

# UC San Diego

## Capstone Projects

### **Title**

Beyond the Bite

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# Beyond the Bite



Photo by Alyssa Sanchez | Blue Shark

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# Capstone Report

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## **Abstract**

The decline of certain shark populations poses a significant threat to marine ecosystems and biodiversity.<sup>1</sup> Despite their potential for maintaining ocean health, sharks continue to be misunderstood and face numerous threats, such as overfishing and habitat degradation. Communicating the importance of shark conservation to the broader public is a challenging task. My Capstone project leverages storytelling, rather than solely presenting scientific data, to connect people to the world of shark conservation and the dedicated individuals working tirelessly to protect these vital creatures. Storytelling has the ability to evoke emotions, increase knowledge, and inspire action, serving as an essential tool for passing down wisdom across generations. By embracing storytelling, we can challenge misconceptions and foster a deeper understanding of sharks' ecological and economic significance.

My film, "Beyond the Bite," highlights the importance of shark conservation. It addresses the negative portrayal of sharks in the media, particularly since the release of *Jaws*, which has fueled fear and misunderstanding. Through the film, I call on viewers to participate in shark conservation, emphasizing that anyone can contribute to these efforts, not just scientists. The film features personal stories and insights from a diverse group of individuals based in San Diego, including a marine biologist, a drone photographer, a tattoo artist, and the CEO of a non-profit organization focused on ocean conservation. By showcasing the various ways local San Diegans are involved in shark conservation, the film provides a comprehensive view of the multifaceted efforts in this field. "Beyond the Bite" aims to highlight the positive contributions of these changemakers and inspire viewers to engage in conservation efforts. Given that personal motivation and connections are crucial for engaging the public in environmental issues, this project aims to spark curiosity and empower the audience to take action in support of shark conservation.

## **Background and Problem Statement**

Sharks play a crucial role in maintaining marine ecosystems, yet they face numerous challenges such as overfishing, habitat degradation, and negative public perception. Factors such as slow growth, late maturity, and few offspring contribute to the challenges in sustaining shark fisheries and recovering depleted populations.

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<sup>1</sup> Roff, G., Brown, C.J., Priest, M.A. et al. Decline of coastal apex shark populations over the past half century. *Commun Biol* 1, 223 (2018).

Currently, 32.6% of shark species are assessed as Threatened with extinction.<sup>2</sup> Negative public perceptions, influenced by media portrayals like *Jaws*, contribute to shark conservation challenges, often fueled by fear, perceived danger, and concerns about human safety.

Studies suggest that increased factual knowledge correlates with higher support for shark conservation.<sup>3</sup> However, the challenge lies in disseminating accurate information, as media sources, including movies, news, and Shark Week programs, have been criticized for presenting inaccurate or sensationalized content.<sup>4</sup>

There is a need for accurate and nuanced information to counteract negative perceptions and support effective shark conservation efforts.

The article, “Values, Attitudes, and Media Exposure: Public Perception of Sharks and Shark Conservation in the USA” concludes that, “Shark conservation messaging can capitalize on emerging positive public attitudes towards sharks to encourage personal behavior change and pro-environmental engagement in ways that support protection for marine ecosystems within the U.S. and globally.”<sup>5</sup>

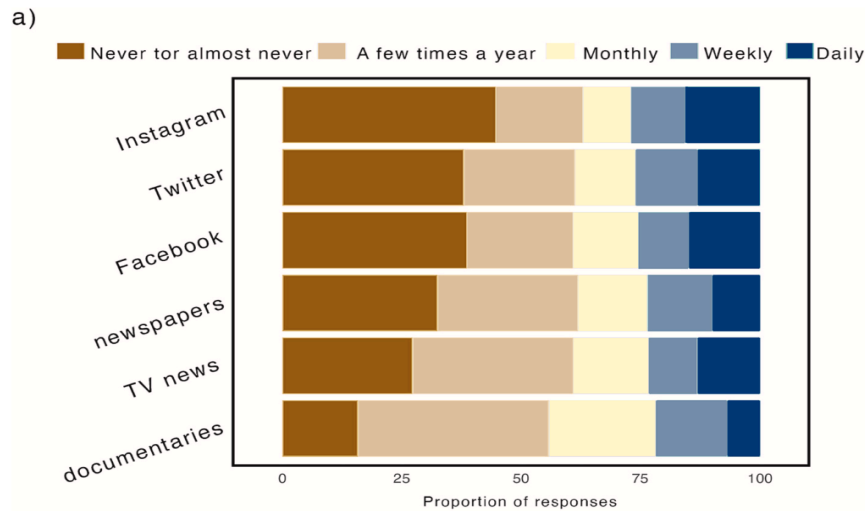


Figure a)<sup>6</sup> shows the proportion of responses (n=750), by participants in the United

<sup>2</sup> Dulvy, et al. 2021. “Overfishing Drives over One-Third of All Sharks and Rays toward a Global Extinction Crisis.” *Current Biology* 31 (21): 4773.e8.

<sup>3</sup> Macdonald, Catherine, Kela McEntee, and Julia Wester. 2023. “Values, Attitudes, and Media Exposure: Public Perception of Sharks and Shark Conservation in the USA.”

<sup>4</sup> Macdonald, et al.

<sup>5</sup> Macdonald, et al.

<sup>6</sup> Macdonald, et al.

States, to the question, “How often do you see information about sharks, shark threats, or shark conservation from each of these sources?”

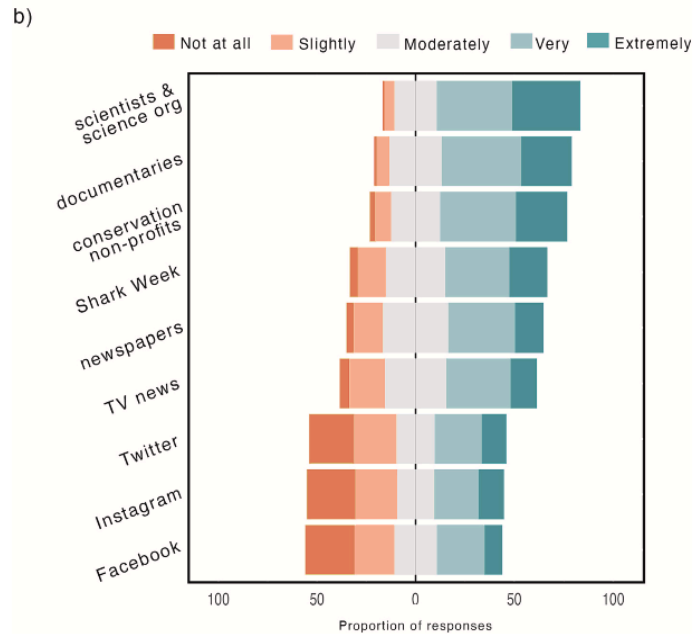


Figure b)<sup>7</sup> shows the proportion of responses (n=750), by participants in the United States, to the question, “How trustworthy do you think each of the following sources is on shark conservation?”

Nature documentaries often evoke empathy for endangered species and, in a sense, appeal to viewers' emotions. Documentaries possess the inherent capacity to motivate change.<sup>8</sup> They “also generate positive public attitudes and subsequently social norms towards an issue, making policy change more likely.”<sup>9</sup> In addition to presenting genuine and accurate information, the emotional dimension of a conservation film plays a crucial role in instigating such transformative action.<sup>10</sup>

San Diego, a coastal city renowned for its rich marine biodiversity, is home to a variety of shark species, including leopard sharks (*Triakis semifasciata*), horn sharks (*Heterodontus francisci*), blue sharks (*Prionace glauca*), mako sharks (*Isurus*

<sup>7</sup> Macdonald, et al.

<sup>8</sup> Register, Lindsey A., "Documentaries Making a Difference: Communication Effects of Environmental Film and Television" (2019). Student Theses 2015-Present. 90.

<sup>9</sup> Jones JPG, Thomas-Walters L, Rust NA, Veríssimo D. Nature documentaries and saving nature: Reflections on the new Netflix series Our Planet. *People Nat.* 2019; 1: 420–425.

<sup>10</sup> Guido, Vivian. “Turning Tides: Sustainability Measures for Shark Conservation.” YorkSpace, August 31, 2023.

*oxyrinchus*), and juvenile white sharks (*Carcharodon carcharias*). This diverse shark population offers a unique opportunity for local residents to leverage their existing skills and knowledge to engage in shark conservation initiatives in innovative and impactful ways. The film aims to elevate public awareness and foster active participation in shark conservation efforts, bridging the gap between the scientific community, conservationists, and the general public.

## **Goals & Objectives**

1. **Raise Awareness:** Increase public awareness about the importance of shark conservation and the specific threats facing shark populations in the San Diego region.
2. **Showcase Diversity:** Highlight the diverse range of individuals involved in shark conservation, including a marine biologist, ecotourism shark encounter diver, and tattoo artist to demonstrate the multidimensional nature of conservation efforts.
3. **Encourage Engagement:** Motivate the local community to actively participate in shark conservation initiatives by providing tangible ways for individuals to get involved.
4. **Challenge Stereotypes:** Challenge negative stereotypes surrounding sharks by showcasing their ecological importance and the positive contributions made by those working towards their conservation.

## **Deliverable & Methodology**

**Link to view film:** <https://youtu.be/rXsWlbf58Jk>

### **Film Pre-production:**

In February and March, I reached out to conduct pre-interviews with different members of the community involved in shark conservation to hear their stories, build rapport, and see if they would be good interview subjects. I took notes and highlighted parts of their stories and answers so that I could build questions around certain talking points. I also conducted a practice interview with one of my CAC members Brendan Talwar, Ph.D. to get my bearings on the filming equipment and practice how I would ask the interview subjects questions. After the pre-interview process, I created a storyboard on Microsoft PowerPoint so that I could move talking points around as needed. This helped me create my story arc and visualize how I wanted my film to be portrayed.

### **Film Production:**

In April and beginning of May I checked out filming equipment from UC San Diego Media Lab and made appointments to interview my chosen subjects and shoot b-roll footage. All subjects signed a UC San Diego Model Image Authorization and Release form. I ended up interviewing four subjects: a marine biologist, a tattoo artist, a drone photographer, and the CEO of Project Kolika, a non-profit organization focused on ocean conservation.

#### Film Post-production:

I began the editing process in May. I decided that I wanted to use clips from all four interview subjects and paired down those clips into sequences. I referenced my storyboard, but also let the story flow from the context of the interviews. I was also collecting and adding b-roll footage during this time from both my own footage and footage from the drone photographer who agreed to let me feature some of his work in the film.

#### **Conclusion**

In the future, I would like to share this film with other organizations such as Minorities in Shark Science (MISS), Shark Allies, and Project Kolika. Sharing my film on social media platforms will also reach a broader audience.

"Beyond the Bite" underscores the necessity of shark conservation and the significant role the San Diego community can play in these efforts. By bringing together diverse voices from various fields, the film aims to present a holistic view of the conservation landscape. It is hoped that this project will foster a deeper understanding and commitment to protecting these vital marine species. By motivating viewers to actively participate in shark conservation efforts, this film aspires to foster a sense of responsibility and empowerment in the preservation of our ocean ecosystems.



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