A Brief History of Data Visualization (and the role of libraries and librarians)

Sally A. Gore
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Commentary

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Abstract

Graphics, illustrations, charts, and tables have accompanied scientific works for as long as people have been reporting findings and publishing papers. Once the purview of researchers and graphic illustrators, today finds libraries and librarians involved in many aspects of data including access, management, preservation, and visualization.

This illustrated timeline traces the history of data visualization from generations of hand-drawn images to today’s exploding arena of data production and visualization tools, highlighting the efforts and opportunities for information professionals and introducing this special issue of Journal of eScience Librarianship devoted to data visualization.

About the Author

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1914
Graphic Methods for Presenting Facts by Willard C. Brinton

The principles for a grammar of graphic presentation are so simple that a remarkably small number of rules would be sufficient to give a universal language.
Willard C. Brinton

1977
The personal computer arrives.

1987
Microsoft Excel: Spreadsheet software for everyone.

1990 and beyond
The explosion of “CHARTJUNK.”

1983, 1990, 1997...

2000 ‘til today
Rapid expansion of data generating, data analysis, data sequencing, and data visualizing tools. Access, management, and preservation of data becomes a key concern and disciplines emerge to address these different aspects related to data including libraries and librarians.

2017
A special issue of the Journal of eScience Librarianship is published, highlighting the future of librarians, librarianship, and data visualization.

It is not how much empty space there is, but rather how it is used.
It is not how much information there is, but rather how effectively it is arranged.
Edward Tufte

We call this the problem of big data.
Disclosure

The author reports no conflict of interest.

References


