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Data Science and Big Data 95-885

Assignment 4: Explorations in Visualization

The United States has always been a melting pot of different cultures and tastes. However, in recent years, consumers have become as concerned with the uniqueness of their food as the healthiness. As more and more individuals pay attention to the ingredients in the food they purchase, it is important to properly educate consumers on which ingredients are healthy and what types of products contain unhealthy ingredients.

In 2014, the Wall Street Journal published an [article](https://www.wsj.com/articles/1-000-flavors-of-banana-the-new-science-of-food-additives-1414687926?mod=pls_whats_news_us_business_f) on industry efforts to craft new flavors through “flavorings, spices, colorings, thickeners, and preservatives.” This article included a compelling interactive [diagram](http://graphics.wsj.com/food-additives-ingredients/) that displays the “Axis of Additives.” The visual informs readers of some of the most common additives found in foods today. It teaches the user what some of these cryptic ingredients are for and importantly, what product categories they are most likely to find them in. The goal is to help the user be a more informed shopper and avoid ingredients they find unsuitable to their diet.

There are hundreds of thousands of products and ingredients to choose from, so it was key for this visual to be broad enough to be comprehended, but specific enough to have some connection to the user. By including only additives rather than all types of ingredients, the writer focuses on an important trend in processed foods: the increase in artificial ingredients and enhancers. On the right-hand-side of the graph, the writer chose to maintain broad categories instead of calling out specific products. Most importantly, the reader can see the relationships that these ingredients have with each food category and vice versa. By not providing too much information, the reader is kept engaged and potentially incentivized enough to find more information on their own.