

Social Proof Positive: Following the Crowd is the Nudge you Need.

How to harness the persuasive power of the influence of others.

If you've ever wondered how to persuade people more effectively to follow your words, here's a tip—get **other people** to write them.

Other people that fall into one of **six** suggestive crowds that compel, based on findings from behavioural science, of course.

TL; DR: We use **Heuristics**—**estimations** based on our previous **experiences**—to help decision-making. The most powerful of these **Rules-of-Thumb***, **Social Proof** states that:

“We view a behaviour as more correct in any given situation to the degree that we see **others** performing it.”

Dr. Robert Cialdini (from *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion*)

Want to buy a new mobile phone? What's the first thing you do?

According to TrustPilot, **77%** of consumers consult the **online reviews** of **other people** before purchasing.

And you would too.

And then you'd go and buy the one you already wanted anyway.

Because your mate just got it and Kylie Jenner had it on her Insta story too.

Read on if you want to know:

- How to harness **Social Proof** and make people more likely to do what you want.
- The **Suggestive Six** and why they work.

**They aren't right all the time, but hey, who is? Not even your perfect older sister.*

The Decision Landscape—Spoilt for Choice

On average we make **35,000** decisions. Every day.

That's **1** every **2 seconds**.

Most decisions require minimal thought, so we use **shortcuts**, like **Social Proof**.

TMI — Too Much Information

In **1900** it doubled every **100 years**.

In **2013** it doubled every **13 months**.

Right about **now** [human knowledge](#) doubles **every 12 hours**.

An avalanche of information.

At our fingertips.

In our pocket.

More than we can possibly process.

Information overload leads to poorer decision-making, by adding **uncertainty**.

No wonder we use **shortcuts**, like **Social Proof**.

Why **Social Proof**?

Hitting the Panic Button

No food. No alcohol. No Toilet Roll!

Covid Pandemic panic buying perfectly demonstrated the triggers and conditions for **Social Proof** to occur.

People queued up for toilet roll, your **friends** queued up for toilet roll, **everyone** queued up for toilet roll, **you** queued up for toilet roll.*

People were hoarding.

People were fighting.

People were shopping at 1am.

People were losing it.

We were told there was plenty of TP to go round.

But

What people saw on TV, on the news, on the streets, made them act. Made us act.

Don't panic! Don't panic! Buy all the Toilet Rollz.

Maybe you feel smug because you didn't, but there was **something you panic bought.*

It was Nutella, wasn't it?

The laxative blend that propelled this social pebble-dashing (and key aspects which turbo-charge **Social Proof**) include:

Conformity

Although we like to think of ourselves as unique, behaviourally we tend to revert to **social norms** so that we can,

be correct.

be liked.

And most importantly

belong.

The Self-Preservation Society.

In the days of Sabre-tooth tigers, choices were of the life-or-death variety.

If we saw someone running, we chose to run. Immediately. Regardless of evidence. If we didn't, there would not be a second chance.

Conformity was fundamental to **survival**.

This instinct has become so powerful, so natural, it can override rules, morals, logic, rationality.

If you don't believe us check out **Solomon Asch's Conformity experiments**.

Sabre-toothed thoughts in your head.

While mortal threats have lessened, psychological threats have exploded.

Today's technology is now the hungry tiger, optimised to stimulate that same survival instinct and exploit our desire to conform.

Buttons are not just being pressed but hammered. Relentlessly.

Back to TP: Toilet paper queues triggered our instinct to **conform**.

Uncertainty tapped into our fear of running out, amplifying our need to **conform**.

In no Uncertain terms

“When we are unsure of ourselves, when the situation is unclear, when uncertainty reigns, we are most likely to look to and accept the actions of others as correct.”

Dr. Robert Cialdini

When we don't know what to do, we follow the behaviour of others.

Just think back to your first:

- ➔ day of school
- ➔ day at Uni
- ➔ job
- ➔ visit to a German Spa (OK, not even **Social Poof** could break my façade of British reserve—iykyk).

Safety in numbers

“We seem to assume that if a lot of people are doing the same thing, they must know something we don't.”

Dr. Robert Cialdini

The greater number of people you observe following a behaviour, the more likely you will too.

Sometimes that behaviour is irrational, like the **Bystander effect**, seen in the case of Kitty Genovese.

This shows the power of **Social Proof**—persuading you to do things you wouldn't normally, all because, to quote Patrick Bateman, "I want to fit in".

Similarity

The more you think you are like someone, the more inclined you are to be influenced by them.

Maybe it's age, gender profession or maybe it's something arbitrary, like a love of Nutella (but seriously, who doesn't?)

Psychologically, we regard those we know—family and especially friends—as most similar to ourselves. This means **Social Proof** including them is by far the most potent.

That's backed up by a 2011 Nielsen study that said "Recommendations from **people I know**" (92%) was the most trusted source of advertising.

What was the must-have footwear brand at your school?

At mine it was Kickers.

First the cool kids wore them, then the rich kids wore them, then everyone wore them.*

Peer Pressure in teenagers is **Social Proof** on steroids.

If you can't remember, just wait till your kids ask you for a pair of whatever's cool** now.

*It's called the **bandwagon effect**.

** Is cool even cool anymore?

Six degrees of **Social Proof**

Now you know why, here's the how.

Use the words and actions of people from these **Suggestive Six** as shortcuts and tap-in to their extraordinary power to persuade.

Expert

Despite what Michael Gove thinks, we defer to those more knowledgeable than us, or at least those who appear to be.

Who would you rather listen to Chris Witty or Boris Johnson? Case closed.

Celebrity

A celebrity's dominant qualities artificially boost your opinion of all their other traits. This is called the Halo Effect.

Brands and products have long exploited the popularity and attractiveness of celebrities for endorsements, behaviours, or even political stances. Why? cos it works.

Wanna try a wine described by a professional sommelier as 'one dimensional'?

Um...

It's by Nikki Minaj.

Hell yes.

Certification

As you would expect, anything that denotes authority or approval gets a big tick.

A big blue tick actually. 

User

Brightlocal's 'Local Consumer Review Survey' states that "**84%** of people trust **online reviews** as much as a **personal recommendation**."

Websites like Amazon, TripAdvisor and Booking.com are filled with examples of **Social Proof**

- 5-star reviews
- review 'helpful' ratings
- '2 in stock' icons
- 'Last booked 1 hour ago' messages.

All tricks used to trigger an undeniable Call to Action.

Testimonials, whether that are text or video are equally as enticing to us.

It is **User Social Proof** which is most potently weaponised by big brands—having so many customers has its advantages here.

The Wisdom of Crowds

Size does matter, at least when it comes to **Social Proof** and especially social media.

We instinctively scan and log how many likes, shares, followers, and comments things we are interested in have had. The more there are, the more it validates our opinion.

And why in real life we will happily queue for a bar but walk right past a restaurant if it's empty. It's even got a name—**FOMO (Fear Of Missing Out** if you are worried about not knowing).

The Wisdom of Friends

Very much the last word when it comes to **Social Proof**, similarity only breeds persuasion when it comes to advice—Friends will always be there for you, after all.

Ever messaged a mate to ask what they are wearing on a night out?

Or followed someone they're following on social media?

Or bought the same clothes as them?

Go forth and multiply

These examples of **Social Proof** are highly effective, but their powers are supercharged when used in combination. This effect has been cryptically dubbed the **multiple source effect***.

Plunder the influence—an example to follow

Now you have the keys to the influence kingdom, you will notice **Social Proof** everywhere you look.

But nowhere is it more prevalent than in the digital online world which we more and more frequent, and no one personifies Social Proof more than the perfectly formed, perma-tanned package that is...

The Influencer.

Influencers are **Social Proof** made flesh. Brands such as Gymshark have led the way in the use of Influencers and Brand Ambassadors. Now everyone follows, literally.

Micro-influencers (~100k followers) especially, have been shown to offer the most bang for your buck (ROI to those who speak marketing).

Why?

Because they are just like me and you. Or at least, that's how they make you feel.

We know **the Wisdom of Friends** is by far the most potent form of **Social Proof**.

The Influencer game is based on engagement and here there is good evidence to suggest Micro-Influencers are deemed most authentic.

They live and operate in a world close to our own (or at least it looks that way) and act in a way which is familiar to us, including:

- Sharing personal things, sometimes very personal
- Available frequently and at length
- Appearing casual, unpolished, and 'real'

These activities makes them more relatable, make you think they are like you, like they could be **you**.

In other words, they become a friend in the eyes of their followers.

A particularly passionate following can lead to tribe-like behaviour, fierce loyalty, almost cultish in mentality—generating a desire to follow the Influencer to the ends of the earth.

Or at the least the next must-tag hotspot or affiliate link.

Social Proof—Under the influence

Use of the **Suggestive Six**, focusing on testimonials, reviews and user-generated content is a good way to make gains quickly, as they are proven, simple and cheap to implement.

Influencers bring potent persuasive power, but are high risk / high reward.

Social Proof fails when authenticity is questioned, or Influencers / Brands go 'off message'.

Incidents like these and the resulting backlash prove Social Proof can be both a blessing and a curse, with social media particular unforgiving in today's Cancel Culture.

Examples include:

- Pandemic flight of the Influencer to Dubai. Many posted as if at home.
- Copy and paste caption fails—suffered by many, notably Naomi Campbell and Scott Disick.
- The Kendall Jenner Pepsi advert.
- Fyre Festival—Bonfire of the Vanities. Promoted by Influencers at great cost, who bailed when everything went up in smoke.
- HMV staff twitter hijack—live-tweeting mass-firings on your socials, guaranteed to go viral.

As with alcohol, the higher the proof, the more potent the influence.

But so too the potential for a crashing hangover or poor judgement.

Drink responsibly.

** multiple different sources of Social Proof which be more effective at persuasion than a single source, even if it provides more evidence.*