

For this assignment, I chose the Magic Bench. The main reason I chose this in particular is because I got to actually test it out myself at the Disney booth at Grace Hopper Conference this year! I tested out the a scene where I sat by some sort of rabbit creature, with a handful of other scholars for a couple of minutes and then left. To be fair, I had completely forgot about the product until now. It is easily forgettable and has short entertainment value.

The Magic Bench is exactly what it sounds, a bench. What makes this bench so magical is the user of mixed reality. Mixed reality is different from augmented reality and virtual reality. It brings virtual reality into reality. The user sits on a bench and looks at a TV where a small scene is played out. The user feels any haptic feedback on the bench due to actuators that are located under the bench. You can also hear the audio feedback. Mixed reality has several benefits over its competitors, augmented reality and virtual reality. Mixed reality actually provides haptic feedback, and makes the user feel much more immersed. A main issue in virtual reality is that, yes the scene looks realistic and yes it may sound realistic but you can't actually interact with the scene. I think what brings such an interesting dimension is the haptic feedback. The first sense we as humans experience and interact with is touch. So when you are in a virtual world through VR, you feel an immediate disconnect and realize that the world is indeed virtual when you expect haptic feedback. Take for example, the raining scenario. A scenario you can play on the bench is when it is raining and you are to scoot over the bench and sit under an umbrella with a cute animal. Feeling the raindrops on the bench is much more interactive than if you were to simply hear it in AR or hear it and see it in VR. Even though the haptic feedback is occurring just on the bench, it is a huge improvement over none at all. I think the next step in virtual reality in general is incorporating the sense of touch. The problem is, how would one incorporate touch? The only feasible way to experience haptic feedback over your entire body, at this point, would be with some sort of suit that was filled with actuators and sensors but that is just not realistic as it would be clunky and bothersome.



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When I was using the product, I was interested for a couple of minutes but I found that it became boring really fast. The only thing that kept the product as interesting was other people. Everyone had different reactions and that is what kept it fresh, even though we were experimenting with the same handful of scenes it always felt different with a new group of people. Yet again after a group of people interacted with the bench for a handful of moments they were bored and moved on. Some, like myself, stuck around to see the interactions of others. The issue arises that when a consumer buys the product for their own house, how much use is there? I think it could be cool to incorporate the bench with movies or commercials, but for fun and recreation purposes it seems very limited. Another issue is that Pixar/Disney was using very cute creatures and I feel like that kinda limited showing off the potential. Imagine how amazing it would be if two relatives lived on opposite sides of the Earth but they both owned the bench. You could potentially see each other sitting on the bench and experience these sensations, such as a rainy night, together and use it as a virtual background for conversation. As for using the Magic Bench as a group activity, I think it is only fun for those who are physically sitting on the chair. Disney showed clips of groups of people interacting, where others sat in the back, and I think that is just silly. All they are doing is watching the scene where simple things have been augmented on it, like a cute animal. That is something we can already do with current technology and apps like Snapchat, so it brings nothing new to the table there. I think the Magic Bench is great at stepping into the world of mixed reality but for now, it seems limited and boring.