Journal of Visualization and Interaction

Reviews for 2024-heinicker-visualizing-round2

Review #1

Completed: 02-06-2025 13:57

Recommendation: Accept Submission

Conflict Declaration

I declare that I have no known conflicts of interest with the authors.

Review

This paper introduces the concepts of 'data exceptionalism' and 'affirmative visualisation' as positivist stances towards the collection and visualisation of data without considering what the data collected represent, and what a resulting visualisation communicates to its audience. This is an important discussion to have in an increasingly 'data-driven' world and this paper introduces some language with which to have these discussions.

I reviewed this paper previously and I would like to thank the author for the time they spent on their revisions, they have made the paper a much clearer read.

Most of my the points I initially raised have been addressed. Many of these points have been addressed by removing material, and while this makes the paper a clearer read I do wish some of the revisions had brought out more support for the arguments made in the paper, and more clearer recommendations for alternative models that might serve the visualisation community better, or at least suggestions for what we might do next to move towards those models.

However, I believe that what is contained within the paper is sufficient to spark conversation around these topics, and provides language and a particular lens that will support those discussions. As such, I recommend accepting this paper in its current form.

Openness

Not relevant, commentary paper.

Classification

Commentary

Recommendation

Accept

Revisions Requested

No requested changes

Reviewer Name

Fearn Bishop

ORCID

https://orcid.org/0009-0001-4329-9511

Review #2

Completed: 04-06-2025 23:22

Recommendation: Revisions Required

Conflict Declaration

I declare that I have no known conflicts of interest with the authors.

Review

This paper identifies two dominant discourses of data visualization, which the author names "data exceptionalism" and "affirmative visualization," and presents critiques of these discourses. I do feel that the updated draft has a much clearer set of key terms and a central argument that is more easy to identify.

However, the updated draft still contains assertive claims that I feel are too strong.

Examples of assertions that are presented without support: - "The real insights we get from them are more about the conditions and motives of the authors" - "insights happen in spite of data images" - "The attempt to discover the world through data visualisations can only ever end in the discovery of the data designer herself" - "Over centuries (if not millennia)"

Finally, figures have been added that are not referenced in the text. It would be helpful if the figures had in-text references that make it clear how these figures support the argument of the text.

Openness

As I wrote in my previous review, I believe that the standard of "openness" when applied to theoretical work is about the ease with which others in the community can situate an argument in a scholarly conversation and apply that argument to their own work.

I do see marked improvements in this draft in structure and organization, and clearer definitions of the key terms. I think the author could still consider further clarifying how the concepts introduced in this paper relate to existing critiques in critical data studies, STS, media theory, or design studies.

Examples: - "In critical data studies, some discussions focus less on the fundamentals of data itself and more on the socio-political consequences of digital technology in relation to data." Which discussions are these? - "I introduce the concept of data exceptionalism (DE)" - for example, do DE and/or AV have a relationship to existing critiques of scientific objectivity?

Further, I still feel that the "Dear Data" critique seems a bit harsh and/or cherry-picked given the artists' stated intentions, and wonder if the Mauri example might have a similar issue. These examples help in making the definition of AV clearer but I worry that they could veer from the purpose of clarifying the definition into takedowns of specific people or projects (rather than critiques of the ideas behind them). I think these examples might need more context that connects them to broader ideas that are being critiqued. It might also help to consider possible alternative interpretations, to mitigate the possibility that readers might just disagree with the authors' interpretation of the evidence, before even being able to engage with the conceptual argument.

Classification

Commentary

Recommendation

Major Revisions

Revisions Requested

- tone down universal assertions
- clearly integrate the new figures into the argument
- ground argument in literature
- rework examples and associated critiques to make them clearer and less open to subjective disagreement

Reviewer Name

Jonathan Zong

ORCID

N/A

Metareview

Completed: 2025-08-05 17:28

Recommendation: Minor Revision

Conflict Declaration

I declare that I have no known conflicts of interest with the authors.

Review

Thank you for your revisions, they have certainly helped this piece mature. We are thankful for your efforts on this piece. And thank you again for your patience with our reviewers, two of whom had technical issues in the process, one of whom was ultimately not able to review.

Please take care to read the attached reviews, especially Review A.

Again, thank you for submitting this piece to us. I will do everything in my power to quickly expedite the future revision process as much as possible.

Revisions Requested

Right now, our requested revisions are:

First, please provide citations for the following assertions, otherwise consider rewording them so that they are not as vulnerable to purely subjective criticism:

- "The real insights we get from them are more about the conditions and motives of the authors"

- "insights happen in spite of data images"

- "The attempt to discover the world through data visualisations can only ever end in the discovery of the data designer herself"

- "Over centuries (if not millennia)…"

- "… rarely derived from the data images themselves,"

- "The increasing amount of data available has created a culture in which the practices that legitimise visual analysis have gained widespread social acceptance."

Second, the figures are not strongly grounded in the surrounding body of the paper. Please provide more context within the paper and within the captions for the images that will assist the reader in understanding how to interpret the images, why they are included, why they are relevant, etc. Consider linking the text to the figures (such as "see figure A") inline.

Next, a pass should be done for typos, misspellings, and missing punctuation. There are still small errors throughout.

Next, Alberto Cairo has actually tweeted about "data anarchism" and being against rules in visualization design (although his twitter may now be gone?). But you can find sentiments of this in his keynote at VISAP "visualization dissensus" as well as his keynote at Outlier "an information designer's ethos", and including in his latest book, The Art of Insight. He has matured in recent years, so it would be valuable to ground statements about his past

preference for rules with dates and context about his changing viewpoints. It might also be more valuable to find folks who are more strict to rules adherence than him, as he may not be the best current example. Consider also Review A's feedback on the "Dear Data" critique as well as possibly also the "Mauri" one.

Lastly, this paper's most significant revision request: This paper would be much more successful if it provided more concretely or clearly what "visualizing in spite of all the data" or what "visualizing otherwise" entails. The ending section concludes with the notion "The dominance of DE and AV obscures the view of alternative perspectives." What are those alternatives? Clearly stating what they look like will help readers be able to apply this work and build off of it. For example, what it means to more closely interrogate the design process (rather than just result) of data images is unclear. Even a summary of the points made in the earlier section, outlining the alternatives of DE and AV, would be helpful. Imperatives may be used here, as well. For example, the following is stated at the end of 2.2.3: "ultimately only the resulting postcards are described and little is said about the apparent pen-pal relationship: data and their images take prededence [sic] over human relationships." This could be summarized with a clear call to action: "prioritize human relationships over data" or equivalent. I would use this opportunity to clearly organize what "self-reflective" work entails in data visualization work and how to do it. Readers will want to know not just how to critique, but what critique enables them to now *do* instead.

Reviewer Name

Frank Elavsky

ORCID

0000-0002-6849-5893