

Governance | Individual communication

IC - (21110) - EXPERIMENTAL EVIDENCE ON FRAMING ACTORS AND VICTIMS IN CONSERVATION NARRATIVES

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Background and objectives

Media narratives play a crucial role in framing marine conservation dilemmas by depicting human actors like fish consumers or the fishing industry as responsible for impacting species and ecosystems. Bycatch, the incidental death and injury of non-target marine species while fishing, is a major threat to marine wildlife and ecosystems because it directly reduces populations (e.g. whales and dolphins), and has indirect effects at the ecosystem level, altering food web interactions. However, there is little evidence documenting the effect of such narratives. The framing of actors and victims is likely to be significant, as behavioural science research shows that people can act less pro-socially when more actors are responsible for a collective outcome (the responsibility diffusion effect), and when more victims need to be helped (the compassion fade effect).

Process and methods (for empirical research)

In a pre-registered online experiment (1,548 UK participants), we conduct the first test of responsibility diffusion and compassion fade in a marine context by varying the type of actors responsible for fisheries bycatch (e.g., consumers and industry), and victims (e.g., a single species, multiple species, and ecosystems) in media narratives.

Main results (or main arguments in the case of critical reviews)

Rather than increase the number of individual actors or victims, we increase higher-level types of actors (e.g. businesses, third-parties) and victims (different species and eco-systems). Unexpectedly, we find that attributing responsibility to both consumers and industry (rather than just consumers) increase support for fisheries policies (e.g., bycatch enforcement or consumer taxes). These effects were primarily driven by female participants in our sample. We find no impact on personal intentions to consume fish, nor any effect from varying the type of victim.

Implications for research and practice/policy | Importance and originality of the contribution

Our results suggest that, neither responsibility diffusion nor compassion fade automatically follows from increasing the types of actors and victims in media narratives, and that effects can depend on the type of outcome and population subgroup.

Palavras-chave : Identifiable victim effect, Responsibility, framing, policy support, conservation, eco-labels, fish consumption, diets,