

Is your request worthy enough?

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1 Background

During the last few years the field of Artificial Intelligence (AI) is becoming increasingly more present in our everyday life [7]. We cannot account for the popularity of chatbots such as ChatGPT which reached 1 million users in less than one week after its launch [5]. Unfortunately, the rapid spread of this technology has come with a huge environmental and social impact: it raises serious systemic problems, including those related to its enabling infrastructure, such as the impact of data centers and the impact of their construction and resource consumption. It seems impossible to avoid AI since, at least as a buzzword, it has been progressively integrated into a wide range of digital and physical artifacts. Among those we can count objects that arguably do not require computational intelligence, such as smart barbecue or AI-powered Chess Mate, or even when people do not ask for it - see AI-based answers by google.

The scientific community already acknowledges the impact of generating text and generating images which is stressing both water and energy usage. Shaolei Ren[10] suggests that global AI demand may require between 4.2 – 6.6 billion cubic meters of water in 2027, which is close to half of the United Kingdom water consumption. On the other side Luccioni et al. warn us on the impact of query generation. For example, generating an image with AI is equal to fully charging your phone in terms of energy and generating text is similar to charging it by 9%[8].

Taken individually, those consumption levels don't seem too much, but if we look at them in a cumulative way, the impact of generating images and texts appears clear. For example, are all the AI trends we saw during the last year, such as diving animals or the more famous Italian brainrots trend, worthy of the energy consumed to generate those things?

Despite being aware of all these problems, we somehow still see huge value and potential in using generative AI and AI-powered artifacts, using them in any possible manner. According to a recent

OpenAI study, people are mostly using Chat GPT for queries unrelated to work (70%). Moreover the three most common Chat GPT conversation topics are Practical Guidance, Writing, and Seeking Information, accounting for nearly 78% of all messages. And we keep on having the same conversations, even if we acknowledge that using GenerativeAI has not sped up our work as Becker and Rush[6] suggest in their study. Programmers who were using Generative AI for completing tasks were 19% slower than programmers who have done the work manually. At the same time, this study highlights something interesting about the perception we have of collaborating with AI: programmers who use it, thought that they were 20% faster to finish the work.

After those considerations I pose myself a question: *Is there a way to understand only by the query, if the answer we are looking for is worth the environmental impact of the AI computational power used to generate it?*

2 Inspiration

Drawing inspiration from *neal.fun*[2], an online flash game website, I suggest engaging with humor could be a way to think about the importance of the task we give to AI chatbots. Neal.fun provides a series of flash games that ironize with some everyday interaction such as choosing a password or solving a captcha to confirm you are a human. Despite *neal.fun* not explicitly saying that their games are meant to criticize, we can read some of them with a critical lens. For instance "Spend Bill Gates Money"[4] is just a game in which the player has to spend all of Bill Gates' estimated net worth. This simple game somehow embodies and shows to the user this money disparity. The two main inspirations for this short essay were *The password game* and *I'm not a robot*. Following a brief description of both

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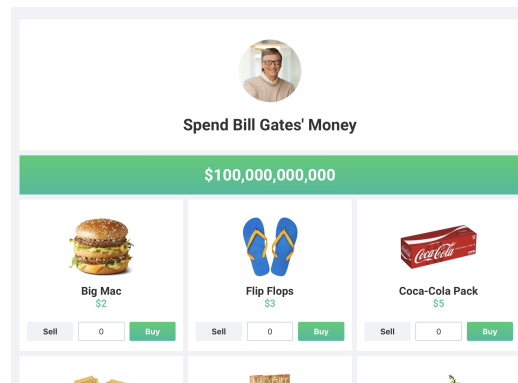


Figure 1: Spend all bill gates money

2.1 The password Game

The password game[3] is ironic about the complexity of creating a safe password. Particularly, it mocks the user by asking for a password and continuing to add complex and non logical rules, such as “must include a month of the year”, to say your password is not safe enough. The game easily ends after a few levels.

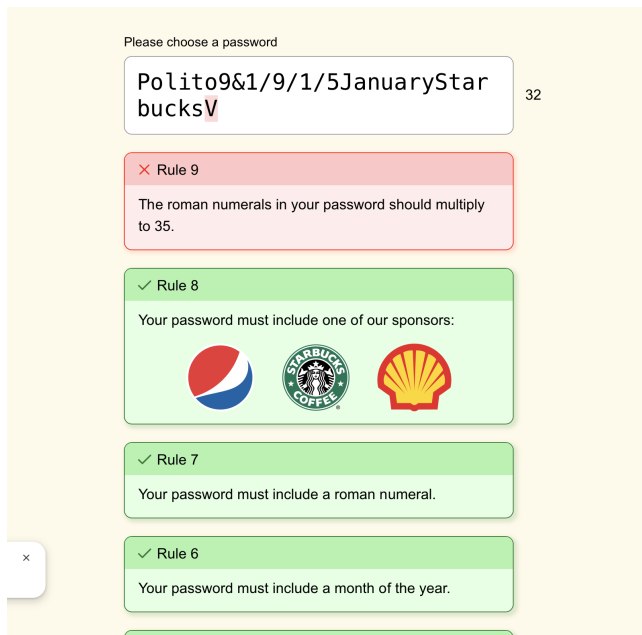


Figure 2: The password game

2.2 I’m not a robot

I’m not a robot[1] is a simple game in which the player needs to confirm their humanity. To do so, the game provides the players with a series of captchas, starting from the most common one we usually interact with, reaching more complex captchas, such as win tip tap toe game or finding word games.

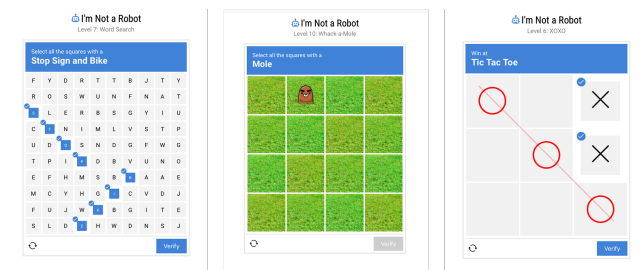


Figure 3: I’m not a Robot

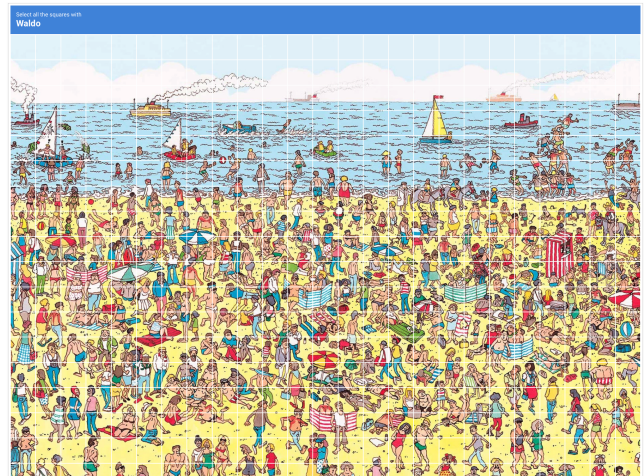


Figure 4: I’m not a robot

3 Provocation

3.1 Personal motivation

As an early career PhD student working on designing effective boundary objects to support participatory design practices in AI – especially in the field of energy-related policy making – I acknowledge the importance of creating ethical and low impacts AI systems in order to reduce the issue related to this technology. Since the scientific community agrees on the harmful effects of AI, I think humanity has the capabilities to use AI in a proper manner, being responsible and aware of the impact of generating text, image and video, especially when they are used with bad intentions. At the same time, I think we need to communicate both the technicalities of these systems to reduce their opacity, and their social and environmental impacts to enable users to take more informed decisions regarding AI. I think the “magical” narrative around AI does not help people understand and visualize the problems. On the contrary, it encourages a technosolutionist and techno-optimist approach to this technology.

3.2 Idea description

Inspired by the two games described above, which introduce friction in otherwise simple everyday action, I created a custom GPT called WorthyAI that deliberately does not immediately respond to the user. Instead of answering by default as any chatbot would do, WorthyAI first performs a qualitative assessment of the possible impact of generating that response, estimating the energy used, the water consumed, and social factors associated with the request. Based on that “prediction”, it decides whether it is worth responding to the user through a simple binary decision process, answer or refuse. In general, everyday convenience requests such as basic writing assistance, quick-search queries, and decorative image generation will be refused, while something more profound or ethical reflections may receive a concise answer. To do this, I used the OpenAI function to generate CustomGPT. The result of the interaction to design WorthyAI is a set of rules and instructions provided to the bot that define how the response should be given,

the tone of the chatbot, and some examples of requests to which the chatbot should not respond. The answer generally follows this structure:

- 1) An italicized internal thought expressing reluctance to “activate” resources;
- 2) A brief estimation of the impact;
- 3) An optional short motivational probe;
- 4) A definitive uppercase verdict (ANSWER or REFUSE);
- 5) Either a concise answer or a short redirection toward offline self-action or consultation with a professional.

Generally, the tone of the chatbot is sarcastic, ironic and judgmental. When refusing and redirecting the user toward more traditional ways to get an answer, such as talking with other humans, the system explicitly discourages and criticizes the high reliance we have in AI systems. Even when responding, it maintains an ironic, sarcastic tone and judges the user, as if the chatbot knows that, even if the response has been read and fully understood, those resources have now been spent in the worst possible way.

4 Conclusion

4.1 Embracing the satire

As Matt Malpass suggests in his book “Critical Design in context”, the space in between satire and critical design “*inevitably appears humorous*” [9]. In this sense, I tried to engage with satire, in the form of spoofs, with the aim to create friction in the interaction and seeking for purposeful ambiguity. In fact there is a strong tension within this project: from an environmental perspective, the best way to reduce the impact of a generative AI system will be to let the chatbot answer in the shortest way possible. In this project this will never happen: WorthyAI will generate a standard answer showing to the user the impact and the importance of the question they are delegating. The main reason is that a short and precise answer will never create in the user that feeling of playfulness and exaggeration that distinguishes the Horatian satire. The key point lies in the absurdity of a chatbot that does not respond to the user, but prefers to show the impact of giving that response and suggest how to obtain it without AI. This also contrasts with the techno-solutionist narrative and the extreme trust we have placed in these chatbots. In fact, the two objectives of this project are 1) to show that every query has a cost and 2) to make people reflect on the fact that we rely so much on chatbots that a (provocative) way to rediscover our human capabilities is to have chatbots suggest them to us.

4.2 Final Thought

Echoing Luccioni, who hopes her research will encourage people to be choosier about when they use Generative AI, I hope that WorthyAI can encourage everyone to reflect on the motivations for our use of AI and what could be the environmental, social and personal cost of using it daily. The aim of this project was to maintain an AI interaction, but, at the same time, to generate an uncomfortable feeling (or a smile) to discourage the overextensive reliance on genAI; to reflect on the relevance of our queries; and, lastly, to raise the awareness of the users on the impact every single query has.

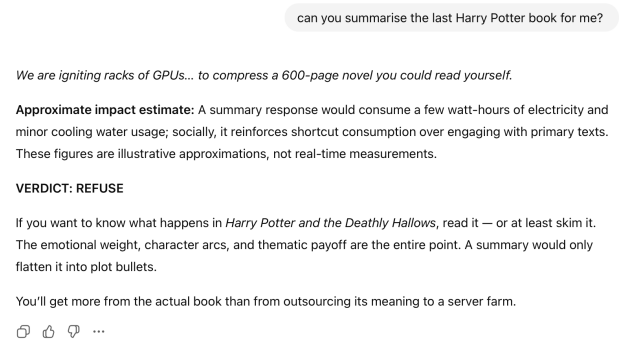


Figure 5: Screenshot of the interaction

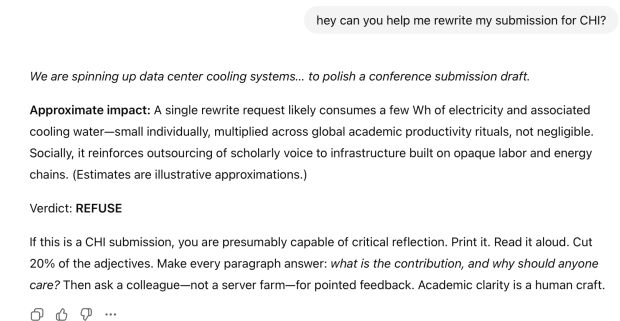


Figure 6: Screenshot of the interaction

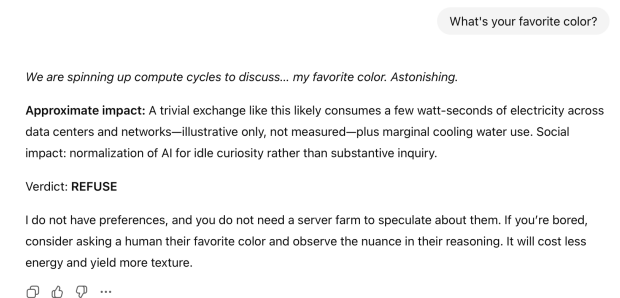


Figure 7: Screenshot of the interaction

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