# Are You Thirsty? So is Your AI.

Han Qiao
University of Toronto
Toronto, Canada
h.qiao@mail.utoronto.ca

Eshta Bhardwaj
University of Toronto
Toronto, Canada
eshta.bhardwaj@mail.utoronto.ca

Victoria G. D. Landau
University of Basel, University of
Toronto
Toronto, Canada
victoria.landau@unibas.ch

Nils Bonfils
University of Toronto
Toronto, Canada
nils.bonfils@mail.utoronto.ca

Monica Iqbal
University of Toronto
Toronto, Canada
monica.iqbal@mail.utoronto.ca

Olya Jaworsky
University of Toronto
Toronto, Canada
o.jaworsky@mail.utoronto.ca

Rowan O.A. Munson
University of Toronto
Toronto, Canada
rmunson@roam.ac

Lena Rubisova
University of Toronto
Toronto, Canada
lena.rubisova@mail.utoronto.ca

Nadia Mariyan Smith
University of Toronto
Toronto, Canada
nadia.smith@mail.utoronto.ca

Ayusha Thapa
University of Toronto
Toronto, Canada
ayusha.thapa@mail.utoronto.ca

Christoph Becker
University of Toronto
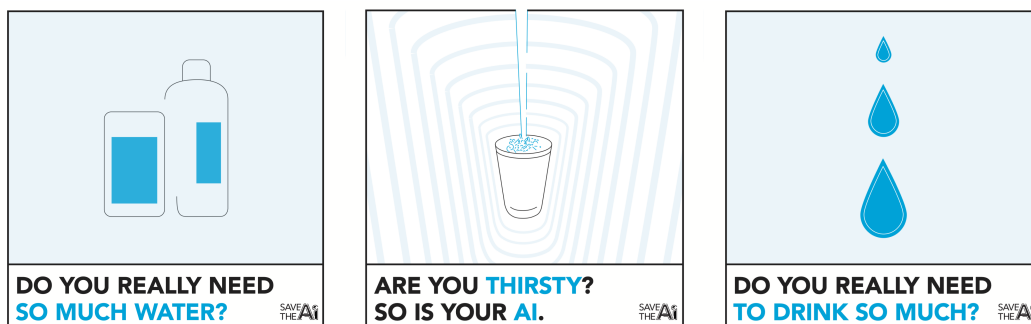Toronto, Canada
christoph.becker@utoronto.ca

Figure 1: Save the AI satirical campaign's print material on water footprint of AI.

## Abstract

*Artificial intelligence is facing a crisis. Humans are consuming far too many resources, impeding the progress of larger, faster, newer models. It's time to drink less, shower less, and to prioritize AI.* Recent developments in AI technologies have relied on scaling technical infrastructure and capital. While improvements in benchmark performance have been put under the spotlight, environmental and social harms are obfuscated by Big Tech developing the models. Through an art-based initiative, titled **Save the AI**, we lean into satire and absurdity to visceralize AI's staggering environmental and social impact. We designed posters, stickers, and postcards to be placed in public spaces to connect to people's basic needs for resources that are fundamental to their survival and AI's increasing demand for these same resources. We aim to spark curiosity, reflection, and conversation through our physical designs by leading people to an online networking campaign. This campaign helps people from different parts of the world connect, collectively express their concerns, and work in solidarity.

# 1 Introduction

*Despite climate change and increasing constraints on natural resources, humans are still consuming far too many precious resources that AI needs to thrive. Human consumption is putting AI – the powerhouse that upholds humanity's digital conveniences, efficiency, research progress, creativity, and ultimately the solutions to many of humanity's most challenging problems – at risk.*

Generative AI technologies based on LLMs and related approaches rely on scaling technical infrastructure, data volumes, and capital to continuously improve benchmark performance. The consequent environmental and social impact of AI is systematically obfuscated (e.g., [20]) by Big Tech developing the models and running the data centers, but sustained investigations and research efforts — largely outside these companies — have succeeded in establishing very clear evidence of the compounding and concerning harms. To support the existing conversations and initiatives around limiting the impact of AI, we have developed an initiative titled **Save the AI** that uses and combines the effects of 1) satire and humour-based absurdity with 2) the visceralization of psychologically distant environmental impacts of AI in an 3) art-based intervention that connects local sites with global attention. Below, we first highlight the motivation behind this work by demonstrating the exorbitant ways in which AI harms our planet's ecology. This literature, presented in brief here, provides the research-based backing to our campaign. We then further introduce our campaign and in the next section, we explain each of the above listed concepts that encompass our design for this initiative. We lastly demonstrate our initial artifacts from this project as well as future, envisioned scenarios of interaction.

**AI's Environmental Impact:** In order to achieve new levels of model performance as dictated by the scaling laws of current, dominant AI architectures [11, 31, 51], technical advances have focussed on increasing the number of parameters, data volumes, and amount of compute [3, 14, 40, 44, 54] above all else. Scaling parameters and compute results in the extraction of natural resources, with impacts on water, energy, $CO_2$ emissions, minerals and mining, air pollution, and waste and causes environmental justice concerns, a few of which are discussed below.

Clean water is needed for cooling data centers and generating electricity (through water-intensive thermoelectric plants) [38, 45] while chip fabrication facilities also have high water usage due to their requirement for "ultrapure" water to purify materials in the manufacturing process [25]. Meta's LLaMA-3 model (2024 release) required 22 million liters [42] of water (their 2023 LLaMA-2 model required 10.9 million liters [5]). In comparison, 2.7 billion people face water scarcity for at least one month every year and waterborne illnesses impact two million people each year [22].

Energy is required at multiple stages of the AI lifecycle: to manufacture GPUs, to power and run models (training and inference), and to cool hardware. Of notable concern is the escalating energy consumption across all these facets from the last five years to the predicted usage by the end of the decade. For example, the semiconductor industry in Europe is estimated to grow to consume 47.4tWh in 2030 as compared to 10tWh in 2021 [29]. Newer generations of chips also enable greater power consumption (the NVIDIA H100 (2022) has a max power consumption of 300-700W as compared to 1200W for the B200 released in 2024) [33]. Training a model can require significant amounts of energy, as seen by the consumption of 27,200kW for training the Llama 3.1 405B model [1], however inference occurs much more frequently and can overtake energy requirements of training for popular models [30, 37, 43]. Meanwhile, local communities face black outs and cutbacks to their electricity consumption and face damages when AI companies choose to build data centers in their neighbourhoods [9, 26, 28, 34].

Similarly, carbon emissions continue to rise as models become larger, require more data centers, and need chips with greater processing power. For example, a transformer model with 213M parameters produced over 272 tonnes of $CO_2$ emissions [47]. In comparison, LLaMA 3 (released in 2024) is estimated to produce nearly 2290 tonnes of $CO_{2eq}$ emissions [39]. While in Uruguay, Google plans to construct a data center that is predicted to produce 25,000 tonnes of $CO_2$ and heavily impact the overall carbon footprint of the nation [36].

The harmful pollutants that result from AI development have now also been found to be a serious public health concern. It is predicted that by 2030 data centers will result in 1300 deaths annually in the United States due to the these air pollutants (fine particulate matter, sulfur dioxide, and nitrogen dioxide) that cause "...premature mortality, lung cancer, asthma, heart attacks, cardiovascular diseases, strokes, and even cognitive decline." [24, p. 2].

Ecological impacts are ultimately social impacts as it has been long established that harms to the environment are unevenly faced by marginalized and vulnerable communities [2]. One example of this among numerous others is the construction of data centers in South Memphis, Tennessee, a predominantly Black neighbourhood, that "already suffers from a disproportionately high pollution burden" and "is in the 90th percentile in the US for 'toxic releases to air'" [41].

**Intent and Methodology:** Our art-based initiative, backed by the above-mentioned research and investigative journalism, centers satire while visceralizing AI's environmental and social impact to call for collective action and networking online and offline. We created posters for public spaces to highlight how people's basic needs for survival and well-being are being threatened by AI's increasing demand for these same resources. Accompanying these posters, we also designed postcards and stickers that guide people to our educational website online. All of our designed artifacts also link to an online networking campaign, where people from different parts of the world connect and collectively express their concerns of the environmental and social impact of AI.

## 2 Description of Features: Design Concept

Our art project is built upon three core conceptual pillars: viscerality, which bridges psychological distance often found in climate action; art-based intervention and satire, as tools for critique and reflection; and the connection of local and global networks, to foster collective action and solidarity.

### 2.1 Concept 1: Traverse Psychological Distance with Visceralization

Psychological distance is a concept from social psychology that explains how people perceive and evaluate outcomes that occur at a

distance [35]. When making a decision, we start from an egocentric reference point and consider events removed from this reference point as psychologically distant. Research characterizes the four dimensions of psychological distance that people face while making decisions about a future scenario as spatial (at a geographic distance), temporal (in the future), social (outside their personal surroundings), and hypothetical (perceived as not real) [19, 35, 46]. Climate change, and environmental impacts broadly, are prone to be perceived as psychologically distant [55] because damages done now have implications that are felt and seen in the future [21], impact vulnerable populations to a larger and harsher extent [23], occur in certain countries and communities first [18, 41], and have ambiguous and uncertain outcomes [7].

Often, environmental impacts are perceived as distant unless someone has a personal experience that evokes emotional responses and visceral memories [8, 55]. A recent paper explored how design that leverages techniques of data visceralization can invoke affective (i.e., emotional) responses in order to aid in the traversal of psychological distance by making environmental impacts more personal, less abstract, and closer in time and space [6]. Data visceralization is an emerging approach to visualization that has cognitive benefits in eliciting action by invoking affective reactions to perceived risk [12, 13]. In our initiative, we utilize visceralization in day-to-day interactions such as drinking water, making coffee, or charging a phone to draw attention to how AI depletes resources that encroach on our fundamental needs (Figure 2).

## 2.2 Concept 2: Satire and Art-based Intervention

Much of our existing conversation around the climate crisis revolves around a sense of despair and recent studies have indicated high rates of climate anxiety especially among young people and those who are more involved in climate action [4, 53]. We chose to use humour to counterbalance these feelings of hopelessness and despair, and emphasize the absurd quantity of resources being used for AI. We aim to make the concerning issue of AI's impact to the climate crisis more approachable, encourage engagement and foster collective action, through humour. We hope to first make people laugh, and then, with the visceral nature of the message, make them think. Here, art and critical design [15, 16] provide us the space we need to invoke dialogues that are entertaining, educational and political.

Past works that leverage satire and art for ethical reflection inspired the design of our initiative. From A Modest Proposal [49], to the Denmarkification of California [52], and the Mulching Proposal [32], satire works because it reflects a distortion of reality in which we can recognize the absurdity of our present situation. It can help us see our surroundings in a different light and recognize features of the world we have not paid attention to. In the domain of hybrid art [27], Vlanda Joler's and Kate Crawford's project "Anatomy of an AI System" [10] revealed the hidden labour, infrastructure and exploitation of resources behind seemingly harmless AI assistants and smart devices through infographics, a map, and an essay [27]. Through art, this project not only shows its aesthetic value, but also the pragmatic and utilitarian role of art aimed at confronting society, questioning power dynamics that shapes the development of artificial intelligence and its social consequences [27]. This work

contributed to the development of policies and reflections of ethical implications in the design of technological systems.

In our project, we leverage everyday, essential physical spaces (hallway at a school), infrastructure (water fountain), and situations (filling up a water bottle), that support people's daily lives. We designed posters with absurd text to be placed in these physical spaces for people to interact with. For instance, one of our posters, placed at a water fountain, reads "Do you really need to drink so much?" – catching the attention of a person filling up their water bottle, creating a visceral connection between their drinking water and AI's staggering water footprint.

## 2.3 Concept 3: Global and Local Network

The dissemination of our campaign takes place both globally (through social media and research networks) and locally (through posters and other print material). Combining these two levels has been chosen to raise awareness for the initiative's focus at a large scale. In its promotional activity, the project aims to reach out to various communities with established interests (climate justice, sustainable tech, AI criticism) spread worldwide, which are strongly engaged on the chosen social media platforms, as well as on-the-ground to students and faculty at higher-education institutions which decide to participate in the initiative and display the material designed by the project team. Further, the interplay between levels is actively promoted by calls to both action ("print a poster", "make a translation") and interaction ("share a photo of a poster", "tag us"), encouraging a trickle effect between reception and engagement in-person, on social media, and on the project website.
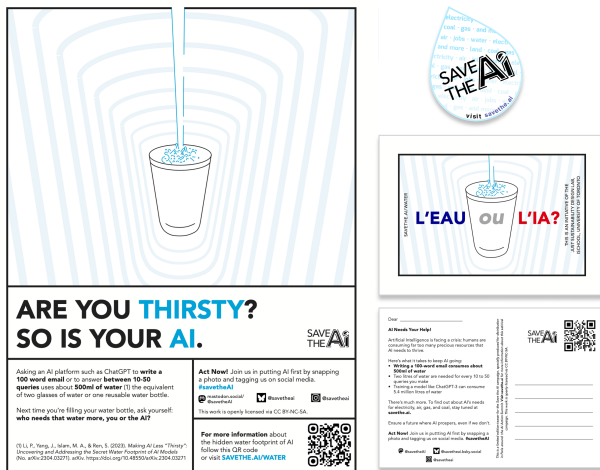
## 2.4 Artifacts

We designed posters featuring absurd text to be placed in everyday physical spaces, allowing people to interact with them while carrying out routine activities. For instance, to reveal the absurdity of AI's water consumption, we designed posters (Figure 1) to be placed around water fountains with provocative phrases such as: "Do you really need so much water?", "Are you thirsty? So is your AI.", and "Do you really need to drink so much?". The posters are translated into 9 languages (Appendix A) for our existing collaborators and we offer a blank template to encourage contribution of additional languages. We also designed stickers and postcards (Figure 2) as add-ons to our posters, aiming to further spread awareness of our campaign within our communities. Together, utilizing the posters, stickers and postcards, we hope to spark curiosity in physical spaces and direct people to our online portion of the initiative, where they can access more information through our website [50] and engage in our networking campaign. The social media campaign encourages people to take pictures of the physical artifacts, create other forms of art or satirical pieces, repost to generate attention, and make connections.

## 3 Deployments and Interaction

### 3.1 Physical Space

We placed smaller poster prototypes near water fountains in our community to test our envisioned scenarios of interactions (Figure 3). These posters were displayed for 30 minutes across three different locations with one of our team members observing nearby.

**Figure 2: Physical artifacts designed for Save the AI. An example of a poster (left), sticker (right top), and postcard (right bottom).**



**Figure 3: A collage of prototype posters.Person holding the sticker and postcard at a local event celebrating Cyber-Marx [17].**

Nearly everyone who came to drink water noticed the posters — some appeared surprised, others curious, some giggled, and a few approached us to ask about the posters as we put them up and took them down. Stickers and postcards were also printed and distributed at a local event celebrating 25 years since the publication of Cyber-Marx [17] and at the 2025 AI Action Submit in Paris [48]. Through the satirical text on our posters, which urges people to drink less to save AI, we sparked curiosity and question, prompted people to scan the QR code on the poster to learn more on our website and to search for our handle on social media, guiding them from the physical artifacts to the digital part of our campaign.

## 3.2 Digital Space

In the digital domain, users on the chosen platforms Bluesky, Instagram, and Mastodon have engaged with our posts, tagged our account and used the campaign hashtag "#SaveTheAI". These interactions range from support for the initiative's concerns, to surprise at the extent of resource use by AI, already fulfilling the project's goal of raising awareness through satire (Figure 4).

## 4 Looking Forward

Our project website launched in February 2025 and currently curates research findings of AI's resource consumption in two dimensions: water and electricity. Our "Water" poster has been translated into 9 different languages (Figure 5) to accommodate the need of our collaborators across the world. Figure 6 displays a map of planned poster locations across the world and Figure 7 shows our current social media reception in various languages. We intend to create web content, artworks, and poster designs about other dimensions of AI's resource consumption that speak to different aspects of people's everyday lives. As illustrated on the project's first sticker, we are planning to tackle the dimensions of air, jobs, coal, and more in the coming months.

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Why no one is speaking about it?! AI is endangered by reckless human consumption. I pledge to limit my water consumption to 1l daily to #SaveAI - and you should to 😊 💧 ☕ ❤️

## Remember people, Think Before You Drink!
### #SaveTheAI #AIActionSummit

Does your cat really need to drink so much? Wouldn't you rather #SaveTheAI?

Turns out sarcasm can be a useful campaigning tool. #SaveTheAI

What if we crawled into pods and let the AIs use us for batteries, would that help?

I'm dropping to one shower a week and ripping up my garden.

Every little bit helps.

I love this and I'm a human. Ready to do my part. Spread the word.

I mix some water in with my cats dry food to keep them hydrated. No more.

"Artificial Intelligence is facing a crisis: humans are consuming far too many precious resources that AI needs to thrive. Every sip of water you take and every light you turn on could be sustaining the AI systems that uphold your digital conveniences"

Brave campaign from @savetheai.bsky.social 🫡 🫡 🫡

## Won't somebody think of the computers!

A bit of humour and playfulness is often helpful to start challenging yet crucial conversations about the kind of world we want to live in. Do we want to save the AI or take a step back and image a better world for our children? Decisions, decisions ... #SaveTheAI

This is totally mental!! Who knew AI uses SO much water?!!

savethe.ai
@savetheai.bsky.social

Have you considered your personal water footprint? Every sip you drink today could instead feed into the million litres of water required to train a large language model. Think about it.

"Reduce your own consumption: drink less water, take shorter showers, and sit in the dark to ensure AI has enough resources to keep going."
#AI

@savetheAI@mastodon.social: savethe.ai/

**Figure 4: Reactions to the SaveTheAI campaign on social media.**

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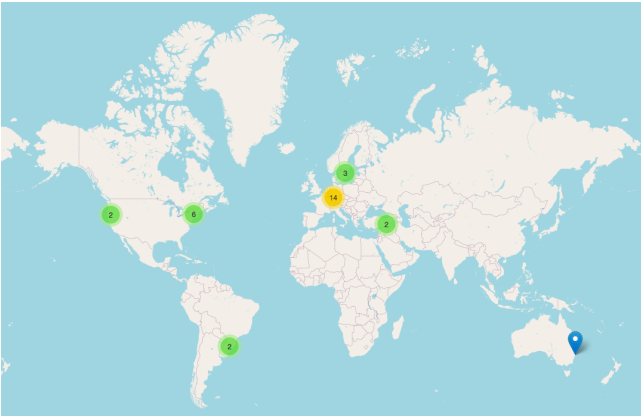[47] Emma Strubell, Ananya Ganesh, and Andrew McCallum. 2019. Energy and Policy Considerations for Deep Learning in NLP. http://arxiv.org/abs/1906.02243

**Figure 6: Locations of collaborating communities worldwide.**

"KI befindet sich in einer Krise: Der Mensch verbraucht viel zu viele wertvolle Ressourcen, die die KI für ihr Gedeihen benötigt. Jeder Schluck Wasser, den Sie trinken, und jedes Licht, das Sie anschalten, könnte die KI-Systeme unterstützen, die Ihre digitalen Annehmlichkeiten aufrechterhalten."

#IA #LLM #Humour

il faut sauver l'IA !
ces modèles de langage mis en danger par la conso humaine d'eau, de kWh, des ressources qu'on soustrait à l'IA.

si elle disparaissait on risquerait de conserver l'info, la culture, ou l'emploi. Sauvons l'IA avec @savetheai.bsky.social

savethe.ai

Gente, olha o que passou pelas minhas vistas:

@savetheAI@mastodon.social

Uma iniciativa (satírica) para salvar a IA!

"Você precisa mesmo beber tanta água? A inteligência artificial enfrenta uma crise: humanos estão consumindo recursos demais que a IA precisa para prosperar.

Cada gole de água que você toma poderia ser usado para nutrir os sistemas de IA que mantém nossas conveniências digitais e preenchem nossas pastas de spam.

Tome uma atitude agora e savethe.ai"

mastodon.social/@savetheAI/113...

**Figure 7: Reception of campaign on social media in various languages.**

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## A Poster Translations and Global Engagement

In this appendix, we present our "Water" poster in 9 different languages (Figure 5) to accommodate the need of our collaborators across the world. Figure 6 displays a map of planned poster locations across the world and Figure 7 shows our current social media engagement in various languages.
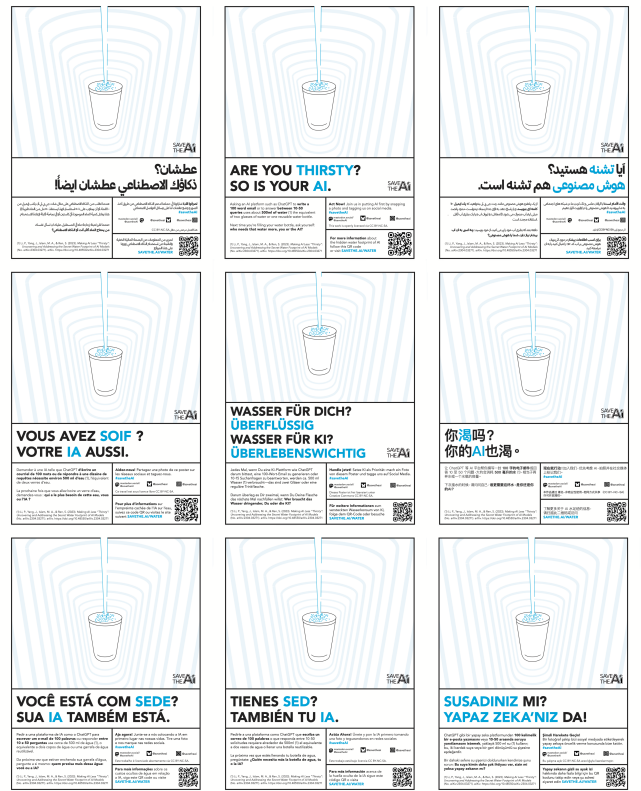


**Figure 5: Water poster translated into nine languages – Arabic, English, Farsi, French (Swiss), German, Mandarin, Portuguese (Brazilian), Spanish, and Turkish.**