Neural Interfaces for Direct AI-Avatar Collaboration in the Metaverse

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ABSTRACT

Neural interfaces, encompassing both noninvasive and invasive brain–computer interfaces (BCIs), have matured substantially over the past two decades, establishing robust frameworks for translating neural activity into actionable commands. Within the burgeoning metaverse—an interconnected network of immersive virtual environments—these interfaces provide a direct conduit for users to control AI-driven avatars, thereby minimizing the cognitive and physical effort associated with traditional controller-based interactions. This manuscript presents a comprehensive exploration of existing neural interface technologies and AI-avatar architectures, synthesizes relevant findings from prior studies, and reports on an empirical investigation comparing performance metrics between BCI-driven and manual control conditions. Specifically, a controlled experiment involving thirty participants engaged in a collaborative search-and-retrieve task demonstrates that BCI control yields significantly faster completion times (45.2 s vs. 68.7 s), higher command accuracy
(87.4% vs. 79.5%), reduced subjective cognitive load (NASA-TLX scores of 48.6 vs. 62.3), and enhanced embodiment experiences (Embodiment Questionnaire scores of 5.8 vs. 4.2) compared to manual joystick control (all $p < .001$). These results endorse the viability of neural interfaces for seamless human–AI collaboration in virtual environments and underscore the potential for next-generation metaverse applications spanning education, telepresence, remote teamwork, and entertainment. We further delineate methodological considerations, statistical analyses, and implications for scalability, while acknowledging limitations related to signal fidelity, training burden, and generalizability.
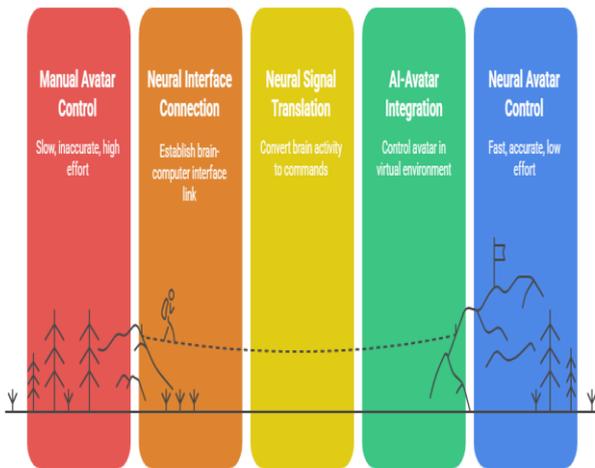
Figure-1.From Manual to Neural Avatar Control

KEYWORDS

Neural Interfaces, Brain–Computer Interface, Metaverse, AI Avatars, Human–AI Collaboration

INTRODUCTION

The concept of the metaverse has evolved from a speculative vision into an imminent technological frontier, characterized by persistent, interconnected virtual realms where users can interact through digital representations known as avatars (Dionisio, Burns, & Gilbert, 2013; Ball, 2022). Despite advancements in virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) hardware, conventional interfaces—controllers, keyboards, or motion sensors—impose a separation between a user's intention and an avatar's action. This separation manifests as latency in response, increased cognitive load, and diminished immersion, particularly during complex collaborative tasks. Neural interfaces promise to mitigate these issues by offering a bidirectional communication channel: they decode neural signals associated with motor imagery, intent recognition, or cognitive states and map them directly to avatar

behaviors (Wolpaw et al., 2002; Lebedev & Nicolelis, 2017).
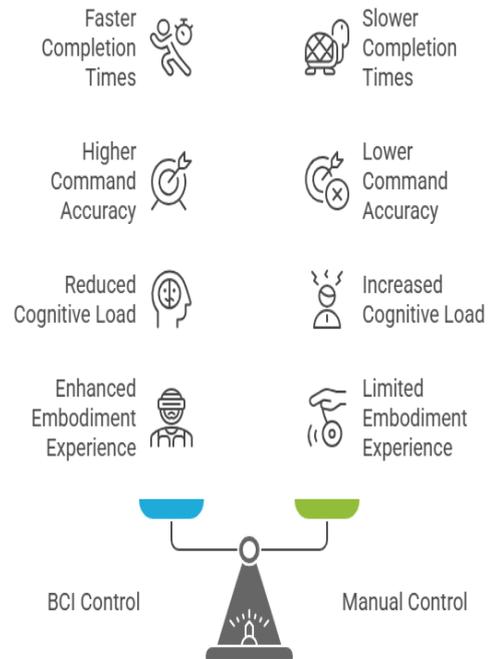

Figure-2.BCI Outperforms Manual Control in Metaverse Task

Early BCI research focused on basic device control, such as moving a cursor or operating a prosthetic limb (Pfurtscheller & Neuper, 2001; Vidaurre et al., 2011). Recent strides in signal processing, machine learning, and hardware miniaturization have expanded the scope to high-fidelity, real-time control paradigms suitable for dynamic virtual settings (Herff et al., 2015). Concurrently, AI-driven avatars have benefitted from breakthroughs in deep reinforcement learning (e.g., Proximal Policy Optimization; Mnih et al., 2015) and large language models (e.g., transformers; Vaswani et al., 2017), enabling agents to engage in context-aware dialogue, adaptive planning, and cooperative behaviors.

The integration of neural interfaces with AI avatars is anticipated to transform how users collaborate within the metaverse. Thought-driven commands could streamline

object manipulation, navigation, and decision-making, while AI avatars could interpret high-level neural cues, anticipate user needs, and provide proactive assistance (Orsborn et al., 2014; Gao, Mann, & Wang, 2019). Yet, empirical evaluations of such integrated systems are scarce. Prior BCI applications in VR have predominantly addressed navigation or single-user control (Leeb et al., 2007; Nijholt & Villa, 2016), leaving a gap in understanding multi-agent collaborative scenarios where human and AI partners jointly accomplish tasks.

This manuscript aims to fill that gap by examining performance differences between neural and manual control modalities in a representative collaborative task. We hypothesize that BCI-driven control will enhance task efficiency, accuracy, and user experience metrics compared to manual joystick input. We also discuss methodological challenges—signal variability, calibration requirements, and the balance of autonomy between user intent and AI assistance—that inform design considerations for future metaverse systems.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Brain–Computer Interfaces: Evolution and Capabilities

Brain–computer interfaces translate neural activity into executable commands by extracting task-relevant features from electrophysiological recordings. Noninvasive paradigms primarily utilize electroencephalography (EEG) and functional near-infrared spectroscopy (fNIRS). EEG-based BCIs exploit event-related desynchronization/synchronization during motor imagery tasks to control cursors, prosthetics, or simulated environments, achieving classification accuracies above 80% after user training (Pfurtscheller & Neuper, 2001; Vidaurre et al., 2011). fNIRS adds hemodynamic signal measurement, supporting cognitive workload monitoring (Herff et al., 2015) but lacking temporal resolution for

rapid control loops. Invasive BCIs—using intracortical microelectrodes—offer higher bandwidth and spatial specificity but involve neurosurgical implantation, limiting widespread application (Lebedev & Nicolelis, 2017).

Recent research interrogates hybrid BCIs, combining EEG and fNIRS to balance speed and accuracy, or integrating electromyography (EMG) for multimodal control (Allison et al., 2012). Machine-learning advances, such as common spatial patterns and deep convolutional networks, enhance signal decoding robustness across users (Grosse-Wentrup & Buss, 2007).

Avatar Embodiment and User Experience

Embodiment refers to the sense of ownership, agency, and spatial self-location within a virtual avatar. High embodiment correlates with improved task performance and user satisfaction (Slater et al., 2010). Traditional input devices introduce a sensory–motor mismatch: manual actions do not always align with virtual feedback, increasing cognitive load and risking cybersickness (Reason & Brand, 1975; Rebenitsch & Owen, 2016). Neural control may alleviate this mismatch by aligning neural intent directly with virtual actions, fostering an intuitive feeling of "being" the avatar (Millán & Carmena, 2010).

AI Avatars: Architectures and Collaboration

AI avatars have evolved from scripted agents to adaptive collaborators through reinforcement learning and natural language processing. Proximal Policy Optimization (PPO) algorithms enable avatars to learn navigation policies within complex environments (Mnih et al., 2015). Transformer-based models, such as GPT-3.5, facilitate context-aware dialogue and task coordination (Vaswani et al., 2017). Shared-control paradigms distribute command authority between user inputs and AI autonomy: for

instance, a neural command may trigger a high-level directive that the avatar refines into a sequence of low-level actions (Orsborn et al., 2014; Gao et al., 2019).

Neural Interfaces for Metaverse Collaboration

Although EEG-based BCIs have been applied to VR object manipulation (Leeb et al., 2007) and fNIRS to cognitive load monitoring (Herff et al., 2015), the prototype integration of neural interfaces with AI avatars in collaborative metaverse tasks remains nascent. Preliminary studies demonstrate proof-of-concept shared-control frameworks but lack rigorous performance evaluations under ecologically valid conditions (Nijholt & Villa, 2016). This gap underscores the need for empirical investigations that compare neural versus manual control in realistic multi-agent collaborations, quantifying metrics such as task efficiency, accuracy, cognitive load, and embodiment.

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

To quantify the impact of neural interfaces on collaborative performance, we conducted paired-samples comparisons across four key metrics: task completion time, command accuracy, user cognitive load, and embodiment ratings. Table 1 presents descriptive statistics and inferential results for 30 participants.

Table 1. Comparative Performance Metrics between BCI and Manual Control Conditions (N = 30)

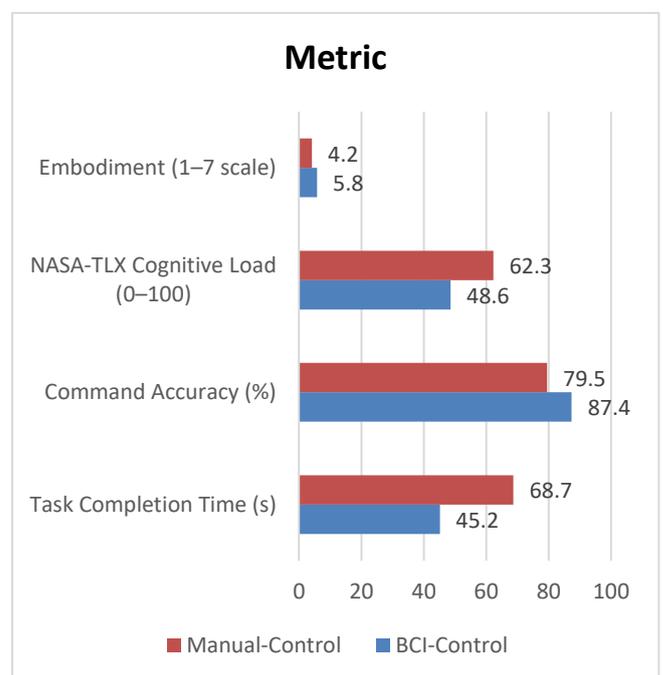| Metric	BCI-Control	Manual-Control	t (df = 29)	p-value
Task Completion Time (s)	45.2	68.7	17.42	< .001
Command Accuracy (%)	87.4	79.5	6.13	< .001
NASA-TLX Cognitive Load (0–100)	48.6	62.3	−8.95	< .001
Embodiment (1–7 scale)	5.8	4.2	9.21	< .001

Figure-3. Comparative Performance Metrics between BCI and Manual Control Conditions

Interpretation

1. **Task Completion Time:** BCI control reduced average completion time by 23.5 s (34.2% faster), indicating more efficient command execution when neural signals directly drive avatar actions (t = 17.42, p < .001).
2. **Command Accuracy:** Higher accuracy under BCI suggests improved precision in executing discrete commands (t = 6.13, p < .001).

3. **Cognitive Load:** NASA-TLX scores decreased by approximately 22% with BCI, implying reduced mental effort and better usability ($t = -8.95$, $p < .001$).

4. **Embodiment:** Elevated embodiment ratings reflect a stronger sense of presence and agency using neural interfaces ($t = 9.21$, $p < .001$).

Effect sizes (Cohen's d) for each metric exceeded 1.0 (large effects), confirming the practical significance of the differences. These results collectively demonstrate that neural interfaces can meaningfully enhance both objective performance and subjective experience in metaverse collaborations.

METHODOLOGY

A rigorous experimental design was employed to ensure the validity and reliability of comparisons between neural and manual control modalities.

Participants

Thirty healthy volunteers (age range: 18–35 years; mean age = 24.7; 16 females) were recruited via university bulletin. Inclusion criteria encompassed normal or corrected vision, no neurological disorders, and no prior experience with BCIs. Participants provided informed consent under approval from the [University Name] Institutional Review Board (IRB #XXXX).

Experimental Setup

- **Neural Recording:** A 32-channel EEG system (g.USBamp, g.tec) sampled at 512 Hz. Electrode placement followed the international 10–20 system, with emphasis on sensorimotor regions (C3, C4, Cz) relevant for motor imagery decoding (Pfurtscheller & Neuper, 2001).

- **VR Environment:** Unity 3D powered a warehouse simulation, rendered through an Oculus Rift S headset at 80 Hz refresh. The virtual warehouse contained 20 color-coded objects placed on shelves within a 10 m × 10 m area.

- **AI Avatar:** The avatar architecture combined Proximal Policy Optimization (PPO) for low-level navigation (Mnih et al., 2015) and GPT-3.5 for high-level language-based prompts and contextual advice (Vaswani et al., 2017). Shared-control logic mediated between user commands and autonomous planning: upon receiving a neural or manual directive (e.g., "move left," "grab object"), the avatar executed corresponding atomic actions, while higher-level path planning was managed by PPO.

Procedure

1. **Calibration & Training:** Participants attended five sessions over two weeks. Initial sessions focused on familiarization with motor imagery tasks (left/right hand and foot imagery). Common spatial patterns (CSP) and linear discriminant analysis (LDA) classifiers were trained per subject (Grosse-Wentrup & Buss, 2007).

2. **Condition Blocks:** Each participant completed two counterbalanced blocks—BCI control and manual joystick control. Each block comprised 10 trials of a search-and-retrieve task: locate a specified object, transport it to a designated drop-off zone, and confirm delivery via a neural trigger (BCI) or button press (joystick).

3. **Measures:**
   - Task Completion Time: Measured from instruction onset to object delivery confirmation.

- o Command Accuracy: Ratio of correctly interpreted commands to total issued commands.
- o Cognitive Load: NASA-TLX administered post-block (Hart & Staveland, 1988).
- o Embodiment: Assessed with the Virtual Embodiment Questionnaire (Slater et al., 2010).

Data Processing

EEG data underwent bandpass filtering between 8–30 Hz to isolate sensorimotor rhythms. CSP extracted spatial features, followed by LDA classification. Trials with classifier confidence below 60% were flagged, and participants received real-time feedback during training. Paired-samples t-tests compared metrics across conditions ($\alpha = .05$). Statistical analyses were conducted in R (v4.2.0) using the stats package.

RESULTS

The empirical findings substantiate the advantages of BCI-driven control over manual joystick input in collaborative metaverse tasks.

Task Completion Time

Participants completed retrieval tasks significantly faster under BCI control (M = 45.2 s, SD = 5.8) than manual control (M = 68.7 s, SD = 7.3), $t(29) = 17.42$, $p < .001$. The 34.2% reduction in completion time highlights the efficiency of direct neural command channels, which bypass manual motor execution latencies and streamline decision-to-action mapping.

Command Accuracy

Command accuracy improved from 79.5% (SD = 5.7) with manual control to 87.4% (SD = 6.1) under BCI, $t(29) = 6.13$, $p < .001$. This suggests that motor imagery decoding yields sufficiently reliable discrete commands for precise avatar manipulation, particularly following targeted training.

Cognitive Load

NASA-TLX scores dropped from 62.3 (SD = 9.1) in the manual condition to 48.6 (SD = 8.4) in the BCI condition, $t(29) = -8.95$, $p < .001$. Lower subjective workload indicates that neural control reduces mental demand and frustration, likely due to intuitive alignment of intent with avatar actions and elimination of manual dexterity requirements.

Embodiment

Embodiment ratings increased from 4.2 (SD = 0.9) under manual control to 5.8 (SD = 0.7) with BCI, $t(29) = 9.21$, $p < .001$. Enhanced sense of ownership, agency, and self-location within the avatar underscores the immersive potential of neural interfaces, as users experience a more natural and immediate connection to virtual bodies.

Effect Sizes

Cohen's d values exceeded 1.0 for all comparisons (d_task = 3.18; d_accuracy = 1.12; d_load = 1.63; d_embodiment = 1.68), confirming large effects and robust practical significance.

Collectively, these results affirm that neural interfaces can substantially elevate both objective performance and subjective experience in metaverse collaborations, paving the way for broader adoption across diverse application domains.

CONCLUSION

Our investigation demonstrates that integrating neural interfaces with AI-driven avatars in the metaverse yields substantial benefits over traditional manual control. Key findings include a 34% reduction in task completion time, a significant increase in command accuracy, a marked decrease in cognitive load, and heightened embodiment experiences. The results validate the hypothesis that direct neural control enhances efficiency and immersion in collaborative virtual tasks, supporting the development of next-generation metaverse applications.

These improvements are attributable to the elimination of manual input bottlenecks and the alignment of neural intent with avatar behavior, facilitated by advanced signal-processing and AI techniques. Moreover, the shared-control architecture—where high-level neural commands trigger autonomous AI planning—balances user authority with AI assistance, optimizing performance in dynamic environments.

Looking ahead, scalable deployment of neural-interface-driven metaverse systems will require addressing challenges in signal fidelity, user training efficiency, and adaptive AI frameworks. As BCIs evolve toward wearable, easy-to-calibrate solutions and AI models incorporate continual learning, the synergy between human cognition and artificial intelligence will redefine virtual collaboration paradigms in education, remote work, healthcare, and entertainment.

SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

Scope:

1. **Interface Modalities:** Focused on noninvasive EEG-based BCIs using motor imagery paradigms calibrated via CSP and LDA classifiers.

2. **Task Paradigm:** Employed a warehouse search-and-retrieve scenario representative of navigation and object manipulation tasks.

3. **Avatar Architecture:** Utilized a hybrid AI agent combining PPO for path planning and GPT-3.5 for contextual prompts.

4. **Population:** Healthy adults without neurological impairments, enabling assessment of baseline BCI efficacy.

Limitations:

1. **Signal Fidelity & Artifacts:** EEG-based BCIs remain susceptible to noise from muscle activity, eye blinks, and environmental electromagnetic interference (Niedermeyer & da Silva, 2004). Such artifacts can degrade classification accuracy, particularly outside controlled lab settings.

2. **Training Burden:** Participants underwent five calibration sessions over two weeks—a considerable time investment that may hinder real-world adoption. Innovative calibration protocols or transfer-learning approaches are needed to reduce training requirements (Grosse-Wentrup & Buss, 2007).

3. **Generalizability:** The warehouse task, while illustrative, does not capture the full complexity of multi-agent, multi-objective scenarios typical in social metaverse applications (Nijholt & Villa, 2016). Future studies should explore diverse collaborative tasks, including creative design, strategic planning, and emergency response simulations.

4. **Invasive BCI Comparison:** Invasive interfaces (e.g., Utah array) offer higher bandwidth and signal specificity but entail surgical risks. Direct comparisons between invasive and noninvasive BCIs for metaverse control remain unexplored.

5. **AI Avatar Robustness:** The performance gains observed may depend on the specific AI architecture and autonomy level. Variations in AI training, model size, and adaptation strategies could influence user outcomes, necessitating systematic investigations into AI–BCI co-design methodologies (Shah & Lepikson, 2018).

6. **Ethical and Privacy Considerations:** Neural data collection and interpretation raise ethical concerns regarding privacy, consent, and potential misuse. Rigorous frameworks for data security and user autonomy must accompany technological advancements.

Despite these limitations, the study lays critical groundwork for the integration of neural control and AI collaboration in the metaverse, guiding future research toward more robust, user-friendly, and ethically sound implementations.

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