



Consumer responses to synthetic humans in advertising

The rapid evolution of generative AI has sparked enthusiasm and intrigue across various sectors. One form of generated content that has received a lot of attention is generated images of people, sometimes known as deep fakes. We use the more neutral term, synthetic humans, to refer to computer-generated images of humans that are photorealistic in appearance. Many companies are now “selling” such synthetic humans for commercial uses, and several brands have stated their intention to use them in advertising. After all, aside from potential cost savings, synthetic humans have advantages related to speed and consistency. A FOMI team consisting of members from both Oxford Saïd and WPP explored the broad question “how do consumers respond to the use of AI-generated models in advertising?” This research is ongoing, but we describe some specific research questions and preliminary findings here.

Do consumers respond differently to ads featuring images of real vs. synthetic humans?

We ran a study where participants were asked to evaluate ads containing either real or synthetic models. The models were matched on basic demographics (rough age, gender, race) and we examined ads from various industries, including financial services, pharmaceutical, personal care, and beauty. Overall, **we found no detectable differences in ad attitude**, brand attitude, industry attitude, or feelings of ad intrusiveness between ads with real vs. synthetic models. Interestingly, people who viewed the synthetic humans reported lower feelings of uncanniness

or discomfort. This is consistent with previous research showing people struggle to distinguish synthetic faces from real ones and find synthetic faces more trustworthy.

How do consumers react to disclosure that humans featured in an advertisement are synthetic?

While the aforementioned study suggests people often cannot discern images of real versus synthetic humans, we were interested in how they might feel if they knew (via explicit disclosure) that a model was synthetic. This is particularly relevant given active and pending legislation regarding AI transparency that would require disclosure when synthetic humans are used. We conducted studies in which participants viewed advertisements featuring synthetic humans that either included or omitted such disclosure. Overall, we found **a slight decrease in ad attitude when such disclosure was present**. Interestingly, the responses greatly depend on various factors, including demographic factors related to both the models and participants themselves. We are continuing to explore these factors to develop a more systematic understanding of if, when, and how synthetic models can be successfully leveraged.

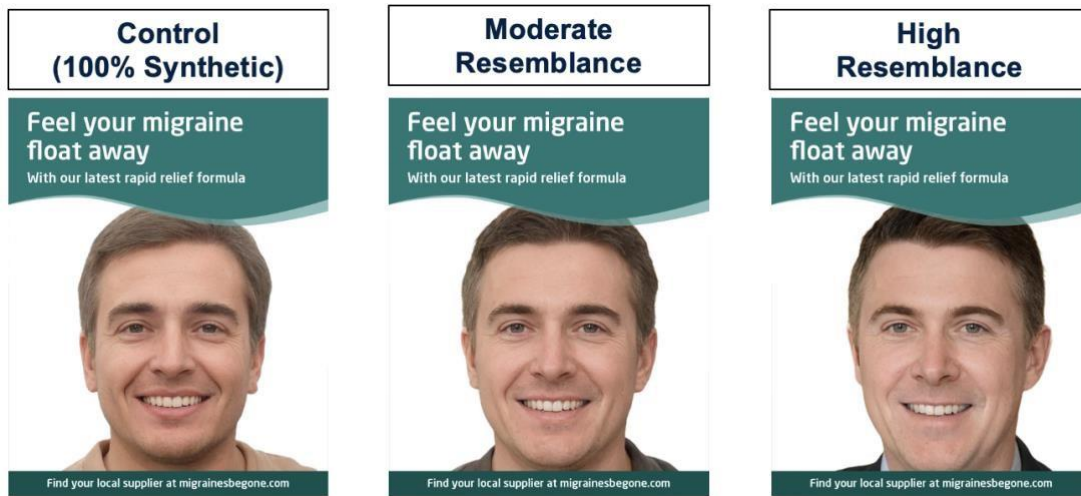


**Please note that this image was generated by an AI algorithm and is not a photograph of a real person*

How do consumers react to synthetic humans that share their likeness?

Interestingly, generative AI can also be used to create hyper-personalized images based on one's own likeness. In fact, many people readily upload photos of themselves for this purpose. Research shows we are more persuaded by those similar to us, so synthetic models resembling the viewer may be impactful. In a preliminary study, we found participants **react positively to synthetic humans that moderately resemble them, but negatively to synthetic humans that greatly resemble them**. As similarity increased, they became aware of the hyperpersonalization

and found it disturbing. We are continuing to explore how and when such personalization is beneficial versus harmful.



Summary

It appears consumer responses to AI-generated models are nuanced. As generative AI continues its explosive growth, we have begun uncovering these reactions, but many questions remain unanswered. This work will only become more relevant as synthetic humans become more prevalent in media in general.