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AI

Irony alert: Hallucinated citations found in papers from NeurIPS, the prestigious AI conference

Julie Bort · 12:34 PM PST · January 21, 2026

AI detection startup [GPTZero](#) scanned all [4,841 papers](#) accepted by the prestigious Conference on Neural Information Processing Systems (NeurIPS), which took place last month in San Diego. The company found 100 hallucinated citations across 51 papers that it confirmed as fake, the company tells TechCrunch.

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Having a paper accepted by NeurIPS is a résumé-worthy achievement in the world of AI. Given that these are the leading machine learning conferences, it's not surprising to assume they would be the most accurate. But the boring task of writing papers is often a tedious one, and

So caveats about hallucinated citations are statistically significant. So out of 100 citations, statistically, zero is, statistically, zero.

It's also important to note that this doesn't negate the research, "Even if the incorrect references in the content of the paper are invalidated."

But having said all that, nothing, either. No scholarly publishing intelligence," [it says](#)

by multiple people who are instructed to flag hallucinations.

Citations are also a sort of currency for researchers. They are used as a career metric to show how influential a researcher's work is among their peers. When AI makes them up, it waters down their value.

No one can fault the peer reviewers for not catching a few AI-fabricated citations given the sheer volume involved. GPTZero is also quick to point this out. The goal of the exercise was to offer specific data on how AI slop sneaks in via "a submission tsunami" that has "strained these conferences' review pipelines to the breaking point," the [startup says in its report](#). GPTZero even points to a May 2025 paper called "[The AI Conference Peer Review Crisis](#)" that discussed the problem at premiere conferences, including NeurIPS.

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Still, why couldn't the researchers themselves fact-check the LLM's work for accuracy? Surely they must know the actual list of papers they used for their work.

What the whole thing really points to is one big, ironic takeaway: If the world's leading AI experts, with their reputations at stake, can't ensure their LLM usage is accurate in the details, what does that mean for the rest of us?

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