Movies Critics Loved, But Audiences Really Didn't - Design Critique

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The given visualisation represents the difference in percentage between the audience and critics scores on Rotten Tomatoes, for sixty movies, released between 2007 and 2017. The data has been gathered directly from Rotten Tomatoes, and the visualisation was created by British data visualisation company, Information is Beautiful. The creators have also provided a link at the bottom of the visualisation which leads to a spreadsheet with details and values for ninety-three movies.

The use of Rotten Tomatoes, a well known website for film and television reviews, as the source for the data definitely induces a sense of trust in viewers. One would assume that such data would be accurate and unbiased. The target audience themselves are most likely film enthusiasts, possibly those who may be interested in less popular but critically acclaimed movies. They would also be accessing the information online, as Information is Beautiful seem to display their visualisations solely on their website.

At first glance, the visualisation appears to be an aesthetically appealing way to represent the given information. The data is presented in the form of a bubble chart, with the colours being used to denote the genre of the movie, and the size of the bubbles being used to indicate the budget. In doing so, the chart aptly utilises colour and size to convey as much information as possible. It is also worth noting that the font used for the text in the chart is "Quicksand", a font specifically designed to improve legibility. This means that the creators may also have tried to make the visualisation more accessible for people with reading disabilities.

However, in spite of all these positives, the visualisation may be confusing to audiences. The horizontal axis of the graph represents the percentage difference in audience and critic scores, while the vertical axis represents the year of release of the movie. This may be misleading, as many people would expect a simple plot between the audience scores and critics scores, and assume that a bubble placed higher on the chart would likely mean a higher value for one of these scores, not that the movie was released on a later date.

As mentioned previously, the target audience for this visualisation are most likely film enthusiasts who wish to watch less popular but critically acclaimed movies. As a result of these unexpected choices for the axes, the target audience may misinterpret the data, and may not choose the same movies they would have chosen, had the axes of graph aligned with their assumptions. In this manner, the design is more difficult to use and interpret than it would have been, had a different set of axes been chosen. The selected axes also mean that the graph itself does not feel quite right.

Furthermore, it is disconcerting that the horizontal axis for the chart, which represents a difference in percentage, only ranges from sixteen to forty percent. It is unclear whether or not this indicates that the maximum difference between the critics' opinions and audiences' opinion for any movie on Rotten Tomatoes is forty percent. The use of these values as a limit also means that certain movies, such as "Hail Caesar!" and "Mr. Turner", are plotted at the very edge of the chart, and garner the viewers' attention for no discernible reason. This is exacerbated by the fact that there is an additional horizontal axis present at the top of the graph, which not only looks slightly out of place, but also acts as a distinguishing boundary for the graph.

Another factor that indicates that the data may be deceptive to audiences is the fact that there are errors in the details of the movies included. For example, the 2014 horror movie, "The Babadook", is incorrectly spelt as "The Badabook" within the chart. Alongside this, the movie, "The Witch", is plotted as having been released in 2016, despite actually being released in 2015. The errors in spelling also apply to the subtitle of the visualisation, where "Rotten Tomatoes" is written without any capitalisation, and the title of the horizontal axis, where the word "hates" has inconsistent capitalisation.

While the use of bubbles is a creative way to conveniently depict more information, the scaling for the sizes of the bubbles with respect to the budget is inconvenient. Movies such as 2009's "Paranormal Activity" and 2015's "Tangerine" are hardly visible on the chart, and stand a risk of being overlooked entirely by audiences. Additionally, the bubble for "Paranormal Activity" appears to be placed below the dotted line representing the year 2009, which signifies that using grey bubbles to indicate a genre on the chart, which is plotted along grey dotted lines, may not have been a good decision. The bubble chart also separates the individual data entities into their own bubbles, which leads to the data losing its flow to an extent.

Moreover, the titles of the movies themselves occupy a great deal of space, occasionally overlapping with the year below, such as in the case of "Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs" and "Indiana Jones & the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull". This may explain why, although the dataset linked in the graph has ninety-three movies, only sixty movies have been plotted in the bubble chart. Any movie that needed to be plotted in those areas, such as "Michael Clayton" from the given dataset, would have been clashing with the text.

Lastly, on a more positive note, the creators have succeeded in drawing the audience's attention to the features they wish to focus on. For example, by not filling in the representative bubble for "The Last Jedi", they ensure that viewers notice the movie and read the descriptive text provided with it, which explains that this is the movie with the largest budget for such a substantial difference in opinion between audiences and critics.

In conclusion, while the nature of the design is aesthetically pleasing and highly appealing, the graph is not very effective in communicating a majority of what it aimed to. The design itself is appropriate for the purpose of representation of the data, but the poor choice of axes and unreliability of the data included in the graph indicate that the visualisation may be misleading.

On the whole, **the design does not work**. While the use of a bubble chart is a creative and attractive way to pack a lot of information into a singular graph, the unusual choice of axes means it does not deliver the information it intended to, and, as a result, the graph lacks a great deal with respect to ease of comprehensibility.