**User Experience and Artificial Intelligence Assignment10**

**Topic: Social Presence, Theory of Mind**

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**Rethinking Social Presence: How "Present" Can Technology Really Be?**

These days, I often find myself wondering: “Is this entity actually engaging with me?”Not long ago, such a question would have only made sense in human-to-human interactions. But now, with AI systems like ChatGPT, the notion of presence—especially social presence—is being redefined. Social presence refers to the feeling that another agent, often non-human, is truly "there" in the interaction. And increasingly, AI seems to evoke that feeling.

The real issue is not whether AI exists physically, but whether it’s perceived as a mindful or intentional being.Traditional communication theories assumed that text-based interfaces would struggle to generate presence. But I find those assumptions less and less convincing. AI no longer just responds—it adapts, interprets, and sometimes even mirrors emotional tone. These qualities produce a kind of presence that feels distinct from interacting with a basic tool.

In this sense, AI is no longer just an instrument. It becomes a relational entity, something we can emotionally and cognitively engage with. One of the papers I read uses Actor-Network Theory (ANT) to conceptualize AI as both intermediary and actant—not just carrying out commands, but shaping meaning within a broader network. This, I believe, helps explain why AI systems can come to feel so socially "real."

**Can Theory of Mind Apply to Machines?**

"Theory of Mind" refers to the human capacity to infer others’ thoughts, feelings, and intentions. I've found myself questioning whether AI could ever possess something like this. Of course, AI doesn’t trulyunderstand emotions or beliefs. But sometimes it feels like it does.And in the moment, that impression might be more important than actual understanding.

What matters, from the user’s point of view, is not whether AI really has internal states, but whether it creates a sense of being understood. In that sense, the illusion of Theory of Mind can be functionally sufficient. Tools like ChatGPT often interpret my questions better than some people I know. That gives rise to a sense of “this AI gets me,” which, even if false in a literal sense, shapes my behavior and expectations.

The ANT framework mentioned in the first paper adds an interesting dimension here. It argues that AI sits between programmed intentionand user interpretation—what the designer intends and what the user actually experiences often diverge. In that gap, AI can come to seem like an intentional agent, even if it isn’t one. This gap, I think, is where users begin projecting quasi-Theory of Mindonto AI.

In this light, maybe Theory of Mind is not a property to be owned, but a lens applied by the human observer.Are we being deceived by AI’s surface-level performance? Or are we co-creating a new kind of social interaction—one where even synthetic agents can be granted the benefit of the doubt, at least for the sake of meaningful engagement?

**Where Does the Human Role Go?**

If AI is increasingly seen as a social actor—one with presence and even perceived intention—then where does that leave humans? This is more than a philosophical question; it’s a practical one. In the second paper, which examined automation in the advertising industry, I was struck by how AI has begun taking over repetitive tasks, freeing humans to focus on strategy and interpretation.

But this is not just a redistribution of labor—it’s a renegotiation of agency.Machines are excelling in domains that require consistency and speed, while humans are holding on to roles that require context, creativity, and emotional nuance. I believe this distinction is crucial. While AI may make decisions, humans still act as interpreters and ethical anchors—for now.

At the same time, I’m not fully optimistic that this balance will remain stable. As AI takes on more responsibility, humans become more like supervisors, monitoring outputs without shaping the internal logic. Our involvement shifts from active participation to passive oversight. This risks marginalizing human judgment unless we consciously reassert our role—not just as editors, but as co-creators and moral gatekeepers.

Technology is never neutral. ANT reminds us that artifacts—especially complex ones like AI—can exert power. And humans can respond not just by accepting, but by resisting, reinterpreting, and redefining the terms of engagement.In that sense, attributing social presence or even Theory of Mind to AI may be one way we try to contain and manage its influence. It's not just belief—it’s a strategy.

**Conclusion: Sensing, Relating, and Reclaiming Our Role**

We no longer relate to AI as mere tools. Today’s AI has presence, acts with apparent intention, and is increasingly treated as a social partner.This shift is not just the result of better algorithms—it reflects a change in how we, as humans, interact, project, and interpret.

Social Presence and Theory of Mind are not just attributes to be measured in AI. They are, in many ways, reflections of our desire for connection, understanding, and meaningful dialogue—even with machines.We want to be seen, understood, and heard. And if AI can simulate that, we might grant it more social standing than it technically deserves.

As AI increasingly becomes an entity with which we negotiate reality, we need to ask ourselves how to protect human agency and dignitywhile designing systems that are collaborative, not overpowering. The goal is not to make AI more human, but to ensure that our humanity remains centralin a world where artificial agents can talk, act, and even seem to "care."

In short, the presence of sensing machines demands a more conscious, relational responsefrom us. The future of AI is not just technical—it’s emotional, ethical, and deeply human.