

Study shows the factors influencing which conservation news get shared on social media

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A team of researchers led by the Department of Biological Sciences at the National University of Singapore (NUS) Faculty of Science recently concluded a study to better understand the factors influencing the spread of conservation news in online media.

Public awareness is often a crucial first step towards policy change and resolution of [conservation](#) issues because societal values determine whether initiatives gain support. There is evidence that [public](#) engagement positively influences civic participation. Therefore, conservation science needs to engage the general public to ensure successful conservation interventions.

News coverage of conservation issues is an important pathway to transfer information to large audiences because it can translate academic research and policy for general audiences. A team of researchers led by the Department of Biological Sciences at the National University of Singapore (NUS) Faculty of Science recently concluded a study to better understand the factors influencing the spread of conservation [news](#) in online media.

The research team, led by Ms Le Nghiem of the NUS Department of Biological Sciences and Dr Sarah Papworth, who was formerly with the Department and is now with the Royal Holloway University of London, discovered that news sites have the greatest impact on how popular an online article will be on Facebook and Twitter. They found that [online news](#) articles about climate change or charismatic mammals and those

with illustrations were more likely to be shared or liked on Facebook and Twitter. Their findings also revealed that five per cent of articles in conservation journals are reported in online news with the probability of reporting largely depending on the journal as opposed to the topic of the article. The results of their study were published in *Conservation Biology* in January 2015.

The team sampled research articles published from 2011 to 2013 in the eight journals with the highest impact factor in the biodiversity conservation category on Web of Science, as well as open-access journals that publish research on conservation and conservation articles in the highest impact multidisciplinary journals. They assessed differences in the frequency in which conservation research is featured in online news sites and the impact of online conservation news content and delivery on Facebook likes and shares and Twitter tweets.

Explaining the importance of understanding the spread of online news, Ms Le Nghiem, one of the lead authors, said, "To ensure successful conservation interventions, there is a need to engage the general public. Although online technologies such as Twitter and Facebook offer new opportunities to accelerate communication between conservation scientists and the online public, factors influencing the spread of conservation news in online media are not well understood. This study aims to fill this knowledge gap."

"Conservation scientists could use these new findings to choose appropriate online media channels to communicate with the public and increase the awareness and effectiveness of their efforts," added Assistant Professor David Bickford, one of the co-authors of the paper.

The researchers argue that in addition to scientists, policy makers and the public, news media should be considered a fourth sector in the conservation process—one that does not passively transmit information

but whose actors have their own motivations. When these motivations align with those of conservation scientists, news media offers opportunities to rapidly disseminate academic research and policy to potentially large audiences. The generation of online content is not, however, sufficient to engage the online public. Therefore, linking online news articles about research to online platforms such as Twitter and Facebook could encourage greater interaction.

Provided by National University of Singapore

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