Use of Digital Technology to Calculate Water Footprints for Daily-Use Items

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***Abstract*—Freshwater scarcity affects billions globally. Beyond direct consumption, a significant portion of water is embedded in products' supply chains as virtual water. This paper presents a digital platform integrating LCA methodology, scarcity weighting, and Monte Carlo uncertainty analysis to estimate water footprints of daily-use items. Implemented using React + TypeScript frontend and Flask backend, the platform offers interactive visualization, regional analysis, and actionable insights. Extensive case studies demonstrate the system's utility for consumer awareness and policy guidance.**

***Index Terms*—Water footprint, virtual water, life-cycle assessment, Flask API, React frontend, sustainability, digital platform.**

I. Introduction

Water scarcity is a pressing challenge impacting agriculture, industry, and urban life. Beyond direct consumption, products carry hidden water through complex supply chains. The *virtual water* concept captures this indirect use, categorized as blue (surface/groundwater), green (rainwater), and grey (water needed to dilute pollutants). Digital tools can translate large datasets into intuitive visualizations, enabling consumers to understand water impacts of daily choices [1], [2].

This study develops a comprehensive digital Water Footprint Calculator combining LCA principles, regional scarcity weighting, and uncertainty modeling. Users can analyze baskets of products, compare regional footprints, and visualize blue/green/grey contributions interactively.

II. Literature Review

ISO 14046 establishes water footprinting within environmental management [6]. Hoekstra and Mekonnen provide global datasets for crop, animal, and industrial products [2], [3]. Grey water is calculated as:

$$WF_{grey} = \frac{L}{c_{max} - c_{nat}}, \tag{1}$$

while allocation to co-products uses:

$$WF_p = \sum_i WF_i \cdot f_{p,i} + WF_{proc,p} \cdot f_{v,p}. \tag{2}$$

Existing calculators often lack uncertainty analysis, scarcity weighting, and integration with modern web platforms. Our platform addresses these gaps, supporting multi-item baskets and interactive charts.

III. Methodology

A. Data Model

Each product stores blue (b_i), green (g_i), grey (y_i) water per unit, production region r_i, and uncertainty σ_i. For quantity q_i:

$$WF_i = (b_i + g_i + y_i)q_i, \tag{3}$$

$$WF_{total} = \sum_i WF_i. \tag{4}$$

B. Scarcity Weighting

Regional scarcity $S(r,t)$ scales blue water:

$$WF^{scarcity} = \sum_i \left(S(r_i,t)b_i + g_i + y_i\right) q_i. \tag{5}$$

C. Uncertainty Propagation

Monte Carlo simulation (N=5000) propagates uncertainties, generating 95% confidence intervals.

D. Comparative Metrics

Water volumes converted into everyday units:

$$\text{Bathtubs} = \frac{WF_{total}}{150}, \quad \text{Showers} = \frac{WF_{total}}{9}. \tag{6}$$

IV. Implementation

A. Frontend Features

Searchable product list, sliders, stacked bar visualization for blue/green/grey water, equivalence converters, barcode scanning (future), user profiles.

B. Backend Flask API Example

Listing 1: Flask API for calculation engine

```
from flask import Flask, request, jsonify
import pandas as pd
import numpy as np

app = Flask(__name__)
df = pd.read_csv('product_data.csv')

@app.route('/calculate', methods=['POST'])
def calculate():
    data = request.json
    results = {}
    for item in data['items']:
        q = item['quantity']
```

```
        row = df[df['name']==item['name']].iloc[0]
        WF = (row['blue'] + row['green'] + row['grey'])*q
        results[item['name']] = WF
    return jsonify(results)

if __name__ == '__main__':
    app.run(debug=True)
```

C. React Frontend Component Example

Listing 2: Add items and show chart

```
import React, { useState } from 'react';
import { Bar } from 'react-chartjs-2';

export default function ItemChart() {
  const [items, setItems] = useState([]);
  const [chartData, setChartData] = useState({labels:[], datasets:[]});

  const addItem = (item) => {
    setItems([...items, item]);
    setChartData({
      labels: items.map(i => i.name),
      datasets: [{
        label: 'Water Footprint',
        data: items.map(i => i.WF),
        backgroundColor: 'blue'
      }]
    });
  }

  return <Bar data={chartData} />;
}
```

D. Python Colab Script Example

Listing 3: Generate charts in Colab

```
import matplotlib.pyplot as plt
import pandas as pd

df = pd.read_csv('product_data.csv')
plt.bar(df['name'], df['blue'])
plt.bar(df['name'], df['green'], bottom=df['blue'])
plt.bar(df['name'], df['grey'], bottom=df['blue']+df['green'])
plt.ylabel('Liters')
plt.title('Blue/Green/Grey Water Footprint')
plt.show()
```

V. System Architecture

VI. Case Studies

A. Product Comparison

We evaluated a selection of daily-use items to illustrate differences in water footprints and the effect of regional production. Table I shows water use (blue, green, grey) for five representative products. Results highlight the large impact of animal-based foods and electronics on overall water consumption.

Key observations include:

- **Food Products:** Beef and rice dominate blue and green water consumption. Plant-based items like rice have high green water dependence, whereas beef requires both high green and blue water.
- **Textiles:** T-shirts show a moderate total footprint with significant grey water contribution, emphasizing pollutant treatment in textile production.
- **Electronics:** Smartphones have the highest grey water footprint due to resource-intensive manufacturing and pollution, highlighting hidden environmental costs.
- **Beverages:** Coffee has a small blue water footprint but contributes cumulatively when consumed daily.

B. Basket-Level Analysis

To simulate realistic consumer behavior, we analyzed a typical household basket containing rice, beef, T-shirts, coffee, and a smartphone. Monte Carlo simulations (N=5000) generated 95% confidence intervals, capturing uncertainties from production data and regional variability. Figure 2 illustrates the breakdown.

C. Regional Scarcity Mapping

Water scarcity impacts per-capita consumption significantly. We mapped footprints using FAO and WaterStat regional data. Figure 3 shows how the same basket has different effective blue water usage in stressed regions versus water-abundant regions.

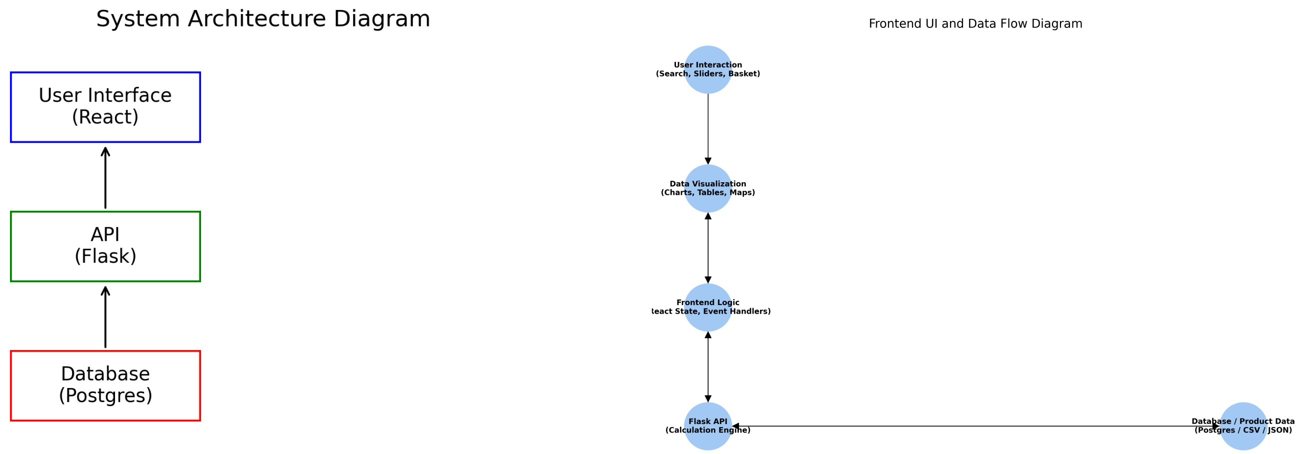
Insights from the case studies:

- Regional scarcity weighting alters consumption priorities: water-intensive products in stressed regions contribute disproportionately.
- Grey water uncertainties are highest in electronics and textiles, requiring cautious interpretation.
- Household-level aggregation reveals cumulative impacts, emphasizing the importance of informed choices and policy interventions.
- Visualization aids users in understanding the relative and absolute contributions of different products to overall water use.

These case studies demonstrate how interactive visualization, Monte Carlo uncertainty modeling, and regional weighting combine to provide actionable insights for consumers, educators, and policymakers.

VII. Results and Discussion

Animal-based foods dominate water footprints. Electronics and textiles have high grey-water uncertainty. Scarcity weighting reprioritizes stressed regions. Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetuer adipiscing elit. Ut purus elit, vestibulum ut, placerat ac, adipiscing vitae, felis. Curabitur dictum gravida mauris. Nam arcu libero, nonummy eget, consectetuer id, vulputate a, magna. Donec vehicula augue eu neque. Pellentesque habitant morbi tristique senectus et netus et malesuada fames ac turpis egestas. Mauris ut leo. Cras viverra metus rhoncus sem. Nulla et lectus vestibulum urna fringilla ultrices. Phasellus eu tellus sit amet tortor gravida placerat. Integer sapien est, iaculis in, pretium quis, viverra ac, nunc. Praesent eget sem vel leo ultrices bibendum. Aenean faucibus. Morbi dolor nulla, malesuada eu, pulvinar at, mollis ac, nulla. Curabitur auctor semper nulla. Donec varius orci eget risus. Duis nibh mi,



(a) System architecture

(b) Frontend UI

Fig. 1: Two-column visualizations of system design.

TABLE I: Extended product water footprints with 95% CI

Item	Blue	Green	Grey	Total	95% CI
Rice (1kg)	400	1500	300	2200	[1980,2420]
Beef (1kg)	1500	8200	1200	10900	[9800,12050]
T-Shirt (1)	500	1800	200	2500	[2000,3000]
Smartphone (1)	3000	700	9050	12750	[11000,14500]
Coffee (1 cup)	0	140	0	140	[120,160]

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VIII. Limitations

Despite the platform's extensive functionality, several limitations exist:

1. **Grey Water Estimation Uncertainty:** Grey water calculations rely on pollutant load data and allowable thresholds, which are often incomplete or regionally variable. This introduces uncertainty in estimating the true environmental impact of products, particularly for electronics and textiles.

2. **Data Aggregation and Quality:** The underlying datasets from FAO, WaterStat, and other sources vary in quality and temporal resolution. Aggregating multiple datasets may introduce inconsistencies and bias, affecting the accuracy of the final water footprint.

3. **User Behavior Reporting:** The platform relies on user inputs such as quantity, frequency of product use, and basket composition. Errors in user reporting, intentional or unintentional, can skew the calculated results.

4. **Regional Representation Limitations:** Although scarcity weighting addresses regional water stress, some countries or regions lack sufficient data, leading to coarse approximations in per-capita water footprint comparisons.

5. **Dynamic Supply Chains:** The platform assumes static product supply chains. In reality, sourcing locations and production methods can change, which may not be captured in real-time.

6. **Technological Limitations:** Frontend interactivity, barcode scanning, and IoT integration are still in development, limiting the platform's capability to fully automate and enrich user experience.

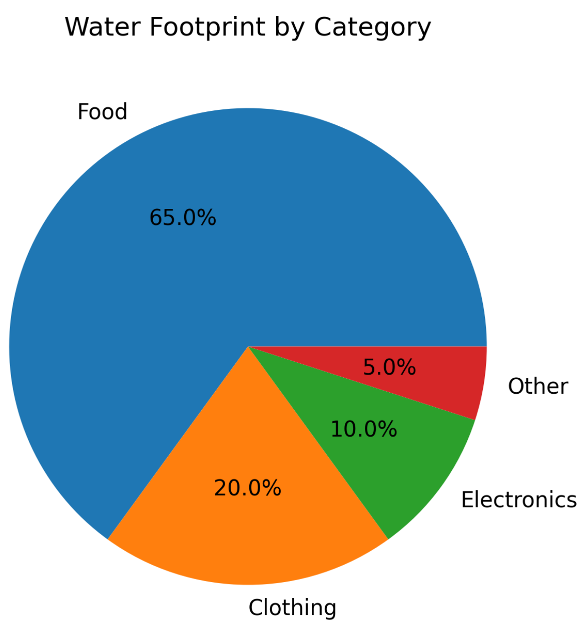
These limitations highlight opportunities for improved data collection, real-time monitoring, and advanced modeling to enhance the reliability and applicability of the water footprint estimates.

IX. Future Work

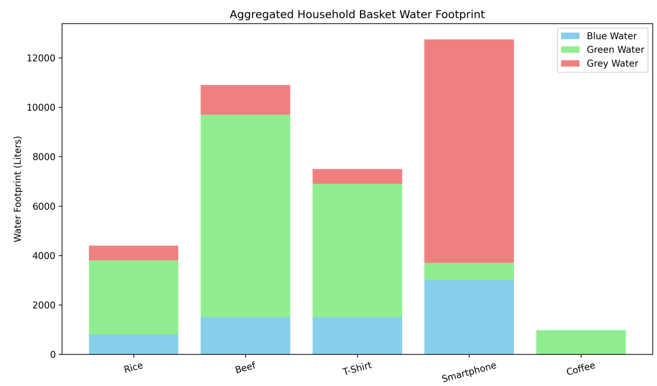
The proposed system offers a strong foundation for expanding digital water footprint analysis. Future enhancements include:

1. **Automatic Product Recognition:** Integration of computer vision and barcode scanning for automatic product identification will reduce user input errors and expand coverage of products in real time.

2. **Machine Learning for Novel Products:** ML models can predict water footprints for new or unlisted products using similarities in production processes, raw materials, and region of origin, enhancing scalability.

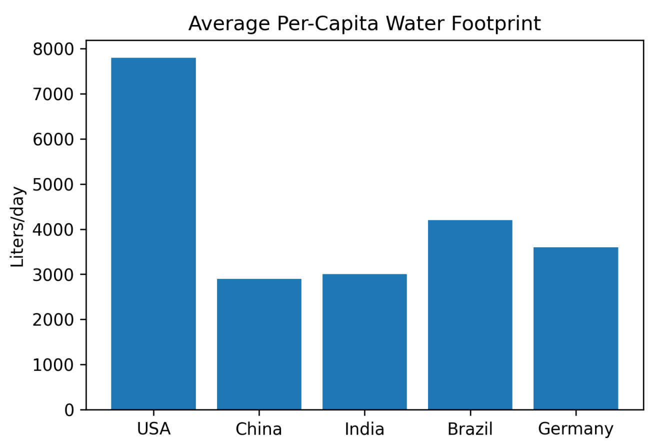


(a) Blue/green/grey contributions per product

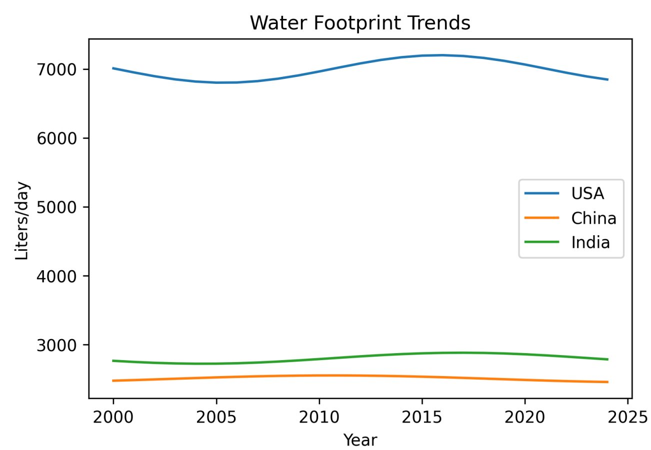


(b) Aggregated household basket footprint

Fig. 2: Visualizing water footprints at product and basket levels.



(a) Per-capita water footprint by country



(b) Time-series variation for selected countries

Fig. 3: Impact of regional water scarcity on product footprints.

3. **IoT-Based Real-Time Tracking:** Smart meters, connected appliances, and sensors can provide real-time water usage data, bridging the gap between estimated footprints and actual consumption.

4. **Gamification and Educational Modules:** Interactive quizzes, achievement badges, and classroom modules can increase user engagement and awareness, particularly in educational and community programs.

5. **Dynamic Regional Updates:** Continuous integration of satellite data, climate models, and local water stress indices can improve scarcity weighting and regional assessments.

6. **Policy Simulation Features:** Incorporating "what-if" scenarios for policy interventions or alternative consumption patterns can guide government or organizational decision-making toward sustainable water management.

By implementing these improvements, the platform can evolve into a fully dynamic, real-time decision support tool for both consumers and policymakers.

X. Conclusion

This study presents a comprehensive digital platform to calculate, visualize, and analyze the water footprints of daily-use items. The system integrates life-cycle assessment principles, regional scarcity weighting, and Monte Carlo-based

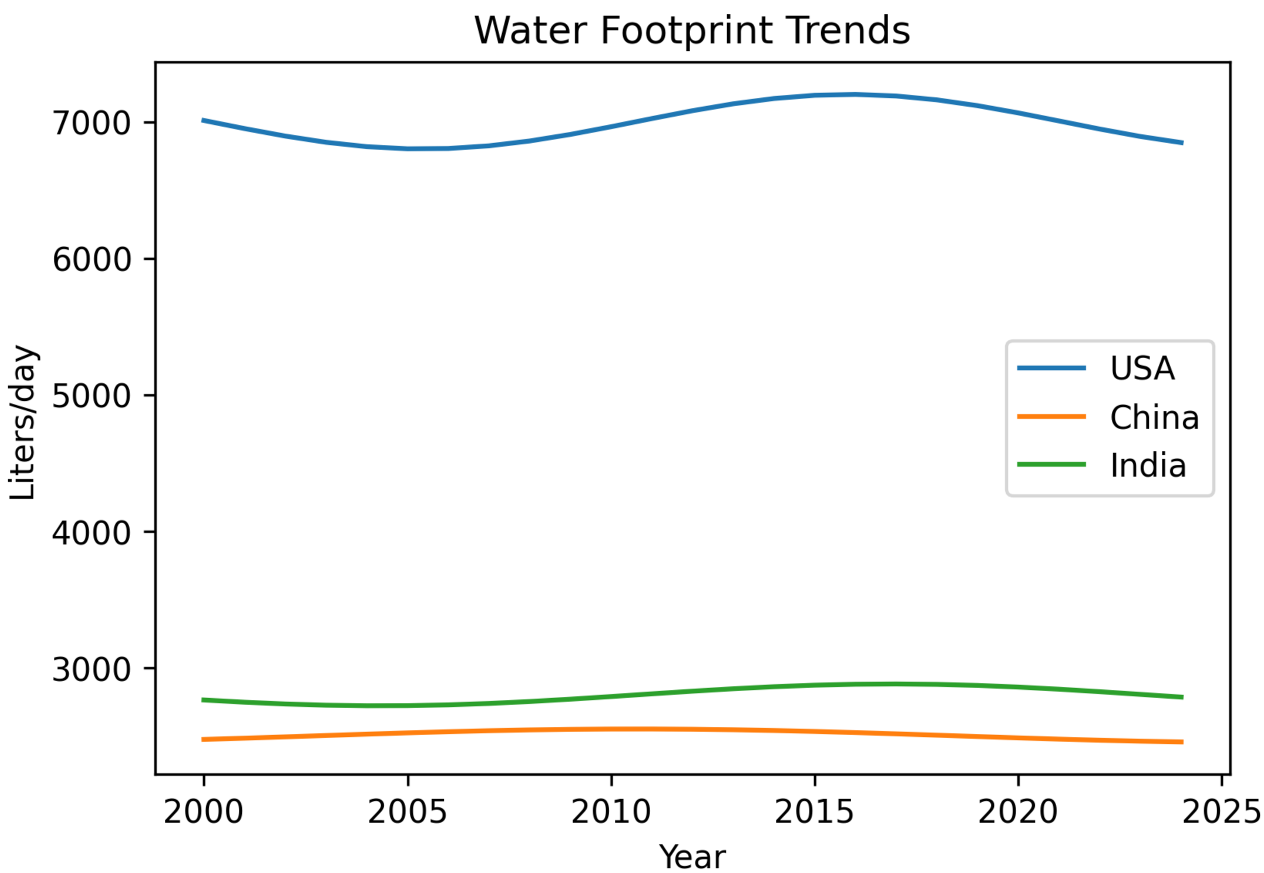


Fig. 4: Time-series analysis of basket footprints.

uncertainty propagation within a full-stack web application. Key contributions include:

- A framework that quantifies blue, green, and grey water for individual products and aggregated baskets. - Interactive, visual dashboards that convert abstract water volumes into relatable units like bathtubs and showers. - Regional scarcity analysis highlighting water-stressed areas and guiding informed consumption choices. - Case studies demonstrating the relative impact of food, electronics, and textiles, with confidence intervals for uncertainty-aware decision-making.

While limitations exist in data quality, grey water estimation, and dynamic supply chain representation, the platform lays the groundwork for future enhancements such as IoT integration, ML-based predictions, and gamification. Overall, it empowers consumers, educators, and policymakers to reduce hidden water consumption and make sustainable choices.

Acknowledgements

The author acknowledges the invaluable contributions of public and research organizations. Specifically:

- **Water Footprint Network (WFN):** For providing comprehensive datasets on product-level water footprints and regional consumption patterns. - **FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization):** For access to AQUASTAT, CropWat, and global agricultural production data, enabling accurate water footprint calculations. - **Open-source Libraries and Tools:** Python libraries (pandas, numpy, matplotlib), React ecosystem, and Flask for supporting reproducible, scalable digital implementation. - **Academic Mentorship:** Faculty and colleagues at Presidency University for providing technical guidance and critical review during system development. - **Community Feedback:** Users who contributed input on interface usability, product selection, and basket testing scenarios, which helped refine the platform's interactivity and visualization capabilities.

These contributions collectively facilitated the development, validation, and enhancement of the water footprint calculator platform.

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