How Tech Companies and Social Media Platforms Can Help Meet U.N. SDG 12

By: Alyssa Hudson and Natalia Mendoza
October 8, 2021

An Introduction to U.N. SDG 12, Target 12.8

The United Nations adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2015 and incorporated 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), each with their own targets, calling on all countries to take swift action to make each goal become reality[1].

SDG 12, titled "responsible consumption and production", commits to making fundamental changes in the way that our societies produce and consume goods and services[2]. Target 12.8 focuses on ensuring that people everywhere have the relevant information and awareness for sustainable development and lifestyles in harmony with nature[2].

In an age when people are more connected than at any other time in history, information can easily be shared, spreading hopeful messages around the world. However, information can also be exploited creating divisiveness between people, groups, and organizations. Globally, there are over 4.55 billion social media users, roughly 57% of the total global population[3].

In the sections below, we highlight examples of various tech companies and social platforms that are making SGD target 12.8 become a reality.
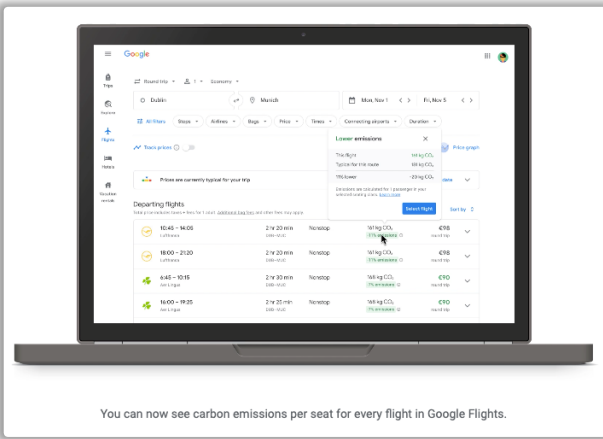

U.N. SDG Poster

U.N. SDG 12

You can now see carbon emissions per seat for every flight in Google Flights.

You can choose the most eco-friendly route in Google Maps.

More Sustainable Choices with Google

Google is on a mission to foster sustainability at scale by organizing information about the planet and making it actionable through technology[4,5]. Google is aiming to help one billion people make more sustainable choices by 2022 and recently announced new ways users can use their products to reach this goal[4,5].
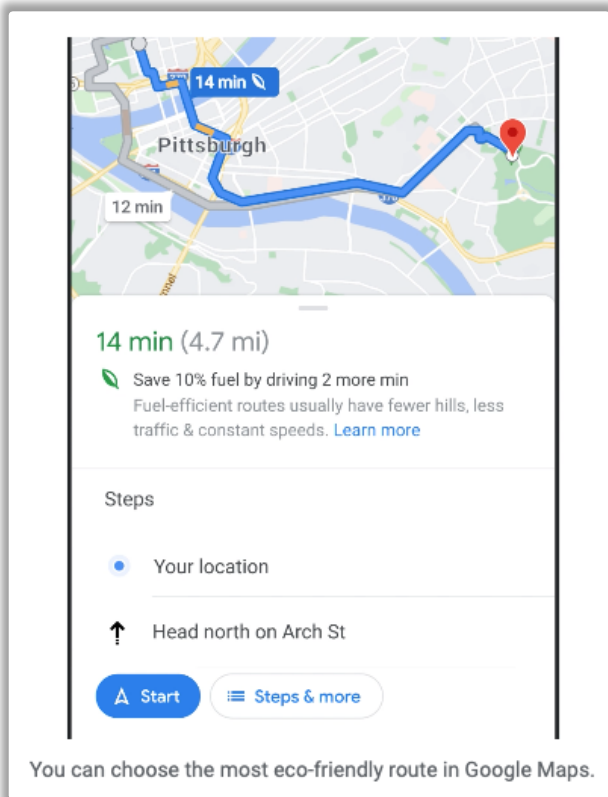
As the world begins traveling again, Google Flights can help you associate the carbon emissions for every flight and show you lower-carbon options. Searching for a hotel? You can now view information about a hotel's sustainability efforts[5].

Traveling by car is carbon-intensive and for many people it's the main mode of transportation. Google Maps now allows you to choose the most fuel-efficient route, which doesn't always involve a car[5].

These are just a few examples of how Google products can allow consumers to make easy sustainable choices. These may seem like small steps but collectively they can generate big improvements.

Ecosia: The Search Engine that Plants Trees

Ecosia, an online search engine, provides consumers with an alternative to mainstream search engines (Google, Bing, etc.) that puts people and planet first. As a certified B Corp, they use the profit from your searches and generated ad revenue to plant trees where they are needed most throughout the world[6,7].

To date, over 137 million trees have been planted to help re-green deserts, restore diversity to forests, and protect wildlife from habitat loss[6,7]. If more people knew about this app and used its extension feature on their browsers, imagine the impact this could create. The reach and potential to bring awareness to consumers is endless.
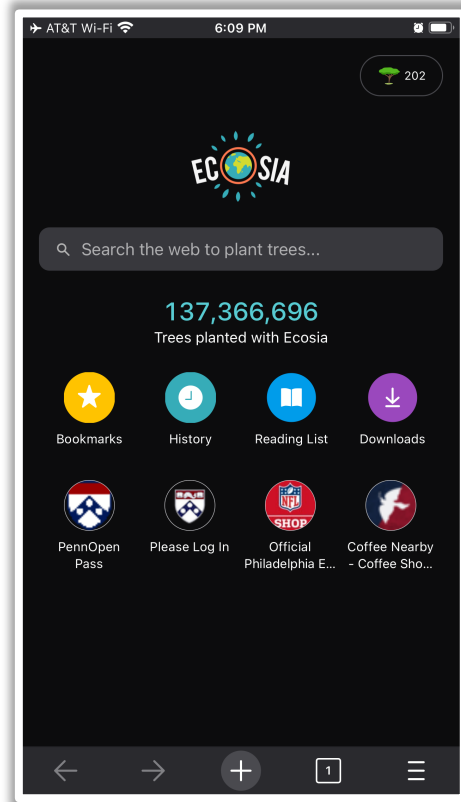
TikTok: Uniting the World's Voices One Video at A Time

TikTok, a social media app for creating short-form videos, provides users a platform to share content and engage with other users through "response" videos or by means of "duets"[8,9]. Hashtags play an immense role on TikTok by highlighting daily trends and sustained cultural movements[8]. For example, #ClimateAction has 310 million views, the equivalent of reaching roughly 93% of the U.S. population.

News of recent events can spread at the speed of light, and in just a day, users can learn things they might not otherwise hear about on mainstream news outlets. Social media offers users a platform to share their experience as it is happening, such as personal accounts of climate-related disasters or on-going relief efforts people and organizations are working on throughout the world.
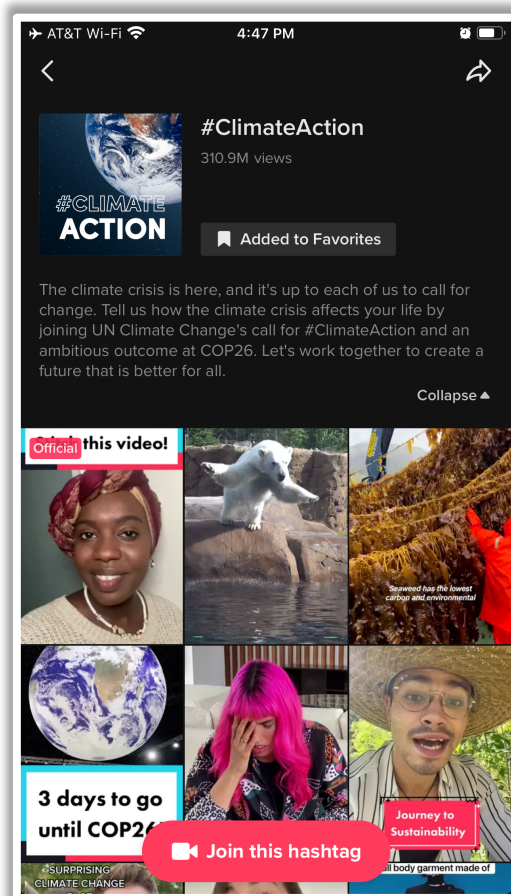
Final Thoughts

Businesses and social media platforms have a responsibility to provide access to sustainable choices and accurate information to their users. Google and Ecosia offer products that result in tangible action to promote environmental restoration.

Mainstream media outlets fail to convey the potential ramifications of climate events to audiences who are not yet experiencing those effects directly. The surround sound created by social media's millions of personal stories helps users understand and relate to the human impacts' climate change can have on the lives of people around the world.

As more people gain access to the internet, a possible solution to ensure U.N. SDG 12 is met would be for organizations to present consumers with choices which consider their environmental impact, allowing them to make the best decision for their lifestyle.

Social media users often end up in their own content bubble, making them less willing to consider opposing views. Tech companies should seek to present users with balanced information. For example, companies could flag user generated content for possible misinformation.

These are straightforward measures that organizations and tech companies can take to ensure people have access to relevant information and awareness of sustainable development around the world.

References

1. https://sdgs.un.org/goals
2. https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal12
3. https://datareportal.com/social-media-users
4. https://sustainability.google/
5. https://blog.google/outreach-initiatives/sustainability/sustainability-2021/
6. https://info.ecosia.org/what
7. https://www.ecosia.org/
8. https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/10/style/what-is-tik-tok.html
9. https://www.tiktok.com/about?lang=en