



RESEARCH ARTICLE

PARODY OF MALAYSIAN LIFE: THE EFFECTS OF MAT LUTHFI'S VIDEO BLOGS (V-BLOGS)
ON MALAYSIAN YOUTH

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ABSTRACT

This study intends to understand the effect of localized parody videos on youths. By specifically focusing on how young Malaysians respond to Mat Luthfi, a famous Malaysian vlogger, the study explicates how video parodies could become a source of entertainment, information and even patriotism. The ideas of user generated content and remix culture are referred to in order to put the youths' viewing experience into context. Interviews were conducted with students at the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), qualitative analysis was applied to make sense of the respondents experiences. In short, the study found that the youths were very much entertained by Mat Luthfi's videos. More importantly they had positive impressions of the messages embedded in the parody videos. Among others, the respondents identified messages of racial unity, humanity and positive attitude.

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INTRODUCTION

User-generated content refers to the creation and sharing of content that may be adapted from any given material such as printed or digital sources (Merrick, 2015). YouTube, the world's largest video sharing site offer this affordance to the internet generation who are very much savvy and active in the creation of online contents. The group of young people who are active on YouTube are often branded as the You Tube generation especially when they make YouTube their online diary by having their own channels where they can curate a media platform of their own (Johnson, 2008). The YouTube generation is capable to translate their ideas, observations, beliefs and aspirations into video contents that are then shared and viewed by others. One of the main video sharing activities on youtube is vlogging. Vlogs have been described as user-generated videos of short duration that are distributed online where others may view, subscribe, or comment on them (Burgess and Green, 2009). According to Snelson (2015) seemingly endless supply of vlogs can be retrieved after entering the search phrase 'vlog' in the YouTube search box. Many of the vlogs at the top of the search results list show an

individual speaking to the camera in the monologue style sometimes associated with vlogging. Among the more popular kinds of vlogs are the 'beauty' 'gaming' and 'travel' vlogs. As such vlogging has brought with it an increase in public documentation of personal lives and experiences. Malaysians are also actively documenting their experiences via vlogging on YouTube. Among them are vlogs that focuses on Malaysia and being Malaysian. These vlogs discuss about Malaysia in a wide array of ideas, settings and contexts. Some take a humorous approach while others are more serious and even explicitly political. Regardless of the vlogs' nature, when discussing Malaysia, these vloggers are creating their own media and offering their own interpretation about Malaysia. Vloggers around the world have their own style and creativity when producing their videos. Parodies are considered one of the popular forms of vlog. A form of remix culture, a parody can be defined as an imitation and representation of real life occurrences as well as a re-enactment of media contents such as films and songs in deliberate exaggeration for comic effect. In Malaysia, there are numerous vloggers who are famous for doing parodies Among the local YouTube sensations are Mat Luthfi, Aiman Azlan, Anwar Hadi and Shazreen Fadzlynda (Mohamed and Azzman, 2017) .These young and prominent vloggers have attracted a large following. Their videos are especially interesting as they focus on presenting Malaysian life and issues through entertaining and funny parodies. Their vlogs usually go beyond simple entertainment. They also

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consist of moral values, opinions, critiques and even suggestions to certain problems or issues. Currently, the most popular of the vloggers would be Mat Luthfi. With channel subscribers reaching to half a million, Mat Luthfi has become a celebrity in Malaysia. Muhammad Luthfi bin Rohime or better known as Mat Luthfi is hails from the northern state of Malaysia, Kedah. One of the reasons why his videos are attractive and resonates to the Malaysian audience is because he uses deep Kedah dialect in his videos. This make him appear to be very Malaysian and familiar to the local viewers. He earned his Bachelor degree from Curtin University, Australia and currently pursuing his postgraduate studies at the same institution. His video blogs has captured the interest of the Malaysian society because message that he brought in his video are full of humour and moral values. His first video entitled "Mother's Day" became famous and viral in which he focused the importance and significance of a mother's love. Due to his popularity on YouTube, he has received few awards such as Anugerah Bintang Popular Berita Harian 2013 for the best YouTube performer and Shout Aloud Award by Digi on 2012 and 2013 (Mat Luthfi, 2015).

Research questions

While anyone today has the ability to share the online content and all types of information on either social media or video sharing websites, not all can attract a large followers and subscribers. In order to be largely accepted, a vlogger must be able to give an impact to the viewers. This impact can only occur if the vlogger is capable to influence, educate and to change the people's perception on certain ideas, issues or problems. How does famous vloggers such as Mat Luthfi are able to gather such a large following? How were they able to turn from an everyday person to a YouTube sensation? This study attempts to look at this by focusing specifically on the impact Mat Luthfi has on his young followers. More specifically, this study investigates three research questions.

They are:

RQ1: How does Mat Luthfi's vlogs effect the youths?

RQ2: What are the messages and values identified by the youths when viewing Mat Luthfi's vlogs?

RQ 3: What are the youth's opinion of Mat Luthfi?

Literature review

User-Generated Content (UGC): User- Generated Content (UGC) has become more pervasive on the Internet and the amount content published online is unideniably growing exponentially everyday (Chen, 2013). People are generating their own content, using their own ideas and resources and sharing them with everyone else simply because it is cheap and easy to do so (Krumm *et al.*, 2008). In 2011 for example, during the earthquake in Japan have reshape the new way of news reporting when the alerts were posted in the real time tweets on Twitter (McKenzie *et al.*, 2012). One of the benefit of user-generated content is when, people all over the world have the easy access to the content that had been shared by the other people around the world in just one click in front of their computer (Stokes, 2013). User-Generated Content (UGC) helps to develop on how people watch television and videos hence, it gives a new induction for an interactive social interaction in online participation, creates business opportunities and also most active platform whereby users

have the availability to give out respond or feedback on comment section, subscribe other people channels and published their own video to share with others (Susarla *et al.*, 2012). Due to this, UGC has made a strong affect to various people in the target market and also organization (Daugherty *et al.*, 2008). Additionally, the video sharing activity on YouTube channels can bring an impact on opinion and culture. Moreover, the popular user generated video helps to makeup the public opinion and attitude of the people. The types of videos that has been created on YouTube users can be about products, events, public service announcements and others (Anwar and Rehman, 2013). Moreover, with the advancement of medium technologies on the internet nowadays have reach a larger audience the whole world (Buckingham and MacArthur, 2008). Social media which represents the online technologies, have been practice individuals to make use of to share opinions, insights, experiences and perspectives among the members of the society (Ramnarain and Govender, 2013). Social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Hi5 and Myspace and other social types of networks namely BlogSpot, micro-blogs, Vlogs on YouTube podcast are the most pervasive form of channel for people to communicate and stay in touch, to search for a problem solving method, and connect with anyone around the world (Boyd and Ellison, 2007; Kumara, 2008). To support, McGillivray (2015) emphasizes that, social media has become the world of the individual and it has been one of the essential part of their lives by updating on their statuses, "Tweets" and information on their account. One of the most popular form of UGC and what this study will focus on is vlogging or video blogs on YouTube. King (2005) mentioned that traditionally, the blogging activity is more into text presentation, but nowadays the development of digital platform have made it possible for anyone to produce of multimedia content such as by sharing videos online especially on YouTube which consist music audio, mp3 and sketch. Video Blogging is a combination of videos and video link with supporting text, images, and other types of multimedia incorporation compared to vlogs. These videos may be embedded and watched on the viewer's web browser. Video blogs are also known as v-logs, vid-blogs, movie blogs, web shows or online TV and it is created by the individual whom they called as 'vloggers' who owns an account in any of the video sharing websites or podcast channel on social media (Gao, Tian, Huang, and Yang, 2010). In a vlog, a video is captured using digital cameras or webcams, and is sometimes incorporated with raw video footage, edited clips, sound, music, and other film effects to enhance the messages. Vlogging can catch people interest because it is much more interesting and versatile to connect with the readers, save time and expand ones network especially on YouTube where people can share it on Facebook, Twitter and other social media platform (Ahn, 2011).

Youth and Parody Video on YouTube: The younger generation who sometimes are labeled as the YouTube generation are the ones making the most of UGC. This generation are very much embedded in the internet that they do mostly everything online. They mostly love to update their status on social networking sites, write features on their daily blogs online and enjoy instant messaging with their friends. YouTube has further expanded this daily online activities by allowing the youth to capture their daily activities on video. Documenting them in unique ways, making them the producer, writer and scriptwriter of their own movie product. Parodies are one of the most common YouTube genre opted by the

young. Parodies allow the young to produce and imitate the characters or certain stereotypes that they observed around them (Rogers Winters, Perry and LaMonde, 2014). Erickson (2015) defined parody as one of the creative artwork that presents humor and mockery aspects. He also claimed that a parody is another way to highlight an issue or another way to comment on certain social phenomenon that is regarded as significant. For instance, a research conducted by Baumgartner and Morris (2008) on the effects of youth towards political humor show found that youth tend to mock the acts of the political figure. Additionally, youth are taking it critically because they see them more than just another comedy show; these videos can change their opinion about whom they want for the next leader or president. In addition, the comedy appeal in parody video can result into a positive emotional release for the youth by enabling them to express their enjoyment through laughter and amusement (Peterson, n.d.). A parody can also increase once awareness by giving an idea to educators to deliver health messages. Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (2012) promotes to use parody type of presentation in giving awareness about the harmful effect on the excessive playing of computer games among youth and children and this has made more people especially parents to open their eyes about the issue discussed. Video parodies have also been found to further social and cultural benefits (Bournemouth University, 2013). These benefits can be observed through the messages that can be taken as embedded in the videos. The youth are inclined to this benefits because they can express their views creatively in the digital platform and social networking, and sharing them with other youths and create a form of discourse (Ahn, 2011).

V-Blogs as the new method of media presentation: Vlogs are created by the youth as new media platform in expressing themselves and giving self-awareness by posting the videos on YouTube (Wesch, 2009). In vlogs, the “vloggers” make account of their selected video sharing websites and make it as their own online visual diary to talk about their life updates, discuss on certain issues and express their opinions (Snelson, 2015). Vlogs can also be used to market a product or to catch people attention especially to get the people to entertain to make yourself to be recognize in the entertainment industry. For example, a 14 year old American boy has been recognized by a media company when he was vlogging on his YouTube channel singing a *Boyz2Men* song (Buckingham, John, and MacArthur, 2008). Academically, in schools, vlogs can be an effective way for classroom instructions where the students are able to make a review by playing the video once again (Dowling, 2013). Other than that, “Video-blogs represent a new, relatively untested instructional technology tool. Faculty and students are beginning to include video blogs in collaborative class and research activities” (British Columbia, 2005). In that case, video blogs is another media presentation that could assist the educational process in enhancing the youth or students to engage in hands on training in class instruction while watching the video (April, 2007). Thus, this new method of media presentation has evokes people emotion hence, it has inspired the viewers to watch it over again because it has been successful entertained by the witty “vloggers” performance (Herman, 2006).

Malaysian youth, culture and media: Davies (2012) claimed that youth or young people are using social media or social networking to expand their networking and promote their ideas and opinions online. Moreover it is also believed that youth

use social media as media of self-expression. The media presentation on the internet has become a trend of culture for any individuals including youth as a production of arts (Latta, Thompson, and Cayari, 2011). In Malaysia, a study found that teenagers and adolescents often used search engines, and other applications from the internet for the purpose of finding information for their school work, downloading music and videos and also to get connected with the people around them especially friends and family (Baboo, Pandian, Prasad, and Rao, 2013). At the present time, young people can easily access any media. As they are growing up, the amount of realization on media have evolved when the media is one the major channel for socialization purposes in searching for information compared to a real time communication with family and friends (Samsudin Rahim, 2001; Farrah Dina Yusop and Melati Sumari, 2013). With regard to the culture of information sharing media, youth often share about their negative feelings and problems on Facebook and other social networking sites, hence they are updating the status almost the whole week (Saodah Wok *et al.*, 2012). A recent report has also been made by Malaysia Minister for Youth and Sports on how youth know about a news. He mentioned that that Youth most preferred to use the internet to get the news as Internet news by browsing on websites, blogs and social media websites; and majority number of them own handphomes, laptops Pc, camera, printer, I-Pod and other electronic devices (Khairy Jamaluddin, 2014).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A qualitative investigation was conducted using a semi structured interview with target edrespondents. The case study is conducted among the Malay, Malaysian students from International Islamic University (IIUM) who are known as the fan or the follower of the Malaysia Vlogger Mat Luthfi. The Malay community was chosen, due to the fact that, the videos presentation were brought in Malay language medium. Mat Luthfi has 50 collection of videos blogs (v-blogs) and half of the videos are in the version on parody. Therefore, the parameter that has been set in this study will be focusing on the investigation of his parody presentations. The students or the informants came from various courses in university. According to Guest, Bunch and Johnson (2006) and Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014), the appropriate sample size for a qualitative research on phenomenological studies will be around 5-15 interviews because the data of qualitative studies are rich and it gives the researcher the opportunity to examine similarities and differences between individuals. Because of this, the interview for this study is conducted to 10 respondents only, due to the sufficient data found to answer the research questions. The respondents were approached via a IIUM online Facebook page using purposive sampling technique. Nearly majority of the students in the page are Malay because the medium used in the page is Bahasa Melayu. 10 respondents responded the resaerchers’ request for interview. All the respondents are mostly at the age of their youth, approximately around 20-28 years old. The interviews were done through Facebook’s online chat which made it possible for the interviews to be conducted at any time and place. (Baratt,2012). The chat box or tool on Facebook is user friendly and it has given a great opportunity for students engage in virtual interaction in learning process as well (Ataie, Shah, Nasir, and Nazir, 2015). The chat scripts were analyd using thematic analysis. A thematic analysis is one of the analysis method in qualitative studies for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns of

themes within data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The collection of the themes were examined for the possibility of error and establishing the trustworthiness to assure the quality in qualitative studies (Carcary, 2009).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Question 1: The study asked three questions. For the first question 'How does Mat Luthfi's vlogs effect the youths?' the study found two broad themes which are the effect of the vlogs in general and the effects of parodies. First, the youth responded emotionally towards the videos in general, this includes happiness, excitement, entertainment and many other positive and negative emotions. The videos also created real socialization among the youths (e.g Ahn,2011). The findings showed that the youth not only watch the videos passively, they also share and discuss about what they watched with friends. They talked about what they liked and don't like about the videos. To protect the identity of the respondents, they will be referred to as male youth or female youth in this section. For example, two respondents claimed:

"I feel happy because the videos are funny but sometimes I get irritated when I don't understand the message. So I usually discuss about it with friends..." (Female youth 1)

"I always discuss his videos with friends especially before class so that my friends can watch them and be entertained too..." (Male youth 1)

The responses above indicate that the youths were emotionally affected by Mat Luthfi's vlogs and they feel the need to discuss and share. This is probably because Mat Luthfi presents himself as someone who understands the youth, His messages often resonate with the young viewers. In addition, his jovial and spirited presentation attracts the youths' interest. His vlogs offer relevant youthful messages and this is important attraction to the viewers because they need to feel that the vlogs are applicable to them (Snelson,2015). The respondents commented that:

"The topics that Mat Luthfi discussed are good and relevant in our daily life" (Female youth 2)

"I think he has done a very good job as he has presented the vlogs with critical analysis but in a way understood by most people" (Male Youth, 3)

Mat Luthfi does not only discuss messages, he also promotes responsible citizenship. For example he encourages his viewers to be good leaders and to promote good deeds, to be more aware and involved in society. The youths responded positively to these messages.

"... He brought the message of humanity, promote good deeds, keep giving hopes for people to change for the better" (Male youth 2)

"... the messages he give are impressive, people get attracted to both the humor and deep advice" (Female youth 3)

"the videos help create awareness build public opinion on certain issues such as politics and leadership" (Male Youth 3)

The parodies Mat Luthfi used to share his messages were very significant in shaping the viewers acceptance of this videos, messages and personality. A Parody is characterized to be comedic and humorous in its presentation (Erickson, 2015). Because of its comedic nature, parodies are sometimes not taken seriously and even seen negatively mostly because it blurs the line between serious content and simple entertainment. One respondent agreed with the stand when she claimed to dislike parodies because she feels that the messages presented in a parody will only be eclipsed by the humorous presentations.

"Some people do not like parody... I am one of them. I feel that when people take parodies as jokes, they will not be able to take the messages given seriously... so any parody will only be taken as pure entertainment" (Female Youth 4)

As the respondent has an education background, she believed that the parody of Malaysia should be more serious and professional if the intention is to educate and shape the nation. Another respondent agreed with this notion. He claims:

"the parodies are funny and entertaining, but the messages could be taken for granted as I mostly look to be entertained rather than being preached to" (Male Youth 4)

Research Question 2: The second research question asked 'What are the messages and values identified by the youths when viewing Mat Luthfi's vlogs?' The results showed that in general the respondents found many positive human values such as honesty and kindness. One of the functions of media is to broadcast a channel or a show that could reach to the target audience. Any types of medium including the digital platform has its own way to serve the mass with its direct message input. The values instilled in the vlogs or any visual presentation have proven in helping to enhance the humanistic, cultural and social values (e.g Bournemouth University, 2013). According to Sadr (2011), human values are those basic elements in the nature of human beings which are to be developed by his own efforts. Here it is found that, the message on humanities can be defined as a message that emphasizes how people can develop kindnesses, become more wiser and to excel in their goals. In his videos Mat Luthfi often advises on how Malaysians can achieve or build a peaceful and harmony country. A message in Mat Luthfi video entitled "Mari Merungut Malaysia" (Lets whine Malaysia) that was posted in 2012 resonated well with Female respondent 2. In the video, Mat Luthfi stressed on not to whine and complain over social media. He claims that youths today are very much obsessed by social media and keep on posting everything about their personal lives and this includes unedited sharing of negative experiences. Female respondent 2 identified that:

"He makes us think and stop whining for things that we cannot control, especially for students, we should not whine over the social medias as work or assignment will be done on time. Complaining and whining will only make things worse"

Male youth 4 also found humanistic values in Mat Luthfi's vlogs. One vlog that truly resonated with him was a vlog titled "Memilih Pemimpin Untuk Noobs" (choosing leaders for noobs). In the video Mat Luthfi listed the different characteristics of a good leader and it was posted near an election. The respondent claimed:

“We need to choose our leaders wisely, look at their contributions as well as personal traits.. It is also important for us to be positive, if we want to live in harmony”

The respondents also found ethical and Islamic values in Mat Luthfi's vlogs. For example, he gives advices on how to be become good Muslims on the do's and dont's in Islam. He also promotes good deeds and kindness among the people. The message focus is not only on the practices but also on good ethics such as honesty and kindness. According to Male youth 1, the messages on these videos also stressed on cultural and social values for Malaysians. Mat Luthfi

“Brought the message of humanity, Islam, and generally promotes good and kind deeds”

Another respondent was influenced by Mat Luthfi's video “Buat Kepala” (Following one's head) in which Mat Luthfi talked about the danger of creating and spreading wrong information. Female youth 4 claims that Mat Luthfi taught her that it is better to check on the credibility of the information first before we could share it with someone else. She further identified that:

“We shouldn't simply say anything we want if we are not sure or we don't have enough information about it”

Female youth 3 found messages on honesty in Mat Luthfi's video. She found Mat Luthfi's video “Be Yourself in Job Interview” especially useful. In the vlog, Mat Luthfi explained how to excel in job interview once graduated from university. Through his parody of a funny job interview scenario, Mat Luthfi reminded his viewers that honesty is the key to success. He even asserted Islamic ideals in which it is essential for people to be honest, as they will be rewarded in the hereafter. The respondent learnt that:

“...during an interview, just be yourself and don't try to be someone else..... pretending to be someone else will not get you the job”

Research Question 3: The last research question asked ‘What are the youth's opinion of Mat Luthfi?’ this question wanted to understand the traits that make a vlogger attractive and influential to the viewers. The study found that in the case of Mat Luthfi, the respondents were particularly appealed to his verbal intelligence and interesting personality. Verbal intelligence refers to how a person uses language in various contexts and in any social surroundings (Bruning, 2015). A person who has verbal intelligence is confident in their communication and presentation. Mat Luthfi is considered to be verbally intelligent because of the unique and funny ways he delivers a message and how he is able to make the messages relevant to the audiences. In a study by Nga (2014), he found that youths seem to view vloggers in parody videos negatively as they are seen as comedians looking to increase their youtube followers. Mat Luthfi manage to defy this view, as he is able to portray himself as both a comedian as well as an intellectual who is knowledgeable, analytical and critical. Male youth 2 pointed out that Mat Luthfi is

“More than a vlogger, he is a good social critic. He is able to articulate the messages in a very informal way that makes you laugh and think at the same time”

Mat Luthfi is also articulate in his attempt to discuss sensitive issues. Male youth 4 observed that Mat Luthfi is very brave to come out with parodies about that criticizes the Muslims

“He is brilliant and brave, he criticized the ways some Muslims are without it being too condescending”

The second theme discussed by the respondents was Mat Luthfi's personality. They claimed that it is Mat Luthfi's creativity, charming, funny but yet brave and intelligent personas that made him attractive enough to be considered a young icon among his viewers. His personality is one of the key factor for youth to watch his video. Male youth 4 identified with Mat Luthfi and claimed “I watch him because he is a very creative, funny, positive and all around good guy”

Since he is famous and have an attractive character, he definitely got the attention on the youth (e.g Buckingham, John, and MacArthur, 2008). According to female youth 3:

“... he did a very good job in delivering the message... and his attractive character to attract the youth and yes he is presented his messages well through his videos!”

Here, it can be seen that Mat Luthfi possessed a great personality can be make huge different to the community by delivering something the respondents want to hear. His personality keeps his viewers interested in his vlogs and what he has to say. They anticipate his parodies because they are satisfied with the way he presents himself. All of the respondents agree that they subscribe to Mat Luthfi's youtube channel because they want to be notified everytime he uploads a new video. The respondents said that they were always eager for a new Mat Luthfi vlog as they feel that they were not only entertained but were informed and educated about issues. The respondents claimed:

“He should keep on making and sharing new videos about current trending issues. I like him and how he presents himself not as an expert but as another citizen” (Male youth 4)

“I wish him all the best and keep on inspiring people with his interesting approach for the youngsters, I believe that he deserves The Malaysian Youth Icon” (Male youth 5)

Youngsters should watch his videos and they might different perspective on certain things. It also could be in visual aids to help teachers nowadays to relate their teachings with current issues” (Female Youth 2)

Male youth 3 even proposed for Mat Luthfi's vlogs to be broadcasted on the mainstream media, he believed that:

“I hope his video will be played on our mainstream media... I would recommend this because Mat Luthfi managed to produce videos regarding unity among the different races in Malaysia through his attractive personality, not many can do that”

It is evident from the respondents' responses that Mat Luthfi as a person is as powerful and as famous as the video parodies that he produces. Not only were the respondents entertained by the parodies that he shares, but most importantly they were

also enticed by Mat Luthfi's personality as he portrays good values and intelligence in his videos.

Conclusion and recommendation

It is clear from the result presented above that Ahmad Luthfi has managed to impact the lives of his YouTube channel subscribers. By using parodies and simple entertainment, he has managed to discuss and make important issues that may not appeal to his young followers. His jovial and funny personality motivated the youths to be positive, happy and optimistic in their search for answers to their problems. The variety of content that Mat Luthfi offers on his channel is another advantage to his ability to gather followers. The respondents in this study praised him for his ability to convert a myriad of issues that range from simple everyday happenings to sensitive racial and political issues. The way he was able to present so many values in his video content makes his vlogs acceptable to not just the youth specifically but all Malaysians in general. The respondents were very impressed with his vlogs that they even suggested for his vlogs to be played in mainstream national media and even be included in the education system. All in all, Mat Luthfi managed to show that User generated content can be more than just entertainment. Everyday users can become significant content maker. Through parodies and remix culture, everyday media users can bring forth important issues, create discourses and offer opinions that are relevant to people in general. Therefore, there are more vloggers than just random internet user. They have certain appeal that can influence different group of audiences. This is why many bodies, societies, advertisers and marketers are paying vloggers to promote about their service, products and campaigns. These vloggers have become opinion leaders in their own niche content categories. In sum, this study has been able to put forth the impact vloggers have on their audiences. However, because of the explorative nature of the study and its subsequent small size, the data gathered is not as vast and in-depth. A bigger sample size and an in-depth interview would be able to expand the study and this is what the researchers hope to do in the short future.

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