



New Study: AI Ads Match Human Creative in Major Report from Columbia University, Harvard University, Technical University of Munich, and Carnegie Mellon University; Taboola Data Shows AI Wins by Appearing Authentically Human and Prioritizing Visual Trust Signals

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NEW YORK, Jan. 28, 2026 (GLOBE NEWSWIRE) -- Taboola (Nasdaq: TBLA), a global leader in delivering performance at scale for advertisers, today announced the findings of a major field study conducted in collaboration with researchers at Columbia University, Harvard University, Technical University of Munich, and Carnegie Mellon University. The research provides the first-ever look at how generative AI (GenAI) compares to human creativity in driving consumer action by analyzing large-scale real-world ad performance.

While GenAI has revolutionized production speed and cost, its impact on actual performance has remained a subject of intense debate. The new study, titled, "[AI Ads That Work: How AI Creative Stacks Up Against Humans](#)," analyzed hundreds of thousands of live ads running on Realize, Taboola's performance advertising platform, totaling more than 500 million impressions and 3 million clicks.

Key insights from the academic research include:

- **GenAI ads perform just as well as human-made ads:** AI-generated ads performed just as well as human-made ads. In raw data, AI ads saw a slightly higher average click-through-rate (CTR) (0.76%) compared to human ads (0.65%), though they performed comparably when researchers applied the tightest statistical controls.
- **AI ads win the most when they don't "look" like AI:** AI-generated ads that did not "look like AI" achieved the highest engagement of all groups, significantly outperforming both human-made ads and AI ads that were perceived as artificial.
- **Human faces are the "secret ingredient" for trust:** The study found that one of the most important factors in making an ad feel "human" and trustworthy was the presence of a large, clear human face. Interestingly, based on Taboola's best practices and policy restrictions, AI-generated ads were more likely to include these trust cues than their human-made counterparts.
- **Brands no longer have to choose between speed and quality:** AI-generated visuals increased or maintained click-through rates without reducing downstream conversion performance, proving that advertisers do not have to trade quality or conversions for production scale.
- **Food, drink, and finance brands were among the first to adopt AI ads:** Specific sectors; most notably, the "food and drink" and "personal finance" industries were early to adopt AI ads.

"Taboola's platform provided us with a literal gold mine of real-world data that is simply unavailable in a lab setting. By analyzing over 500 million impressions, we were able to move past the hype of GenAI and uncover its real impact in large scale settings," said Oded Netzer, Vice Dean for Research, Columbia Business School. "Our findings prove that when AI is used to enhance human cues—like the trust found in a human face—it doesn't just match human performance; it often sets a new ceiling for engagement."

Methodology

The study utilized a quasi-experimental "sibling ads" approach, comparing matched pairs of AI-generated and human-made ads created by the same advertiser for the same campaign on the same day. This methodology allowed researchers to isolate the impact of the GenAI creative while controlling for external variables like the identity of the advertiser, timing, audience targeting, and landing pages.

About Taboola

Taboola empowers businesses to grow through performance advertising technology that goes beyond search and social and delivers measurable outcomes at scale.

Taboola works with thousands of businesses who advertise directly on Realize, Taboola's powerful ad platform, reaching approximately 600M daily active users across some of the best publishers in the world. Publishers like NBC News, Yahoo, and OEMs such as Samsung, Xiaomi and others use Taboola's technology to grow audience and revenue, enabling Realize to offer unique data, specialized algorithms, and unmatched scale.

Disclaimer – Forward-Looking Statements

Taboola (the "Company") may, in this communication, make certain statements that are not historical facts and relate to analysis or other information which are based on forecasts or future or results. Examples of such forward-looking statements include, but are not limited to, statements regarding future prospects, product development and business strategies. Words such as "expect," "estimate," "project," "budget," "forecast," "anticipate," "intend," "plan," "may," "will," "could," "should," "believes," "predicts," "potential," "continue," and similar expressions are intended to identify such forward-looking statements but are not the exclusive means for identifying such statements. By their very nature, forward-looking statements involve inherent risks and uncertainties, both general and specific, and there are risks that the predictions, forecasts, projections and other forward-looking statements will not be achieved. You should understand that a number of factors could cause actual results to differ materially from the plans,

objectives, expectations, estimates and intentions expressed in such forward-looking statements, including the risks set forth in the Company's Annual Report on Form 10-K for the year ended December 31, 2025 under Part 1, Item 1A "Risk Factors" and our subsequent filings with the Securities and Exchange Commission. The Company cautions readers not to place undue reliance upon any forward-looking statements, which speak only as of the date made. The Company does not undertake or accept any obligation or undertaking to release publicly any updates or revisions to any forward-looking statements to reflect any change in its expectations or any change in events, conditions or circumstances on which any such statement is based.

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