

How does age affect public perception of species and what factors influence this change?

Brave as a... hyena? Cute as a... shark? Intelligent as a... vulture?



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INTRODUCTION

Species and habitats are receiving global conservation efforts due to the mass loss of biodiversity (Briggs, 2017). However, the public only support conservation of species they like or can relate to and so some species' projects, typically carnivores or stigmatised species, fail due to lack of public support (Shapiro *et al*, 2016).

Previous studies on public perception have considered gender (Keane *et al*, 2016), cultural differences (Straka *et al*, 2018) and media influence (Mazzoldi *et al*, 2019) however, age is an understudied area. Understanding why public support varies across species and age is important to ensure the future generations support all species conservation.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- ❶ Does perception of species change with age?
- ❷ Does media influence perception of species?
- ❸ Does education influence perception of species?
- ❹ Does personal experience influence perception of species?

METHOD

1. Questionnaire
6 species, 3 positive & 3 negative
? Traits associated
? Where seen
? Biggest influence
List of films
? Films seen
? Biggest impact

2. Questionnaire
shared & responses
collected
Shared across social
media and student
pages
Goal of 100 responses

3. Statistics
Ordinal logistic
regression and Fishers
Exact test

4. Thematic analysis

5. Recommendations
given

RESULTS

Ordinal logistic regression was run for each species and there was no statistically significant association between age and score from animal traits for any of the species. However, there was significant association between portrayal of species and participant's opinion with positively portrayed species receiving more positive responses when fishers exact test was run.

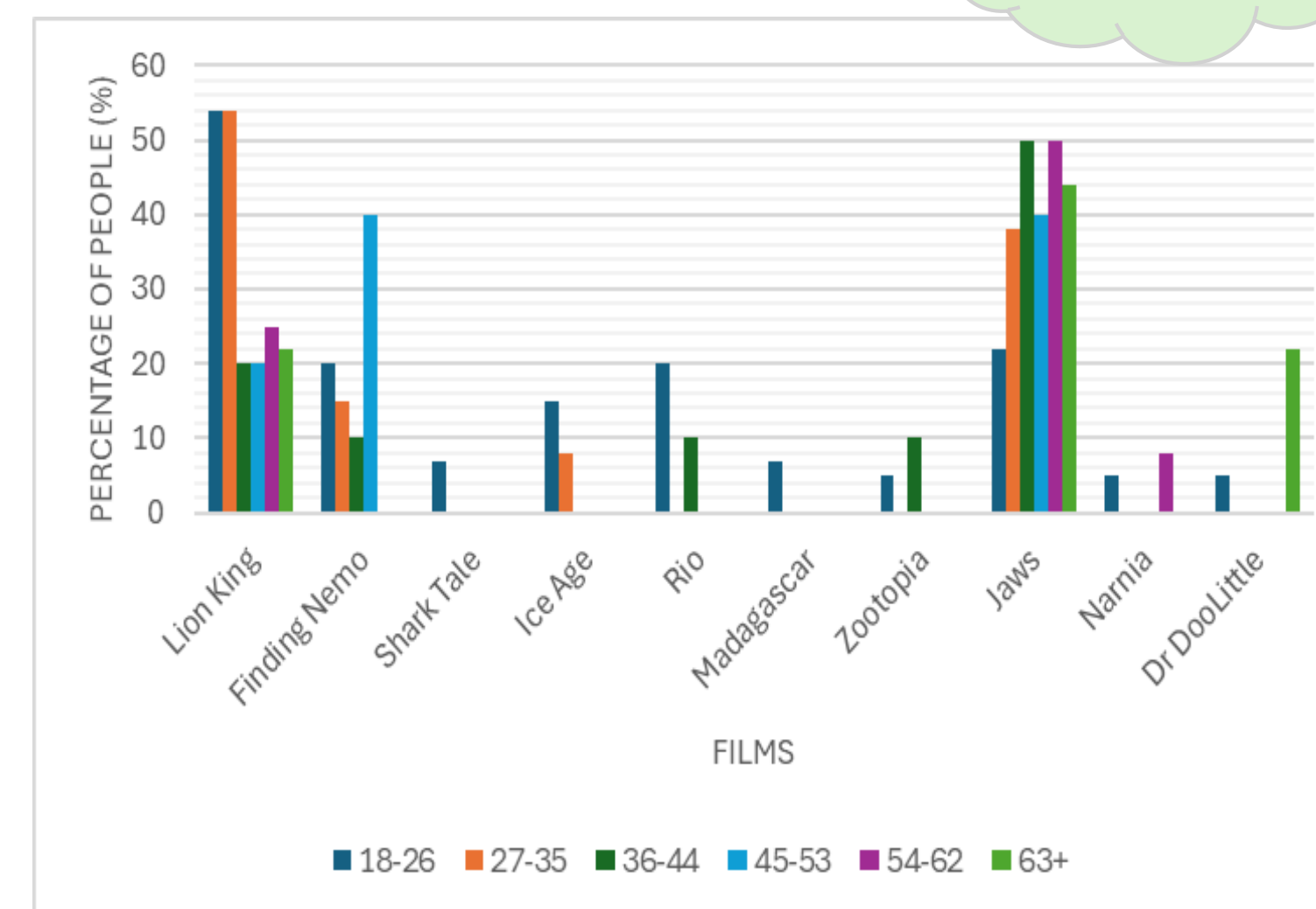
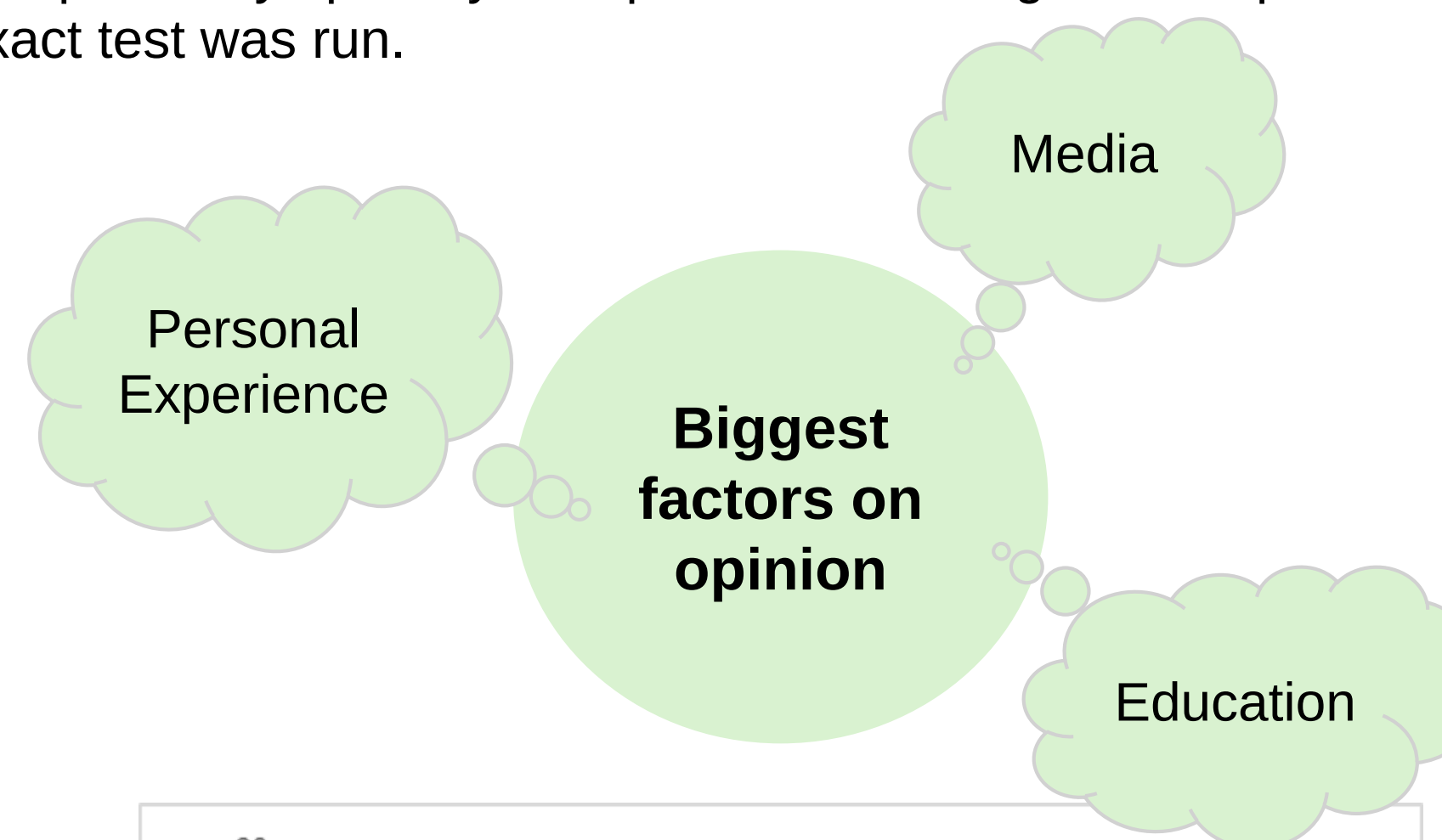
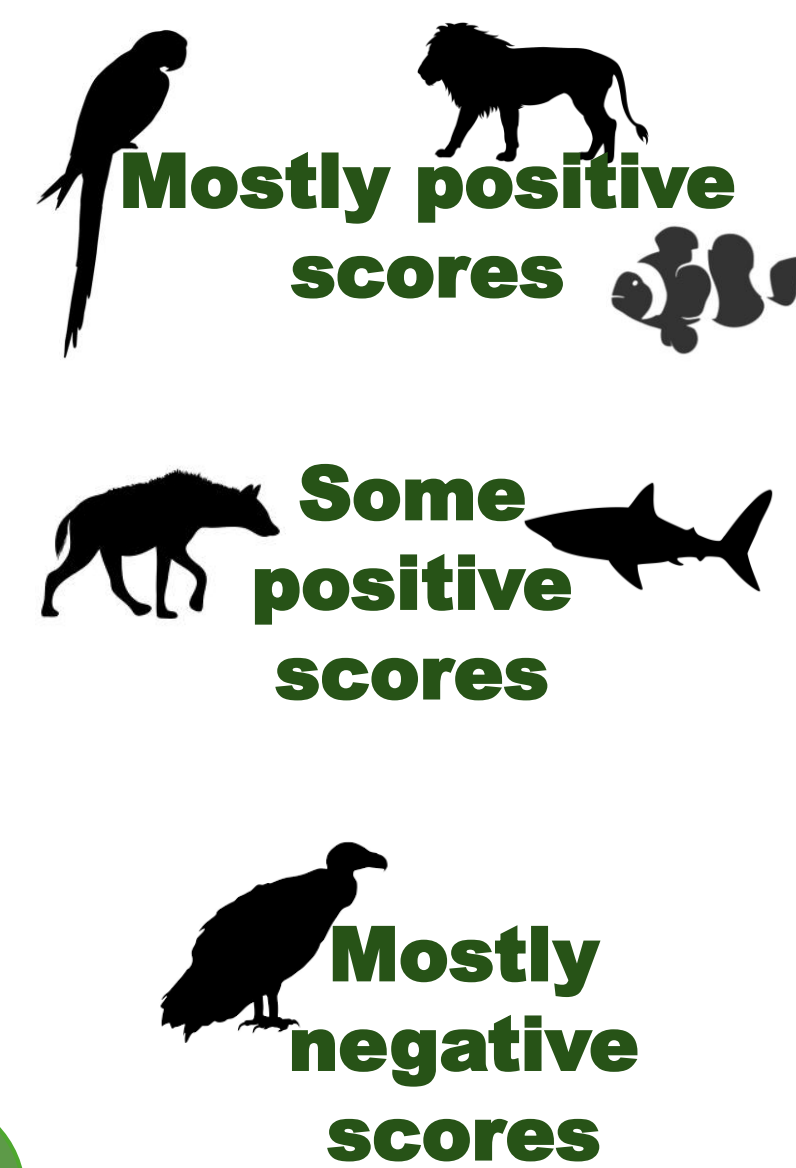


Figure 1: The percentage of participants from each age group who chose each film as the most influential on their opinion of the portrayed species

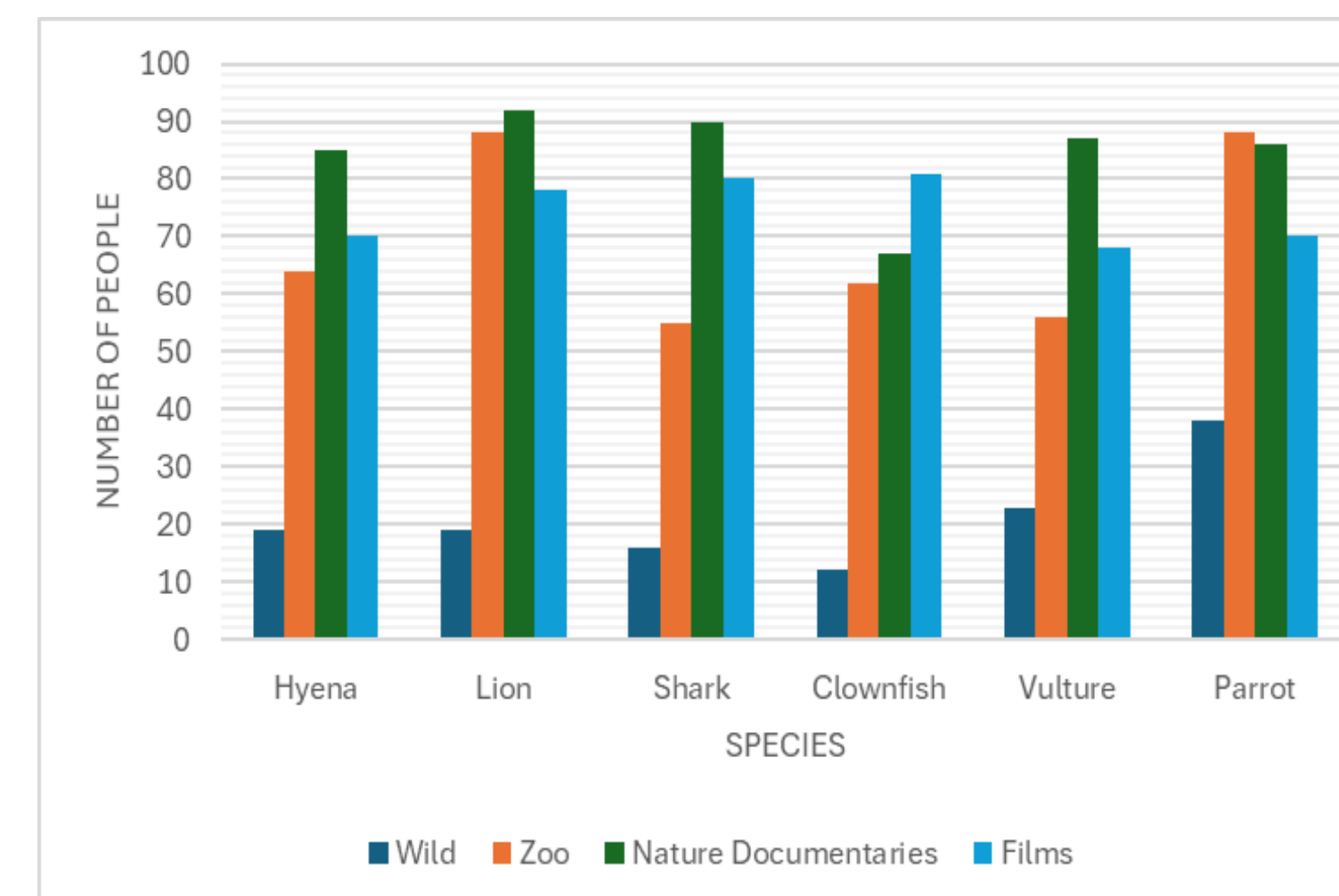


Figure 2: Number of participants who had seen each species in the wild, zoo, nature documentaries and films

DISCUSSION

Distributing the questionnaire across social media meant most participants were 18–26-year-olds with fewest participants 45–53 and 63+ (Regmi *et al*, 2016). Therefore, there was not enough data to be able to confidently determine if age impacted public opinion of species.

Media appeared to influence opinion for all species but specifically lion and hyena. this is potentially due to the popularity of The Lion King and due to its recent remake, which has reiterated the positive lion and negative hyena characteristics (Hugosson, 2022).



Although both clownfish and sharks received overall positive scores this was at much different rates. This could have been due to media. Busque & Litchfield (2021) found that majority of shark films portrayed them as overly-aggressive and a significant risk to humans which this study agreed with due to the frequency of participant's negative responses including media, 'Jaws' and shark attacks.

Personal experience appeared to be a greater influence than media on parrots and vultures. Participant's experience of wild parrots and vultures, and parrots as household pets, encouraged positive responses. However, if experiences are linked to human-wildlife conflict as if often seen in vultures (Zuberogoitia *et al*, 2021) this experience may not form positive opinions.



Scan to see how your opinion compares to the participants in this study

Scan me!

CONCLUSION

Media, specifically anthropomorphic films, are one of the biggest influences on negative opinions. This negative perception can prevent public support for certain species. Furthermore, personal experience and education had a positive impact on opinion which zoos should consider to help improve public-animal relations for stigmatised species.

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