Designer Statement- "Digital Overload"

My visual argument, *Digital Overload*, critiques how social media has transformed connection into consumption. It argues that users are not only constantly watched by digital platforms, but also conditioned to seek validation through endless scrolling and notification loops. The composition centers on a person illuminated by the harsh blue glow of a phone screen. That glow represents both attraction and entrapment highlighting that addictive light that keeps us staring even when we know it's draining us. Surrounding the figure are scattered eyes, symbols of surveillance, judgment, and others who are similarly addicted. Each one mirrors the feeling of being observed online, even in supposed solitude. Behind it all, familiar icons from Instagram, Facebook, and other platforms blur into a chaotic fog that erases individuality. One of my biggest challenges was getting that chaos to feel intentional. My early drafts were too cluttered as I had too many icons, too many eyes, and too much noise. The composition looked overwhelming, but not in the purposeful way I wanted. The viewer didn't know where to look, and that confusion weakened the argument. What fixed it was how I reworked the light. I made the phone and person the brightest point in the piece and darkened everything else around it as I expanded outwards. That glow instantly draws the eye to the center and symbolizes how screens dominate our focus. I also made the icons more transparent by lowering the opacity so that they could be chaotic without overtaking the scene. Once I found that balance, the image felt overwhelming but controlled.I chose a cold blue color palette to emphasize emotional detachment. The layered opacity of icons and eyes creates visual noise that mirrors the constant flood of notifications and content we face every day. The central figure's exhaustion captures the hidden emotional cost of our digital lives. Overall, making my piece made me think more critically about design as communication. I realized that creating digital media isn't just about making something look polished, but it's about directing emotion and attention.

Reflection: "Digital Overload"

My visual argument, Digital Overload, explores the psychological and emotional consequences of social media consumption. The core argument is that the digital platforms designed to connect us have instead learned to manipulate and consume our attention. Through the visual metaphor of surveillance and control, the piece suggests that users are both the watchers and the watched, trapped in a cycle of validation, distraction, and dependency. My target audience is primarily young adults and college students, a generation that has grown up immersed in technology and is intimately familiar with the feeling of always being online. The purpose of this composition is to critique the culture of constant connectivity and to persuade viewers to pause and reflect on how much control social media truly holds over their daily lives.

I wanted the image to produce discomfort rather than neutrality. I didn't want it to look like a poster about digital wellness. Instead, I wanted it to feel invasive, to mirror the anxious energy of being flooded with notifications and watched by unseen algorithms. The piece operates as a visual warning, not by moralizing, but by showing the power imbalance between human users and digital systems. Ultimately, the argument is not that technology is evil, but that our relationship with it has become parasitic: what once served us now feeds on us.

The rhetorical choices I made were to communicate through immediate, emotional impact rather than explanation. I thought making a visual image instead of an audio would be best in making an immediate impact. The overstimulation of digital life is primarily a sensory experience of screens, lights, pings, and endless scrolling, so it made sense to represent that through image rather than words. I began with a dark color palette dominated by deep blues and blacks to evoke the artificial glow of a screen in a dark room. The central figure, lit only by their phone, represents how absorbed we become by our devices, both physically and psychologically.

The light on the face is cold and isolating, rather than warm or inviting, to suggest that the connection technology promises is ultimately hollow. The word CONSUME arches above the person's head as both a title and a command. Its placement gives it the shape of a halo or a brand, symbolizing how consumption has become sanctified in digital culture. The surrounding eyes represent the surveillance inherent to online life: advertisers, algorithms, and other users are always watching. I wanted them to feel omnipresent, part human, part machine, floating in the dark like manifestations of invisible attention. Behind these elements, the logos of popular social media fog up the image, just how it fogs up our minds. By visually layering these symbols, I aimed to create a sense of digital claustrophobia. Everything in the composition converges toward the glowing rectangle of the phone, the brightest point in the image. That central glow functions as a visual metaphor for addiction as it captures attention completely, leaving the rest of the surroundings dim.

My process began with brainstorming different metaphors for digital overstimulation. I sketched several ideas in Procreate that involved screens replacing faces with tangled cords representing social networks. Eventually, I settled on the motif of the watcher and the watched, which led to the idea of surrounding the viewer with eyes and notifications. I used Procreate's layering and blending tools to assemble the composition, experimenting with different brush textures and opacity settings to make the lighting look realistic. The most difficult part of the process was balancing clutter with clarity. Early drafts looked too visually noisy, which made it hard for viewers to focus on the argument. I was able to reduce the noise by changing the opacity of the background which also recentered the focus to the man in the center. It was also nice to hear feedback from fellow peers during our draft day as I felt encouraged in the direction I took.

I used Procreate on an iPad for the design because it allowed me to draw and edit freely

with precise control. The software gave me flexibility to blend photographic elements with hand-drawn textures and to use lighting brushes to create the phone's blue glow. The easiest part of the process was sketching and layering elements since the interface is intuitive and supports pressure-sensitive drawing. The most challenging part was achieving a cohesive color balance, as Procreate's lighting effects can easily overpower the composition if overused. I learned how to adjust hue, saturation, and Gaussian blur to create depth without flattening the image.

Overall, Digital Overload taught me that visual rhetoric is not just about aesthetic arrangement but about emotional persuasion. Every light, shadow, and layer of text shapes how the viewer feels and interprets meaning. By building this piece in Procreate, I discovered that visual design and rhetorical strategy are inseparable. The tools we use to create are also the tools we use to argue.

AI STATEMENT:

I used ChatGPT (OpenAI) during the initial brainstorming stage of this project. Specifically, I asked the model to help me think through different angles and thematic approaches related to how digital technology shapes and influences daily life. ChatGPT provided high-level idea prompts and topic directions, such as possible themes (attention economy, digital identity, technology and mental health) and potential project formats.

No text, media, code, or design elements from ChatGPT were copied directly into my final project. All writing, visual design, creative decisions, and production work are my own. The AI's role was limited to early ideation and helping me clarify the conceptual direction of my piece. I critically evaluated the suggestions before determining which ideas aligned with my personal perspective and the goals of the assignment.

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