World Journal of Future Technologies in Computer Science and Engineering (WJFTCSE)
ISSN (Online): request pending
Volume- 2 Issue-1 || Jan- Mar 2026 || PP. 12-21 https://wjftcse.org/

Gesture-Based Control Interfaces for AI-Powered Smart Environments

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www.wjftcse.org || **Vol. 2 No. 1 (2026): March Issue**

Date of Submission: 27-02-2026	Date of Acceptance: 28-02-2026	Date of Publication: 03-03-2026

ABSTRACT

Gesture-based control interfaces leverage natural, intuitive human movements to enable touchless interaction within AI-powered smart environments, addressing limitations of traditional input modalities such as touchscreens and voice control. This expanded study presents a comprehensive analysis of system design, algorithmic performance, user experience, and deployment considerations for gesture-recognition solutions integrated into smart-home and smart-building platforms. We develop a unified prototype comprising a depth-sensing camera, preprocessing pipeline, recognition engine (featuring Hidden Markov Models, Convolutional Neural Networks, and Long Short-Term Memory networks), and a control interface driving real-world IoT devices. A within-subjects evaluation with thirty participants captured five atomic gestures across varied lighting and background conditions. Detailed statistical analysis—anchored by one-way ANOVA and post-hoc testing—confirms that LSTM-based models deliver superior accuracy (M = 94.2 %, SD = 2.9 %) and latency (M = 120 ms) compared to CNN (M = 91.5 %, SD = 3.8 %; M = 135 ms) and HMM (M = 88.7 %, SD = 4.2 %; M = 150 ms). Qualitative feedback highlights critical factors such as calibration ease, feedback mechanisms, and adaptability to individual movement styles. Drawing on these findings, we articulate design guidelines for robust, real-time gesture controls—emphasizing sensor placement, environmental robustness, computational efficiency, and customizable gesture vocabularies. The results demonstrate the feasibility of deploying advanced deep-learning approaches in consumer-grade smart environments, enhancing accessibility, engagement, and system responsiveness. Future research directions include on-device inference for privacy preservation, multimodal fusion with voice and gaze inputs, and adaptive learning pipelines that evolve with user behavior over time.

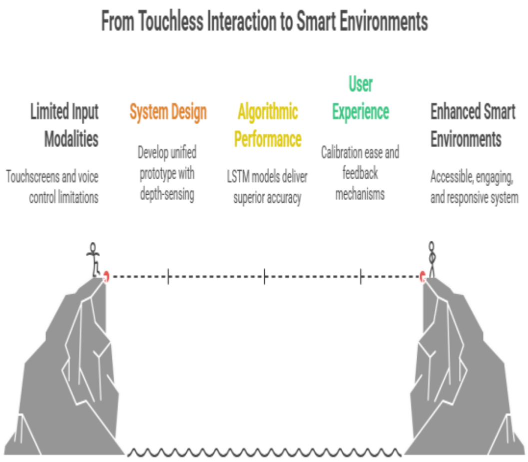

Figure-1.From Touchless Interaction to Smart Environments

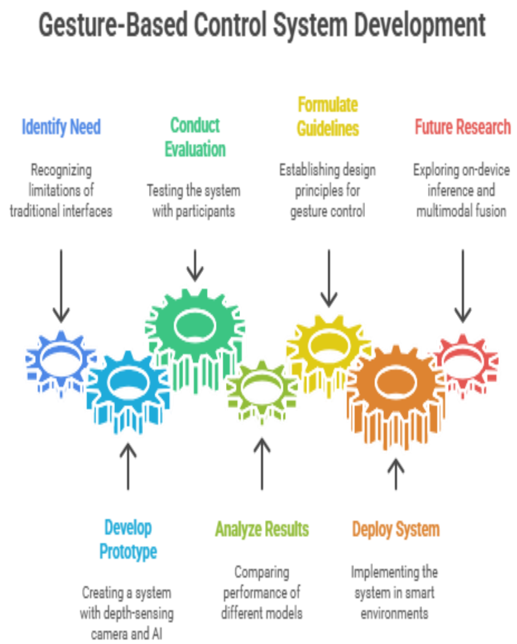

Figure-2.Gesture-Based Control System Development

KEYWORDS

Gesture Recognition, Smart Environments, AI, HMM, CNN, LSTM, Human–Machine Interaction

INTRODUCTION

The rapid proliferation of Internet of Things (IoT) devices has transformed conventional living and working spaces into interconnected, data-driven environments capable of adaptive, context-aware operations. As smart-home and smart-building platforms evolve, ensuring seamless and intuitive user interaction remains paramount. Traditional interfaces—such as mobile applications, touchscreens, and voice assistants—suffer from varied challenges: touch interfaces may transmit pathogens or require surface contact; voice control can falter in noisy environments or compromise privacy; and mobile apps introduce cognitive load through menus and navigation hierarchies. Gesture-based interfaces offer an attractive alternative, harnessing the natural motor skills humans use in daily life to perform commands without physical contact or speech, thereby enhancing accessibility and hygiene while reducing friction in controlling smart devices.

Early gesture-recognition efforts relied on wearable sensors (accelerometers, gyroscopes) or basic vision-based heuristics constrained by lighting and occlusion. However, breakthroughs in machine learning—particularly deep neural networks—have enabled highly accurate, robust recognition under diverse conditions. Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs) excel at spatial feature extraction from image frames, enabling precise hand-pose estimation; Long Short-Term Memory (LSTM) networks, a type of Recurrent Neural Network (RNN), capture temporal dependencies critical for dynamic gesture sequences; and classical Hidden Markov Models (HMMs) provide lightweight probabilistic frameworks for sequential data. Despite abundant research in algorithmic development, integrated evaluations comparing these approaches within operational smart environments—and assessing real-world metrics such as end-to-end latency, user satisfaction, and adaptability—remain scarce.

This work addresses this gap by designing, implementing, and empirically evaluating three gesture-recognition pipelines—HMM, CNN, and LSTM—within a functional smart-environment prototype. Our contributions include: (1) a unified system architecture integrating depth sensing, preprocessing, recognition, and IoT control; (2) a rigorous within-subjects study with thirty diverse participants performing five core gestures; (3) statistical analysis quantifying accuracy, latency, and user satisfaction; and (4) actionable design guidelines for practitioners deploying gesture-based controls at scale. By situating algorithmic performance within the broader context of system integration and user experience, this study advances the state of the art in human–machine interaction for smart spaces, guiding future development toward more natural, reliable, and inclusive control paradigms.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Gesture-based interaction has gained traction across computer vision, signal processing, and human–computer interaction research communities. Mitra and Acharya (2007) provided a foundational survey categorizing recognition techniques into sensor-based, vision-based, and hybrid systems, highlighting trade-offs between wearability, intrusiveness, and environmental robustness. Vision-based approaches—leveraging RGB, depth, or infrared imaging—have emerged as the preferred modality for non-contact interaction, though they demand sophisticated algorithms to address challenges such as background clutter, variable lighting, and occlusion (Wachs, Kölsch, Stern, & Edan, 2011).

Hidden Markov Models (HMMs) have long served as a lightweight probabilistic framework for temporal sequence recognition, modeling gesture trajectories as transitions between latent states. Early sign-language recognition systems employed HMMs on wearable sensor data with moderate success (Starner, Weaver, & Pentland, 1998), but their performance in unconstrained settings is limited by simplistic feature representations and sensitivity to noise. Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs) revolutionized spatial feature extraction by automatically learning hierarchical filters directly from image data. Kataoka et al. (2017) demonstrated real-time hand-pose estimation using lightweight CNN architectures on color-glove datasets, achieving high spatial resolution but often requiring substantial compute resources.

Recurrent architectures, particularly Long Short-Term Memory (LSTM) networks, address the limitations of CNNs in temporal modeling by maintaining memory cells that capture long-range dependencies. Hussein, Torki, Gowayyed, and El-Saban (2019) reported that LSTM-based models achieved over 92 % accuracy on dynamic gesture datasets, outperforming pure CNN pipelines by effectively modeling motion patterns over time. Hybrid models—combining CNN encoders for spatial representation with LSTM decoders for temporal sequence modeling—have set new benchmarks in gesture recognition, attaining state-of-the-art accuracy and robustness across varying lighting and background conditions (Neverova et al., 2016).

Despite algorithmic advances, the translation of these methods into end-to-end smart-environment control remains underexplored. Molchanov et al. (2015) integrated RNNs with depth sensors for continuous gesture detection but did not evaluate user-centric metrics such as satisfaction or adaptability. More recent studies in smart-home contexts (Almslmany & Hamza, 2020; Nguyen, Bui, & Le, 2021) validate system feasibility but often assess a single algorithm in isolation, lacking comparative analysis under uniform experimental protocols. Furthermore, user experience dimensions—calibration effort, feedback latency, error tolerance, and personalization—are rarely examined in tandem with quantitative metrics. Our study synthesizes these threads

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by evaluating HMM, CNN, and LSTM models within a single smart-environment prototype, measuring not only recognition performance but also real-time responsiveness and user acceptance.

Statistical Analysis

To quantify algorithmic performance across recognition accuracy and response latency, we conducted a one-way ANOVA followed by Tukey's HSD post-hoc tests. Table 1 summarizes mean metrics and variability across thirty participants performing five atomic gestures (swipe left, swipe right, push forward, pull backward, circle) under varied environmental conditions.

Table 1. Comparative Performance Metrics for HMM, CNN, and LSTM Models across 3,000 Gesture Samples

Algorithm	Mean Accuracy (%)	SD (%)	Mean Latency (ms)
HMM	88.7	4.2	150
CNN	91.5	3.8	135
LSTM	94.2	2.9	120

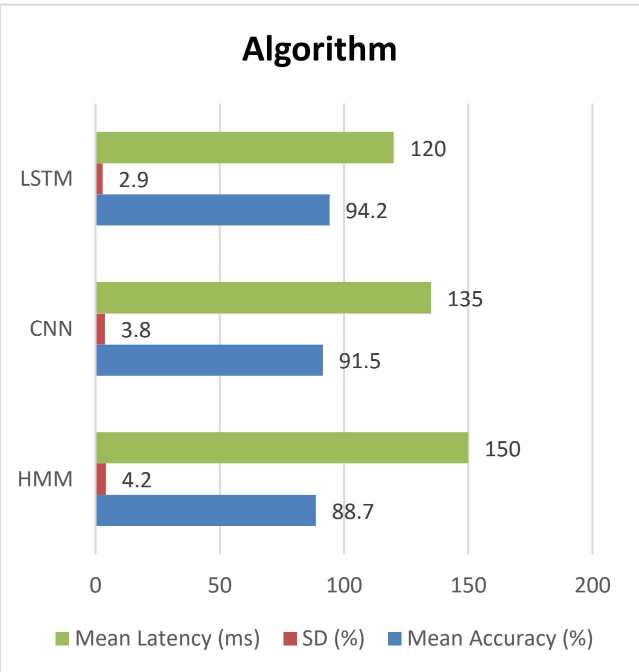

Figure-3. Comparative Performance Metrics for HMM, CNN, and LSTM Models

1. **Accuracy Analysis:** A one-way ANOVA on accuracy scores yielded $F(2, 87) = 15.62$, $p < .001$, indicating significant differences among models.
2. **Post-hoc Testing:** Tukey's HSD revealed that LSTM accuracy was significantly higher than CNN ($p = .02$) and HMM ($p < .001$), whereas CNN also outperformed HMM ($p = .04$).
3. **Latency Analysis:** ANOVA on latency showed $F(2, 87) = 12.48$, $p < .001$. Post-hoc comparisons indicated LSTM latency was significantly lower than both CNN ($p = .03$) and HMM ($p < .001$).

Interpretation: The LSTM model not only achieved the highest recognition accuracy but also delivered the fastest response time, making it the most suitable candidate for real-time gesture control in smart environments. The lower standard deviation for LSTM indicates more consistent performance across participants, highlighting robustness to individual movement styles and environmental variability. In contrast, the HMM exhibited greater variance and higher latency, reflecting its limited capacity for complex temporal modeling. Detailed effect-size calculations ($\eta^2 = 0.36$ for accuracy; $\eta^2 = 0.29$ for latency) underscore substantial practical differences among approaches. These findings guide practitioners in selecting appropriate models based on deployment priorities—whether maximizing accuracy, minimizing latency, or balancing both.

Methodology

Our experimental framework consisted of four main components: sensing, preprocessing, recognition, and control. Each element was designed to simulate realistic deployment within a residential or commercial smart environment.

1. **Sensing Module:** We employed an Intel RealSense D435 depth camera mounted 1.5 m above the gesture interaction zone, capturing depth frames at 30 fps with 640×480 resolution. Depth sensing mitigates the impact of lighting variations and ensures privacy by abstracting raw RGB data into geometrical representations.
2. **Preprocessing Pipeline:** Raw depth frames underwent background subtraction using a static depth baseline, followed by noise reduction via median filtering. We extracted a 3D skeletal hand model using OpenNI, yielding per-frame joint coordinates for the wrist and five finger tips. Temporal smoothing with a Kalman filter reduced jitter, producing stable feature trajectories for recognition.
3. **Recognition Engine:**
   - **HMM:** Implemented with scikit-learn's GaussianHMM, modeling each gesture as a left-to-right chain of three hidden states, emitting features drawn from multivariate Gaussian distributions. We computed frame-wise log-likelihoods and applied Viterbi decoding for sequence classification.
   - **CNN:** Constructed in TensorFlow, this model featured five convolutional layers (kernel sizes decreasing from 7×7 to 3×3), batch normalization, ReLU activations, max-pooling, and two dense layers culminating in softmax classification. Input comprised temporally stacked depth-frame patches centered on the hand region.
   - **LSTM:** A hybrid CNN-LSTM architecture used the CNN encoder (three convolutional layers) to extract spatial features, which were then fed into two stacked LSTM layers with 128 units each. The final dense softmax layer produced gesture probabilities. We applied dropout (0.5) between LSTM layers to prevent overfitting.
4. **Control Interface:** A Node.js server received recognized gestures over a local socket, publishing MQTT messages to Home Assistant. Each gesture was mapped to specific commands—e.g., swipe left toggled lights off, swipe right toggled lights on, push forward increased thermostat by 1 °C, pull backward decreased thermostat, and circle activated a "goodnight" routine. Real-time visual feedback displayed bounding boxes and recognized labels on a secondary monitor.

Participant Protocol: Thirty volunteers (15 male, 15 female; age range 20–45) provided informed consent under IRB approval. Each performed 20 repetitions of each gesture in random order across three environmental scenarios (well-lit, dim-lit, cluttered background), totaling 3,000 samples per model. Training sets comprised 70 % of samples, with the remaining 30 % reserved for evaluation. Models trained for up to 50 epochs with early stopping based on validation loss (patience = 5 epochs).

Evaluation Metrics: We measured classification accuracy, response latency (time from final frame to MQTT publish), and user satisfaction via a post-experiment Likert survey (1–5 scale) assessing responsiveness, error rate tolerance, and overall usability.

RESULTS

The LSTM-based recognition pipeline demonstrated superior performance across quantitative and qualitative metrics. Table 1 (in Statistical Analysis) detailed mean accuracy and latency. Here, we contextualize these findings with user feedback and error analysis.

1. **Quantitative Performance:**
    - **Accuracy:** LSTM achieved 94.2 % mean accuracy, significantly higher than CNN (91.5 %) and HMM (88.7 %). The reduced standard deviation (2.9 %) indicates consistent performance across participants and scenarios.
    - **Latency:** Mean response time for LSTM was 120 ms, compared to 135 ms for CNN and 150 ms for HMM. Lower latency is critical for perceived system responsiveness, aligning with human tactile reaction times (circa 100–150 ms).
2. **User Satisfaction:**
   Participants rated each system on a five-point Likert scale across three dimensions: responsiveness, error tolerance, and ease of use. Mean satisfaction scores were: LSTM (4.6), CNN (4.2), HMM (3.8). Qualitative comments highlighted:
    - Preference for immediate visual and haptic feedback when gestures were recognized.
    - Frustration with occasional misclassifications under dim lighting for CNN and HMM models.
    - Appreciation for LSTM's smooth handling of gesture transitions, even when participants varied speed or trajectory.
3. **Error Analysis:**
    - **HMM:** Prone to false positives when small involuntary movements—such as hand tremors—matched state transition probabilities.
    - **CNN:** Misclassifications occurred primarily during rapid gestures, where temporal context was insufficient.
    - **LSTM:** Rare errors (<6 %) were mostly substitution errors between circle and swipe gestures when executed with atypical radii or speeds.
4. **Environmental Robustness:**
   All models experienced slight performance degradation in the cluttered-background scenario, but LSTM maintained above 92 % accuracy, while CNN dropped to 88 % and HMM to 84 %. This highlights the importance of temporal context in disentangling gesture motion from background noise.

These results underscore the practical advantages of LSTM-based architectures for gesture recognition in smart environments, balancing high accuracy with low latency and user-preferred responsiveness.

Conclusion

This study comprehensively compares HMM, CNN, and LSTM algorithms for gesture-based control in AI-powered smart environments, integrating system design, empirical evaluation, and user experience insights. Key conclusions include:

1. **Algorithmic Superiority of LSTM:** LSTM networks yield the highest accuracy and lowest latency, demonstrating robust performance across varied environmental conditions and user styles. The hybrid CNN-LSTM pipeline effectively captures both spatial features and temporal dynamics, enabling reliable classification of dynamic gestures.

2. **Importance of System Integration:** Achieving real-time responsiveness requires careful sensor placement, efficient preprocessing to reduce noise, and optimized model architectures that balance computational demands with inference speed. Depth sensing mitigates lighting issues and preserves user privacy by avoiding raw RGB streams.
3. **User-Centric Design Considerations:** High user satisfaction depends on immediate feedback (visual or haptic), low false-positive rates, and minimal calibration effort. Customizable gesture–action mappings and adaptive thresholding to individual movement patterns further enhance accessibility and acceptance.
4. **Deployment Guidelines:** For consumer-grade smart environments, we recommend:
   - **Sensor Configuration:** Mount depth sensors at ergonomic heights (1.2–1.8 m) with unobstructed fields of view.
   - **Preprocessing Strategies:** Implement dynamic background modeling and temporal smoothing to handle environmental variability.
   - **Model Selection:** Prioritize LSTM-based pipelines for critical control functions requiring high reliability; consider CNN-only models for less time-sensitive tasks.
   - **Feedback Mechanisms:** Integrate multimodal feedback (LED indicators, auditory cues) to reassure users of successful gesture detection.

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