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SHARC: A Visual Design Framework

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SHARC: A VISUAL DESIGN FRAMEWORK

Visual Design Explanation

Throughout your academic and professional careers, there will be situations where efficiently navigating and understanding visual information, such as charts and graphs, will be just as important as navigating and understanding textual information. Creating visual information will also be critical to your professional success. A basic understanding of visual design principles will help you create visual material that viewers can effectively navigate.

Visual design impacts how visual information is navigated (read) and understood.

Effective visual design successfully navigates the reader across visual material. A visual design framework to consider when both reading and creating your own visual materials is SHARC:

Space – Arrange elements evenly and include only what is necessary to create visual harmony

Hierarchy – Prioritize elements from most important to supporting details so viewers have a visual path to follow

Alignment – Group elements with seen or unseen lines to organize the space

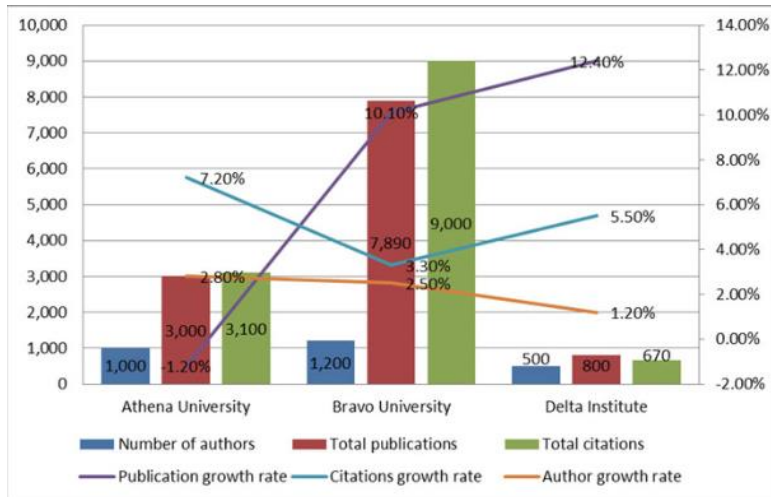
Repetition – Unify elements so important differences become a focus point

Color – Create emphasis and mood to support message

Below are two data visualizations (different datasets, so don't compare the data, just the design). Example A. illustrates how visual design can hinder effective navigation of the visualization. Example B. illustrates how visual design can effectively navigate the viewers' attention across the page.

Example A. Ineffective Visual Design

Total Number of Authors, Publications and Citations



"A 5 step guide to data visualization" by Elsevier. Retrieved from <https://www.elsevier.com>.

Space – Objects are evenly distributed, but the horizontal lines on top of the vertical lines clutter the space.

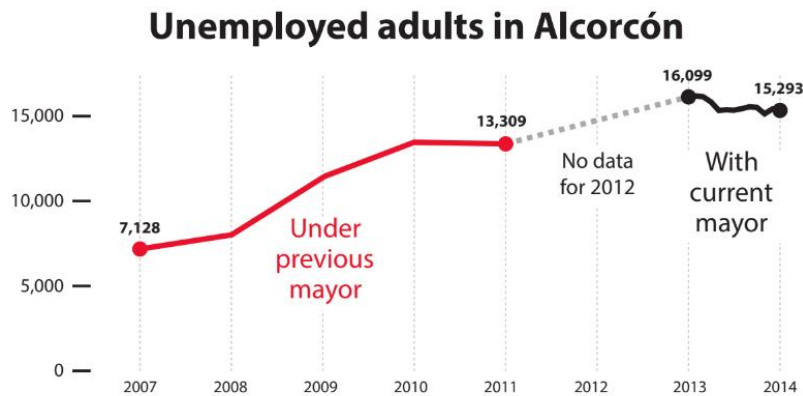
Hierarchy – Font size with the use of bold prioritizes the title, but with the vertical and horizontal lines competing, and there being a number of variables to consider, the viewer is left to decide where to navigate.

Alignment – Everything is in alignment except the horizontal lines cutting through numbers and bars, causing visual detours.

Repetition – The font size and type are repeated, but with a number of colors to consider, there are competing focus points.

Color – It can be argued there are times when all bold colors work, but with little contrast in the colors and each one being a strong color, in this visualization, it's difficult to decide which color(s) to focus on and how to keep track of them. The overall mood is a feeling of clutter and chaos.

Example B. Effective Visual Design



“Alcorcon Good” by Alberto Cairo (WIAD Miami 2016)

Space – Objects are visually balanced throughout with no clutter or large empty areas to distract viewers’ focus.

Hierarchy – Font size with the use of bold prioritizes the title. The use of red, directs you to the most important point supporting the title. Grey and black are used for supporting details.

Alignment – Lines organize elements into designated areas, so it’s easy to focus on different areas.

Repetition – Repeated colors, font and font size unify elements to highlight the important differences.

Color – Grey, white and black contrasts with red to emphasize a point. The simple palette of color gives the graph a factual, organized look.



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