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CYBER SICKNESS IN VIRTUAL REALITY - LITERATURE REVIEW

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Abstract

In this paper, we present a review of the major issue of Virtual Reality - Cyber Sickness. As Virtual Reality becomes more and more popular and advanced technology, it is being used in a variety of areas, such as military, surgery, schools, etc. for training and education. Although at this point, Virtual Reality technology has multiple problems to overcome, Cyber Sickness issue is one of the most difficult ones, as it is closely linked to our physiology and Virtual Reality technology as well. Cyber Sickness symptoms are very similar to those of Motion Sickness, but are caused by Virtual Reality Environments. Due to its potential harm to human health, it is important to know the causes of this issue and possible ways to combat it. In this paper, we will highlight what aspects of Virtual Reality technology cause these symptoms and their outcomes.

Keywords: Virtual Reality; Cyber Sickness; Motion Sickness; Postural Stability

1. Introduction

In the modern time Virtual Reality (VR) technology became very popular and is used in many different areas such as entertainment, military, healthcare, education, engineering etc. Thanks to modern technological advance of computer hardware and software, it became possible to incorporate 3D VR in innovative applications of teaching, training, and learning [1][2][3]. Virtual environment or virtual world is a computer generated 3D representation of real or fictional environments. A user can interact in such an environment independently in the same pace, one would experience events in the real world [4]. VR has the ability to support realistic and immersive simulation and enables transfer of taught skills in VR into real contexts as well as provide multi-user, embodied and interactive active learning [5]. VR is believed to be a promising tool for training and complex problem solving, which requires weighing multiple variables and situational decision making [5][6][7][8]. As an example, VR can be used in ergonomics in order to find out time requirements for specific tasks, as well as help minimize the risks related to physical injuries [9].

Despite many studies in this area, there is still controversy about the real effects of VR on learning and cognition, but preliminary results indicate that the use of VR can increase learning performance [10], facilitate usability and enhance interaction [11], help to reconstruct and navigate through non-existent environments [12], help disabled learners with knowledge accessibility [13], etc. Serious games tend to be used often in formal education and with sufficient support are shown to be highly motivational and effective in learning complex tasks [14][15].

VR Technology can be of great use for emergency service personnel such as police, ambulance, fire fighters and army, as they have to be prepared for various operations at all times, thus continuous training is crucial for their success and security. But training in real environment is sometimes impossible, due to cost or complexity and the good alternative that comes handy is virtual training environment, which allows training for such complex collaborative tasks [16][17]. Thus, if the situation doesn't predispose for real life training practice due to danger, cost or effort, emergency service personnel can profit from virtual training to train for scenarios in real environment [18]. Often VR training is the only option that is possible [19]. And in order to make complex VR applications/simulations, some authors suggest methodologies for designing VR applications [20].

One of the topics that frequently comes up about VR is Cyber Sickness (CS). This is something similar to Motion Sickness (MS), as the symptoms are similar, but one is caused in virtual world, another in the real one. There are various applications and suggestions that try to measure and combat those symptoms of CS as they can potentially affect health in a negative way, which could lead to fatal accidents, such as car crash due to feeling sick. Previous research on this topic helps immensely, as it is important to understand what to expect and find the way to deal with that issue. The symptoms include: headache, nausea, vomiting, fatigue, postural instability, disorientation, etc. This sickness is a natural reaction to an unnatural environment and it happens due to the mismatch between sensory inputs. When those inputs don't agree, that's when you start feeling sick. In traditional MS the mismatch occurs because you feel movement in your muscles and your inner ear, but you don't see it, like it happens on the boat. With CS it's the opposite, you see movement on the screen, but you don't feel it.

Most of the experiments on evaluating CS in subjects are carried out in some kind of simulators, such as flying simulator, driving simulator, surgical simulator, etc. Or other variant of such environment is maze. A Simulation is a model of a real world where user has the ability to interact with the environment [21]. Simulations are helpful and useful as they provide realistic context in which individuals can explore, experiment and see immediate results as they create models of their own or try theories on the modeled concept [22]. Depending on the amount of senses simulated in VR, such as vision, hearing, touch, balance, even smell, the immersion level in the artificial world can vary. As every person is susceptible to CS in different ways, various environments and scenarios can cause divergent sickness levels in users as well. Thus, it would be wise to conduct more studies in different VR simulations to establish more precise link between training in that particular sphere and the levels of CS caused by it. Narrowing research to specific areas, would allow better understanding of things.

2. Cyber Sickness – Symptoms, Causes and Outcomes

There are a wide variety of research conducted in the field of VR on simulator sickness: simulator sickness in different types of moving images [23], comparison of one-screened and three-screened display types [24][25], relationship between age and sickness level [26], and gender effect on simulator sickness [27][28]. Research on virtual environments has provided converging evidence that being placed in a virtual environment with an HMD can lead to MS [29]. Previous studies suggest that a twenty-minute exposure to VREs can increase CS symptoms in over 60% of participants [30]. It has been found that exposure to VEs and simulators caused 30% of exposures result in nausea, up to 40% in eyestrain, as well as the experience of numerous other symptoms of MS including headache, dizziness/vertigo, loss of postural stability, drowsiness, salivation and sweating [31]. Numerous factors are related to the susceptibility and severity of visually induced motion sickness (VIMS) [32][33][34], including the sensation of illusory self-motion [35][36][37], gender [38], age [39], or personality factors like neuroticism and anxiety [40]. Due to many factors contributing to the cause of simulator sickness both from technological and individual standpoints, it is very difficult to predict [41]. It has been noted that psychological conditions such as anxiety can significantly increase when simulated motion increases [42]. Based on the theories of sensory conflict [43]and neural storage [44], changes in visual stimulus could cause sensory conflicts between different modalities (vision, touch, etc.) which in turn could evoke different levels of virtually induced MS.

Little is known on the subject of virtual environment effects on symptoms of CS, thus, a new system describing VE systems, the Virtual Environment Description and Classification System (VEDACS [45]) was proposed. VEDACS describes VEs in terms of 42 variables which are then divided into seven categories: (1) environmental dimensions, (2) visual complexity, (3) the motion of objects, (4) the tasks that users perform, (5) the provision of help/assistance, (6) the provision of sound, and (7) global measures such as the amount of time that each person spent in a VE.

It has been suggested that the size of the monitor and the resulting display angle can also influence the severity of VIMS [46][47]. Often head-mounted devices are used for displaying virtual environments and they are known to cause MS [48][49]. A research conducted to analyze simulator sickness score using a video game in VR with a HMD, notes that sickness occurred in all participants who played the game for a maximum of 50 min [50]. Similar research suggests that sickness occurred both, in users who played a game on a standard TV screen and those with a HMD [51]. One study, targeted at finding out effects of immersion in VRE using a 20 m experiment, concluded that remarkable effects of immersion could not be found under such a short duration condition [52]. Other research suggests that the duration of exposure might be a causal factor in postural disequilibrium and that exposure of less than 3 h would not be sufficient to

induce an outstanding detriment in postural steadiness [53]. According to the sensory conflict theory [43][44][54], anything that strengthens the non-veridical visual stimulus should increase MS.

According to various studies, in virtual environments, high-latency that can result from low frame rates can lead to reduced sense of presence [55], impaired task performance, reduced user response [56][57] or simulator sickness [58]. It has been determined by some authors [59] that the critical end-to-end latency is at 17ms, but other authors [60] found this threshold to be even lower. When rotating head in virtual environment with head mounted display on, adaptation to a newly displayed scene has to happen and due to the delay in visual image, during the process of adaptations, some users may develop MS and show postural disequilibrium [61][62].

It is noted that VR environment influences automatic nervous system and equilibrium [63]. Sensory conflict theory states that when there are conflicting visual and vestibular inputs disequilibrium occurs, which results in MS [64]. When sensory conflict happens, the instability of persons standing positions occurs [65] and the influence of this instability may appear in humans walk after the righting reflex occurs [66]. It is a reflex that corrects the orientation of the body when it is taken out of its normal upright position. Various studies note that CS can effect 50-80 % of people, depending on the quality of the digital content and how it's presented [67]. Also, some studies show that women are more susceptible to MS than men, and those with a history of migraines or concussion also suffer a higher chance of getting motion sick [68]. Also, the older subjects are more susceptible to Simulator Sickness than younger subjects [26][69].

Some authors suggest that major contributor to MS is the duration of motion with visuals [70]. Others argue, that consumer HMDs require ideal frame rates in order to reduce/prevent the discomfort of MS [71]. Various researchers believe that decreasing Field of View (FOV) tends to decrease VR sickness, though at the cost of sense of presence [72]. A few authors came to a conclusion that a wide FOV display can maximize "immersion" in VE, whereas narrow one may hinder sense of presence [73][74]. As a result of increased FOV, users exhibited more postural instability, which has been suggested to be a surrogate measure for simulator sickness [75][76]. Differences in FOV have been related to navigation and memory differences [77][78][79]. Larger FOV can improve spatial awareness as well as increase sense of presence and consequently may help exhibit better memory structure of that VE [80]. Various methods, such as brain wave readings [81], behavioral metrics [82], and self-reported measures [83][84][85], have been employed over the years in order to measure users sense of presence in VEs.

Sense of presence is defined as "a state of consciousness", the psychological sense of being in the virtual environment [86][87][88][89][90]. A similar concept related to sense of presence is immersion – degree of "the subjective impression that one is participating in a comprehensive, realistic experience" and "the semi-voluntary experience of being transported into an alternate context for an extended duration" [7][91]. Previous research suggests that higher levels of immersion are associated with higher levels of presence [89][92][93]. Furthermore, the psychological perception of being inside a virtual world is known as presence [94]. Among many factors affecting user's feeling of presence, one is the content of the virtual world [95]. Immersive experience can be created via the sensory and environmental fidelity in 3D virtual environment, engagement with virtual objects and activities, and emotional experience activated through realistic scenarios in virtual world [8].

In some research it is noted that 3D video yields higher discomfort levels than 2D video [96]. There is an interesting conclusion made by some authors, stating that the highest value of sickness occurs during rotation along roll axis and that the results were highly consistent [97]. A study was conducted to analyze Visually Induced Sickness during day-night driving sessions, which showed that sickness level in night sessions was much higher than in morning sessions. In addition to that it was proved that sleep deprivation may strengthen the symptoms [98]. It's interesting to notice that in traditional MS studies, younger subjects were found to be more prone to sickness than older subjects [43], whereas in others, many older visitors appeared to suffer from effects of CS more than younger subjects [99].

It has been noted that some users might exhibit symptoms of CS, both during and after VR experience [100][101]. CS is different from MS in the way that the user is stationary, but has a compelling sense of motion as the visual imagery changes [102][103]. Vection or otherwise illusions of self-motion and sickness can be caused by watching changing moving scenes in VE [104]. Also, it is found that users spending more than 20 min in VE experience progressively more sickness symptoms [105]. Studies suggest that both exposure duration and repeated exposure are significantly linearly related to sickness outcomes [106]. The repetitive watching of the same video image reduced subjective score of MS in 8 of the 14 participants [107]. Some authors found that scene oscillations produce vection and promote CS significantly [108]. Simulation Sickness Questionnaire (SSQ) has been found to be valid and reliable subjective measure tool for both simulator sickness and side effects experienced in VEs [109][110]. It's interesting to note, that MS after immersion in VRE is much greater when both pre and post questionnaire are given rather than when only post test questionnaire is used [111].

Some previous studies suggest that the discomfort of MS can cause self-control ability decline and lead to serious traffic accident fatalities [43]. And as it was mentioned that the discomfort of all motion related sicknesses may even last

for the entire day [112]. This adds some risk to using VR, as many people are very susceptible to VR Sickness and have to cope with that discomfort after their experience with it through the rest of the day, during which fatal accidents may occur and not only during driving a vehicle. For these reasons some studies are conducted to determine a set of MS indicators that would predict the occurrence of a person's MS as soon as possible [113]. Specifically they use electroencephalography (EEG), as among other imaging technologies, it outperforms the other methods in terms of portability and temporal resolution, which refers to the precision of a measurement with respect to time.

Currently there is a debate concerning VR technology and VR sickness. Some argue that the problem of VR sickness is inherent from this technology itself and as long as there is mismatch between what is visually perceived and what is physically sensed, fixing the VR display properties does not address the root cause [114]. Particular study indicates that the weight of the HMD devices themselves play big part in causing VR sickness [114]. The 1994 US Navy study reported that techniques such as biofeedback, relaxation training, and counseling had an estimated 40 to 85 % success rate in helping reduce susceptibility to MS [114]. MS drugs for the most part claim to prevent, not treat, MS [114]. It is suggested that a visible horizon has a mitigating effect on MS [115][116].

Researches were conducted to find out the effect of virtual and real walking in virtual environment and the results seem controversial. A study found that during the task requiring a navigationally complex environment and for a long period of time, it is preferable to use simulated walking [117]. On the other hand, another study reported that natural walking caused less MS than simulated walking in one out of two experiments involving a virtual maze [118]. During a similar research no differences were found in simulator sickness between real walking and several virtual travel techniques in a small virtual room [119]. Furthermore, no differences were found between real walking, gaze-directed and pointing-directed travel techniques in a complex 3D maze [120].

3. Conclusion

In this paper we have showed a multitude of studies conducted on the subject of Cyber Sickness. This issue, which is similar to Motion Sickness, is directly linked to Virtual Reality technology and as research suggests, could potentially harm human health and life. As benefits of Virtual Reality are tremendous, and there is no doubt that it will be used widely in the future, this means that dealing with the issue of Cyber Sickness is inevitable, thus it is important to understand what are the causes of it and what could be done to combat it. Previous research and experiments help with this immensely, as they provide useful information that could be used for future studies. It could be used to allow understanding of what to await while working with Virtual Reality applications and simulations, take every precaution and be prepared for most scenarios.

As every person is susceptible to Cyber Sickness in different ways and every scenario in Virtual Reality is different, in order to have precise knowledge on this topic, it is necessary to produce more research and narrowing the scope to specific areas and scenarios would allow better understanding of this issue.

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