

# Innovation trajectories for information visualizations: Comparing treemaps, cone trees, and hyperbolic trees

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## Abstract

This paper reviews the trajectory of three information visualization innovations: treemaps, cone trees, and hyperbolic trees. These three ideas were first published around the same time in the early 1990s, so we are able to track academic publications, patents, and trade press articles over almost two decades. We describe the early history of each approach, problems with data collection from differing sources, appropriate metrics, and strategies for visualizing these longitudinal data sets. This paper makes two contributions: (1) it offers the information visualization community a history of how certain ideas evolved, influenced others, and were adopted for widespread use and (2) it provides an example of how such scientometric trajectories of innovations can be gathered and visualized. Guidance for designers is offered, but these conjectures may also be useful to researchers, research managers, science policy analysts, and venture capitalists.

## Keywords

information visualization, innovation trajectories, graphical user interfaces, treemap, cone tree, hyperbolic tree

## Introduction

The healthy outpouring of innovations from the information visualization community has raised important questions about how to measure the efficacy, adoption, and durability of these innovations. These measures could help retrospective analyses that seek to compare several technologies, but the greatest interest is predictive models that forecast eventual impact of novel technologies. This goal may be difficult to attain, but simpler descriptive and explanatory theories can be helpful to guide future entrepreneurs,<sup>1</sup> corporate research managers,<sup>2</sup> government funding agency staff,<sup>3</sup> and historians of science as they seek to understand the evolution of technology.<sup>4,5</sup> Another goal is to develop prescriptive theories based on these metrics, which suggest guidance and policies for promoting technological innovations.

Initial questions of *efficacy* can be partially settled by empirical testing with traditional controlled experiments with a few dozen subjects for a few hours that compare an existing visualization against the innovation.<sup>6</sup> Critics of this approach suggest that short training periods with standard tasks are insufficient to test innovations that may require more substantial training, a wider variety of tasks, and even changes

to familiar problem-solving strategies<sup>7</sup> and work practices. These critics advocate extended case studies with users who work for weeks and months using the innovative visualization on their own tasks. Longer term measures of efficacy account for other changes such as improved interfaces, better training, simpler integration with other tools, and a community of like-minded users who are capable of discussing advanced uses of an innovative visualization. Evaluations of efficacy often lead to refinements and clarification of which tasks are more assisted, and provide a basis for promoting an innovation.

Measuring *adoption* (also called acceptance or diffusion) beyond the originators is also a challenge as innovations may spread in different ways.<sup>8</sup>

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Simple measurements in the 2–5 years following the initial presentation of an innovation include the number of references in later papers, implementations by multiple open-source or commercial organizations, and use by a growing set of users. Some impacts are more noteworthy than others, such as solving important problems, sales of commercial products, or inspiring further innovations. However, impacts may take years or decades to emerge and innovations may need much transformation or integration with other ideas to have impact. The longer term (5–15 years) diffusion through organizations, industries, and countries is likely to be segmented, as in reaching novice or experienced users, professionals or consumers, and old or young users. The Technology Acceptance Model<sup>9</sup> focused on perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use, but later versions incorporated other parameters.<sup>10</sup>

Measuring *durability* (also called sustainability) over decades is important in understanding why innovations lose their enthusiastic advocates or satisfied users, how later innovations replace earlier innovations, and how innovations become so accepted as to become invisible, unmentioned, and taken for granted.

These measures may be difficult to capture, difficult to compare, imprecise, and unstable over time. For example, the number of websites mentioning an innovation began to be relevant only by the later 1990s, so comparisons with earlier innovations are difficult. Download counts for some software are useful, but sometimes a few hundred downloads by valued users can be a success whereas in other situations millions of downloads may be needed to claim success.

Another class of difficulties relates to names used when using search engines, digital libraries, or databases. Some innovations have distinct names that are easy to track, whereas others have generic names that are harder to search for. An innovation may be given different names by those who make refinements or brand names for commercial purposes, meaning that credit is less easily tied to the originators. Often an innovation becomes integrated in a larger product so it is difficult to track.

This paper uses counts of academic papers, patents, and trade press articles as measures to describe the innovation trajectories of three tree visualization methods: treemaps, cone trees, and hyperbolic trees. These three innovations were chosen because they were developed in the same time period and served the same requirements, making them competitors. In addition, these three were attractive because they largely had distinctive names to facilitate searching. Finally, as the innovators were trusted colleagues of the first author, they were cooperative in providing valuable commentaries.

A secondary measure is the number of citations to key academic papers and patents. We use these measures and other sources to try to explain the relative success of innovations and give guidance to promoters of information visualization innovations.

A still more difficult goal is to use early measures to predict which future information visualization innovations will become successful. This latter goal is aligned with current US National Science Foundation efforts to develop a ‘Science of Science’, which would help program managers allocate funding more effectively to high-payoff research proposals.

This paper begins with a personal historical review of tree browsing and visualization methods that focuses on treemaps, cone trees, and hyperbolic trees. Then it discusses how to gather data for tracking the trajectory of these methods from academic publications to commercial applications, followed by data visualization to show these trajectories. The discussion provides guidance to designers and the conclusion discusses the difficulty of such reviews, lessons learned, and future work.

## Tree browsing and visualization

Even early uses of computers, such as Doug Engelbart’s famous 1968 demonstration of his Augment system presented strategies for browsing tree-structured information, often described as hierarchies. Some tree browsers simply used indented textual representations, which became standard in many directory browsers such as Microsoft Windows Explorer. Indented textual representations are highly effective because they allow rapid scanning down lists, alphabetical ordering, and comprehensible expand/contract strategies to support exploration. The disadvantages include the need for frequent scrolling as the number of nodes grows and the difficulty in discovering large subtrees that might be several levels down.

The appeal of graphical user interfaces encouraged many developers to create node-link diagrams, which became widely used during the 1980s. These visualizations were readily understandable, whether drawn with the root node at the top, bottom, left side, or right side. With small trees of 10–50 nodes this strategy was effective, but with larger trees that had large depth (many levels) or high branching factor (high fan-out), drawing a complete tree was impossible, even with megapixel displays. While panning and zooming facilitated exploration, and overviews helped even more, the node-link diagram had its limitations.

### Early history

By the early 1990s several research groups developed innovative methods of tree browsing that offered fresh

overview and browsing strategies. In each case they developed a space-limiting approach which ensured that the entire tree would always be seen on standard displays, thereby avoiding the need to pan and zoom, but requiring some new user actions. This paper focuses on three of these tree-browsing methods:

**Treemaps** used nested rectangles to show tree structure, producing not only a space-limiting but also a screen-filling algorithm (Figure 1). The area of each leaf rectangle was determined by one of its attributes, and interior rectangles were sized by the sum of the attribute values of its subtrees and colored by any other attribute value. The original recursive algorithm, slice-and-dice, organized subtrees in a meaningful order (alphabetical, chronological, etc.), but often resulted in long thin rectangles (high aspect ratios).<sup>11,12</sup> Improved layouts produced more square-like aspect ratios (i.e. closer to 1),<sup>13,14</sup> but sacrificed the lexicographic ordering. Bruls et al.'s 'squarified' algorithm caught on widely because it was visually appealing (typically placing large squares in the upper left and small squares in the lower right), eased selection, and often permitted better labeling.

Still further refinements offered ordering, low aspect ratios, and some new strategies.<sup>15</sup> The University of Maryland Human-Computer Interaction Lab tree-map history page offers numerous links.<sup>16</sup>

**Cone trees** used a three-dimensional (3D) layout with the root node at the top, and the first level of nodes was hung down in a circular layout connected by links to the root node, thereby looking like a cone<sup>17,18</sup> (Figure 2). Lower levels of nodes were also laid out in cones all the way down to the leaf nodes at the bottom of the screen. The appeal of 3D tree structures was strong and the animated rotation of cones to bring occluded nodes to the front made for eye-catching demonstrations. Perspective effects, lighting models, and shadows added to the impressive visual appeal. When the root node was placed at the left side and lower levels to the right, the design was called 'cam tree' because the appearance was similar to an automobile cam shaft. Tree-structure traversal and node name searching were the main emphasis, so node color and size coding were not discussed. Robertson, inspired by early scientific visualization researchers, applied the power of high-end graphics workstations to create

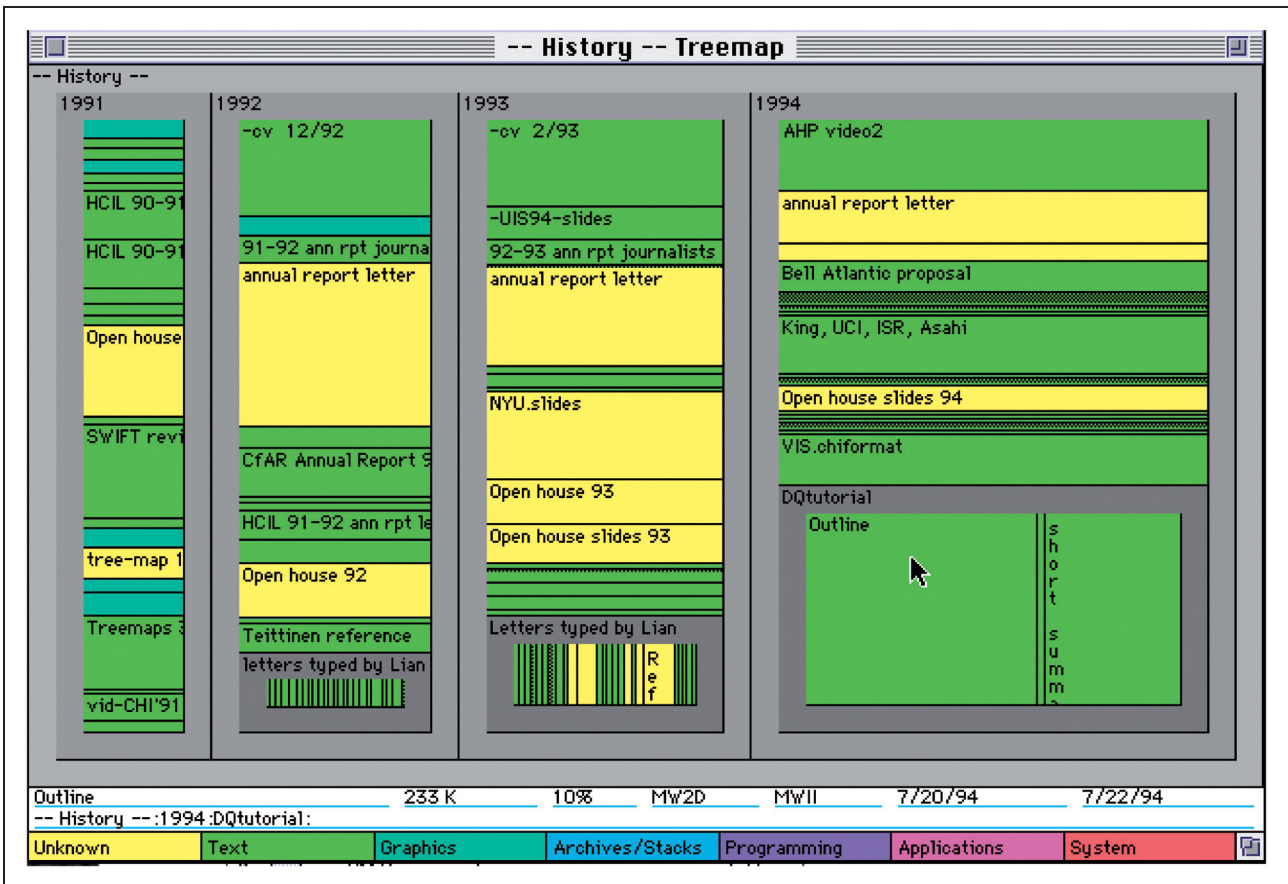
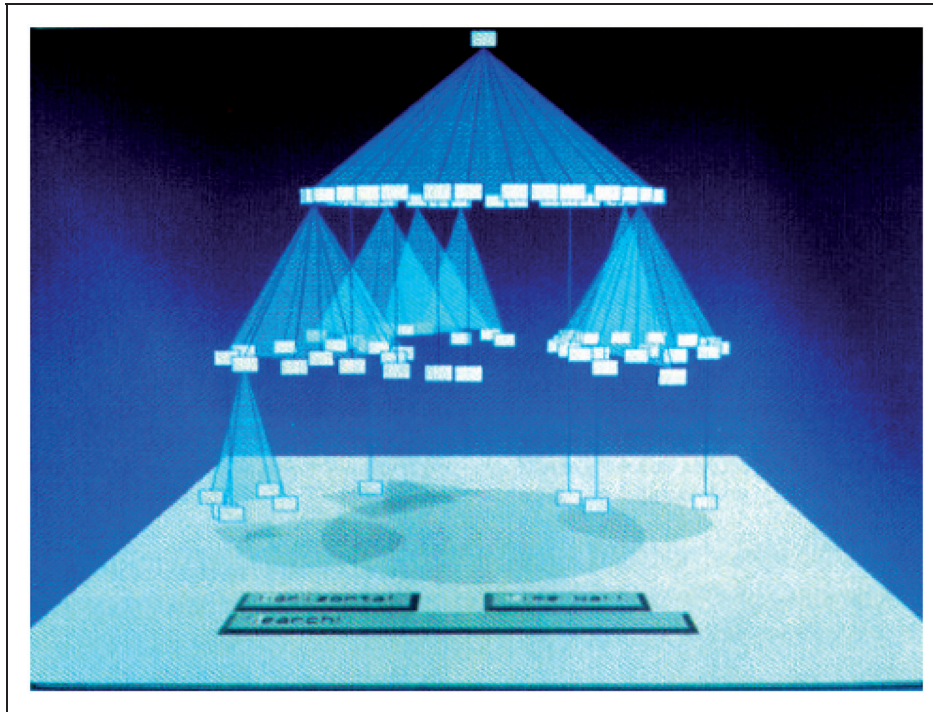


Figure 1. Early version of Apple Macintosh treemap from TreeViz using the slice-and-dice algorithm.



**Figure 2.** Early version of cone tree from<sup>18</sup> showing 3D representation and shadow effects below.

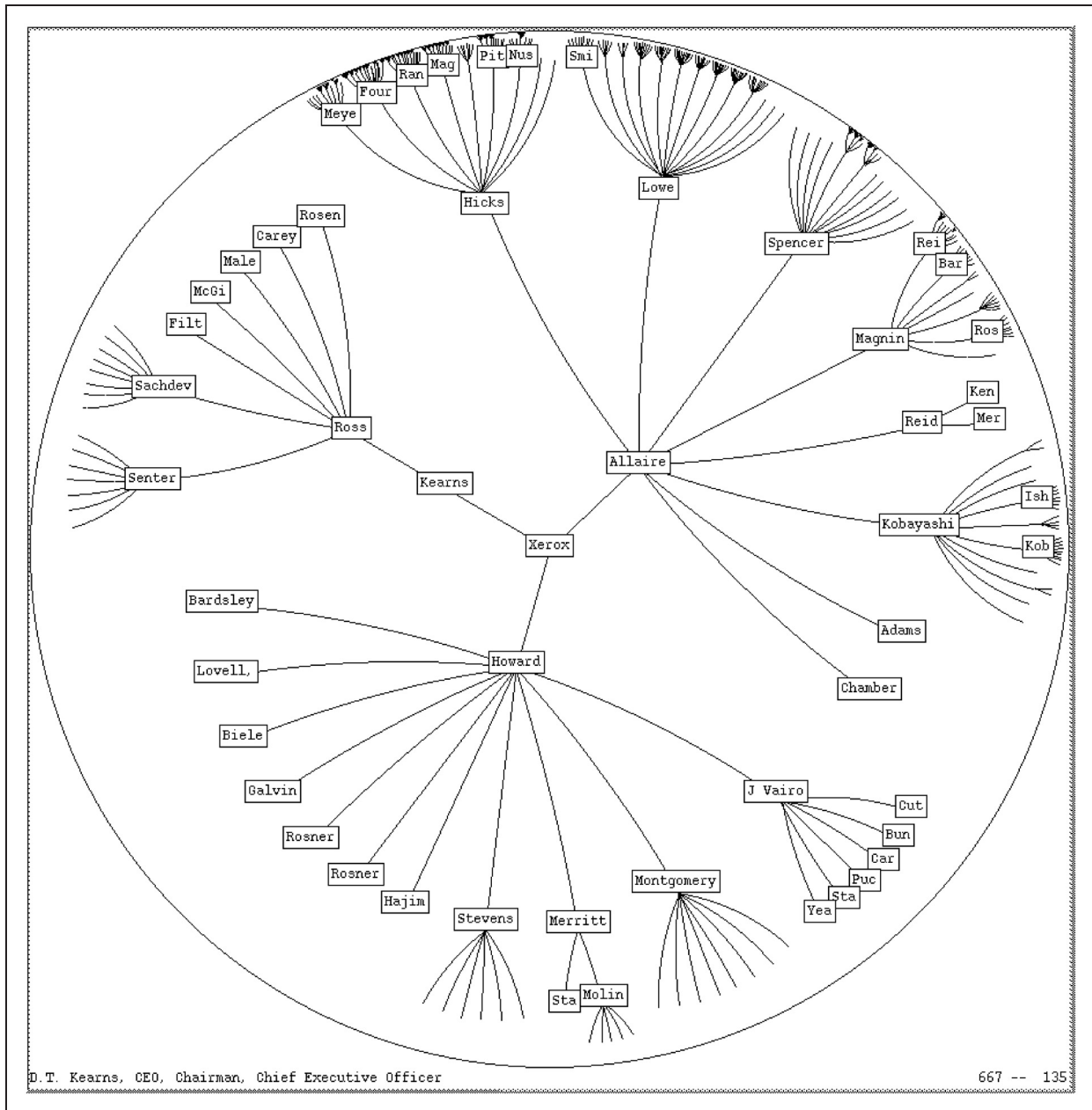
abstract data animations based on physical processes. Their published video produced a vigorous response and great interest.

**Hyperbolic tree browser** retained the appealing node-link visual presentation but placed the root node in the center with first-level nodes arranged around it in a circle or oval (Figure 3). Further levels were placed in larger concentric circles or ovals,<sup>19</sup> thus preserving a two-dimensional (2D) planar approach. To ensure that the entire tree would be visible, outer levels were shrunk according to a hyperbolic formula. The compelling aspect of the hyperbolic tree browser was that users could drag any node to the center, thereby redrawing the tree in a smoothly animated way that was innovative, playful, and eye-catching. The developers were inspired by Escher's art work and drew on the popular notion of fisheye layouts, which magnified the central area while diminishing the peripheral areas. They adopted the then current terminology of 'focus + context', suggesting that the main item of interest was entirely viewable, while the context remained visible, but reduced in size. Node labels were readable for nodes in the focus area while truncated labels were used at the periphery. Using node size and color to represent node attribute values was introduced in later versions.

Treemaps were invented by the first author (Shneiderman) of this paper while working at the

University of Maryland. He was seeking to solve an immediate problem of understanding disk space usage on a machine shared by 14 users. Inclined to visual solutions, such as the nested rectangular structured flowcharts (often called Nassi-Shneiderman diagrams<sup>22</sup>), he tried many variations that used size and color to represent data variables. After much struggle, he had the inspirational moment that led to the compact recursive algorithm, which guaranteed containment in a rectangular region (space-limited) and complete use of that region (space-filling). He then worked with graduate student Brian Johnson to implement the algorithm and refine the design. The original paper followed the lengthier path of journal review and production, so it was published in 1992,<sup>12</sup> months after the implementation description appeared at a 1991 conference,<sup>11</sup> which had a more rapid turnaround.

Cone trees and the hyperbolic tree browser originated at the Xerox Palo Alto Research Center (PARC), where a well-funded team of researchers was developing advanced visual interfaces from as early as 1988. While cone tree authors Robertson, Card, and Mackinlay were distinct from the hyperbolic tree browser authors, Lamping, Rao, and Pirolli, they collaborated on other projects and co-authored related papers. The University of Maryland did not file any patents for treemaps, but Xerox submitted multiple US patents on aspects of cone trees (5295243, 5689628, 6088032, and others) and hyperbolic trees (5590250, 5619532,



**Figure 3.** Early hyperbolic tree browser from<sup>20</sup> showing an organization chart.<sup>21</sup>

6300957, and others), as well as some European patents.

All these researchers were enthusiastic about their innovations and had many opportunities to present their ideas in journals, at conferences, and in professional talks. They were all respected and productive researchers, whose work would draw attention from colleagues. As a university researcher Shneiderman had the advantage of graduate students who would implement and evaluate variations on treemaps, while the Xerox PARC researchers were a capable well-funded group of professionals who were embedded in a community skilled at producing innovations.

### *Proving efficacy*

Proving efficacy of new ideas is often difficult, as the innovators struggle to identify relevant tasks, decide on the degree of training, choose appropriate subjects, and assess long-term performance. First versions of new ideas typically require many refinements to reach maturity plus integration with existing technologies. While the two initial treemap papers did not offer evaluations of efficacy, work was already under way on two evaluations.<sup>23</sup> The first, using 12 participants, showed performance benefits for treemaps over UNIX commands for specific directory browsing

tasks. The second, using 18 participants, showed performance benefits for treemaps over paper reports containing financial data. These modest studies were especially helpful in understanding the strengths and weakness of treemaps, which led to many improvements.

Cone tree developers did not conduct traditional evaluations:

Evaluation of this work [on cone trees] was a topic of frequent conversations. We had a firm belief that we needed a more holistic approach to evaluation of the whole user experience rather than the usability techniques which were in use at the time (which tended to focus on specific design features, and we believed might be misleading). Lacking that holistic evaluation approach, we did no formal user studies. So, the only informal evaluation that was done was based on our own experience as information workers, and the observations we made when using the new techniques compared to the existing ways of looking at the same information structures.

(GG Robertson, personal communication, 21 March 2010)

The initial hyperbolic tree browser paper<sup>19</sup> described an evaluation with only four users with a World Wide Web hierarchy of uniform resource locators (URLs). The counterbalanced within-subjects design produced subjective preferences that favored the hyperbolic tree browser compared with a ‘conventional 2-D scrolling browser with a horizontal tree layout’. However, there were no significant performance differences.

Subsequent evaluations of tree searching were conducted by many other researchers. A comparison of several space-filling tools for tree visualization found problems with treemaps but performance improved with experience.<sup>24</sup> However, their tasks emphasized traversal, nesting levels, and name-related operations for which treemaps are known to be weak.

### *Adoption and durability*

Many sources describe the evolution of novel ideas into mature technologies and possibly commercially successful innovations.<sup>4,5</sup> Measuring the efficacy, adoption, and durability of an innovation remains difficult, but clearly some ideas such as the World Wide Web have enormous impact and widespread adoption, whereas other ideas, such as pie menus, have a narrower impact and limited adoption. For the innovations discussed in this paper, the remainder of this section covers critical incidents, influence on other research groups, commercialization by companies, and visibility in popular media. The following section covers citation analysis for academic papers, patents, and trade publication articles.

As Moore<sup>1</sup> points out, innovators face a modest challenge in gaining early visionary adopters and much greater challenges in crossing the chasm to reach an early majority of the more pragmatic business users. His arguments are especially relevant to disruptive innovations that require changes to existing practices and ways of thinking. Novel visualizations still face this challenge and have the additional burden that many people are more resistant to visualizations than textual or tabular numerical presentations. Educational efforts to promote visual literacy are spreading as more interactive visual strategies are developed and as the benefits in corporate utilization grow. Innovators are typically enthusiastic about the benefit of their work and they successfully engage with other innovators who are attracted to novelty. However, reaching the wider circles of early adopters, the early majority, and the later majority that Moore describes can be difficult.

Proponents of novel information visualizations frequently report that an effective method is to show potential users their own data, or at least familiar data sets using the novel method. This is in harmony with Moore’s advice to focus on narrow vertical market segments where measurable advantages can be shown.

**Treemaps** were developed for disk directory browsing, which had meaningful variables that could govern rectangle size (file size) and color coding (file type or age). A memorable incident was a presentation by Ben Shneiderman to the University of Washington Department of Computer Science on 13 January 1993. Faculty and student attendees were skeptical about the treemap as a directory browser and even hostile to the idea of replacing UNIX, DOS, or current graphical user interfaces. After the talk, Shneiderman went to their lab and inserted an early demonstration disk into one of their workstations to show them their disk directory. The gasps from viewers were immediate – they saw that much of their space was wasted by three copies of a large compiler that had been installed by separate users. The University of Maryland did not file patents but did succeed in securing at least 17 licenses of the software, bringing enough income to support occasional research assistants to make improvements.

While several companies began offering a treemap addition to their directory browser, adoption was slow. Jarke van Wijk and his team developed a free program, SequoiaView,<sup>25</sup> that applied his refinements of squarified and cushion treemaps. SequoiaView produced hundreds of thousands of downloads, a popular following, and a spin-off company called MagnaView.

A big increase in adoption and an expansion to a very different application domain came in 1999 when Martin Wattenberg,<sup>14</sup> working for Smartmoney.com, developed Map-of-the-Market<sup>26</sup> to show more than 500 stocks in 11 industry sectors, which were divided

into subsectors, all as leaf nodes at the third level. Wattenberg's clustered layout, developed independently of the squarified layout, used size to indicate market capitalization and color to indicate degree of rise or fall since the previous day.

This free web application, which had good labels and helpful tips with links to extensive background data, generated a huge following. However, Smartmoney.com was only moderately successful with charging a monthly fee for more sophisticated treemaps or in licensing their software. Shneiderman became a consultant to Smartmoney.com in 1999 and developed a working relationship with Wattenberg that led to further research results.<sup>15</sup>

Another free public website that increased impact was Marcos Weskamp's Newsmap,<sup>27</sup> which used a treemap to visualize the data on active news stories as reported by the Google news aggregator. In April 2004, just after Weskamp released Newsmap, it generated 114 comments on Slashdot.org.<sup>28</sup>

By 2007, Wattenberg, working at IBM Research with Fernanda Viegas and others, produced ManyEyes,<sup>29</sup> a popular collaborative visualization web site with 20 visualizations including treemaps. This open tool expanded adoption as thousands of users were able to upload their data and view the results in treemaps or other visualizations. Also in 2007, *The New York Times* began using its own interactive treemap software. It continues to use treemaps to help tell stories such as automobile industry sales, financial trends, budget allocation, and inflation factors.

These and other treemap applications, as well as several open-source implementations, increased the impact and broadened the adoption, but specific numbers of users are hard to find. The movement to treemap commercialization was advanced by companies such as The Hive Group (for which Shneiderman is a technical advisor), Panopticon, Lab Escape, Macrofocus, Magnaview, ILOG, and others listed on the Wikipedia page.<sup>30</sup> The Hive Group's chief executive officer, Jim Bartoo, reports:

Hundreds of organizations have licensed the company's Honeycomb visualization software including some of the largest banking, oil & gas, pharmaceutical, and consumer products companies in the world. . . With the exception of the economic crisis associated with 2009, The Hive Group's sales (of treemaps) increased between 40% and 50% each year since 2005.

(personal communication, 28 March 2010)

In addition, the Wikipedia page lists 16 versions of treemap software in development libraries in these languages: Adobe Flex, Java, JavaScript, Silverlight, Perl, Python, Ruby, and SVG. The following section reports

on the citation and patent history. It may be too early to discuss durability, but numbers of companies, websites, and users continues to grow.

**Cone trees** produced a strong immediate response with great interest in the academic community. The first published paper<sup>18</sup> was presented at the 1991 Association for Computing Machinery (ACM) CHI conference in a session that is credited by some attendees as launching 'information visualization' as a topic. The authors also published an influential videotape, 'Information Visualization using 3D Interactive Animation', which was distributed widely by the SIGGRAPH Video Review to academic researchers, course instructors, and industrial laboratory developers. A group at the University of Waterloo created its own cone tree implementation with fewer 3D effects and what it believed to be refinements, such as a better node layout.<sup>31</sup> They conducted a small user test with five users and three tasks with mixed results but some guidance for refinements. A Tcl/Tk cone tree implementation at the University of Canterbury was evaluated by a controlled study with 10 users performing seven tasks on cone trees as well as an indented tree interface similar to Windows Explorer.<sup>32</sup> The cone trees consistently took longer and generated poorer subjective ratings, although some subjects expressed enthusiasm for them. A variation of the cone tree for MySQL databases was shown in a 2006 YouTube video by Daniel Bierwirth.<sup>33</sup> A commercial application of cone trees was created by Xerox spin-off XSoft under the name Visual Recall, but it did not reach many users. A demonstration of the S3 graphics chip used cone trees in its 1997 Visidrive 3D product. No Wikipedia article could be found for cone trees.

**Hyperbolic trees** were first described in a two-page demonstration paper at a 1994 conference,<sup>19</sup> but the fuller description appeared in the 1995 ACM CHI conference, which generated excitement and widespread interest.<sup>20</sup> The original video, 'Visualizing Large Trees Using the Hyperbolic Browser', published by the CHI conference by way of the 1996 *SIGGRAPH Video Review*, shows examples of organization charts and web browsing.<sup>34</sup> Hyperbolic trees (HTs) generated variations from university groups and was spun off from Xerox PARC as a commercial product from Inxight. There were commercial and public uses such as web-based hyperbolic trees for popular web sites such as NASA. Inxight CTO Ramana Rao reports that they

licensed toolkits to implement HT in vendor's or solution provider's packages (~100 deals) and several end user products including an enterprise server product (~500 servers) that allowed for incorporating HT into internal web apps and an end user product for publishing site maps on websites (~5000 sites) and may be 500k users

of a Windows navigation freebie called Magnifind. The revenue over 10 years was on the order of \$30M.

(Rao, personal communication, 27 March 2010)

Hyperbolic trees were renamed Startrees by Inxight, which was acquired by Business Objects in 2007, which in turn was acquired by SAP, which continues to offer licensing at its website.<sup>35</sup> Inquiries to SAP about sales history were not responded to. Rao laments the absence of a champion at SAP and the declining number of public web-based uses.

The Wikipedia article on hyperbolic trees<sup>36</sup> gives seven external links including examples that remain on the web, such as the Green Tree of Life from the University of California-Berkeley.<sup>37</sup> An unidentified developer provided an open-source version called “Hypergraph” on the Sourceforge website.<sup>38</sup> However, strong patent protection by Xerox PARC raises questions about legality of usage of this code or the Inxight source code, which was also posted at Sourceforge with clear warnings. Of course, developers outside countries in which patents were filed could have developed implementations, but we could not find any evidence of such work.

One enthusiastic writer for an information professionals’ magazine wrote about ‘The Hype Over Hyperbolic Browsers’:<sup>39</sup> ‘For libraries, this approach could revolutionize subject searching’, but she cautions that

Unfortunately, I predict that it is unlikely we will see hyperbolic browsers or visually orientated relational databases replacing traditional search engines any time soon. Current conventions for searching and information retrieval are so ingrained that will take an enormous cultural shift among information professionals to pave the way for graphically oriented search tools.

This comment, painful to all information visualization researchers, may have an important message about the difficulty in gaining acceptance to many of our innovations.

Competition over browsing strategies for hierarchies produced a lively event at the ACM CHI ’97 conference in which six teams competed to browse a 7000-node hierarchy.<sup>40</sup> Results were complex but Ramana Rao, using the hyperbolic tree browser, clearly stood out. However, the tasks chosen involved only navigation over named nodes with no attribute values so the benefits of treemaps’ size and color coding were not applicable.

Other evaluations of the hyperbolic tree browser helped reveal its strengths and weaknesses for specific tasks.<sup>41–43</sup> A survey article covering overview + detail, zooming, and focus + context interfaces

discussed tree browsing plus other applications, reviewed the empirical studies, and provided a principled analysis based on perceptual psychological issues.<sup>44</sup>

## Citation counts, patent history, and trade press articles

Tracking academic papers would seem to be relatively easy as these data are extremely important to many people and there is a long history of analyzing these data for research projects, tenure decisions, scientometric analyses,<sup>45</sup> and history of science studies. Academic authors have an obligation to cite relevant previous work, which makes tracking influence possible, especially when facilitated by some search services. Similarly, there is strong interest in patents and patent authors are required to point to prior art that influenced their innovations. The US Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) provides free public access to the patents, but extracting links to previous patents or academic papers requires diligent effort, as these links are not well supported. Trade press articles are available through commercial search services such as Lexis/Nexis and free services such as Google’s or Bing’s search engine. However, trade press articles rarely link to or mention academic papers, patents, or related trade press articles. Instead, they name corporations or products, mention key terms or concepts, and quote from key individuals, but extracting this information is difficult.

An initial study of academic citation and download patterns for the six primary papers shows the strongest and most continuing interest in the original cone tree papers (Table 1). An initial study of use of the terms treemaps, cone trees, and hyperbolic trees shows the higher volume of mentions for treemaps possibly indicating broader interest beyond the research community (Table 2). These searches give an overall impression, but detailed analysis is necessary as they may include extraneous citations and mentions while omitting relevant ones. The terms are fairly specific, but there are problems of disambiguation. Treemaps are also used in phylogenetic research and as a Java program, while cone trees generate some results from botanical studies.

To find more detailed, relevant results, as well as analyze the trajectory of citations over time, we pursued a more conservative approach. We compiled data sets for the three innovations from three sources. For academic papers we obtained from ACM an XML database dump of the ACM Digital Library.<sup>46</sup> This provided us with metadata for the vast majority of the papers published dealing with these visualization innovations and provided a representative sample of the visualization literature. Moreover, it also included



**Table 1.** Citation and download counts for key academic papers on each innovation as of July 5, 2011

	Google scholar citations	ACM DL citations	ACM DL downloads, last 12 months	CiteSeer citations
Treemap				
ACM TOG 1992 <sup>12</sup>	896	193	429	268
IEEE Vis 1991 <sup>11</sup>	942	192	229	184
Cone tree				
ACM CHI 1991 <sup>18</sup>	1211	281	460	397
CACM 1993 <sup>17</sup>	608	139	497	233
Hyperbolic tree				
ACM CHI 1995 <sup>20</sup>	923	197	343	270
UIST 1994 <sup>19</sup>	225	60	63	79

**Table 2.** Frequency counts for each innovation in various services as of July 5, 2011. Each query covers known variations of each term and plural forms.\* The bottom number in italics for ACM DL, CiteSeer, and USPTO shows the count when all search fields are used, versus our search across specific fields. The term treemap has a strong showing, but some references are to a phylogenetic term, a Java program, and park maps. The ideas and papers related to cone trees and hyperbolic trees are often cited, but the terms are not always used, giving both a lower count.

	Google scholar	ACM DL	HCI BIB	Web of science	IEEE Xplore	CiteSeer	USPTO	Lexis/Nexis
Treemap	9240	166 <i>593</i>	35	52	122	138 <i>1873</i>	67 <i>166</i>	153
Cone tree	2550	19 <i>204</i>	4	3	10	18 <i>421</i>	51 <i>79</i>	15
Hyperbolic tree	2100	32 <i>121</i>	10	7	11	25 <i>283</i>	53 <i>61</i>	72

cleaned citations between papers with approximately 30% of all references within our post-1990 data set linked to papers within the ACM Digital Library. We obtained patent records through automated scraping of the USPTO patent database,<sup>47</sup> which includes abstracts, full texts, linked citations to other patents in the database (100% linked), and other references to academic papers (unlinked).<sup>48</sup> The USPTO database is less usable than Google Patents for reading patents, but it was easier for us to extract references to other patents and papers from it. Finally, we automatically scraped trade journal and newspaper articles from the Lexis/Nexis academic database, which provides a wide selection of news, political, legal, business, and reference information including trade journals, newspaper articles, and press releases.

Within the ACM Digital Library database dump we searched for papers where the title, abstract, or keywords matched one of the three innovations. We called each of the matching papers *flagged* papers. This search methodology limited the results to papers that we

\*The variations we searched for are shown in the regular expressions below:

TM: \b{tree[- ]?map}[s]?b

CT: \b{cone[- ]?tree}[s]?b

HT: \b{hyperbolic[- ]?(tree|browser)}[s]?b

The queries have to be written specifically for each service. For ACM and CiteSeer we searched across title, abstract, and keywords. For USPTO we searched the title, abstract, claims, and description. On WOS searches are by topic. We added constraints to improve relevance for USPTO ('AND visuali\$') and Lexis/Nexis-All News ('AND visuali!'). The Web of Science results were manually verified.

believed made contributions to one of the three tree-browsing strategies. The search on title, abstract, and keywords was performed using these regular expressions:

```
\b(tree[- ]?map)[s]?\b
\b(cone[- ]?tree)[s]?\b
\b(hyperbolic[- ]?tree)[s]?\b
```

Each regular expression is composed of a starting word boundary (“\b”), the first part of the name (e.g. ‘tree’, an optional hyphen or space ‘[- ]?’), the second part of the name (e.g. ‘map’, an optional plural form ‘[s]?’), and, finally, another word boundary. Using tree-map as an example, the regular expression will match all six of the following variations: ‘treemap’, ‘treemaps’, ‘tree-map’, ‘tree-maps’, ‘tree map’, and ‘tree maps’.

This accounted for all but one of the innovation name variations we discovered within the dump. The last, a lone instance of ‘hypertree’ used for the visualization among a huge number of parallel processing usages, was added to the flagged papers manually. There were, however, a handful of critically important papers that did not match these restrictions. These included,<sup>17,19,20</sup> the pivotal work on hyperbolic trees and cone trees. These three omissions were quickly discovered because of our prior knowledge of the field, though we present a technique later to help identify omitted potentially relevant publications. We added them to the flagged papers manually after their discovery and checked for additional omitted but relevant papers in the dataset. The term ‘hyperbolic browser’ was occasionally used in later references for hyperbolic trees, though we did not search for that variation. We later tracked its appearances (seven papers, under 20 citations), but these do not alter the general trends reported below.

Additionally, we added any publications that cited a flagged paper, as well as any publications cited by flagged papers as well. We call these papers *alters* to the flagged papers, or just *alters*. We added to our citation or edge dataset all citations (going either direction) between flagged papers, flagged papers and alters, and between just alters. The benefits of including the alters and the edges between them are threefold. First, it gives us a way to count the number of citations each paper receives, including binning citations into time periods. Second, it allows us to find commonly cited papers within an innovation, providing leads to potentially relevant publications that did not match our search terms. Finally, it gives us a rough idea of the publication and citation trends in the field to compare against. Adding any papers to the dataset manually necessitates including all citations between it and all flagged papers and alters (in either direction), as well as adding the

requisite new alters and all citations between them and all flagged papers and alters. This is required to ensure proper citation counts and to find missed papers that would have been highlighted by the new addition.

Patents were added similarly, though instead of searching a database dump for the matching keywords the automated scraping tool we developed downloaded only the flagged patents and their alters. For matching it used the same regular expressions as we used for academic papers, searching across the abstract and full text of the patents. This wonderfully clean dataset of patent-to-patent citations was easy to automatically extract as well, including all citations in either direction between flagged patents, flagged patents and alters, and between just alters.

The links between patents and papers were more difficult to extract as only the plain text references section was available. We wrote a simple title and year matching tool to compare the references with the cleaned academic papers dataset, which was able to extract the vast majority of the citations from patents to papers. The reverse citations from papers to patents were more difficult as there is a huge range of formats for citing patents in the papers in our dataset,<sup>†</sup> along with optical character recognition (OCR) failures in the ACM references. However, none of the flagged papers cited any relevant patents, so these edges are excluded from the analysis.

Lexis/Nexis articles were automatically scraped by querying keywords for different tree structures and exporting the results in bibliographic format. It was parsed by automatic scripts to make it suitable for visual analysis. We also manually read each article and collected the data about the major organizations and products discussed. There were no easily identifiable citations to these articles as even the URLs were not available. Even with proper URLs, web citation networks are much harder to accurately extract and have fewer metadata attached to them. As such, we did not collect any citation data for them.

Our conservative approach in these searches provided us with a low estimate for the total impact of these innovations. More liberal studies have larger numbers, but for the purposes of this paper we wanted to identify direct contributors and the impact of their contributions. Moreover, we can do a much more careful and accurate analysis uncluttered by the chaff. As an example, compared with the straightforward basic search provided by the ACM Digital Library, which includes references and reviews in the

<sup>†</sup>Here is an example of a lightly tested regular expression to match most patent citations within the ACM DL dump (all one line):  
 ((United States|US|U\.\S\.\U\.\S\.\U\.\S) )  
 ?patent(</i>)? ? ?{US|No[\.]?|Number}? ? ?  
 {US|#}?[\d, -\.]?{4,9}\d\b

search, our technique matched 132 treemap papers instead of 357, many of which were not appropriate. Similarly, we found 19 cone tree and 20 hyperbolic tree papers compared with 75 and 100 found online. We were able to verify each rejected match from the online results manually, though many of them ended up being added as alters due to the references that the basic search matched against. The majority of the alters were not particularly relevant to the innovation, only citing the work in a single line or paragraph. This was even more the case with the patents, which have a tendency to cite even tangentially related patents and papers in an effort to be comprehensive.

We analyzed the resulting network of publications and citations between them to ensure that our search terms were not omitting any relevant publications. Potentially relevant publications were those that were highly cited by others with a particular flag but did not have that flag themselves. A treemap is a straightforward visualization for finding omitted publications by using a hierarchy based on the citations themselves. We created a hierarchy with the innovations or flags of the source paper as the first level, the flags of the target paper as the second, and, finally, the target paper metadata as the third and last level (SourceFlags → TargetFlags → TargetMetadata). As each rectangle was sized by the number of citations, potentially omitted papers are shown as large rectangles, making them easy to spot.

We used this visualization to find two top-cited papers and the top-cited patent for hyperbolic tree that were not properly flagged as HT themselves because they did not mention ‘hyperbolic tree’ anywhere within their title, abstract, or keywords (for papers) or their full text (for patents). As it turns out, these three are critical hyperbolic tree publications that would have substantially impacted the validity of our results, though we had noted their absence before because of our prior knowledge of this area. We easily found a critical omitted cone tree paper and patent through the same technique.

## Visualizing innovation trajectories

While there are many tools for showing timelines of numerical data, categorical event data, and historical time lines, there is relatively little work on showing the multiple complex longitudinal relationships among different types of data such as academic papers, patents, and trade press articles. Even more complex is showing the historical pattern of linkages among commercial suppliers, products, press releases, and adopting organizations.

Visualizations for historical academic citation patterns are usually traced to Garfield’s arguments

for ‘historiographs’ to show the impact of a single paper.<sup>49,50</sup> A more general tool, DIVA (Database Information Visualization and Analysis) shows multiple horizontal time lines for each topic with nodes showing papers and links to show citations within and across the time lines.<sup>51,52</sup> The impact of key authors at four human–computer interaction conferences is thoroughly examined and visualized with several forms of networks but less emphasis on temporal relationships.<sup>53</sup> Citation patterns across subtopics are shown in CiteSpace,<sup>54</sup> which recently added the capacity to locate nodes on timelines.<sup>55</sup> The progress of scientific arguments is visualized to show opposing opinions and supportive research studies.<sup>56</sup> Attribute-based network visualization which shows temporal patterns for academic papers, as well as links across topics, provides an inspiration for our current research.<sup>57</sup>

The business literature discusses the process of innovation adoption, especially as measured by trade press articles<sup>58,59</sup> and income from sales.<sup>60</sup> Wang and Swanson<sup>60</sup> show a 5-year sales histogram, plus growth rate, and textual annotations of significant events. The famed Gartner’s Hype Cycle is a chart with five stages in the evolving expectations for and visibility of an innovation: Technology Trigger, Peak of Inflated Expectations, Trough of Disillusionment, Slope of Enlightenment, and Plateau of Productivity.<sup>61</sup> However, critics complain that this widely discussed chart is not really a cycle, does not reflect reality, and fails to provide a basis for action.

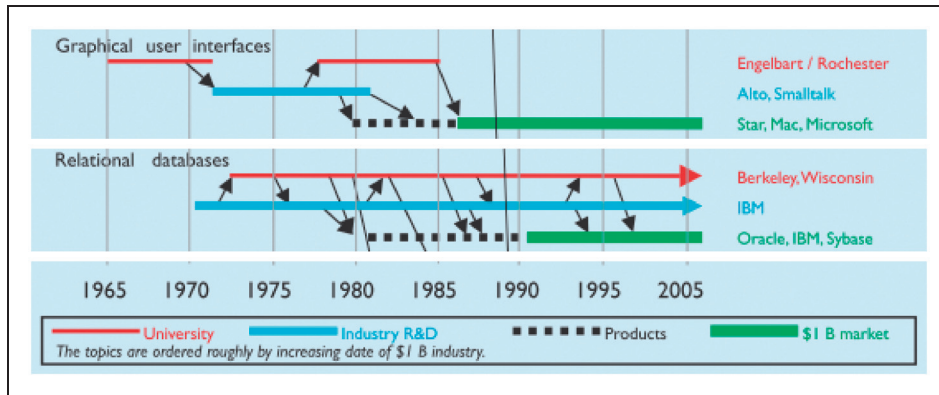
A compact visualization that shows relationships among academic research, industrial research, and the emergence of billion dollar industries was described as ‘tire tracks diagrams’ because of their visual similarity to the tracks a wet tire might make on pavement.<sup>3,62</sup> These diagrams are appealingly simple and suggest the strong impact of academic research on commercial success, but they are based on the knowledge of, and discussions among, selected researchers (Figure 4). Attempts to replicate them from public data have not proven successful. Historical time lines of many kinds are a popular method, but there are few strategies that can take data from multiple and diverse public sources and automatically create complex timelines that show innovation trajectories.

## Publications

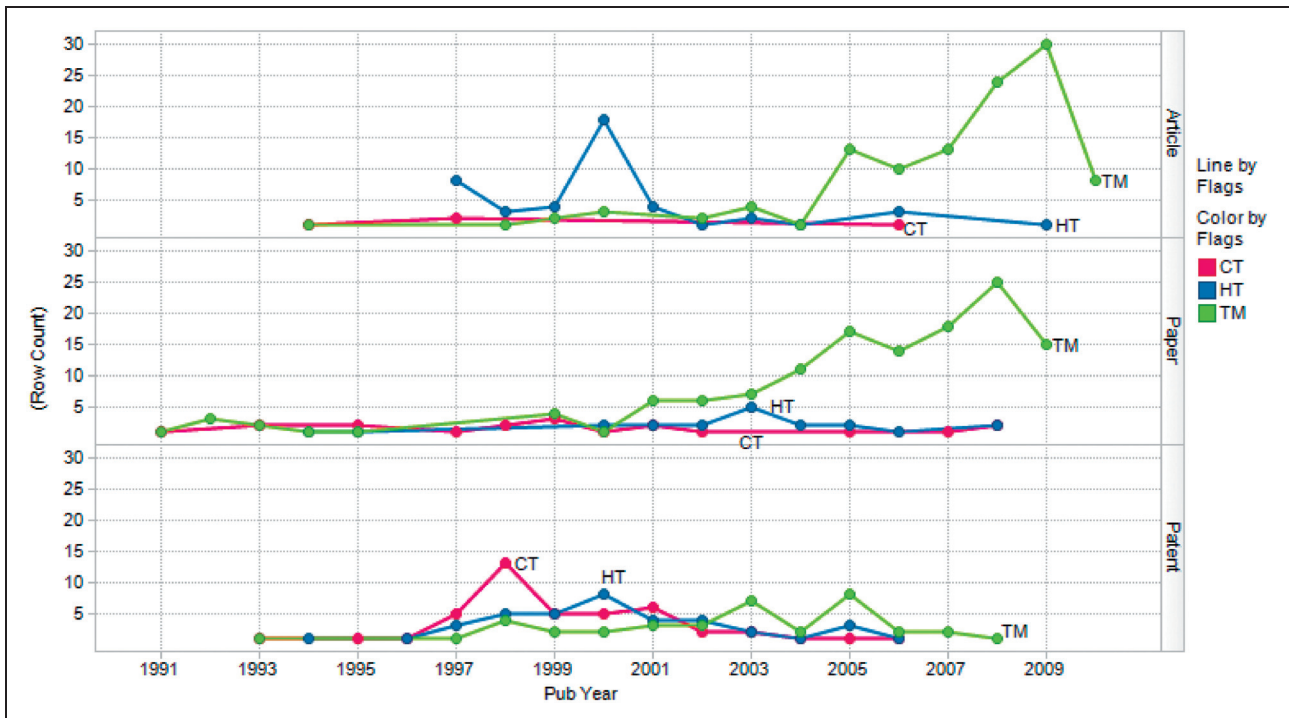
Perhaps the most straightforward way of visualizing the adoption or impact of each innovation is by using line charts to show the number of publications for each. Figure 5, prepared with Spotfire, shows separate line charts for the trade press *articles* (top), academic *papers* (middle), and *patents* (bottom). Each

line shows the trajectory for one innovation, with the publication year on the  $x$ -axis and the number of publications during that year on the  $y$ -axis. Green represents treemaps (TM), blue represents hyperbolic trees (HT), and red represents cone trees (CT). A few key features are immediately apparent. There is a large spike of 17 trade press articles published for

hyperbolic trees in 2000. Drilling down into the data, it became apparent that Inxight was heavily promoting its hyperbolic tree products with press releases, which accounted for almost all the publications. It is possible that their promotion helped swell hyperbolic trees in academic papers slightly in the subsequent years.



**Figure 4.** ‘Tire tracks’ diagrams showing university research (red, upper), industrial research and development (blue, middle), and the emergence of products (black squares), and \$1 billion markets (green, lower). Adapted from.<sup>3</sup>



**Figure 5.** These line charts show the number of trade press articles (top), academic papers (middle), and patents (bottom) published each year matching each innovation: treemaps (TM/green), hyperbolic trees (HT/blue), and cone trees (CT/red). Note: the sharp fall in patent figures in the faded area may be due to the average 32-month USPTO processing time in 2005–2008.

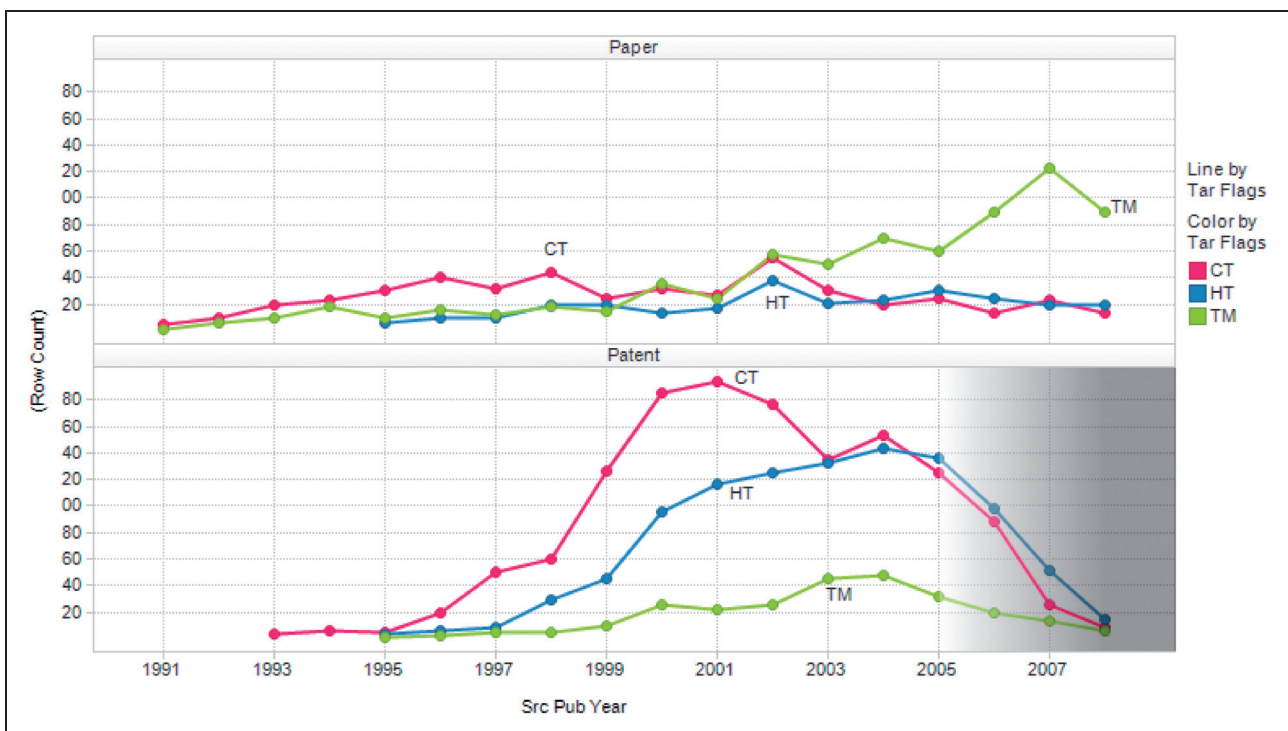
For both trade press articles and academic papers treemaps became steadily more mainstream after 2002 and were promoted heavily by the Hive Group, Panopticon, SequoiaView, and others. This increase was matched by 2 years of somewhat increased treemap patents, predominantly assigned to the Hive Group, IBM, and Microsoft; though the patents tapered off while trade articles and academic papers continued to increase. These patent figures seem to fall off sharply during 2006–2008 (shaded gray). This change was traced to the time it took the USPTO to process patents, which increased dramatically to an average of 32 months during 2005–2008 (the publication year we use for patents is the filing date).<sup>63</sup> Our dataset of matching patents and their alters contains only one patent from 2009, compared with 200, 152, 66, and 19 in 2005, 2006, 2007, and 2008, respectively. We omitted all 2009 data from the charts because of incompleteness from all our data sources.

Treemaps were a little late to the patent party, with cone trees and hyperbolic trees already heavily patented from 1997 to 2003. Cone trees were patented by 12 unique assignees led by Xerox with 18, 41% of the total, followed by Sun with seven and Microsoft with five. Hyperbolic trees were less concentrated by assignee

with 20 unique assignees, though again Xerox led with almost a quarter of the total (nine). The other top contenders were IBM (four), Rosetta Inpharmatics (three), and HP (three). Treemaps were concentrated similarly with 19 unique assignees. IBM was the leader in treemaps with 12 (31% of the total), with runner-ups Microsoft and the Hive Group tied with four.

### Citations

Instead of simply looking at the number of publications each year for an innovation we can analyze the number of citations the related publications receive over time. Figure 6 provides an example, where the *y*-axis represents how many times matching publications have been cited per year instead of showing the number of publications per year. Unfortunately, there are no easily measurable citation data for trade journal articles so they are omitted in further analyses. Separate line charts show academic *papers* (top) and *patents* (bottom), with the publication year on the *x*-axis and line color green for treemaps (TM), blue for hyperbolic trees (HT), and red for cone trees (CT). The Figure 6 *y*-axis is the count of all citations from both academic papers and patents published that year



**Figure 6.** These line charts show the number of citations academic papers (top) and patents (bottom) matching each innovation received each year. Each line represents a different innovation: treemaps (TM/green), hyperbolic trees (HT/blue), and cone trees (CT/red).

Note: the sharp fall in patent figures in the faded area may be due to the average 32-month USPTO processing time in 2005–2008.

where the cited publication matches the innovation. We include patent-to-paper citations in the citation count for academic papers, though no paper-to-patent citations existed for term-matching patents in our dataset. The notable pattern is the steady increase in treemap academic citations after 2002, compared with the decline in cone tree and hyperbolic tree academic citations.

This visualization paints a somewhat different picture for cone trees and hyperbolic trees, where, instead of shorter spurts of academic papers and patents published, there is a more prolonged and sizable measured impact. Even though there were only a few cone tree academic papers published each year, they were cited 44 times in 1998 and 55 times in 2002. Citations for cone tree patents peaked in 2000 (194) and for hyperbolic trees later in 2005 (144), also a local maxima for cone trees (153). Treemap patents were never comparatively highly cited but peaked in 2003–2004 with 45. All have been following a steady descent in the period of 2006–2008 (shaded gray), though this matches closely the reduction in patents in our dataset during that time period, possibly due to the backlog at the USPTO.

Another approach to measure adoption or impact is to dig down to the level of individual papers and patents to see their influence. The scatterplots in Figure 7 show a triangle for each publication with the y-axis representing the total number of citations it received from both academic papers and patents and the horizontal publication year. The left column shows academic *papers* and the right *patents*, with a row for each innovation: cone trees (CT/top), hyperbolic trees (HT/middle), and treemaps (TM/bottom). Here, the key publications for each innovation are apparent, with labels where there is space. The 1991 ACM CHI paper by Robertson et al. on cone trees<sup>18</sup> has been cited 242 times, with the 1993 CACM paper by Robertson et al.<sup>17</sup> cited 132 times. The first patent in 1993 by Robertson et al., ‘Display of hierarchical three-dimensional structures with rotating substructures’, was cited 130 times and the two most cited follow-ups came in 1997: Pirolli et al., ‘System for categorizing documents in a linked collection of documents’ (138) and Pirolli et al., ‘System for predicting documents relevant to focus documents by spreading activation through network representations of a linked collection of documents’ (103). Those only touch on cone trees as an application of their patent, though. The high citation counts might be due to striking visual content and the strong reputation of the PARC researchers, which raised the impact of their CHI 1991 conference presentation.

For hyperbolic trees, the two-page 1994 UIST description<sup>19</sup> garnered 47 citations, though dwarfed

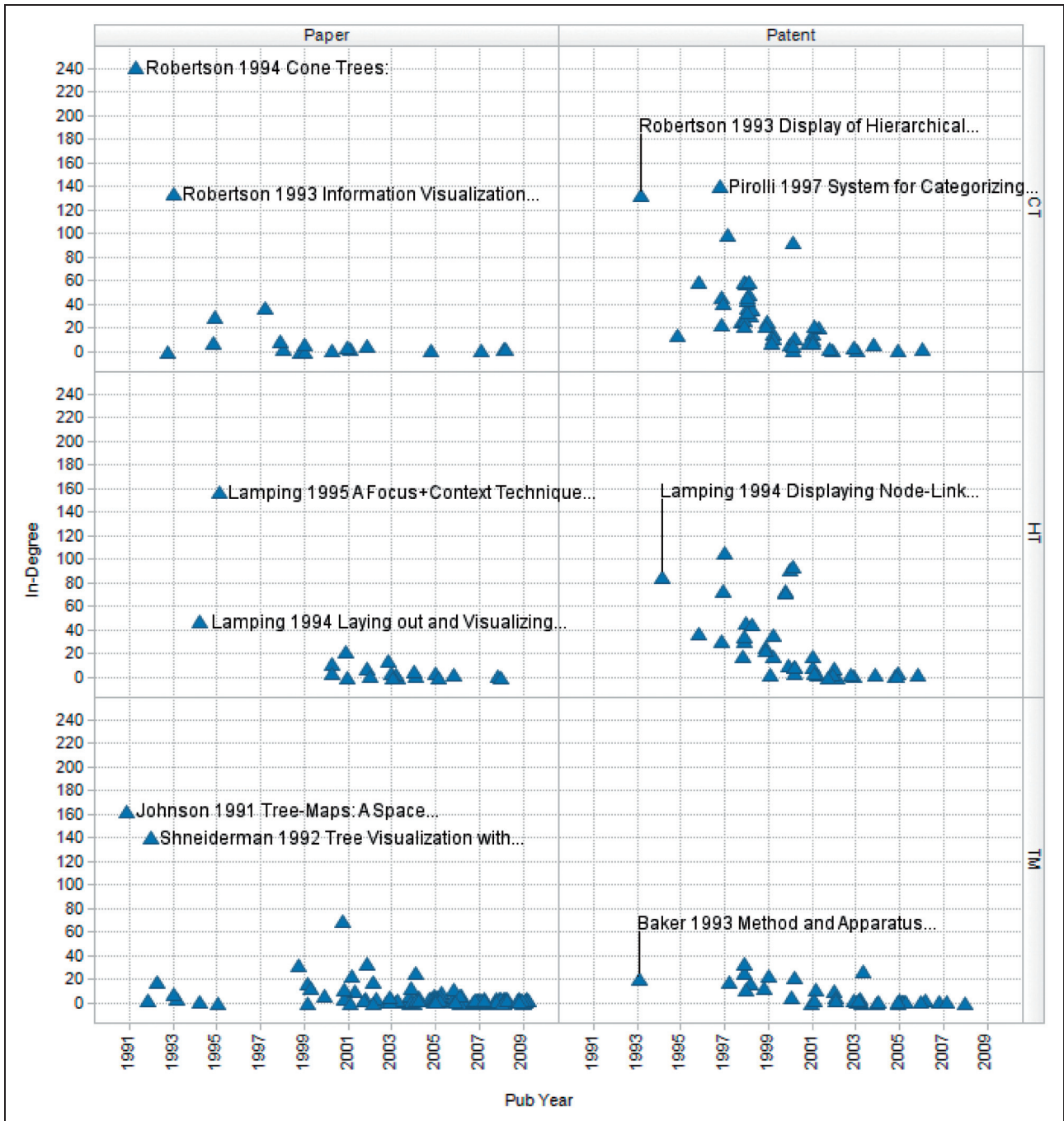
by the 156 for the 1995 ACM CHI paper.<sup>20</sup> The enhanced version by the University of Waterloo<sup>64</sup> received only 30 citations. There is an interesting mix of highly cited patents during 1994–2000. There were not any highly cited treemap patents, though there was an early 1993 patent by Baker with 27, and the original papers received substantial recognition. The 1991 IEEE Vis paper<sup>11</sup> was cited 158 times and the 1992 ACM TOG paper<sup>12</sup> got 143. A notable departure from the other innovations is the highly cited 2001 PhotoMesa paper and two new design papers in 1999<sup>14</sup> and 2002<sup>15</sup>, which may have helped usher in a renewed interest in treemaps.

An even finer-grained look at the citation counts of individual papers repeats the pattern of strong early interest in cone trees and hyperbolic trees, followed by steady increase in treemap citations from 2002 (Figure 8). Both the cone tree and hyperbolic tree patents (Figure 9) are highly cited over time, while the main treemap patent was consistently but not frequently cited.

## Discussion and guidance to designers

Our sample of these three information visualizations for tree structures is small, so generalizations are difficult, but the trajectories over the same 20-year period for these competitive innovations invites reflection. The conjectures in this section may provide useful guidance to designers, but much work is needed to validate them.

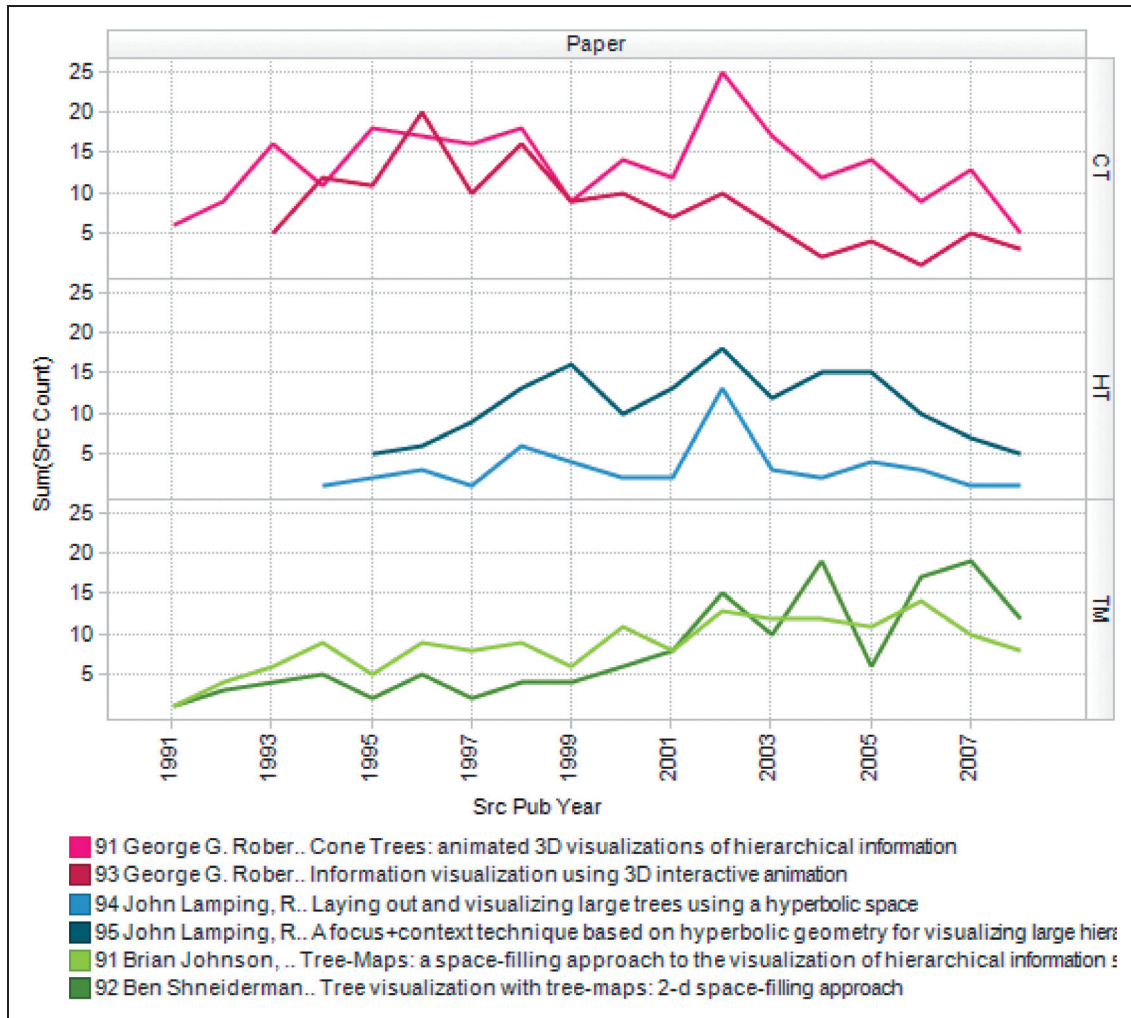
*Novel ideas may need refinements to fit their context.* Some new ideas catch on rapidly and spread widely, but most fail. A third group takes decades of steady refinement and tuning to be tuned to appropriate application domains. The entrenched command line interface slowly gave way to the graphical user interface, which has opened the doors for many users. Similarly, the entrenched textual, numeric, and tabular interfaces for data are giving way slowly to new information visualization ideas. Change is possible, although new application domains, platforms, tasks, and users may offer fertile possibilities, much as Moore<sup>1</sup> and Ogle<sup>65</sup> suggest. Rao comments on these issues in his Information Flow blog in 2003, predicting that by 2007 ‘there will be 100 million users of information visualizations on a near-daily basis’.<sup>66</sup> That goal was probably attained by 2011, but it represents only a small fraction of all computer and web users. An important accelerator of refinements is empirical evaluations of novel ideas by controlled, usability, or case studies, which can help tune the designs to important applications.



**Figure 7.** The total number of citations each academic paper and patent receives is plotted here, providing another measure of its influence. The number of citations, or in-degree, a publication receives is plotted on the vertical axis and the publication year is plotted on the horizontal. The rows divide the innovations: cone trees (CT/top), hyperbolic trees (HT/middle), and treemaps (TM/bottom) and the columns publication type: academic papers (left) and patents (right).

*Compelling demonstrations with familiar applications help.* These three cases suggest that an important promoter of adoption is having a readily understandable demonstration using a familiar application domain, while carrying out commonly used tasks. Treemaps started with directory browsing, but became a broader success when other appropriate applications appeared,

such as Smartmoney’s MarketMap, supply chain management, insurance fraud, stock portfolio analysis, and production management. Cone trees began with directory browsing and spread to web browsing, but few other applications. Hyperbolic trees were used for information-rich applications such as organization charts, web browsing, and document libraries. These



**Figure 8.** The citation trajectory of two key academic papers for each innovation is shown here. Each colored line represents a publication and indicates how many citations it received each year. This provides another view of their long-term impact. The rows divide the innovations: cone trees (CT/top), hyperbolic trees (HT/middle), and treemaps (TM/bottom).

first two conjectures are well aligned with Rogers<sup>8</sup> and Moore.<sup>1</sup>

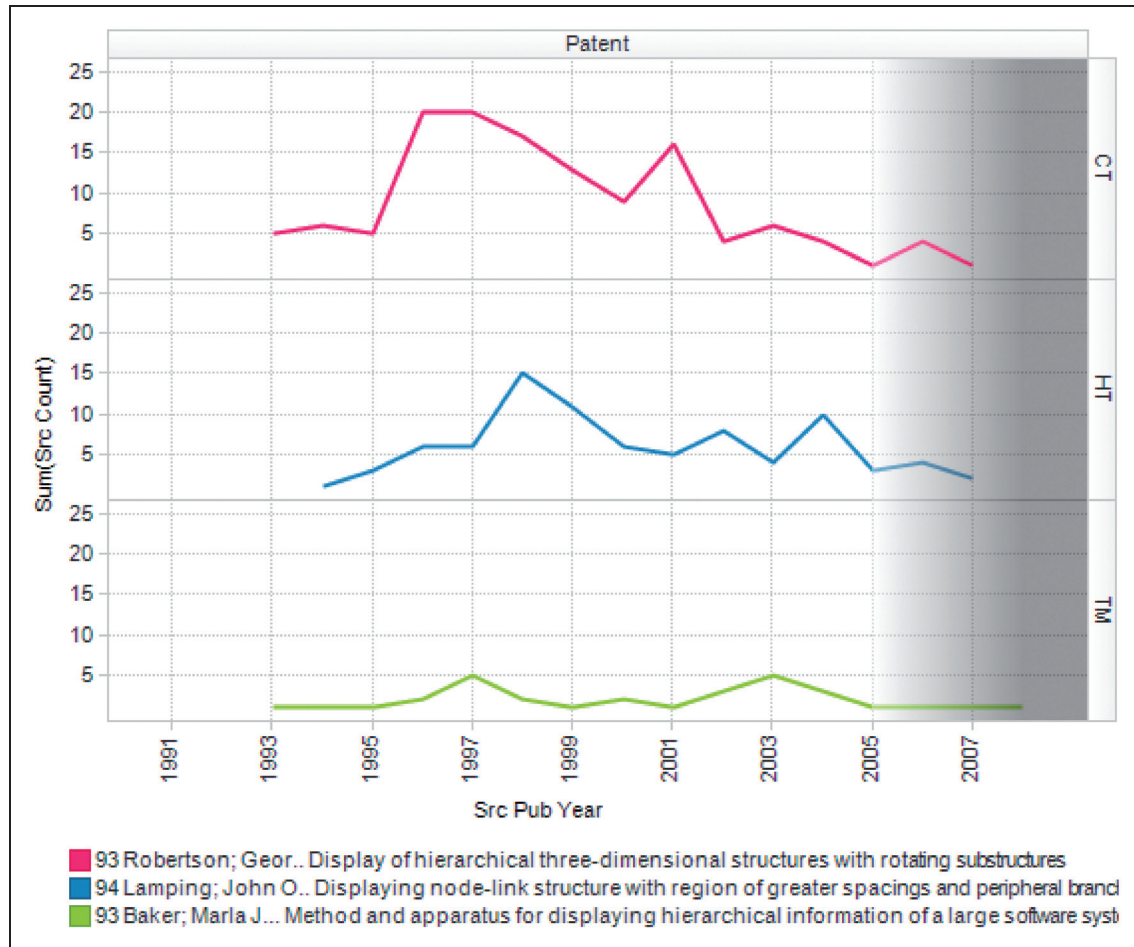
*Two-dimensional information visualizations remain advantageous in practice.* Both sides of the long-standing controversial issue of 2D versus 3D information visualization can make points based on tree browsing. While several 3D treemaps were implemented, they quickly faded and empirical evidence showed few benefits over 2D versions.<sup>67</sup> The 3D cone tree generated strong interest and may have inspired many developers, but the lack of commercialization raises questions about the complexity of using 3D representations for these tasks.

*Spatial stability is an asset.* Enthusiasts for user-controlled animated visualizations included the designers

of cone trees and hyperbolic trees, which were sufficiently appealing to generate strong interest, but the modest commercialization raises questions of efficacy. Does the frequent change of position of nodes undermine recall and discovery? By contrast, the treemaps had limited animation, mostly related to zooming in on a subtree, but, until recently, this was usually done with a simple jump zoom rather than a smooth animation.<sup>64</sup> Researchers on treemaps focused on spatial stability, especially as node sizes changed, to prevent the disturbing movement and reshaping of rectangles. Later refinements to treemaps addressed these issues but have yet to appear in commercial versions.

*Emerging ideas may benefit from open access.* While Shneiderman has written and spoken in favor of intellectual property protection,<sup>68</sup> these cases add support





**Figure 9.** The citation trajectory of the key patent for each innovation is shown here, just as in Figure 8. Note: the sharp fall in patent figures in the faded area may be due to the average 32-month USPTO processing time in 2005–2008.

to those who argue that patents inhibit adoption and diffusion. The unpatented treemaps led to many implementations with refinements and a lively competition among commercial and open source developers. By contrast, the patented cone trees and hyperbolic trees limited the number of derivative implementations. Ironically, the number of treemap refinement patents approximately matches the number of patents for cone trees and hyperbolic trees. Card points out that the academically oriented University of Maryland produced a more broadly adopted and commercialized technology whereas the industrially oriented Xerox PARC produced strong and more broadly cited papers: ‘The existence of patents, for example, especially when coupled with ownership by a large corporation with its attention on other areas, is a significant barrier’ (personal communication, 30 March 2010).

Each of these five conjectures is an invitation to further research and the development of examples to refine them or show counterexamples.

## Conclusion

With this paper, we make two contributions: (1) we offer the information visualization community a history of how certain ideas evolved, influenced others, and were adopted for widespread use and (2) we provide an example of how such scientometric trajectories of innovations can be gathered and visualized.

Understanding the innovation trajectory for novel research ideas from invention to successful innovation is a difficult task. Even when there are evaluations of efficacy and precise records of early adoption it seems difficult to predict durability. Academic citation counts are not always tied to patent counts or trade press articles, and certainly many factors govern commercial success. A few of the determinants of success are the entrenched alternatives, resistance to change, interactions with existing technologies, intellectual property rights, perceived usefulness and ease of use, availability of free versions, influence of entrepreneurial

individuals, and responsiveness of trade press editors. This complex mix of personalities, ideas, institutions, and economic constraints makes it difficult to predict outcomes even 2–3 years in the future.

On the more positive side, readers might take away an appreciation of how many components there are to commercial success and the sobering realization of how much effort is required in many cases. Early evaluations of efficacy may help lead to refinements, as well as a clearer understanding of which tasks and application domains are a good match for an information visualization invention. Presentations at conferences, through videos, and at academic seminars can provide further feedback and a chance to win over visionaries and early adopters. The shift to a commercial effort is still more demanding, probably requiring enthusiastic champions (as Ramana Rao certainly was for Inxight's hyperbolic trees), a devoted team of developers, and a determined sales force. Small or large companies can help advance an invention to a broadly used innovation.

There are also many dimensions to success. Academic success is typically measured by citation counts, which are presumed to be an indicator of influence on other researchers. Commercial success could be measured in dollars, number of customers, or number of users. For inventors, there is great satisfaction and pride in seeing their ideas influencing others and being put to use for important applications. The information visualization community faces substantial challenges in bringing their ideas to broad adoption, but each success creates a greater visual literacy, which sharpens users' critical thinking while making them still more sympathetic to the next innovation.

### Acknowledgements

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