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Green Artificial Intelligence: Reducing the Energy and Environmental Footprint of Intelligent Computing Systems

Melissa Schilling

Professor New York University

Abstract

The rapid expansion of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has created significant opportunities for scientific discovery, economic development, automation, and digital transformation. At the same time, the increasing computational requirements of large AI models have generated concerns regarding electricity consumption, carbon emissions, water use, electronic waste, and the broader environmental footprint of intelligent computing systems. Green Artificial Intelligence (Green AI) has emerged as an important research direction that seeks to improve the environmental sustainability of AI throughout its lifecycle. This study examines the concept of Green AI and evaluates technological and organisational approaches for reducing the energy and environmental footprint of AI systems. A qualitative and conceptual methodology based on secondary literature is adopted to analyse energy-efficient model architectures, efficient training, hardware optimisation, data-centre efficiency, model compression, edge AI, renewable energy integration, carbon-aware computing, and lifecycle management. The study proposes an integrated Green AI framework connecting efficient algorithms, sustainable hardware, intelligent infrastructure, renewable energy, and responsible model deployment. The analysis indicates that environmental efficiency should be considered alongside model accuracy when evaluating AI systems. Techniques such as pruning, quantisation, knowledge distillation, efficient architectures, workload scheduling, and carbon-aware computing can reduce computational requirements, while edge AI can reduce data transmission and centralised processing requirements in appropriate applications. However, efficiency improvements may be offset by increasing model scale and AI adoption, creating a potential rebound effect. The study concludes that sustainable AI requires a shift from a narrow focus on computational performance towards a broader optimisation of accuracy, energy efficiency, carbon intensity, resource utilisation, and environmental impact. Green AI should therefore become an integral principle of AI research, deployment, governance, and infrastructure planning.

Keywords: Green AI, Sustainable Artificial Intelligence, Energy Efficiency, Carbon Footprint, Green Computing, Machine Learning, Sustainable Computing, Data Centres, Edge AI, Environmental Sustainability.

1. Introduction

Artificial Intelligence has become one of the most influential technologies of the digital era.
AI systems are increasingly used in:

- Healthcare.
- Financial services.
- Manufacturing.
- Transportation.
- Education.
- Agriculture.
- Energy management.
- Public administration.
- Scientific research.
- Consumer applications.

The growth of AI has been accompanied by rapidly increasing computational requirements.
Modern AI models can require substantial computational resources during:

1. Data preparation.
2. Model training.
3. Fine-tuning.
4. Inference.
5. Storage.
6. Networking.
7. Cooling.

Consequently, the environmental sustainability of AI has become an increasingly important research concern.
The central question is no longer simply:

How accurate is the AI model?
It is increasingly:

How much environmental cost is required to achieve that level of intelligence?
This question forms the foundation of Green Artificial Intelligence.

2. Concept of Green Artificial Intelligence

Green AI refers to approaches that seek to reduce the environmental and resource requirements of AI systems while maintaining acceptable levels of performance.

Green AI considers environmental efficiency throughout the AI lifecycle.
A simplified lifecycle is:

Data Collection → Training → Deployment → Inference → Maintenance → Retirement
Environmental impacts can arise at every stage.
Green AI therefore seeks to optimise:

- Energy consumption.
- Carbon emissions.
- Computational requirements.
- Hardware utilisation.
- Water consumption.
- Data storage.
- Network traffic.
- Electronic waste.

3. Green AI versus AI for Green

An important distinction exists between Green AI and AI for Green.

Green AI

Focuses on reducing the environmental footprint of AI itself.
Examples:

- Energy-efficient algorithms.
- Efficient hardware.
- Low-carbon training.
- Model compression.

AI for Green

Uses AI to solve environmental problems.
Examples:

- Smart-grid optimisation.
- Climate modelling.
- Renewable-energy forecasting.
- Wildlife monitoring.
- Energy-demand prediction.

The two approaches are complementary.
An AI system can help optimise renewable-energy infrastructure while simultaneously consuming substantial computational resources.
Therefore, both sides of sustainability should be considered.

4. Research Objectives

This study aims to:

1. Examine the concept of Green AI.
2. Identify major sources of AI-related environmental impact.
3. Analyse techniques for improving AI energy efficiency.
4. Examine sustainable computing infrastructure.
5. Evaluate the role of renewable energy and carbon-aware computing.
6. Investigate the potential of edge AI for reducing environmental impact.
7. Develop an integrated Green AI framework.
8. Identify challenges and future research directions.

5. Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative and conceptual research methodology based on secondary academic literature.

The analysis focuses on research relating to:

- Green computing.
- Sustainable AI.
- Machine-learning efficiency.
- Data-centre sustainability.
- Energy-efficient hardware.
- Model compression.
- Edge computing.
- Carbon-aware computing.

The study integrates these areas into a conceptual framework for environmentally responsible AI development and deployment.

6. Environmental Footprint of AI

The environmental footprint of AI consists of multiple dimensions.

Energy Consumption

Electricity is required for computation, networking, storage, and cooling.

Carbon Emissions

When electricity comes from carbon-intensive sources, AI operations can generate associated greenhouse-gas emissions.

Water Consumption

Data centres may require water for cooling.

Hardware Production
AI hardware requires raw materials, manufacturing, transportation, and infrastructure.

Electronic Waste
Obsolete computing equipment contributes to e-waste.
Therefore:
AI Environmental Footprint = Energy + Carbon + Water + Hardware + Waste

7. AI Training and Energy Consumption

Training large AI models can require substantial computational resources.
Training typically involves repeated calculations across large datasets.
A simplified process is:

Dataset → Model → Computation → Parameter Update → Repetition
The number of computations can increase substantially as:

- Dataset size increases.
- Model size increases.
- Training duration increases.
- Hyperparameter experiments increase.

Therefore, efficient training is a major component of Green AI.

8. Inference and Operational Energy

Environmental considerations do not end when training is complete.
A widely deployed AI system may process millions of requests.
Therefore, inference can become a significant source of cumulative energy consumption.
For example:

One inefficient inference × Millions of requests = Significant cumulative energy demand
Green AI should therefore optimise both:

- Training efficiency.
- Inference efficiency.

9. Model Efficiency

One of the most important principles of Green AI is to avoid unnecessary computational complexity.
Researchers can consider:

Performance per unit of computation
rather than performance alone.

A smaller model that provides adequate accuracy may be preferable to a substantially larger model with only marginally better performance.
This encourages the development of efficient architectures.

10. Model Pruning

Pruning removes parameters or connections that contribute relatively little to model performance.
The basic concept is:

Large Model → Identify Redundant Parameters → Remove Them → Smaller Model

Potential benefits include:

- Lower memory requirements.
- Faster inference.
- Lower energy consumption.
- Reduced hardware requirements.

Pruning is particularly useful when a model contains substantial redundancy.

11. Quantisation

Quantisation reduces the numerical precision used by a model.
For example, a model may use lower-precision numerical representations where appropriate.
This can reduce:

- Memory consumption.
- Computational requirements.
- Inference latency.

However, excessive quantisation may reduce model accuracy.
Therefore, Green AI requires balancing:

Efficiency ↔ Accuracy

12. Knowledge Distillation

Knowledge distillation transfers useful knowledge from a larger model to a smaller model.
The general process is:

Large Teacher Model
↓
Knowledge Transfer
↓
Smaller Student Model
↓
Lower Computational Cost

This approach can create more efficient models while retaining much of the performance of larger systems.

13. Efficient Model Architectures

Researchers are developing architectures designed to achieve strong performance with lower computational requirements.

Examples include:

- Lightweight neural networks.
- Efficient convolutional architectures.
- Sparse models.
- Mixture-of-experts approaches.
- Efficient transformer architectures.

Architectural efficiency can reduce the computational cost of both training and inference.

14. Table

1. Green AI Techniques

Technique	Primary Objective	Environmental Benefit
Pruning	Remove redundant parameters	Lower computation
Quantisation	Reduce numerical precision	Lower memory and energy
Knowledge distillation	Create smaller models	Efficient inference
Efficient architectures	Reduce computation	Lower energy requirements
Early stopping	Avoid unnecessary training	Reduced training energy
Transfer learning	Reuse existing knowledge	Less training computation
Sparse computation	Compute only relevant components	Lower processing demand
Model selection	Choose efficient models	Reduced resource consumption

15. Hardware Efficiency

Software efficiency must be complemented by efficient hardware.

AI workloads can benefit from specialised processors designed for machine learning.

These include:

- GPUs.
- TPUs.
- AI accelerators.
- Neural processing units.

Hardware efficiency can be evaluated through metrics such as:

- Performance per watt.
- Energy per inference.
- Computational throughput.
- Memory efficiency.

The goal is not simply greater processing power but greater useful computation per unit of energy.

16. Data-Centre Efficiency

Data centres are central to modern AI infrastructure.
Their environmental impact depends on:

- Computing equipment.
- Cooling systems.
- Power distribution.
- Networking.
- Storage.
- Facility design.

Improving data-centre efficiency can therefore substantially reduce the environmental footprint of AI services.

17. Cooling Efficiency

Computing equipment generates heat.
Data centres must remove this heat to maintain safe operating temperatures.
Traditional cooling systems can consume significant energy.
Alternative approaches include:

- Advanced airflow management.
- Liquid cooling.
- Free cooling where climate conditions permit.
- AI-based cooling optimisation.

AI itself can potentially be used to optimise cooling systems.
This illustrates the distinction between:

Green AI
and
AI for Green.

18. Renewable Energy

The environmental impact of AI depends partly on the electricity source used to power computational infrastructure.
AI workloads powered by low-carbon electricity can have lower associated operational emissions than workloads powered by carbon-intensive electricity.

Potential strategies include:

- Solar power.
- Wind power.
- Hydroelectricity.
- Renewable-energy procurement.
- On-site generation.
- Energy storage.

19. Carbon-Aware Computing

AI workloads do not necessarily need to be executed at exactly the same time or location.
Carbon-aware computing attempts to schedule computational workloads when and where electricity has a lower carbon intensity.
For example:

High Renewable Availability → AI Workload Scheduling

This can reduce emissions without necessarily reducing computational output.
However, carbon-aware scheduling must also consider:

- Latency.
- Data location.
- Service availability.
- Grid conditions.
- User requirements.

20. Edge AI

Edge AI processes data closer to where it is generated.
Instead of:

Device → Cloud → Processing → Device

the system may use:

Device → Local AI Processing → Local Decision

This can reduce some network traffic and centralised processing requirements.
Edge AI can be useful for:

- Smart sensors.
- Industrial systems.
- Autonomous devices.
- Healthcare monitoring.
- Smart cities.

However, edge devices themselves consume energy, so the overall lifecycle must be evaluated.

21. Sustainable Data Management

Large datasets require:

- Storage.
- Backup.
- Transmission.
- Processing.

Data management strategies can reduce unnecessary resource consumption.

These include:

- Removing redundant data.
- Efficient storage formats.
- Data lifecycle management.
- Selective data retention.
- Efficient data pipelines.

The principle is:

Collect and process only the data necessary for the intended purpose.

22. Green AI in Cloud Computing

Cloud infrastructure allows organisations to share computing resources.

This can improve utilisation compared with poorly utilised dedicated infrastructure.

Cloud providers can potentially optimise:

- Server utilisation.
- Workload allocation.
- Cooling.
- Power management.
- Renewable-energy integration.

However, cloud computing does not automatically mean environmentally sustainable computing.

Actual environmental performance depends on infrastructure, workload, electricity sources, and utilisation.

23. Lifecycle Assessment

Green AI should consider the complete lifecycle of AI systems.

Stage 1: Hardware Production

Raw materials and manufacturing.

Stage 2: Data Preparation

Storage and processing.

Stage 3: Training
Computational energy.

Stage 4: Deployment
Infrastructure and networking.

Stage 5: Inference
Ongoing operational energy.

Stage 6: Maintenance
Updates and retraining.

Stage 7: Retirement
Hardware reuse, recycling, and disposal.
This prevents organisations from focusing only on training energy while ignoring other environmental impacts.

24. Table

2. AI Lifecycle and Environmental Impact

Lifecycle Stage	Major Resource Requirement	Potential Green AI Strategy
Hardware production	Materials and energy	Longer hardware lifespan
Data preparation	Storage and processing	Efficient data pipelines
Training	High computation	Efficient algorithms
Deployment	Infrastructure	Efficient hardware
Inference	Continuous computation	Model compression
Maintenance	Retraining	Incremental learning
Retirement	Electronic waste	Recycling and reuse

25. Energy Efficiency as a Performance Metric

Traditional AI research often emphasises:
- Accuracy.
- Precision.
- Recall.
- F1-score.

Green AI introduces additional dimensions:
- Energy per training run.

- Energy per inference.
- Carbon emissions.
- Training time.
- Hardware utilisation.

A broader evaluation model is:

AI Performance = Accuracy + Efficiency + Environmental Impact

Researchers should report environmental metrics alongside conventional model-performance metrics.

26. Rebound Effect

Efficiency improvements do not automatically guarantee lower total environmental impact.
Suppose an AI model becomes 50% more energy efficient.
If organisations then deploy it at several times the original scale, total energy consumption may still increase.
This is known as a potential rebound effect.
Therefore:

Efficiency Improvement ≠ Automatically Lower Total Impact

Sustainability requires considering both efficiency and scale.

27. Green AI and Sustainable Business

Organisations can integrate Green AI into corporate sustainability strategies.
Potential benefits include:

- Lower energy costs.
- Reduced carbon emissions.
- Improved resource efficiency.
- Reduced infrastructure requirements.
- Stronger environmental performance.

Green AI can therefore contribute to both environmental and economic objectives.

28. Green AI Governance

Organisations should establish policies requiring environmental considerations throughout AI development.
Governance frameworks can require teams to document:

- Model size.
- Training resources.
- Energy consumption.
- Hardware utilisation.
- Carbon footprint.

- Deployment requirements.

This can create greater accountability.

29. Green AI and Responsible Innovation

Green AI should be considered alongside other responsible-AI principles.
A responsible AI system should aim to be:

- Accurate.
- Fair.
- Transparent.
- Secure.
- Privacy-preserving.
- Energy efficient.
- Environmentally responsible.

This creates a broader concept of sustainable and responsible AI.

30. Proposed Green AI Framework

The study proposes the following integrated framework:

Efficient Data
↓
Efficient Algorithms
↓
Efficient Hardware
↓
Energy-Efficient Infrastructure
↓
Renewable / Low-Carbon Energy
↓
Carbon-Aware Scheduling
↓
Efficient Deployment
↓
Lifecycle Monitoring
↓
Continuous Optimisation

This framework connects technical efficiency with organisational sustainability.

31. Data Analysis

The conceptual analysis identifies five major pathways through which Green AI can reduce environmental impact.

31.1 Computational Efficiency

Reducing the number of computations required.

31.2 Hardware Efficiency

Increasing useful computation per unit of energy.

31.3 Infrastructure Efficiency

Improving data-centre utilisation and cooling.

31.4 Energy Optimisation

Using low-carbon electricity and carbon-aware scheduling.

31.5 Lifecycle Optimisation

Reducing environmental impact across hardware and software lifecycles.
Together:
Efficient Algorithms + Efficient Hardware + Efficient Infrastructure + Clean Energy + Lifecycle Management
↓
Lower AI Environmental Footprint

32. Challenges

32.1 Lack of Standardised Metrics

Different studies may measure energy and emissions differently.

32.2 Rapid Hardware Evolution

Frequent hardware replacement can create additional environmental costs.

32.3 Increasing Model Size

Efficiency improvements may be offset by increasingly large AI models.

32.4 Data-Centre Expansion

Growing AI demand can increase overall infrastructure requirements.

32.5 Measurement Complexity

Accurately estimating total environmental impact can be difficult.

32.6 Accuracy–Efficiency Trade-Off

Highly efficient models may sometimes provide lower predictive performance.

32.7 Rebound Effects

Lower computational costs can encourage substantially greater AI usage.

33. Recommendations

Organisations and researchers should:

1. Report energy consumption alongside model accuracy.
2. Measure environmental impact throughout the AI lifecycle.
3. Prefer efficient models where performance requirements permit.
4. Use pruning, quantisation, and distillation where appropriate.
5. Extend the useful life of AI hardware.
6. Improve data-centre energy efficiency.
7. Increase the use of renewable electricity.
8. Implement carbon-aware workload scheduling.
9. Reduce unnecessary data storage and processing.
10. Establish organisational Green AI policies.
11. Include environmental criteria in AI procurement.
12. Evaluate the rebound effects of large-scale AI deployment.

34. Questionnaire

5-Point Likert Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree

No.	Statement
1	AI systems should be evaluated according to both accuracy and energy efficiency.
2	Large AI models can create significant environmental challenges.
3	Model compression can contribute to sustainable AI development.
4	Data centres should increase their use of renewable energy.
5	Carbon-aware computing can reduce the environmental impact of AI.
6	Organisations should measure the carbon footprint of AI systems.
7	Energy efficiency should be considered during AI model selection.
8	Edge AI can reduce some data-transfer and centralised processing requirements.
9	Green AI should become part of responsible AI governance.
10	Environmental sustainability should be considered throughout the AI lifecycle.

35. Future Research Directions

Future research should develop standardised metrics for comparing the environmental performance of AI systems.

Important research areas include:

- Energy-efficient generative AI.
- Sustainable large language models.
- Carbon-aware AI training.
- Renewable-powered AI infrastructure.
- Green edge AI.
- Sustainable AI hardware.
- AI lifecycle assessment.
- AI and water consumption.
- Electronic waste associated with AI hardware.
- Sustainable data-centre design.

Research should also investigate how to establish a common metric that combines model performance with energy and environmental costs.

36. Conclusion

The rapid development of Artificial Intelligence has created significant technological and economic opportunities, but it has also introduced important environmental challenges.

Green AI provides a framework for addressing these challenges by focusing on the environmental efficiency of intelligent computing systems.

Energy consumption can be reduced through:

- Efficient model architectures.
- Pruning.
- Quantisation.
- Knowledge distillation.
- Efficient hardware.
- Edge processing.
- Better data management.

Environmental impact can also be reduced through:

- Renewable energy.
- Carbon-aware workload scheduling.
- Efficient data centres.
- Sustainable hardware management.
- Lifecycle assessment.

However, Green AI should not be reduced to simply making individual models more efficient.

The broader challenge is to ensure that efficiency gains are not overwhelmed by continuous increases in AI scale and deployment.

The future of sustainable AI therefore requires a shift from:

"Build the largest and most capable model possible"
towards:

"Achieve the required intelligence with the minimum necessary environmental cost."
Green AI should consequently become a fundamental consideration in AI research, procurement, infrastructure planning, deployment, and governance.
Ultimately, sustainable intelligent computing requires the simultaneous optimisation of performance, energy, carbon, resources, and long-term environmental impact.

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