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CS 171: Visualization
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HW 2: Design Analysis of Visualization A

The audience here seems to be the general public or readers of the New York

Times, as this visualization appears on their website. Since it portrays the average

consumer's spending, it does not seem to be targeting any specific professional group,

but rather just providing a general overview. This visualization tries to shed light on what

average consumers spend most of their money on – after a brief look, it is clear that the

largest percentage (42%) is spent on housing, with significant amounts also spent on

transportation and food/beverages (18% and 15% respectively). It also goes into more

detail to examine just what people are spending money on within those categories – for

instance, the majority of food/beverage spending is pretty evenly split between fast food

and full-service restaurant meals.

This visualization makes decent use of color on a diverging scale – it is intuitive

to assume that colors close to red indicate something negative, like an increase in price,

while lower frequency colors like blue are more positive, like decreases in price. This

visualization also uses effective layering techniques by labelling only the largest portions

such that viewers can focus their attention on the most important values. Likewise, the

blocks that have the most severe changes in price are colored most darkly, while those

that have not changed much remain fairly light, which also catches the viewer's attention.

Overall, I like this visualization because it concisely summarizes a pretty large and

complex dataset, without overwhelming or intentionally misinforming the viewer.

Some improvements, however, could be made to certain labelling tendencies and the data-ink ratio. For instance, even the largest portions of the smaller categories (such as miscellaneous and health care) have no labels to indicate what kinds of items either of those might contain. Additionally, the little blurbs underneath the category headings, while interesting, don't contribute information especially pertinent to what the visualization is trying to portray. Finally, it is sometimes hard to distinguish size within the categories. For instance, under transportation, "gasoline" and "new cars and trucks" look to be approximately the same size, and because of the shape irregularity and lack of percentage labeling for subgroups, we can't be sure which is larger. So I would advise somehow standardizing those shapes or at least giving the larger proportions percentage labels to display any difference in amount.