Sept 13, 2012
Dear Mr. Matthew Ericson

I am writing in regard to present some of my point of view about the information visualization artifact for the Olympic results at http://london2012.nytimes.com/results.

Firstly, I would say that is an awesome work, I think most of the users including me will find their needed information easily and successfully via this information visualization graphic, and it also offers us a great user experience when filtering the medal count information as well as navigating to some specific event news.

In the graphic part, the countries are listed by the geographic location, with different color to label different continent, which is in accord with users’ mental model when they are searching for a country in a world map. The size of the circle will give user a rough idea about the medal number of each country.

During the interaction, users could always clicking on the blank area to reset the graphic when they get lost, and usually people will not get overwhelmed by huge amount of information, because it is loaded in sequence with the items they clicked, and all of the information is presented in one screen.
Although it is a great tool as I mentioned previously, there still exists some issues that could be improved.

The first one is about the vague affordance, sometimes users don’t know which item is clickable in the chart, such as when users hover their mouse on the circle, the cursor will not be changed, and the message box will be displayed instead. In that case, usually people will not understand that the circle is for them to click, and they might think that message box is the final information that the designer wants to present.

Besides, even when the user click on the circle, the feedback is still not enough for them to tell whether they have already clicked it or not, especially when you click on it and then move your mouse. For example, I clicked the Germany in the following screenshot, but the artifact did not give me any feedback that indicates I did click that item.
Another example for limited feedback is when user clicking on a country, they might not realize that the data table is also changing accordingly, until they scroll it down and pay attention to it.

So I think, the “loading” text might be useful when the data table is updating, even though the response speed is fast.
Additionally, there are also some other minor aspects that could be improved for usability, such as when user selects the 1980, 1984 in the timeline, they might notice that very few countries attended these two Olympics, if the designer could add a comment saying that there is a boycott during these two Olympic games. That might be helpful.

Moreover, currently, when user clicked on the country, the medal count part on the right section will not be updated, such as I clicked the Brazil in the following screen shot, but I still cannot see the Brazil’s medal count unless I click “show all”.

Finally, it might be good that we could pick more than one country at the same time and do some comparison.

Overall, this artifact is a great tool for users to filter the Olympic medal count with different year and country, and navigate to more specific events news without getting overload.
We really appreciate your brilliant designing idea in creating that tool. Looking forward to trying more products designed/released by you.

Thank you.
Best Regards,

Shaojie (Jeffrey) Li
jeff2011@Umd.edu
College of Information Studies
University of Maryland, College Park