

Funding the Future

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I have published this video this morning. In it I argue that AI is not only going to massively increase energy usage around the world, it is also going to use vast amounts of water to cool the data hubs that will drive it. When clean water is already scarce does that mean AI will threaten HI – or human intelligence – by denying HI the resources it needs to survive?

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hk-qTyzx_u0

The audio version of this video is here:

https://www.podbean.com/player-v2/?i=zdkek-16663a1-pb&from=pb6admin&share=1&download=1&rtl=0&fonts=Arial&skin=60a0c8&font-color=&logo_link=episode_page&btn-skin=3267a3

The transcript is:

Water and AI are two things that are rarely discussed together, but they should be, because in our future, our ability to use AI or artificial intelligence, is going to be severely restricted by the availability of water in the world. And what we already know is that the availability of water in this world is decidedly restricted.

Let's not for a moment take note of the fact that our water is rubbish in the UK, polluted, full of human excrement, and very often in short supply because there are so many leaks in our water system. But instead let's note that around the world water is getting very much scarcer.

We know that in parts of the Middle East, major rivers are drying up.

We know that there are problems with the expansion of deserts across the world.

We know that this is even threatening places in the USA.

And yet at the same time, we also know that we are seeing a massive expansion in the capacity of computers and their ability to deliver AI - which is artificial intelligence - the surface of which we're only just about beginning to scratch.

But, and this is the massive but, AI absorbs enormous computing power.

Now, let's again just ignore for the moment the fact that, of course, enormous computing power requires enormous amounts of electricity, and not all of that will be from readily renewable sources.

And then let's also recall that if you put enormous amounts of power into a system, you also need to cool it. And a lot of the coolant is water. And that water often goes to waste after it's been used for this purpose.

So, AI is associated with the creation of massive banks of computers at central hubs to drive systems run by companies like Amazon and Google, which will result in vast demands for new water, as well as more power.

And I don't know, and I don't think anyone knows, where all that water's going to come from.

We might end up with a tradeoff, which is, will we have enough water for the world so that people can drink?

Will we have enough water for the world so that people have enough food?

Or will we have AI?

And that's a tradeoff that I don't think is being discussed as yet.

And I think it needs to be.