What do German consumers think about labelling, seafood guides and other information about (sustainable) seafood?

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Consumers' information needs

- Fish market very diverse and complex from a consumers' point of view
- Consumers need information in order to make decisions in line with their preferences
- But consumers are frequently overstrained by the information offered
Communication about seafood

- Mandatory indications
- Sustainability labels
- Seafood guides
- Sustainability policies of the retail
Aim

Analysis of...

• how consumers perceive different information offers and if they use them
• how consumers perceive sustainability policies of the retail

Recommendations for the consumer communication of (sustainable) seafood
What we have done

• 3 focus groups with in total 29 participants in Brunswick and Hamburg
  – 66% women
  – 62% no college or university degree
  – 83% consumed fish every week
  – 62% look for sustainable fish

• Thematic content analysis
Perception of mandatory indications

- Use and awareness of indications was limited
- But generally appreciated...
  - increase transparency → trust
  - support informed decisions
- Most used indications
  - commercial designation
  - geographic origin
- Critique
  - hard to find
  - uninformed service personal
Perception of sustainability labels

- Many participants stated to use sustainability labels in their purchase decision
- Labels as indication of quality and sustainability
- Online information about labelling schemes expected in addition to labels on/nearby products
Perception of sustainability labels

• Multitude of labels overstrains participants
• Wish for one simple, unified indication like the EU organic label
• Trust in a sustainability label declines if widely present
Perception of sustainability labels

• But skepticism towards labels (including organic ones):
  – is compliance regularly controlled?
  – possible misuse due to
    – private bodies issuing labelling schemes
    – certification bodies paid by producers

• Wish for
  – independent and periodic third party control
Perception of seafood guides

- Majority of the participants was unaware of the existence of seafood guides
- If participants knew seafood guides, they mostly mentioned online applications
- Perception ranged from useful to too complicated
- Further critique
  - inconsistency between guides
  - credibility of NGOs?
Perception of sustainability policies of the retail

• Welcomed addition to sustainability labels

• Comfortable → reduces search efforts

• But:
  – policies might increase prices
  – can retailers control whole value chain?
  – who does control the commitment of the retail?
 Perception of existing information

- Consumers are used to the existence of sustainability labels
  - expected as quality indicator
- Sustainability policies by the retail mostly welcomed
- Minimal use of seafood guides
- Existing information appreciated
  - but information fatigue
  - increase in information at point of sale unnecessary/potentially counterproductive
Recommendations for an improved communication

• Mandatory indications:
  – display of the geographic origin at the front of the package
  – better informed service personal

• Sustainability labels:
  – homepages are a must-have (informative and easily understandable)
  – if a label is widely present at the market → efforts are needed to sustain trust (e.g., steady improvement of underlying standards)

• Seafood guides:
  – need to reduce complexity, increase convenience
Suggestion for increasing the consumption of sustainable fish

• Combining sustainability policies of retailers with sustainability labels
  – Addresses different consumer groups, those who...
    – actively look for labels
    – want to rely on retailers
Thanks!

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