**User Experience and Artificial Intelligence Assignment4**

**Topic: MAIN & Machine Heuristics & Affordance**

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**We Don’t Trust the Information—We Trust the Cues**

Lately, I find myself asking: “Did I really believe this information because of what it said?”In most cases, I realize that my judgment had less to do with the actual content and more to do with howthe information was presented—or whopresented it.

This tendency is well explained by Sundar’s MAIN model, which outlines how users form judgments about credibility based on four technological affordances of digital media: Modality, Agency, Interactivity, and Navigability. Each affordance activates a specific cognitive heuristic—a mental shortcut that enables users to assess the reliability of a message quickly. For instance, video (modality) feels more “real” than text, and content attributed to machines (agency) may trigger a sense of objectivity.

To me, MAIN is especially insightful because it captures how modern users, particularly digital natives, respond in information-overload environments. These days, consuming information often means scanning for trust cues, not reading closely. The younger the user, the more likely they are to evaluate credibility based on design features, UI structure, or the smoothness of interactionrather than content accuracy. We are no longer evaluating whatis said—we’re responding to howit is packaged.

**The Belief That Machines Don’t Lie: The Paradox of Machine Heuristics**

What fascinates me even more is how often we trust machines over humans. Whether it’s disclosing personal data or relying on a decision, users frequently rate machine agents as more trustworthy than human ones. This is driven by what researchers call the machine heuristic—the belief that machines are less biased, more secure, and more reliablethan people.

On one hand, this belief makes sense. Machines don’t have moods, favoritism, or ulterior motives. They promise consistency and rationality. But I also see a potential danger: when trust in machines becomes too automatic, we stop questioning the output. The design signals "machine logic," and that alone becomes enough to convince us—even when the logic might be flawed.

Studies have shown that users are more likely to disclose sensitive information when the interface suggests the agent is a machine, particularly if they already subscribe to the machine heuristic. The key insight here is this: people don’t base trust on actual security measures; they base it on perceived signals of technological neutrality. Trust, then, isn’t a careful judgment—it’s a sensory shortcut, deeply shaped by how a system looksand feels.

**Technological Trust Doesn’t Require Human Warmth**

Affordance in the digital age isn’t just about what a system can do. I think it’s more about what a system suggests about its relationship with the user. A clearly navigable interface, responsive interactions, and structured feedback all subtly signal to the user that the system is reliable—even if it doesn’t replicate any human-like empathy or personality.

The TIME model, which builds on dual-process theories, explains how user trust and engagement develop through two routes: one based on symbolic and design cues, and another based on experience and participation. Both channels matter—especially in a world where AI systems increasingly act as social actors.

To me, the key takeaway is this: technological trust doesn’t require the AI to be “human.”It only needs to be predictable, consistent, and structurally legible. People may find human agents warm, but they also find them error-prone. Machines, by contrast, derive trust from systematic behavior and minimal ambiguity. So instead of trying to make AI more emotional, we should focus on designing trustworthy interactions, even if they are functionally dry.

**We Trust the Impression, Not the Technology Itself**

In the end, we don’t trust information—we trust how the information makes us feel. That feeling often stems not from the argument’s strength but from subtle, sensory cues: the tone of a chatbot, the layout of a screen, the responsiveness of a button. The MAIN model helps explain how these signals work, and the machine heuristic shows how they can override deeper scrutiny.

Whether or not an AI is intelligent or ethical matters—but what often determines user trust is whether it appears to be structured, neutral, and machine-like. That’s why I believe the goal for future system design shouldn’t be to make AI more human-like, but to build systems that visually and interactively suggest safety, clarity, and predictability.

As the boundary between humans and machines continues to blur, our standards for trust are being reshaped. And at the center of that shift is not the algorithm itself, but the emotional and perceptual signals it emits—what we might call the design language of trust.