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Temporal-Guided Spiking Neural Networks for Event-Based Action Recognition

BMVC 2023 Submission # 137

Abstract

This paper explores the promising interplay between spiking neural networks (SNNs) and event-based cameras for privacy-preserving human action recognition (HAR). The innate ability of event cameras to capture exclusively the contours of moving subjects, coupled with the inherent capability of SNNs in transmitting spatiotemporal information through discrete spikes, establishes a highly synergistic compatibility between these two technologies for achieving event-based HAR. However, previous studies on event-based HAR have relied solely on spiking neurons to handle long-term temporal information, which is crucial for accurate HAR, limiting SNNs' performance in this area. In this paper, we introduce two novel frameworks aimed at augmenting the ability of SNNs to process long-term temporal information: temporal segment-based SNN (TS-SNN) and 3D convolutional SNN (3D-SNN). The TS-SNN extracts long-term temporal information by dividing actions into shorter segments, while the 3D-SNN replaces 2D spatial elements with 3D components to facilitate the transmission of temporal information. To promote further research in event-based HAR, we create a dataset, Falling Detection-CeleX, collected using the high-resolution CeleX-V event camera (1280×800), comprising 7 distinct actions. Extensive experimental results show that our proposed frameworks surpass state-of-the-art SNN methods on our newly collected dataset and three other neuromorphic datasets, showcasing their effectiveness in handling long-range temporal information for event-based HAR.

1 Introduction

Spiking neural networks (SNNs) represent the third generation [11], [26] of neural networks and are distinguished for their ability to perform tasks with ultra-low power consumption when deployed on dedicated neuromorphic hardware [52], [12]. These networks transmit spatiotemporal information between units via discrete spikes, mimicking the biological neural system. SNNs are inherently compatible with event-based cameras, which employ bioinspired sensors to asynchronously measure per-pixel brightness fluctuations, thereby generating an event stream that encodes time, location, and sign of the brightness changes [12]. Consequently, SNNs are ideally suited for integration with event cameras.

Previous research on SNNs [22], [31] has showcased impressive accomplishments in object recognition and classification tasks. We posit that the integration of SNNs and event-based cameras holds exceptional promise for human action recognition (HAR) [53]. Traditional video-based HAR models often raise privacy concerns [5, 6], [31], rendering their

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application inappropriate in private settings such as fall detection in bathrooms. SNNs work- 046 ing in tandem with event cameras can overcome this limitation as event cameras only capture 047 the outline of moving subjects, ignoring their identifying features and static backgrounds, 048 thereby preserving privacy while performing HAR.

Several studies [2, 8, 23] have demonstrated the applicability of SNNs for HAR on neuromorphic datasets captured by event cameras. However, their capability to manage long-range temporal information is solely dependent on spiking neurons within the SNNs, which is insufficient for video-based HAR. Effective processing of long-range temporal information is critical for accurate video-based HAR. In light of this, we propose two frameworks to improve the SNNs' capacity to process long-term temporal information. The first framework, temporal segment-based SNN (TS-SNN), implements a temporal segment strategy [55] on SNNs, which enables the extraction of long-term temporal information by breaking down lengthy actions into shorter moments. The second framework, referred to 3D convolutional SNN (3D-SNN), involves substituting the 2D spatial components in SNNs with 3D spatialtemporal components to facilitate the transmission of temporal information between layers.

Furthermore, we collect a event-based HAR dataset, Falling Detection-CeleX, specifi- 062 cally focused on privacy-preserving applications to encourage further research in this area. At present, there is a scarcity of event-based real-world HAR datasets and existing datasets [III, ZZ] primarily focus on standard action recognition scenarios, neglecting the most common privacy-preserving situation occurring in home settings, such as fall detection. Additionally, the majority of these event-based HAR datasets were captured using DVS128 and DAVIS346 sensors [20], which have relatively low resolutions of 128×128 and 346×260 pixels, respectively. In contrast, we utilize the CeleX-V [1] event camera for our recordings. The CeleX-V is a 1-megapixel multifunctional sensor with a high resolution of 1280×800 pixels, enabling it to capture more detailed information compared to lower-resolution alternatives. Our dataset consists of 875 recordings featuring 51 subjects performing 7 distinct actions, including three types of falls.

We conduct quantitative comparisons with state-of-the-art (SOTA) SNN methods on our 074 newly collected dataset, as well as three additional standard neuromorphic datasets. The experimental results indicate that the proposed frameworks outperform SOTA methods, show-076 ing the effectiveness in processing long-range temporal information for event-based HAR.

The contributions of this work are fourfold. First, We introduce TS-SNN, which leverages temporal segment strategies to extract long-term temporal information. This method involves breaking down lengthy actions into shorter segments, enabling SNNs to process and analyze long-term temporal information more efficiently. Second, We propose 3D-SNN, which substitutes the 2D spatial components in SNNs with 3D spatial-temporal components. By incorporating this change, the transmission of temporal information in SNNs is facilitated, leading to better processing of long-term temporal information for event-based HAR. Third, We collect an event-based action recognition dataset named Falling Detection-Celex, with a special focus on falling detection. The dataset includes 875 recordings of 51 subjects performing 7 distinct actions, including three categories of various types of falling. This dataset will be made publicly accessible to the community. Last, We evaluate two proposed frameworks using our Falling Detection-CeleX dataset as well as three additional challenging event-based HAR datasets. The results show that both frameworks outperform the existing SOTA accuracies across all four datasets.

2 Related Work

2.1 Event-based Action Recognition

Human action recognition (HAR) has attracted substantial interest from the academic community due to its various real-world applications, such as human-robot interaction [53], visual surveillance systems [24, 54], elderly person monitors systems [2, 21], and autonomous navigation systems [25]. Recently, event cameras have emerged as bio-inspired sensors that capture movements in the environment without compromising sensitive information. Therefore, event sensors are the perfect choice for privacy-preserving HAR. Innocenti *et al.* [55] converted the output of an event camera into frames and used standard computer vision techniques to analyze them. However, this method primarily concentrates on aggregating events and handling frames.

On the other hand, some researchers have proposed dealing directly with events. For instance, Maro *et al.* [27] introduced a framework for dynamic gesture recognition based on time surfaces developed by [187]. SNNs are ideal for processing event data as they transmit information through discrete spikes. George *et al.* [187] presented an SNN that utilizes convolution and reservoir computing to classify human hand gestures. Liu *et al.* [27] proposed a hierarchical SNN architecture for event-based action recognition, which leverages motion information. Additionally, Fang *et al.* [17] introduced the spike-element-wise (SEW) ResNet by applying residual learning to deep SNNs.

However, these models rely solely on spiking neurons to manage long-term temporal information. Nevertheless, their performance is not optimal. To address this issue, we propose two frameworks that incorporate spiking neurons to further enhance the ability of SNNs to process long-range temporal information.

2.2 Event-based Datasets

The availability of real-world event-based action recognition datasets is currently limited. Amir et al. [1] proposed a dataset for event-based hand gesture recognition, which was recorded using a dynamic vision sensor (DVS) [2]. Maro et al. [2] collected datasets for event-based human gestures utilizing an asynchronous time-based image sensor (ATIS) [3]. Additionally, Miao et al. [2] produced a neuromorphic dataset with a DAVIS camera from three different perspectives. However, the dataset is relatively small, including only 291 recordings.

More recently, Liu et al. [\square] proposed a new dataset for event-based action recognition using a DVS camera with two lighting conditions and two camera positions. It is worth noting that the existing datasets were recorded using DVS128 and DAVIS346 sensors with resolutions of 128×128 and 346×260 pixels, respectively, which are relatively low resolutions. To ensure a more comprehensive and detailed capture of information, we use the CeleX-V [\square] event camera instead for recording. The CeleX-V has a significantly higher resolution of 1280×800 pixels.

Moreover, all the existing datasets only focus on normal action recognition scenarios and overlook the most common privacy-preserving applications of action recognition, such as elder falling detection in homes. Hence, we gather a new event-based falling detection dataset. The newly acquired dataset is called *FallingDetection-CeleX*, which contains 875 recordings of 51 subjects performing seven different actions, including three different types of falling. The dataset is intended for both event-based action recognition and falling detection.

3 Preliminary: Spiking neuron model

Spiking neuron models serve as the fundamental computational unit of SNNs. A unified model [N] characterizes the dynamics of diverse spiking neuron types, employing the subsequent discrete-time equations:

$$H(t) = f(V(t-1), X(t)),$$
 (1)

$$S(t) = \Theta(H(t) - V_{\text{th}}), \tag{2}$$

$$V(t) = H(t) \cdot (1 - S(t)) + V_{\text{reset}} \cdot S(t), \tag{3}$$

where V(t) indicates the membrane potential after the trigger of a spike at time t, H(t) represents the membrane potential after neuronal dynamics, X(t) denotes the external input to the neuron at time t, S(t) denotes the output spike at time

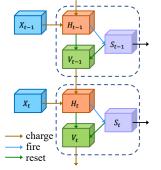


Figure 1: The general discrete spiking neuron model.

t, and $\Theta(\cdot)$ is the Heaviside step function. Once the membrane potential H(t) of a neuron reaches a particular threshold $V_{\rm th}$ at a given time t, the neuron will generate a spike, resulting in the membrane potential dropping to a reset value $V_{\rm reset}$ that is lower than the threshold $V_{\rm th}$. This process is referred to as the hard reset and is widely used in deep SNNs. These equations constitute a general discrete spiking neuron model, which is illustrated in Figure 1.

Spiking neuron models that are commonly utilized include the Hodgkin-Huxley [2], Izhikevich [3], and leaky integrate-and-fire (LIF) [2] models. Apart from the variability in neuronal dynamics (Eq. 1) for distinct spiking neurons, all spiking neurons exhibit identical neuronal fire (Eq. 2) and reset (Eq. 3) equations. Among these models, the LIF model is the most straightforward and efficient, making it the ideal choice for implementation. The neuronal dynamics of the LIF neuron model are defined by [2]:

$$H(t) = V(t-1) + \frac{1}{\tau} \cdot (X(t) - (V(t-1) - V_{\text{reset}})), \tag{4}$$

where τ represents the membrane time constant. Fang *et al.* [\square] have introduced a training algorithm that enables the learning of both the synaptic weights and membrane time constants 167
of LIF spiking neurons, known as parametric leaky integrate-and-fire (PLIF) neurons. In this
paper, we leverage the capability of PLIF neurons as the computational units to enhance the
overall expressiveness of SNNs. The neuronal dynamics is defined by:

$$H(t) = V(t-1) + \frac{1}{1 + \exp(-a)} (X(t) - (V(t) - V_{\text{reset}})), \tag{5}$$

where a is a learnable parameter.

4 Method

Although SNNs have the ability to utilize temporal information, they still face challenges when processing long videos. In order to enhance their effectiveness in recognizing actions within videos, we have drawn inspiration from traditional video processing techniques and put forth two frameworks: *TS-SNN* (Section 4.2) and *3D-SNN* (Section 4.3). These frameworks aim to enhance SNNs' capacity to extract long-range temporal information, thereby improving their ability in handling lengthier videos.

4.1 Neuromorphic Preprocessing

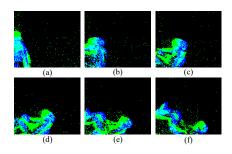


Figure 2: Video frames converted from event data, depicting a person falling down as captured from a side view. The frames are arranged in sequential order, from (a) to (f).

Subsequently, the event data is converted into videos with only two channels, and the number of frames is a hyperparameter that can be adjusted. These videos solely capture dynamic actions and omit the static background and detailed features of individuals, as depicted in Figure 2. This approach effectively preserves the privacy of users while still providing essential information about their actions.

4.2 Temporal Segment-Based Spiking Neural Network

Long-range temporal information is crucial in achieving high accuracy in human action recognition. A major limitation of conventional SNNs is that other components besides spiking neurons are unable to model long-term temporal information effectively. This is primarily due to their limited access to temporal context since they are designed to operate solely on a single frame, which is characteristic of spatial networks. However, complex actions, such as falling down, comprise multiple stages spanning over a relatively long period, and failing to utilize long-term temporal structures in SNNs' training would be a significant loss.

Therefore, as depicted in Figure 3, we propose the incorporation of the successful strategy of temporal segment network (TSN) traditionally used in wides setion of

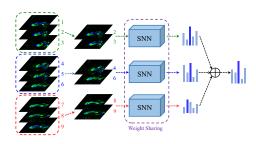


Figure 3: The framework of *TS-SNN*. As an example, a video comprising N=9 frames is partitioned into L=3 segments, and K=2 frames are randomly selected from each segment. These segments are then processed through a weight-shared SEW ResNet, and the resulting distributions are combined to make predictions.

(TSN), traditionally used in video action recognition, into SNNs. Since the spatial components in SNNs are inherently designed to operate on a single frame, their prediction of short-term temporal information is more precise than long-term temporal information. Consequently, we divide the preprocessed video into L segments, denoted by $\{S_1, S_2, ..., S_L\}$, with the aim of segmenting the long-range temporal information into shorter segments. From each

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segment, we randomly select K frames belonging to the same moment of one action, which 230 is solely processed by one SNN to obtain a more accurate prediction of the short-term tempo- 231 ral information. The SNNs processing different segments share weights, thus resulting in L 232 accurate short-term prediction distributions. Finally, these short-term distributions are combined using a straightforward fusion method such as summation, averaging, or maximum 234 operation to obtain the ultimate accurate long-term distribution. This approach enhances the 235 ability of SNNs to handle long-term temporal information, thereby improving the accuracy 236 of event-based human action recognition.

Formally, the ultimate accurate long-term distribution is formulated as follows:

$$y = \operatorname{Softmax} \left(v(\varphi(S_1; \mathbf{W}), \varphi(S_2; \mathbf{W}), \cdots, \varphi(S_L; \mathbf{W})) \right), \tag{6}$$

where S_i indicates the *i*th segment comprising K frames. $\varphi(S_i; \mathbf{W})$ is the weight-shared SNN 241 that processes each segment S_i and produces its corresponding prediction distribution. The 242 segmental consensus function v combines the distributions from multiple segments to obtain 243 a consensus of class prediction y among them. This approach enhances the ability of SNNs 244 to handle long-term temporal information, thereby improving the accuracy of event-based 245 human action recognition. We refer to this proposed temporal segment-based method as 246 TS-SNN.

4.3 **3D Spiking Neural Network**

Although the temporal segment strategy has significantly improved the performance of SNNs in event-based human action recognition, the spatial components of the SNN architecture still process frames one by one, resulting in temporal information delivery occurring only in spiking neurons and the step of distribution incorporation. To further enhance the capability of SNNs in handling temporal information, it is crucial to improve other network components besides spiking neurons. The inability of these components to handle temporal information limits the model's understanding of the video. 3D convolution is a suitable candidate that effectively preserves spatial-temporal information and is compatible with spiking neurons. Therefore, we propose replacing the 2D spatial components with 3D spatial-temporal components to facilitate

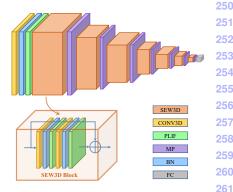


Figure 4: Architecture of 3D-SNN, 262 consisting of 7 spike-element-wise 263 (SEW) residual blocks, each including 264 CONV3D, BN, PLIF, MaxPooling, and 265 FC layers.

the delivery of temporal information between different layers. Our framework is illustrated 267 in Figure 4. It is important to note that SNNs can be enhanced with 3D components to better 268 handle temporal information, and we select the SEW ResNet [1] as our baseline model.

5 **Experiments**

In this section, we conduct experiments on several event-based action/gesture recognition datasets to evaluate the effectiveness of our proposed SNNs. Ablation studies are carried out 274 to quantify the effectiveness of each module.

Table 1: Comparisons of the validation accuracy with state-of-the-art methods on four datasets. *: re-implementation results based on the publicly available code.

Methods	FallingDetection-CeleX		DVSGesture		DailyAction	AR	
Methods	Fall Detection	Action Recognition	10-classes	11-classes	DanyAction	AK	
EVENT-DRIVEN [_	_	_	_	68.3	55.0	
SPA [ZZ]	_	_	_	_	76.9	_	
Truenorth [[]	_	_	91.8	_	_	_	
SLAYER [57]	_	_	93.6	_	_	_	
Motion-based SNN [23]	_	_	_	92.7	90.3	78.1	
PlainNet* [□]	89.8	64.3	92.1	91.7	92.8	66.7	
Spiking ResNet* [4]	91.8	70.4	92.1	90.6	95.8	67.4	
SEW ResNet-ADD* [4]	93.2	82.7	97.4	97.2	98.7	83.0	
EvT [56]	_	_	98.5	96.2	_	_	
TS-SNN (Ours)	94.6	88.4	98.9	97.6	99.4	89.1	
3D-SNN (Ours)	95.9	90.1	98.1	97.6	99.3	94.9	

5.1 Datasets

FallingDetection-CeleX Dateset: The newly collected *FallingDetection-CeleX* dataset comprises 875 recordings of 51 subjects acting 7 different actions, namely lying down, sitting, squatting, bending, falling from a standing position (fall1), falling while getting up (fall2) and falling backward/slipping (fall3). The CeleX-V [3] event camera is used to do the recording. We select 581 clips for training and 294 clips for testing. In order to capture event sequences from various angles, each subject repeats each action from 3 different viewpoints (i.e, front view, back view, and side view). We consider two tasks in this dataset, the first one is the normal 7-class 'Action Recognition', and the other is the 'Falling Detection', which is the binary classification problem (fall down or no fall).

DVSGesture dataset $[\square]$: It is a real-world gesture recognition dataset collected by the DVS128 camera with a sensor size of 128×128 . It comprises 1342 recordings of 11 different actions collected on 29 individuals under 3 different lighting conditions. As suggested by the dataset paper, 23 subjects are designated as the training set, and the remaining 6 subjects are reserved as the validation set.

DailyAction dataset [23]: It comprises 1440 recordings of 15 subjects performing 12 different actions. A DVS camera was positioned at two different locations, each with a distinct distance and angle. The actions were recorded under two lighting conditions: *natural light* and *LED light*. Each subject performed each action under the same camera position and the same lighting condition.

Both the DailyAction dataset [23] and AR dataset [23] papers mention that the whole dataset is divided into the training and validation sets by 8:2, but they do not release the division details. We conduct experiments based on the 5-fold cross-validation strategy on these two datasets.

5.2 Implementation Details

We select the Spike-Element-Wise (SEW) ResNet $[\square]$ as our baseline model, and train the proposed 3D-SNN and TS-SNN from scratch in an end-to-end manner, using standard cross-

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entropy loss as the classification loss for optimization. The network architecture consisted 322 of 7 blocks for all experiments. In the 3D-SNN, the first convolutional layer implemented a 323 $1 \times 1 \times 1$ kernel, while the following 3D convolutional layers employed a $1 \times 3 \times 3$ kernel size 324 with 32 channels for the DVSGesture dataset and a $3 \times 3 \times 3$ kernel size with 128 channels 325 for the other three datasets. Each max pooling layer used a $1 \times 2 \times 2$ kernel size. For TS-SNN, 326 we follow the network setup in SEW ResNet [12] for all four datasets. In the experiments on 327 the DVSGesture dataset, we choose SGD as the optimizer and set the initial learning rate to 328 1e-3, which was reduced with cosine annealing. Both 3D-SNN and TS-SNN were trained for 192 epochs with a batch size of 16, consistent with the baseline models [2]. On the other three datasets, we use the Adam optimizer and set the initial learning rate to 1e-3, which was reduced with cosine annealing. The total number of epochs was 300, and the batch size was 8. For the 3D-SNN, all datasets were integrated into T=16 frames, with $T_{\text{train}}=12$ frames randomly chosen for training. For the TS-SNN, we sample K = 5 frames, with a total of N = 24 frames and L = 3 segments.

5.3 **Comparison with Existing Literature**

Results on FallingDetection-CeleX Dataset. Table 1 shows the experimental results on Falling Detection-CeleX Dataset. It can be seen that our proposed methods achieve state-ofthe-art performance on both the 'Fall Detection' and 'Action Recognition' setting. Notably, on the 'Action Recognition' setting, the proposed 3D-SNN outperforms the existing method by more than 7%.

Results on DVSGesture Dataset. We follow the cross-subject protocol, as suggested in [III] to evaluate our frameworks and compare our 3D-SNN and TS-SNN models with state-of-theart methods, as shown in Table 1. Since there is an extra category for random movements, Table 1 shows the validation accuracy with and without including the extra category (for 11 and 10 classes classification, respectively). It can be seen that our proposed methods outperform state-of-the-art methods on both these two settings.

Results on DailyAction Dataset. Since there is no official training and validation set, we conduct the experiments based on the 5-fold cross-validation strategy. Our proposed methods achieve state-of-the-art performances on the DailyAction dataset, as shown in Table 1.

Results on AR Dataset. We compare our proposed methods with state-of-the-art methods, as shown in Table 1. We can find that our proposed TS-SNN and 3D-SNN outperforms the other SNN-based methods by a large margin. Specifically, the 3D-SNN outperforms the baseline model by around 12%. Action Recognition Dataset only contains limited training samples, the experimental results shows that our proposed 3D-SNN can perform extremely well on the small-scale dataset.

Ablation Studies 5.4

In this subsection, we perform ablation studies to evaluate the impact of various convolutional kernel sizes on our 3D-SNN and various segment and frame choices on the proposed TS-SNN. All experiments for ablation studies are conducted on the Falling Detection-CeleX 363 Dateset under the 'Action Recognition' setting.

1) Impact of the spatial and temporal convolutional kernel sizes: The convolutional kernel size has a direct effect on the learned features, here we present the classification accuracy obtained using different spatial and temporal convolutional kernel sizes with 3D-SNN ar- 367 chitectures, as shown in Table 2. (Noted that we follow [11] to implement the even-sized kernels.)

Temporal kernel sizes: Row (a) in Table 2 shows results of 3D-SNN that changing temporal kernel size. We can find that model with the temporal kernel size 3 performs best among the different temporal kernel sizes. Consequently, we choose the temporal kernel size 3 for all experiments in this paper.

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Spatial kernel sizes: Table 2 (b) shows the results of 3D-SNN nets that changing spatial kernel size. We can find that the best classification accuracy is 90.1%, obtained with models that have the kernel size of $3 \times 3 \times 3$ and $3 \times 5 \times 5$. Since 5×5 spatial convolutional kernels need much more computation cost, compared with Table 2: Comparisons of 3D-SNN with different 3D kernel sizes.

orent 3D Reffict Sizes.					
		$f_t \times f_w \times f_h$	Top-1 Acc. (%)		
(a)	Temporal	$1 \times 3 \times 3$	88.1		
		$2 \times 3 \times 3$	88.8		
		$3 \times 3 \times 3$	90.1		
		$4 \times 3 \times 3$	89.8		
		$5 \times 3 \times 3$	88.4		
(b)	Spatial	$3 \times 2 \times 2$	87.8		
		$3 \times 3 \times 3$	90.1		
		$3 \times 4 \times 4$	89.1		
		$3 \times 5 \times 5$	90.1		
		$3 \times 6 \times 6$	89.1		
		$3 \times 7 \times 7$	88.8		

 3×3 spatial kernel, we choose $3 \times 3 \times 3$ for the best trade-off between performance and efficiency for 3D-SNN experiments in this paper.

2) Impact of the Number of Segments and

Random Selected Frames: As mentioned in Section 4.2, for the TS-SNN, we divide the event sequence into *X* segments and randomly select K frames in each segment. In this part, we study the impact of the number of segments (X) and the number of selected frames K on the Falling Detection-CeleX Dateset. As shown in Table 3, sufficient performance has been achieved when L = 3, K = 5 and L =

Table 3: Comparisons of TS-SNN with different numbers of segments and numbers of selected frames.

Segments (X)	Selected Frames (K)						
Segments (A)	2	3	4	5	6	7	
3	86.4	88.1	87.8	88.4	88.4	87.4	
4	86.4	87.8	88.1	88.1	_	_	
6	87.4	87.8	_	_	_	_	
8	88.1	_	_	_	-	-	

3, K = 6. Therefore, we choose L = 3, K = 5 for the best trade-off between performance and efficiency. (Note that we do not conduct the experiments if there is only one selected frame or if all frames need to be selected.)

Conclusions

In this paper, we demonstrate the potential of SNNs in combination with event-based cameras for event-based HAR. To address the limitation of SNNs in processing long-range temporal information, we propose two novel frameworks: TS-SNN and 3D-SNN. The TS-SNN extracts long-term temporal information by dividing actions into shorter segments, while the 3D-SNN replaces 2D spatial components with 3D ones to facilitate the delivery of temporal information between different frames. To encourage further research in event-based HAR, we create the FallingDetection-CeleX dataset, gathered using the highresolution CeleX-V event camera. Our proposed frameworks surpass SOTA methods on our collected Falling Detection-CeleX dataset and three other neuromorphic datasets. The experimental results demonstrate the efficacy of our frameworks in processing long-range temporal information for event-based HAR. We believe that our findings will pave the way for future research in this area and provide a solid foundation for developing practical applications that address privacy concerns in HAR.

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