

# INFLUENCES OF 3D ANIMATION ON KENYAN MEDIA AND ADVERTISING LED BY AN ANALYSIS OF MICHAEL MUTHIGA'S WORKS

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# Influences of 3D Animation on Kenyan Media and Advertising Led by An Analysis of Michael Muthiga's Works

## ABSTRACT

**Background:** The African animation scene has been slowly but surely growing and booming in the recent years. The same growth has been observed in East Africa. Animation in Kenya begun gaining traction particularly after the migration of broadcasting technologies from analogue to digital. The switch to a digital era, growth of social media and the availability of graphic technologies in Kenya has seen Kenyan animators begin to thrive and gain footing in a somewhat underutilised industry. The use of animations has now moved from when it was only 2D animations on our screens to a point where 3D animations are nothing new to us. **Objective:** The objective of this paper is to elaborate how animators in Kenya are now utilising their skills in the advertising sector and in broadcasting. This paper focuses on the journey of Michael Muthiga, a Kenyan animator, from animating as a hobby, to animating advertisements for some of the largest brands in Kenya. It aims to show his achievements, processes and how he has influenced the direction of advertising in Kenya through three dimensional animations. **Design:** This paper uses qualitative data gained through desktop research techniques. **Result:** The research concluded that 3D animation has become an integral part of the advertising sector. It also revealed that Michael Muthiga's use of 3D animation in advertising has led to a positive ripple effect as it influenced other Kenyan animators to understand that 3D animation is not reserved for making animated films alone. His achievements have also helped solidify the animation profession in Kenya, assisting it to be viewed as a viable career and business venture not just as a hobby.

**Keywords:** 3D animation, Michael Muthiga, animators

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Animation is an industry that has been around since the early 1900s. The first 3D animated feature film was however released in 1995. The film 'toy story' made history as it introduced people to the world of 3d animation. Despite this, only 2d animations could be seen on our tv screens. From the cartoons to the advertisements on local tv stations, 2d was the main animation style employed. Apart from this, these animations were also often made by foreigners.

Animation has begun getting its footing in Kenya in the recent years. Before 2010 it was almost nonexistent in Kenya and east Africa as a whole. In the recent years though we have seen designers becoming interested in the field. We have been able to see characters made in the African likeness and our stories begin to be told. Programs such as Tingatinga tales and the Akili/ubongo kids have graced our screens telling African folktales and also educating children. We have also seen various animators such as Brian Msafiri and Kwame Nyong'o emerge. It is however important to note that most of the locally produced animations were 2 dimensional.

After the emergence of the 3D advertisement for Jamii Telkom's -faiba, the industry started to get some attention. The advertisement featuring two cavemen was like a breath of fresh air for the Kenyan viewers. This begun a trend of 3D animated advertisements on our screens as Safaricom, Barclays and Mkey soon followed up with their own animated advertisements. Despite all this, the public knows little of the animator behind these animations.

### 1.1 Michael Muthiga

He is one of the famous animators in Kenya. he is the CEO of Fatboy Animations. He has made a name for himself being one what's the few animators doing 3D animations in advertisements. He is well known for his works with faiba, Safaricom and KCB.

Michael was born in 1986 and he grew up in the estate of Buru Buru. That his primary school in MP Shah Primary School. Having come from a family of artists Michael Muthiga himself used to love drawing and was very interested in the arts. Michael used to use most of his time drawing and through that he was able to hone his craft. Despite his talents his parents are very worried because at the time art did not seem like a viable career option. From that educational suffering because he was putting too much concentration on his art.

In high school he was able to take odds of at least one and this was one of his favorite subjects because he did not have to study or read for it. However, he had to push a push back on the ads in his upper high school classes in order to be able to pass. Michael got to learn about animation from his high school teacher who told him that animation will be the next big thing in Kenya in the next five years. Due to this point finishing high school Michael enrolled in an animation college. He was supposed to take the course for a year but after two months he decided to drop out because he felt he had learned what he needed to learn and the pace was slow.

Despite the fact that Michael is no longer in college he still continued to learn animation. Michael bought some animation books from solid center mall. These books are the ones which helped him learn about animation. He studied hard for five months learning all he called on animation day at night. In his

mind Michael was convinced that animation was the career path he wanted to pursue. He was however scared as at the time animation was still a new career field in Kenya. Michael decided he needed something to fall back on therefore he went to Malaysia to do of course in civil engineering. However, after a year Michael came back to Kenya and decided to take the plunge and pursue his passion in animation. Decided if there was no animation industry, he was going to make one.

Michael's first animation gig was with the production team of Tingatinga tales. Ticketing details was a project commissioned by BBC and Disney Channel. It was a child program produced here in Kenya. The production was running low and they needed new animators and this is where Mike was able to send his show deals and CV. He was hired as a junior animator. As the production crew is using a specific software Michael and all the other people who were hired had to go through a two-month training. This training proved to be very impactful to Michael as it enhanced his skills. Michael worked there for a while and was later promoted to lead designer because of his great work. Despite the promotion Michael felt he needed to learn more and explore that is why he resigned before his contract had ended.

Upon his departure from Tinga Tinga tales, Michael began his own company fat boy animations. Michael decided to name his company fat boy because of a nickname he was given while walking for Tinga Tinga tales. This is because when he entered the company, he was very skinny but due to long hours of anime teen while seated he put on some weight. While at Tinga Tinga tales, Michael had been thinking that 3d animation would change the industry. Due to his thoughts, he had been practicing and made a full 3D animation clip. Michael posted this clip on YouTube and it went viral. Due to this clip Michael got so many comments of people asking if he could do something similar for them. This as the beginning of his journey.



Fig. 1. Michael's first 3D character from the clip he put on you tube

## 1.2 Design Process

### 1.2.1 Step 1: Brief

As with any other design process, Michael first begins with with acquiring a brief from his clients. Michael feels that this is the most important step in his process. This is because it's requires him to read and understand what the client needs and how to interpret the brief. He needs to make decisions on what will be appealing, creative, humorous how to make it memorable to the audience.

### 1.2.2 Step 2: Character design

After the analysis of the brief, Michael and his team comes up with the characters and design them on their softwares. They also Start looking for actors who will voice the characters.

### 1.2.3 Step 3: Script writing

After the character design they come up with a story which they put in writing. The story is then presented to the clients and if he likes it, they begin the character design.

### 1.2.4 Step 4: Storyboarding

The next step after script writing is creation of the storyboard. A storyboard is simply a comic strip of what's the animation will be about.

### 1.2.5 Step 5: Recording

Accompanied by the voice actors, Michael then heads into studio to record the story/ voice the characters.

### 1.2.6 Step 6: Animating

Equipped with the voice and the characters, they then make the environment around the characters and bring this story to life. After the animation is complete, he presents it to the clients who then approves or makes changes.

### 1.2.7 Step 7: Rendering

Upon approval from the client, Michael then goes into the last stage which is rendering. This is the most expensive stage. Rendering requires many powerful servers and as these resources are not available in Kenya, he outsources these services. As internet is fast these days, he sends the animation files to a company in California who render for him. Despite the expense, this method is fast as he is able to get his render in a short period of about an hour. If he was to do the rendering himself as he used to do before, it would take up to a week.

## 1.3 Examples

Below are a few examples of works Fatboy productions has produced.

### 1.3.1 Jamii Limited – (Faiba Advertisement) – caveman series

If you are a resident of Kenya, you most definitely know the cavemen (Fig. 2) who graced our



Fig. 2: *Faiba* advertisement cavemen characters



Fig. 3. Safaricom customer care *Zuri* avatar

screens in a fiber advert. cavemen series was one of Michaels animation stats blasted him into fame. He had had an idea of making caveman for a while before he got the opportunity to work for fiber. The characters are cave men who speak in English but with a vernacular Kamba accent. this Idea makes the caveman relatable to us and makes the advertisement memorable.

### 1.3.2 Safaricom advertisements

Michael has worked with Safaricom on a variety of projects. He has made various characters for their advertisements such as Mazgwembe and Kinuthia. He also designed the customer care character Zuri (Fig. 3) for Safaricom.

### 1.3.3 Stanbic Bank advertisements

With the rise of technology, banks have begun offering banking applications. Stanbic bank z among the banks that are offering these services. Users of the Stanbic bank application can attest to the presence of an avatar at the initial page of the app. This avatar guides the users. The 3D custom character is also one of Michael Muthiga's works.



Fig. 4. Stanbic bank animations

## 1.4 Form and Content

### 1.4.1 Style

Michael focuses on the 3d animation style. All his characters are 3d including the ones used in print media. His main tools of work to create the characters is the maya software which is a staple in the animation industry.



Fig. 4. Stanbic bank animations

#### 1.4.2 Form

Animations created by Michael can also be classified as caricatures. His characters often feature exaggerated features. This style makes his characters fun and easy to remember. This style also makes them humorous and emphasizes some stereotypes that the audience relates to such as his 3D character business man Mbugua.

For the environment around his characters, he tries to keep it fairly realistic with minimal exaggeration or oversimplification.



Fig. 6. The real photograph of the inspiration for the character *Mazgwembe*



Fig. 7. *Mbugua*, stereotypical Kenyan business man

#### 1.4.3 Content

Content of his animations are mainly human beings. They are at the center of the advertisements and stories and messages are conveyed through them. His animations also contain ordinary environments such as houses, shops and recognizable landscapes. The content in his animations is recognizable and easy to comprehend.

### 1.5 Themes

#### 1.5.1 Pop culture

Michael Muthiga animations borrow inspiration from the popular culture in Kenya. Michael and his team take time to attend events and mingle with people so that they can inform themselves on what is trending, how people are speaking and current social issues. This allows his animations to be relatable as well as enable him to employ humor in his works. An example would be his character "*Mazgwembe*" an



Figure 8: recognizable/ realistic environments, objects and landscapes

boisterous and confident character in one of his Safaricom advertisements. The character's name is itself humorous and is a name copied from a sheng word. Sheng is a Swahili- English cant that is also made with some of the Kenyan vernacular languages. The language is commonly spoken by the youth. The stories in his animations also exude an understanding of the current stories being talked about by people and their daily experiences. This makes his advertisements interesting and more appealing to the target audience.



Fig. 9. *Mazgwembe*, a boisterous character that mirrors pop culture



Fig. 10. Characters created by Michael that mirrored trending music in Kenya

## 1.5 Cultural identity

Cultural identity is evident in Michael's characters. Some of his characters normally speak with a recognizable accent from certain Kenyan tribes. His caveman series had two cavemen whose English had a distinct Kamba language influence. This made the characters relatable despite them being cavemen. Another example would be of Somali characters he had made for a covid protocol commercial. From the way they speak to their garments, you can clearly tell and appreciate that they are from the Somali tribe. Apart from making the adverts feel closer to home, this aspect makes the public appreciate their cultures and the Kenyan diversity even more.



Fig. 11.: Somali characters that adorn the Somali attire

## 1.6 Influences of Michael's animation in the advertising sector

### 1.6.1 3D animation in advertising

Through his success in the advertising industry, 3d animation has become a well-respected medium of advertisement. Many companies are seeking his services for television and online advertisements. He was able to prove that 3d animations can also do as well if not better than 2d animations which were being used before.

### 1.6.2 Playful yet professional

Through his interesting characters Michael has been able to bring a balance between humor and professionalism. Through the use of caricature, he has been able to make advertisements that are formal but in a playful setting. This allows the audience to dive freely into the advertised products and services without spoiling the appeal and image of the brand.

### 1.6.3 Better pay for animators

The introduction of 3d animation to broadcasting and social media has had a vital influence on the animators as well. This has provided better opportunities and more duties for them to undertake in the advertising and broadcasting sector. This has a financial gain as there are more jobs for animators in the industry.

### 1.6.4 Interesting and memoral content

Animated advertisements and infographics are easy to recall. They are interesting and all the distortions and caricatures create emphasis. This has been clearly shown in Michael's advertisements as people tend to remember them more than advertisements made with the best videography that aired at

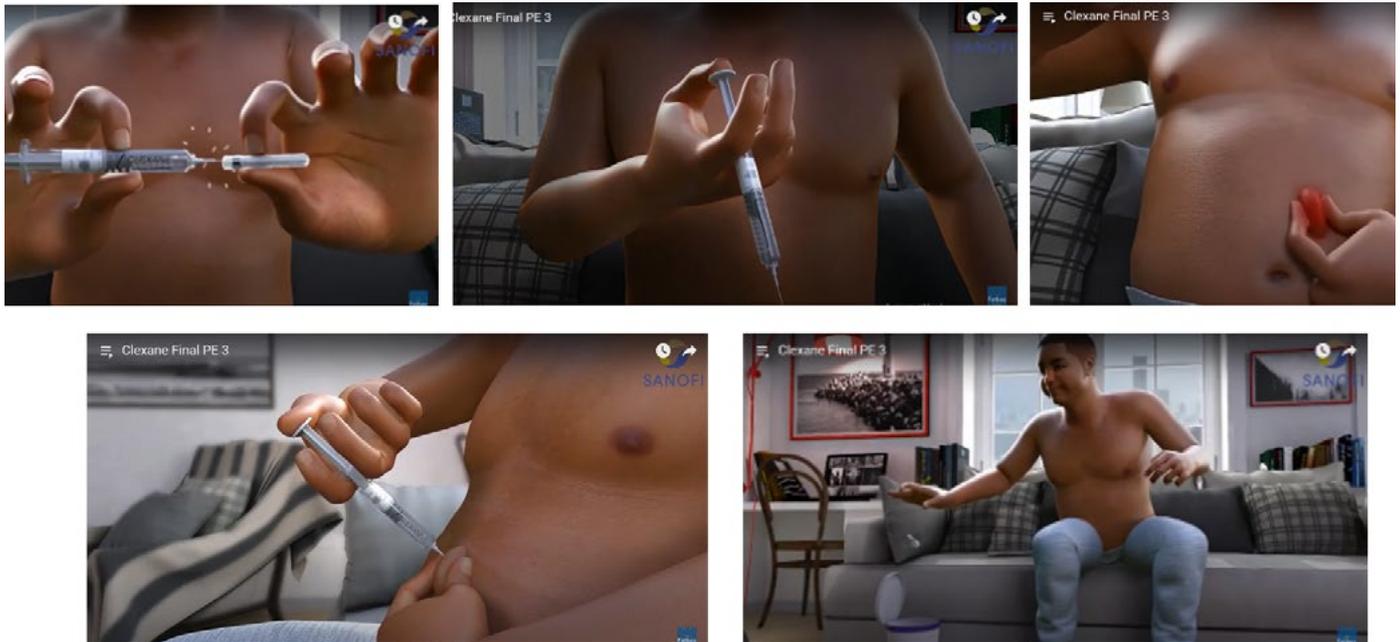


Fig. 10. Characters created by Michael that mirrored trending music in Kenya

the same time as his advertisements.

As 3d animated advertisements are interactive, it is easy to learn and recall the information.

### 1.7 Challenges experienced and future opportunities

The dependence of animation on technology is undeniable. This means that electricity is an animator's friend. However, electrical outages become a deterrent when one is in the process of animating. This has been one of the challenges fat boy animations has had to deal with. Erratic issues such as transformer breakdowns weigh down the productivity of the company and delay rendering processes.

Animation also requires a lot of investment especially when it comes to the equipment. As fat boy animations has been on the rise, more work has been coming in. this is however inversely proportional to the hardware available. This makes meeting deadlines difficult.

Despite the challenges mentioned, Michael is thriving. He hopes to also set up an online animation training school. He aims to mentor and share his skills with other upcoming animators. He hopes to be able to reach animators who are not based in the capital city through this program.

## 2.0 DISCUSSION

Michael Muthiga has most definitely conquered a great battle by making 3d animation a viable career option in Kenya. He found a niche and plunged himself into uncharted territory. He is an inspiration to many upcoming animators. Despite all his achievements in introducing 3d animation to media, there is still much improvement to be seen. We still see the Kenyan media stations broadcasting cartoons bought from foreign companies. This is disappointing considering we have talented animators who can make the same animations.

One may argue that media stations purchase foreign animations as there is a shortage of Kenyan animations. Despite this, I believe broadcasting stations can produce their own animations as they have the budget. In a similar way to how they hire producers for their in-house productions, they could also hire animators for the local children content. This may even be cheaper than purchasing the expensive programs they do from Disney and other worldwide production houses.

### 3.0 CONCLUSION

Multiple market research has shown that cartoons and caricatures are effectively received more than even high-quality images. This is equally seen in the education system here children grasp illustrations better. 3d animations are even better as they move and have a voice. This ensures effective and interactive passage of information. As advertisements aim to engrave potential customers and draw awareness to their brand, 3d animations prove to be a great solution. Michael Muthiga has made animation look professional and has been able to engage the audience using relatable content and humor. He has truly been instrumental in bringing a new era of 3d advertising and his achievements have been advantageous to other animators.

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