



Communicating Food Sustainability to Consumers

Case Study: Evocco



This case study is based on an interview conducted with Ahmad Mu'azzam, CEO at Evocco, along with publicly available information. The information in this case study does not necessarily reflect the views of UNEP, WWF or GlobeScan but aims to highlight and explain the approach of Evocco in communicating food sustainability to consumers.

Evocco is a mobile app that helps people track, improve, and offset the carbon footprint of their food shopping. The app was founded in 2017 and launched in November 2020 in Ireland and January 2021 in the UK.

Objectives

Evocco's goal is to help people track the carbon footprint of their food shopping. The Evocco team believe that helping consumers to track the climate impact of their food and providing them with more information about how they can improve this impact will encourage more informed shopping decisions, shift individual behaviour and drive wider systems change.

Approach

Scope and Visual Tools

The Evocco app works by asking users to photograph their grocery shopping receipts. Push notifications remind users to scan receipts at the times they most frequently log in to the app. The app scans the receipt and the products listed on it are matched with those in Evocco's life cycle assessment (LCA) database. Consumers are provided with the carbon footprint of the product and also what percentage of their carbon budget it consumes to be within planetary boundaries for that month. Evocco estimates that 65kg of CO₂ consumed is what is required to be within planetary boundaries. This estimation comes from a 2019 report from the Institute for Global Environmental Strategies, Aalto University and D-mat Ltd. titled [1.5-Degree Lifestyles: Targets and Options for Reducing Lifestyle Carbon Footprints](#).

Evocco partners with Eaternity, a company specialising in carrying out LCAs for food products, to calculate the score of food products shown in the app. Eaternity use a Scope 3 analysis (covering value chain emissions from production to end of life) to calculate the greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions associated with each food product, accounting for a wide range of factors including: agricultural inputs from fertilisers and pesticides, emissions from animals as they grow, animal feed inputs including the agricultural inputs used to grow feed, transportation of food from where it was produced to where it was sold and the packaging of the product.

On the app, the carbon footprint of a product is shown as kilograms of CO₂e and the user is told how this compares to the maximum overall amount of carbon an individual should be consuming, in order to stay within planetary boundaries,

the safe levels at which humans can consume the earth's resources. Evocco calculates and displays this individual limit as 65kg CO₂e per month from food in developed nations to remain on track for a 1.5-degree world.

The app then provides personalised tips and recommendations on how the user can improve their score and reduce their impact. Consumers are also encouraged to offset their purchases via links to local initiatives such as 'Go Carbon Neutral' – an Irish not-for-profit that plants native woodland in Ireland.

The app shows the users' individual monthly footprint as a simple calculation of:

65 kg – x kg from food that month + any kg offset that month = their total score, marked either as inside planetary boundaries or outside boundaries

The app is easy to use with clear step by step instructions and a clean design. At the moment, the app primarily covers groceries, but Evocco plans to extend usage to other food retail such as restaurants and/or take away food later in 2022.

Messaging and Behavioural Tactics

Evocco's approach is inspired by health and fitness apps such as Strava, Fitbit and My Fitness Pal, and how these apps break down complex topics and communicate the simple actions that consumers can take to lead healthier lifestyles. Evocco aims to apply these learnings to drive behaviour change in grocery shopping.

Evocco relies on a learning model whereby consumers are shown their individual climate impact as soon as they make a purchase. The app then provides them with information on how they can improve, such as shifting towards plant-based products and buying more seasonal food, and the tools to track this over time. The aim is to motivate consumers to compete with themselves and lessen their environmental impact when shopping as they become more familiar with the tool.

The Evocco team also incorporates learnings from behavioural science when communicating their sustainability message to consumers. They have incorporated nudging tactics including encouraging offsetting CO₂e emissions beyond individual 'planetary boundaries' and promoting products such as in-season vegetables and plant-based options.

Evocco's use of language aims to encourage and inspire consumers with positive and future-focused messaging. The idea is that creating a positive discourse about consumer impacts on the environment will help to build a 'collective consciousness' to encourage consumers to work together to achieve the reduction of emissions from food purchasing. This type of language aims to motivate consumers to get involved rather than scaremongering or guilt-tripping consumers with negative language.

Evocco plans to base some future developments on social influence theory, another behaviour change tactic. They hope to develop a rewards scheme for regular users of the app, as well as developing a digital space where consumers can demonstrate to their friends and families that they are using Evocco, offsetting and contributing to their communities.

Channels and Audience

Evocco's primary channel for communicating to consumers is through the app.

As a relatively young start-up, spreading the word and attracting new users are important goals. The Evocco team are exploring ways of raising awareness organically, such as through Instagram, where the company posts 'Evocco climate newsreels', which aim to break down the complexity of climate change to raise consumer understanding.

The business has also featured on Ireland AM, RTÉ 1 Future Island program, CNN International and The Guardian G2 and has run workshops with university students to engage as wide an audience as possible.

Evocco targets the conscious consumer who wants to make a difference, track their personal impact and whose purchases are driven in part by environmental values, but doesn't currently know how to take action. Evocco is currently working on providing more benefits for users who are already more engaged in climate action. Options being explored include a space where they can recommend low-impact products or recipes and share with peers to provide a more personalised user experience and crowdsource tips and recommendations.

Partnerships

Evocco has partnered with multiple small sustainable brands in Ireland such as Zero Waste Store and Q Café Co. These brands encourage their customers to download the Evocco app, generating traffic and helping to promote Evocco's sustainability message. For example, one campaign with Q Café gave customers a choice of low-impact menu options in the restaurant, as verified by Evocco.

The Evocco team aim to expand these partnerships in the future to larger retailers and brands.

Measuring Success

The Evocco app is still in its early days since launching the app in 2020. As of the end of 2021, the app had 2,812 registered users in Ireland and the UK and 976 of these have uploaded a receipt. A further ten percent of these users (94) uploaded a receipt every month in 2021. Overall, the app has facilitated 4,200 kg of CO₂ offsets from 348 receipts.

Ongoing use of consumer feedback

A key part of Evocco's business model is regular consumer feedback: this enables evaluation of the effectiveness of their sustainability communication. For example, Evocco summarised consumer feedback asking for 'clearer information, less clutter and better alignment of the basket score and planetary boundaries', on a post shared with its Instagram followers.

Initially when the app launched, each food product was given a nutrition score, a carbon footprint and an overall star rating (a combination of the nutrition score and CO₂). However, feedback from consumers showed that many users found the relative score interesting but that nutritional information was overwhelming and confusing. Evocco has found that focussing the entire user experience around the one hero metric of kg of CO₂e by product reduces confusion and makes the information more actionable.

Evocco has had positive feedback in response to the tips and recommendations the app provides to consumers, particularly around seasonality of products, which is a topic that some users were previously less aware of in terms of its carbon impact.

User feedback has also revealed that the accuracy of information provided is very important to some more engaged consumers: the information on each product provided needs to be as consistent and reliable as possible to ensure consumers trust and remain loyal to the app. This is a priority for Evocco to continue working on.

Challenges

Evocco aims to provide empowering information to the consumer to help them make more informed choices, but it can be hard to strike a balance between too much scientific jargon and providing simple information that is potentially too basic and condescending. It is important to not deter more knowledgeable consumers by oversimplifying the information.

As well as balancing the complexity of information to share with users, Evocco faces technical challenges that mean the impact of some products is not always shown accurately on the app. For example, after scanning plant-based meat alternatives using the app, these are sometimes incorrectly shown as animal meat products, significantly affecting the accuracy of the carbon footprint reported. Evocco is working to overcome these known technical issues, but the related challenge is to maintain consumer trust as people seek useful and reliable information.

Guidelines

The Evocco team strive to ensure that the app follows the UNEP Guidelines for Providing Product Sustainability Information, namely reliability, relevance, clarity, transparency, and accessibility. They also aim to meet UNEP's 'aspirational principles' for communication in the longer term.

Looking Ahead

Evocco aims to organically grow the awareness of the app and sustainability message by collaborating with bigger brands and retailers in the future. As more users log more purchases over longer time periods, and as the technology behind the app becomes more accurate, Evocco will be able to measure and track the impact the app is having on consumer purchase choices and carbon footprints.

Going forward, Evocco hopes to launch in the USA in 2023 and plans to develop an additional digital tool to sell to food retailers and delivery apps that will track the climate impact of a product's journey through the supply chain. This will assist retailers in providing climate impact information directly to consumers whilst providing Evocco access to product data to further improve its app.