

**Considerations for Social Presence Theory, Research, and Application
in the 21st Century**

Panel discussion session proposal for the ISPR 2012 “Presence Live!” Conference in
Philadelphia, PA, October 24-26

Chair:

David Westerman, Ph.D.
West Virginia University

Organizer/Respondent:

Paul Skalski, Ph.D.
Cleveland State University

Panel Rationale

The concept of social presence or feeling “with” mediated others has a long history dating back to seminal work by Short, Williams, and Christie (1976), well before the general concept of (tele)presence was popularized in the 1990s (Steuer, 1994; Lombard & Ditton, 1997). Yet advances in social presence theory and research lag behind those in the area of spatial presence or “being there,” which currently has a stronger theoretical basis (chiefly the MEC model by Wirth et al., 2007) and more developed and validated measures (e.g., Vorderer et al., 2004; c.f. Nunez, 2007). Although there have been some laudable attempts to further understandings of social presence (e.g., Biocca, Harms, & Burgoon, 2003), scholarly work in this area seems to have stalled, relatively speaking, despite an explosion of social media technologies.

This panel attempts to help rectify this problem through a series of presentations focusing on issues related to social presence. Panelists will present work dealing with social presence theory, measurement, and application. Following these presentations, a guided discussion will be opened up with the audience in an effort to identify key issues for social presence scholarship and technologies in the 21st century. What conceptual and measurement issues remain to be resolved? What contexts for social presence are in need of further study? And how can we best engineer social presence using current and future communication technologies?

Panelists

Each of the people listed below has conducted research in the area of presence and at least one of the authors of each paper agreed to attend the conference.

Presentation #1:

Paul Skalski
Cleveland State University
School of Communication
Cleveland, OH 44115
216-687-5042
p.skalski@csuohio.edu

Presentation #4:

Stephanie Kelly
North Carolina A&T University
School of Business and Economics
Greensboro, NC 27411
336-334-7500
skelly@ncat.edu

Presentation #2:

David Westerman
West Virginia University
Department of Communication Studies
Morgantown, WV 26506
304-293-3905
david.westerman@mail.wvu.edu

Presentation #3:

Brian Blake
Cleveland State University
Department of Psychology
Cleveland, OH 44115
216-687-9294
BRIANBLAKE@csuohio.edu

Kimberly Neuendorf
Cleveland State University
School of Communication
Cleveland, OH 44115
216-687-3994
k.neuendorf@csuohio.edu

Paul Skalski
Cleveland State University
School of Communication

Presentation #1

Challenges in Studying Social Presence: The Case of One-Way Communication

Paul Skalski

Most scholars studying social presence are interested in two-way communication situations such as human-computer interaction or computer mediated communication. As a result, conceptualizations of social presence and their corresponding measures include items dealing with interactivity (Biocca, Harms, & Burgoon, 2003). But what happens in one-way communication situations, such as watching a person deliver a speech on TV? Do people have meaningful social presence reactions during one-way communication situations, and if so, how can they be measured?

This presentation argues that social presence regularly occurs in response to one-way messages and presents suggestions for investigating these reactions. It begins with a brief review of concepts related to social presence in the mass communication literature, such as parasocial interaction (Hartmann & Goldhoorn, 2011), and distinguishes one-way social presence from them. It also reviews existing measures that could be adapted to measure this type of presence (e.g., the passive interpersonal scale from the Temple Presence Inventory by Lombard & Ditton, 2007). It next presents research findings demonstrating varying levels of social presence in response to different one-way communication messages (e.g., Skalski & Tamborini, 2005). Finally, a series of recommendations are presented, including (1) a set of sub-concepts and measurement items for studying one-way social presence, (2) suggestions for refining social presence theory to account for one-way communication, and (3) a call to researchers to correctly measure one-way social presence instead of spatial presence or other types of presence in particular situations.

Presentation #2
Social Presence and Computer-Mediated Communication:
The Key Concept?

David Westerman

Computer-mediated communication has exploded over the last two decades. Online interaction has especially increased, seemingly exponentially, in the era of so-called social media, such as Facebook and Twitter. Early theories of online interaction, such as Social Presence Theory (Short, Williams, & Christie, 1976), suggested that it would be impersonal and not useful for relationships due to the lack of cues provided. However, other perspectives such as Social Information Processing Theory (Walther, 1992) suggest how people can form relationships even through very lean media, and has a good deal of evidence supporting it. Given the sheer amount of media interaction that takes place, anecdotally, this also makes sense. This presentation will discuss this, and will argue that establishing social presence in online interactions is the key to using technology for interpersonal relationships, and will suggest that the development/refinement of an updated social presence theory is important for the field.

Presentation #3

Selling through Social Presence: Implications for Online Shopping

Brian Blake, Kim Neuendorf, & Paul Skalski

An increasing number of people are bypassing traditional brick and mortar stores in favor of online shopping. Although some may view online shopping as less personal than real-world shopping, features of online shopping sites such as recommendation agents and user communities have the potential to create a sense of social presence. The MAIN model (Sundar, 2008) argues that technological affordances related to modality, agency, interactivity, and navigability activate heuristics determining responses such as social presence. Using MAIN as a framework, this presentation discusses features of online shopping websites likely to support social presence. It builds on existing research on website appeal (e.g., Blake & Neuendorf, 2004) and considers how features of shopping sites and other online selling platforms affect users. Preliminary results of a cross-national survey on online shopping and social presence (with U.S. and Chinese samples) will be reported. Results will be discussed in terms of their implications for e-commerce practitioners.

Presentation #4

What is Social Presence? Definitional Issues and Instructional Communication

Stephanie Kelly

Social presence has been argued to be a necessary condition to improving education; both in traditional face-to-face classrooms and in technologically mediated ones (Gunawardena, 1995). The experience of social presence has been found to lead to positive educational outcomes, such as student satisfaction and instrumentality in a course (Johnson, Hornik, & Salas, 2008) as well as decreases in frustration and increases in affective learning (Hample & Dallinger, 1995). But what is social presence? This presentation will highlight issues arising from unclarities in the explication of social presence, especially in regard to similar concepts such as electronic propinquity (Korzenny, 1978) and mediated immediacy (O'Sullivan, Hunt, & Lippert, 2004).

References

- Biocca, F., Harms, C., & Burgoon, J. K. (2003). Toward a more robust theory and measure of social presence: Review and suggested criteria. *Presence: Teleoperators and Virtual Environments*, *12*(5), 456-480.
- Blake, B. F. & Neuendorf, K. A. (2004). Cross-national differences in website appeal: A framework for assessment. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, *9*(4), 1-34.
- Gunawardena, C. N. (1995). Social presence theory and implications for interaction and collaborative learning in computer conferences. *International Journal of Educational Telecommunications*, *1*, 147-166.
- Hample, D., & Dallinger, J. M. (1995). A Lewinian perspective on taking conflict personally: Revision, refinement, and validation of the instrument. *Communication Quarterly*, *43*, 297-319.
- Hartmann, T. & Goldhoorn, C. (2011). Horton and Wohl revisited: Exploring viewers' experience of parasocial interaction. *Journal of Communication*, *61*(6), 1104-1121.
- Johnson, R. D., Hornik, S., & Salas, E. (2008). An empirical examination of factors contributing to the creation of successful e-learning environments. *International Journal of Human-Computer Studies*, *66*, 356-369.
- Korzenny, F. (1978). A theory of electronic propinquity: Mediated communication in organizations. *Communication Research*, *5*, 3-24.
- Lombard, M., & Ditton, T. B. (1997). At the heart of it all: The concept of presence. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, *13*(3). Retrieved from <http://www.ascusc.org/jcmc/vol3/issue2/lombard.html>

- Lombard, M., & Ditton, T. B. (2007). Measuring presence: The Temple Presence Inventory (TPI). Retrieved from <http://astro.temple.edu/~lombard/research/>.
- Nunez, D. (2007). *A Capacity Limited, Cognitive Constructionist Model of Virtual Presence*. Dissertation, Department of Computer Science, University of Cape Town. Retrieved from <http://pubs.cs.uct.ac.za/archive/00000454/>
- O'Sullivan, P. B., Hunt, S. K., Lippert, L. R. (2004). Mediated immediacy: A language of affiliation in a technological age. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 23, 464-490.
- Short, J., Williams, E., & Christie, B. (1976). *The social psychology of telecommunications*. London: John Wiley & Sons.
- Skalski, P. & Tamborini, R. (2005). *Vividness, social presence, and persuasion: Reconsidering the influence of modality on attitude formation*. Paper presented to the Information Systems Division of the International Communication Association at its 55th Annual Conference in New York, NY, May 26-30.
- Steuer, J. (1992). Defining virtual reality: Dimensions determining telepresence. *Journal of Communication*, 42(4), 73-94.
- Sundar, S. S. (2008). The MAIN model: A heuristic approach to understanding technology effects on credibility. In M. J. Metzger & A. J. Flanagin (Eds.), *Digital media, youth, and credibility* (pp. 72-100). Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- Vorderer, P., Wirth, W., Gouveia, F. R., Biocca, F., Saari, T., Jäncke, F., Böcking, S., Schramm, H., Gysbers, A., Hartmann, T., Klimmt, C., Laarni, J., Ravaja, N., Sacau, A., Baumgartner, T. & Jäncke, P. (2004). *MEC Spatial Presence Questionnaire (MECSPQ): Short Documentation and Instructions for Application*.

Report to the European Community, Project Presence: MEC (IST-2001-37661).

Online. Available from <http://www.ijk.hmt-hannover.de/presence>.

Walther, J. B. (1992). Interpersonal effects in computer-mediated interaction: A relational perspective. *Communication Research*, 19, 52-90.

Wirth, W., Hartmann, T., Böcking, S., Vorderer, P., Klimmt, C., Schramm, H., Saari, T., Laarni, J., Ravaja, N., Gouveia, F. B., Biocca, F., Sacau, A., Jäncke, L.,

Baumgartner, T., and Jäncke, P. (2007). A process model of the formation of spatial presence experiences. *Media Psychology*, 9, 493–525.