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## thesis proposal<sup>1</sup>

### **objective:**

The core objective of my thesis project is to get people to *do* something positive for the environment. On a personal level, I'd also like to learn more about avenues through which to take action about environmental issues, make something I'm proud to share and also learn about activism and political involvement in the digital age.

The direction of my thesis is a result of a deep-rooted interest, not only in the environment, but in how media can be used for positive social change. I have long refused to believe my generation isn't interested in politics – rather we just don't know how to relate to the traditional methods of political communication like newspapers and news TV as we have grown up in the world of social media. Hence, I wanted to take my thesis as an opportunity to explore how I could motivate those around me to change their behaviour and enact positive change. The decision to focus on the environment comes from my own deep-rooted love of nature. I believe in preserving our planet because I've seen its natural beauty and spent time in the undisturbed wilderness. The vastness of nature never fails to astound and inspire me along countless other people. Additionally, nature, in all its majesty, has never been quite as threatened as it is right now under the United States' current political regime.

### **context:**

The context for this thesis project falls under two umbrellas: the personal context that drove me to this idea, and then the academic context and previous work that has informed my conceptualization of this project.

On a personal level, my idea for this thesis has morphed from an approach that tried to convince people to *care* about the environment through installation art and experience, as evidenced in my original thesis proposal;<sup>2</sup> to one about engaging in direct action and trying to produce a quantifiable result. I absolutely love installations and the idea of working with video, projection mapping and/or 360 degree GoPro rigs is absolutely something that I am still very intrigued by. Hence, I'm not planning on throwing these ideas completely out the window. I'm hoping that I can explore these passions in the hyper-cinemas class I am slated to take with Gabe in the spring.

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<sup>1</sup> I have structured this proposal in the same manner as the final project for IML 346 – that is broken into objective, context, methodology and outcome so as to better examine how the proposal has changed over the course of the summer

<sup>2</sup> “*To do this I plan to create a video installation. The aim of the installation is to be immersive so it can recreate the feeling of being outside as closely as possible. I plan to have four walls playing video of the same location so it feels as though one is surrounded by the outdoors. On the screens footage of different outdoor spaces will be playing. Additionally, I envision having it be a quasi-meditative space and so viewers will be encouraged to sit or lie down and just exist within the space to feel the restorative quality of nature.*” Description of the video installation I planned in my original thesis proposal

I ultimately switched tracks to focus on designing a campaign because I thought it would provide a better opportunity not only to implement more stringent outcome measures, but, because I felt it would teach me more about the process of using new media to affect action and ‘political’ change.

The broader context of this thesis is the shifting political landscape. Up until extremely recently, politics has been dominated by traditional news sources (news stations like Fox and CNN, newspapers and rallies) and traditional forms of engagement (petitions, voting, demonstrations). However, with millennials there has been a strong shift away from these traditional political ways because there is “a widespread perception that the institutions historically associated with American democracy are dysfunctional [and] public trust in core institutions is eroding.”<sup>3</sup> Instead, millennials have started to turn to new avenues like social media in order to mobilize their political voice and achieve change. In many ways “political activism has been reinvented in recent decades by a diversification in the *agencies* (the collective organizations structuring political activity), the *repertoires* (the political actions commonly used for political expression), and the *targets* (the political actors that participants seek to influence). So we are seeing politics conducted through fan organizations (new agencies), politics conducted through creating and sharing music videos (new repertoires) and politics directed against [companies like] Lowe’s, Warner Brothers, and Lionsgate (new targets) rather than elected officials.”<sup>4</sup> This change is happening incredibly rapidly and we are left trying to catch up and understand the ramifications of this changing engagement for not only our political system but our society and world.

It is amidst this changing landscape of political activism that I ask the question “how does one engage with youth and make change happen?” Doing a case study comparing campaigns by 350.org and Surfrider began to give me insight into the different styles of campaigns and their respective appeals. While 350.org has recently redone its site, emphasises social media capabilities at every turn and visually looks ready to tackle the 21<sup>st</sup> century and all its millennials, its actions remain tied to traditional political institutions - think petitions and demonstrations. In contrast, Surfrider has a much less social media heavy presence and its site retains a much lower level of professionalism when compared to 350.org. However, their focus is on real world action and small actions managed by individuals or groups independent of the national political intuitions (think local ordinances against plastics and beach clean ups). While both organizations are doing well, by the end I found myself much more strongly drawn towards the Surfrider model and organization set up.

However, that does not mean that I underestimate the importance of good graphic design and visual coherence. Merely, my point is that, that is not enough to attract millennials – painting a duck a different colour doesn’t change that it is still a duck at its core, it just looks different. The same thing goes for these sorts of campaigns and actions – it is not enough to give traditional actions a facelift, based on readings it has become clear that it requires rethinking and remodeling much of the traditional political engagement model to make it more direct – think smaller projects, less time and more immediate impact.

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<sup>3</sup> BAMN (3)

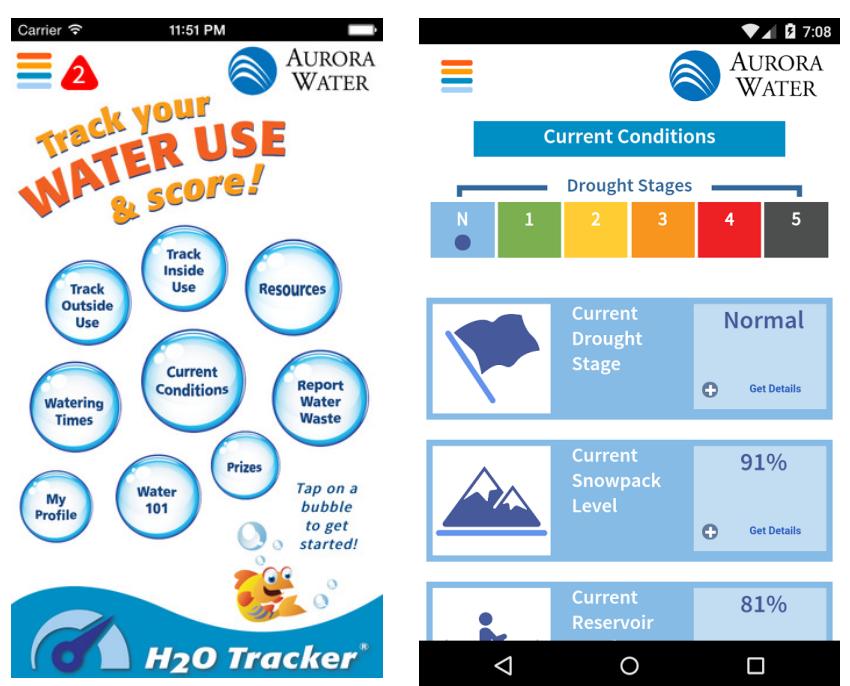
<sup>4</sup> BAMN 256

Another key part of this context is, in fact, related to graphic design. For a long while now while the rest of the online world has veered towards clean, modern and neat designs, many environmental organizations have retained a hoax-like, joking, childish kind of design. For example, much of the up and coming technology out there does not have a large focus on aesthetics. Many of the companies achieving really cool things have websites and apps that adhere to old school design practices and tradition “eco” design – none of which is sleek or modern. For examples please see the “Drip Detective” and “H2O Tracker” apps which are both apps geared towards reducing water consumption but have antiquated aesthetics that turns millennials off right away given the amount of online content they are inundated with every day.



Drip Detective App^

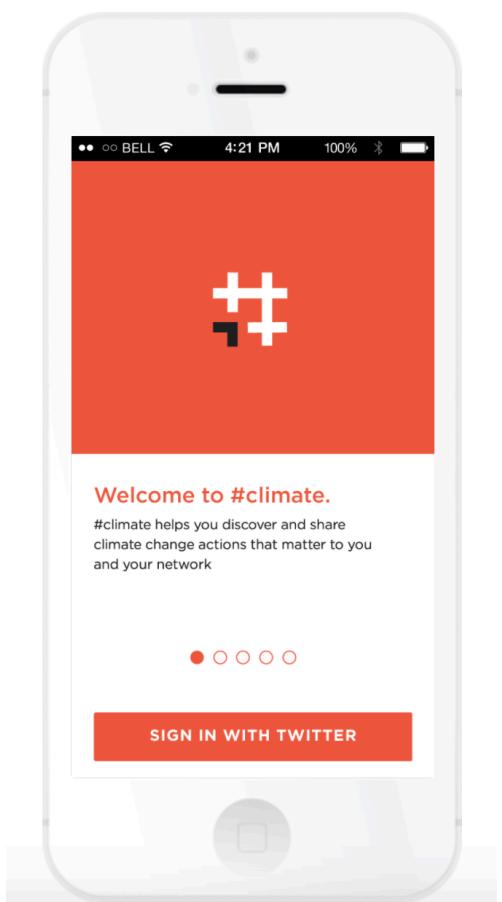
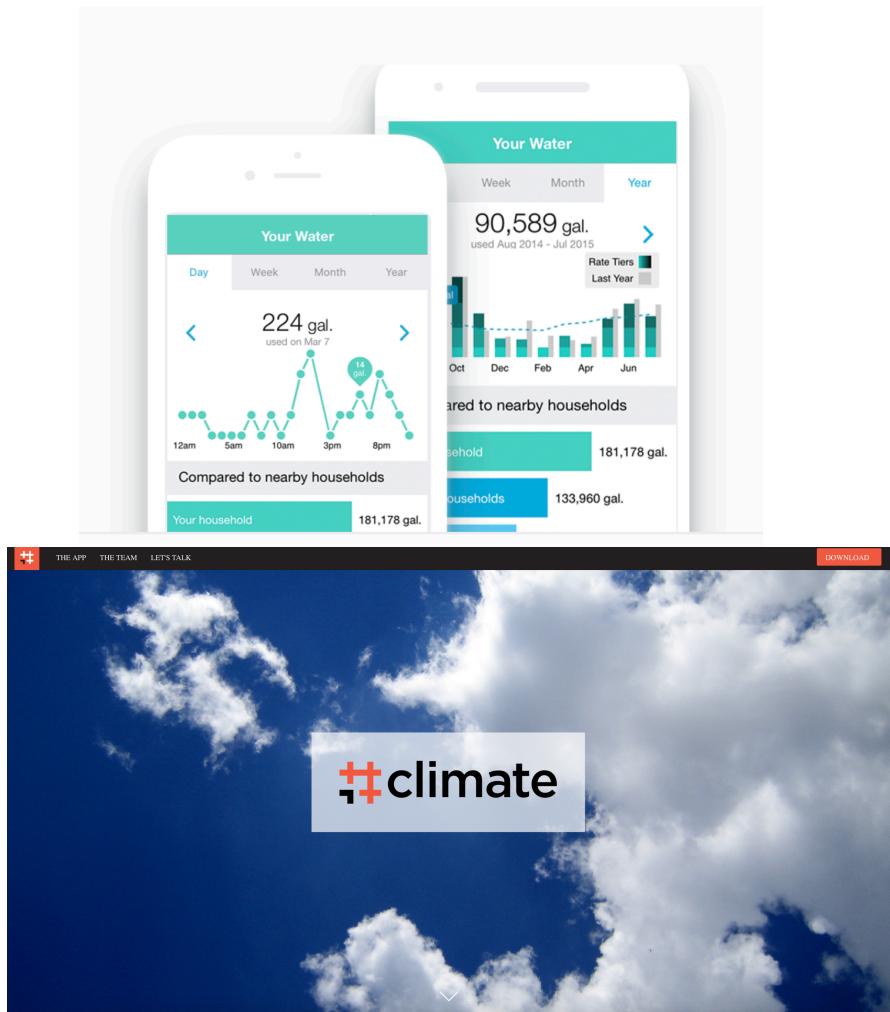
H2O Tracker App →



The issue with ignoring design is that, especially when trying to appeal to the younger generation who has grown up surrounded by different web design, aesthetics are critical. This is why I plan to emphasize the look and feel of the database as well as the installation. I plan to draw inspiration from the #climate, 350.org and Dropcountr websites as they feature clean, modern design that draw users in rather than repelling them with their janky-ness.

# Take control of your water bill

The Dropcountr app helps you make small everyday changes that add up to a lot of water and money saved, all for free.

[GET THE APP](#)

### **methodology:**

Based on reading thus far, it has become clear that people don't take action for two reasons:

1. They don't care enough/realize why a cause is important
2. It's too hard to and they don't know how

Hence, I'd like my thesis to try and address both of these parts. I see the magazine accomplishing #2 however, achieving #1 seems a bit less clear. #1 is really where my initial proposal started with the video walls and immersing oneself in nature. Ideally, I would love to still incorporate something along these lines – be it a 4 wall video projection, a compilation of nature films on a standard screen there are quite a few options however, they remain a second priority to the magazine.