

MuseumsForward

"I saw the real thing:" Do art museum visitors care about original versus replicas?

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Abstract

Replicas in museums have been vastly studied for years, with research centered on discussions with curators and academics reflecting on the use of replicas in art museums. However, there is a lack of research about the discussion of replicas in museums that involves museum visitors. My research aims to bring museum visitors' opinions toward replicas to the forefront of this conversation by asking them directly. An eight-question survey was used to ask museum visitors if they had a positive, negative, or indifferent opinion to 15th-17th century European painting replicas. The survey used original paintings from the Cleveland Museum of Art, Seattle Art Museum, and the Cummer Museum of Art and Gardens. Sixty surveys were completed in total with most surveys collected online with written instructions and a small number collected in person with the same instructions given orally. This research found that while most of the participants had an indifferent opinion toward replicas in art museums, most indifferent responses had a negative opinion toward replicas in their free response. This trend led to the conclusion that more art museum visitors had a negative opinion toward replicas in museums. This research also found that original paintings are preferred over replicas, no matter the date of creation and replicas created closer to the original painting were held in a higher opinion than replicas made more recently. Implications from this research can be used to help museums understand firsthand what museum visitors want to see in art museums regarding replicas.

Keywords

Replica; Art Museum; Museum Visitor; Period Copy

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Introduction

Museums have a reputation for housing authentic artifacts for visitors, who travel from all over the world, to glimpse at and say, "I saw the real thing!" But, do museum visitors really care if objects are authentic? Stephan Schwan and Silke Dutz published a questionnaire in 2020 asking museum visitors' opinions on authenticity, and while no art museums were used in the questionnaire, the results concluded that 46% of respondents preferred authentic objects over seeing replicas.¹ This study therefore left a clear gap regarding art museums and specifically how museum visitors feel about the authenticity of paintings in art museums, prompting the question, "What are museum visitors' opinions on replicas in art museums?" This research paper describes the findings of a survey conducted in 2023-2024 to understand if art museum visitors care if they are looking at original art versus a replica.

Background Information on Replicas

The definition of "replica" is used in art history to define a piece modeled after an original work of art.² Replicas can be found in almost every type of art museum, and it is important to understand the history of replicas in the art world, as they are ubiquitous. Replicas have a long history that dates to ancient times and such examples can be identified with the addendum, "the Greek original" or "Roman copy."³ This is because many Roman statues were copied after original Greek statues.⁴ Walter Benjamin offers a brief history of the Greeks who also created replicas:

The Greeks knew only two procedures of technically reproducing works of art: founding and stamping. Bronzes, terra cottas, and coins were the only art works which they could produce in quantity. All others were unique and could not be mechanically reproduced. With the woodcut graphic art became mechanically

¹ Stephan Schwan and Silke Dutz, "How Do Visitors Perceive the Role of Authentic Objects in Museums?" *Curator: The Museum Journal* 63, no. 2 (April 2020): 217-37, 219, 221.

² Sally Malenka, "The Ritual Around Replica: From Replicated Works of Art to Art as Replica (Part 1)." *Objects Specialty Group Postprints, Volume Seven*, 2000, 21-28, 22.

³ Elaine K. Gazda, "Introduction: Beyond Copying: Artistic Originality and Tradition." *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome. Supplementary Volumes* 1 (2002): 1-24, 9.

⁴ Ibid.

reproducible for the first time, long before script became reproducible by print.⁵

During the Renaissance, sculptors would make replicas of ancient art to practice sought-after skills as well as to prove to clients and other artists that they had mastered difficult sculpture techniques.⁶ Early modern sculptors, using original statues as models for their own replicas, would then replace the missing pieces or broken limbs on the original Greek statues that were lost to time.⁷ Moreover, apprentices worked at artists' workshops creating replicas of famous works at the direction of the original artist.⁸ These pieces were quite common and became known as "period copies," many of which can be found on display in modern museums today. An example of this is Leonardo da Vinci's, *The Virgin of the Rocks*; the original painting was completed in 1485 and currently resides at the Louvre while the period copy completed in 1508 is housed in the National Gallery in London, England.⁹ Building off the history of replicas, the next section will discuss two studies that influenced the design of my research.¹⁰

Previous Research

There have been many studies written about the importance of authenticity in museums and the place of replicas in museums, but very few surveys exist asking museum visitors how they feel about replicas in art museums specifically. Schwan and Dutz published an article in 2020 which included a questionnaire to determine what museum visitors consider "authentic" artifacts in museums.¹¹ The study was conducted at nine museums in Germany, including three natural history museums, three cultural history museums, and three science and technology museums. The study focused on museum visitors and

⁵ Walter Benjamin, *Walter Benjamin's the work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction*, February 21, 2018, 1–26. 2.

⁶ Mark Cartwright, "Copies & Fakes in Art during the Renaissance." World History Encyclopedia, February 21, 2024.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Leonardo da Vinci, *Leonardo Da Vinci, the Virgin of the Rocks*. Leonardo da Vinci | The Virgin of the Rocks, NG1093, National Gallery, London.

¹⁰ The literature on this field is vast, and space does not permit a full discussion of this topic here. For more information, please refer to Sally Malenka's, "The Ritual Around Replica: From Replicated Works of Art to Art as Replica (Part 1)."

¹¹ Schwan and Dutz, "How do Visitors," 217.

how they view authenticity in museums by using a six-point questionnaire with 703 participants.¹² There were only two questions in the questionnaire that mentioned replicas directly or indirectly. The first asked how museum visitors reacted to noticing an object on display was not the original, and the second question asked how museum visitors interacted with copies of objects instead of originals.¹³ The results of the first question demonstrated that museum visitors were generally indifferent to every response choice except they strongly disagreed that they would look away from an object upon finding out it was not an original.¹⁴ The results of the second question revealed that museum visitors felt there was a place for replicas if the original object were damaged or needed to complete an exhibit, and they also felt it should be made clear when a visitor is looking at a replica and not an original.¹⁵

The next study turns from authenticity and focuses instead on the rationale for the high value of original artwork in museums.

In their article “Art and Authenticity: The Importance of Original in Judgments of Value,” George E. Newman and Paul Bloom discuss why original paintings are appraised at a higher value than replicas.¹⁶ Newman and Bloom concluded that there are three explanations for the higher value of original artwork: the first is the unique act of creating the original painting, the second is the artist’s physical contact with the painting, and the third is the previously-held assumption that people will pay a considerable sum for original artwork.¹⁷ Newman and Bloom conducted five experiments in their research to understand how the average person values original art in a non-museum setting with three of the five experiments referencing this question. Thirty-three undergraduate students participated in the first experiment, and the results indicated that replicated artworks were seen as less valuable; however, replicated artworks made by the original artist were seen in a more valuable light.¹⁸ Another experiment by Newman and Bloom in the same study included 150 adults from an online panel who agreed

¹² Schwan and Dutz, “How do Visitors,” 222.

¹³ Schwan and Dutz, “How do Visitors,” 224

¹⁴ Schwan and Dutz, “How do Visitors,” 228

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ George E. Newman, Paul Bloom, “Art and Authenticity: The Importance of Originals in Judgments of Value.” *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General* 141, no. 3 (November 14, 2011): 558–69, 560.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Newman and Bloom “Art and Authenticity,” 561.

that original artwork that required substantial effort to create has more value than a replica that required high effort to reproduce.¹⁹ An additional experiment with 180 adults from an online panel who were placed into two groups were told different things about two paintings.²⁰ One group was told that one of the paintings was original and that the other one was a copy that was inspired by the original but done slightly differently; the other group was told that two different artists did similar paintings by coincidence.²¹ The first group placed a higher value on the original painting when told the other was a replica while the second group placed an almost even value on the two paintings when told they were made by two different artists.²² The experiments that Newman and Bloom conducted confirmed their hypotheses that original art does have a perceived higher value which can be attributed to the act of its creation, physical contact by the artist with the original painting, or the belief that people will pay more money for the original painting.

The gap in previous research regarding visitors' perceptions of art in museums lies in the lack of data concerning visitors' opinions about replicas inside art museums. Surveys and questionnaires have been conducted with museum visitors in the past, but they asked questions about authenticity or focused on the value of original art compared with replicas. With this general lack of research, there is much left to be discovered about visitors' opinions of replicas in art museums. My research focuses on museum visitors' opinions toward original European art and European replicas in art museums. My research also includes the necessity of replicas in museums and, using Indigenous art as an example, explains why this survey can only be applied to European art and not to the art of other cultures.

Purpose Study and Questions

My study examines whether museum visitors have a positive, negative, or indifferent opinion concerning replicas using a series of questions that explore original European paintings from the 15th through 17th centuries at the Cleveland Museum of Art, Cummer Museum of Art and Gardens, and Seattle Art Museum. A final question asked if visitors would have answered the questions differently if asked about

¹⁹ Newman and Bloom "Art and Authenticity," 564.

²⁰ Newman and Bloom "Art and Authenticity," 566.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

Indigenous art instead. This question, however, requires additional research to address the importance of using replicas of Indigenous art in museums rather than relying on the results of this particular survey.

Methodology

To have as many people as possible participate in the survey, the majority of the data was collected online with written instructions, while a small number of surveys were completed in person with the same instructions given orally (Appendix E). Convenient sampling was used to collect the surveys which provided a wide range of answers. Participants ranged in ages from 18-79 with the majority between 20 and 30 years of age. About half of participants were graduate students and the other half of participants were middle class adults no longer in school. Before filling out the survey, each respondent was asked if they had, in fact, visited an art museum in the past to ensure participants had previously visited a museum prior to the survey. Respondents were asked to spend no more than five minutes on the survey and to limit their free response questions to one or two sentences. Respondents were put into three groups and asked to look at a European painting from the Cleveland Museum of Art, Cummer Museum of Art and Gardens, and the Seattle Art Museum. The painting at the Cleveland Museum of Art was a Southern Renaissance painting by Sandro Botticelli and workshop, completed around 1490, titled *Virgin and Child with the Young Saint John the Baptist* (Appendix A). The painting at the Cummer Museum of Art and Gardens was a Dutch still life painting by Frans Snyders, completed around 1630, titled *Still Life with Fruit and Flowers* (Appendix B). The final painting, located at the Seattle Art Museum, was a Northern Renaissance painting by Lucas Cranach the Elder, which was completed around 1516-18, titled *The Judgement of Paris* (Appendix C). The rationale for choosing these museums was to have two midsize museums (Cleveland Museum of Art and the Seattle Art Museum), and one small museum (Cummer Museum of Art and Gardens), to demonstrate a variety of levels of museum exposure. The average number of visitors a year at the Cleveland Museum of Art is about 860,000.²³ The downtown location for the Seattle Art Museum sees a similar number with over 800,000 visitors a year.²⁴ Lastly, the Cummer Museum of Art and Gardens has about 140,000 visitors a

²³ "The Cleveland Museum of Art Ends Fiscal Year with Record Attendance." Cleveland Museum of Art, August 9, 2019.

²⁴ "Corporate Giving." Seattle Art Museum (SAM).

year.²⁵ Their geographic locations are widespread across the United States, as the museums are located in the Midwest, the Pacific Northwest, and the Southeast. This was intentional, so that the survey did not become a case study of one museum or geographic location. The words “copies/replications” were used in the survey to refer to a replica, as I found this to be easier for respondents to understand without explanation; however, this paper includes the word “replica” as this is used in the museum field.

Survey

The survey consisted of eight questions with guided answers. Questions three through eight had a free response section for respondents to elaborate on their reasoning (Appendix D). All three paintings used in the survey were original. The instructions, both oral and written, asked the respondent to imagine that they are looking at a replica for each question. There were sixty surveys responses completed in total. The guided responses were then graphed to demonstrate the raw data as percentages, and the free responses were examined for trends and comparisons. The free response sections were key to understanding a respondent’s reasoning behind having a positive, negative, or indifferent opinion, by showing the respondent’s rationale for choosing “yes” or “no” to questions that were asked. The sections that follow dive into the results question-by-question with the data analyzed separately.

Question 1: How Important Is going to art museums and seeing art to you?

This question was asked to understand which participants placed a higher priority on going to art museums compared to those who had a lower priority. This question was key to begin the survey, as the participants were not inside a museum at the time of the survey. It was also necessary because this data could be used to compare to other questions to examine any trends that might appear. A Likert scale of 1-10 was used to determine the degree of each respondent’s opinion with 1 being least important and 10 being most (Appendix F). For analysis, results were grouped to include the numbers 1-5 as lower priority and 6-10 as higher priority. The results indicated that 30% (n= 18) of the respondents considered it a low priority to view art in art museums while 70% (n= 42) of the respondents felt it was a high

²⁵ Magazine, Smithsonian. Smithsonian.com.

priority. The results of this question indicate that most respondents reported that visiting art museums is a high priority for them. This question's results were analyzed in Question 2 to find trends and make comparisons between the data.

Question 2: Have you ever gone out of your way to see artwork at a museum because it was a famous, authentic artwork? (Drove to a faraway museum, planned a vacation around a museum, took a day off work...)

Question 2 was asked to understand which participants made an extraordinary effort to see art that was deemed authentic (Appendix G). This question was asked because it is generally understood that authentic art is a strong motivator for people to visit museums since objects in a museum are seen as having a high validity.²⁶ It is also the case that most museum visitors assume that original artwork has a higher value than a replica because of the use of word "original."²⁷ The use of the words "original art" leads to the museum visitor inadvertently placing a higher value on that art because these two words create the assumption that there is nothing else in the world that will look like this specific object.

Of the respondents, 53% (n= 32) said yes, they have gone out of their way to see authentic art at a museum. Of the respondents, 47% (n= 28) said no, they have not gone out of their way to see authentic artwork at a museum. This question was almost split directly down the middle which does not translate to the results of Question 1. This means that for the 30% (n= 18) of participants who did not feel it was very important to see art, more of them have gone out of their way to see authentic art in a museum, despite it not being a high priority. Perhaps one reason for this discrepancy is that some respondents might have been on a vacation where they were brought along to a museum by a frequent or ardent museumgoer when they would not have chosen to go to on their own.

²⁶ Juan Gariel Brida, Marta Disegna, Raffaele Scuderi footnote, "The Visitors' Perception of Authenticity at the Museums: Archaeology versus Modern Art." *Current Issues in Tourism* 17, no. 6 (December 3, 2012): 518–38, 3-4.

²⁷ Newman and Bloom, "Art," 560.

Question 3: If this painting was the original, would you have a positive opinion, negative opinion, or an indifferent opinion?

Question 3 refers to the three European paintings, *Virgin and Child with the Young Saint John the Baptist*, *Still Life with Fruit and Flowers*, and *The Judgement of Paris* (Appendix A, B, C). Of the respondents, 77% (n= 46) had a positive opinion of viewing the original artwork, 23% (n= 14) had an indifferent opinion on viewing the original artwork, and 0% (n= 0) had a negative opinion on viewing the original artwork (Appendix H). From these results, it can be concluded that most respondents preferred to see original artwork; while some had no opinion, no one felt negatively about seeing an original artwork. This is likely because there is nothing controversial about original art in museums; it is what is expected to be “on view.”

Eye-catching positive free responses included, “There is a certain draw to original art, especially famous pieces as they were created by the hands of the original artist. In reality, I usually do not know if something is an original unless it is stated, and I still have a positive opinion.” A second participant responded with, “It’s always cool to see the original piece of art. There is a sense of connection to the piece.” A third participant said, “I think it’s easier to appreciate an original painting and the work it took to complete.” Museums have built their reputations housing one-of-a-kind artwork that can only be seen in the holding institution, and this reputation has been picked up even by casual art museum visitors.

A responder reporting an indifferent opinion wrote, “I think it would be dependent on the actual art and where it originates from.” Another respondent answered, “If the artwork is good, it really does not matter if it is an original.” A third participant with an indifferent opinion responded with, “It doesn’t look as famous to me as the other paintings. There’s something exciting about knowing you are looking at the original of one of the really famous paintings, almost like a rush.” This comment echoed by George E. Newman and Paul Blooms’ comments on originality, “An original Picasso may be valuable because Picasso actually touched it, and Picasso is a famous and well-known artist. In contrast, a forgery would not have been touched by Picasso and, therefore, would not contain any of his special essence.”²⁸ This quote speaks to more famous artists’ works being sought out in museums because of their name and the importance that museums

²⁸ Newman and Bloom, “Art,” 559.

have placed behind them. The paintings selected for this survey were specifically chosen because they are *not* widely famous or recognizable to casual art museumgoers. This was done because it is difficult for museum visitors to move beyond seeing the celebrity status that surrounds a famous painting. For instance, if this survey was conducted with the *Mona Lisa*, or *The Birth of Venus*, it would have been a distraction for the survey participants because the object is so famous and sought-after. The use of less distinguished paintings was intentional to keep the focus strictly on museum visitors' opinions toward replicas.

Question 4: If the painting was a copy/replication created between 5-10 years after the original, would you have a positive opinion, negative opinion, or an indifferent opinion?

This question references period copies, which are copies done within a relatively short time after the original (Appendix I). Since not every respondent is aware of what a "period copy" means or the history behind the term, it was simpler to give a time span for reference instead. Copies during the Renaissance became a common way to master artmaking techniques, deceive buyers, or to demonstrate artistic skill to potential future clients.²⁹ Sometimes these replicas found their way into museums under the name "period copy," created during the period but carrying their own history, separate from the original.

Of the respondents, 23% (n= 14) had a positive opinion, 62% (n= 37) had an indifferent opinion, and 15% (n= 9) had a negative opinion. From this data, it appears that more respondents did not feel strongly negative or positive about period copies, hence the high percentage of indifferent opinion.

One of the respondents who had a positive opinion wrote, "As a person who doesn't know much about art, I think I would be okay with a replication if it was of equal quality." Another responder shared, "I would still have a positive opinion if it were a copy contemporaneous with the piece. I think copies made so soon after an original work can say something interesting about the context and time period in which the art was made." This last comment speaks to the age of the replica having a large impact on what kind of opinion museum visitors have.

²⁹ Cartwright, "Copies."

Of the respondents with an indifferent opinion, one wrote “I would prefer to see the original work, it seems more special. If it was created only 5 years after and it was a really old painting, it would not bother me as much because it is still really old. If it was a more recent work, I would prefer the original for sure.” Another respondent with the same opinion wrote, “It would not matter much to me, but seeing the original would be cooler.” Responders who had positive and indifferent opinions to period copies provide insight that the age of the replica is a factor. It appears that while a period copy is still a replica, they were created so close to the original painting that museum visitors still feel there is a high value in seeing a period copy due to its age.

One respondent with a negative opinion responded with, “I came to the museum to see the original, if it is a copy then it would not have the same impact on me.” A different respondent indicated, “I have a negative opinion, as to me the piece is more than just a pretty picture. I enjoy knowing the history behind this artwork and a copy does not embody the history behind it as the original would.” A third respondent said, “The original piece is one of a kind, even if the copy does its best to be exact, it will never be able to be an exact copy.” This response is in line with the idea that a copy can never match an original. A perfect replica can never be achieved by a human because creative identity never goes away entirely, even when creating a replica.³⁰

Question 5: If the painting was a copy/replication created in the last 10 years, would you have a positive opinion, negative opinion, or an indifferent opinion?

This question refers to modern replicas without using the word “modern” by asking respondents to imagine that the painting they were looking at was painted between 5-10 years ago (Appendix J). Of the respondents, 12% (n= 7) had a positive opinion, 55% (n= 33) had an indifferent opinion, and 33% (n= 20) had a negative opinion. Once again, an indifferent opinion was the highest percentage followed by a negative opinion, but the gap was smaller than in Question 4. More respondents had a negative opinion about a modern replica than a period replica.

One of the positive opinion respondents answered, “I would appreciate the replicas more if they were done by hand and not computer-

³⁰ Richard Shiff, “Representation, Copying, and the Technique of Originality.” *New Literary History* 15, no. 2 (1984): 333–63, 335.

generated.” Another respondent who had a positive opinion wrote, “A replica of the original created in the last 10 years would likely have less exposure to light and other elements that might affect the quality of a painting, allowing it to potentially match more of what the original work was intended to look like at the time of creation.” This last comment is worth noting because it brings attention to the benefits of a modern replica in that the quality and condition can be better than a period copy or an original painting.

One of the respondents that had an indifferent opinion responded with “Just take a picture of the original at this point and display it.” This was the only free response that suggested taking a picture of a painting had the same value as a modern replica. Another respondent who had an indifferent opinion answered, “I do not think I would travel or go out of my way to see a copy painted recently, depending on the age of the original piece. If it is a work that is several centuries old, I would not have an interest.” This last comment supports the analysis of Question 4, which is that the age of a replica painting influences museum visitors’ opinions being positive, negative, or indifferent. The age of the replica needs to be closer to the original painting for more museum visitors *not* to have a negative opinion.

Two of the respondents who had a negative opinion wrote, “It is modern and still a replica, so it’s less special.” Another answered “I think it depends on how it was recreated. If it was attempted to be recreated in a similar way the original was made (same materials etc.), I would be like...awesome. But, if it was recreated with modern techniques and tools, I’d be a little disappointed.” These last two comments show support of the theory that original objects in museums promote curiosity and engagement, while replicas tend to do this less, especially when presented with a copy and an original.³¹ The negative and indifferent comments offer a dismissive attitude about replicas and their place in museums. There is a lack of desire to interact with the replicas as they are not the originals, and the original artwork has an intangible higher value.

Question 6: Did you have any previous opinions on copies of art prior to this survey?

³¹ Louise Bunce, “Appreciation of Authenticity Promotes Curiosity: Implications for Object-Based Learning in Museums.” *Journal of Museum Education* 41, no. 3 (July 2, 2016): 230–39, 235.

This question was asked to understand if the participants had prior knowledge of replicas in museums (Appendix K). Of the respondents, 32% (n= 19) said “yes” they have had a previous opinion before this survey, while 68% (n= 41) of participants said “no.” This informed my research in that it showed most respondents had no previous opinions, and this was their first time giving this question any thought.

Three of the respondents indicated, “I have enjoyed seeing originals over copies most of my life.” A second respondent answered, “I hadn’t thought about age of the copy relative to the age of the original, but I knew that copying & forging artwork was a highly skilled and lucrative trade, and it can be super interesting to dig into.” A third participant answered, “I do not feel the need to see the real *Starry Night* or *Mona Lisa* because I have seen so many reproductions. If I ever had the chance to, I would certainly not turn it down, but I would not go too far out of my way to see the originals. I value every stage of reproduction (recent or period) of it if it is not being falsely presented as original; transparency and honesty is important.” This response raises a problem some museums have with the display of replicas in museums. When displaying a replica, it is essential museums make this clear, and do not obscure or make it difficult to differentiate from an original. If museums display originals and replicas in the same manner, it can lead to the museum visitor not being able to differentiate what they are looking at.³² The Smithsonian’s African American Museum, for example, made it difficult to understand one of their Jacob Lawrence paintings because they displayed a photographic reproduction of the painting. The only clue that it is a reproduction is in the curatorial statement where a photo credit reads, “Bridgeman Images.”³³ When museums hide replicas in plain sight, museum visitors can be unaware; others may discover the replica and lose trust in museums as an institution. Art museums owe it to their visitors to be as transparent as possible about what is on display.

Though respondents who answered “no” were not required to give a free response some offered their reasoning for selecting this choice. One of the respondents replied, “I sometimes don’t even read the card that says whether or not I am looking at an original.” Another respondent answered, “No, I never knew they used copies.” These responses return to the Smithsonian’s African American Museum display problem. It is unrealistic to assume every museum visitor reads

³² Bunce, “Appreciation,” 236.

³³ Menachem Wecker, “The Imitation Game.” *The Washington Post Magazine*, February 27, 2019.

curatorial statements, so not stating replicas clearly on tombstone labels or at all can go unnoticed. Museum visitors deserve to know if they are in fact looking at an original or a replica as museums are seen as pillars of truth and are expected to house reliable information.³⁴

Question 7: As a museum visitor, do you believe museums should have only authentic art and no copies/replications on display?

Schwan and Dutz conducted a similar survey in their research that asked six questions regarding “authenticity” in museums.³⁵ Furthering this, my study asked one question on authenticity in museums to understand how museum visitors specifically in art museums reacted to authentic art (Appendix L). This question was asked in response to Question 6 to understand if a previous opinion on replicas translated to a belief that museums should only have authentic art. If this were true, then the percentages of respondents should closely align, and in fact, they did come back almost the exact same.

Of the respondents, 28% (n= 17) said “yes” museums should only have authentic art, and 72% (n= 43) said “no” museums should not. Two of the respondents who answered “yes” responded with “Replications diminish value, no?” and “I prefer to see the original as it has been 1st created (not copied). I prefer to see the original thought process, but if that is not possible (if a museum cannot display an original), seeing a replica may be better than seeing nothing at all.” This thought reflects the desire to see the original conception of an idea and the implementation of it not a “copy and paste” which is what a replica is. An original painting can be compared to the composing of a performance, there is originality behind it, while a replica does not have this.³⁶

Two of the respondents who said “no” answered with “There is nothing inherently wrong with bringing art to visitors via replication,” and “If an original was damaged or deteriorated it would be nice to see what it

³⁴ Alyssa Frije, “Aura of Authenticity: The Impact of Original Objects in the Museum Guest Experience a Thesis in Museum Studies.” *Aura of Authenticity: The Impact of Original Objects in the Museum Guest Experience a Thesis in Museum Studies*. Thesis, State University College at Buffalo, 2017. 1-65, 48.

³⁵ Schwan and Dutz, “How do Visitors,” 223-224.

³⁶ Newman and Bloom, “Art,” 559.

looked like originally." Personal preference plays a large part in the answers given with more respondents disagreeing with the question.

History of Museums and Indigenous Communities

Before discussing the results of Question 8 in the survey, it is important to understand the history of Indigenous art in museums. The relationship between most Indigenous communities and Western Museums is complicated. Nearly all Indigenous cultures in the Americas share in the impacts from colonialism, the aftermath of which is still seen today. Indigenous communities can view museums as untrustworthy and as places that glorify the reaping of colonialism. Some Indigenous communities today do not want to interact with museums based on this history and the colonialist principles upon which museums were built.³⁷ Museums gained popularity in the 1850's and from this time until relatively recently, they have had a history of specifically excluding Indigenous communities from consultation and participation in exhibitions that use their culture's art.³⁸ Anthropologists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries highly influenced how curators in museums displayed Indigenous art, leading curators to display Indigenous art as if Indigenous cultures were extinct and preserved in museums.³⁹ Moreover, Indian Removal Acts and similar laws restricting their cultural practices were at an all-time high during the nineteenth century. One example is the Civilization Fund Act of 1819; this law allowed organizations to set up boarding schools with the goal of assimilating Native American children into Western culture.⁴⁰ Another law passed was The Indian Removal Act of 1830, which forcibly removed Indigenous communities east of the Mississippi to present day Oklahoma.⁴¹

³⁷ JoAllyn Archambault, "Native Communities, Museums And Collaboration." *Practicing Anthropology* 33, no. 2 (2011): 16–20, 20.

³⁸ Antonis Chaliakopoulos, "History of Museums: A Look at the Learning institutions Through Time," *TheCollector*.

³⁹ Amy Lonetree (Hochunk), "Introduction: Native Americans and Museums," in *Decolonizing Museums: Representing Native America in National and Tribal Museums*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012, 1-28, 9.

⁴⁰ "Libguides: Native American Law: Native American Boarding Schools." Native American Boarding Schools - Native American Law - LibGuides at University at Albany, December 23, 2023.

⁴¹ "President Andrew Jackson's Message to Congress 'On Indian Removal.'" 2022. National Archives. May 10, 2022.

These and other colonialist events affected how exhibitions were developed and displayed. Many Indigenous cultures were diminished in museum settings, which was the point of such laws. Before 1960, some consultation was conducted between museums and Indigenous communities, but it was sparse.⁴² Post 1960, momentum for Indigenous communities to be involved in museums increased, a product of the Civil Rights activism.⁴³ Today, museums have become less curator-centered with regard to Indigenous art exhibitions and have turned to Indigenous communities for guidance and consultation, bringing them into the center of the exhibition and design work.⁴⁴ When Indigenous communities are asked and accept participating in museum exhibitions, museums benefit greatly by being able to accurately reflect their culture and provide the most holistic educational experience to museum visitors possible.

Question 8: Would you have answered any questions differently if this was an Indigenous (Native American) object?

This question was asked because only European paintings from the 15th through 17th centuries were used in this survey (Appendix M). This question was meant to determine how different respondents viewed Indigenous versus European replicas. Western ideology has so heavily influenced museums that one could argue they are the gatekeepers of what is and is not art. Critics of this belief say that it is not up to Western ideology to call Indigenous art “primitive art” or “art” because it already is art.⁴⁵ Euro-centric beliefs should not be the benchmark that other culture’s art is compared to because art is different in every culture.

Of the respondents, 43% (n= 26) said “yes” they would have answered questions differently, and 57% (n= 34) said “no” they would not have answered questions differently. The respondents were split almost 50/50 on this question, so the free response section was used to examine why the respondents selected what they did. Two of the respondents who answered “yes” replied with, “I guess it would depend on who made the replication and if it was approved by any living descendants. But for educational purposes it could be useful.” Another

⁴² Archambault, “Native Communities,” 16.

⁴³ Archambault, “Native Communities,” 17.

⁴⁴ Lonetree, “Introduction,” 1.

⁴⁵ Larry Shiner, “‘Primitive Fakes,’ ‘Tourist Art,’ and the Ideology of Authenticity.” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 52, no. 2 (1994): 225–34, 225.

answered, "Yes, if it was an Indigenous artist/art that was being replicated but not credited/replicated by a non-Native artist." Two of the respondents that answered "no" responded, "Would not care what culture or race an artist was," and the other answered, "Art is art." It is important to note from these opinions that it is critical for the creation of Indigenous replicas to be completed by an appropriate Indigenous artist. No curator today would hire a non-Indigenous artist to create a replica for a museum as that would not be ethically or politically correct.

Analysis of Replicas in the Survey

For further analysis, the data for Questions 4 and 5 has been combined to gauge percentages of responder's opinions strictly on replicas (Appendix N). When combined, 18% (n= 21) of responders had a positive opinion towards replicas, 58% (n= 70) had an indifferent opinion to replicas, and 24% (n= 29) had a negative opinion towards replicas. From this data, it appears that most museum visitors have an indifferent opinion on replicas; however, after the review of free responses, most responders who selected "indifferent" had a negative tone in their free responses. For example, two survey participants who had indifferent opinions to replicas in Questions 4 and 5 replied, "I still would find the artwork beautiful but so appreciate seeing the original work" and "My opinion on recent copies is situational as there are many different reasons and ways modern copies are created. Generally, I think the internet and how easy it is to see these pieces online makes a recent copy seem less special or significant. I know this is not true and logically I think it shouldn't matter whether it is an original or a modern copy, but I still am slightly disappointed when it is a modern copy." Both free responses have an underlying negative voice that emphasizes the desire for original art to be seen in museums despite not claiming any strong opinions. This trend leads to the conclusion that museum visitors have a more negative opinion towards replicas in museums.

It is possible that some respondents may not have had strong opinions on any of the questions as they did not have a pre-existing connection with art museums; nonetheless, they offered insight into how they truly felt about replicas and originals in museums. There are more favorable responses to original and period replicas than there are modern replicas. Over half of the respondents say that they have gone out of their way to see authentic art, but less than half said it was important for them to go to art museums. This shows that museum visitors are willing to put in the effort to see authentic art even when it is not a high

priority for them. The survey also revealed that most respondents did not believe that museums should only have authentic art on display. They did, however, echo that they wanted honesty and to know if they were looking at a replica. The last question of the survey leads us to the next part of my research about the importance of Indigenous replicas in and outside of museums.

Everything is Not as it Seems: Indigenous Replicas

I used to believe there was no place for replicated art in museums. I, like so many museum visitors, wanted to see only “authentic” art where artists hand-made their masterpieces. My perspective has since changed with respect to Indigenous art because I have learned that different factors lie behind how Indigenous and European art are viewed. The findings of the research presented thus far can only be applied to early modern European art. The inclusion of this next section is to provide research regarding why Indigenous replicas are important in museums.

Creating Indigenous Replicas in an Authentic Way

Thus far, I have only discussed Indigenous communities in the United States, but there are also Indigenous communities all over the world that have felt the effects of colonialism which can still be seen in museums today. For example, across the Pacific Ocean, one museum has paved the way by commissioning contemporary Indigenous artists for onsite studies of their culture’s art for the purpose of replicating pieces. At the National Taiwan Museum, head curator Li Tzu-Ning fostered a space for Indigenous Taiwanese artists to come to the museum to learn art techniques no longer commonly practiced in the artist’s culture.⁴⁶ Through interviews and documentation of the techniques artists used to create the replica, the museum’s understanding of the piece’s cultural importance grew.⁴⁷ In embracing this process, museum staff interviewed the artists to learn more about the cultural significance of an object, and curators were able to write a more detailed account of how each object was made. Creating replicas offers the opportunity to document the process of recreating Indigenous art by relearning what has been forgotten. This form of replication offers Indigenous communities a way to learn their past lost

⁴⁶ Marzia Varutti, “Authentic Reproductions: Museum Collection Practices as Authentication.” *Museum Management and Curatorship* 33, no. 1 (2017): 42–56, 15.

⁴⁷ Varutti, “Authentic” 15-16.

through colonialism or other factors while also offering museums a detailed first-hand experience of the techniques used to create these traditional pieces. Replicas serve an invaluable part of the process where first-hand experience and knowledge are gained by both Indigenous artists and museum staff. Museum staff recorded the process so that future museum staff could look back on the process and learn from this experience as well. This is the best way to ensure that learning continues for not only one generation of museum staff but for the future generations as well. By creating Indigenous replicas in museums, Indigenous artists, museum staff, and museum visitors can all take part in the educational benefit of this process.

Differences Between European and Indigenous Art

Indigenous and European art, from conception to lasting impact, are not the same. One major distinction lies in the idea that in many Indigenous cultures their art is understood to be “alive” with their ancestors. An example of this is in Tlingit culture, who live in Southeastern Alaska, where art is seen and felt as alive because when Tlingit artists create, their DNA becomes a part of the object.⁴⁸ In this way, their spirits live on through the object, and their descendants can feel their ancestors in the object. The Kwakwaka'wakw are an example of an Indigenous community that follows a similar belief to the Tlingit. The Kwakwaka'wakw are a nation of Indigenous communities who live in British Columbia and follow the belief that their carvings and other art objects are alive, and their ancestors are within them teaching them the history of the Kwakwaka'wakw and the world.⁴⁹ Daisy Sewid-Smith, who is part of the Kwakwaka'wakw First Nations, writes of the differences in European and Indigenous art:

When non-Indigenous people, and some of our own non-traditionalists, take cognizance of what we now know as “Northwest Coast Native art,” they scrutinize and they analyze the object or painting as you would a Rembrandt. They study the light, the shade, the brush strokes, and then they proceed to interpret what they are viewing in European art terms. They see the paintings, carvings, and

⁴⁸ Lily Hope, (Tlingit). Art H 525 Autumn 2023: Museums and Indigenous Peoples, Class Lecture, University of Washington.

⁴⁹ Daisy Sewid-Smith (Kwakwaka'wakw). “Interpreting Cultural Symbols of the People from the Shore.” *Native Art of the Northwest Coast: A History of Changing Ideas*. Eds. Townsend-Gault, Charlotte, Jennifer Kramer, Ki-ke-in. UBC Press, 2013. pp.15-25, 17.

dances as visual art and nothing more. As with a Rembrandt painting, the carver or painter determines the value of his creation; and as with a Rembrandt, the appraisal of the object or painting becomes greater in value after the artist's death. These objects and paintings are coveted and collected throughout the world as works of art.⁵⁰

This passage encapsulates the misconceptions that European art history analysis is transferable to all art. Sewid-Smith identifies the flaws in using the same approach one would use for European art for Indigenous art; it is clear it does not transfer. For example, when a painting is completed, the artist is not seen as still living in the painting after their passing. Instead, their legacy is remembered, and their techniques are taught and analyzed. Indigenous and Greco-Roman-art, for instance, analyses do not equate with each other and should remain separate. European art has been studied more vastly and intensely when compared to Indigenous art. Therefore, there are unknown elements in Indigenous art that still need to be studied. Colonialism and Western museum design were created in sync and ultimately favored European art. Classical art history analysis has developed to favor European art, leaving all other cultures' art out of the equation. European art is not at a higher standard than Indigenous art; they are simply different, with their own unique genesis and *raison d'être*.

Indigenous Replicas

As someone who has advocated for "authentic" art and seeing the original work of an artist in a museum, I feel it is important to clarify that replicas are not invalid, nor should they have a negative impact within museums. When I go to museums and see replicas of Indigenous art, I do not feel cheated or robbed of the experience of seeing "authentic" art. Based on the survey results, I speculate that the majority would have an indifferent opinion with a more negative undertone because that was the result for European painting replicas and over half of participants said they would answer the survey questions the same had Indigenous art been used. Indigenous replicas have a place in museums and there needs to be education for museum visitors to understand the importance of replicas regarding other cultures. In understanding the history of Indigenous communities and

⁵⁰ Sweid-Smith, "Interpreting," 16.

museums, I see that replicas are not something to ignore or dismiss as invaluable. Museums can learn from this research how museum visitors need more attainable education to understand the place of replicas in Indigenous exhibitions.

Conclusion

Museum visitors' opinions on replicas in art museums vary greatly. This research provides a survey with definitive and open-ended questions and an analysis of the data produced. The first trend produced in this research is that original paintings are generally preferred over replicas both period and modern. The second trend is that period replicas are viewed more positively than modern replicas due to the proximity in the age of the replica to the original. The third trend this research shows is that while more museum visitors have an indifferent opinion toward any form of replicas, there were more negative free responses toward replicas rather than original art. This research also brought to attention the desire of museum visitors to know if what they are looking at is authentic or a replica. Several respondents did not know museums used replicas or that they could be displayed in the same way. Lastly, this research noted that over half of survey respondents would have answered the survey the same had Indigenous art been examined instead of 15th through 17th early modern European paintings, indicating that education is critical to understanding the importance of the role replicas play in cultures outside of Western museums.

This survey scratched the surface of museum visitors' opinions on original art versus replicas in art museums and the reasoning behind their opinions. Next steps for this research could include working with a larger database to see if these trends and findings stay the same with a larger pool of respondents. The use of famous paintings and replicas in the surveys instead of lesser-known paintings and originals could also be used to see if trends change. The use of Indigenous art could be used in the survey as well to gain a direct evaluation of museum visitor's opinions of Indigenous art replicas. This research offers the ability for museums to see firsthand that art museum visitors want to see original art over replicas and use this data to their advantage. There is still much for museums to learn about museum visitor interactions with original art versus replicas, but this research is a start and may serve as a reference point; and as one survey respondent said, "It is nice to see the real thing."

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Appendix A



Sandro Botticelli and Workshop, *Virgin and Child with the Young Saint John the Baptist*, c. 1490, Cleveland Museum of Art

Appendix B



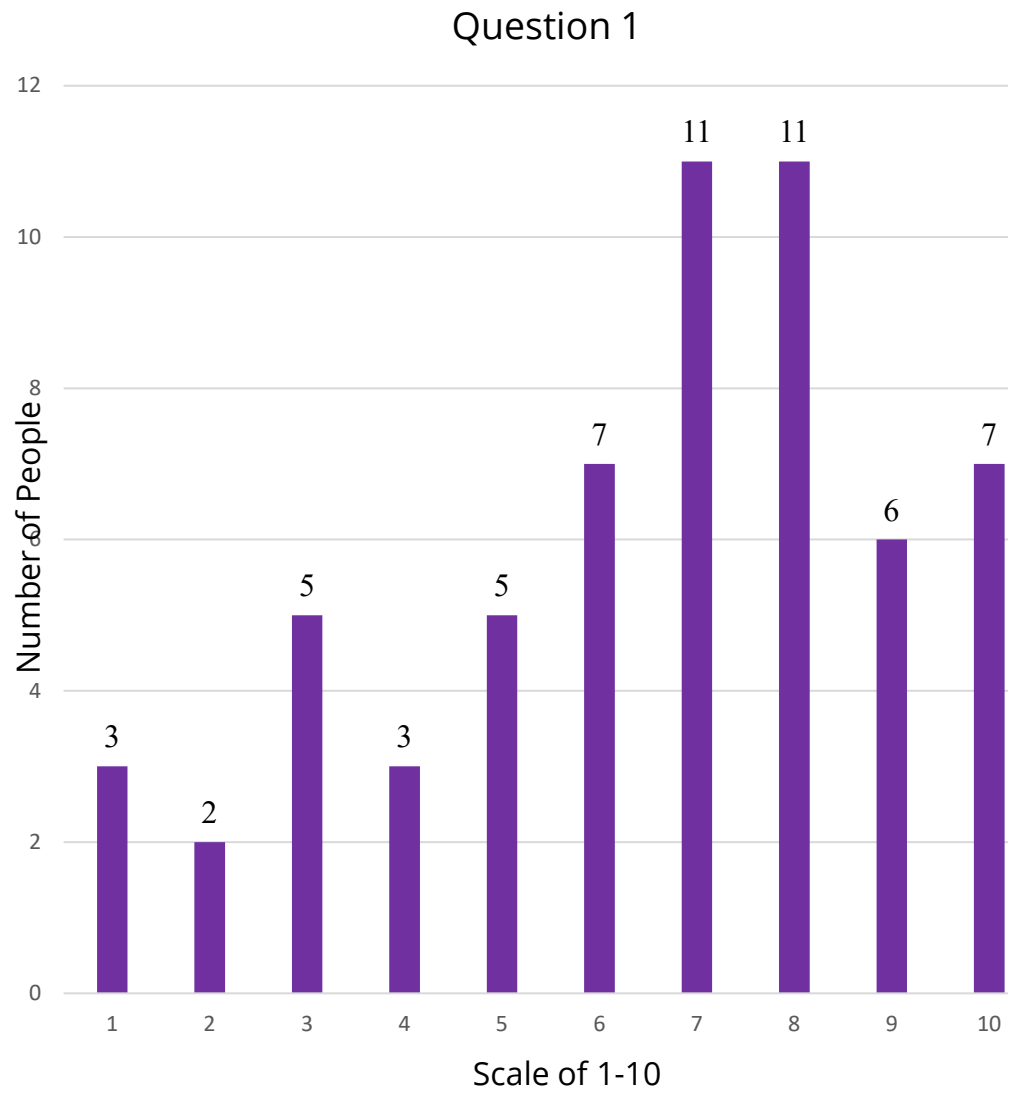
Fran Snyder, *Still Life with Fruit and Flowers*, 1630, Cummer Museum of Art and Gardens



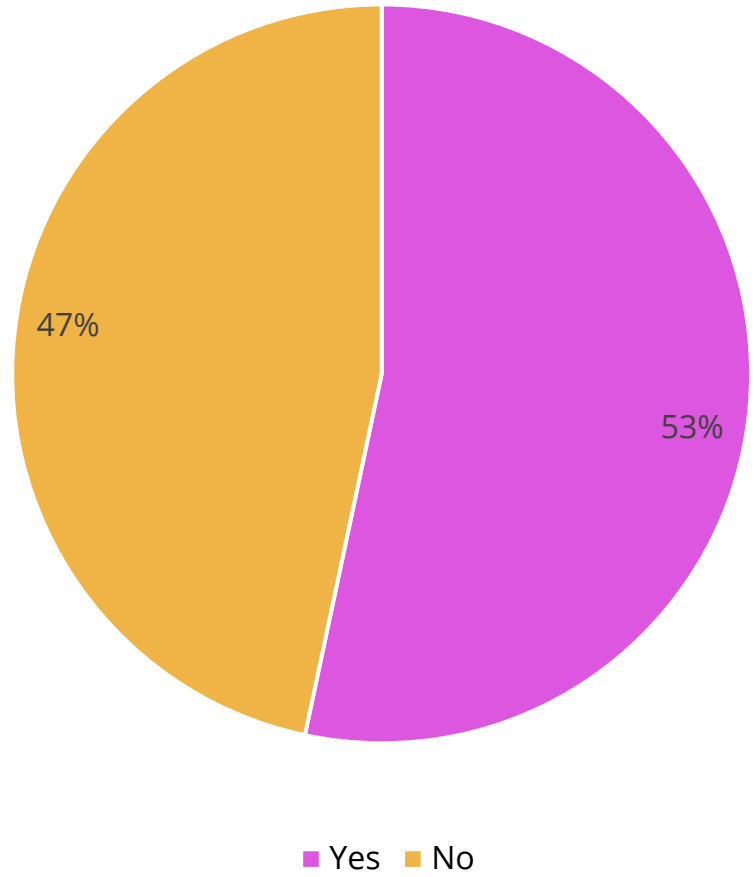
Lucas Cranach the Elder, *The Judgement of Paris*, c. 1516-18, Seattle Art Museum

Written/ Oral Instructions

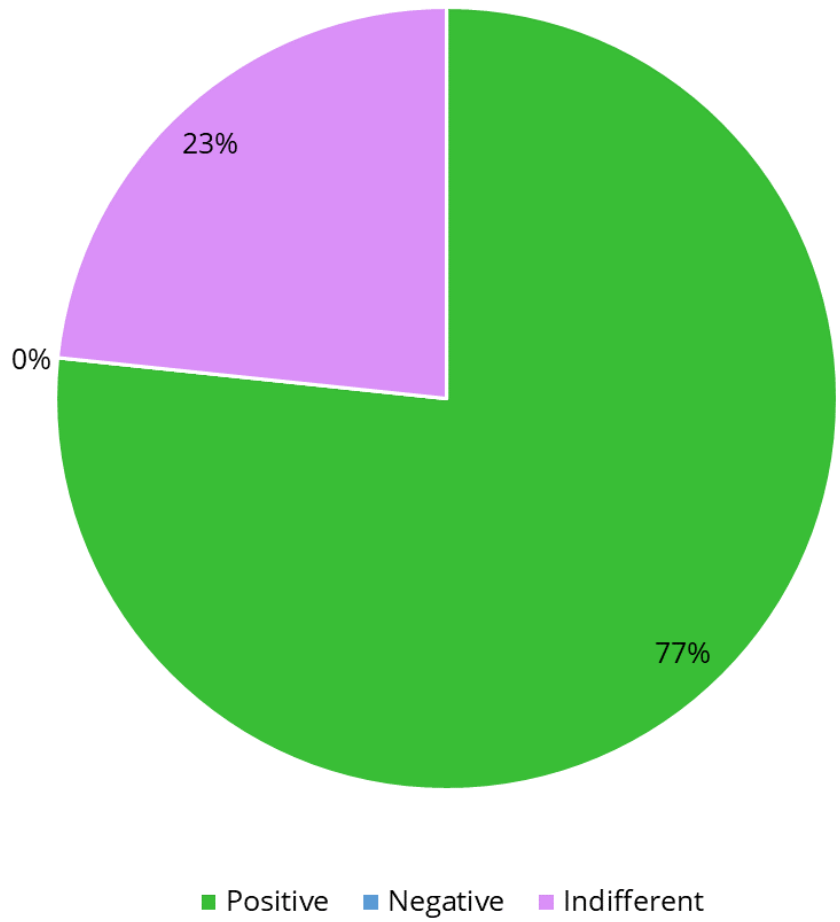
Questions 1, 2, and 8, you do not need to refer to the painting on the second page of the survey. Please refer to the painting for questions 3-7. The painting that you will be looking at is a _____, ca. _____ and it is the original painting, questions 4 and 5 are asking you to imagine that it is a replication. Also, please limit your free response questions to 1-2 sentences. I would appreciate your answers being as honest as possible (do not answer them how you think I would want you to).



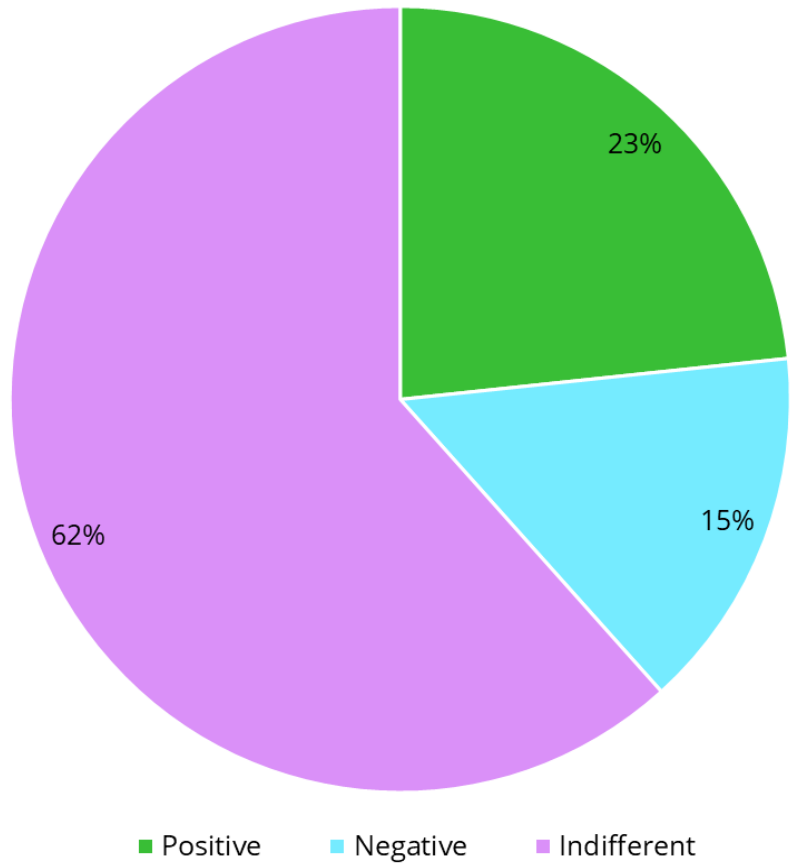
Question 2



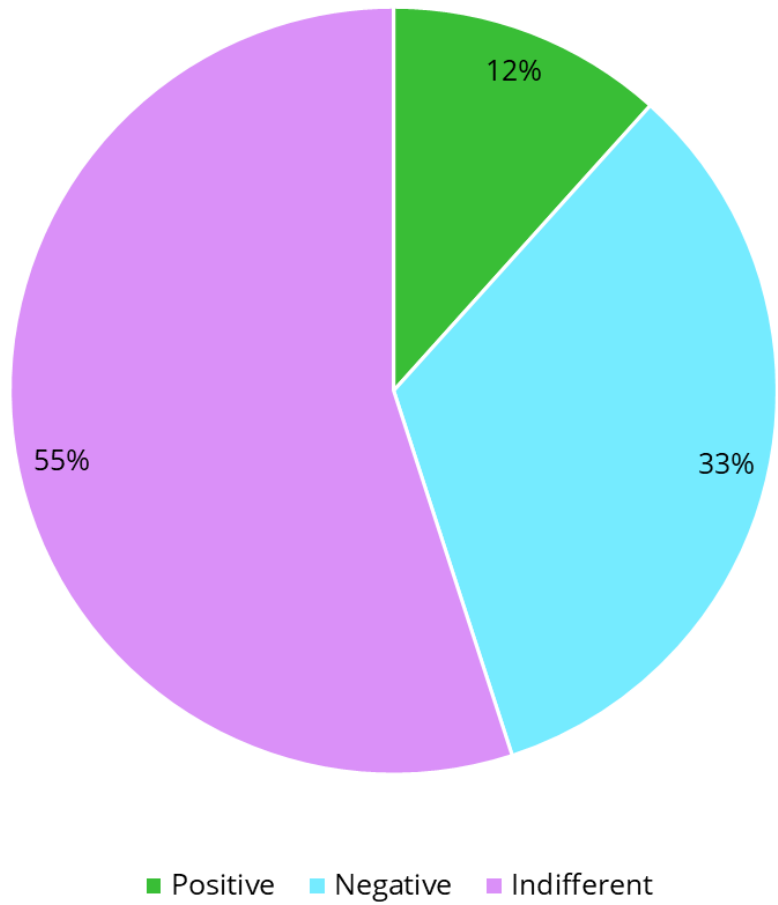
Question 3



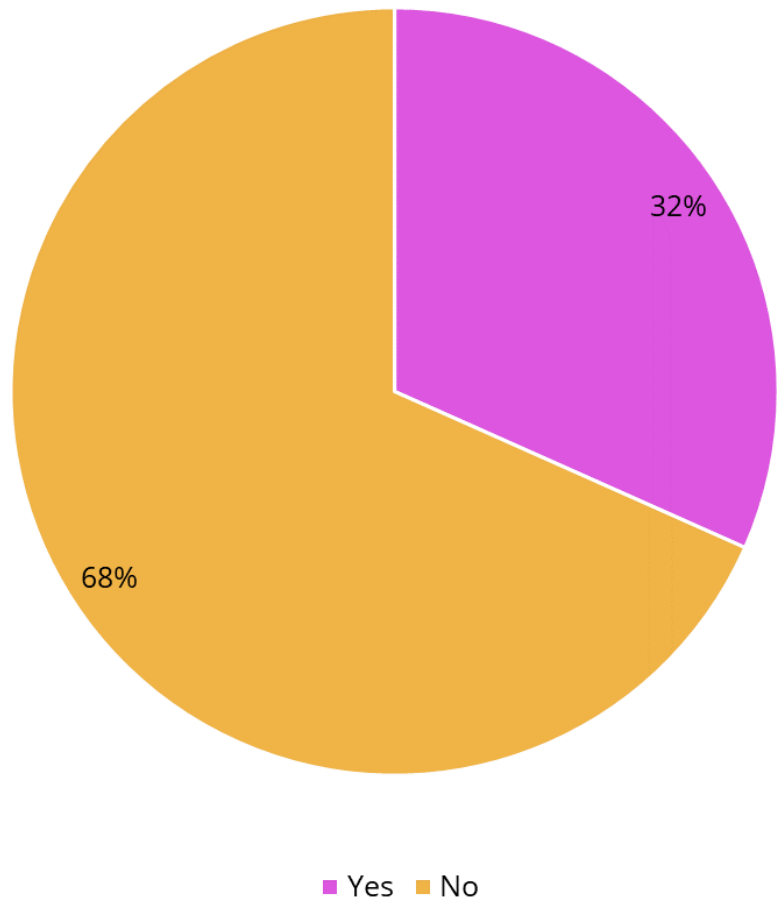
Question 4



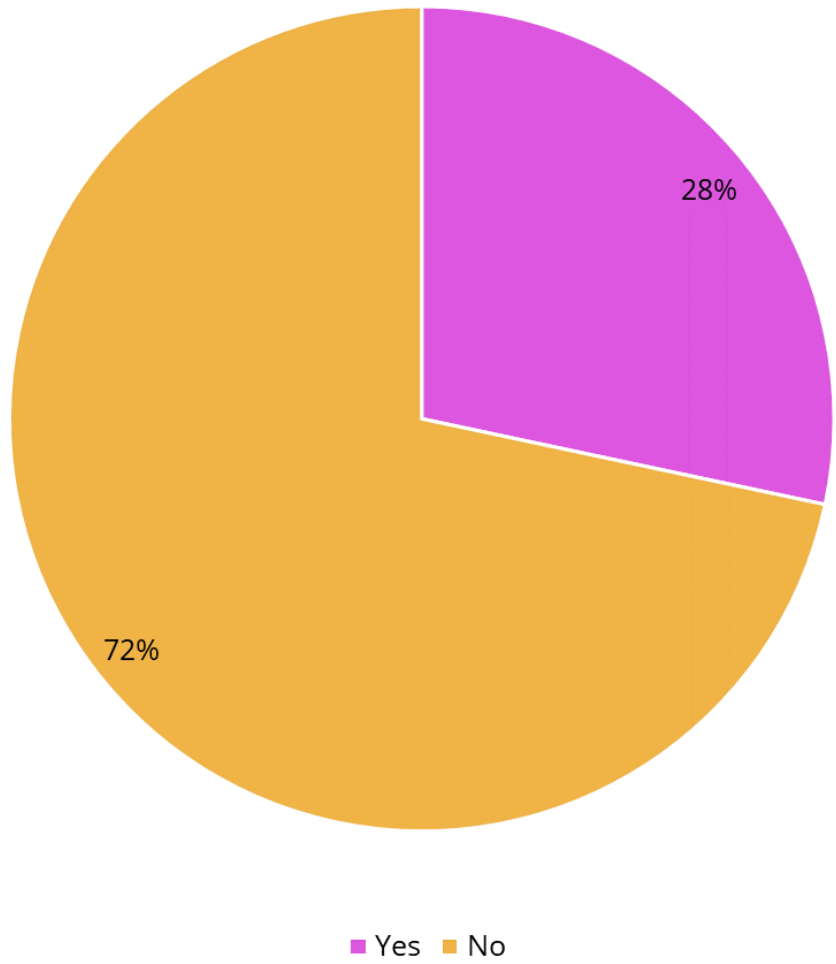
Question 5



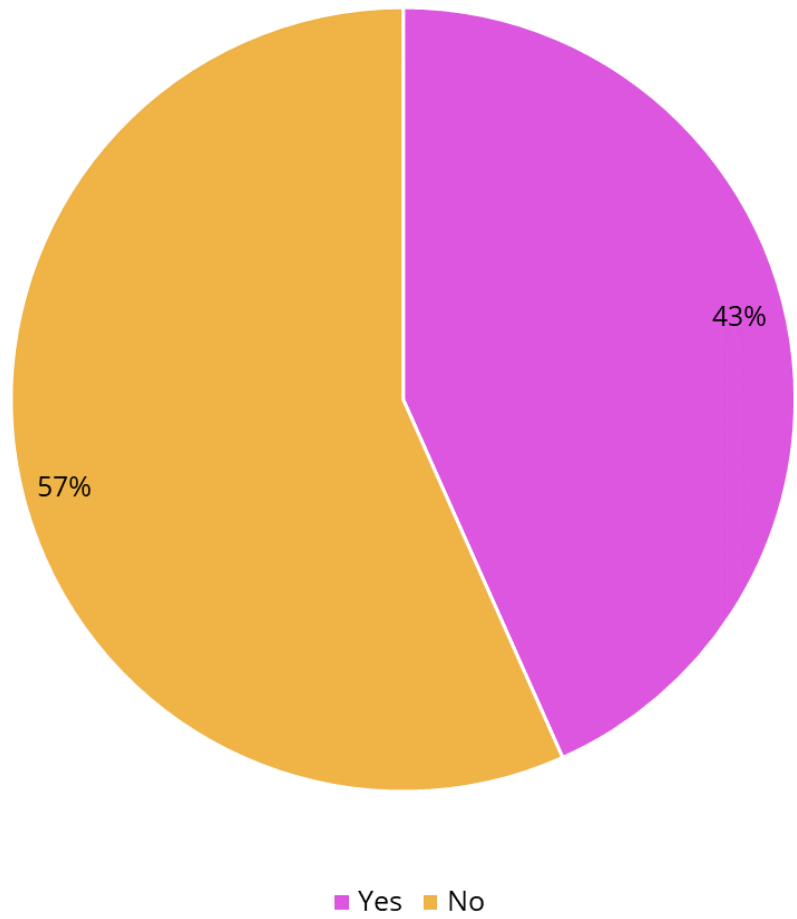
Question 6



Question 7



Question 8



Percentage of Replicas

