DSC 640
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Term Project Milestone 3: blog

Blog link

https://briggs-dsc640.blogspot.com/2021/02/airplane-safety-by-numbers.html

Justification of design

I created a blog post intended to be accessible to a general audience. To communicate effectively, the sentences are intentionally short and the grammar uncomplicated. The logical flow is broken into short paragraphs, with title text summarizing the idea of each one. I have ensured that the post is easily viewable on both desktop and mobile devices.

The post opens and closes with beautiful photographs meant both to capture reader interest - a post does no good if nobody reads it - and also to set a mood. The opening picture shows a jet landing. The mostly clear azure evening sky above, and orderly rows of runway lights below, couch the plane between tranquility and control. The emotional content of the closing photograph is also calmness, with perhaps an element of yearning for adventure, as a woman gazes out of a familiar airplane window to tropical-blue seas below.

The post opens with an attempt to build a bridge of understanding to the reader's perspective. If they are reading the post, they are potentially concerned about airline safety themselves, and so I normalize their concerns by placing them among peers. These charts are simple line charts showing relative search frequency of "airline safety" over time. The graphs are clean and uncluttered, so as to minimize distraction from the one critical element: they are both trending down. Without needing to understand the vertical axis, the reader can see that these graphs are going down. After establishing rapport by normalizing safety concerns, I am making a subtle bandwagon appeal to dislodge reservations.

When people think of airplane safety, it must be compared to something. Naturally, any mode of transport will be compared to the most ubiquitous one: cars. Unsurprisingly, car safety has improved tremendously since its invention. I vividly display this fact with a sharply declining graph. The point of doing so is this: by convincing the reader that the car with which s/he is familiar has gained so much in safety, *then* favorably comparing airplane safety to car safety, the impact should be greater than if the airplane safety was introduced first without context. As with the case of the search interest graphs, the car safety graph is sparse in detail, and the y-axis does not need to be considered to appreciate the downward trend. To keep coherence to the presentation, and for lack of reasons to do otherwise, the same colors are used.

I present the airplane safety statistics in the form of a mystery. The title of this short paragraph is 18,000 years, which is itself a summary statistic. The paragraph goes on to explain the significance of this number. The information could have been presented graphically, e.g. by showing the deaths per billion miles as it evolves over time. I chose to present the number for considered reasons. The safety of air travel is my central point, 18.000 years is a long time, and I want the memorable magnitude of this number to anchor belief in airplane safety in the reader's mind. The variability in a graph of the statistic over time would distract from this simple point, and may lose some portion of the potential blog audience.

To finish putting the rarity of airplane deaths into perspective, I compare their frequency to some other vivid yet uncommon causes of death. I intentionally left out some causes which, while rare, may also be overblown in the public imagination. Shark attack deaths, for example, are rarer than airplane deaths, and it would not do to show that comparison.

References

Gross, A. (2016, Sep 08). Americans Spend an Average of 17,600 Minutes Driving Each Year. Retrieved from https://newsroom.aaa.com/2016/09/americans-spend-average-17600-minutes-driving-year/#:~:text=During%20this%20time%2C%20drivers%20travelled,AAA%20Foundation%20for%20Traffic%20Safety

Data Sources

https://www.bts.gov/content/transportation-fatalities-mode
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Motor_vehicle_fatality_rate_in_U.S._by_year
https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/policyinformation/statistics/2015/fi200.cfm
https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/us-population/
https://www.airlines.org/dataset/safety-record-of-u-s-air-carriers/#
https://www.floridamuseum.ufl.edu/shark-attacks/odds/compare-risk/death/
https://trends.google.com/trends/?geo=US

Github

https://github.com/cabriggs/DSC640