Mislabeling of Seafood

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INTRODUCTION

There is a gap in the research on the effectiveness of educating consumers in reducing the prevalence of mislabeled seafood. Research indicates that approximately a third of seafood is mislabeled and that mislabeled seafood has significant repercussions ranging from environmental damage to economic losses. However, most consumers are not aware of the issue. In order to reduce the prevalence of the issue, the effectiveness of education in changing consumers' spending habits was investigated. Videos were used as the medium of education.

Goals

- *Establish consumer awareness of the issue.*
- *Evaluate how much consumers know on the issue.*
- *Evaluate if education in the form of videos is an effective medium in combating the issue.*

RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

In order to evaluate whether education is an effective method of changing consumer spending habits, two surveys were given out: one at the beginning of the project and one at the end. The goal of survey one was to establish whether or not the participants were informed about mislabeled seafood and to determine how much they knew about the topic. This established a baseline level of knowledge, which was used to evaluate how much participants learned from the videos. After filling out the first survey, participants were then asked to watch two videos. The goal of the videos was to educate participants on the who, what, when, where, and why of mislabeled seafood. After watching the two videos, the participants were giving a second survey. The goal of this survey was to determine if the videos were effective tools for educating consumers and if education was effective at fostering changes in consumers' spending habits.

DATA AND FINDINGS

1. Figure 1 (Left chart) : Responses to "Do you verify if the seafood you eat is authentic?" in the first survey.
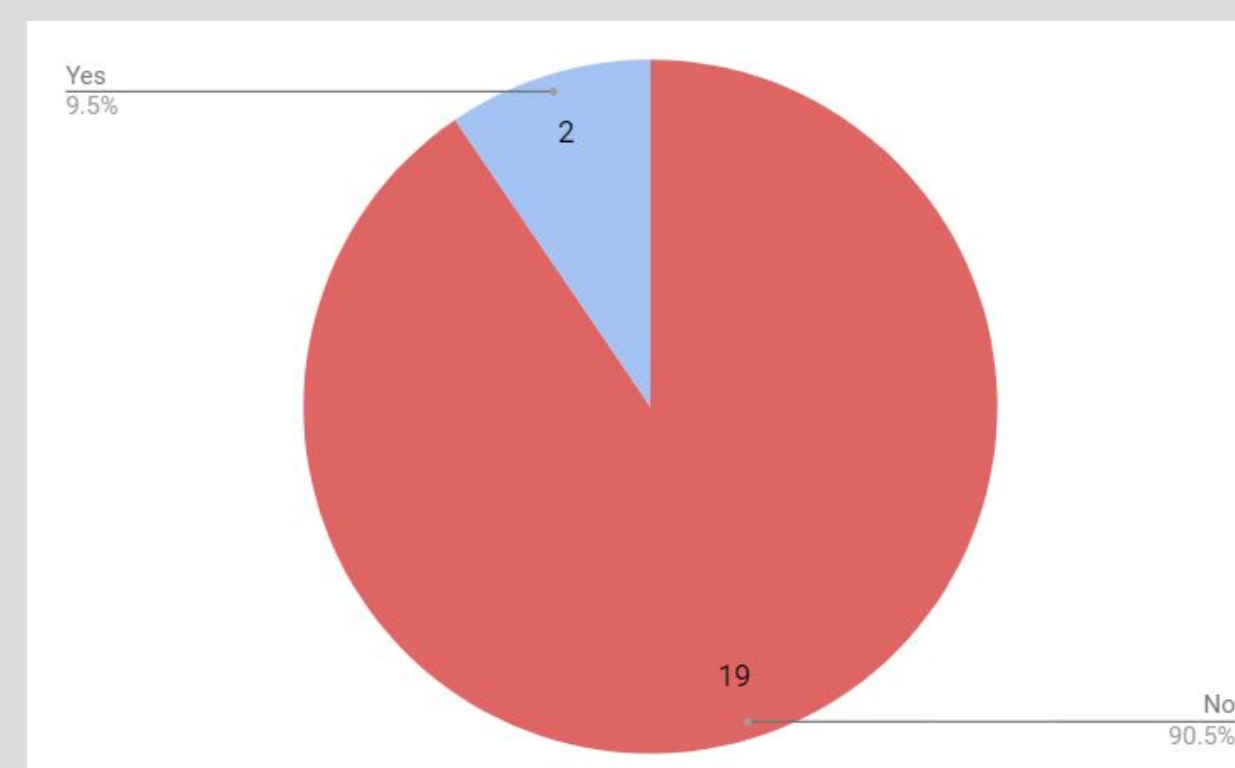
2. Figure 2 (Right Chart) : Responses to "After watching the videos, would you check if the seafood you eat is authentic?"
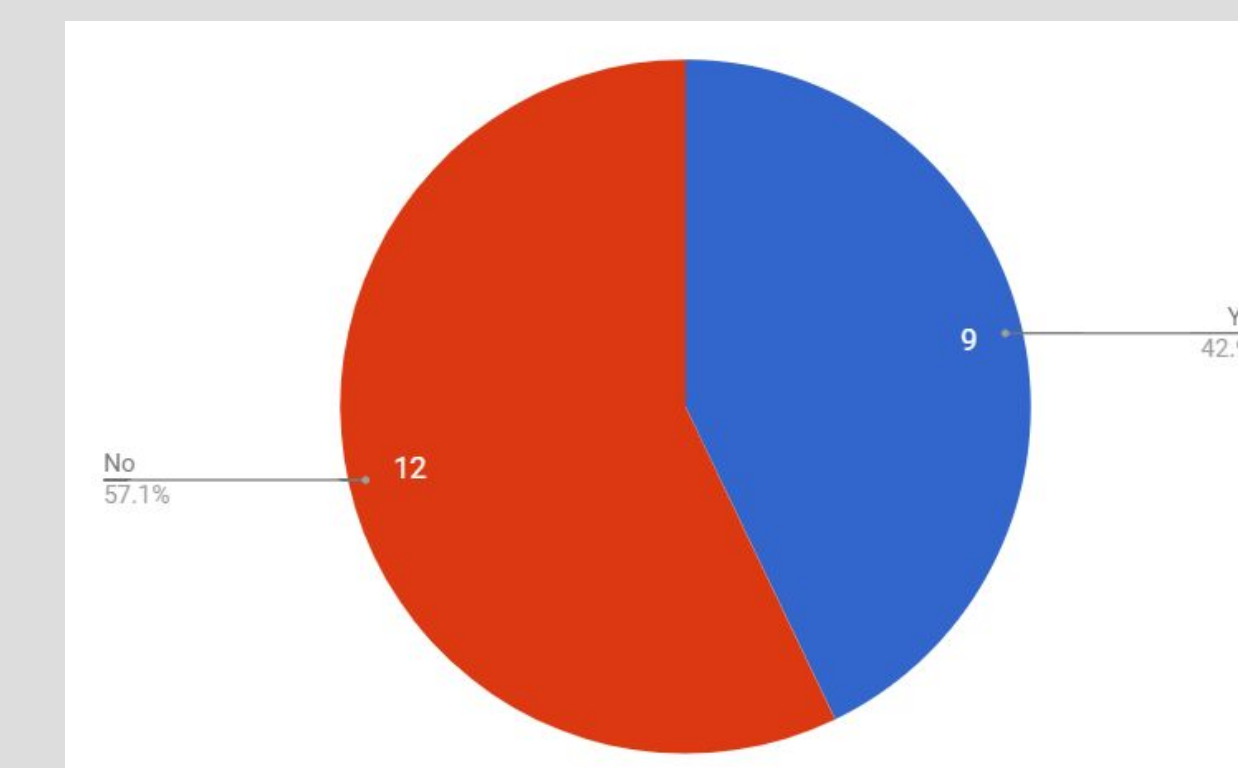

After watching the videos, the participants had a far better understanding of the issue of mislabeled seafood. After watching the videos, the number of correct responses to questions on the issue increased significantly. The average across all questions was a 37.8% increase in correct responses. Furthermore, the increase in consumer knowledge was correlated to a change in consumer spending habits. In the first survey, only 2 participants responded that they verified the authenticity of their seafood. After watching the videos, the number of participants who would authenticate their seafood increase to 9. However, a majority of the participants (57%) said they would not verify the authenticity of their seafood, even after learning about the issue.

DISCUSSION, ANALYSIS, AND EVALUATION

Educating consumers is an effective way to change their spending habits. After watching the two videos, the number of participants willing to verify the authenticity of seafood increased 32%. Of the majority of participants who said they would not verify if the seafood they ate was authentic, 54% of participants who said their reason for not authenticating the seafood was that they don't eat seafood. Discounting these participants from the survey, the portion of participants willing to verify the authenticity of their seafood increases to 66%. The general consensus among the 34% who did not want to authentic their seafood was that it was too much effort.
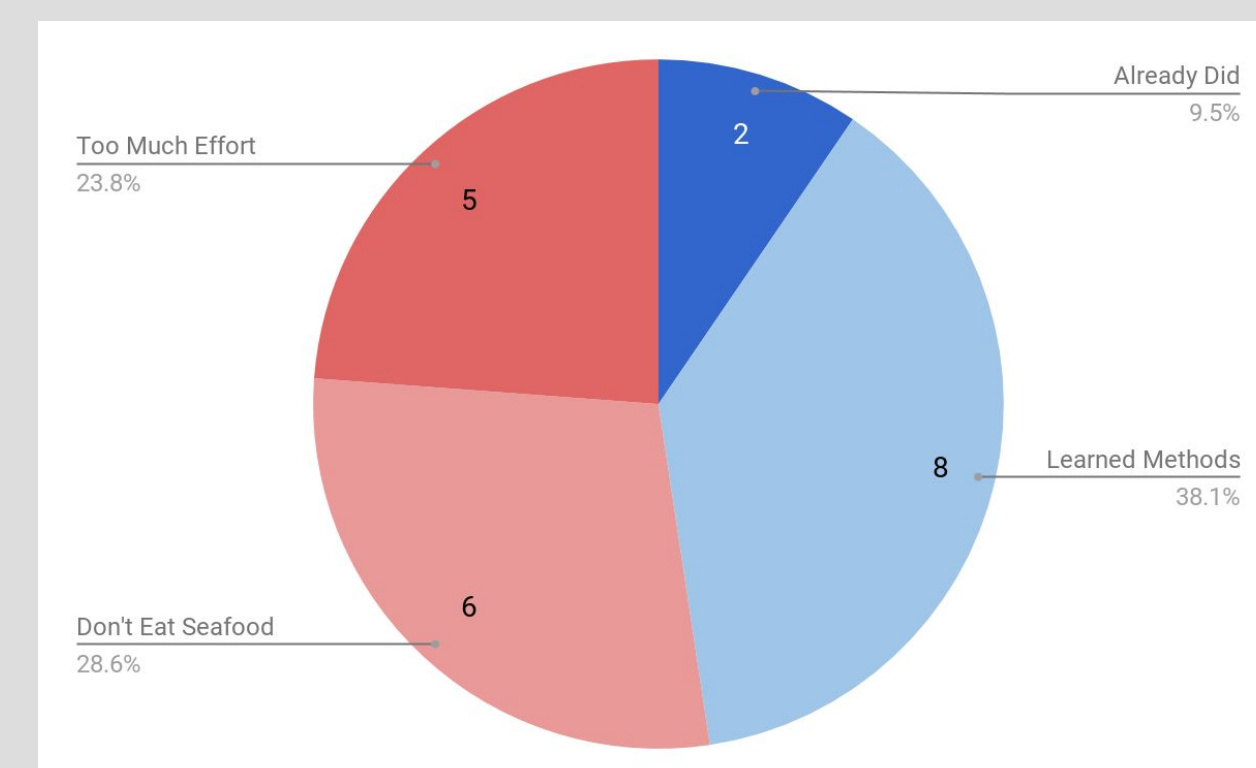
3. Figure 3: Response to the question "Why or why not?" (based on answers in Figure 2).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS / REFERENCES

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CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND NEXT STEPS

Even though the portion of participants willing to authenticate their seafood (discounting those who do not eat seafood) was 66% by the second survey, there is still room for improvement. The 34% of the population who responded that they would not check for authenticity did not do so because they do not believe that mislabeling of seafood is an issue; rather, they believe that it is not feasible for them to check for authenticity. Further research should be conducted into this issue. New methods that are easier for the user to implement should be developed and then tested to see if the population currently unwilling to verify the authenticity of their seafood would be willing to do so with new methods.

While the results of consumer education look promising, there is a cause for concern. It is one thing to say you will do something and another thing to follow through. While participants said they would check for authenticity, it is impossible to determine from this data if the participants actually began to verify the authenticity of their seafood. A potential improvement for the future would be to verify if participants actually begin to check the authenticity of their seafood. It would also be of interest to observe if participants only check for authenticity during the first few months after the study and then revert back to their previous behavior, or if they follow through on the change.