

Study finds sharks get bad rap when viewed with ominous background music

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A pair of gray reef sharks patrol the deep outer terrace at Palmyra Atoll in the Line Islands. Credit: Brian Zgliczynski

In a new study, researchers at Scripps Institution of Oceanography at the University of California San Diego found that the background music in shark documentaries affects viewers' perceptions of sharks. The researchers suggest that ominous background music could hinder shark conservation efforts.

Scripps scientist Andrew Nosal and a colleague at Harvard University recruited over 2,000 online participants to share their attitudes toward

[sharks](#) after watching a 60-second video clip of sharks swimming. They compared the results of the participants who watched the clip set to ominous [background music](#) to those watching the same video clip set to uplifting background music, or silence.

Participants who viewed the video with ominous background music rated sharks more negatively than those who viewed the clip with uplifting music or no music.

"Given that nature documentaries are often regarded as objective and authoritative sources of information, it is critical that documentary filmmakers and viewers are aware of how the soundtrack can affect the interpretation of the educational content," said Nosal, the lead author of the study published in the journal *PLOS ONE*.

More information: Andrew P. Nosal et al. The Effect of Background Music in Shark Documentaries on Viewers' Perceptions of Sharks, *PLOS ONE* (2016). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0159279](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0159279)

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