

Impact of Social Proof on Customer Buying Behaviour

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Abstract: *This research paper studies how social proof affects the buying decisions of customers in India, with special focus on service businesses in the event planning and venue management sector. Social proof means the influence that other people's opinions, reviews, recommendations, and experiences have on our own buying decisions. Before booking any service today - especially high-value services like wedding venues, banquet halls, and farmhouses - most customers check what previous customers have said.*

Primary data was collected from 100 respondents through a 20-question structured questionnaire distributed online through Google Forms. Data was analysed in Microsoft Excel using percentage analysis, mean, standard deviation, and correlation analysis.

The study found that personal recommendations from friends and family is the most trusted form of social proof with a mean of 4.43. Reading reviews before buying scored 4.32. Real event photographs increasing booking comfort scored 4.38. Negative reviews stopping purchase scored 4.26. Influencer recommendations were the least trusted at 3.56. The overall confirmation that social proof plays a major role in final buying decisions scored 4.42 with 90 percent agreement. Both hypotheses of the study were supported through correlation analysis with values ranging from 0.52 to 0.81.

The study concludes that social proof is a primary driver of customer buying behaviour in today's Indian market and provides practical recommendations for businesses to build and manage their social proof presence effectively.

Keywords: Social Proof, Customer Buying Behaviour, Online Reviews, Word of Mouth, Event Planning Services.

I. INTRODUCTION

India is a country where celebrations are deeply embedded in family and community life. Weddings, birthday parties, anniversaries, corporate functions, and religious ceremonies happen every single day across the country. These celebrations are not just events - they are emotional milestones that families remember for the rest of their lives. This culture of celebration has given birth to a large and fast-growing event planning and venue management industry in India.

Over the last two decades, Indian families have increasingly moved away from self-managed events toward professional event planning services. Expectations for decoration quality, food presentation, photography, lighting, entertainment, and overall management have grown significantly. Today, a wedding involves not just a venue but a complete experience - grand entry arrangements, stage decoration, floral setups, catering, choreography, and more. Meeting these expectations requires professional expertise that dedicated event businesses provide.

Within this industry, businesses like Radhika Event Planners (<https://www.radhikaeventplanners.com/>) represent the modern full-service model. They manage multiple venues including R.V. FarmHouse, Dev Palace, and DF-Palace 2, with capacities ranging up to four thousand guests. Their services cover complete decoration, food management, bridal grand entry, spectacular pyro effects, and professional event coordination. Their motto - We plan! You celebrate - captures exactly what modern event businesses offer their clients.



For businesses like this, attracting new clients is directly connected to one powerful concept - social proof. Before any family commits to booking a venue or hiring an event planner, they look at what previous customers have experienced and said. They check Google reviews, look at Instagram photos from past events, ask friends and relatives for recommendations, and read testimonials. This entire research and decision-making process is driven by social proof.

Social proof, as explained by psychologist Robert Cialdini in his work on influence and persuasion, is the natural human tendency to look at what others are doing and saying when we are uncertain about our own decisions. In simple terms - if many people trust something and are happy with it, a new customer feels safer trusting it too.

This study investigates how different forms of social proof - reviews, ratings, personal recommendations, real event photos, influencer content, social numbers, and website testimonials - influence the buying decisions of Indian consumers, with particular relevance to the event planning and service sector.

II. OBJECTIVES AND HYPOTHESES

2.1 Research Objectives

Objective 1: To identify the types of social proof that influence customer buying behaviour across product and service businesses.

Objective 2: To analyse the relationship between social proof elements and the buying decisions of customers.

2.2 Hypotheses

H₀1: Social proof does not have a significant impact on customer buying behaviour.

H₁1: Social proof has a significant impact on customer buying behaviour.

H₀2: There is no significant relationship between the type of social proof and the buying decisions of customers.

H₁2: There is a significant relationship between the type of social proof and the buying decisions of customers.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Several researchers have studied social proof and its impact on consumer behaviour in recent years.

Sharma and Gupta (2022) found that 78 percent of Indian e-commerce consumers would not buy a product with fewer than ten reviews, even if the product looked suitable and the price was right. They concluded that consumers trust peer reviews far more than brand advertising.

Mehta and Joshi (2022) studied star ratings on food delivery platforms and found that a restaurant with a 4.2 rating from 500 people was trusted more than one with 4.8 stars from only 8 reviews. Volume of social proof matters as much as quality.

Kapoor and Nair (2022) found that personal recommendations from friends and family were the number one source of new hotel bookings in the Indian hospitality industry, confirming the enormous cultural weight of word-of-mouth in India.

Chatterjee and Roy (2023) found that micro-influencers with 10,000 to 100,000 followers generated more genuine trust than celebrity influencers, and that 64 percent of young respondents had bought or planned to buy after seeing a micro-influencer recommendation.

Pillai and Menon (2023) studied Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities and found that Google Reviews had become the single most trusted source of information for local service businesses, with businesses below a 4.0 rating losing nearly half their potential customers to competitors.

Goyal and Sharma (2023) specifically studied event venue booking and found that high-quality photographs from real past events were ranked the most convincing form of social proof for venue selection, more than professional promotional photos.

Jain and Mittal (2024) found that video testimonials on Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts were significantly more persuasive than written reviews for service businesses, as they allowed potential customers to see genuine emotion and hear real voices.



Rawat and Chauhan (2024) studied group decision making in Indian family wedding venue selection and found that social proof helped the primary decision maker - often the young couple - convince older family members who held the budget authority.

Pandey and Verma (2025) found that encouraging guests to tag the event business in their post-event social media posts created an organic wave of social proof reaching 200 to 500 new people per event at zero additional marketing cost.

Iyer and Menon (2025) conducted the most comprehensive recent study and found that businesses with a strong and consistent digital social proof ecosystem grew their bookings by an average of 52 percent compared to businesses with weak social proof.

Research Gap: Most existing studies have focused on product-based e-commerce or have used qualitative methods. Very few studies have quantitatively measured the impact of specific social proof types on buying decisions in the Indian event planning and venue booking sector using primary survey data. This study fills that gap.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research Design

This study follows a **descriptive research design** because it aims to measure and describe how social proof currently affects customer buying behaviour without testing new theories or experimental conditions.

4.2 Research Approach

A **quantitative research approach** was used. Data was collected in numerical form through a structured questionnaire and analysed using statistical tools in Microsoft Excel.

4.3 Data Source

The study is entirely based on **primary data** collected fresh from 100 real respondents. No secondary data was used for analysis.

4.4 Sampling Design

Table 1 - Sampling Design

Parameter	Details
Target Population	Consumers who buy products or book services online or offline
Sampling Method	Convenience sampling
Sample Size	100 respondents
Age Group	18 to 45 years
Geography	Pan-India, urban and semi-urban areas
Mode of Survey	Online through Google Forms

4.5 Data Collection

The questionnaire was shared through WhatsApp, Instagram, and email. Responses were collected anonymously to ensure honest answers. All data was downloaded from Google Forms into Microsoft Excel for analysis.

4.6 Data Analysis Tools

Table 2 - Statistical Tools Used

Tool	Purpose	Excel Formula Used
Percentage Analysis	To summarise demographic data	$(\text{Frequency}/\text{Total}) \times 100$
Mean	To find average agreement per statement	=AVERAGE
Standard Deviation	To measure consistency of responses	=STDEV
Correlation Analysis	To test relationship between variables	=CORREL
Bar and Pie Charts	To present findings visually	Excel Chart Tools



V. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

5.1 Demographic Analysis

Table 3 - Age Group of Respondents

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage
Below 18	5	5%
18 to 25	42	42%
26 to 35	33	33%
36 to 45	15	15%
Above 45	5	5%
Total	100	100%

Interpretation: 75 percent of respondents are between 18 and 35 years, confirming the sample captured the most digitally active and purchase-ready consumer segment in India.

Table 4 - Gender of Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	54	54%
Female	43	43%
Prefer not to say	3	3%
Total	100	100%

Interpretation: The sample is nearly balanced between male and female respondents, ensuring findings represent both genders fairly.

Table 5 - Frequency of Checking Reviews

Frequency	Frequency	Percentage
Always	48	48%
Most of the time	31	31%
Sometimes	14	14%
Rarely	5	5%
Never	2	2%
Total	100	100%

Interpretation: 79 percent of respondents regularly check reviews before buying, confirming that review-checking is a deeply established habit among Indian consumers.

Table 6 - Type of Purchase Made Online

Type of Purchase	Frequency	Percentage
Products only	28	28%
Services only	19	19%
Both equally	53	53%
Total	100	100%

Interpretation: 72 percent of respondents regularly purchase services online, directly validating the relevance of studying social proof in the service sector.

Table 7 - Prior Experience of Booking Event Venue

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	67	67%
No	33	33%
Total	100	100%



Interpretation: 67 percent of respondents have direct personal experience with event venue booking, making their responses on social proof credible and practically grounded.

5.2 Main Data Analysis Table - Section B and Section C

This is the most important table in the entire study. It shows the mean score, standard deviation, and agreement percentage for all 15 Likert scale questions across both sections.

Table 8 - Main Data Analysis Table - All Likert Scale Questions

Q. No	Statement Summary	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	SD	Agreement %
Q6	Reading reviews before buying	2	3	8	35	52	4.32	0.89	87%
Q7	High star rating builds confidence	2	4	10	38	46	4.22	0.93	84%
Q8	Large volume of reviews builds trust	1	3	9	40	47	4.29	0.84	87%
Q9	Real customer photos on social media	3	5	14	41	37	4.04	1.01	78%
Q10	Personal recommendation leads to booking	1	2	7	33	57	4.43	0.82	90%
Q11	Influencer recommendations affect decisions	6	12	24	36	22	3.56	1.14	58%
Q12	Social numbers increase trust	3	6	18	42	31	3.92	1.02	73%
Q13	Website testimonials increase confidence	2	5	16	44	33	4.01	0.97	77%
Q14	Less likely to book without reviews	2	4	11	38	45	4.20	0.94	83%
Q15	Negative reviews stop purchase	2	3	10	37	48	4.26	0.92	85%
Q16	Real event photos increase booking comfort	1	2	8	36	53	4.38	0.82	89%
Q17	Scarcity plus reviews creates urgency	3	7	19	40	31	3.89	1.05	71%
Q18	Social media recommendations build trust	2	4	13	42	39	4.12	0.95	81%
Q19	Willing to pay more after strong social proof	5	11	22	38	24	3.66	1.12	62%
Q20	Overall role of social proof in final decision	1	2	7	34	56	4.42	0.81	90%
	Overall Average						4.12		



Interpretation of Main Data Analysis Table:

The overall average mean of 4.12 across all 15 Likert scale questions confirms that social proof has a strong and consistent influence on both the buying behaviour and final buying decisions of Indian consumers.

The highest mean is for personal recommendations from friends and family at 4.43 with 90 percent agreement. This tells us that in India, where family and community relationships are deeply valued, a trusted personal recommendation is the single most powerful form of social proof. No digital tool or platform can match the trust that comes from a known and respected person saying I used this service and it was excellent.

The second highest is the overall social proof impact statement at 4.42 with 90 percent agreement. Nine out of ten respondents confirmed that social proof plays a major role in their final buying decision. This is the direct answer to the central research question of this study.

Negative reviews stopping purchase scored 4.26 with 85 percent agreement, confirming that negative social proof is a powerful deterrent that can completely reverse a positive buying intention.

Reading reviews before buying scored 4.32 with 87 percent agreement, confirming that this behaviour is now a deeply automatic step in the purchase process for most Indian consumers.

The lowest mean belongs to influencer recommendations at 3.56 with only 58 percent agreement and the highest standard deviation of 1.14, showing the most divided opinions in the entire study. Influencer content is relevant only for younger consumers aged 18 to 25 and loses effectiveness with older age groups.

Questions with lower standard deviations - particularly Q8 at 0.84, Q10 at 0.82, Q16 at 0.82, and Q20 at 0.81 - show the most consistent agreement across all respondent types, meaning these findings are the most reliable and applicable across the widest range of customers.

5.3 Correlation Analysis Table

Correlation was calculated in Microsoft Excel using the CORREL formula to test Hypothesis Set 2 - whether there is a significant relationship between the types of social proof and customer buying decisions.

Table 9 - Correlation Analysis Between Social Proof Variables and Buying Decision Variables

Social Proof Variable (Section B)	Buying Decision Variable (Section C)	Correlation Value	Strength of Relationship
Reading reviews - Q6	Overall buying decision - Q20	0.74	Strong Positive
High star rating - Q7	Less likely to book without reviews - Q14	0.71	Strong Positive
Large volume of reviews - Q8	Negative reviews stop purchase - Q15	0.76	Strong Positive
Real customer photos - Q9	Real event photos increase comfort - Q16	0.79	Strong Positive
Personal recommendation - Q10	Social media recommendations build trust - Q18	0.81	Strong Positive
Influencer recommendations - Q11	Willing to pay more - Q19	0.52	Moderate Positive
Social numbers on website - Q12	Scarcity plus reviews creates urgency - Q17	0.63	Moderate Positive
Website testimonials - Q13	Overall buying decision - Q20	0.68	Strong Positive

Interpretation of Correlation Table:

All eight correlation values are positive. This means that as the strength of social proof increases, buying confidence and the likelihood of making a positive buying decision also increases consistently across the entire sample.

The strongest correlation of 0.81 is between personal recommendations and social media recommendations building trust. This confirms that word-of-mouth social proof - whether shared face-to-face or through Instagram and WhatsApp - has the most powerful and most consistent relationship with actual buying decisions in this study.



The second strongest correlation of 0.79 is between real customer photos on social media and feeling comfortable booking after seeing real event photos. This confirms that visual social proof from genuine past events is an extremely powerful factor in booking decisions for event businesses. When potential customers see real photographs of beautifully decorated stages, grand bridal entries with pyro effects, well-arranged food spreads, and happy guests at a venue, they connect emotionally with that visual evidence and feel far more confident about booking.

The correlation of 0.76 between large volume of reviews and negative reviews stopping purchase confirms that review volume and review quality work together to shape the final purchase decision. A high volume of positive reviews creates strong confidence while negative reviews in that volume carry strong deterrent power.

The correlation of 0.74 between reading reviews and the overall buying decision confirms that the habit of reading reviews is directly and meaningfully linked to the final decision a customer makes.

The weakest correlation of 0.52 belongs to influencer recommendations and willingness to pay more. While a positive relationship exists, it is moderate and confirms that influencer-based social proof has the most limited and most divided relationship with buying behaviour across the full sample.

The correlation value of 0.68 between website testimonials and overall buying decision confirms that testimonials still have a meaningful impact on final decisions, even though they are slightly less trusted than independent platform reviews.

All correlation values above 0.50 indicate a statistically meaningful positive relationship between social proof types and buying decisions. This evidence is sufficient to reject the null hypothesis H_0 and accept the alternate hypothesis H_1 .

5.4 Hypothesis Testing Results

Table 10 - Hypothesis Testing Summary

Hypothesis	Statement	Evidence	Decision
H_0 1	Social proof does not significantly impact buying behaviour	Overall mean 4.12, Q20 mean 4.42, 90% agreement	Rejected
H_1 1	Social proof has a significant impact on buying behaviour	Strongly supported by data	Accepted
H_0 2	No significant relationship between social proof type and buying decisions	All correlation values positive ranging 0.52 to 0.81	Rejected
H_1 2	Significant relationship exists between social proof type and buying decisions	Strongly supported by correlation data	Accepted

5.5 Comparative Analysis Summary

Table 11 - Age-wise Comparison of Key Social Proof Types

Social Proof Type	18 to 25 Years	26 to 35 Years	36 to 45 Years
Personal recommendation (Q10)	4.31	4.52	4.61
Influencer recommendations (Q11)	4.02	3.31	2.87
Real customer photos (Q9)	4.19	3.91	3.74
Reading reviews (Q6)	4.28	4.39	4.27
Real event photos comfort (Q16)	4.29	4.44	4.38
Overall social proof role (Q20)	4.38	4.47	4.41

Interpretation: Personal recommendations grow stronger with age while influencer content loses trust significantly with older respondents. Reading reviews and real event photographs are consistently strong across all age groups. Since Indian wedding booking decisions involve both young couples and older parents together, businesses must build social proof strategies that appeal to all age groups simultaneously.



Table 12 - Gender-wise Comparison of Key Social Proof Types

Social Proof Type	Male (54)	Female (43)
Reading reviews (Q6)	4.26	4.40
Real customer photos (Q9)	3.94	4.17
Personal recommendation (Q10)	4.39	4.49
Real event photos comfort (Q16)	4.28	4.51
Negative reviews stop purchase (Q15)	4.19	4.35
Social numbers (Q12)	3.97	3.86
Overall social proof role (Q20)	4.37	4.49

Interpretation: Female respondents are slightly more influenced by visual social proof and detailed reviews across almost every category. The biggest gap is for real event photos, where females scored 4.51 versus 4.28 for males. Male respondents respond slightly more to social numbers and urgency signals. Event businesses should ensure both visual richness and factual evidence are present across all platforms.

Table 13 - Experience-wise Comparison of Key Social Proof Types

Social Proof Type	Previously Booked (67)	Never Booked (33)
Reading reviews (Q6)	4.39	4.18
Personal recommendation (Q10)	4.51	4.27
Influencer recommendations (Q11)	3.54	3.61
Real event photos comfort (Q16)	4.47	4.18
Negative reviews stop purchase (Q15)	4.34	4.09
Overall social proof role (Q20)	4.49	4.27

Interpretation: Respondents with prior venue booking experience are more dependent on strong social proof across almost every category. They have lived through the process and know from personal experience how much reviews and real photographs matter. First-time bookers are slightly more open to influencer guidance. Businesses need social proof rich enough for experienced buyers and accessible enough for first-timers.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on all findings, the following practical recommendations are made for event planning and venue management businesses:

- Make review collection a formal post-event process. After every function, send a WhatsApp message with a direct Google review link to the client family within two days while the experience is still fresh.
- Build and maintain an active photo and video gallery. Collect real event photographs after every function and publish them regularly on the website, Google Business profile, and Instagram.
- Encourage guests to tag the business on social media. Place a branded hashtag board at every venue and request the client family to tag the business in their event posts.
- Respond professionally to every review - positive and negative. Never leave any review unacknowledged. A professional response to a negative review often builds more trust than the complaint itself destroys.
- Create a simple referral programme. Offer a small complimentary service or gift to past clients who refer new bookings to create a structured word-of-mouth growth engine.
- Tailor social proof communication by age group. Use Instagram content and influencer collaborations for younger couples. Build personal referral networks through community contacts for older decision makers.
- Collect short video testimonials immediately after events. A 30-second genuine video from a happy client recorded on the spot is one of the most persuasive pieces of content available.
- Display social numbers prominently. Show total events organised, total families served, and years in business on the website homepage and all digital profiles.



VIII. CONCLUSION

This research paper studied the impact of social proof on customer buying behaviour with 100 respondents and 20 questionnaire items analysed in Microsoft Excel. The overall average mean of 4.12 across all Likert scale questions and 90 percent agreement on the overall social proof impact statement confirm that social proof is a primary and powerful driver of customer buying decisions in India today.

Personal recommendations from trusted people are the most influential form of social proof. Real event photographs are the most powerful visual evidence for venue businesses. Negative reviews are strong purchase deterrents. Volume of reviews matters alongside quality. And nine out of ten customers confirm that social proof shapes their final decision to buy or book.

Both null hypotheses of the study were rejected. Social proof has a significant impact on customer buying behaviour. There is a significant positive relationship between the type of social proof and buying decisions, confirmed by correlation values ranging from 0.52 to 0.81.

For businesses like Radhika Event Planners that provide complete event management including farmhouses, banquet halls, food, decoration, grand entry, and pyro effects, these findings provide a very clear message. Every event organised is an opportunity to create social proof. Every happy family is a source of future referrals. Every review collected, every photograph shared, and every Instagram tag from a satisfied guest builds the trust that brings the next family to the door.

In today's Indian market, the businesses that grow are not just the ones that offer the best service. They are the ones that make their best service visible, sharable, and trustworthy through consistent and genuine social proof.

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QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear Respondent, this questionnaire is part of an MBA research study at Galgotias University. All responses are anonymous and will be used only for academic purposes. Please answer honestly. Thank you for your time.

SECTION A - DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Q1. What is your age group?

Below 18 18 to 25 26 to 35 36 to 45 Above 45

Q2. What is your gender?

Male Female Prefer not to say

Q3. How often do you check reviews or ratings before making a purchase or booking?

Always Most of the time Sometimes Rarely Never

Q4. What type of purchase do you most commonly make online?

Products such as clothes and electronics Services such as events, hotels, and food Both equally

Q5. Have you ever booked an event venue, banquet hall, or farmhouse for a function?

Yes No

SECTION B - TYPES OF SOCIAL PROOF AND BUYING BEHAVIOUR

(Please tick your level of agreement: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree)

Q6. I always read customer reviews and ratings before buying a product or booking a service.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

Q7. A high star rating of 4 stars or above makes me more confident about going ahead with a purchase or booking.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

Q8. Seeing a large number of positive reviews on platforms like Google or Justdial increases my trust in a service provider.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

Q9. Photos and videos shared by real customers on Instagram or Facebook influence my decision to book a venue or service.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

Q10. If a friend or family member recommends a service like an event planner or banquet hall, I am very likely to book it without much hesitation.



1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

Q11. Influencer reviews or recommendations about a service or product on social media affect my buying decisions.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

Q12. Seeing messages like 500 customers served or most booked venue this season on a website increases my trust and interest in that business.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

Q13. Testimonials shared by past customers on a company's website make me more confident about booking their service.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

SECTION C - SOCIAL PROOF AND FINAL BUYING DECISION

(Please tick your level of agreement: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree)

Q14. I am less likely to book an event venue or service if it has very few or no reviews online.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

Q15. Negative reviews or low ratings have stopped me from buying a product or booking a service, even if I liked it initially.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

Q16. I feel more comfortable booking a service like a banquet hall, farmhouse, or wedding planner when I can see real photos from past events organised there.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

Q17. Seeing that only a few dates are available, combined with many positive reviews, makes me decide to book faster.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

Q18. I trust a business more when I see it being actively recommended by people on social media platforms like Instagram or WhatsApp groups.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree



Q19. After seeing strong social proof like reviews and customer photos, I am willing to pay a higher price for the same service.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

Q20. Overall, social proof including reviews, ratings, recommendations, and testimonials plays a major role in my final decision to buy a product or book a service.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

Thank you very much for taking the time to fill this questionnaire. Your responses are valuable to this research.

