# Rise in shark attacks linked to social media influencers promoting close encounters



A recent study has linked the rise in shark attacks to social media influencers who encourage travellers to "stroke" sharks during their encounters. The research, published in the journal Frontiers in Conservation, examined records of shark incidents in the seas around French Polynesia and analysed a global database of shark attacks dating back to the 1800s.

In French Polynesia alone, researchers found 74 recorded shark bite incidents, with approximately five per cent classified as defensive attacks. These defensive encounters occur immediately after a shark perceives human interaction as threatening. Extending their analysis to a worldwide dataset known as the Shark Attack Files, over 300 incidents were identified with similar defensive characteristics.

Professor Eric Clua from PSL University in France, who led the study, attributed some of this rise in encounters to the influence of social media. He told The Times, “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 highlighted a lack of public understanding regarding different shark species, stating, “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 added that despite the often fearful reputation sharks carry, they are responsible for fewer than ten human deaths worldwide annually, a stark contrast to dogs, which cause over 10,000 deaths but enjoy a positive public perception.

Several celebrities have contributed to the trend through social media posts showing close contact with sharks. These include actor Zac Efron, singer Ciara, and actor Bella Thorne. Viral footage also shows divers handling large shark species such as tiger sharks, which can exceed five metres in length, sometimes grasping the animal’s nose.

Among social media figures is Taylor Cunningham, who shares videos of herself swimming with and touching sharks. Conservationist Ocean Ramsay commented on the trend, stating, “we love to share rare moments of physical connection.”

Academics maintain that while sharks have long been feared, many incidents of attacks are provoked by humans harassing the animals, such as poking or prodding them. Professor Clua advised those who encounter sharks 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.”

This study underscores the complexity of human-shark interactions and the role of social media in influencing behaviours that may increase the risk of defensive shark attacks.

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

## References

* <https://www.surfer.com/news/selfies-blamed-rise-in-shark-attacks> - Corroborates the role of social media and selfies in the rise of shark attacks. It suggests that people's desire for social media content contributes to increased shark encounters.
* <https://www.vice.com/en/article/shark-attacks-are-on-the-rise-because-people-keep-taking-selfies-with-them> - Supports the idea that influencers and selfie-taking tourists are contributing to shark attacks, often provoking defensive reactions from sharks. This is linked to social media's influence on people's interactions with sharks.
* <https://www.instagram.com/p/DI_o_97x1sE/> - Discusses how social media influences travelers to interact with sharks, contributing to a rise in shark attacks, echoing the concern about social media's impact on human-shark interactions.
* <https://www.divephotoguide.com/underwater-photography-scuba-ocean-news/study-shark-attacks-could-rise-due-selfie-taking-tourists> - Mentions a study suggesting that selfie-taking by tourists is a factor in the increase of shark bites, aligning with the notion that human behavior influenced by social media affects shark encounters.
* <https://www.mensjournal.com/travel/experts-warn-influencer-behavior-shark-attacks> - Highlights the influence of social media influencers on shark encounters, noting that defensive attacks often occur due to humans provoking sharks, aligning with the findings from French Polynesia and global databases.
* <https://www.noahwire.com> - Provides the original context and summary of the study linking social media influencers to the rise in shark attacks, emphasizing the role of human interaction and the impact of social media on shark conservation and safety.
* <https://www.independent.co.uk/travel/news-and-advice/influencers-tiktok-instagram-shark-attacks-b2740632.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data