

Research Question:

In what ways do the shared formal tools of motion graphics — typography, imagery, texture, motion and sound — operate under different logics of composition, pacing and semiotic function when the context shifts from cinematic title sequence to short-form audiovisual advertisement?

Outline of research Objective:

This project investigates how the formal elements of motion graphics — typography, imagery, texture, motion, and sound — are configured differently across contexts, comparing two distinct short-duration audiovisual formats: cinematic and television title sequences, and short-form audiovisual advertisements circulated across broadcast and social media platforms. Focusing on semiotic analysis of text–image compositions and title design (Betancourt, 2019) as well as motion design theory (Stone and Wahlin, 2018), the project will examine how each format constructs a recognisable on-screen identity and compresses narrative content into a micro-form legible within seconds. It will explore how openers work as aspirational paratexts that shape the audience’s anticipatory understanding and framing (Grey, 2013; Davison, 2012) and how advertising employs dynamic branding logics and audio branding techniques in selling a product’s identity and audience engagement (Minsly & Fahey, 2017; Yan & Goh, 2025). By comparing the compositional, temporal, and semiotic strategies used in each form, this research will shed light on the distinction in narrative and perceptual possibilities of motion graphics as an audiovisual form, contributing to an increasing pool of research on motion, visual narrative, and audience engagement in digital culture (Rahmadieni & Wempi, 2025; Yan & Goh, 2025).

Literature Review:

Section 1 : Motion graphics as a formal system

Motion graphics serve both decorative and technical purposes. It is a system that creates meaning. Stone & Wahlin (2018, p. 12) define the field as an interdisciplinary creative practice. It synthesises motion, graphic design, animation, and storytelling. Moving images and sound convey messages grounded in human experience and communication. Technology underlies this process, but does not define it. Gallagher & Padly explain that motion “gives life to inanimate words and images, encoding them with a message for an intended audience” (Stone & Wahlin, 2018, p 54). The toolkit

gathers five formal elements: typography, imagery, texture, motion, and sound. All these operate together across the production workflow (Braha & Lorenceau, 2018).

These five elements work together, each determining the meaning of the others. Betancourt (2019, pp. 30, 33) calls this relationship the text-image composite: a visual combination of words and images that communicates through three modes—figure-ground, calligram, and rebus. Critically, “audience understanding of the relationship between typography and image determines their meaning” (Betancourt, 2019, p. 50). None has meaning in itself. Motion introduces time, increasing the system's difficulty. Stone & Wahlin (2018, p. 166) note that movement functions as a “verb, not a noun,” directing perception and changing how all elements are seen. Pacing acts as the “glue” that unifies meaning throughout (p. 13). Unlike static design, motion graphics uses change itself to produce meaning (Betancourt, 2019).

What motion uniquely enables is what Maselli & Panadisi (2025, p. 1) call synaesthetic motion design. This follows Saul Bass’s merger of Bauhaus graphic logic with the temporal moving image. Sound, movement and image fuse into “a single expressive unit,” in other words, a choreography that is not only visual but musical in nature. Stone & Wahlin (2018, p. 73) argue that pacing allows the designer to “drive the read,” guiding when and where the viewer looks. Rhythm, however, acts as a tool for affective resonance with music. It builds drama and release over time (p. 362). Motion does not carry meaning, but controls the order in which meaning unfolds. This understanding sees motion graphics as a time-based semiotic system, where the interaction of formal elements produces meaning that none of them carries alone. How this system operates, however, depends on the compositional logic applied to it. This literature review now examines two such logics: the paratext logic of title sequences and the persuasion-and-recognition logic of shot-form advertising.

Section 2: Title sequences and paratext logic

Title sequences coexist within a paratextual logic in which function and form are intertwined. They not only persuade or sell, but also build on-screen identity, prime the audience’s expectations, and position the viewer before anything begins. Gray (2013) describes sequences as “greeters, gatekeepers, and cheerleaders” of media, arguing that they frame the text through stylised typography, colour, pacing, and animation. In this sense, they are not simply list credits; they establish tone, genre, and cultural prestige through aspirational formal choices.

Open sequences are also semi-autonomous works in their own right. Stanitzek (2009) interprets them as “a film within a film.” He determines that the sequences have their own internal logic and aesthetic coherence. They hold an independent visual identity beyond the main story. Davison (2012) adds on with a temporal dimension, showing that credits have long-term power and build

cumulative meaning over time. The example of *Six Feet Under* (2001) (Davison 2012, p. 18) shows this. The synchronised “hit points” are analysed and found to create a near-bodily satisfaction that rewards repeated viewing. Together, these accounts show that the title sequence operates as both a threshold in a single view and as a ritual that gains meaning through serial repetition.

The framing and priming function is similarly embodied. Elsaesser & Hagner (2010) define the “sensory threshold” as the point at which a stimulus becomes perceptible. This helps explain how title sequences prepare the viewer not exclusively intellectually but physically (p. 47). As Sobchack argues, we experience film through the “full history and carnal knowledge” of our bodily sensorium (cited in Elsaesser and Hagner, 2010, p. 127). Betancourt (2019) explains how this compression of meaning happens semiotically through the interaction of text and image. Figure-ground, calligram, and rebus structures are especially important here. Meaning is produced rapidly because the viewer reads multiple layers simultaneously. This allows complex story worlds to be communicated in seconds. The film addresses not just the mind but the entire body in just 30 to 90 seconds. This occurs through the semiotic layering mechanism described by Betancourt (2019) earlier. Semiotics layer stacks of meaning. The brain processes complex story worlds in seconds.

Historically, the logic can be traced back to Saul Bass. Maselli & Panadisi (2025) explain that Bass believed film, like symphony, deserved a mood-setting opening. This view aligns closely with Gray’s (2013) notion of the aspirational paratext. Title sequences are considered emotional and aesthetic thresholds rather than tools of persuasion. This is based on Bass’s work from the early days of television to today’s streaming television. This logic can therefore be described as paratext logic: the organisation of these designs around identity construction, priming the audience's mood and position rather than directly using persuasion. Short-form audiovisual advertising, by contrast, operates under a different compositional logic entirely.

Section 3: Short-form advertising and persuasion logic

In TV commercials, brand films, and digital formats, every formal decision must lead to brand recognition and direct audience behaviour within seconds. Yan & Goh (2025) provide an overview of how factors such as typography, colour, and animation contribute to the audience’s attention, understanding, and brand recognition, while also warning that cognitive overload becomes a risk when formal complexity exceeds. Rahnadeini & Wempi (2025) extend on this by examining the factors that audiences actually experience through short-form audiovisuals, which evoke feelings of engagement, trustworthiness, and memorability.

Within this context, Mohamed (2025) introduces “dynamic branding” as the extension of static visual identity into a time-based animated form across digital touchpoints. This is important to

consider when thinking about advertising because movement is not merely aesthetically pleasing to the brand; it also conveys connotations of speed, tempo, and direction that may represent dynamism, trust, playfulness, or stability. Das (2024) reinforces this view by stating that visual consistency in motion graphics is critical for keeping brand recognition and strengthening brand affinity over time. Unlike title sequences, which build identity from the start through paratextual logic, advertising extends an already existing identity into motion.

Sound plays a vital part in this logic of persuasion. Minsky & Fahey (2017) describe audio branding not just as a supplement to branding, but rather a constitutive part of brand identity, defining it as how a brand sounds to the world. Their concept of the sonic logo, a brief two or three-second musical signature, shows how sound can produce recognition even without visual support.

Graankjaer (2014), in relation to TV advertisements, extends this idea of music in commercials, suggesting that music is meaning-constructive rather than decorative, and that sound and image operate semiotically together. Thus, audio branding in advertising cannot be treated as background; it plays a part in brand recognition and recall.

The difference between the two worlds is therefore structural. Title sequences use formal elements to create an immersive sensory threshold, positioning the viewer and revealing identity before it begins (Elsaesser & Hagener, 2010, p. 47). Short-form advertising, by contrast, uses the same elements to trigger rapid recognition and prompt behavioural responses, such as recall, engagement, or purchase intent. Both forms are compressed into seconds, but their semiotic goals differ: title sequences aim at immersion and priming, while advertising aims at activation and persuasion. The same toolkit is therefore organised according to opposite logics.

This can therefore be described as persuasion and recognition logic: the compositional logic of short-form advertisements in which every element is optimised to secure brand recognition and behavioural response within seconds. Unlike the paratext logic of the title sequences, which constructs identity and primes interpretation, persuasion and recognition logic seeks to activate an existing brand identity and guide audience action. The next section examines what this contrast reveals about motion graphics as a medium and why the gap between these two fields matters.

Section 4 : The comparative gap

The preceding sections have shown that title sequences and short-form ads use motion graphics for fundamentally different purposes. Yey, scholarship treats these formats in isolation. Betancourt (2019), Maselli & Panadisi (2025), Stanitzek (2009), Gray (2013) and Davison (2012) focus on title sequences as semiotic and paratextual objects. Their analytical frameworks exploring paratext, text-image composite, and serial identity are developed only in the context of title sequences and do not

engage with the scholarship on advertising. However, Yan & Goh (2025), Rahmadieni & Wempi (2025), and Mohamed (2025) study the effectiveness of advertising, audience engagement, and dynamic branding, but only in terms of short-form advertising. Although Yan and Goh's (2025) systematic review is the most comprehensive overview of the current state of motion graphics in commercials, no mention is made of title sequence scholarship, suggesting that this separation is structural rather than coincidental.

Because these fields do not speak to each other, neither can answer the question this thesis asks: when the same toolkit is used in both formats, what does the difference in outcome reveal about the medium itself? Both fields describe what motion graphics does within their format, but neither can distinguish what is format-specific from what is intrinsic to motion graphics as a system. The result is a blind spot: motion graphics is theorised as television paratext or as advertising technology, but not as a comparative, cross-format practice in its own right.

This thesis addresses that blind spot through close formal and semiotic analysis of four to six case studies, two to three title sequences and two to three short-form audiovisual advertisements, applying the same analytical lens to both formats. Betancourt's (2019) text-image composite framework and Stone & Wahlin's (2018) motion design theory provide tools for tracking how typography, imagery, texture, motion, and sound operate under paratext logic in title sequences and under persuasion and recognition logic in advertising. By holding the toolkit constant and varying the format, the project maps how these two compositional logics diverge and what those divergences reveal about motion graphics as a medium. My earlier comparison of *The Crown* and *Lessons in Chemistry* title sequences, both produced by Elastic, already demonstrates this method in miniature: the same studio using the same toolkit produces sharply different results. This thesis is an extension of this kind of comparative logic across formats, from title sequences to short-form advertising, to separate what is specific to each format from what is medium-specific in motion graphics. The case studies that follow test this framework against concrete examples, examining how typography, motion and sound are configured under each compositional logic.

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