one and two are organised in the first act, stages three and four in the second, and stages five and six in the third. These two narrative structures are viewed as continuations of Aristotle's three-act structure (Ackerman, 2018; Loughrey, 2020).

Methodology
This study employs a qualitative phenomenological research design to answer the research questions and accomplish the study's objectives. The study was conducted primarily through qualitative observation. This method was chosen because it is the best approach to comprehending the influence of the post-Aristotelian story paradigm on the storytelling development of computer-animated television series produced in Malaysia between 2010 and 2019.

The indirect observation method was used as the primary instrument for the data collection on selected computer-animated television series produced in Malaysia between 2010 and 2019. The data samples for this study were collected using a qualitative sampling method, with non-probability sampling as the primary sampling method. The purposive sampling technique was used to identify samples of local computer-animated television series downloaded from YouTube.

A total of forty episodes from eleven local animated television series were selected as the sample size (refer to Table 1), and six criteria were established in the selection of the titles for the local computer-animated television series. Each series' first, middle, and last episodes were selected and analysed for each of the nine titles. Only two titles (*The Amazing Awang Khenit* and *Pada Zaman Dahulu*) were examined in more than three episodes. This is due to the fact that the story for the final episodes of *The Amazing Awang Khenit (season one)* was spread across two episodes. In contrast, nine episodes were chosen for *Pada Zaman Dahulu*, with one story spread across three episodes.

Table 1
List of Malaysian Computer-Animated Television Series Titles and Episodes

No	Title	Year	Episodes
1	Upin & Ipin (Season 13)	2019	1, 7 & 13
2	Rimba Racer (Season 2)	2019	1, 5 & 10
3	Ejen Ali (Season 2)	2017	1, 7 & 13
4	Cerita -Cerita Didi & Friends	2017	1, 10 & 20
5	BoBoiboy Galaxy (Season 1)	2016	1, 12 & 24
6	Ejen Ali (Season 1)	2016	1, 7 & 13
7	The Amazing Awang Khenit (Season 1)	2014	1, 13 25 & 26
8	Puteri	2014	1, 3 & 6
9	BoBoiboy (Season 2)	2012	1, 7 & 13
10	Satria: The Warrior of 7 Elements	2012	1, 13 & 26
11	Pada Zaman Dahulu (Season 1)	2011	1-3, 7-9 & 10-2

The empirical analysis method was used to analyse the data from the forty episodes of the eleven chosen computer-animated television series from Malaysia. This study used a seven-step qualitative data analysis procedure for empirical analysis by Creswell and Creswell (2018). The ATLAS.ti 8 software for qualitative data analysis was utilised to analyse the data gathered via indirect observation. Tesch (1990), who describes an eight-step coding process and procedure, served as the basis for the analysis's adopted coding procedure. The predetermined codes were subsequently developed and classified into themes and subthemes (refer to Table 2). In order to analyse the data, eleven predetermined codes (codebooks), one overarching theme, and one sub-theme were identified and utilised. Each of the episodes analysed in ATLAS.ti 8 was encoded with these codes. In order to establish the validity and reliability of this study, two additional measures were taken. First, the definitions of the codes did not change during the coding process, which was achieved by continuously comparing the data to the codes generated for data analysis. Second, the data were tabulated in a table, allowing a more precise interpretation of the analysed data and a more succinct conclusion.

Table 2
The Predetermined Themes, Sub-Themes and Codes (Codebook)

Themes	Sub-Themes	Codes
Storytelling Model	Story Structure	3 Act
		4 Act
		Freytag's Pyramid
		17 Stages
		Narrative Theory
		Paradigm
		4-Act Story
		Beat Sheet
		Hero's Journey
		Story Circle
		6 Stage

Findings and Discussion
The Utilisation of Storytelling Models in the Storytelling Development
The first set of analyses focused on the utilisation of storytelling models in the development of storytelling in forty local computer-animated television series episodes. After observation and analysis, it was determined that the forty episodes examined used and demonstrated five distinct storytelling models. Each episode is viewed as utilising a distinct storytelling model as the main framework for the story-building process. The five-storytelling model which was found evident was the *three-act structure* by *Aristotle* (circa 335 BC), the *Freytag's Pyramid* by *Gustav Freytag* (1863), the *paradigm* by *Syd Field* (1979), the *four-act story structure* by *Kristin Thompson* (1999), and the *six-stage plot structure* by *Michael Hauge* (2014) (refer to Figure 3).
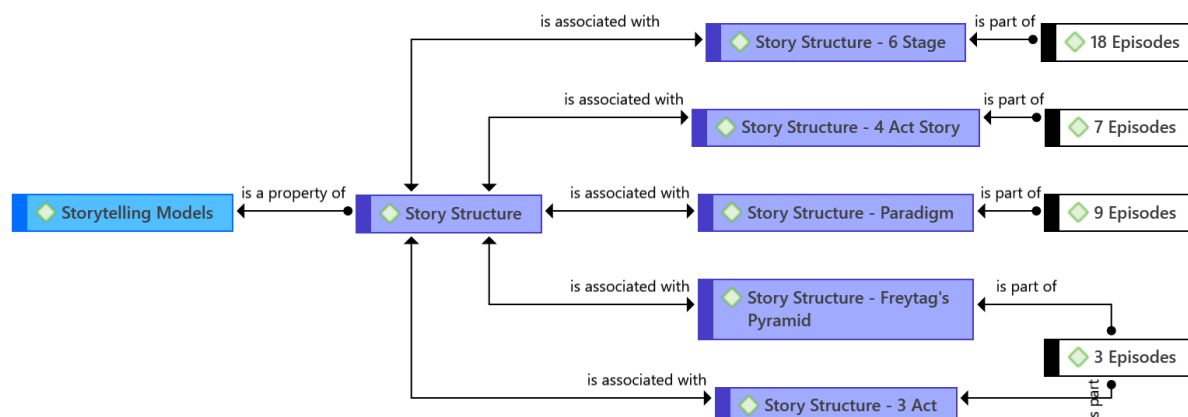

Figure 3: The Comprehensive Analysis of the Major Theme of Storytelling Models

Three episodes of "*Cerita-Cerita Didi and Friends*" employed the three-act structure, while three episodes of "*Upin & Ipin*" employed Freytag's pyramid. In contrast, the nine episodes of "*Pada Zaman Dahulu*" appear to employ the paradigm model. In comparison, the seven episodes of "*The Amazing Awang Khenit*" (four episodes) and "*Puteri*" (three episodes) appear to employ the four-act story structure. On the contrary, the six-stage plot structure was observed in eighteen episodes from "*Ejen Ali seasons one and two*" (six episodes), "*BoBoiBoy Galaxy*" (three episodes), "*Rimba Racer*" (three episodes), "*BoBoiBoy*" (three episodes), and "*Satria: The Warriors of the 7 Elements*" (three episodes) (refer to Table 3).

Table 3
The Five Storytelling Models Discovered in the Analysed Episodes

No	Storytelling Models	Total Episodes	List of Titles and Episodes
1	3 Act Structure	3	1. Cerita – Cerita Didi & Friends (episodes 1, 10 & 20)
2	Freytag's Pyramid	3	1. Upin & Ipin (episodes 1, 7 & 13) (season 13)
3	Paradigm	9	1. Pada Zaman Dahulu (episode 1, 2, 3, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 & 12) (season 1)
4	4-Act Story Structure	7	1. The Amazing Awang Khenit (episode 1,13, 25 & 26) (season 1) 2. Puteri (episodes 1, 3 & 6)
5	6 Stage Plot Structure	18	1. Ejen Ali (episodes 1, 7 & 13) (season 1) 2. BoBoiBoy Galaxy (episodes 1, 12 & 24) (season 1) 3. Ejen Ali (episodes 1, 7 & 13) (season 2) 4. Rimba Racer (episodes 1,5 & 10) (season 2) 5. BoBoiBoy (episodes 1, 7 & 13) (season 2) 6. Satria: The Warriors of 7 Elements (episodes 1, 13 & 26)

In the overall analysis, it was discovered that the *three-act structure*, *Freytag's pyramid*, and *the four-act story structure* were used as the primary framework and structure for constructing stories with fewer plots and conflicts. In contrast, *the six-stage plot structure* and *the paradigm* were used as the primary framework and structure to develop a more complex story with a more significant number of plots and conflicts. It was also observed that the majority of local computer-animated television series titles employ the same story structure throughout the episodes of single or multiple seasons. This is demonstrated in "*Ejen Ali*" (seasons one and two", "*BoBoiBoy Galaxy*" (season one) and "*BoBoiBoy*" (season two). Overall, these findings suggest that the storytelling model employed in each episode is influenced by the story's approach, storytelling elements, and, most significantly, the story's length and duration. These factors are crucial for determining the most suitable storytelling model to use during the story-building process.

Approach to Story Arcs implemented in the Storytelling Development
The second set of analyses centred on the implementation of story arcs in the development of forty episodes of local computer-animated television series. The initial observation and analysis determined that three different approaches towards story arcs were identified in the forty episodes examined. The approach to the story arc was analysed in order to comprehend the use of a single, multiple, or season-spanning continuing storyline in the storytelling approach in the forty episodes analysed. The three approaches towards the story identified were single-episode story arcs, multiple-episode story arcs and season-spanning story arcs (refer to Figure 4).
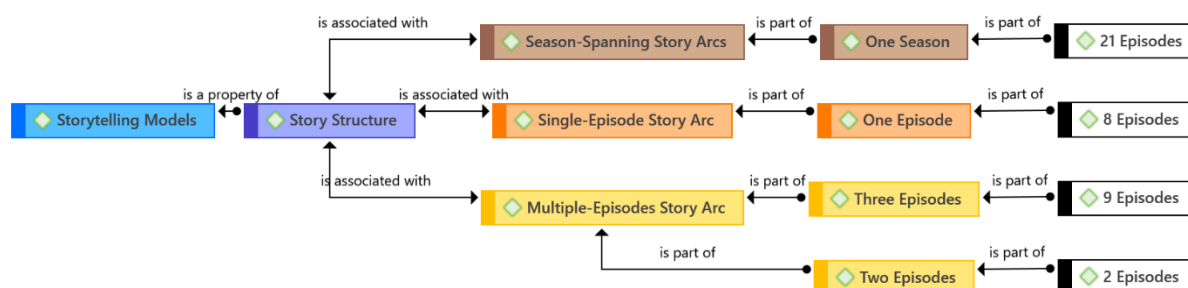
Figure 4: The Comprehensive Analysis of the Sub-theme Story Arcs

It was discovered that eight episodes of "*Cerita-Cerita Didi & Friends*," "*Upin & Ipin*" (season 13), and "*The Amazing Awang Khenit*" (season one) utilised the single-episode story arc. In contrast, eleven episodes of "*Pada Zaman Dahulu*" and "*The Amazing Awang Khenit*" (season one) were observed to utilise the multi-episode story arc. On the contrary, the season-spanning story arc was observed in twenty-one episodes of the animated titles of "*Ejen Ali*" (seasons 1 and 2), "*BoBoiBoiBoy Galaxy*" (season 1), "*Rimba Racer*" (season 2), "*Puteri*", "*BoBoiBoy*" (season 2), and "*Satria: The Warriors of 7 Elements*" (season 2) (refer to Table 4).

Table 4
The Three-Story Structure Discovered in the Analysed Episodes

No	Story Structure	Total Episodes	List of Titles and Episodes
1	Single-Episode Story Arc	8	1. Cerita – Cerita Didi & Friends (episodes 1, 10 & 20) 2. Upin & Ipin (episodes 1, 7 & 13) (season 13) 3. The Amazing Awang Khenit (episode 1 & 13) (season 1)
2	Multiple-Episodes Story Arc	11	1. The Amazing Awang Khenit (episode 25 & 26)　　(season 1) 2. Pada Zaman Dahulu (episode 1, 2, 3, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 & 12) (season 1)
3	Season-Spanning Story Arcs	21	1. Ejen Ali (episodes 1, 7 & 13) (season 1) 2. BoBoiBoy Galaxy (episodes 1, 12 & 24) (season 1) 3. Ejen Ali (1, 7 & 13) (season 2) 4. Rimba Racer (episodes 1,5 & 10) (season 2) 5. Puteri (episodes 1, 3 & 6) 6. BoBoiBoy (episodes 1, 7 & 13) (season 2) 7. Satria: The Warriors of 7 Elements (episodes 1, 13 & 26)

The overall analysis revealed that the multiple-episode story arc is the most preferred method for a continuing storyline. This can be seen as the multiple-episode story arc was consistently used over thirty-two episodes (nine animated titles). The multiple-episode story arc is seen as a way to prolong the storyline through numerous episodes and is extensively employed across the forty episodes. Furthermore, it was evident that "The Amazing Awang Khenit" (season 1) extended the story arc of the final episode over two episodes (episodes 25 and 26),

which had a single storyline spanning two episodes. In contrast, the storyline of "Pada Zaman Dahulu" spans three episodes and is the only animated series to use both single-episode and multi-episode story arcs throughout its entire season. It can be concluded that local animation practitioners favour continuous storylines across multiple episodes and season-spanning story arcs as the preferred storytelling development approach for local computer-animated television series.

The Influence of the Post-Aristotelian Story Paradigm on Storytelling Development
The third and final set of analyses focused on comprehending the post-Aristotelian story paradigm's influence on the storytelling development of local computer-animated television series. Based on the observation and analysis, it was determined that two of the five storytelling models identified and utilised across the forty episodes are influenced by the post-Aristotelian story paradigm. The two-storytelling models are the *paradigm* by *Syd Field* (1979) and the *six-stage plot structure* by *Michael Hauge* (2014) (refer to Table 5).

Table 5
Two Storytelling Models Identified and Influenced by the Post-Aristotelian Story Paradigm

No	Storytelling Models	Total Episodes	List of Titles and Episodes
1	Paradigm	9	1. Pada Zaman Dahulu
2	6 Stage Plot Structure	18	1. Ejen Ali (season 1) 2. BoBoiBoy Galaxy (season 1) 3. Ejen Ali (season 2) 4. Rimba Racer (season 2) 5. BoBoiBoy (season 2) 6. Satria: The Warriors of 7 Elements

The examination of forty episodes (eleven animated titles) revealed that twenty-seven episodes (seven animated titles) utilised two distinct storytelling models, which is believed to have a strong influence by the post-Aristotelian story paradigm. Similar to the three-act structure developed by Aristotle, the foundation of these two storytelling models consists of three acts, which serve as the primary structure. The paradigm model employs the three acts as its foundation, with act one serving as the story's setup, act two as the confrontation, and act three as the story's resolution. Similarly, the structural foundation of the six-stage plot structure is based on three acts, and each of the three acts is well-balanced with two stages. Act one consists of stage one's setup and a new situation, while act two consists of stage three's progress and stage four's complications and higher stakes. The final act, act three, consists of stage five's final push and stage six's aftermath.

Overall, the analysis reveals that most local computer-animated television series employ a storytelling model that is heavily influenced by the post-Aristotelian story paradigm. This is evidenced by the fact that out of eleven animated titles (forty episodes) studied over a decade, seven (twenty-seven episodes) fully employ the storytelling model influenced by Aristotle's three-act structure. In addition, this supports the notion that the traditional storytelling approach of every story having a beginning, middle, and end, which consists of three acts, is still used and practised in contemporary storytelling. It could be concluded that the Malaysian computer-animated television series' storytelling development over a decade from 2010 to 2019 has been strongly influenced by the post-Aristotelian story paradigm. This

is evidenced by the fact that the majority of the examined animated titles and episodes employ the storytelling model, whose three acts form the basis of the story structure.

Conclusion

Storytelling models have existed for more than two thousand five hundred years and are regarded as an essential component of storytelling. Despite the fact that the three-act structure was created decades ago, its use and application to the development of stories remain relevant. The three-act structure continues to be regarded as the primary method for structuring an animated story and is widely employed in Malaysia for the storytelling development of animated shorts and series. The application of the three-act structure is also evident in various other available storytelling models, as the structural foundation is viewed as more complex and is utilised in the story-building of animated television series with a longer running time. With the numerous storytelling models available, each of these structural forms could be applied to a single or continuing storyline which applies the three acts as the framework of story-building. Even though each structure takes a unique structural approach, the fundamental element of structuring a story for animation still utilises the three acts of the beginning, middle, and end, where it is applied in the form of an inciting incident with a conflict driven by the characters, who then embark on a journey to resolve the conflict with a conclusion at the end of the story.

For the future development of computer-animated television series in Malaysia, animation practitioners can use these findings as a guide for story-building. The method of utilising a post-Aristotelian story paradigm can serve as the primary structure (motivation) in the story-building process. Evidently, the post-Aristotelian story paradigm has been the preferred method for computer-animated television series over the past decade. It has greatly influenced the storytelling model used in the development of computer-animated television series in Malaysia. This study contributes further by demonstrating that the storytelling model of the *three-act structure* can be used for shorter stories with fewer plots and conflicts. In contrast, the *six-stage plot structure* and the *paradigm* can be used for longer stories with more plots. In addition, this study contributes to understanding the application of story arcs in the story-building process. The multiple-episode story arc can be used for developing storytelling within multiple episodes and for the season-spanning story arcs.

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