



What Makes a Winning Data Story?

Bahareh R. Heravi & Adegboyega Ojo

School of Information and Communication Studies University College Dublin &

Insight Centre for Data Analytics National University of Ireland, Galway

Data storytelling is rapidly gaining prominence as a characteristic activity of digital journalism, with significant adoption by small and large media houses. Lately, there has been increased attention on the qualitative aspects of data stories; specifically on how they impact journalism and how data journalism could be improved. At the same time, there is a growing stock of knowledge on exemplars of exceptional and good data storytelling from a journalistic viewpoint. For instance, the Global Editors Network (GEN), through its Data Journalism Award, have been identifying exceptional data journalism practices since 2012.

While a few studies in the past have examined single aspects of data storytelling, such as narratives, visualisation or analysis (Segel and Heer 2010; Lee et al. 2015; Alexander and Vetere 2011, Stikeleather 2013a), there is a lack of systematic research around the characteristics of good data stories, as well as the technologies and tools employed in such stories. Similarly, a literature review in the Data Journalism domain shows that there are few studies in this area focusing on theory or methodology (Ausserhofer et al. 2016). We are yet to see a systematic effort to gain better insights into the characteristics of good data stories, how such stories are created, and what skills are required in creating such stories.

In this paper we aim to address this gap in systematic research and practice by studying the winners in the Global Editors Network's annual Data Journalism Awards, and providing a framework to characterise successful data storytelling. Through analysing the winning stories, this paper will provide a systematic insight into the combination of tools and techniques which enable excellence in data journalism. The framework developed in this paper provides a systematic analysis of the practical aspects of data journalism, studying all data storytelling cases recognised as the outstanding by Global Editors Network (GEN 2016) as part of the Data Journalism Award, from 2013 through 2016. Using a multicase approach (Baxter and Jack 2008), this study uniformly characterises each of the 44 cases and then proceeds to determine genres of these stories and the nature of technologies employed in creating these stories. The resulting knowledge base is then analysed using the Formal Concept Analysis method to determine the major genres of data storytelling, and further to identify the types and combinatory breakdown of technological tools required to develop the award-winning stories.

Our findings refine the traditional typology of data stories from the journalistic perspective and also recommend technical competencies for the future data journalist and teams working in newsrooms.
