# Social media influencers linked to rise in defensive shark attacks worldwide



A recent study has linked social media influencers encouraging close interactions with sharks to a rise in defensive shark attacks around the world. The research, published in the journal Frontiers in Conservation, highlights concerns over the growing trend of travellers and influencers stroking or holding sharks, behaviours that may provoke dangerous responses from these marine animals.

The study, led by Professor Eric Clua of PSL University in France, analysed shark encounters near French Polynesia, where 74 shark bite records were examined. Among these, five per cent of attacks were classified as defensive, meaning they occurred immediately after humans interacted with sharks in ways perceived as threats. Beyond this regional analysis, the researchers also assessed a global database called the Shark Attack Files, which archives shark incident data dating back to the 1800s. Their findings showed that over 300 incidents worldwide reflected this defensive pattern.

Professor Clua attributed the increase in such incidents partly to social media content that encourages risky behaviour around sharks. “I don’t encourage, as many influencers do on social networks, [people] to cling to a shark’s dorsal fin or stroke it, under the pretext of proving that they are harmless and [those people are] supposedly working for their conservation,” he said. Speaking to The Times, he elaborated on public misconceptions about sharks, noting: “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 also pointed out that sharks have a highly negative perception despite being responsible for fewer than ten human deaths globally each year. By contrast, dogs, which are generally viewed positively, cause more than 10,000 deaths annually. This discrepancy highlights the complex relationship humans have with sharks and the misunderstandings propagated in part by social media trends.

A number of celebrities have contributed to the phenomenon by sharing footage of themselves touching sharks. Well-known figures such as actor Zac Efron, singer Ciara, and actor Bella Thorne have posted videos online showing physical contact with sharks. Viral footage has also circulated featuring divers handling large shark species, including tiger sharks—apex predators that can grow beyond five metres in length. Influencer Taylor Cunningham posts videos of her swimming with and touching sharks, while conservationist Ocean Ramsay has expressed enthusiasm about sharing “rare moments of physical connection” with the animals.

Despite sharks’ fearsome reputation, many experts stress that attacks usually happen when sharks are provoked or feel threatened by human behaviour. Professor Clua advises those who encounter sharks to admire them from a distance and avoid touching them. “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,” he said.

The Independent is reporting that this study underscores the impact of human actions and social media trends on shark behaviour, contributing to a nuanced conversation about wildlife interaction and conservation in marine environments.

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

## References

* <https://www.the-independent.com/travel/news-and-advice/shark-attacks-social-media-influencers-b2739455.html> - This article corroborates the claim that social media influencers are partly responsible for the rise in shark attacks by encouraging interactions with sharks. It highlights a study published in the journal Frontiers in Conservation that analyzed shark encounters near French Polynesia.
* <https://www.pluggedin.com/blog/on-the-radar-influencer-shark-attacks-snapchat-lawsuits-and-rejection-cakes/> - This source discusses the recent increase in shark attacks and suggests that social media influencers are contributing factors by normalizing risky behavior around sharks.
* <https://www.mensjournal.com/travel/experts-warn-influencer-behavior-shark-attacks> - This article supports the assertion that social media influencers’ actions are driving a rise in shark attacks by detailing their increasing audacity in engaging with wild sharks. It references Professor Eric Clua’s research on defensive shark bites.
* <https://brobible.com/culture/article/influencers-causing-rise-shark-attacks-study/> - This article provides further evidence of the role influencers play in shark attacks by referencing Professor Clua’s study, which suggests that influencers normalize ill-advised encounters with sharks.
* <https://news.mongabay.com/2024/10/social-media-influencers-bad-behavior-with-marine-wildlife-is-risky-for-animals-too-commentary/> - While not specifically addressing shark attacks, this commentary highlights the broader issue of social media influencers engaging in risky behavior with marine wildlife, which can be detrimental to both humans and animals.
* <https://www.noahwire.com> - This source is mentioned as part of the original article but does not provide direct evidence to support specific claims about shark attacks and influencers. However, it might offer broader context or background information on marine wildlife interactions.
* <https://www.independent.co.uk/travel/news-and-advice/shark-attacks-social-media-influencers-b2739455.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data