

Design critique

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Video 1: De Amerikaanse Presidentsverkiezingen 2016

Introduction

This video shows why Trump won the 2016 American presidential elections, by explaining how the electoral voting system works. Its intended audience is Dutch people with an interest in these elections, who want to know more about the election results.

Strong points

Clear charts

The video introduces the topic with news footage of Clinton and Trump, and quickly gets to the first data visualization: a bar chart showing the percentage of votes each candidate received. Each element of the chart is added one by one along with the voice-over, so the information never gets overwhelming.

The clear visual encodings used (position and color) get the information across very quickly. In the end, the actual percentages are also displayed on top of each of the bars in the chart, so the viewer can get this information without having to look at the axes.

Engaging visuals

The video uses many different video clips and animations to tell the story. It is done in a way that draws the viewer in and makes it very easy to interpret all of the information. When explaining the history of the electoral system, you see a clock spinning backwards and immediately associate this with going back in time.

Using an animation of Google Earth to zoom in on Washington D.C., followed by a video shot from the perspective of someone riding in a horse carriage, makes you feel engaged in the story.

Visual encodings

To illustrate how electors are divided among states, they choose to show three states as an example. Here, it uses the shapes as an appropriate visual encoding. You then see the stickmen representing the electors going into each state. Again, the animation here is done very well and it layers the information for the viewer. You only get one piece of information at a time, so there is never a distraction from the message.

Had they chosen to illustrate this with a more plain visualization, like a bar chart, the information would not have come across as well.

Color

In the bar charts, the colors used not only contrast each other, they also encode a specific meaning. Red is the color of the Republican Party, and blue the color of the Democratic Party. While this is not pointed out in the video itself, anyone who familiarizes themselves with American Politics would immediately recognize the colors.

Room for improvement

While the video has many strong points, it also leaves room for improvement. One general point of improvement is the information-density. A lot of information is shared in just three minutes and it goes rather quickly. Occasionally the voice-over seems rushed, which makes it hard to keep up with everything that's being said.

Some of the improvements I would make to this video are, in order of appearance:

Animation about the electors (0:33)

Since the video is told in Dutch, this particular animation is confusing. As a viewer, you have to know that 'electors' mean the same as the Dutch 'kiesmannen'. Not only is this a distraction, in the same image there is also a stickman holding up an orange sign with more text in English.

Both of these things draw attention away from what is being said, which makes it hard to follow the information. A solution would have been to draw something like this themselves, with Dutch text instead. Even simply showing images of people voting, would have distracted less from the audio.

Image of computer (1:01)

After it is explained that electors used to travel for days to get votes to Washington, the video shows an image of a computer while the voice-over says that "things are different nowadays."

I assume this implies that computers can now be used to quickly process election results from all over the country. However, the image of this computer is very brief and it is not a regular computer: it appears to be some kind of special gaming computer. This makes it stand out and distract from what the video is trying to say. As a viewer, you don't have time to make the connection to what's implied.

By changing the voice-over to say something along the lines of: "Now, with the use of computers, votes can very easily be sent to Washington", it would have been much more clear. If they would have also shown either a regular computer, or a special computer that's used to process votes, the image itself wouldn't have been as distracting either.

Opponents and proponents of the electoral system (2:20 - 3:00)

This part of the video could have easily been left out. It does not add anything useful to accomplish the video's goal; at this point in the video it is already clear how the electoral system works, and how this has affected the 2016 election results. Now this information is rushed through, so the viewer does not actually retain any of it.

The images also don't support what is being said. If they did want to keep this information in the video, they could have simply listed the three reasons why people are against the electoral system in text, or illustrated it with simple icons.

In the end, the single argument of proponents of the electoral system they mention leaves me with more questions than answers. This could have been better as a topic for its own video.

Conclusion

While there are several points of improvement for this video, it does achieve its intended goal of helping people understand the electoral system. By doing so, this gives you a better understanding of the outcome of the American Presidential elections in 2016. It could've been even better with a different ending, but overall the video was well done.

Video 2: Overbevissing

Introduction

This video explains the importance of the problem of overfishing and gives several possible solutions for this problem. Its intended audience is the general public, and its goal is to create awareness of this problem and to make the viewer more critical of their fish consumption.

Weak points

The start of the video

The introduction shot that shows a sign of fish on sale has a lot of text and does not fit the storyline well. One thing that's said while it zooms in on this sign is that a particular kind of fish is available for a reasonable price at most supermarkets. Aside from the fact that this sign is not from a supermarket, I think it would have been a better introduction to the topic to actually show either people eating fish, buying it in a store, or showing fishermen at sea.

Map of Europe (0:35)

This split view shows a hand drawn map of Europe on the left where certain seas are colored in one by one, and a pie chart on the right. The two visual encodings in this map (shape and color) have not been used well. Because of the way the countries are drawn, it takes a second to recognize that it is in fact the map of Europe. This distracts from the information that is told.

As more seas are colored in, the color itself actually becomes a misleading factor. While the labels on the pie chart on the right are correct, the colors on the map make it seem like when they are talking about the Mediterranean sea, they also still include the North Sea. This is because this part of the map is still blue.

Line Graph (1:14)

This line graph contains a lot of chart junk. The axes are appropriately labeled, but there is so much text written vertically that it takes some studying to fully understand what it says. Meanwhile, the information told by the voice-over gets lost because the viewer tries to decipher the graph. If they would have layered the information, as the creators of the video of the American election did with their bar chart, it would have not been so distracting.

Once they add lines to the graph, the text that is added to each of them also unnecessarily clutters the graph. The first line says 'Business as usual', which is a phrase that's never used in the voice-over. This makes it unclear why the term would be used in the graph itself. Simply showing the line without adding text would've been sufficient.

Second line graph (1:33)

When a second line graph is added to this same visualization, things become more complicated. As a viewer, you do not immediately pay attention to the axes of the second graph, since your attention is drawn to the new lines of this graph. However, if you do pay attention, you would see that the scales are not labeled well.

The y-axis simply says 'a lot' and 'not much'. Though these labels could be appropriate for a graph in a video, since viewers do not have a lot of time to study the axes, it can be misleading in this case. Especially since the graph on the left *does* have proper labels.

The Lie factor of this second graph could be high, as there is no way of knowing the exact numbers the lines represent. Because of this, the creators of the video could be exaggerating the patterns in the graph to match their story.

Use of language

For people who, like me, have no prior knowledge of the subject, a lot of phrases and words might need clarification. The phrase 'fish population' is used a lot throughout the video, but it is still unclear to me what is meant by this exactly. Is it the species of fish, or all the fish in one particular area?

At one point the voice-over mentions "getting fish populations to a healthy population level." Not once is it explained what a healthy level actually is. One way of making this more clear could have been to add a horizontal line to the line graph to show the level that would be considered "a healthy fish population".

Style

In regards to aesthetics, style and playfulness, I think the creators of the video missed many opportunities. Visually, a lot could be done with the information in the video and the topic of overfishing, but some of the visualizations were lacking creativity.

The video ends and starts with examples of something people can relate to on a personal level, but the data in the rest of the video is very generalized and abstract. At some point, they mention possible consequences for consumers, but don't go into detail. This could have been an interesting point. How much does a certain type of fish cost now, and how much would it cost in this scenario?

Translating the data into examples that individuals can relate to would get the importance of the problem of overfishing across much better.

Good points

There are good points in this video that compensate for the above mentioned shortcomings. First of all, the voice-over tells the story in a very clear and calm way, which makes it easy to listen to the information.

I also thought the split screen idea, with the map of Europe and the pie chart, was very well done. The pie chart showing which part of the fish populations was healthy in a particular sea fits the data well. The colors used for this chart, red and yellow, contrast each other and also encode the meaning of 'red' being bad and 'yellow' being more positive.

While I mentioned the weak points of the line graph before, it does accomplish one thing very well: it provides a good overview of the effects of the different strategies throughout time. Using this as way to compare the different scenarios is easy to do, and would not be accomplished in the same way if they had used separate graphs for each of the solutions.

The video ends with a clear message, which is matched by the animation of the stickman with the fish and a bag of money.

Conclusion

Though there are definitely good points to this video, the execution of it did not quite achieve its intended goal. Assuming the goal was to create awareness of the problem of overfishing and to inform viewers about possible solutions, most of the information was not retained by the end because of the visualizations used. They did have a strong ending that conveyed a clear message, but that is the only takeaway from this video.