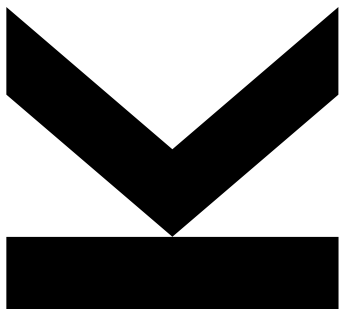


HOW TO EXPLAIN AI



Impact & Engagement Case for the Participatory and Collaborative Development of an Artistic Intervention to promote AI Literacy

How to explain AI: Impact & Engagement Case for the Participatory and Collaborative Development of an Artistic Intervention to promote AI Literacy

Impact & Engagement Study of the LIT Robopsychology Lab

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1. OVERVIEW

1.1. TITLE OF IMPACT AND ENGAGEMENT STUDY

How to explain AI: Impact & Engagement Case for the Participatory and Collaborative Development of an Artistic Intervention to promote AI Literacy

1.2. NAME OF THE RESEARCH INSTITUTE

LIT Robopsychology Lab, Johannes Kepler University (JKU) Linz, Austria

1.3. RESEARCH TEAM MEMBERS

DI (FH) Kathrin Meyer, MSc,
Dr. phil. Benedikt Leichtmann, BSc MSc (until March 2023),
Mag. Thomas Meneweger (until April 2024),
Lara Bauer, BSc MSc,
Katharina Payreder, BSc,
Univ.-Prof.in Mag.^a Dr.ⁱⁿ Martina Mara

1.4. TIME FRAME

Duration: 07/2022 – 12/2023, Integration phase: 01/2024 – 06/2024

1.5. ABSTRACT FOR THE GENERAL COMMUNITY

Artificial Intelligence (AI) affects us all. The more far-reaching and promising AI technologies become, the more important it is for people to gain a basic understanding of AI in order to benefit from technological advances. However, studies show a lack of so-called AI literacy among the general population, which can induce uncertainties and reduce motivation to engage with the topic. The project “How to explain AI” (2022-2024) explored informative, innovative and creative methods of knowledge transfer by involving citizen scientists, artists and AI experts as co-researchers in a series of participatory workshops. In addition, several interactive events and performances were carried out to facilitate conversation on the topic of AI, encourage people to reflect, share ideas and insights and alleviate uncertainties by gaining a basic level of AI literacy. Impact was observed on several levels: The co-researchers themselves reported increased interest in issues related to AI through their participation in and subsequent connection to the project. Second, the local population was impacted via the AI song and several interventions in the public space, which offered the opportunity to directly engage with the topic of AI. Additionally, based on the success of this project, funding for a follow-up project for more songs about AI was obtained.

1.6. KEYWORDS

AI Literacy, Artificial Intelligence, participation, co-creation, art and science, performance, music, participatory science communication, participatory research, collaboration

1.7. SCIENTIFIC DISCIPLINE

Code Statistics Austria: 501002 Applied Psychology, 102013 Human-Computer Interaction, 102001 Artificial Intelligence, 508016 Science Communication

1.8. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS RELATIVE TO THE IMPACT (UNITED NATIONS)

Goal 4: Quality Education

1.9. USERS AND BENEFICIARIES

general public, co-researchers, AI experts and developers, scientific community

1.10. FUNDERS

This project was funded by the Ludwig Boltzmann Society, Open Innovation in Science Center, within the OIS Impact Lab program “The future we want!” (<https://ois.lbg.ac.at/projects/the-future-we-want>).

2. IMPACT AND ENGAGEMENT STUDY

2.1. VISION & MISSION – ENVISIONING IMPACT

Artificial Intelligence has become a staple in news coverage and everyday life. However, studies show steep variations in the degree of understanding and awareness on AI (Stürz, Stumpf, & Mendel, 2020). News coverage on AI, which tends to present it as either rather utopian or dystopian (Cools, Van Grop, & Opgenhaffen, 2022), or as a topic that mainly concerns the industrial sector rather than regular citizens (Brennen, Howard, & Nielsen, 2018), may play a role in reducing motivation to engage with the issue on one's own and even stoking fears related to AI-technologies or technological advances as a whole. As a consequence, members of the general public often do not possess the level of AI literacy needed to realistically assess risks and opportunities of AI, making it difficult for them to benefit from new technological developments and achieve a sufficient level of AI-related self-efficacy (Long & Magerko, 2020).

Self-efficacy broadly refers to whether an individual considers themselves capable of performing tasks and overcoming possible challenges (Bandura, 1982) – self-efficacy with regard to the topic of AI concerns the assessment of one's own abilities to identify and use AI-systems effectively. AI literacy, on the other hand, is defined as “a set of competencies that enables individuals to critically evaluate AI technologies; communicate and collaborate effectively with AI; and use AI as a tool online, at home, and in the workplace” according to the commonly accepted definition by Long and Magerko (2020). Both, a basic level of AI literacy and self-efficacy is crucial to enable meaningful and independent reflection on the array of AI-related information available, which in turn requires a basic understanding of AI.

To foster the necessary basic understanding of AI, stimulate interest in the topic and encourage reflection, we utilized several creative approaches, starting with the identification of citizens' key questions and uncertainties about AI in a series of participatory workshops. By involving a diverse group of co-researchers through these workshops, we managed to capture perspectives and opinions of the general public and facilitate better understanding of the challenges individuals face in acquiring AI literacy. In addition, we developed and implemented an educational intervention that provides well-founded answers in a creative and easily accessible form of knowledge transfer.

2.2. STRUCTURE – ORGANIZING IMPACT – Research Team

Since 2018, the Robopsychology Lab at the Linz Institute of Technology has conducted research on current psychological questions of AI and robotics, on fears of new technology and on determinants of technology acceptance. Under the direction of Prof. Martina Mara, the lab combines methods and expertise on psychological core subjects such as human experience, perception and behavior with current issues pertaining to AI and robotics, placing special focus on how the needs of different groups of people can be taken into account when it comes to technology development. The participatory project “How to explain AI” aimed to contribute to a better public understanding of AI and was led by Prof. Martina Mara. Kathrin Meyer took on the organizational project management. Together with Thomas Meneweger, she also coordinated the workshops and participatory processes. Past team member Benedikt Leichtmann played a key role in the lead-up and development phase of the project. Lara Bauer supported the participatory processes, study and data preparation and conducted the study alongside Katharina Payreder.

We first focused on which key questions citizens ask about AI in relation to their daily lives, before concentrating on how the answers to these questions should be presented so that as many people as possible can relate to them. In order to develop an informative, innovative method of explaining AI and to ensure that a wide range of perspectives and viewpoints on AI would be represented, in addition to the Robopsychology Lab team co-researchers from different sectors of the general public were involved.

As the main representatives of the general public, ten citizen scientists provided insight into the way AI affects their daily lives and the questions and uncertainties that may arise as a result. Seven artists from various disciplines (e.g., AI artist, cultural workers, filmmaker and multimedia artists, artistic researchers) explored new creative approaches in knowledge transfer and offered their perspective on creating a far-reaching, engaging educational intervention. Four individuals working in professional capacity with AI and thus considered experts on the topic shared their technical expertise, offered their perspective as developers and consumers of AI systems and helped alleviate uncertainties by answering the citizen scientists' key questions. The co-researchers were recruited through multiple avenues – for example, announcements were posted on social media sites, and a variety of district centers and cultural or leisure associations in Linz were contacted – in order to reach and involve a diverse group of people in the project. In the pre-phase, we conducted preliminary discussions and online interviews with interested participants to find out their reasons and motivations for taking part in the project. In addition, all participants completed a pre-survey, which captured their initial expectations, hopes and motivations for the project.

2.3. ENGAGEMENT & PROJECT ACTIVITIES – ENABLING IMPACT

Methods

The citizen scientists, artists and experts each had three individual, staggered workshops in which they worked on their respective topics but stayed in a constant feedback loop with the other groups. Following this initial step, members of all three groups joined together to develop the idea for the educational intervention – a song about AI.



Overview of the project phases and the involvement of the co-researchers

The song “A Liadl, ans üwa KI” (English: “A song all about AI”) was then written by “Blonder Engel”, an Upper-Austrian singer-songwriter known for his humorously yet informatively worded lyrics on different topics. Co-researchers were invited to listen to the song during the creation phase and offer feedback (e.g., on the contents covered by the lyrics) to the artist himself. Description and impressions of the

participatory process can be found on the project website: <https://www.jku.at/en/lit-robopsychology-lab/research/projects/how-to-explain-ai/the-participatory-process>

Research team members of the LIT Robopsychology additionally conducted an in-process evaluation on the participatory process throughout the project as well as following the creation of the intervention. We primarily utilized the OIS Impact Model and the OIS Impact Reflection Instruments by the Open Innovation in Science Center of the Ludwig Boltzmann Gesellschaft (see REFERENCES) to first identify the key impact elements, and then find methods of assessing the fulfilment of said criteria throughout the project. Additionally, the process was led by a Theory of Change, which helped uncover the goals, stakeholders, changes, potential problems and solutions and allowed the documentation of different inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes and the impact before, throughout and after the project. Support for the participatory workshops and impact evaluation was provided by members of the Ludwig Boltzmann Gesellschaft and coordinators for Open Innovation in Science, Mathieu Mahve-Beydokhti, BSc MA; and Mag. (FH) Patricia Stark, MBA.

Types of Engagement

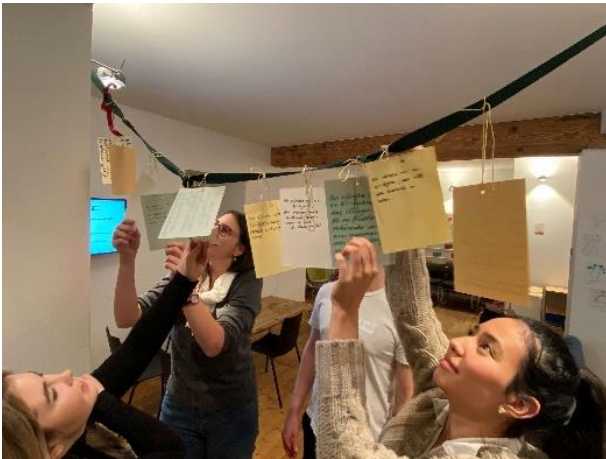
The types of engagement created by this project were twofold. Firstly, engagement with and of the co-researchers was vital during the development phase of the creative intervention. Secondly, we aimed to reach a wider audience after completion of the song.

Multiple activities were implemented throughout the workshops to tie the topic of AI to the co-researchers' personal lives (e.g., letting them create a "wish-list" to AI, asking them to observe in between sessions where AI might be relevant in their own daily lives) and help them work together as a team.



The co-researchers clustering questions and developing a creative intervention
(photography: LIT Robopsychology Lab)

Although the song itself was written by an external singer-songwriter and the co-researchers were therefore not directly involved in the process, we organized a joint "review" of co-researchers and the singer-songwriter to discuss content of the song and ensure that it was in line with the results of the workshop phase.



Impressions from the participatory workshops and song review
(photography: LIT Robopsychology Lab)

The release of the song was combined with a public event informing about the project and the participatory process. Representatives of all groups of co-researchers were involved in the discussion panel at this evening. <https://www.jku.at/en/lit-robopsychology-lab/news-events/detail/news/liadl-abend/>

The official music video and all other material to the song can be found under references:
<https://www.jku.at/ki-liadl> (see overview in chapter 3.2. OUTPUTS)

After the development phase of the song had concluded and a music video accompanying the song was released, it became clear that for all its considerable advantages (e.g., reusability, easy distribution), a song alone is not an intervention and cannot guarantee measurable impact. Thus, we created a physical and interactive “embodiment” – an exhibition booth containing multiple activities to actively and directly engage and reflect on the subject of AI. For example, visitors could read information on both AI as well as the participatory project itself, listen to the song and watch the music video and record their opinions either verbally (through colorful buzzers) or in written format.



Visitors interacting with members of the LIT Robopsychology Lab and the exhibition booth
(photography: Nina Danninger Photography)

For the purposes of both “uptake” as well as “visibility”, we presented the booth at various locations, such as the Natural History Museum Vienna (<https://www.jku.at/en/lit-robopsychology-lab/research/projects/how-to-explain-ai/european-citizen-science-konferenz/>) as well as an event on the main square in Linz, where a group of singers and members of the Robopsychology lab performed the song for the public. Visitors were invited to listen to the song and share their impressions about AI – for example, by recording their opinions as audio messages, writing answers to questions (e.g., “In what area are you better than AI?”) and clipping them to the booth or filling out a questionnaire on AI literacy and possible fears related to AI. Additionally, the booth remained in a pop-up store on main square for two weeks, with members of the research team present each day to answer questions and engage with the visitors. (<https://www.jku.at/lit-robopsychology-lab/forschung/projekte/how-to-explain-ai/hauptplatz/>)

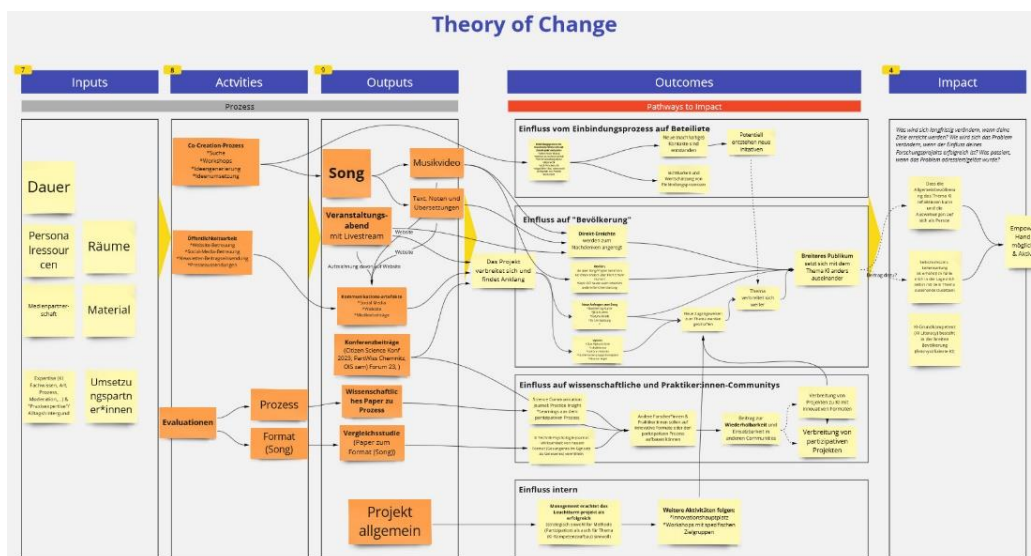


Singer-songwriter Blonder Engel performing the song “A Liadl, ans üwa KI” at the main square in Linz
(photography: Nina Danninger Photography)

We undertook these efforts in order to reach a wider demographic than is usually represented in academia (for example people who might not be well-versed in scientific reporting or even harbor fears related to technological advances) and bring the topic of AI “to the people” – not through a newspaper or report on TV but in a tangible, accessible way right in the midst of their everyday life.

2.4. PATHWAYS TO IMPACT – ACHIEVING IMPACT

We applied the Theory of Change and various impact tools from the Ludwig Boltzmann Gesellschaft in order to reflect on the participatory process throughout the course of the project. Through vision building and reflection during the Theory of Change Process, we were able to determine that the impact unfolded on different levels. We built on the Logic Model Template provided by the LBG Open Innovation in Science Center (see REFERENCES).



Excerpt from the Theory of Change process

Firstly, the co-researchers were impacted through the participatory process, especially with respect to the aforementioned elements of change. We placed particular emphasize on the impact elements “eye level”, “continuous involvement” and “shared vision” of the OIS Impact Model. Involving the co-researchers “as equals and enabling participation, co-design, and balance of interests among all participants” is described as a key tenet of “eye level” in the OIS Impact Model. In order to fulfill this criterion, we ensured a constant feedback loop between the groups and implemented participation checks after each workshop. Participation checks, included as part of the OIS Reflection Instruments by the Open Innovation in Science Center of the Ludwig Boltzmann Gesellschaft, are short questionnaires to be used at the end of workshops, events or other activities and help to determine the participants’ current state of minds, their opinions and possible grievances regarding the project.

In terms of the element “shared vision”, we further conducted qualitative interviews with co-researchers at multiple stages to record their expectations and wishes for the project as well as their satisfaction with the results and the participatory process as a whole. In terms of Continuous Involvement, Eye Level and Meaning, they reported feeling connected to the project and the other co-researchers, both in personal interactions with the researchers following the workshops as well as during the qualitative interview.

“I think it's just really well organized, and the meeting zone with the people is just great, so that you think of each other as a team.” (Example quote from the qualitative interview – translated from German)

The co-researchers further offered feedback and took part in activities and events, some even attended a conference together with members of the LIT Robopsychology Lab. For example, Verena Pietsch (former Stanzl), representing the AI experts, took part in the discussion round "How can we build knowledge together?" at the OIS zam Forum of the Ludwig Boltzmann Gesellschaft and shared her experiences with the participatory process. A link to the event including picture impressions from the discussion round are included in the references (LIT Robopsychology Lab, 2023).



Figure 1 LIT Robopsychology Lab member Kathrin Meyer and co-researcher (AI expert) Verena Pietsch during the discussion round at the OIS Zam Forum (photography: Nina Danninger Photography)

Furthermore, even those who had dropped out at the end of the first project phase remained interested in the outcome and responded favorably to emails containing updates, showcasing that the shared vision was conveyed even beyond the project boundaries.

Secondly, we aimed to impact the local population by offering various ways to engage with the topic of AI. Around 400 people were reached directly via on-site activities such as the exhibition booth or a livestreamed event and discussion evening, while others were reached by publication and promotion of the song and music video through radio, news reports, newsletter submissions and social media support. For example, the accompanying music video has amassed more than 4000 views on YouTube as of the date of this report. The discussion event was attended by around 80 people and watched by an additional 443 viewers on a livestream published on the official YouTube page of the Johannes Kepler University (JKU, 2023). On Spotify, the song reached more than 2000 listeners. Links to a recording of the livestream, the official music video and the song on Spotify are included in the reference list.

Media did not always report in a way that was consistent with our impact goal of demystifying AI. In particular, there were some ambiguities in the choice of images accompanying the articles – some outlets used images such as human-like robots, which are common in the portrayal of AI, but are not a good example of it. However, we can also report positive experiences. For example, a discussion about the widespread depictions of AI with a journalist who conducted an interview with researcher Kathrin Meyer led to the original, very human-like depiction in the accompanying illustrations being replaced with a more appropriate one (April 2023).

“I have to smile at practically every story about ChatGPT at the moment - it almost always features a humanoid robot. Our conversation was a really important learning experience for me. We have now changed the picture in the story.” (example quote from an exchange via E-mail with a journalist)

The example shows that such discussions can be thought-provoking and create impact at a personal level, which can lead to more nuanced, less misleading and more demystified coverage of AI, at least for individual stories.



Collage of various news reports and social media coverage on the project and song

We held around ten lectures in which the project and the participatory process were presented to both university and non-university audiences. In addition, we organized around five workshops in schools and hobby clubs to offer participants the opportunity for a more interactive discussion. The opportunity to ask questions in a more informal environment had an impact on people's self-efficacy, which became clear in conversations with visitors. For example, several participants reported that they had not previously thought about the topic of AI, but were now encouraged to reflect on it. In this way, we were able to both raise awareness and engage with people to discuss their thoughts on AI and its impact on society, and even address some of the concerns associated with the technological process. An exemplary situation took place at our event at the Natural History Museum Vienna, when two older children/young teenagers visited the booth and engaged in a long discussion about what exactly AI is, what it can do and how it will develop in the future.

A preliminary analysis of data gathered during the presentation of the exhibition booth (around 170 participants, full results are planned to be published on a later date) additionally revealed that people who had listened to the song in part or in full reported less fears related to AI than those who had not.

Thirdly, other researchers and practitioners should be able to build on the results of our project by developing their own innovative formats or adapting the participatory process. In the hope of possibly motivating other researchers to tackle AI literacy in a more out-reaching, participatory process, we aim for the publication of scientific studies – both on the impact of a creative intervention on aspects such as self-efficacy, but also as a practice report of the participatory process itself. We presented insights into the project at scientific conferences such as the Austrian Citizen Science Conference (a list of our publications and conference contributions to the project can be found in the references).

Finally, there was an internal impact on the Robopsychology Lab itself. We gained significant experience in terms of participatory work with a diverse group of people. Additionally, we gathered knowledge about different methods to facilitate self-efficacy and personal competence with respect to topics such as AI for individuals who might harbor anxieties or fears related to technology. We reflected on the process and our personal thoughts, ideas and possible difficulties during several internal meetings as well as by filling in a diary (based on the LBG impact tools) at each stage of the project.

However, the impact of a participatory project does not necessarily end with the end of the project itself, and we will therefore continue to stay in touch with the co-researchers, provide opportunities for future engagement and encourage the public to reflect through the song and discussions about AI.

2.5. FUTURE ACTIVITIES – ADVANCING IMPACT

We plan to publish both the contents of our workshops on our website, as well as a more detailed process report on the participatory project as a whole in a scientific journal. In this way and by communicating the effectiveness of a new format of information presentation (sung as opposed to read) and translating the lyrics to the song into several languages, we aim to contribute to the replicability and usability in other communities. We hope to add to the dissemination of innovative and participatory AI projects and intend the project “How to explain AI” to act as a cornerstone on which other researchers can apply similar formats in other communities.

Furthermore, we hope that encouraging creative approaches toward communicating knowledge about technical topics will ultimately have a positive impact on media coverage, i.e., lead to more nuanced reporting on AI. As discussed in chapter 2.4, talking to journalists or reporters about common yet unnecessarily misleading portrayals of AI can prove to be very effective in changing the course towards more accurate and demystifying depictions of AI, at least on an individual level. Of course, this will not immediately change the entire media landscape and further, broader reflection on this topic is needed. However, this was not the focus of our project – instead, we concentrated on reaching people in the everyday population.

The song “A Liadl, ans üwa KI” received such a great response in media and society that we stuck to the collaboratively developed idea of using a song to communicate aspects of AI and submitted a follow-up project. A special call of the JKU Linz Institute of Technology gave us funding for two more music pieces about AI and a public event at the Ars Electronica Festival 2024 (<https://www.jku.at/songsaboutai>). These music pieces, the event and the media and public reception of our activities have given a new impetus – that was not to be expected in the beginning of our project “How to explain AI” but contributes to our impact goals very well.

2.6. LEARNINGS – REFLECTING IMPACT

In terms of the participatory process, we learned that continuous involvement of the co-researchers is vital during a participatory project, in order to ensure a swift reaction to possible problems. For example, expectations on the project’s goal might not always perfectly align between each co-researcher and the project team. Additionally, participation checks such as questionnaires may not be detailed enough to capture these subtleties, especially when it comes to people’s fears or uncertainties.

Another learning presented itself in the selection of the OIS impact tools. We began by reflecting on the goal and planned impact of our project and, based on this, selected the impact elements that were particularly relevant to us (Eye-Level, Efficiency, Orientation, Emotional Benefits, Continuous Involvement and General Acceptance, Knowledge about Competencies and Needs, Appreciation, Self-Efficacy, Shared Vision, Research Quality, Visibility of the topic, Direct life impact on Co-Researchers, Relevance and Uptake). However, throughout the process, three “core impact elements”

automatically crystallized, which were of particular importance for the success of the project (Eye-Level, Efficiency and Shared Vision). In our opinion, a well-considered selection is therefore crucial in order to be able to sufficiently and continuously check and fulfill a certain number of main criteria.

Decisive advantages of participatory projects include the multiplication of results and ideas at various levels as well as the different pathways to impact. For example, it was an insightful realization that the communication with the co-researchers did not end even after the official conclusion of the project and that the co-researchers in turn disseminated the project in their social environment, which created new contact opportunities.

However, there are also some potential drawbacks to creative interventions. For example, activities (such as the performance of the song on the main square) might not have the intended impact or might even act as a distraction to the extent that the audience only perceives the song and loses sight of the underlying topic of AI. For this reason, the performance on the main square was accompanied by the physical representation through the booth, where people could inform themselves not only about the song, but also about AI and the participatory process.

Another potential difficulty lies in the very broad intended target audience of a project aiming to achieve societal impact on a specific, technical issue such as AI. As many people tend to be unaware that AI affects them personally or simply do not consider it relevant to their current lives (e.g., due to a lack of knowledge about the applications in which AI systems can already be found), it becomes in turn more difficult to reach them. We took measures to account for this and designed a freely available song and made sure to create accessible events, i.e., events that took place right in the midst of everyday life and had no prerequisites such as costs or prior knowledge of the topic and could therefore be attended by anyone.

The importance of accessibility and the necessity of making complex topics like AI “tangible” was a crucial learning throughout this project. In our experience, people often tend to shy away from engaging due to preconceived notions that a topic such as AI is “not for them”. These thoughts can arrive and fester for several reasons – some individuals may not have much knowledge about the subject (and perceive it as something only specifically educated people can grasp), or feel a lack of agency and control when it comes to technological advances as a whole. Thus, in these cases, achieving societal impact begins on a “small”, individual scale and spreads with each person that might have been encouraged to reflect on AI and its presence in their everyday lives. Of course, since AI as a field is ever-evolving and new developments are ever-present, impact cannot be a static thing. Creative yet reusable interventions such as the song, music video and booth may therefore be of particular use.

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Alle Publikationen zum Projekt im JKU Research Portal:
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