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Design critique

Video that receives my praise

“group assignment guido pim chris eva” **XTC** <https://vimeo.com/195271288>

The video begins with a slow motion, but grainy quality shot of people who are surely on drugs. It is said that the media states that XTC use is increasing a lot and that this is dangerous. Then the tone changes a lot, a new soundtrack starts with a bang, and the image becomes clear for the drawn data visualisation: We'll explore the facts of XTC use!

The intended audience is people who'll go to parties, or feel concern for the use of party drugs. Because of the link to the media, intended audience could also be people who want to check what the media tells them.

Strong points

The introduction was clear, and the story flow was really nice. Each subject went into the next naturally. I'll give a quick summary of the story flow and why I think it is really good. Begin: Increased drug use in clubs & Increased strength of pill (both seem bad and raise the question: how much can a person take?). This is immediately explained, 1 mg of the drug per kilo of person. Then it links this new information back to the increased pill strength and shows how much of a pill someone can take. We see a person should not even take an entire pill (This raises some ideas and questions in the viewers head: 'I thought I could take at least one pill, what would happen to me if I did that? Why does the strength increase so much that I can't take a single pill?'). That first question the viewer thought of is immediately answered and that goes into the next and final subject of how many people die from the drugs. It shows the amount of deaths in relation to other drug use, those deaths rates are surprisingly low in my opinion. The video then even summarizes the findings, which not a lot of the videos did.

The video gives good insight in the drug use in Dutch clubs and relates the given info nicely with other measurements, from other countries, and other drugs.

The video continues to use the example of the XTC using partygoer 'Jason' (whose name is probably chosen for the much used data structure .json in this course), until Jason maybe dies of an XTC overdose, as one of the three unlucky ones of 2016. Jason was put to good use in the video, especially when explaining how much XTC a person can take. And he increased the playfulness of the video.

The graphs are very clear and are shown long enough. All axes start on 0, the lie factor of the graphs is low. Good colours are used for the lines and bars: red and green mostly. The entire video seems to use the primary colours red, green and blue consistently, both in the visualizations and in the filler videos. For example, the slow motion girl with fireworks is posed in vivid red lights with red fireworks, and the credit screen video at the end is full of green lasers. I do not know if that was intentional, but I liked it.

The time lapsed drawings are quite steady, that is sometimes not easy to accomplish. I can see the creators thought of taping the paper down to the table, very nice! Also the drawings look nice and straight, but are drawn without a ruler, which is good because rulers can obstruct the image during drawing.

The goal of the video is achieved: We've learned about XTC use in Dutch clubs.

Room for improvement

There is one obvious flaw with the axes of one graph (visible at 1:15-1:50), the axes goes from 50 to 100, 150, 200 and finally 25. That should be 250 obviously. Another flaw which is easier to miss is the incorrect title of the 'death by drugs' bar graph at 2:10. It is said twice that the data which is represented in the graph is from 2016, and this is the case as can be seen by checking the data with the line graph. But the title says 2013.

One detail that seems to be important for the story is that the amount of deaths by XTC use have decreased from 7 a year in 2003 to 3 a year in 2016, only going down over time. This is in sharp contrast with the message that the media wants to get across, which message seemed to be justified by the data presented in the video at first. But the decrease in death is said to be "just fluctuating over the years". This does feel a bit strange.

I would have liked it if the creators tried to visualize the amount of deaths by alcohol, which would be of the chart.

The graphs of previous subject remain on screen, this could help in one way, linking the graphs together, as they do so nicely in the story. But it can also make it possible that a viewer falls behind on the story because they are still watching the old graph. The story is moving on, but the visualization is not moving on. It could be better to remove the graph when the new one is being drawn. If this does not leave enough room to look at the graph, then the drawing of the graph could be sped up more, leaving the completed graphs on screen longer.

The graphs become darker as the video goes on, which could have been fixed in post-processing.


Video that could be improved in some points

'Noord-Zuidlijn': <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W-JJ62tZ4Tg>

The video is about the 'Noord-Zuidlijn' which is supposed to update the current public transport service in Amsterdam with a new metro line. It begins with posing the main problem: 'More people are using the public transport in Amsterdam, this growth will be too much for the current transport system, while there is less money being spend on it.' The solution is the Noord-Zuid line which enables the transport system to become a 'visgraad model', instead of the current 'pinneweb model'. This new model will be more efficient, while the old spider-web model causes redundancy in routes. The new model will make things better for the GVB because of increased efficiency of the new metro line. The video ends by asking the question "But, is it useful for the traveller? ". The music stops, and four seconds later the video stops. I don't know why the video would end on such a cliff-hanging tragic question, which will never be answered. The four silent seconds make the ending more awkward, as the last tram passes by with no credits or sources.

This video is particularly interesting for inhabitants of Amsterdam, because they use this transport system a lot. People who want to know how transport can change in the future could also be interested.

Data visualisation is made by time-lapse drawing with a pen, and sometimes colouring parts of the visualisation. The style is consistent and the images are steady. The filler images are time lapses or real time video of the public transport system in Amsterdam.

Visualisation 1: A line graph that shows growing number of people over time without markings or scales on the axes. This graph type is the correct one for what is shown. I think the line graph could start last year, and visualize the growth till this year, because the line is quite straight. Maybe the graph starts 10 years ago, it is not told, nor is it shown. It does however introduce this character: . Which is shown in every graph where appropriate, which makes the style seem more consistent, and increases the aesthetics and playfulness.

Visualisation 2: A bar graph that shows the decline in government funding. This could have been done with a line graph like the previous visualisation, although there are just two data points and now there are labels for the data.

Visualisation 3: The different models for the public transport system are shown. I'll get back to this one in the next section.

Weak points

Not a lot of the story is visualized with (accurate) graphs. The lie factor is high because there is no way of telling how much time is on the x-axes or how many people are on the y-axes, we just have to trust the narrator. The model representations are simplified so much that they barely look like the public transportation maps of Amsterdam anymore, they just show the general model shape. I would have liked to see the main metrolines/ tramlines pointing in the right direction, or the lines drawn on a simple map of Amsterdam. You could interpret this video with the idea that all metro and tramlines are going to be replaced. Perhaps the map of Amsterdam with the current metro lines could have been updated with the new visgraad model, in another vivid colour, this would place the new model in the old context better.

In the model visualisation there are four words:

1. “Spinneweb”, which should be spelled “spinnenweb”, with an n.
2. “Visgraad”, which should be spelled “visgraat”, with a t instead of a d.
- 3 & 4. “redundancy” and “efficient”. Those are the only two English words in the video, as seen in the other two words on the screen at the time, the video is in Dutch. One of the words is used as an adverb: ‘redundancy’, while the other one is used as a verb: ‘efficient’. They could have been used consistently as one, for example: ‘redundancy’ and ‘efficiently’, or ‘redundant’ and ‘efficient’. Instead it’s a mix. Luckily the narrator also uses the English version of these two words, making it a bit less bad.

There is not a lot of data-visualisation in the movie. While the narrator tells the story, the video is mostly calming footage of the current public transportation system in Amsterdam, which is shown 1 minute 40 seconds, while there are only 1 minute 13 seconds of drawings, which also doesn’t show a lot of data.

The music is quite prominent and could thus distract from the storytelling. I found myself ticking along with the rhythm of the song, so I think it is a bit too loud.

The ending poses a question: “But, is it useful for the traveller? ”, which I think leaves the viewer with an unfinished feeling. But the answer has been talked about. Travel times were discussed and it was said that the new model requires more changing of transportation lines, the public would not like that. If the question was asked before the answers came, viewers can get the feeling the question is answered and leave the video with more satisfaction.

However, the video does follow the instructions better than most, because we were told not to use real data. The video does tell its story quickly, which can be summarized neatly as I found out in the beginning of this critique.

There were nice ideas of visualising which routes would be faster with the new Noord-Zuidlijn and which routes would be slower. But it seems these ideas were too difficult to implement. The subject was probably hard to use for data visualisation in the end because of difficult to obtain data.

The video feels consistent in its style. It only consists of high quality public transport footage and the drawings. The visualizations achieve their goal with the narration.