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NCG Position | SLxAI, “Avatars,” and the Governance Gap in AI Representation

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Mislabeling AI avatars creates compliance and trust risks. NCG outlines governance standards for synthetic media, disclosure, and system classification.

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The term “avatar” is currently being applied inconsistently across AI systems, and that lack of precision is beginning to introduce material risk into the field.

At SLxAI, multiple demonstrations fell under a single label despite representing fundamentally different technical approaches. From a governance standpoint, this is not a semantic issue. It is a classification failure.

Two Different Things Under One Label

There is a clear distinction between:

- Systems that generate sign language from learned data
- Systems that transform existing human video using overlays or style transfer

These are not interchangeable. They differ in:

- Underlying model architecture
- Data provenance
- Authenticity of output
- Ethical and representational implications

Three Immediate Risks

Conflating them under the term “avatar” creates three immediate risks.

First, representation risk. When video-to-video systems apply overlays, including skin tone modification or stylistic transformation, without disclosure, the output may misrepresent the identity and authorship of the signer. This raises concerns related to transparency, consent, and cultural integrity.

Second, trust and procurement risk. Buyers, institutions, and stakeholders cannot accurately evaluate solutions if categories are blurred. A system that transforms existing footage is not equivalent to one that generates language independently. Without clear labeling, decision-making becomes distorted.

Third, field-level credibility risk. Conferences like SLxAI function as signaling mechanisms for the direction of the industry. When distinctions are not enforced, it sets a precedent where marketing language overrides technical accuracy.

From an NCG perspective, this is a governance failure, not a technology failure.

The issue is not whether these tools exist. It is whether they are:

- Properly classified
- Transparently presented
- Ethically deployed

From an NCG perspective, this is a governance failure, not a technology failure.

A Minimal Standard

A minimal standard moving forward should include:

- Explicit labeling of system type (generative vs. video-to-video vs. 3D model)
- Disclosure of transformation methods applied to human subjects
- Clear differentiation between synthetic generation and modified recordings

Without these controls, the industry risks normalizing ambiguity at the exact moment it needs precision.

THE QUESTION

The question is not “what is an avatar.” The question is: what standards are we willing to enforce when defining one.

TIPS

Know something about a sign language AI system that the public should know? Send it to tips@novaracg.com. Every tip is read by me and kept confidential. If you work in the UK, writing to us is not by itself a protected disclosure under the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998, so before you share employer information, check your options with Protect (protect-advice.org.uk), the free whistleblowing advice line.

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