

It's not what you look at that matters, it's what you see:

Analysing the contemporary paradigm shift in narrative information design

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ABSTRACT

Information design is currently in the process of a significant paradigm shift; off the pages of newspapers and books, onto the digital screens of the countless internet users in our modern, information society. Enabled by changing societal trends and rapidly increasing computational power and accessibility; information design is no longer a limited, static or exclusive academic tool. Rather, it is becoming a boundless, dynamic, awareness raising mass medium.

This paper takes a critical look at this evolution of information design with particular focus on the narrative capabilities and competencies of its implementation. Analysing the field both critically and historically, an understanding of the basic principles of information design are established, allowing significant insight into the place information design now holds in the digital, data laden age.

Using current, public facing examples of information design as benchmark, this paper evaluates the narrative elements of successful, interactive information visualisations, providing a stepping stone towards a set of standard principals for the present domain.

Finally, an in-depth review of one outstanding practitioner, Hans Rosling, is presented as a pioneer of a number of avant-garde visualisation techniques and a driving force of the fields' future. A firm believer in information designs' ability to tell stories and allow users to "see" the statistics at hand; Rosling, his colleagues and their successors are responsible for the popularisation of information design. A trend which has allowed the practice to come to the fore of public and academic interest, and which shows no signs of slowing momentum; the popularisation and the intrinsically linked demand for narrative information design served as both the inspiration and justification for this paper.