

The All-In-One Cinemagraph:

Photography, Video And Design In A Single Graphic Resource For Persuasive Visual Communication

El «todo en uno» del *cinemagraph*: fotografía, vídeo y diseño en un solo recurso gráfico para la comunicación visual persuasiva.

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If there is anything that is truly unique about the contemporary era, it is hybridisation in its different facets and dimensions, a phenomenon that also extends to the world of graphics. One example of such hybridisation is the cinemagraph, a graphic resource with the appearance of a photograph, characterised by the movement of a small area of the image in contrast with the static nature of the rest of the picture. The cinemagraph is the product of the convergence of the disciplines of photography and video in the interests of enhancing a picture's visual impact.

This article offers a description of the characteristics of the cinemagraph and explores the dimensions of its use from a theoretical perspective.

La contemporaneidad se caracteriza por la hibridación en sus diferentes facetas y ámbitos, algo que se extiende también al universo gráfico. Un ejemplo es el *cinemagraph*, recurso gráfico de apariencia fotográfica caracterizado por el movimiento en una pequeña región que contrasta con el estatismo del resto de la imagen. Esto es fruto de la confluencia de diferentes disciplinas como la fotografía o el vídeo, con el fin de potenciar su efectividad visual. En este artículo revisamos las características del *cinemagraph* y hacemos una propuesta de sus dimensiones de uso desde una perspectiva teórica.

Key words

Cinemagraph, photography,
graphic resources, hybridisation,
moving pictures

Palabras clave

Cinemagraph, fotografía, recursos
gráficos, hibridación, imagen en
movimiento

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Introduction

In a context of permanently changing trends and technological leaps, design could not remain static and it needed to activate itself and get in motion, as a cautionary action to preserve the continuity of its reputation.

Thus we have witnessed new graphic resources appearing, as a response to the new visual demands that increasingly ask for more emotion, hook and delight. A clear example of it is the cinemagraph. A cinemagraph is but an image in which some of their elements are subtly moving, while the rest of the composition stays static. This particularity, however, does not grant them the category of conventional photography, nor that of video, which may seem to point at it being an element devoided of identity that has remained in an intermediate space between both disciplines. Quite the contrary, the cinemagraph arrives with its own identity, stemming from an ambitious mix of photography, design, video, cinematography, communication and technology that aims at enhancing its visual effectiveness.

In this article we review the features and areas of usage of the cinemagraph and we put forward a proposal of the dimensions of its use, from a theoretical perspective. This is a review and test article, paying attention to the observation and bibliographic methodology that has continuity in subsequent experimental works on its uses and applications.

In it, we aim at exposing the theoretical frame upon which it is based, analyse the aspects that make it an element with the capacity to draw attention in a creative, effective way, and to create its own taxonomy of the dimensions of its use.

Context

In the 39th edition of the *International Conference on Information Systems* Miao Xiaoyu and Zhenhui Jiang defined the cinemagraph as a “special type of animation that is characterised by contrast and the coexistence of movement and stillness through artificial manipulation”. Its key is the isolation of some specific part of a video, while the rest remains static as in a photograph (Yeh and Li, 2012), this is something that influences visual attention and the interest on the product or scene displayed in the image.

Others, like Caldwell (2012) refer to cinemagraphs as a new photographic modality, a fusion between the more traditional photography, cinematography and animation, while for Niewland (2012), they are directly presented as animated GIF (*Graphic Interchange Format*) that operate in loop and which, thanks to a system of layers and a masking action, allow to display a part of their composition (which is its largest, static part), in motion.

The term *cinemagraph* was coined by photographer Jamie Beck and graphic artist Keving Burg who started researching animated GIFs in 2009 (Niewland, 2012). Together they decided to join their disciplines to produce motion photographs that became popular through a series developed in New York Fashion Week, in February, 2011 (Warren, 2011).

The phenomenon was a sensation and began to spread, increasing the interest in knowing such technique, which initially was complex and required specialised knowledge of photography and design, but also of digital post-production and computing. In parallel, there was an increase of algorithms and programming patents simplifying its creation process, such as “Method for Creating Automatic Cinemagraphs on an “Magine Device” (Mashiah,



Cinemagraph 1. Fuente: cinemagraphs.com (Burg y Beck para Chanel).

2015), "Creating a Cinemagraph" (Lehtiniemi *et al.*, 2017) or Automatic generation of semantic-based cinemagraphs" (Oh *et al.*, 2018) referring to algorithms and patents, and *Clipets* (Microsoft), *Cinemagram* (Factyle Inc), *Halpix* (Skwirrl), *Motion on Picture-Cinemagraph Effect* (Step Soft LLC), *Cinemagraph: Motion on Photo* (GreenEye Developers) or *MaskArt* (Photo and Video Creative Labs Inc) among many other programs and applications.

Something similar happens with academic literature around this resource. Some time after the creations of Burg and Beck became popular, academia began to echo this, mostly through articles focusing on the technical side, rather than the conceptual side of it. The other focus on the cinemagraph within academic literature has been less explored and it is where we place this work, which will only briefly describe its situation when it comes to technical questions.

Hybridation as a creative formula

Cinemagraph is an efficient, innovative graphic resource that stems from the hybridation of disciplines through the use of digital technologies.

Still, it could be stated that its initial discipline is photography (which does not confer it with a higher value or importance).

Photography, in an effort to evolve and adapt to new times and new communication requirements, needed to establish relationships with other media and systems, thus generating new products and visualisations based upon interaction (Ramos, 2012).

It already went through a great revolution with its passage from analogue to digital systems in the end of last century. This meant a new way to see, understand and take photographs. A second revolution happened already in the twenty-first century, with the spreading of mobile devices and the use of social media. These were changes in the ways images were captured, that are coupled with technical progress related to image treatment and digital file manipulation through computer processes, to the point that they expanded the very notion of "photography". New hybrid formulas were thus created, through the interrelation of this photography with other disciplines such as video, cinematography, graphic design, or electronic engineering, telecommunications or data processing.



Cinemagraph 2. Fuente: cinemagraphs.com (Burg y Beck para Amazon).

A technical, aesthetic reinvention took shape. (Vicente, 2005).

As we can see, we cannot speak of the cinemagraph as though it were a common photograph. A photograph, by definition, represents a fixed image, while a cinemagraph includes a region in movement, for which it is necessary to have made a video recording, and to have processed the images through post-production systems. It cannot be classified as video either, when it comes to its format or final result, since video is defined as a representation of images in movement, whereas, in cinemagraphs as previously stated, movement is found only in a small area of the image. Also, videos are full of what could be considered as “distractions”, which with cinemagraph disappear, frozen, in order to direct the attention of the viewer.

It is a graphic resource that may well be used as a design element, however, its vocation is more photographic, nurtured with certain cinematographic aesthetics, and which depends on the application of the algorithms of applications and computer programs (without which its elaboration would not be possible).

Through all this, we appreciate how far from showing an inclination for one media or another, the cinemagraph is a resource which identity is inter-media, in a double meaning of the expression. On the one hand, it is the result of the interaction of diverse media and disciplines, on the other had, its evolution has been propiciated by the use of new digital media, particularly, social media.

This breaks with classic classification criteria such as static/dynamic or photograph/video/animation, among other taxonomies. Cinemagraph is no more this than that, actually it may be considered an all-in-one. Its format and its clean, expressive way to transmit messages through image, along with how easy it is to share it, is being increasingly valued, especially in advertising and art fields.

However, its clean look, and that simple, calm appearance does not mean it is an easily created resource, quite the contrary; hybridation increases the complexity of processes.

We can generate cinemagraphs working at it from many angles, and we can get fine results following very different paths. This will depend on whether we want a more or less processed image (which will



Cinemagraph 3.
Fuente: Netflix.



Cinemagraph 4.
Fuente: cinemagraphs.com (Burg y Beck para Ecco Domani).

require more resources, and the use of more image processing programs), whether we want it to have more or less technical quality (in this sense, it is not the same to create a cinemagraph to be projected in an art gallery, than generating one that will be shared on Instagram, when it comes to image resolution and other technical aspects), another factor would be the use it will have (professional or domestic scopes). In all these cases we can still define three main parts in the production process of a cinemagraph:

1. Production: Image capture through a video recording device, be it a camera (professional or home equipment), a mobile telephone or any other device.

2. Postproduction: Image processing. Be it to adjust colour, contrast or to add some filter (something now can be done at the image capture stage), and/or to achieve the motion effect of a region in the image, while leaving the rest static. There is no single method for this step; the options are increasingly varied and more user-friendly and easy to use (a clear example of this are mobile phone apps).

3. Reproduction: Finish. The format will be determined by the choice we face here: whether we want it to work as a video, or if, on the contrary, we want it to operate as a loop. Currently, in the case of cinemagraphs being used on social media, is becoming less relevant when it comes to networks

like Instagram which activate automatically in the repetition of videos once they have finished playing. However, it may be relevant if they are destined for electronic magazines, advertising billboards or cinema theatres.

Fields of applications and dimensions of the use of cinemagraphs

We mentioned earlier the cinemagraphs that Beck and Burgh made for New York Fashion Week in 2011, and how these became a hallmark in the concept and use of this creative resource. Both have continued to produce cinemagraphs for the world of fashion (Armani, Chanel or Chopard are among their clients), but also for other clients such as Amazon or Lincoln Motor Company¹.

It is the case that advertising is tending to use this type of resource more often, perhaps due to what Burg himself indicates "People just cannot stop looking at those images [...] and that is exactly what the advertising industry wants" (in Marketing Directo, 2015).

Nowadays their use is not limited to sophisticated brands, but it is becoming widely popular in numerous advertising campaigns in the most diverse

1. <http://cinemagraphs.com>

sectors and even more so with the rise of Instagram, since it is a brief, surprising format, with a high emotional impact and easy to share.

An example is the cinemagraph which introduced Netflix series *Stranger Things*², or some created to advertise PUMA or Land Rover.

Deserving a special mention are those cinemagraphs created to advertise food or drinks. Thus, we find the ones developed for Ecco Domani, in which we can see how a wine glass moves. Everything is kept static, except the wine itself. In it, we can appreciate the full detail of colour and texture while an agreeable sensation spreads, watching the movement in the wine glass³.

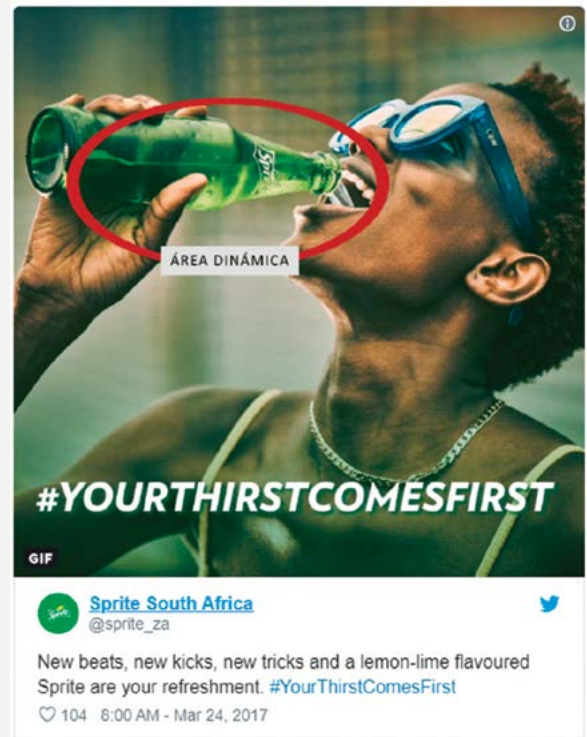
The same thing happens with Sprite⁴ or the launch campaign for the new Cerveza de Valencia and their beer brands Mussa, Maula and Butoni, which also played with displaying the dynamics in the image where the liquid was.

All of them took advantage of the qualities of cinemagraphs to highlight their product, but this is not necessarily the case. In a Coca-Cola cinemagraph, rather than animating the region where the brand or the product are, they chose to animate another part of the scene. We can see a Coca-Cola can over a swimming pool⁵. It is precisely the water in the swimming pool which moves, transmitting an agreeable sensation of calm and coolness, and through that, of Coca-Cola. We have seen here that they may be used to highlight qualities and features of a product as well as to produce emotional engagement, through generating gentle sensations evocative of placidity and a calm verging on the hypnotic.

When it comes to communication and persuasion, cinemagraphs are efficient. Toet *et al.* (2017) stated that cinemagraphs displaying food generate stronger affective and appetitive responses than static images. This is because focusing motion on a specific area, the spectator's attention is held and their visual experience is richer and more ample.

This does not only happen with food cinemagraphs. Park and Rhee (2014) discovered that the use of a cinemagraph to introduce products in e-commerce webs results in a higher buying intention than if a static images had been used. Accordingly, Park *et al.* (2015) state that cinemagraphs obtain more positive emotional responses (in Xiaoyu and Jiang, 2018).

Art is another field where the use of cinemagraph is rather common. This allows to explore new dimensions of what other creators had done up until



then, especially those specialising in photography or video. Beyond Beck and Burg, previously mentioned, we find artists dedicated to cinemagraph on art platforms and social media, one of the most popular would be Behance. Its repercussion offline is limited (museum, art galleries), Internet is its natural exhibition space.

When it comes to dimensions or creation and use criteria for cinemagraphs, in our study we have established three groups according to their vocation:

1. Aesthetic dimension: it takes place when the main purpose of the cinemagraph is contemplative delight or enjoyment. These are images of great beauty and subliminal qualities. In this sense, Léa Colomer (2014) stated that cinemagraphs arose interest and beauty, same as Chan *et al.* (2012), who had also defined them as a new way to define beauty. They introduced cinemagraph as an alternative way to present beautiful scenes.

This aesthetic dimension can be achieved through different ways, for instance through a gentle, delicate movement, through armonious shapes and/or colours in the image composition, or through other graphic devices.

2. Qualitative dimension: consists in the use of the cinemagraph to highlight the qualities of a product, not so much appealing to emotions, as to its objective characteristics. This is the case of the

2. https://www.instagram.com/p/BWahfMTFWJ5/?utm_source=ig_embed

3. <http://cinemagraphs.com/food2/>

4. https://twitter.com/sprite_za/status/84516833951397888

5. <http://coca-cola.tumblr.com/post/29069347658/lets-take-this-poolside>



Cinemagraph 6.
Fuente: Coca-Cola
Tumblr.

mentioned beverages examples, such as the beer and wine cinemagraphs, which rather than transmitting sensations, aim at displaying the product itself and its differentiating features, even if it is just small details. Here the cinemagraph's function is to highlight certain elements, whether for the viewer to notice them, or to emphasize them.

3. Sensorial dimension: this refers to the sensorial experience that the contemplation of the cinemagraph produces, whether through its artistic dimension or as advertising. It does not focus the viewer's attention on the specific features of the object or product itself, but it aims at generating an atmosphere capable of bringing about emotions, which in the case of advertising, may perfectly be associated with the brand or product, even if they are not describing it directly. It would be appealing to the viewer's emotions, for instance, displaying wind-swept hair, or reproducing the a vinyl record turning on a record player, while the rest of the composition is kept consciously static.

These dimensions will attend to the main function and use of each specific case. However, they are not exclusive. There is no obstacle for creating or finding cinemagraphs which combine several of these dimensions.

Conclusions

Technology and with it, the spaces of exchange and sharing that social media are, have been generating

their own space that favours the new visualities, new communication forms, and new aesthetic norms. All this also demands new resources that adapt to the needs of the time. In this context, media and traditional systems find themselves forced to evolve and to weave themselves with different kinds of media. The synergies this generated, result in formulas that are effective in terms of communication and persuasion, and capable of producing an impact.

Cinemagraphs are a fine example of this. They can be classified according to their aesthetic, qualitative and/or sensorial dimensions. Through the interplay between the static and the dynamic, they provoke a visual attraction that is intensified, to use Caldwell's words (2012), by the repetition of the motion that traps the viewer in a hypnotic loop of infinite temporality.

However, concluding from this that cinemagraph would be superior to other graphic media, as these same authors expressed, is questionable. Rather, we interpret that it is one more graphic resource, of many, to choose to our convenience. It is in no case intrinsically superior, and its existence does not question the permanence of classic media like photography, video or animation, even though it has something from all three.

It is still an element of a brief trajectory, but that retains the capacity to capture the attention, due to its poetic nature and the strangeness of its form, captivating the viewer with a new visual experience.

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