

The Hidden Inflation of Digital Life

Assignment #1: Storyboard

October 3, 2024

Professor Gabby Resch

Data Visualization and Storytelling

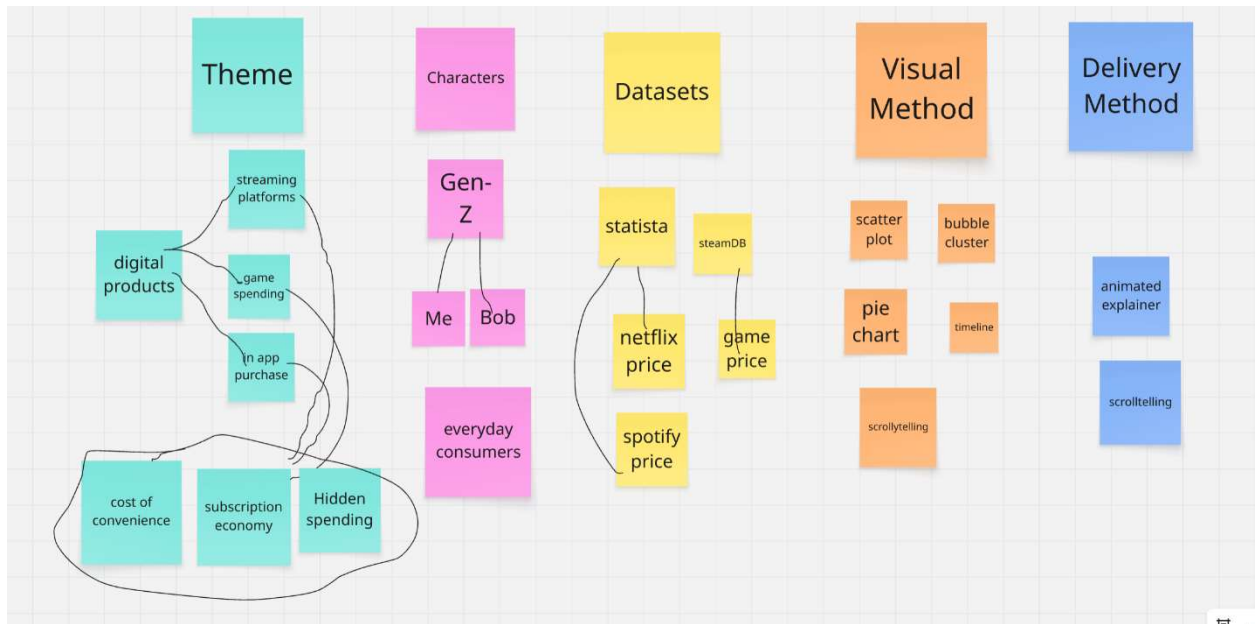
Ziqi Su 101027700

Introduction and Rationale

I start my attempt to the storyboard to think about different factors of why the cost of living has increased. But one area is often omitted that is the invisible inflation of our digital lives. From in-game purchases and streaming subscriptions and cloud storages, digital products are often considered affordable yet have gradually become significant recurring expenses. My data story “The Hidden Inflation of Digital Life” will explore how the price of online entertainment and digital consumption has increased over the past decade, with a heavy weight on younger generations heavily relying on these services for leisure, learning and social activities. This topic intrigues me because I just realized how much I have spent for the passed year on video games and compared with my other daily expenses. By focusing on the human side of this idea like emotions, habits, and trade-offs behind our digital purchases, this project aims to make audiences reflect on the true cost of convenience in an increasingly online world.

Brainstorming

By showing what Bob experiences in his life with digital products and other everyday expenses, readers can step into his shoes and reflect on their own decision making and how the market subtly influences them.



Character

In this story I will be a protagonist Bob who is deeply involved in digital spending. By showing what Bob experiences in his life with digital products and other life expending concerns, the readers will fit in his role and review about their decision making and how the market is influencing them.

Method and Data

I reviewed sources such as Statista, and some other news articles that track subscription fee increases for platforms like Netflix, Spotify, and Steam. I also collected information on in-game purchase trends and the average annual digital spending among Gen-Z consumers.

Rather than conducting a full data analysis, I used this information to guide the structure of my story and create mock visualizations, such as line graphs comparing price growth or infographics illustrating monthly spending patterns. Then involve them into a more story based Packed Circles graph which evolves over time to show the portion of digital expense compared with other daily expenses. These visuals serve as

narrative tools that complement the human element of the story, helping readers see how their decision making relate with the increasing expense.

Audience Description

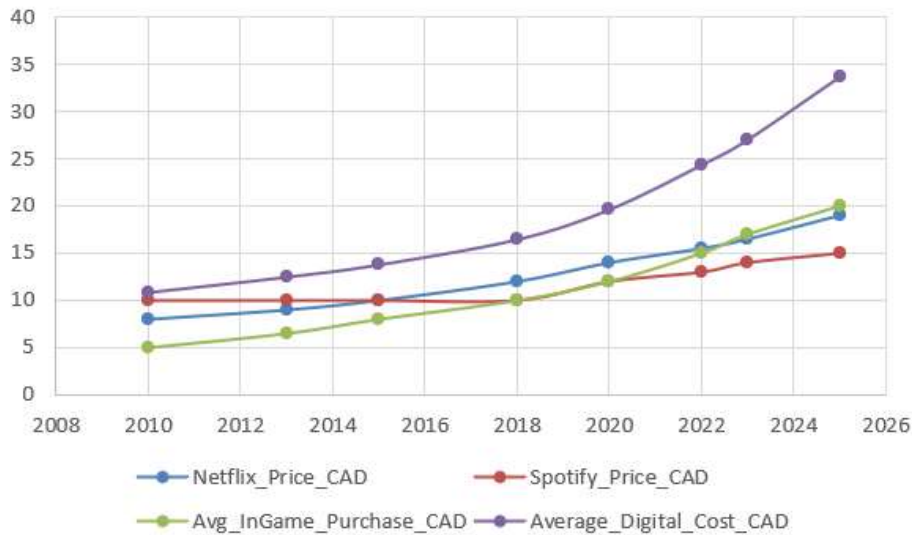
The primary audience for my data story is Gen-Z, who have grown up entirely within the age of digital medias. They stream a lot of music, movies, plays games and go online and read almost everyday. Though, many are unaware of how much these small digital costs accumulate over time. My goal is to engage with them through familiar visuals, relatable characters and easily understandable storytelling style (TikTok-style attention).

Iteration 1

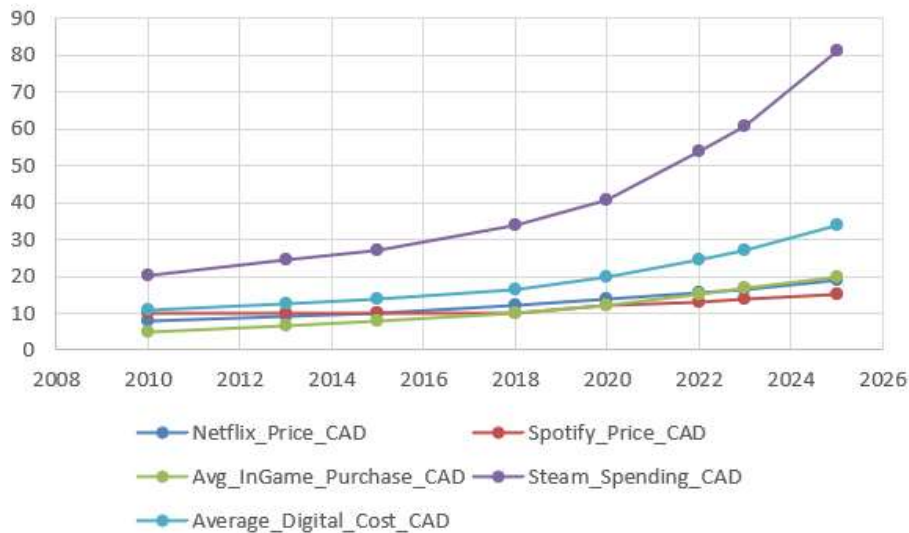
I am Bob,

Today I just came across my bill and saw some familiar faces, Netflix, Spotify, EA Sports ... The number on the bill is different than I remember which I signed up for, did I tick the terms and conditions without looking at it again?

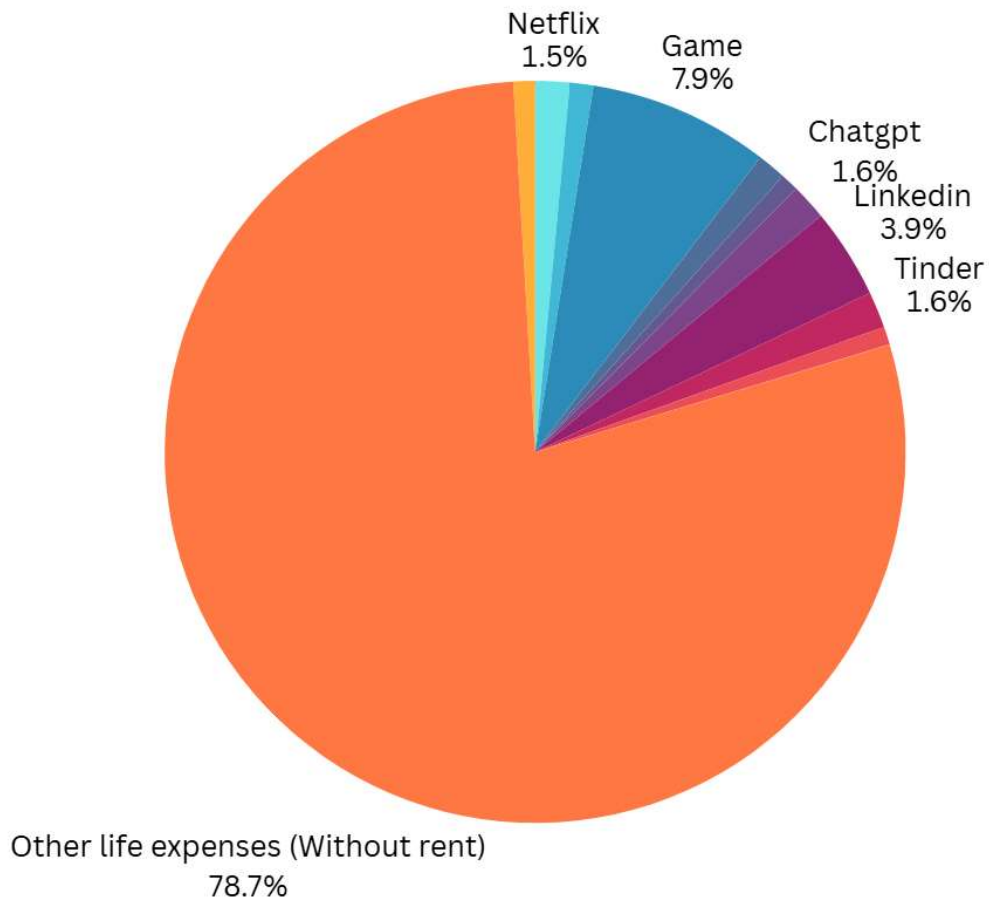
In order to find out, I created a spreadsheet using data from public sources to examine how my digital spending has changed over time.



Oh I realize I also spend a lot on Steam, but I don't remember how much I spend there over the years, let's replace it with average steam spending from the public.



Wow it has increased a lot over the years, probably because of the inflation. But why do I feel it cost more than that? Maybe I used the wrong chart? Perhaps we can try with Pie Chart since it can show me the proportional relationship.

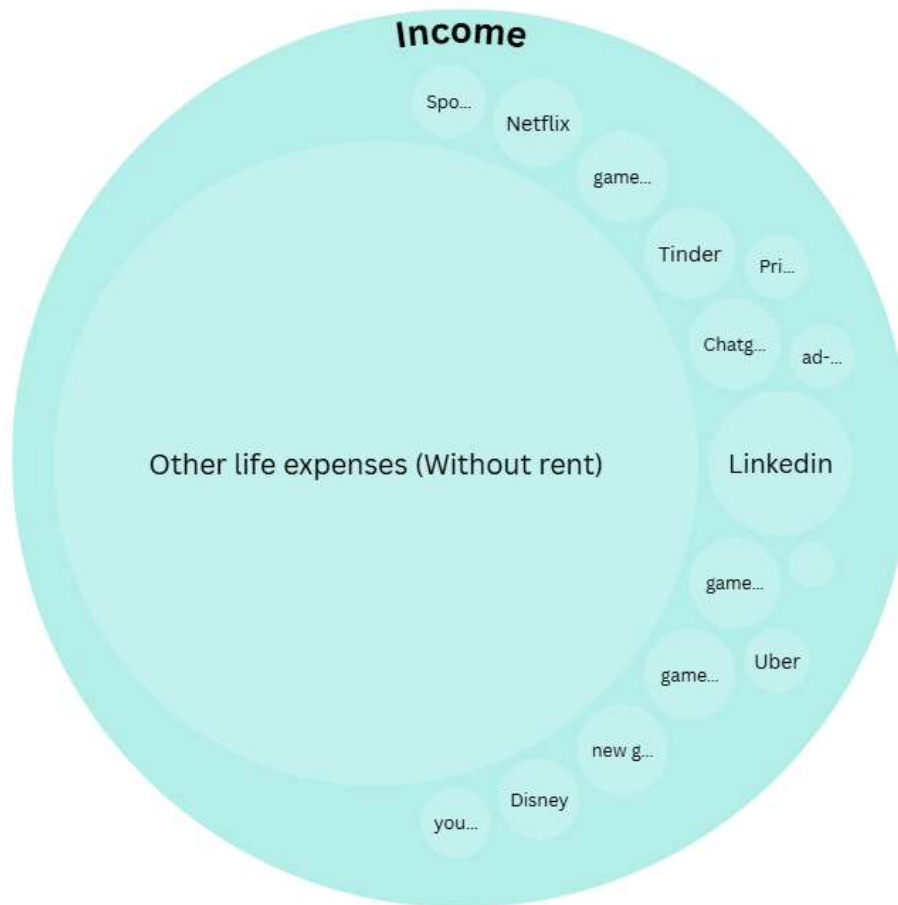


Iteration 3

The Pie Chart looks good, without all those digital purchases I could save around a quarter of expenses. While thinking about the proportion of the relationship, I discovered another representation, Packed Circles.



We can also specify the sections in Games as there are many types of game products I buy, game-pass1, game-pass 2, game-pass 3...



It looks very packed. With the large portion of it taken by the other life expenses. If one day more the digital subscription come out and I want to get it, it would be hard to fit into the space, as they were already subscription based; I must cancel to get something new. The bond between me and the digital products are tide as I have been using them for years, the emotions play an important role here.

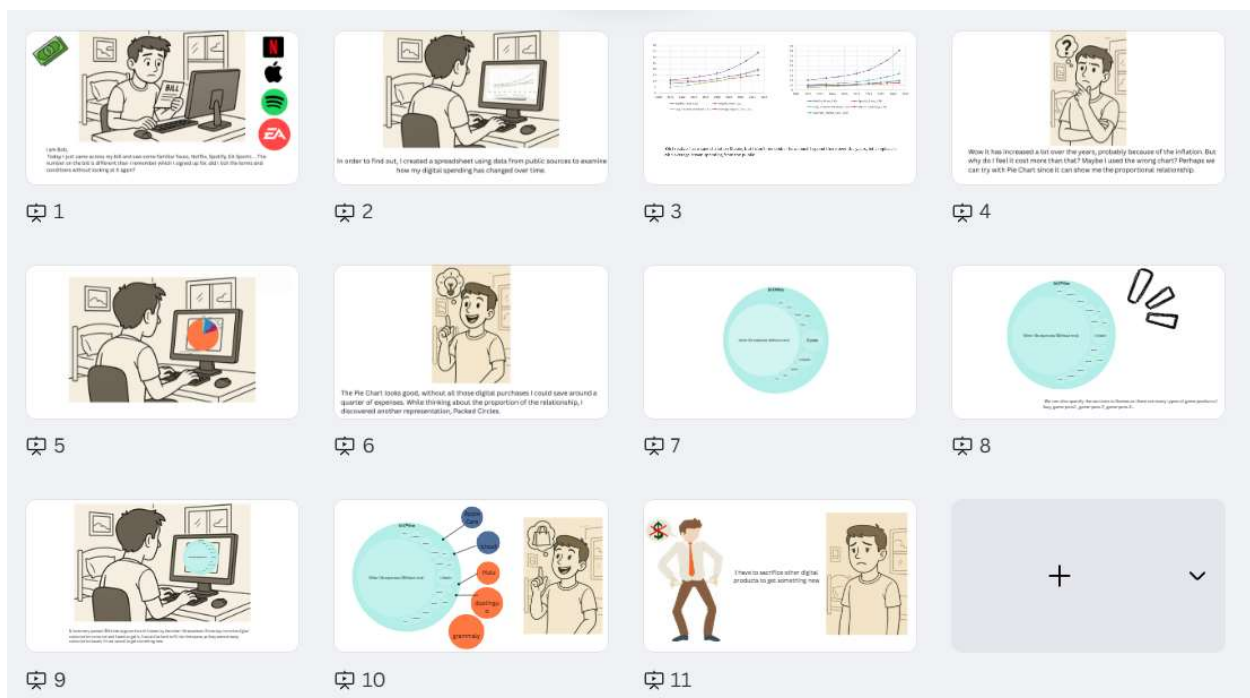
Method (Revisit)

As I dig into the representation, I continuously learn more about the data and myself. It would be better if I present the story in the following way:

Make the use of all iterations, as a thinking process, from a linear perspective to a proportional perspective, and at the end connect to real life in decision making. In form of a scrolling telling, firstly demonstrate Iteration 1, the increasing fees to digital

services/products. Then secondly demonstrate the proportional relationship between these products and income. And thirdly to Iteration 3, the bubbles flies in one another until the circle of income cannot fit no more. The audiences come to make a hard decision of getting a new digital product with a fixed total income, one service need to be removed to obtain their desired new product. In this approach, they shall connect the story with their lives in depth, and my goal reaches.

The Storyboard

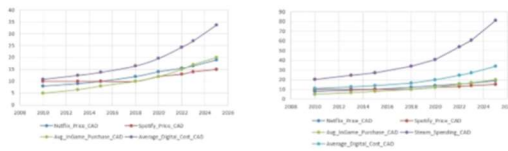




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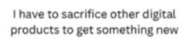
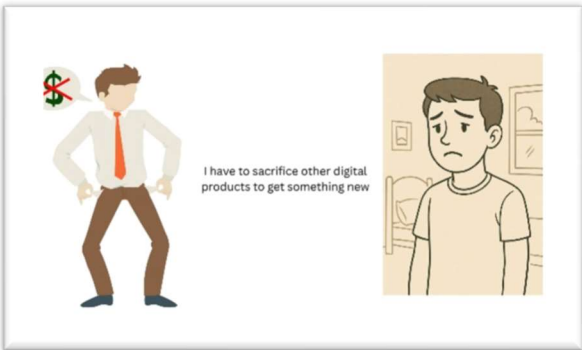
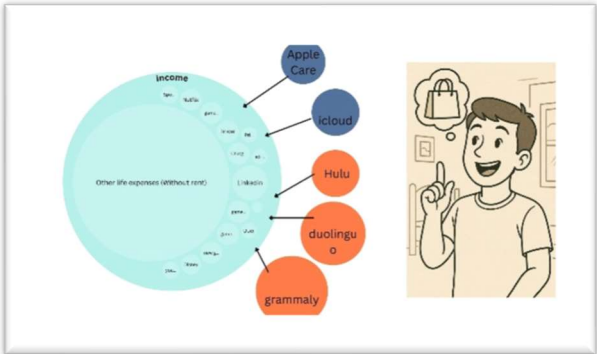
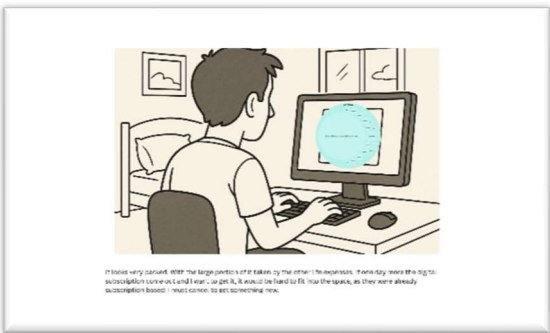
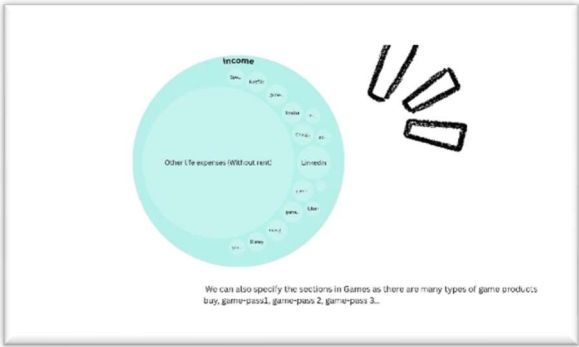
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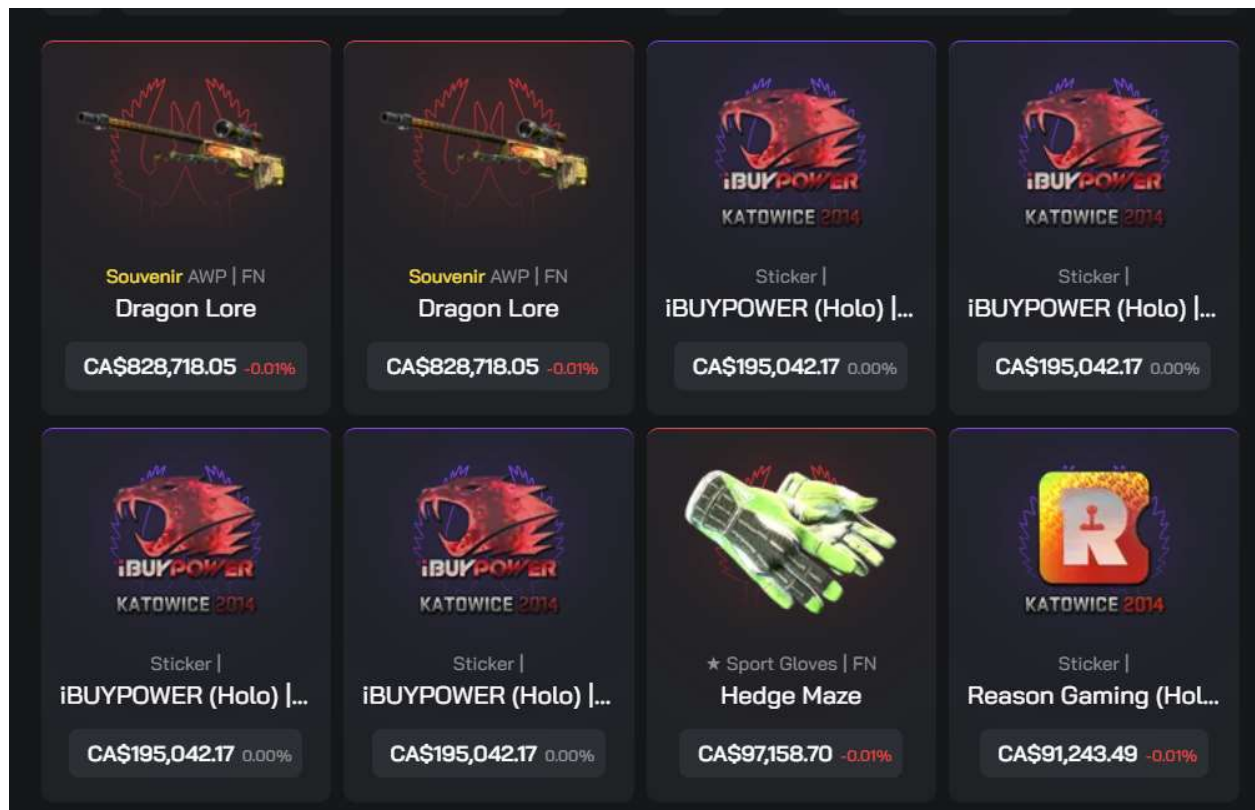
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Conclusion



With a photo of values of inventories from Counter-Strike, I ask myself, with a price of a house, is it really worth it? There are many options for digital products, as I reached the end of my exploration, I began to see how deeply digital spending has become intertwined with our emotions, routines, and our identity. From subscriptions to small in-game purchases, every digital choice reflects not just convenience but also a subtle dependence on technology driven lifestyles. By connecting the data with the human side of consumption I hope my audience, especially Gen-Z, can pause and reflect on their own digital habits. Are these recurring costs worth the comfort and entertainment they bring, or have they quietly reshaped what we value? The story ultimately invites readers to think about their relationship with the digital world which not just as consumers, but as conscious participants in a growing digital economy.