The use of cinemagraph effect in the creation of digital illustration work: A review

J Witabora\(^1\), D K Homan\(^2\)

\(^1\)New Media Program, Visual Communication Design Department, School of Design, Bina Nusantara University, Jakarta, Indonesia 11480
\(^2\)Animation Program, Visual Communication Design Department, School of Design, Bina Nusantara University, Jakarta, Indonesia 11480

jowitabora@binus.edu

Abstract. Cinemagraph technique in the photography world brings up a new discourse in the presentation of a photograph as a visual communication media. Cinemagraph approach offers a new visual language that was never explored before. Even with a simple presentation, the visual effect created using cinemagraph can be a memorable and deep experience. The ability of cinemagraph to draw attention and give a deep experience are some of the main reasons why it has succeeded to be a new visual communication media. Illustration as a visual communication media that also thrives in the digital world, can make use of cinemagraph. The researchers consider this possibility interesting and something worth reviewed. This research’s purpose is to look into possibilities of using cinemagraph technique in illustration that might eventually be an effort to bring a breath of fresh air in the illustration world.

1. Introduction

In the study of visual communication design, illustration has been a part of its board spectrum that always manages to survive the change of time, and it keeps evolving. It has been able to be incorporate social and cultural issues and to live through the never-stopping technological developments. The current state of technology gives an easy way for illustration to grow in the digital world. The adequate software ecosystem and the presence of advanced hardware make the creation of an illustration work faster and easier, and they are one of the important aspects that help illustration thrive nowadays.

In the beginning, the presence of technology in the illustration work was merely an instrument to help with the creation. The end result of the illustration still carried the conventional-analogue character of its previous media and it could not completely respond to the digital environment and explore the potential in it. Nowadays, there are a lot of efforts to break through the old approach.

In the digital comics world, there has been panel layout exploration, from the one based on the experience of looking into a monitor, no longer within the limits of its old media (print media), pioneered by Scott McCloud [1] to the use of GIFs to show a short animation in Thunderpaw webcomic [2], and the use of some techniques like 3D and parallax in digital comic Protanopia by Andre Bergs [3]. This shows that illustration is not always about aesthetics and the ability to use a visual language, but also about the critical attitude in understanding the media used in an illustration creation.

In the era of digital world and internet, an illustration work will not end in one media only, it can get into all possibilities. An illustration idea will not be stuck only in its physical form, but it can
evolve to a digital entity in the digital realm that has different rules and limits. It can integrate with other digital medias, like digital photography, interactive media, and animation [4]. In an era where everything can be done quickly and instantly, it will not only affect the illustration work, but also the way of displaying the work, as there will be new ways of doing it. The internet has been a new gallery and social media has been a new way to display illustration works, both can be accessed by anyone, anywhere.

Cinemagraph as a new digital media offers a fresh and different approach of visual language. It manages to combine photography and videography in one dynamic visual harmony. Cinemagraph allows a photograph to be more vivid, as a subtle movement effect is added to certain parts of the photograph and it creates paradox illusions from a still and moving photograph combined. Cinemagraph is able to capture a moment like a photograph but it has a repetitive effect that does not seem to end due to its touch of videography. The effect will result in a deep experience that sticks to the memory. The success of cinemagraph in the world of photography, might also be possible to be duplicated in the illustration world. By applying cinemagraph to illustration, it can bring up a new discourse, interesting to be reviewed.

This research aims to explore the potential of cinemagraph technique in illustration works. How the technique can be used to fulfil the need of illustration visual language as the media of story-telling, information, identity and art expression, and able to bring a newness in the illustration world. It is needed to do an exploration of the technique, effect and visual impact resulted from combining cinemagraph to an illustration work to get the suitable and positive formulation for this technique.

2. Review of Literature

2.1. Digital Illustration

Illustration has always been in a vague position between art and design. In its creative process, it does not only respond to reality, but also creates a new reality that may feel unfamiliar. It has the potential to create new awareness, style, and trend. It is not only able to solve problems of existing structures but also able to do a restructuration [5].

As a form of art, illustration does not only meet the market demand, it also gives new challenges to create a new market, and that is why illustration may seem independent and exclusive. As design, it does not have to keep a distance from the market, it has to have an aesthetic fit for the public, so it can be functional and can stand on its own as one of cultural strategies. The force of these two elements, art and design, is important in the creation process of illustration that is autobiographical and ethnographical [5].

The illustration world has become more fluid now. Its limitations were used to be clear, but they are now vaguer. It no longer moves within commercial art [6] but it has gone far and has moved within other fields. Its presence to deliver certain messages in a visual form needs not only high standard, unique aesthetic approach, and good technique, but also intellectual ability to design a message that is effective, interesting, and right for its function and media. The understanding of visual language and its use are important to reach the goal of communication as a commission (story, advertising, information) and identity. Done in the correct way, then it became a powerful tool, more than a written text, to build a specific perception to the audiences [7].

Nowadays, illustration is present in digital global communication world [4]. It has many forms and thrives in the media industry, advertising, and entertainment. To be able to respond to the growth and acceleration of the need in this industry, illustration has to be flexible to be able to get into one
creation method to the other, to interact with and integrate to the other medias so it can be an interdisciplinary practise.

Male [6] in his book states, “Illustrator of today and the future will need to see how global, experiential and experimental insights can generate the most felicitous models for contemporary communications problems; to stretch and questions one’s practise and gain inspiration from within and beyond immediate boundaries; be professionally and intellectually adept at social engagement; and use human interactions to inspire new thinking and, when situation are conducive or favourable, create polar tensions of friction to inspire fresh and original thinking.”

The future of the world of illustration will not be separated from technology, from the tools used in its creation process and the media used to display the work are now more mobile-accessible and immersed in our physical world. This is a space that should always be explored in the illustration world.

2.2. Cinemagraph
Cinemagraph technique was first created by Kevin Burg and Jamie Beck in 2011 and since then, it had become a popular technique to use. The technique creates a ‘living photograph’ illusion, as stated on Burg and Beck’s website, “A living moment in an otherwise photograph.”

Cinemagraph creates a paradox of a still photograph and movements that just keep going and on a loop. It offers a new visual that allows an intense and immersive experience. “The cinemagraph automates a cognitive selection by creating a focal point of movement in a scene to actively construct or manufacture awareness of the event for the viewer.” [8].

Cinemagraph, with its uniqueness, is able to draw a lot of attention from viewers, more than photograph and video [9]. The paradox created can stimulate viewers’ brain to be continuously active in translating the accepted visual signal. It is inevitable that it can stimulate focus and attention. In visual perception study, cinemagraph is able to offer a visual illusion, created from perception and sensory aspects combined, and it creates a strong visual attention. The perception of a still scene that viewers get from elements that act as clues in cinemagraph, can suddenly be shaken by the presence of the moving elements that are not a part of the still scene, and vice versa [10].

To create a good cinemagraph effect, good skill in processing a visual is needed. The key of achieving success in creating the right paradox that leads to a believable reality is the precision of choosing which parts of an image needs to be still and which one needs to be moving. This all comes back to having visual aesthetic sensitivity in composition and expertise in shapes and movements in image manipulation.

Graphics Interchange Format as the cinemagraph format makes it different from still image or animation format. It has the advantage of being a lighter file, so it is easier to display in the digital world, like social media. Its ability to easily draw attention is another reason why it blooms in social media. This goes along with the phenomenon of contemporary culture of distraction and of shorthand-videos [11].

The ability of cinemagraph to draw attention is now giving an opportunity to cinemagraph to enter the advertising world. Flixel stated this on its website, saying that there were many global brands using cinemagraph as it was able to catch consumers’ attention. In a Mehek Seyid’s article “Cinemagraphs VS Still Photos in Social Advertising: Microsoft Case Study” [12], there was an explanation on the use of cinemagraph in Microsoft Surface social media advertisements. On Twitter, it showed an increase of 110% compared to the 1.96% increase in engagement generated by advertisements using still photos, and the effect was also seen on Facebook, as the engagement rates increased by 85% with cinemagraph social ads. The good impact of using cinemagraph was also supported by Ji Seob Park [13] in a research on the effect of cinemagraph in the food industry. The research found that not only did cinemagraph increase the level of attention, but it also encouraged the customers’ will to buy the food. This shows that cinemagraph is a strong visual communication media, not only when applied on advertisements, but also on other visual communication medias, including digital illustration.
3. Methods
This research uses an inductive-qualitative method from the Grounded theory methodology. An empirical observation will be done by analysing digital illustration works using the cinemagraph technique. A new theory is expected as a result of the analysis of cinemagraph implementation in the digital illustration world. The analysis of the perception aspect and the basic understanding of design will help form a theoretical structure.

The digital illustration works that will be analysed are the works of illustrators that have experiences in the creation of movement-integrated illustration. The researchers will also look into the use of cinemagraph as a digital entity of still works that have been created before and as a new form of work on social media.

4. Result and Discussion
In photography, the cinemagraph effect is a result of combining a still photograph and a motion video. It means that a moving subject has to be captured at the same time as the creation of a photograph. This is a different factor when applied to illustration where there is no moving object that needs to be captured at the same time as the creation of an illustration. The moving object in an illustration is something that is completely made up and it gives the illustrator complete freedom to be creative. Not only can the illustrator control which part should stay still and which part should have movements in it, they can also control the movements and this cannot be done in photography. Controlling movements is the main factor that determines the success of a paradox creation as it will help the viewers believe what they see.

The creation of cinemagraph-integrated illustrations is growing fast in the digital world and social media. It takes the form of a visual effect that is attached to the surface of an existing illustration. It is usually added after the illustration is made. This technique is able to create a good cinemagraph illustration with a strong paradoxical effect. Illustrators use this technique to display their works on social media and to show that the cinemagraph illustrations are not just previews for their works in the physical world, but works that can transform to a new entity, compatible with its realm.

The researchers discovered some findings after analysing some cinemagraph illustration works and their creation process that are on the internet and on social media:

1. Like a work in photography, a cinemagraph illustration has to be able to create a believable visual paradox. The viewers have to believe that the visual paradox going on, is not supposed to happen, and if one element is moving, the other one cannot be still, because both elements are inseparable.

2. Movements are a crucial element, determining if the created paradox will work. When a manipulated movement cannot reflect the real perception of a movement then the paradox will not be believable. For example, in Lowlex by Joe Maccarone [14], the movement of the waterfall is not smooth, and it cannot show a perception of water flowing and it results in a very weak paradox. The proportion and the choice of the moving element have to be done carefully so it can show both moving and still paradox, not just a moving animated image or a still image.

3. The movements created have to be movements that show a never-ending perception (loop) and can blur the beginning and the end of a movement. This can be achieved by using the Reverse Loop or Repeat Loop technique [15]. This is important if an illustrator wants to create a believable still image, and an on loop effect like the Shepard tone illusion [10]. According to Peirce semiotics, this happens because the time of the beginning and the end of a movement becomes blurred [16]. In Rebecca Mock’s The Quiet Ones [17], viewers can see a looping view from a train window, making it seem like the train keeps on moving forward.

4. The better it is for an illustration style to present a believable reality, the easier it gets to present a cinemagraph visual paradox.
5. On mobile technology, image editing application can make it faster and easier for a cinemagraph illustration creation. An illustrator just has to attach a visual effect on the surface of the illustration, but still having to be meticulous when it comes to choosing the right visual effects for the illustration. Illustrator Alex Ross [18] on his Instagram account uses this technique. He adds weather effects like rain, snow, and lighting, and good lighting effect to help his watercolour works look more vivid.

6. The researchers discovered Plotaverse [19], a mobile application that introduces another way to create still and moving paradox illusions. By using morphing effect, Plotaverse can add movements to still images with controllable details such as size, direction, and many other details. This can help create a good paradox especially when some parts of an image that wants to be morphed are the parts that are not too defined, or when they are the form of particles and textures, so the movements created still look natural. This morphing effect has great potential and its use in cinemagraph illustration can be analysed further.

Cinemagraph illustration opens a way for illustration in the digital reality. If applied well, cinemagraph will be able to create illustrations that can draw a lot of attention from the viewers. Illustrators should explore the possibilities offered by cinemagraph as it may fulfill illustrators' needs that get more complex nowadays.

References
[1] Mccloud S 2009 The Infinite Canvas Scott McCloud Journal RSS
[2] Lee J 2016 Thunderpaw in the Ashes of Fire Mountain Online tpaw-news.tumblr.com
[3] Bergs A 2017 Protanopia – A Revolutionary Digital Comic for iPhone and iPad Online andrebergs.com
[4] Wigan M 2018 Thinking Visually for Illustrators (Bloomsbury Visual Arts)
[5] Saidi A I 2016 Desain, Media & Kebudayaan (Bandung:Penerbit ITB)
[6] Male A 2017 Illustration: A Theoretical and Contextual Perspective (New York: Fairchild Books)
[7] Adi D A 2015 Ilustrasi Kritik Sosial dalam Bahasa Visual Metaphore pada Karya Mahasiswa Mata Kuliah Ilustrasi Desain sebagai Studi Kasus Humanior 6 221
[8] Niewland M 2012 Framed in Time: A Cinemagraph Series of the Everyday & Grounded Theory of Cinemagraphy (A Major Research Paper). McMaster University
[9] Khan F B Cinemagraph: A Fusion of Still Images and Motion Video for Science Communication in a New Media Convergent Ecosystem Journal of Scientific Temper 4(1&2) 21-27
[10] Goldstein E B and Brockmole J R 2017 Sensation and perception (Boston, MA: Cengage Learning)
[11] Hagman H 2012 The Digital Gesture: Rediscovering Cinematic Movement through Gifs – Hampus Hagman Refractory: A Journal of Entertainment Media
[12] Seyid M 2018 Cinemagraphs vs. Still Photos in Social Advertising: Microsoft Case Study Flixel Photos
[13] Park J S, Bae J H and Cho K S 2014 The Effect of Non-verbal Communication using Cinemagraph in Mobile Electronic Commerce of Agrifood on Visual Attention and Purchase Intention Agribusiness and Information Management 6 24–3
[14] Maccarone J 2014 Lexlow Music Joe Maccarone
[15] Adler L 2015 Cinemagraph Pro Youtube
[16] Chiarini A 2016 The Multiplicity of the Loop: The Dialectics of Stilness and Movement in the Cinemagraph Communicazioni Sociali. Journal of Media, Performing Arts and Cultural Studies 1 87–92
[17] Mock R 2014 Rebecca Mock Illustrates
[18] Ross A 2018 Alex Ross on Instagram: "The #Fantasticfour #ff #sdcc #marvel @comicbookpros @cbcebulski" Instagram
Acknowledgement
The authors gratefully acknowledge that the present research is supported by Ministry of Research and Technology and Higher Education Republic of Indonesia. The support is under the research grant BINUS University of Year 2018 Contract Number 020A/V.RTT/IV/2018