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CINEMATOGRAPHIC ELEMENTS IN *SUPER SEMA*

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Abstract

The study explored the construction of cinematographic elements in Super Sema, a Kenyan animation film. The study intended to reconnoitre how cinematographic elements conveyed certain communicative values, which was done by investigating how the cinematographic elements were used to convey particular communicative values. Animation films use visual elements to convey various messages to the audience, and Cinematography is one of the most influential factors in communicating ideas to the audience visually. Cinematography is incredibly important in films, and a filmmaker has to understand different cinematographic methods and how to use them to tell a narrative effectively visually. This research aimed to determine whether Super Sema series animators employed cinematographic elements as visual metaphors with visual semantics to convey various communicative values. The study used *Super Sema* (2021) animated series as a case study. The following objectives guided the study: To determine the cinematographic elements in *Super Sema.* This study was Qualitative in nature using Exploratory Design. Random sampling was employed to select the sample of the eight (8) episodes of the Supa Sema animated series. The study used Semiotic theory to explain the study's variables, relationships, and findings. The primary data was collected via observations-close reading, and secondary data was collected from the existing literary works. Content analysis was used to analyse the data collected. After conducting a content analysis through a close reading of the selected episodes, it was found that the *Super Sema* animated series used diverse cinematographic elements which were presented in tables with varied communicative values.

Key words: *Cinematographic elements, shots, angles, movements, framing and composition*

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1.0 BACKGROUND

The journey of animation unfolds with historical milestones and contemporary growth, marked by key figures and technological advancements. Vikiru (2009) highlights animation's early days, where simple sketches were photographed around 1910. Walt Disney revolutionized the field in 1928 by introducing sound to animated films, propelling animation to new heights. Disney's commitment to refining characters into fine art and creating emotional depth laid the foundation for modern animation studios like Pixar. Kent (2017) underlines cinematography's role in visually conveying scripts to audiences, which applies to animation as well, engaging viewers through visual storytelling.

African animation's history remains underexplored, as noted by Vikiru (2009). African animation possibly originated in South Africa in 1916, with traces in Egypt during the 1930s, and further developments in the Democratic Republic of Congo in the 1950s (Callus, 2008). African animation frequently revolves around native storytelling, societal commentary, myths, and political critique. The misconception surrounding animation in Kenya is prevalent, leading to misinformation and a need for understanding. The COVID-19 pandemic acted as a catalyst, driving Kenya's animation industry growth as companies turned to animation for entertaining and informative content.

Despite challenges, the Kenyan animation industry is evolving, evident from the emergence of production companies post-Covid-19. The industry embraces diverse genres like comedy and music videos. The inaugural Kenyan Animation Festival in 2019 marked a significant milestone, showcasing local talent and creativity (NTV Kenya, 2019). Animators, such as Eamon Mullan and Lydia Mugure, emphasize careful planning and execution in animation production, along with the importance of understanding cinematography. Muteti (2020) acknowledges that computer animation injects life into inanimate images, while Kihima (2019) notes the industry's slow growth in Kenya, with an upsurge in educational and entertaining animated films.

The integration of animation in Kenya's entertainment sector is evidenced by creators like Alex Kirui and Dennis Murage, who produce content for social media. Notable animations range from marketing videos for business products to 2D animations for skiza tunes promotion. The Super Sema series (2021) stands out for its diverse use of cinematographic elements. Cinematography, a cornerstone in both live-action and animation, communicates emotions and narratives uniquely. The study's focus on Super Sema delves into cinematographic techniques like framing, composition, camera angles, shots, and movements.

Cinematography's role in animation is paramount; it enhances communication and narrative in animated films. Different dynamics exist between animation and live-action cinematography, with animation relying on virtual cameras or keyframes. Visual grammar, as defined by Thompson & Bowen (2009), forms the basis of communication between filmmakers and audiences. This study aims to explore the communicative values embedded in cinematographic elements, providing insights into Super Sema's narrative impact. The journey of Kenyan animation is propelled by creativity, technical prowess, and a commitment to visual storytelling, promising a vibrant future for the industry.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter aims to analyse the body of the related literature review and probe the lacuna that the study proposed to fill.

2.1 Composition and Cinematographic Elements.

Azangalala (2014) conducted a study on *Cinematographic Techniques in Selected Kenyan Experimental Films.* He sampled four films and studied on-camera film technique. His findings indicated that it was necessary to add different camera shots and movements when shooting the scene since utilising a long shot to capture a moment that lasts for four minutes would have been monotonous for the viewer. The present study proposed to study how CE could be applied as a medium of conveying various meanings or communicative values to the viewers in animation values.

In research by Håkansson *(2013)* on *Re-examining the Traditional Principles of Cinematography of Modern Movies: A Case Study of Children of Men and Clerks II*, where the importance of cinematography principles for the visual output of a film are discussed, the results of Håkansson's study show that neglecting cinematography rules might lead to the spectators being directed away from the narrative. The study indicates that to grasp the importance of cinematography elements in modern films, it is necessary first to comprehend what they are and when they are applied. Håkansson employed live-action films to study cinematographic principles while this study wanted to investigate the animated films to determine the CE in the *Super Sema* animated film and how they have been used to convey diverse Communicative Values and their relation with the narrative.

Vikiru (2009), in his PhD thesis on *2D animation for effective communication with children in Kenya: A case of Githurai location, Kiambu County*, found that many people gain a better knowledge of the world by viewing visuals rather than words. Animation films are image-oriented, and comprehensively presenting them to the spectator will enhance knowledge by understanding what is offered through visuals. As cited in Vikiru's (2009) PhD thesis, Whalen (1996:119) notes that "55 percent of the audience receives more visual information as opposed to 38 percent voice and 7% words only. Vikiru's study did not present how visuals, such as cinematographic elements, can help convey information; the presented study established that on its findings.

A study by Hodaie (2018) in a thesis titled *Writing with Light: An Exploration of Cinematography and visual storytelling* conducted at Oregon State University found that a fascinating film requires good writing and acting, but if the visual narrative is not so good, the narrative will fail to achieve its purpose. This is because films are largely visual narratives, in that even when the sound is turned off, the images in a film can typically make it apparent what is happening on the screen. Cinematographic elements are visual elements that inform the narrative, which informs the communicative values amended in the narrative. The study indicated that using visual narrative techniques to deliver narrative content visually and control viewers' thoughts and emotions is an important aspect of a filmmaker's task in making a film. The results of this study show that depending on how films are edited can express various meanings; this study proposed to establish the meanings that could be identified with CE, which are aspects of the visual element in the *Super Sema* animated series.

Joon, Jong Sze, Hui, Soon Eu, Chan, and Yuen May (2008) researched *Understanding the Technicalities of Photorealistic 3D Environments to Support Cinematography and Composition for Film and Animation.* It was conducted at Malaysia's 5th International

Conference on Computer Graphics, Imaging, and Visualisation. Their findings show that composition is vital in film and animation. Their results indicate that the shot size is the basic unit of the composition, which helps the audience to understand the scale, scope, and importance of the image presented to them. This informs that every shot aims to communicate certain information to the viewer. The present study proposed investigating CE, which includes camera shots, angles, movements, framing, and composition, and establishing their purpose in communicating various information/meanings in the *Super Sema* animated series.

3. CINEMATOGRAPHIC ELEMENTS IN *SUPER SEMA*

In this section, the study presents the cinematographic elements: camera angles, camera shots, camera movements, and composition and framing techniques identified in the *Super Sema* animated series. The chapter presents the cinematographic elements determined in the *Super Sema* animated series episodes observed during the data collection.

Junaedi, Hariadi, and Purnama (2018) posit that an animator or a photography director often controls the positioning or movement of the camera during the creation of an animation or video game. This is usually done during the storyboarding process, where the shots, angles, movements, composition, and framing are planned in connection to the narrative to be conveyed and in line with the message intended to be relayed to the viewer. Here, the animator can know the number and the diversity of cinematographic elements needed for a specific animated video.

The position of a camera and the size of the shot are also a factor to consider since a virtual camera must be manually placed or manipulated in the virtual setting, which necessitates modelling and computations that must be done for every scene to meet the narrative aspects expected to be conveyed to the viewer. Through observation methods, the researcher observed the various episodes and determined a variety of cinematographic elements used in the series under study using the VLC software. He was able to break the scenes into frames for easy observation of shots as frames or images and notes were taken for analysis of the cinematographic elements determined. This helped to answer the first guiding objective for this research, which was to determine the cinematographic elements in *Super Sema* animated films.

Numbers, according to Becker (1970) and Hammersley (2008p.3), help support statements about the frequency, quantity, or typicality of certain occurrences, as described in Maxwell (2010). In that context, the study applied the use of tables to present the determined cinematographic elements as complementary to the statement that *Super Sema* utilised diverse cinematographic elements. This is justified by Maxwell (2010), who asserts that when numbers are utilised to complement an overall process approach to the study, using statistics becomes a valid and beneficial method for qualitative researchers to evade more generalisation.

3.1 Camera Angles

The definition of camera angles varies among scholars but is simply the camera's position concerning the subject. Camera angles are used for various specific purposes in animation and live-action films. Over the years, camera angles have commonly conveyed various meanings to viewers of cinema, and Kraft (1987) notes camera angles can influence the viewer's connotative meaning of the photographic image. Lannom (2020) asserts that camera angles can change the meaning of the shot; if one wants to make the character powerful, weak, or neutral, confused, then the camera angle's power cannot be overlooked. During the

observation, it was noted that according to the frequency of occurrences of diverse camera angles, the *Super Sema* animated Series employed one hundred and twenty-three camera angles that were determined with various connotative meanings. Amongst the determined camera angles include the following six categories:

1. Eye Level
2. High Angle
3. Low Angle
4. Dutch Angle
5. Knee level
6. Overhead
7. Ground level

In terms of distribution per episode, the Super *Sema* animated series employed a variety of camera angles that were determined, and they were noted as shown in the table. 1 table below.

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Table 1: Camera angles

	Super sema **Episode**	**Camera Angles**							
		Eye Level	**High Angle**	**Low Angle**	**Dutch Angle**	**Knee level**	**Ground level**	**Over head Angle**	**Total Frequency**
1	***Episode 1***	8	8	11	1	1	0	1	**30**
2	***Episode 2***	1	8	5	1	0	0	0	**15**
3	***Episode 3***	4	3	6	0	0	0	0	**13**
4	***Episode 4***	2	8	5	0	0	0	0	**15**
5	***Episode 5***	4	5	8	0	0	1	0	**18**
6	***Episode 6***	6	1	3	0	0	0	0	**10**
7	***Episode 7***	6	5	1	0	0	0	0	**12**
8	***Episode 8***	4	3	3	0	0	0	0	**10**
	Total	**35**	**41**	**42**	**2**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**123**

3.2 Camera Movements

Camera movement is the change or shift of the camera's position or rotation within a scene inside a frame. In the same context, camera movement can be referred to as the shifting of the camera to visually narrate and shape the audience's perspective of the scene (NFI, n.d). This technique is employed by filmmakers for various purposes not limited to engaging the viewer physically and psychologically and conveying specific visual narrative information, as it shall be expounded in the following chapters. A camera movement must be driven by how it advances the narrative to be effective, which is supported even in craft literature, where the narrative drive is often cited as the primary driving force for camera movement (Nielsen et al., 2007). Cameras, in that regard, should be used purposely as opposed to arbitrarily in the essence of adding up meanings to the narrative and conveying information to the viewer.

Diverse camera movements may possess varying communicative values, slowly and smoothly moving cameras may give viewers a sense of epicness, and shaky camera movements can give them a sense of unease and even a sense of danger (Morgan, 2013). One hundred and forty-five camera movements from different categories were determined in the Super *Sema* animated film.

In *Super Sema*, it was determined that different camera movement categories present, were pertinent to convey various messages to the audience, including

1. Panning camera movement
2. Tilting camera movement
3. Zooming camera movement

4. Tracking camera movement
5. Whip camera movement
6. Random/ shaky camera movement
7. Dolly Zoom/ Zolly camera movement

In terms of distribution and frequency of occurrences per episode, the Super *Sema* animated series employed a variety of camera movements that were determined and noted as shown in the Table. 2.

Table 2 Camera Movements

Episodes	**Camera Movements**							
	Zoom	**Tilt**	**Pan**	**Random**	**Whip**	**Track**	**Zolly**	**Total Frequency**
1	8	5	3	0	0	0	0	16
2	8	4	2	1	1	1	0	17
3	5	1	2	0	1	0	0	9
4	12	3	7	0	0	2	4	28
5	8	1	3	0	0	4	0	16
6	11	2	3	0	0	5	2	23
7	10	2	9	0	5	0	0	26
8	8	0	2	0	0	0	0	10
TOTAL	**70**	**18**	**31**	**1**	**7**	**12**	**6**	**145**

2.3 Camera Shots

Many scholars may agree that a shot is primarily an uninterrupted, continuous view from when the camera is turned on to record to when it is pressed to stop. This simple definition may fit well in live-action films since the actual camera is used to record. Studiobinder (2020) avers that a camera shot is made up of a string of frames that are taken continuously from the start of the camera's roll until it ends. In animation films, however, a camera shot may equate to the amount of space the viewer can see in a specific frame to convey information about a character, setting, scene, or theme to the audience. Similarly, multiple camera positions may be used to highlight connections and emotions of the audience to engage them, communicate to them, or even make them think of something that can connect them to the context of what is happening inside the frame.

Animators may convey distinct meanings and emotions for various scenarios by blending camera shots. Choosing the shots is one of the most enjoyable parts of filmmaking, but it is

also a significant choice since the size of the shot you select can affect the surrounding images and how the viewer will interpret them (Lannom, 2020). During the observation, it was noted that in terms of frequency of occurrences, the *Super Sema* animated Series employed one hundred and ninety-two camera shots that were determined with various connotative meanings.

In *Super Sema*, it was determined that considering the frequency of occurrences, there were different camera shot categories pertinent to conveying various messages to the audience, including

Close-up (CU)

Extreme Close-up (ECU)

Medium Close-up (MCU)

Medium shot (MS)

Wide shot/ long shot (L.S/W.S)

Extreme Long shot (ELS)

Full Shot (FS)

Over The Shoulder (OTS)

Establishing shot (EST)

Point of View Shot (POV)

In terms of distribution and frequency per episode, the Super *Sema* animated series employed a variety of camera movements that were determined.

They were noted in the Table. 3

Table 3: Camera Shots

Episode	**Camera Shots**									***No. of Shots***
	C.U.S	**E.C.U.S**	**MCUS**	**MS**	**WS ELS LS**	**FS**	**OTS**	**EST**	**POV**	**Total** Frequency
1	6	2	1	8	9	2	1	0	0	**29**
2	3	2	3	5	7	5	0	1	5	**31**
3	4	0	8	6	4	1	2	0	0	**24**
4	4	0	0	4	12	2	0	0	0	**21**
5	2	0	3	4	4	2	0	1	0	**16**
6	4	0	1	8	3	6	1	0	0	**24**
7	6	1	5	5	3	2	0	0	0	**22**
8	1	0	1	12	9	1	0	0	0	**24**
Total	**30**	**5**	**22**	**52**	**51**	**21**	**4**	**2**	**5**	**192**

3.4 Framing and Composition

According to Cassidy (2019), the technique of placing and organising or arranging subjects and objects in a frame is called composition. People find specific alignments and forms to be pleasant in shots as they view the films as live-action films or animation films. A film narrative must also be told through the film's composition to have a good effect on the viewer. Positioning your subjects and objects within a frame might enhance your storytelling. You achieve this by giving some subjects and objects more emphasis while giving others less. Filmmaking relies heavily on composition.

Mccullagh (2018) posits that Film composition is crucial because it helps focus the audience's attention. The second reason composition is significant is that it enables us to produce aesthetically attractive pictures that are distinctive to the filmmakers' style. It instructs viewers to focus on a particular subject among many others or a single area within a cluttered scene. Beyond all of the practical and individualised goals of composition, however, it also enables us to express information and subtext immediately.

According to Lannom (2020), the placement and positioning of your subjects in your photo can be referred to as camera framing. Composing a photograph is more important than just aiming the camera at the subject. The number of subjects included in the frame and their spatial relationships with one another and the camera should be taken into account while framing images for filmmakers and animators. The framing process is influenced by the set design, how performers are positioned in the scene, and how they change position with the setting. The framing mostly tells a visual story of the image within a frame to connote meaning to the viewer. A camera will simply be pointed towards a group of performers by an amateur cinematographer, who will then capture the scenario and consider it acceptable. However, skilled filmmakers not only point and shoot what is in front of them but also use framing and composition of images and subjects to tell a narrative. The difference is significant for beginners and professional filmmakers. In animation, animators without explicit knowledge of visual cinematographic elements like framing and composition may disregard them in their narrative and fail to compose visuals that convey visual narrative meaning, like guiding the viewers and balancing powers. During the observation, it was determined that the *Super Sema* animated Series employed three hundred and sixty-two composition and framing techniques within the various categories that frequently occurred in various episodes, with various connotative meanings. In *Super Sema*, it was determined that different framing and composition categories were pertinent to convey various messages to the audience, including:

1. Single Shot
2. 2 Shots
3. 3 Shots
4. Symmetrical
5. Leading Line
6. Fill The Frame
7. Rule Of Third
8. Frame Within a Frame
9. Asymmetrical
10. Diagonal Framing

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In terms of distribution and frequency of occurrences per episode, the Super *Sema* animated series employed various framing and composition techniques that were determined, and they were noted as shown in the table. 4, the table below.

Table 4: Framing and Composition

Composition and Framing											
Episodes	**Framing**			**Composition**							
	Single shot	**2 shot**	**3 shot**	**Symmetrical**	**Leading line**	**Fill the frame**	**Rule of Third**	**Frame within a frame**	**Asymmetrical**	**diagonal framing**	**Total Frequency**
1	18	17	2	14	4	3	16	1	0	0	**75**
2	13	1	0	10	1	2	8	5	0	0	**40**
3.	10	3	1	3	0	0	8	1	1	0	**27**
4	6	2	4	9	2	1	6	6	1	0	**27**
5	14	4	2	15	3	1	6	6	0	0	**51**
6	18	10	1	19	7	1	6	2	3	1	**68**
7	20	1	1	2	4	1	6	1	0	0	**36**
8	12	1	1	11	3	0	5	4	0	1	**38**
Total	**101**	**39**	**12**	**83**	**24**	**9**	**61**	**26**	**5**	**2**	**362**

4. CONCLUSION

This section covered the study and presented the cinematographic elements: camera angles, camera shots, camera movements, and composition and framing techniques determined in the *Super Sema* animated series during the data collection.

The objective of this study was to determine the cinematographic elements in the selected animated film to answer the question of how many determinable cinematographic elements and the extent they occurred in the selected eight episodes. This was done to reinforce one of the recommendations made to animators in this study that it is essential to use a variety of cinematographic elements in animation to avoid monotony and to avoid relying too heavily on other elements like sound to tell viewers narratives that can be told through visuals.

After conducting a content analysis through a close reading of the selected episodes, it was found that the Super Sema animated series used diverse camera angles. To justify using Becker's quasi-statistics and prevent overgeneralization, it was determined that one hundred

and twenty-three determinable camera angles were used in various episodes, where in terms of episodes distribution, thirty-five of them were Eye levels, forty-one were High angles, forty-two were Low angles, two were Dutch angles, one was a Knee level, one was ground level, and the other one was an Overhead camera angle.

It was noted that the *Super Sema* animated Series employed one hundred and ninety-one camera shots determined with various connotative meanings. In terms of episode distribution, thirty were close-ups, five were extreme close-ups, twenty-two were medium close-ups, fifty-two were medium shots, twenty-one were full shots, four were Over-the-shoulder shots, two were Establishing shots, five were Point-Of-View shots, fifty-one wide shots.

A good number of composition and framing techniques were determined in the Super *Sema* animated series, where three hundred and sixty-two composition and framing techniques were determined with various connotative meanings. In terms of distribution for framing, Ninety-one Single Shots, thirty-two two shots and twelve three shots were determined. For other composition techniques, eighty-three Symmetrical composition techniques, twenty-four Leading Lines composition techniques, nine Fill-the-Frame composition techniques, sixty-one Rule of Third composition techniques, twenty-six Frame-Within-a-Frame composition techniques, five Asymmetrical composition techniques and two Diagonal framing composition techniques were determined all with various narrative purposes.

Diverse Camera movements were used in the Super Sema animated series, and those determined were one hundred and forty-five camera movements with various connotative meanings. In terms of episode distributions, seventy zoom camera movements, eighteen tilt camera movements, thirty-one pan camera movements, one random/shaky camera movement, seven whip camera movements, twelve track camera movements and six zolly movements were determined in the eight episodes that were analysed through close reading.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Recommendation for Animators

The present study advocates for animators to acquire a comprehensive understanding of the principles governing framing and composition within the realm of cinematography, elucidating the intricate arrangement of constituent elements within the confinements of the screen's parameters. It is imperative for animators to attain a profound comprehension of how the constituents present on the screen, including characters, settings, and props, establish interrelationships that harmonize within the framework of a single shot. By deftly manipulating both subjects and camera orientations, animators possess the capacity to adroitly steer the audience's gaze towards salient focal points, thereby imbuing the narrative with layers of significance. It is paramount, however, that the arbitrary employment of cinematographic elements (CE) be vigilantly eschewed, as such a practice is liable to introduce perplexity among viewers or engender an undue dependence on verbal exchanges as a means of elucidation. Instead, animators are enjoined to wield CE with strategic intent, harnessing their potential to engage the spectator's senses in a visual symphony that kindles the intended affective responses. In the pursuit of narrative advancement, animators are advised to judiciously harness the potential of cinematographic elements, modulating their deployment in alignment with the exigencies of the narrative context.

5.2 Recommendations for Researchers

In light of the study's findings, it is recommended that researchers undertake a rigorous exploration of the creative idioms that find expression in animated cinematic productions, with specific attention directed towards works exemplified by "Super Sema." A pronounced emphasis is placed on deciphering the rationale underpinning the recurrent utilization of symmetrical compositional techniques within the confines of the animated film. In this vein, a deliberate endeavor to discern the factors that impel such compositional preferences, including but not limited to considerations of the target audience's proclivities, is strongly advised. Furthermore, it is urged that researchers embark upon an exhaustive examination of the extant body of scholarship spanning the domains of animation and cinematography. By immersing themselves in this rich corpus of knowledge, researchers can glean insights into the manifold ways in which diverse cinematographic elements serve as conduits for the transmission of nuanced communicative values, thereby enriching their analytical framework.

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