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# iNVENTX 2025 Creative Exhibition

## SUSTAINAISSANCE: Emotion . Expression . Identity

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### Invitation to Variables

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### Abstract

*Invitation to Variables* explores digital fatigue and emotional disengagement in an age of algorithmic sameness. Inspired by the repetitive structures of online content, the artwork investigates how users respond to perceived redundancy, whether they disengage or persist in seeking variation. A 3x3 grid of QR codes printed on fabrics serves as the primary interactive element. While six QR codes link to the same video, three offer distinct experiences, creating a tension between uniformity and novelty. This work aligns with the exhibition theme SUSTAINAISSANCE: Emotion, Expression, Identity by reframing sustainability through the lens of psychological endurance. Here, sustainability refers not to environmental resources, but to our capacity to sustain emotional engagement, intentional expression, and identity in a hyper-digital world. The repetitive scanning becomes symbolic of how digital users navigate choice, curiosity, and expectation. The piece prompts reflection on our threshold for boredom, our assumptions about content, and the resilience required to remain self-aware amid digital saturation. By shifting the focus toward inner sustainability, *Invitation to Variables* suggests that preserving curiosity, attention, and critical thought is just as vital as sustaining the planet, offering a nuanced critique of how we consume not only products but also information and experience.

**Keywords** Digital fatigue; Social media fatigue; Interactive installation; Intentional engagement; Emotional disengagement ; Variable

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## Artist Statement

### *Concept and Theme*

In a culture of hyperconnectivity, where content is algorithmically curated and endlessly scrollable, the illusion of choice conceals a deeper crisis: the erosion of attention, reflection, and individuality. In just one minute, Google processes 2.4 million searches, YouTube hosts 694,000 hours of watched video, TikTok sees 167 million videos viewed, while users post 1.7 million updates on Facebook, 66,000 photos on Instagram, 347,000 tweets on Twitter, and 2.43 million snaps on Snapchat (Pedrero-Esteban & Barrios-Rubio, 2024). Fatigue, once exclusive to the offline world, now manifests online as a psychophysical and psychosocial condition (Aka, 2024). Though digital content is abundant and instantly accessible, it rarely fosters relevance, understanding, or emotional connection. Social network fatigue (Aka, 2024), a form of digital fatigue, signals a deeper sustainability crisis, one that depletes not just natural resources but also the emotional and cognitive energy needed for self-reflection and expression.

The Invitation to Variables artwork engages with this crisis through a structured aesthetic inquiry. The artwork comprises a 3x3 grid of QR codes, six of which lead to an identical video and three to distinct content. While visually identical, the QR codes function as differentiated elements designed to prompt varied forms of user engagement. The viewer's response whether it be curiosity, indifference, or persistence functions as the dependent variable, providing insight into the limits of psychological sustainability amid repetition and predictability.

Framed under the theme SUSTAINAISSANCE: Emotion, Expression, Identity, the work reimagines sustainability across two dimensions: environmental and emotional. Digital technologies, while physically unsustainable due to their reliance on extractive production and high energy consumption, are equally taxing on our emotional well-being. This dual lens underscores that sustainable futures demand both ecological responsibility and emotional resilience. Invitation to Variables thus becomes a psychological and artistic testing ground, prompting viewers to confront the tension between sameness and difference and to examine how long we can sustain the will to seek meaning in a world engineered for distraction.

### *Approach and Process*

The artwork began with the creation and embedding of video links: six directing to a looping visual narrative and three leading to distinct thematic content. These videos explore:

- The psychological toll of digital overconsumption (Figure 1)
- The degradation of ecosystems through resource overuse (Figure 2)
- The long-term impacts of unsustainable economic practices
- The numbing repetition symbolic of digital fatigue (via the repeated video)



Figure 1. Scene Depicting the Psychological Toll of Digital Overconsumption



Figure 2. Scene Depicting Environmental Degradation through Resource Overuse

The sustainability themes presented in the videos serve as a metaphor for our digital consumption, highlighting how patterns of environmental degradation mirror the strain placed on our cognitive and emotional well-being. Just as excessive exploitation of natural resources leads to ecological collapse, constant digital stimulation and repetitive content consumption erode our mental clarity, emotional resilience, and capacity for reflection. By drawing this parallel, the work emphasises that true

sustainability must address both the external environment and our internal, psychological landscapes underscoring that cognitive sustainability is just as vital as ecological preservation.

Technically, the project integrates graphic design, video production, and installation art. The visual simplicity of the printed canvas contrasts with the layered experience of scanning and watching, emphasizing the disconnect between surface appearances and deeper meaning. This setup simulates a digital experience within a gallery space, challenging passive viewing and inviting action, discovery, and decision-making. The QR codes comprising four distinct videos offer a fragmented yet unified narrative that provokes introspection about our digital habits.

Experimentally, the artwork treats audience behaviour as medium. The piece remains incomplete without interaction. Each scan becomes a micro-interaction that uncovers how viewers respond to repetition, ambiguity, and discovery. Emotional reactions ranging from curiosity to frustration, form part of the artwork's evolving narrative.

Thus, *Invitation to Variables* becomes a living inquiry into emotional and cognitive sustainability. It compels viewers to navigate patterns, surprises, and fatigue, offering a reflection of how we sustain our expressive selves in a culture of superficial engagement.

### ***Meaning and Impact***

The central question is urgent: in the pursuit of speed and convenience, are we losing qualities essential to human flourishing curiosity, patience, and self-reflection? The work's design purposefully invites monotony to evoke subtle frustration and surprise, turning the viewing process into a critique of passive digital consumption. It asks how repetition often disguised as variety shapes our emotional responses and perceptions of choice.

This installation prompts viewers to critically reflect not only on their engagement within the gallery but also on broader patterns of digital behaviour, relationships, and self-awareness. It raises significant questions: Are we losing our capacity for curiosity? Have we become emotionally disengaged in the pursuit of instant gratification? Through its use of friction and repetition, the work aims to rekindle intentional engagement and emotional presence traits that are increasingly vital for psychological and social sustainability. The work also gestures toward broader conversations on digital wellbeing and responsibility in addressing social media fatigue through digital wellness strategies that promote a healthy online-offline balance (Murtaza & Molnár, 2024).

More profoundly, *Invitation to Variables* expands the sustainability discourse beyond environmental impact. It advocates for the preservation of inner ecology, attention, emotional depth, and authentic expression. In an age of algorithmic sameness, sustaining the self becomes a radical act. The work asserts that emotional and psychological resilience are central to sustainability and urges a more holistic understanding of what it means to thrive in the digital era.

### ***Materials and Techniques***

The artwork features a 3x3 grid of QR codes printed on canvas, combining tactile materiality with digital interactivity. Each QR code is indistinguishable in appearance, compelling viewers to engage without visual prompts relying instead on curiosity and will.

The monotone color palette reinforces the theme of monotony. Shades of grey, often associated with boredom, emptiness, and fatigue mirror the emotional atmosphere of digital oversaturation. Yet, with each scan, the viewer initiates a micro-interaction, uncovering subtle variations that reveal how people navigate sameness, ambiguity, and novelty.

### ***References and Influences***

The concept draws on the aesthetics of everyday repetition, reminiscent of Andy Warhol's critique of mass consumerism. Warhol's use of serial imagery to reflect on culture's commodification echoes the repetitive use of QR codes here transforming a mundane symbol into a contemplative device. As Jiahang (2023) notes, Warhol's approach encouraged audiences to reflect on the intersection of art and life, suggesting that both could be seen as mirrors of each other.

The work is also inspired by Murakami's distinction between design and art commercialisation: while design beautifies the functional, commercialisation makes art a part of everyday life (Jiahang, 2023). This installation occupies both spaces turning design into reflective art and art into a functional experience.

### **Conclusion**

*Invitation to Variables* redefines sustainability by shifting attention from environmental concerns to the inner ecology of attention, emotion, and identity. By highlighting the psychological toll of passive digital consumption, the artwork invites a more holistic view of sustainability one that includes emotional resilience and intentional engagement. As a future direction, the artist aims to further explore how the illusion of choice in digital media often leads to disengagement, and to advocate for reconnecting with the original purpose of digital space: to inform, connect, and enrich rather than numb. In doing so, the

work offers a critical foundation for future conversations on meaningful interaction in both art and everyday digital life.

## References

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## Authors’ Bio

**Nor Alley Zulkafly** is a lecturer in Advertising Design at Multimedia University. Her creative practice explores digital culture, visual communication, and consumer behaviour, with a focus on how media consumption shapes identity and emotional engagement. Blending design, research, and interactivity, her work examines the psychological effects of repetition, participation, and digital overload in contemporary life.