Dear New York Times Visualization and Interaction Design Team,

I am writing this letter to communicate my opinions and recommendations for your Netflix rental patterns visualization, available at http://tinyurl.com/netflixmap\(^1\).

First and foremost, the visualization offers an interesting view on local movie rental preferences across United States and the comments show that the visualization is highly welcomed by visitors, even found addicting for a short term. The page and query response times are fast, the data content is of high interest to most web users, the visualization and types of queries are clear to understand, use and analyze. Below, I describe some steps that might increase the impact of your visualization.

The visualization is aesthetically appealing, yet allowing multiple color schemes can help people with color related disabilities or make the differences among regions more visible with high contrast schemes. Pop-up content can be modified by a check-box along the map, which enables/disables viewing top movies in pop-up window. If disabled, the occlusion can be greatly decreased, which might be useful when analyzing the current rating only. A major extension can be aimed at presenting categorizations of main film genres (e.g. drama, comedy, action), and allow filtering and browsing through types. This addition will yet complicate the interface and add a visual clutter if not handled carefully.

A user information section could be useful to guide the users with interaction methods (e.g., some users did not understand that the camera can be panned), to describe how this data is generated (e.g., the release date of a movie within the year can affect how many times it is purchased through the same year) and to address privacy concerns if possible. Also, url’s to a specific query (movie and city) can be generated to allow users share their interests, which can increase the number of times the visualization is shared, and therefore visited. As for minor interface improvements, previous-next navigation buttons can display the name of the related movie on mouse hover, guiding the user about the next state. The horizontal scrollbar can display more (4-5) labels for alphabetic display and thus guide better when searching for a specific movie.

Although the visualization is targeted towards end-users, the data is also highly meaningful for advertisers and film distributors as well. Merging this data with other sources which tracks box-office success, DVD purchases, other streaming networks and local advertisement campaigns can lead to insights that are commercially valuable. Also, correlations between movie rentals to demographics is another point of interest which even end-users try to observe\(^2\). There are surely many ways in which this data can help understand and relate the patterns in online movie rentals. The prominent success of your visualization is that it also leads to identification of such patterns, leaving the users requesting more.

I hope that you find my review and recommendations useful and that they will help you create visualizations that continue to present highly interesting and easily accessible content.

Yours faithfully,

M. Adil Yalcın

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\(^1\) Interestingly, this url shortener link was already registered and pointing to the specific visualization.

\(^2\) I believe this is the “addictive” factor the end-users experienced.