

## Court Orders New Trial Based On Juror's Internet Research

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The American judicial system is based on the impartiality of juries and the doctrine that jurors will consider only the evidence admitted at trial in rendering their verdict. What happens when a juror obtains additional information relevant to a case through Internet research?

The Vermont Supreme Court recently addressed this issue in reversing and remanding a lower court's denial of a motion for new trial by a criminal defendant. After a jury trial in a Vermont trial court, defendant Abdi was convicted of one count of aggravated sexual assault on a child. The facts surrounding the alleged crime involved the culture of the Somali Bantu community in which defendant lived. After the verdict was issued, the trial court learned that, during deliberations, one of the jurors had researched Somali culture on the Internet and shared some of the research with the rest of the jurors. The court conducted a hearing, determined that none of the jurors were influenced by the information in reaching the verdict, and denied defendant's motion for a new trial based on jury misconduct.

The Vermont Supreme Court disagreed, holding that it was impossible to conclude that the outside information had no impact on the verdict. The court also suggested that, in the age of increased technology, new legislation may be in order admonishing jurors from consulting outside sources. Many states, including Michigan, have already taken such steps.