Approaches and Applications of Virtual Reality and Gesture Recognition: A Review

Sudha M R, SSN College of Engineering, Department of Computer Science and Engineering, Chennai, India
Sriraghav K, SSN College of Engineering, Department of Computer Science and Engineering, Chennai, India
Sudar Abisheck S, SSN College of Engineering, Department of Computer Science and Engineering, Chennai, India
Shomona Gracia Jacob, SSN College of Engineering, Department of Computer Science and Engineering, Chennai, India
Manisha S, SSN College of Engineering, Department of Computer Science and Engineering, Chennai, India

ABSTRACT

Interaction with a computer has been the center of innovation ever since the advent of input devices. From simple punch cards to keyboards, there are number of novel ways of interaction with computers which influence the user experience. Communicating using gestures is perhaps one of the most natural ways of interaction. Gesture recognition as a tool for interpreting signs constitutes a pivotal area in gesture recognition research where accuracy of the algorithm and the ease of usability determine the effectiveness of the algorithm or system. Introducing gesture based interaction in Virtual reality applications has not only helped solve problems which were commonly reported in traditional Virtual Reality systems, but also gives user a more natural and enriching experience. This paper concentrates on comparison of different systems and identifying their similarities, differences, advantages and demerits which can play a key role in designing a system using such technologies.

KEYWORDS

Computer Interaction, Design Challenges, Kinect, Leap Motion Controller, Oculus Rift, Sign Language Interpretation, Usability Constraints, Virtual Reality, Zelzter’s Cube

INTRODUCTION

The evolution in user experience has been humongous. One major wave of change was brought by the introduction of Graphical User Interface (GUI) which was preceded by complex commands entered through terminal to operate a computer machine (Dirk Börner, Marco Kalz, Marcus Specht, 2013). The gap between the user and the virtual environment in the computer has been narrowing at a rate faster than ever (Aggarwal, S., & Bhatnagar, V., 2013). With the introduction of the concept of technologies like Virtual Reality, the blurring of boundaries between reality and virtual world has been made plausible.

The most common approaches in gesture-recognition that have traditionally been used in the literature are: image based and sensor-based systems (Li-Minn Ang, Kah Phooi Seng & Tee Zhi Heng, 2016). While using the sensor-based systems, the user has to wear electronic gloves while performing the signs. There are many sensors within the glove to detect different hand and finger articulations. Image-based systems use camera(s) to acquire a sequence of images of the hand. In
this paper, several existing methodologies that were used to implement these systems were analyzed and their merits and demerits are expounded.

The concept of Virtual Reality (VR) was first presented in 1965 by Ivan Sutherland (Mazuryk & Gervautz, 1996) who is regarded as father of computer graphics. He proposed the concept of “The Ultimate Display” that led to the creation of The Sword of Damocles, the first virtual reality game designed with specialized Head Mounted Display (HMD) and head tracking. Since then, virtual reality has come a long way. From Aspen Movie Map, CAVE to Oculus Rift and Google Cardboard, the technology has advanced over the years in terms of quality, cost and even size. VR gradually gave rise to a concept called Augmented Reality (AR) which blurred the boundaries between virtual and real world. The Virtual Trial Room Simulation (Biswas, Dutta, Dey et al., 2014) is a fine example of AR applications which aims to simulate virtual trial rooms in real-time without the need for tags, markers or expensive depth and motion cameras. Lately, attempts have been made to not only allow the user to view virtual worlds but also interact and feel the virtual world through various interaction devices and haptic sensation using props.

The paper is organized in the following order. The first following section describes the various theoretical concepts of Virtual Reality and Telepresence. The next section focuses on the myriad applications of Virtual Reality used for various fields. The third section classifies and analyses the history of gesture and sign language detection and its interpretation techniques. It explores techniques that use image processing and neural networks, sensor embedded glove based systems and the applications that use skeletal tracking devices like the Kinect and Leap Motion Controller. The final section explains how Virtual Reality can be coupled with Gesture Recognition Techniques for a more intuitive and natural user experience. It addresses the common design challenges and usability constraints posed by Virtual Reality systems.

CONCEPTS IN VIRTUAL REALITY

Since the inception of virtual reality and its conception by Ivan Sutherland, different perceptions of virtual reality have been developed and presented. While each of them differs from one another in their method of implementation, the level of immersion and sensory revelation, they all share some qualities that are unique to the concept of virtual reality. A well-known method proposed by Zeltzer (Zeltzer, 1992) is the Zeltzer’s AIP cube which defines the components in a virtual reality environment’s complexity and quality using three parameters namely – Autonomy, Interaction and Presence as shown in Figure 1. These parameters are expressed as the coordinate axes of a cube. Autonomy is defined as a qualitative measure of the ability of a computational model to act and react to simulated events and stimuli, ranging from 0 for the passive geometric model to 1 for the most sophisticated, physically based virtual agent. Interaction is the degree of access to model parameters at runtime (i.e., the ability to define and modify states of a model with immediate response). The range is from 0 for “batch” processing in which no interaction at runtime is possible, to 1 for comprehensive, real-time access to all model parameters. Presence provides a rough (dimensionless) measure of the number and fidelity of available input and output channels” (Kalawsky, 2000).

The point (0, 0, 0) represents the presence of no virtual environment characteristics while at (1, 1, 1) the most ideal characteristics of virtual environment are satisfied. In reality, the actual systems vary their Interaction, Presence or Autonomy levels to suit the conditions and scenarios where the system is used.

Telepresence (Held & Durlach, 1992) is another term that is used while describing a virtual reality system. It explores the level to which the user is allowed to perform normal functions by the virtual system and the operator in turn receives optimum sensory feedback from the control system so as to provide an experience of immersion. It is more appropriately expounded by stating that, “At the worksite, the manipulators have the agility to allow the operator to perform normal human functions. At the control station, the operator receives sufficient quantity and quality of sensory feedback to provide a feeling of actual presence at the worksite.”
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