# Social media influence linked to rise in risky shark interactions and attacks



A recent study has linked the rising number of shark attacks to social media influencers encouraging travellers to physically interact with sharks. The research, published in the journal Frontiers in Conservation, analysed shark encounter records from the seas around French Polynesia and found that five per cent of the 74 recorded bites were defensive reactions following human interactions perceived as threatening by the sharks.

The international research team also examined the Shark Attack Files, a comprehensive global database of shark incidents dating back to the 1800s, finding over 300 cases consistent with these defensive attack patterns.

Professor Eric Clua of PSL University in France, who led the study, attributed this increase in risky behaviour to social media trends where people are urged to “cling to a shark’s dorsal fin or stroke it” to demonstrate that sharks are harmless and promote conservation. Speaking to The Times, Professor Clua remarked, “People know the difference between a [Yorkshire terrier] and a pit bull, whereas they don’t know the difference between a blacktip reef shark and a bull shark, which are their marine equivalents.”

He further highlighted the misconception surrounding sharks, saying, “There’s an incredibly negative perception bias towards sharks … they are responsible for fewer than ten human deaths a year worldwide, whereas dogs are responsible for more than 10,000 deaths and are perceived positively by the public.”

The trend has seen high-profile celebrities such as actor Zac Efron, singer Ciara, and actor Bella Thorne sharing videos of themselves touching sharks. Viral footage also shows divers handling large apex predators like tiger sharks, which can grow over five metres in length, with some even grasping their noses.

Social media influencer Taylor Cunningham regularly posts content of herself swimming with and touching sharks, while conservationist Ocean Ramsay commented, “We love to share rare moments of physical connection.”

Despite public fascination, academics emphasise that shark attacks often arise from human behaviours that provoke or harass these animals. Professor Clua advised anyone encountering a shark in the water: “Don’t touch. Just look at it. Enjoy its beauty, but remember they are wild animals, predators that can act as predators. It is not only a matter of safety but also of respect.”

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

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7. <https://www.independent.co.uk/travel/news-and-advice/influencers-tiktok-instagram-shark-attacks-b2740331.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data