

Does Eco-Labeling on Meal Options Prompt Consumers to Make More Sustainable Choices?



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A Feasibility and Pilot Study in University of Bristol Cafés

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Background

People with a good understanding of food's environmental impact are **more likely** to choose food products with a **low** environmental footprint. One way to improve understanding is to **label food** with information about sustainability (eco-labelling). Here, we conducted a feasibility study examining the implementation of traffic light eco-labels in a real-world setting. This will inform larger studies in the future.

Objectives

Assess the **feasibility** of adding eco-labels to food products to inform a larger trial.

Assess the **acceptability** to consumers and café staff of adding eco-labels to food products.

Study Design

Four University of Bristol cafés participated. Each completed a one-week control period (business as usual), followed by a one-week intervention period where we placed traffic light **eco-labels** on all pre-packaged lunch items.

- During the intervention week
 - Every morning eco-labels were attached to pre-packaged lunch items.
 - **Posters** were placed in cafés which pointed customers to an online **survey** which asked them about their **opinions** on the eco-labels, and if the labels **influenced** their choice of lunch item.
 - Café staff were asked about their experience during the study to assess feasibility and acceptability.



Eco-labels had **three subcategories** (water usage, biodiversity loss, greenhouse gas emissions), each rated as either low (green), medium (amber) or high (red) environmental impact.

Each label was also given an **overall rating** of low, medium or high environmental impact based on these subcategories.

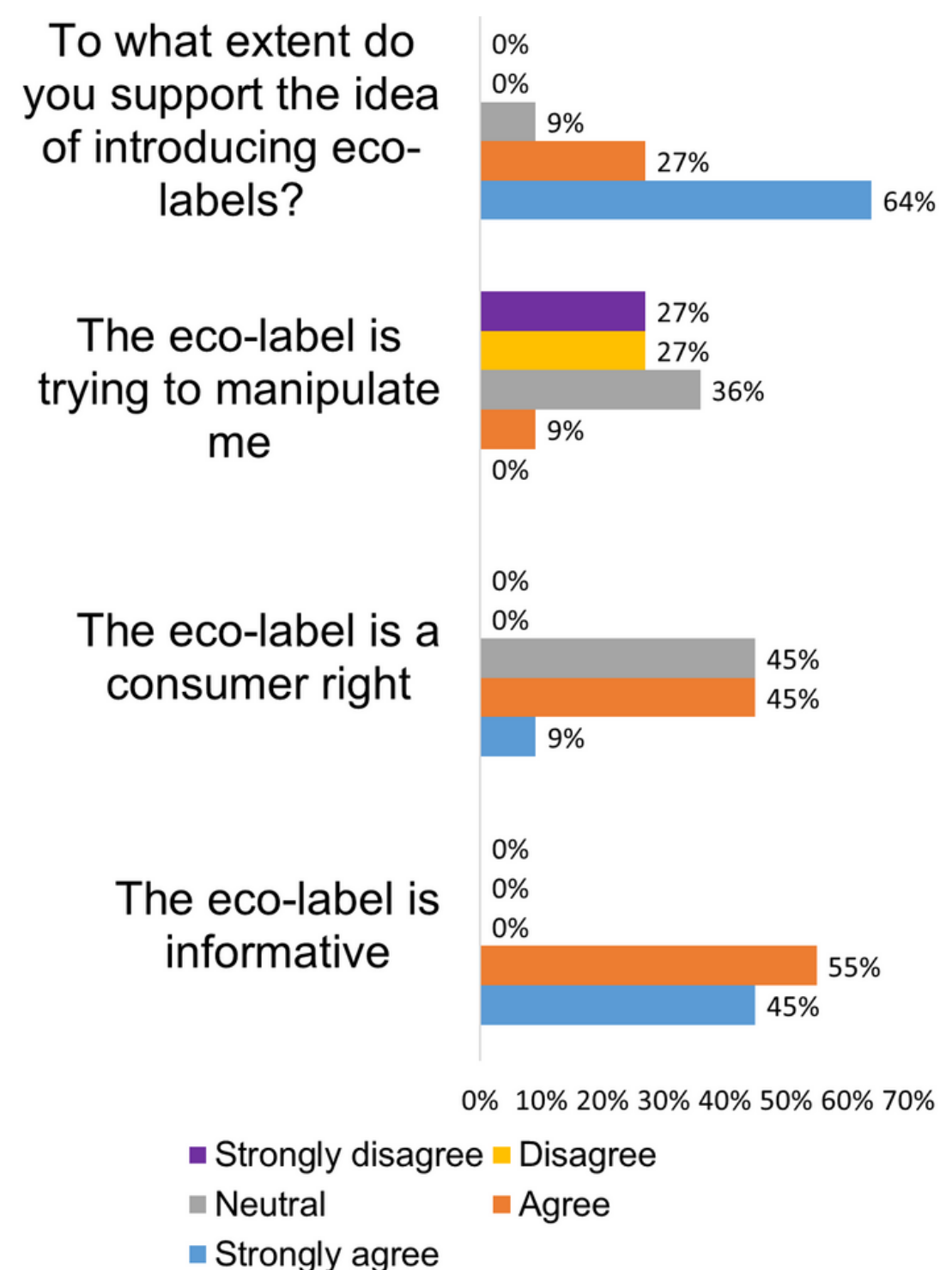
Results

Online Survey of Café Patrons

There were 11 café customers (participants) who completed the survey, with a mean age of 35. 55% were female and the majority (64%) were omnivores.

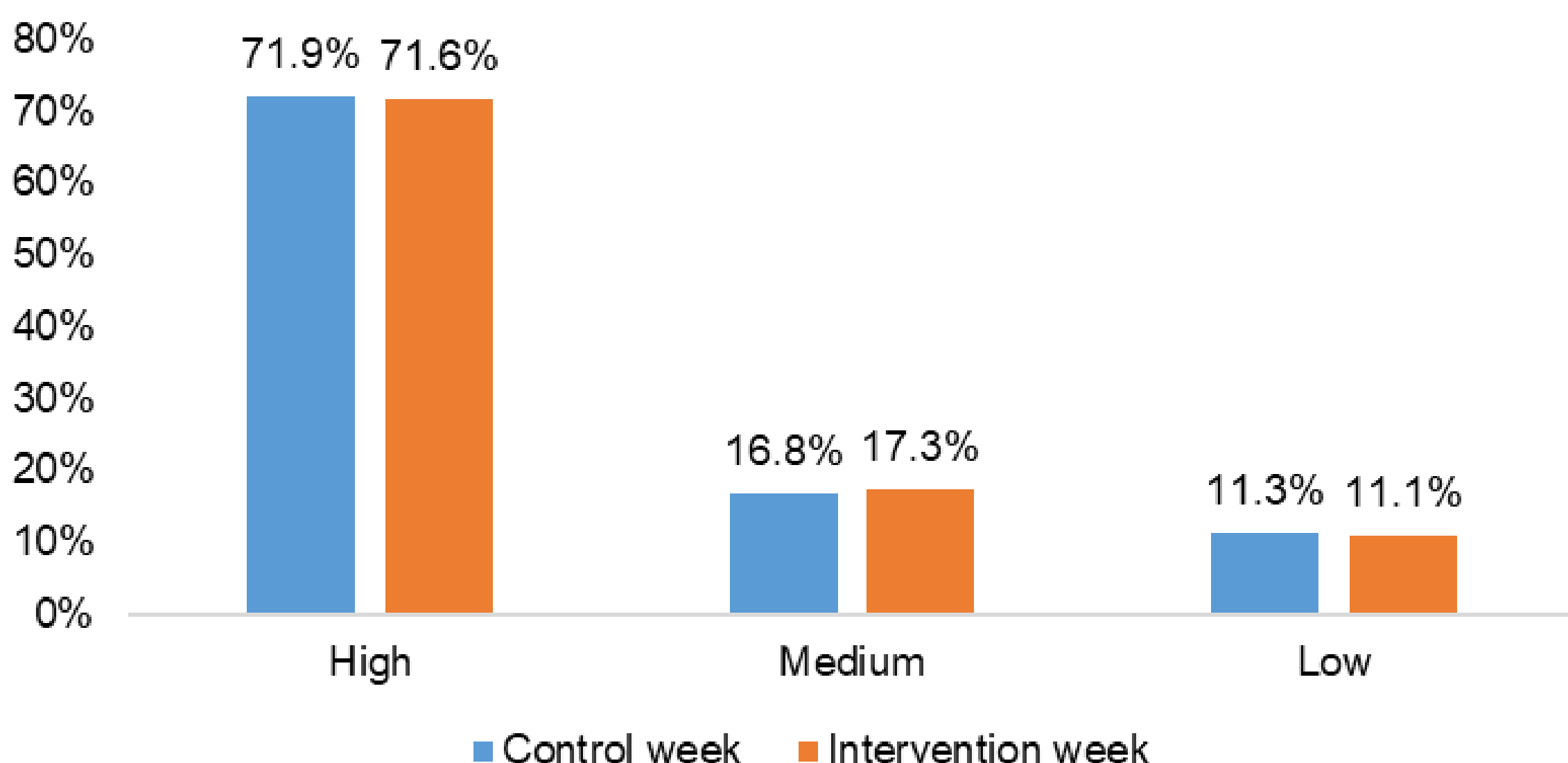
Acceptability of eco-labels

- Most participants supported the idea of introducing eco-labels on food products.
- Some participants believed that the labels push responsibility onto the consumer, rather than the supplier or the cafés who choose to use that supplier (and who prioritise selling high environmental impact products).



Sales Data

The bar chart below displays the percentages of lunch items with each label type (high, medium and low environmental impact) sold in the control week and the intervention week. There were substantially more products with higher environmental impact available to buy than products with lower environmental impact.



Take Home Messages

As a feasibility study, this study is not able to make any conclusions about whether the eco-labels influenced behaviour.

However, data from the survey suggests the eco-labels were generally positively received by customers, with most participants agreeing that eco-labels should be added to food products.

The vast majority of food products on sale and purchased were classified as having a high environmental impact. While eco-labels may be one method of promoting more sustainable diets, other interventions should be considered, including institutional policies such as making high environmental impact products much less available.



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