

[0074] Meanwhile, FIG. 8A illustrates that the lower electrode 32b partially contacts the metal dome 55, and at least part of the electro-active polymer 31 forms a horizontal layer on the lower electrode 32b. However, a structure in which the lower electrode 32b contacts an upper curve of the metal dome 55 may be considered, and at least part of the electro-active polymer 31 contacts the lower electrode 32b at the upper curve of the metal dome 55. FIG. 8F illustrates a haptic button 107 minimizing a distance between an electro-active polymer 42 and the metal dome 55, as a modification of the haptic button 100 illustrated in FIG. 8A. When the distance between the electro-active polymer 42 and the metal dome 55 is minimized, stimulation can be continuously provided to a user by the electro-active polymer 42 and the metal dome 55. Here, the fixing portion 33 also suppresses the horizontal motion of the electro-active polymer 42.

[0075] FIGS. 9A and 9B are cross sectional views illustrating the detailed structure of the haptic button 110 according to the second exemplary embodiment of the present invention. In the second exemplary embodiment of the present invention, a plurality of the notches 34 are formed in the upper side of the electro-active polymer 31, i.e., the side contacting the upper electrode 32a. The fixing portion 33 is disposed between the electro-active polymer 31 and the contacts 58 and 59 to maintain a predetermined distance therebetween and suppress the horizontal motion of the electro-active polymer 31.

[0076] When a voltage is applied to the two electrodes 32a and 32b, the electro-active polymer 31 protrudes upward. Here, the notches 34 open, thereby providing a rough texture to a user contacting a contact surface 61. The roughness of texture increases when the amount of a crack in each notch 34 increases, that is, when the height of protrusion of the electro-active polymer 31 increases. Accordingly, the texture of the haptic button 110 can be controlled by controlling the voltage applied to the two electrodes 32a and 32b.

[0077] The haptic button 110 illustrated in FIGS. 9A and 9B may further include a metal dome in space maintained by the fixing portion 33.

[0078] FIGS. 10A through 10F are diagrams for explaining the detailed structures of haptic buttons 120, 125, and 130 according to the third exemplary embodiment of the present invention. FIG. 10A illustrates the detailed structure of the haptic button 120 including the single separator 35. The separator 35 fixes a portion of the electro-active polymer 31 so that the portion contacting the separator 35 does not have displacement in the horizontal direction, like the fixing portion 33, and also divides the haptic button 120 into a plurality of regions. A pair of the two electrodes 32a and 32b are disposed per region in the haptic button 120. Accordingly, the height of protrusion of the electro-active polymer 31 can be separately controlled in each of the regions by controlling a voltage applied to the pair of the two electrodes 32a and 32b in each region.

[0079] FIG. 10B is a top view of the haptic button 120. The fixing portion 33 is formed along the edge of the haptic button 120 to fix the electro-active polymer 31. The separator 35 is formed extending in the widthwise and lengthwise directions from a center of the haptic button 120. The top side of the fixing portion 33 may contact and fix the electro-active polymer 31 and the bottom side thereof may be fixed to the spacer 53.

[0080] A pair of the electrodes 32a and 32b is disposed in each of four regions defined by the separator 35. When the height of protrusion is separately controlled in the four regions by controlling a voltage applied to each pair of the electrodes 32a and 32b, the transformed shape of the haptic button 120 can be controlled, as illustrated in FIGS. 10C and 10D. In addition, stiffness of the haptic button 120 in the four regions can be separately controlled. FIG. 10C shows a transformed state of the haptic button 120 in which two upper regions and a lower left region are activated. FIG. 10D shows a transformed state of the haptic button 120 in which an upper left region and a lower right region are activated.

[0081] When the haptic button 120 is used as a telephone number input button illustrated in FIG. 7, if input buttons are controlled such that different regions are protruded, a user can identify a button just by touching the button. For example, when there are four regions that can be independently protruded or not in the haptic button 120, a total of 16 cases are made. Accordingly, 12 number input buttons illustrated in FIG. 7 can be identified through the sense of touch.

[0082] When a user identifies a wanted haptic button 120 through the sense of touch and presses the haptic button 120, the upper contacts 58 become in contact with the lower contact 59 and a button input is sensed. Actually, when the haptic button 120 is not much larger than the user's finger as in a mobile telephone or when a stroke of the haptic button 120 is very small, even if the user presses the center of the haptic button 120, at least a part of the four regions is pressed, and therefore, there is no problem in button input.

[0083] The haptic button 120 may be used to provide the sense of touch to a user in an application such as a video game. When the four regions of the haptic button 120 have the same frequency, the user will feel a single stimulation. However, when at least one of the four regions has a different frequency than the other regions, the user will feel a plurality of stimulations from the single haptic button 120. Such various oscillations can be generated by controlling the waveform of a voltage applied to a pair of the electrodes 32a and 32b.

[0084] The haptic button 120 illustrated in FIGS. 10A and 10B is divided into the four regions in uniform size and shape. Unlikely, if the haptic button 125 includes a plurality of separators 36a, 36b, 36c, and 36d capable of moving in the widthwise or lengthwise direction, as is illustrated in FIG. 10E, the size of each region can be increased or decreased. In a state where a certain stimulation is provided to a user through four regions, if the size of the regions is changed, the user will feel a different stimulation from one moment.

[0085] FIG. 10F illustrates the haptic button 130 including two separators 35a and 35b. The haptic button 130 just includes one more separator than the haptic button 120 illustrated in FIGS. 10A and 10B. Accordingly, the haptic button 130 is divided into nine regions. In the present invention, the number of separators can be arbitrarily selected during manufacturing. In addition, the number of separators extending in the widthwise direction may be different from the number of separators extending in the lengthwise direction in a single haptic button.

[0086] FIG. 11 is a block diagram of a haptic device 200 according to an exemplary embodiment of the present invention. The haptic device 200 includes a micro processor 215, a memory 210, an application module 220, a display