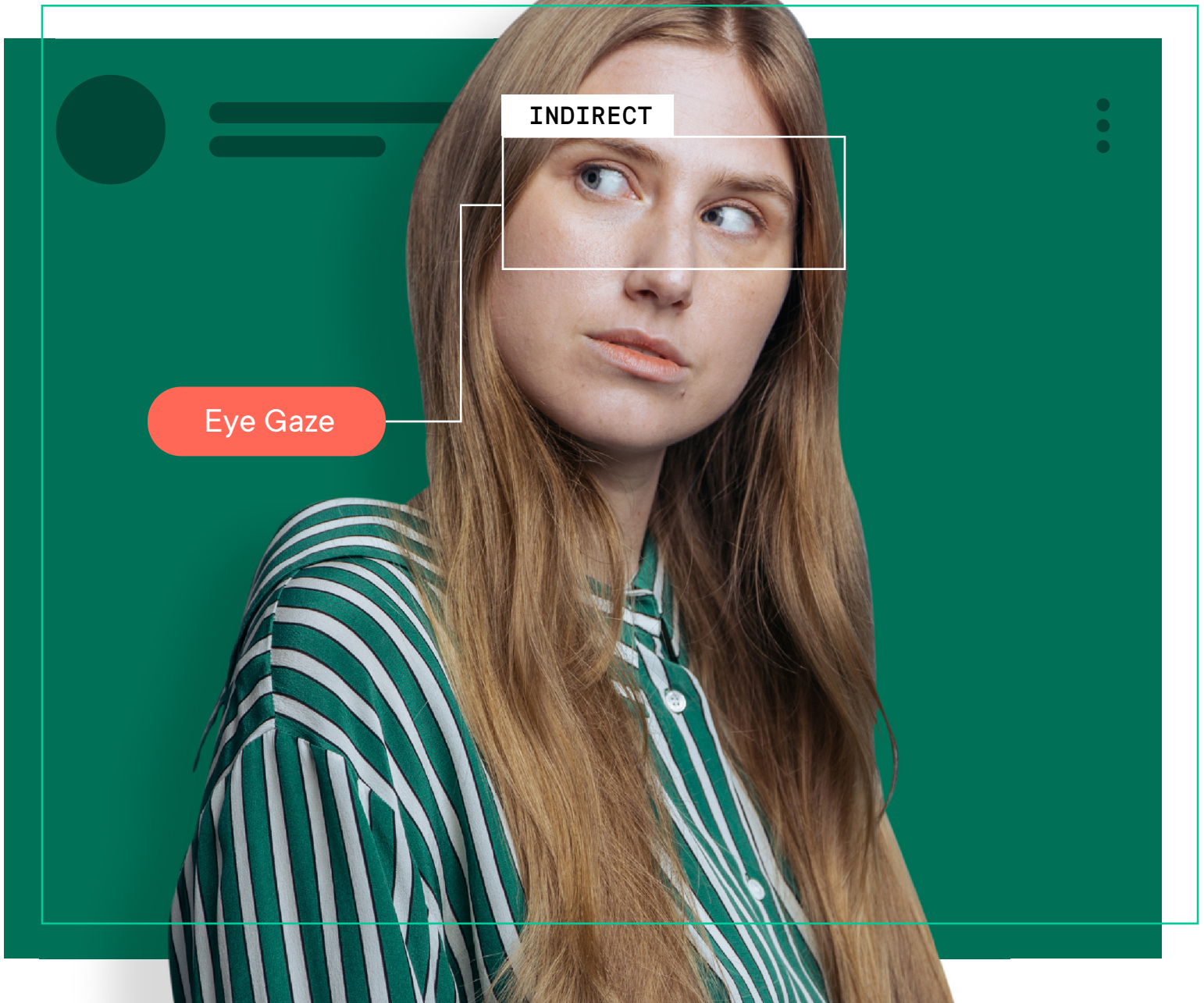
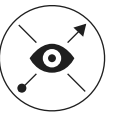


# Focus On: Eye Gaze

## How a Model's Gaze Can Impact Ad Performance





# What you'll see

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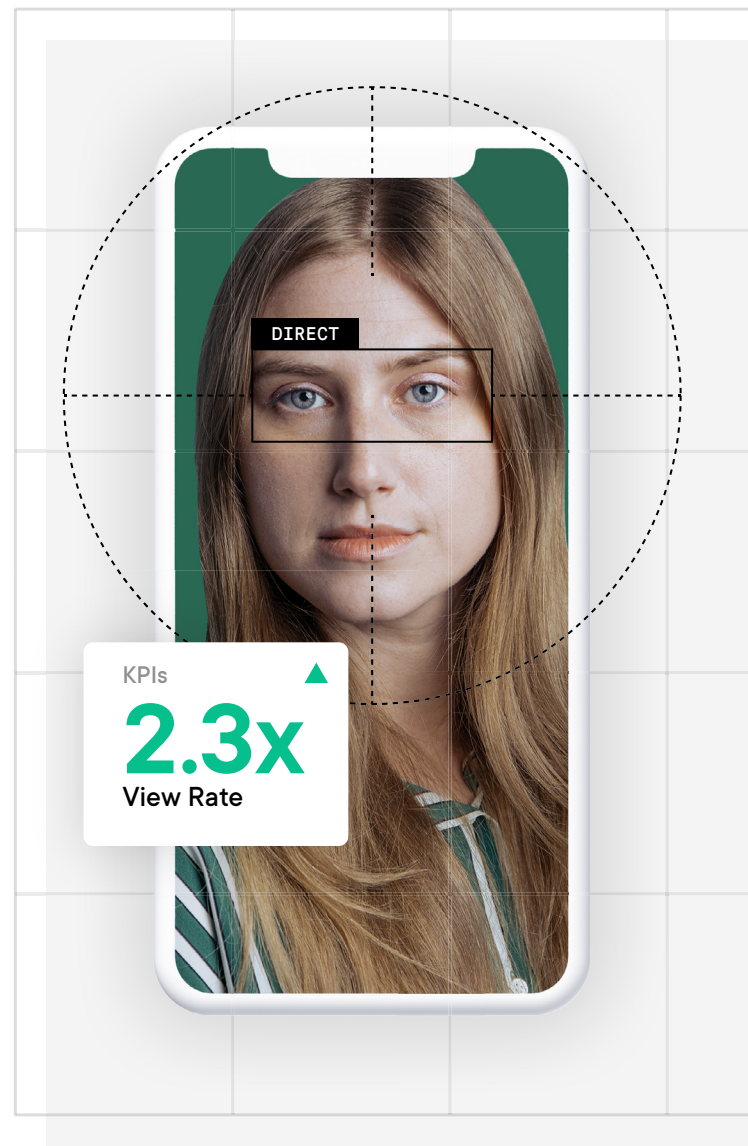
# Look into my eyes

Eyes are often referred to as the “window to the soul,” and for good reason. They convey our emotions, and help us to communicate. Making eye contact indicates trust and connectedness. Avoiding eye contact can be a sign of distance and disinterest.

So it's no wonder that eye gaze in advertising — **the direction of the model's gaze in ad creative** — could influence how consumers react to ads too.

To explore the relationship between eye gaze and creative performance, **VidMob reviewed over 1.1 million ads to see if the subject of the image looked at or away from the camera (we refer to this as a direct vs. indirect gaze)**. Next, we looked at the effect on campaign performance.

For this analysis, ads ran across **Facebook and Instagram, Snapchat, and YouTube from 2018 to 2020, and generated some 2.1 trillion impressions.**




# Methodology

We looked at how eye gaze during the **viewability window** (the first three seconds of video on Facebook and Instagram, the first two seconds on all other platforms) correlated to ad performance based on the unique campaign goals.

What we looked at:

1,116,280 digital video assets

2,118,472,082,434 global impressions

Platform	Industries	Campaign Timeline*	Campaign Objectives:	
			KPI	Definition
 	CPG Entertainment & Retail Verticals	01/2020 – 12/2020 (01/2018 – 12/2020 for industry vertical analysis)	View Rate	How often a video ad was played for at least three seconds
			Click-Through Rate (CTR)	How many times someone clicked on an ad
		01/2018 – 12/2020	View Rate	How often a video ad was viewed for at least two consecutive seconds or was swiped on
			Swipe-Through Rate (CTR)	How often an ad was swiped on
	All Verticals	01/2019 – 12/2020	TrueView View Rate	How long an ad was viewed (video / thumbnail impressions)
			Click-Through Rate (CTR)	How many clicks an ad received

\*Based on the availability of data and sample size constraints for each platform.

# Methodology

The data was grouped as follows:

**Direct Gaze:** where the model looks directly into the camera, establishing eye contact with the consumer

**Indirect Gaze:** where the model looks in any direction other than straight to camera

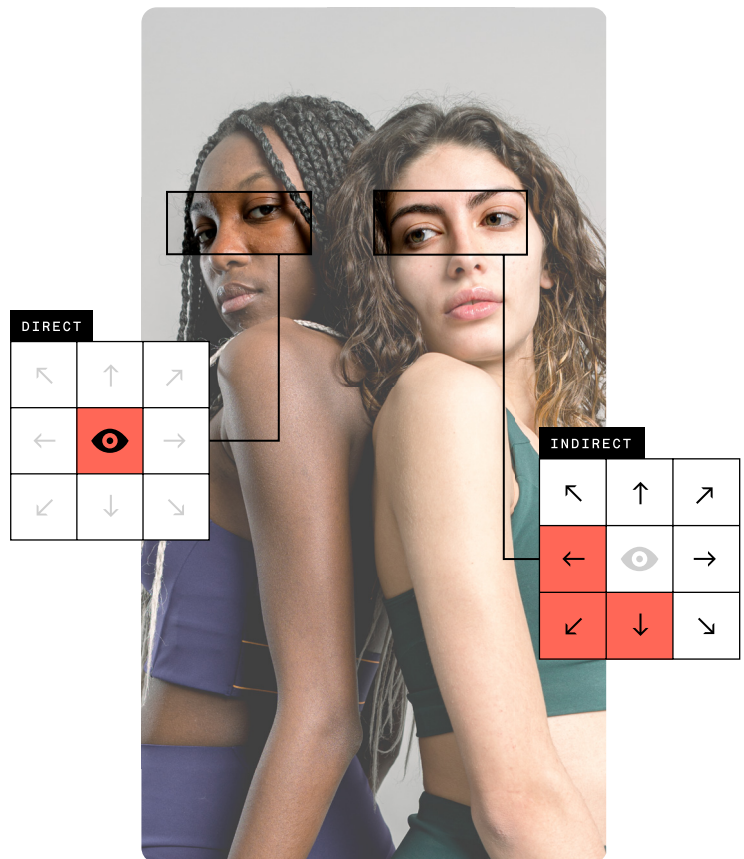
To select for industries where eye gaze often plays an important role in brand messaging, we focused on: CPG, retail, and entertainment.

Sometimes, ads feature more than one person on-screen at once. For the purposes of this report, we treated each gaze as a separate and distinct data point.

## Did You Know?

VidMob's technology can capture up to nine different eye gaze directions featured in creative: left, right, down, up, up-left, up-right, down-left, down-right, and straight.

9 EYE GAZES		
↖	↑	↗
←	👁	→
↙	↓	↘



# TL;DR

When deployed intelligently, eye gaze can have a positive effect on ad performance, but its impact is influenced by ad placement, narrative, and campaign objective:

1

**Eye gaze influences creative performance, but the outcome changes over time — even on the same platform.** This is a time-sensitive creative attribute:

Eye gaze direction was seen to influence campaign **view** and **click rates**, but outcomes changed from one year to the next:

Direct gazes were associated with a **+2.7% increase in CTR across Facebook/Instagram in 2019-20**, but declining CTR and view rates on the same platforms in 2018.

2

**Campaign objectives change how viewers react to eye gaze. Your metrics matter:**

On average, the same gaze direction had opposite effects on view and click rates:

Direct gazes were associated with **+1.47% CTR** across all platforms, and **-6.67%** view rates.

3

**Incorporating eye gaze into the visual narrative can positively influence returns on investment (ROI):**

Aligning gaze direction with the natural flow of the story was seen to help brands reach their goals more efficiently, for example:

**Direct gazes** were associated with higher click rates when brands were looking to purposefully engage viewers in the dialogue, like educational and gaming content

**Indirect gazes** were seen to lift click and view rates for sports, lifestyle, and medical content

Pairing direct gazes with **positive facial expressions** had a beneficial impact on app installs.



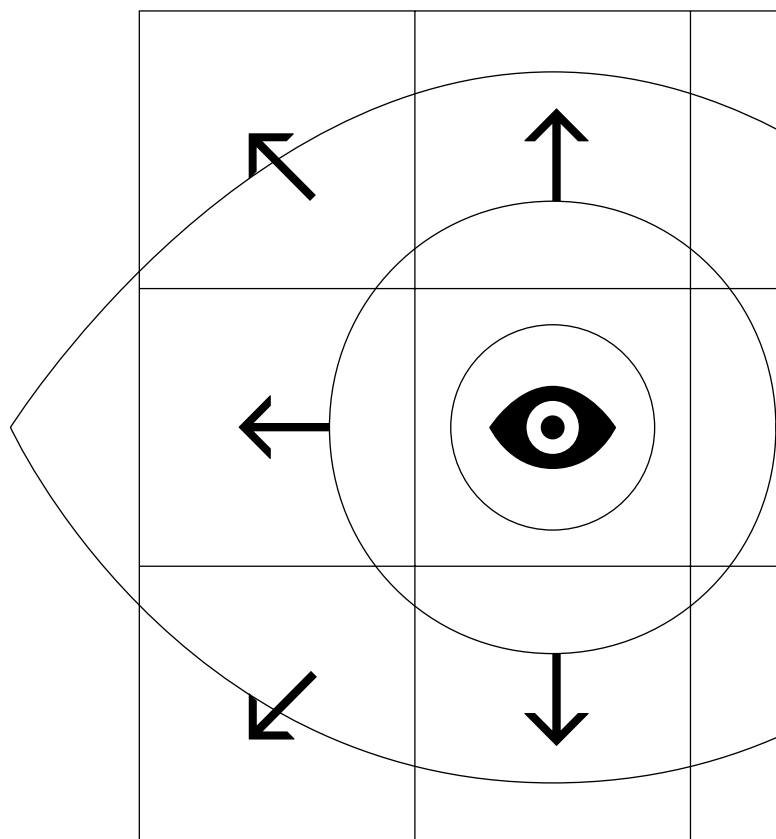
## In Summary

**Keep a close eye on what works best for your brand by campaign, platform, and objective** because — as the data suggests — best practice is about knowing, in real time, what creative choices are working *for you*.

More than eye gaze alone, creative performance depends on how this attribute relates to *other variables* like the ad platform, your industry vertical, storyline, and campaign objectives.

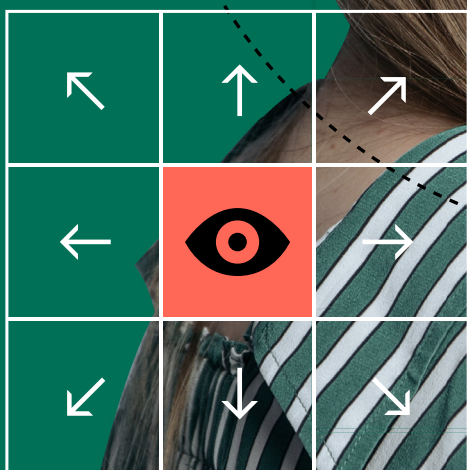
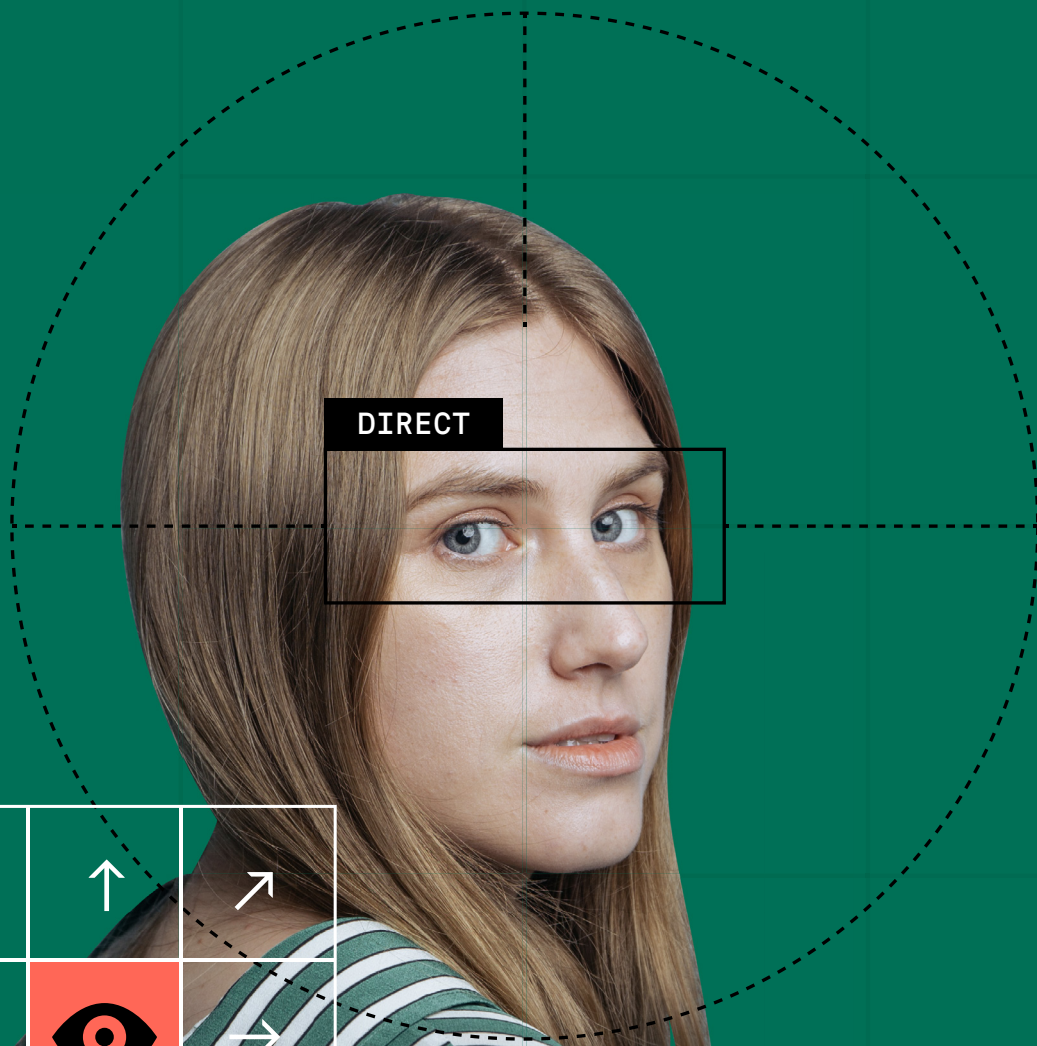
So while it's worth paying attention to how eye gaze impacts ad performance — and in some cases can reveal big opportunities for brands (read on for more about that) — that's just the tip of the iceberg. This data shows **audiences respond differently to similar creative elements depending on the context**.

That's as good a reason as any to pay close attention to **your brand's unique creative data as the key to optimizing digital performance**.





# Visualize the Data





# Direct Gaze vs. Indirect Gaze

## Impact on Creative Performance

Featuring a **direct gaze** in an opening shot tended to **lift click-through rates (CTR)**, but **lower view rates**.

### Sample Size:

1,116,280 video assets

2,118,472,082,434 impressions

### How to Read These Charts:

The data in this section looks at the **variance in performance** between ads featuring a direct and indirect gaze in the first 2–3 seconds of viewable creative. To give you the full picture, sample size data is provided in each section of this report.

Due to the large sample sizes in this study, each percentage difference in cross-platform data equates to a significant number of impressions — **almost 21 billion** — based on the total volume of impressions analyzed.

Direct Gaze in Opening Frame			
	CPG	Retail	Entertainment
Click-through Rate (CTR)	—	↑ 3.2%	—
View Rate (Views / View-Throughs)	↓ 2%	↓ 3%	↑ 1%

See the data in action










# Direct Gaze vs. Indirect Gaze

## Impact on Creative Performance

INSIGHT TO ACTION

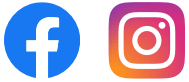
Platform	    
Vertical	Retail
Objective	Clicks / Conversions

When a global sports apparel brand saw **indirect eye gazes** were associated with a **pronounced increase** in mobile CTR, they were intrigued.

VidMob's Creative Analysts took a closer look. As it turned out, these images tended to portray athletes playing sports. Watching this drew in viewers.

That powerful insight, combined with extra visual analysis, informed the brand's mid-flight **creative optimization**. This resulted in **+1.58% average CTR** and significant traction for the brand.





# Facebook + Instagram

## Impact of a Direct Gaze on Creative Performance (2018-20):

Direct and indirect gazes drove seemingly opposite outcomes for video ads on Facebook and Instagram.

**Direct gazes tended to increase clicks, while indirect gazes were associated with more views.**  
However, this trend grew less pronounced over time.

### Sample Size:

1,009,276 video assets

1,942,418,263,959 impressions

Campaigns ran between: 01/2018 - 12/2020,

or 01/2020-12/2020 for our industry vertical analysis

Direct Gaze in Opening Frame			
	2018	2019	2020
Click-through Rate (CTR)	—	↑ 3.6%	↓ 1.8%
View Rate (Views / View-Throughs)	↓ 3%	—	↓ 1%

See the data in action






# Facebook + Instagram

## Impact of a Direct Gaze on Creative Performance (2018-20):

INSIGHT TO ACTION

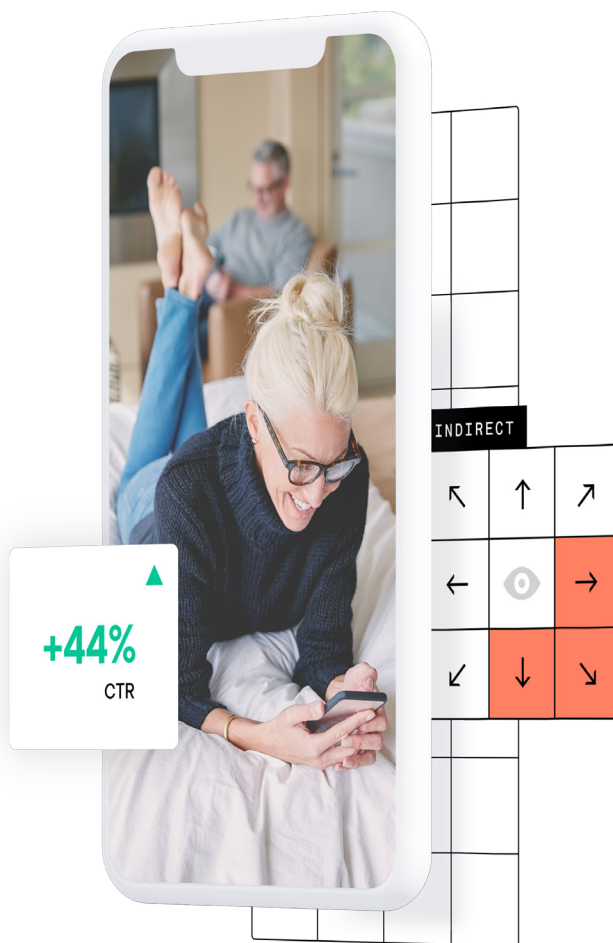
Platform	
Vertical	Financial Services
Objective	Clicks / Conversions

During the lookback analysis for a large financial services company, eye gaze surfaced as a new area of creative best practice.

By digging into the data, VidMob discovered that when talent looked directly at the camera, it tended to lift 3-second view rates for educational content about investment options **+59% above average** compared to similar content.

Meanwhile, **indirect gazes, associated with more casual lifestyle imagery than interview-style narratives, were associated with +44% clicks** for ads about specific products or services such as investment funds, credit cards, and loans.

This analysis equipped the brand with key insights to drive meaningful performance going forward.





# Facebook + Instagram

## Creative Performance by Vertical (2020):

To understand how eye gaze influences campaign performance across industry verticals, we analyzed a year's worth of data for brands in this space. Overall, **direct gazes were associated with +1.8% CTR across all verticals, with retail ads seeing the largest lift (+3.2%).**

At the vertical level, the impact of direct gazes on view rates changed. **While featuring direct gazes tended to lower performance for retail and CPG ads, they actually generated more views for entertainment ads.**

Direct Gaze in Opening Frame	CPG	Retail	Entertainment
Click-through Rate (CTR)	—	↑ 3.2%	—
View Rate (Views / View-Throughs)	↓ 2%	↓ 3%	↑ 1%

See the data in action








# Facebook + Instagram

## Creative Performance by Vertical (2020):

INSIGHT TO ACTION

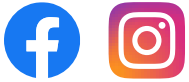
Platform	
Vertical	Nonprofit
Objective	Clicks / Conversions

A nonprofit looking to raise awareness for children with autism connected to VidMob's charitable Foundation, VidMob Gives, to drive mid-flight optimizations. **While using illustration had a strong impact on ad performance, so did gaze for ads featuring real-life footage.**

Not being able to maintain eye-contact or show appropriate facial expressions can be early symptoms of autism. By incorporating this into the ad — a child looking away from the camera — the child's indirect gaze conveyed the condition, and resonated with viewers.

This insight translated into extra performance for the organization. **The use of an indirect gaze was seen to lift view rates in select creative by as much as +14%. In fact, simply featuring a gaze of any kind helped to lift click rates up to 22% higher than the account average.**






# Facebook + Instagram

## Creative Performance by Vertical (2020):

INSIGHT TO ACTION

Platform	
Vertical	Gaming
Objective	Installs

When a global **mobile gaming brand** ran a pre-campaign analysis with VidMob for their Facebook creative, **they realized having in-game characters looking directly at the viewer resulted, on average, in a 10% decline in cost per install (CPI) for their app.**

If those characters looked straight to camera but also had happy facial expressions, the CPI **decreased by 35%, outperforming their historical campaign average by \$6.**

As a result, the brand will now be factoring those learnings into their creative best practices, and testing them out in future campaigns.





# Snapchat

## Impact of a Direct Gaze on Creative Performance:

The impact of eye gaze trends can change dramatically year to year, and this is especially true for Snapchat.

A direct gaze was associated with 3.4% lower swipe rates in 2018, but seemed to boost them in 2019-20. Similarly, direct gazes were associated with an 18% lift in view rates in 2018, but the trend reversed in 2019 (-1%) and 2020 (-7%).

### Sample Size:

102,482 video assets

139,568,296,792 impressions

Campaigns ran between: 01/2018 - 12/2020

Direct Gaze in Opening Frame	2018	2019	2020
Swipe Rate	↓ 3.4%	↑ 1.9%	↑ 0.1%
View Rate (Views / View-Throughs)	↑ 18%	↓ 1%	↓ 7%



# Snapchat

## Creative Performance by Vertical (2018-20):

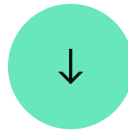
This analysis looked at the impact of eye gaze on Snapchat ads across three industry verticals: CPG, retail, and entertainment.

**CPG and retail ads that opened with direct eye contact tended to get more swipes, but this gaze direction was also associated with lower view rates for CPG and entertainment brands.**

Direct Gaze in Opening Frame	CPG	Retail	Entertainment
Swipe Rate	↑ 6.3%	↑ 2.3%	
View Rate (Views / View-Throughs)	↓ 9%		↓ 9%

See the data in action






# Snapchat

## Creative Performance by Vertical (2018-20):

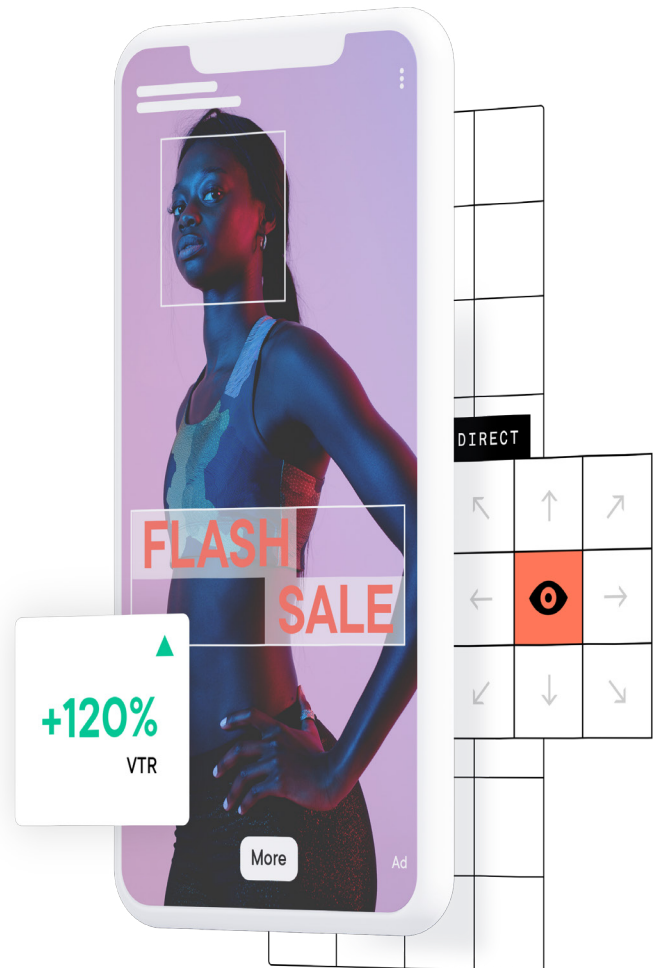
INSIGHT TO ACTION

Platform	
Vertical	Retail / eCommerce
Objective	Views / Conversions

More than eye gaze alone, the human presence can change how we respond to ads — and what that means for campaign performance. That much was clear when VidMob ran an [analysis](#) of Snapchat ads on behalf of 28 retail and ecommerce brands.

The study, which spanned 10,826 ads and 3.9 billion impressions over Q4 2019-20, showed **ads featuring actors rather than products saw a 45% lift in view rates. Close-up shots of the actors lifted view rates up to 120%.**

These trends then reversed when the campaign objective switched to conversions. In this instance, product-centric shots and less organic narratives yielded higher ROAS.







# YouTube

## Impact of a Direct Gaze on Creative Performance (2019-20):

Opening ads with a direct gaze correlated with **+2.2% CTR on YouTube**. This relationship was especially noticeable in 2020 when **CTR increased +7.7%**.

However, opening ads with a direct gaze also resulted in lower view rates. **This effect was most pronounced in 2019, when direct gazes were associated with 8% performance.**

### Sample Size:

4522 video assets

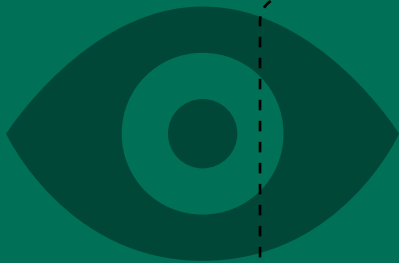
36,485,521,683 impressions

Campaigns ran between: 01/2019 - 12/2020

Direct Gaze in Opening Frame		
	2019	2020
Click-Through Rate (CTR)	↓ 1.4%	↑ 7.7%
View Rate (Views / View-Throughs)	↓ 8%	↓ 4%



# How to use this Data to Improve your Creative Performance



**Top Performer**  
20.5%

# The power of ads to captivate their audience has always been the key to success

**Intelligent Creative** empowers you to manage your creative performance to dramatically improve ROI. That starts by knowing how each visual or audio attribute in an ad contributes, or is likely to contribute, to campaign performance.

This report looks at large volumes of data to provide general insights into the effectiveness of a single creative attribute: eye gaze. This is one of countless visual details that can be analyzed and optimized to improve performance.

Use this analysis as the starting point for exploring how eye gaze impacts your brand creative. Insights can vary by brand, campaign, and by platform — even from one year to the next. True creative intelligence is about setting and refining your brand's unique best practices.

See how eye gaze has impacted your ad performance to date.



# Why VidMob?

The world's leading platform for **Intelligent Creative**, VidMob offers an end-to-end solution to help brands improve their marketing results by unifying creative and data. As the only company in the world to receive a Certified Creative Marketing Partner badge from every major social and digital platform, our access to creative data is unparalleled.

A portion of every dollar VidMob receives is used to fund pro bono creative services for nonprofits through its 501(c)(3) VidMob Gives. Learn more about VidMob at [vidmob.com](https://vidmob.com) and VidMob Gives at [vidmob.gives](https://vidmob.gives).

