# Designing a Poultry Barn: A Collaborative Design Approach Using Virtual Reality

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**Abstract.** Visualizing a new design in Virtual Reality (VR) is now a part of product development pipeline in several industries. Several researchers have demonstrated attaining higher level of immersion by creating photoreal virtual environments and by using advanced devices which are now available in the market to get higher level of tracking accuracy and higher degree of interaction. In this work, we have explored the possibility of using the VR technology during the design phase with a multidisciplinary approach. Through this work, we have demonstrated that a regular Head Mounted Display (HMD) which lacks several features when compared to the pricier ones is sufficient for product development and visualization. Using VR, we even managed to design the building which will house the product that we developed. We have chosen a poultry farm that breeds chickens for this study and solved their problem of repetitive manual work by designing an automated feeding system. We manged to all this with the same virtual environment that we have developed for the purpose of this study.

Keywords: Product development, virtual reality, collaboration and interdisciplinary.

## 1 Introduction

In poultry barns, large number of chickens are raised to be later sold to either the local market or to food processing centres [1]. The chickens are providing with sufficient food and water as per the local government regulations [2] and [3]. On an average, it takes about 12 weeks for a chicken to reach its standard weight which is about 2.5 KG [4]. After proper inspections, the chicken is transported to the food processing industry [5], [6] and [7]. In several countries, automation is done for feeding the chickens [8], [9], [10], [11], [12] and [13]. But such systems are almost non-existent in many developing and underdeveloped nations [14]. This is mainly due to the cost and technical expertise that is needed to operate such system. Hence there is a needed in developing a cost-effective automatic feeding system for small barn owners. Poultry barns are designed to both keep the chicken inside the barn and to protect them from natural predicators which are habitants in the geographics location where the barn is located. Safety of barn workers should also be considered while building a barn. Having proper ventilation facility with sufficient lights and maintain proper temperature is necessary for the growth of the barn gown chickens [15].

Traditional approach in New Product Development (NPD) involves customer need identification, concept generation, concept evaluation, design generation, design evaluation, fabrication and documentation [16]. The same is illustrated in *Fig.1*. With the advancement in

digital technologies, we are now employing new digital technologies while developing products. Technologies such as Cloud [17], [18] and [19], Deep Learning [20], [21], [22] and [23], Virtual Reality [24], [25], [26], [27] and [28], Augmented Reality [29], [30], [31], [32] and [33] and Mixed reality [34], [35], [36], [37] and [38] are widely used at different stages of product development. Customer data from various sources especially those from the internet [39], [40], [41], [42], [43], [44] and [45] are extensively used in NPD. In earlier days, while developing products to meet the needs of a single or a small group of customers was less feasible from the cost perspective [46]. This is no longer acceptable as the customer preferences have now become very diverse [47] and [48]. Customers prefer very high degree of customization in their products and services that they pay for [49]. Hence, organizations are looking at new technologies to cut cost at different stages of product development to accommodate greater degree of product customization. It is worth noting that most of the costs in NPD is associated with the design phase. This cost can be reduced by effectively utilizing time and resources during the designing of products with the help of the above listed technologies [50]. Digital technologies have created an era of stronger interdisciplinary collaborations. Proper collaboration of multiple teams from both within and outside of the organization while developing new products will lead to innovative and high value products [51], [52], [53], [54], [55], [56] and [57].



### Traditional NPD pipe line

Digital technologies enable Collaborative Product Development (CPD). CPD offers significant benefits over the traditional approach such as faster development time, faster redesign, and higher possibility of early product launch [58]. CPD eliminates any domain specific biases that would arise while evaluating the large system design. This not only gives different perspectives while developing new products, but it also adds value to the design by identifying earlier unknown issues and providing an interdisciplinary solution.

In recent years, VR technology is being used to enable Collaborative Product Development (CPD). Industries are getting the benefits of virtual prototyping which is a product of VR that eliminates the costs associated with making a physical prototype [59], [60], [61] and [62]. In VR, more than one person can be present in the virtual world. This makes evaluation of concepts and designs with interdisciplinary teams possible [63].

#### 2 Method

For this work, we have collaborated with a local poultry barn owner who wishes to automate his barn. To begin with, we collected data from the existing barn and generated concepts that would replace it. We have used commercial CAD software to develop 3D models of the existing and the proposed barn and the automated system. We then converted the models to VRML file standard to use in the virtual environment built using the VR technology. We used a commercial VR application development software which runs on python to develop the VR environment. Sony Head Mounted Display (HMD) was used for viewing into the VR environment. The HMD comes with limited capabilities and does not have position and orientation trackers. Nevertheless, we chose to use it to minimize the costs associated with VR technology. With VR, it is now possible to merge multiple stages in the NPD (concept evaluation, detailed design, design evaluation) and thus reducing time needed for finalizing the design (Fig. 2). Before we developed the VR environment, we created a detailed storyboard to design the User Interface (UI), to manage event triggers and to determine what virtual objects must be placed in the field of view of the user. To improve realism, we have added models of the barn chickens to the VR environment. The chicken is passively animated with sound and its motion is controlled by a random number algorithm.

### **3** Developing the Virtual World

#### Modeling and Simulating the Existing System in VR

Most poultry farms in both developing and underdeveloped nations use manual labor to feed and monitor the animals at the barns. In several instances, it is the owner of the barn that takes up the responsibility of refilling the feeding troughs regularly. To understand the challenges, the poultry barn worker faces, we have recreated and visualized the existing barn in VR. We did so to uncover design and usability problems that are not indicted by the end user.



# 4 NPD Pipeline with Virtual Reality technology

We created the 3D models of the feeder troughs (Fig.3) and gave it color to make it look more realistic. We positioned them as how they are placed in the existing farm (Fig.4). We even added a virtual human character which would be controlled by the user using the keyboard. We built the VR system in a way that when the user puts on the HMD, he would see through the eyes of this virtual human character. We have created provisions for more users to view the VR environment from a third person perspective which mirrors the actions of the user with HMD (Fig.5).



Recreating the existing feeder trough in CAD



Viewing the interior of the existing poultry barn in VR

# 5 Modeling and Simulating the Proposed Design in VR

The automatic feeding system is utilized in barns across the globe. The system consists of a big hopper which is usually placed in separate location outside the barn. The feed is sent to the barn though the hopper. Feed is then moved from the hopper to the feeding troughs through the small pipes which connects the trough to the hopper. We evaluated the design of the feeding system, placement of feeding roughs and the barn itself in the VR environment (Fig.7). After and elaborate visual inspection and redesigns, we were able to freeze the design that works in engineering terms and something that the end user likes (Fig.8). We had to use interdisciplinary approach in the design process.



3D Model of the feeding trough suggested for use in the proposed design



3rd Person view of the VR environment with the final design

### Conclusion

Through this work, we have demonstrated that product can be collaboratively developed on systems built on the Virtual Reality technology. We have utilized an HMD with lesser frame rate, no position, and no orientation trackers. The virtual environment that we have built offers lesser immersion, but we were able to run it without many difficulties even on a laptop which offers lesser computation capabilities when compared to the workstations which are normally used for this purpose. Having low framerate, and less immersion did not impact the objectives. Hence, we encourage product developers to utilize low-cost HMDs for design visualization. Which will save a significant amount of money that would otherwise be spent on purchasing high performance trackers, HMD's with higher frame rate and How a product would behave in its work environment well before finalising the design during the design phase of the work in this work we were also able to see both the products there's a feeder system and the born in which the product would be built into though this work through this work we have demonstrated that we can develop and evaluate multiple products which should be developed collaboratively and by interdisciplinary teams. Such an interdisciplinary system will promote entrepreneurship as it will make it a little bit easy for new entrepreneurs to plan their workspace and office buildings all in a single environment. With the ability of cloud, 5G and AI technologies one can even simulate the productivity of such workspace in real time.

This will provide the entrepreneurs plan the capability to customize their workspace, plan for facilities and estimate cost and productivity all in a single virtual world.

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