

## Evaluating a public engagement event

### **Food Education: Get involved, donate, and make smoothies**

Evaluating a public engagement activity is just as important as the engagement itself. It follows along the preparation process, the performance and finally provides us with evidence of impact and a reflection tool. This blog is a record for the Food Education team and other academics, presenting an overview of the event and the evaluation. These two sections are divided into three paragraphs: The Overview discusses the purpose of the project, the people participating in it, and the activity design. The Evaluation section assesses these three pillars. To gain a better insight into this particular engagement activity, I recommend watching it before moving onto the Overview.

#### **Overview**

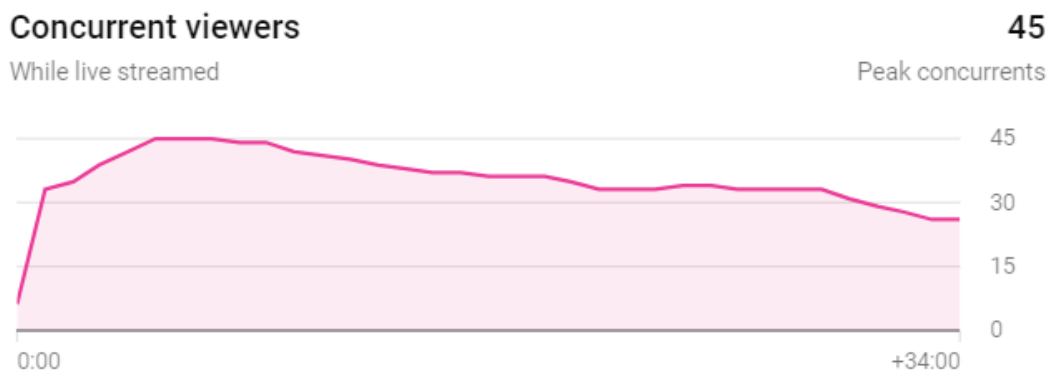
PURPOSE: One objective of the 30-minute Food Education live event was to encourage a better understanding food production and availability issues. By giving tips on creatively managing food waste, we aimed to inspire people and change their behaviour to work towards an environmentally friendly lifestyle.

PEOPLE: The public engagement team was made up of six students from a variety of backgrounds and departments, which contributed to a creative and interdisciplinary environment to work in. The audience was invited by the team and the Public Engagement module coordinators. Hence, we expected that most registered invitees are connected to Warwick University or Coventry, such as fellows of the Warwick Institute of Engagement, members of Food Intercept. Still, there will be a great diversity in age and culture. External guests are assumed to have a general interest in food and sustainability.

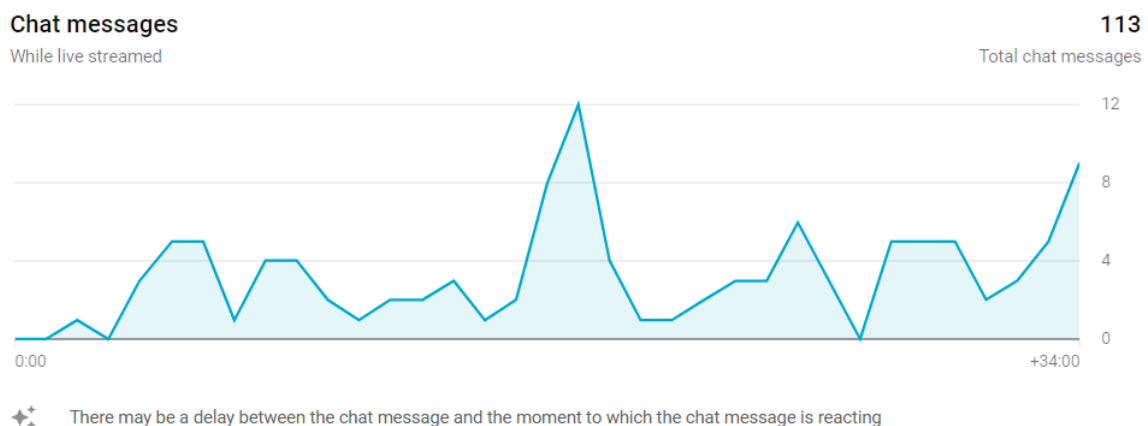
PROCESS: The activity was designed to explain global and local issues first, then explore solutions in the same, localised manner: national, institutional, community led, and individual actions. The overripe banana motif followed along with the presentation, and on almost every slide there was a hidden banana icon. To enhance the audience's understanding, we shared relevant and topical information, supported by powerful images and astounding statistics. The short video clip was used to help the listener imagine constant hunger and evoke emotion. These messages and visuals aimed to change the participants' attitude. This intrinsic motivation will lead to behaviour change. For guidance, we demonstrated numerous activities that people can participate in, assisted with QR codes and links. Speakers interacted with the audience by asking questions that they could answer in the live chat. The opening question, "Have you ever thrown away an overripe banana?" encouraged people to communicate and affirmed that food waste is present in every household. The second question, "How many kgs of fruit and veg do you think Food Intercept gave a new lease of life last term?" generated a guessing game and we could give shout-outs to individuals. Finally, we asked the audience to think about the foods in their fridges that they have no intention of eating or using. In the introduction and after the Q&A, we reminded the audience to complete the pre and post questionnaires. The data is collected purely for evaluation purposes and kept anonymous.

## Evaluation

**DELIVERY AND IMMEDIATE OUTPUTS:** We had 45 concurrent viewers at the start, and 28 (62%) of those stayed until the end. Within four days, the number of viewers grew to 99. As expected, one-third of the people who registered on the Warwick Institute of Public Engagement page reported that they are English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British. 20% of the registered invitees stated to be young adults (18-39), 20% to be middle-aged adults (40-59), 40% to be elderly (60+), and the remaining 20% is 'prefer not to say'. Because of the high ratio of middle-aged adults as expected and the limitations of an online event, we applied a small range of resources: live chat, QR codes, and links. At the beginning of the presentation, we explained the use of these tools. They are considered adequate for our audience. Due to some technical issues, the last QR code leading to a Vevox page did not work. Thus, we could not collect people's ideas of their next action to fight food waste.



**DESIGN:** Throughout the 30-minute live stream, we had 113 comments, out of which 26 were positive feedback. 14 comments came in for Question 1, most already proposing solutions. It proves that people have some background knowledge. Two participants showed emotions provoked by the video clip: "loving the cartoon", "Feeling very emotive about this [...]". Question 2, the guessing game, generated the peak in comments (11 in total) 18 minutes in. Four people answered for Question 3. The second highest peak in interaction occurred during the Q&A. Eight questions were posed, all referring to solutions contributing to a positive change in the future. It indicates that the audience immediately started thinking ahead.



To gain knowledge on what the audience’s overall experience was, we included a satisfaction scale in the post questionnaire:

*Please circle the smiley face that best represents how engaging the presentation was.*



Five out of six said it was very engaging, and one said it was engaging.

**IMPACTS:** We made questionnaires to measure the change in the depth of their understanding of the topics we covered. The knowledge scale is 1-10, 1 being ‘I have never heard of this concept before’ to 10 being ‘I know a lot about this subject’. The pre-questionnaire was completed by 22 people, while the post-questionnaire is only by 6. The averages of answers are shown here:

Topic	Knowledge before (av)	Knowledge after (av)
The environmental damage of food waste	6.7	8.5
Food waste charities and policies in Coventry	2.7	7.7
How Warwick as an institution is combating food waste	2	8.2
How you can combat food waste in your household	6.8	9.2
Warwick university student action initiatives	3.8	8.7

It indicates that people who stayed until the end and remembered to complete the surveys significantly increased their knowledge. Throughout the presentation, we received great ideas in the comment section that may imply a change in attitude. e.g. education, raising awareness, locally/home-grown food, extra charge for high carbon footprint food items, reduce packaging in shops. Since the Vevox page did not work, we could not measure the event’s impact as we planned. As an alternative proof, we asked Food Intercept whether they experienced any change in audience activity on their social media account. They received seven profile visits after the event, compared to zero, from the week before.

**CRITICAL SELF-REFLECTION:**

- Online engagement should be suitable for those watching on their phones. To fully engage during our event, viewers needed to follow the QR codes with their phones while watching the presentation on a computer screen.
- Although more people can join an event online than in person, it is just as easy to leave. Visuals and activities must be more engaging.
- Reduce the number of surveys by keeping the pre-, and post-questionnaires in one document.
- Fusing the demographic information with the surveys can create a clearer image of the audience’s background knowledge in different age groups and the kind of activities they would engage with.

- Track change in future actions more efficiently by including extra questions in the survey (no need for a separate page) e.g., Which activity did you like the most and you are the most likely to participate in? To measure the increased interest in the promoted campaigns, organisations, newsletter sign-ups, website clicks, and social media followers can be powerful tools.
- A live event would have allowed us to carry out more diverse and interactive activities. For example, setting up a whiteboard where people can share their next actions before leaving; making delicious smoothies from suboptimal foods with the audience; general questions can be answered by raising hand. It is also easier to get instant feedback from the audience by looking at their facial impressions.