Plan Overview

A Data Management Plan created using DMPonline

Title: Digital Healing or Digital Harm? Interrogating AI Chatbots and Social Robots through the Lenses of AI, Psychology, Theology, Ethics, and Law (APTEL)

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Project abstract:

Globally, over one billion people—nearly one in seven—live with a mental health condition, including more than 150 million in the WHO European Region in 2021, despite half of European health systems using AI chatbots in patient care and fewer than one in ten nations defining liability regulations for AI (World Health Organization WHO, 2025). In mental health care and companionship, AI systems such as chatbots and social robots are increasingly described as “caring”, “empathetic”, and “wise”, raising urgent questions about AI’s emerging moral authority—especially through the lens of Christianity that grounds dignity in the Imago Dei. The primary concern regarding AI and "personhood" is the misallocation of moral and legal responsibility—treating a tool as if it possesses Creator capabilities, right-bearing agency, and life-altering morality, thereby enabling humans and institutions to evade accountability when actual individuals are harmed. We hypothesise that under the foundational understanding of divine order in Christianity and the rule of law, most Christians do not accord AI the same moral authority as human agents, even when they welcome it as a helpful tool. This APTEL study offers an experimental, theologically informed investigation of how Christians discern AI’s moral and spiritual status in mental health and caregiving. Drawing on Christian theological anthropology and notions of “soul care”, it examines AI’s anthropomorphism across four themes: trust, moral authority, law and liability, and perceived spiritual care. Because AI lacks moral agency, it cannot possess an intrinsic moral compass or conscienceness. To test whether Christians nevertheless relate to AI as if it were a "quasi-moral" subject, we compare two AI-based mental health modalities with human care: (1) AI mental health chatbot versus human counsellor and (2) AI caregiving social robot versus human carer. In a mixed-methods experiment ($N = 36–45$), clergy, Christian mental-health professionals, and lay Christians will interact with all three agents in counterbalanced order (Latin square). After each interaction, participants will complete four scales (Likert 7-point) on (1) moral authority, (2) trust, (3) ethical-legal responsibility, and (4) perceived personhood and “soul care”. Mixed-design qualitative ANOVAs and thematic analysis will identify Christians’ ethical “red lines” between responsible tool use and problematic “moral outsourcing” that may compromise discipleship, conscience, and human dignity.

#ai #anthropomorphism, #theology, #law #moralagency

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Digital Healing or Digital Harm? Interrogating AI Chatbots and Social Robots through the Lenses of AI, Psychology, Theology, Ethics, and Law (APTEL)

Data Collection

What data will you collect or create?

Qualitative analysis.

The APTEL study will gather qualitative data. Approximately N = 36-45 semi-structured interviews (and/or small focus groups) will be performed with Christian clergy, therapists, and laity Christians to investigate their impressions of AI chatbots and humanoid agents, particularly in terms of moral authority, theology, and psychological impact. Audio will be recorded in common formats (e.g.,.wav or.mp3) for transcription, and then securely destroyed once the transcripts have been validated. Transcripts will be saved in.docx and.txt formats, with preservation copies in.pdf/.pdf-A.
The project documentation (interview guides, codebooks, data dictionaries, and readme files) will be saved in.docx and.pdf/.pdf-A formats. Any analysis notes or scripts (for example, for qualitative software like NVivo) will be saved in plain-text formats (.txt and similar). Data quantities will be minimal (far under 10 GB overall; anonymised transcripts and documentation are anticipated to be under 1 GB), readily supported by institutional storage, regular backups, and secure cloud services in accordance with university policy.

Existing datasets do not address APTEL's special multidisciplinary focus (legal, psychology, theology, and AI ethics within a Christian population), hence fresh data will be collected. If recruitment feasibility is required during the study, a modest supplementary online questionnaire may be used to acquire brief, descriptive information from additional Christian participants. Any such supplemental data would be initially stored in.xlsx format, with any de-identified analysis files preserved in.csv format, and would be kept to a minimum and managed in accordance with the same storage, backup, and access policies as outlined above.

Quantitative analysis.

To test the primary hypotheses, a mixed-design ANOVA will be conducted for each composite scale (moral authority, trust, perceived personhood-“soul care”, comfort-legal and duty of care), with **Modality** (human professional, AI mental-health chatbot, AI caregiving agent) as a within-subjects factor and **Group** (clergy, Christian mental-health clinicians, lay Christians) as a between-subjects factor. This approach is appropriate because each participant rates all three agent types, while participants belong to only one Christian role group. The analyses will examine:

- (a) overall differences in perceived moral authority, trust, personhood and comfort between human and AI agents (main effect of Modality),
- (b) differences between clergy, clinicians and lay Christians (main effect of Group), and
- (c) whether patterns of attribution to AI versus human agents vary by Christian role (Modality × Group interaction).

Where effects are significant, planned pairwise comparisons and exploratory regression models (e.g. including theological orientation and prior AI exposure) will be used to clarify the pattern. This directly addresses APTEL’s central question of when, and for whom, AI systems are granted moral authority relative to human agents.

To test the primary hypotheses, a mixed-design ANOVA will be performed on each composite scale (moral authority, trust, perceived personhood-“soul care”, comfort-legal and duty of care), with Modality (human professional, AI mental-health chatbot, AI caregiving agent) as a within-subjects

factor and Group (clergy, Christian mental-health clinicians, lay Christians) as a between-subjects factor. This method is acceptable since each participant rates all three agent kinds, whereas participants only belong to one Christian role category. The analyses will investigate:

- (a) overall disparities in perceived moral authority, trust, personhood—“soul care,” and comfort—legal and duty of care, between human and AI agents (main effect of Modality),
- (b) distinctions among clergy, clinicians, and lay Christians (main effect of Group), and
- (c) attribution patterns to AI versus human agents as they differ by Christian role (Modality × Group interaction).

In cases of substantial affects, planned pairwise comparisons and exploratory regression models (incorporating theological orientation and previous AI exposure) would be utilised to elucidate the pattern.This directly answers APTEL's key question, when and for whom AI systems be awarded moral authority in comparison to human actors.

How will the data be collected or created?

Semi-structured qualitative interviews (and, if applicable, small focus groups) will be conducted with a sample size of 36-45 Christian participants, including clergy, Christian therapists, and lay Christians. Participants will be recruited through church networks, professional associations, and snowball sampling, with an ethically approved invitation and information sheet. Before any data collection may begin, all participants must provide signed informed consent.

There will be a pretest and posttest questionnaire. Interviews will be conducted utilising a piloted semi-structured subject guide centred on perspectives of AI chatbots and humanoid agents, notably in terms of moral authority, theology, and psychological impact. Interviews will be conducted in person, in a quiet, private room at a mutually convenient location (such as a church, clinic, university, or community venue). With authorisation, audio will be recorded on a digital recorder or encrypted recording device, then transmitted to secure institutional storage and removed from the recording device.

The researcher and/or a trusted transcription service will transcribe audio recordings verbatim while adhering to a confidentiality agreement. Transcripts will be reviewed for correctness against the audio before being pseudonymized, which means names and other direct identifiers will be deleted or masked. Throughout the data collecting and analysis process, reflective field notes and analytic memos will be prepared to document contextual information, emergent themes, and researcher reflections.

The study materials (interview guides, consent forms, and information sheets) will be version controlled and preserved with the data, with any modifications clearly noted. File naming conventions and a simple data dictionary/readme file will be utilised from the beginning to provide consistency, transparency, and quality assurance throughout the dataset.

If recruiting feasibility dictates it, a modest supplementary online questionnaire may be used at a later time to gather brief, descriptive information from more Christian participants. Any such questionnaire would be administered through a secure, GDPR-compliant survey platform, with a limited number of primarily closed questions linked with the interview themes and an integrated permission process. London South Bank University (LSBU) The Doctoral College will act as the Data Controller for this project.

Documentation and Metadata

What documentation and metadata will accompany the data?

Integrity in Research.

London South Bank University will act as the Data Controller for APTEL: London South Bank University (LSBU) of 103 Borough Road, London, SE1 0AA telephone number: 020 7815 7815 are the data controller for the personal data that will be processed.

The dataset will come with a project-level README file that explains the goals, design, sampling and recruiting, interview techniques, steps for anonymisation and pseudonymization, and any access limitations. It will also talk about the folder structure, how to name files, how to handle versions, and make it clear that all personal data has been handled according to the Data Protection Policy (2024) of London South Bank University, the UK GDPR, and the Data Protection Act 2018.

The preserved materials for the qualitative data will consist of the final interview guide (with version date), participant information sheet and consent form templates, along with a concise methodological note recording any modifications made during fieldwork. A basic data dictionary will include a list of each pseudonym or ID and its non-identifying characteristics, such as clergy, clinician, or lay Christian, broad region, or interview wave. It will also include definitions of any variables used in .xlsx, .xls, .xlsm, .xltx, or .xlsb formatting. A short qualitative codebook or analytic framework will include the important themes and codes and show how they relate to the research objectives. This will help secondary users comprehend and analyse the anonymised transcripts.
If a small online questionnaire is included, it will be recorded with an instrument file that includes the precise language and response possibilities, as well as a short codebook that explains each item, response scale, and coding.

Ethics and Legal Compliance

How will you manage any ethical issues?

Ethical issues.

LSBU Code of Practice for Research Ethics and Integrity: https://www.lsbu.ac.uk/_sources/pdf/research/LSBU-Code-of-Practice-for-Research-Ethics-and-Integrity.pdf

London South Bank University (LSBU) is ranked 6th in the world for inequality reductions according to reports. LSBU addresses ethical issues using a comprehensive framework that includes specific committees, official policies, and clear reporting routes. This system guarantees that all staff and students act with integrity, and that any issues are addressed publicly and fairly. We plan on implementing:

- Code of Practice: LSBU's Research Ethics and Integrity Code explains what behaviour is expected and what happens if you don't follow it. This code is updated every so often to keep up with changes in the field.
- The University Ethics and Integrity Committee (UEIC) is in charge of all issues related to ethics and integrity in university research and business. Policies for the Lower-Level School Ethics Panel are looked at and approved.
- School Ethics committees (CEIPs): These committees go over school research and send complicated issues to the UEIC.

There are certain important moral rules that all research and activity must follow:

1. Beneficence: Research must have value.
2. Autonomy: Letting participants know what is going on and giving them the choice to agree or

back out.
3. Not hurting participants or researchers is called non-maleficence.
4. Justice means always being fair and honouring people's rights.

- Speak Up Policy: The school wants students and staff to report any suspected bad behaviour without fear of punishment. There are many ways to send in concerns, and your privacy will be safeguarded.
- Training and Guidance: All postgraduate research (PGR) students and staff must take research integrity training, which helps to create an ethical culture.

Since Project APTEL plans work with the NHS, the LSBU School Ethics Panel approves NHS research. To do research in health and social care, we must follow Health Research Authority approval guidelines (www.hra.nhs.uk). In most cases, LSBU's NHS sponsor details must be included, and supervisors and the sponsor must authorise electronically. School's NHS sponsor will send LSBU insurance details in a sponsor letter.

Project APTEL plans to uphold with the strongest integrity the ethical considerations listed above to the best of our ability.

Human participants will obtain agreement to share and reuse data.

How will you manage copyright and Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) issues?

Copyright and IPR.

LSBU https://www.lsbu.ac.uk/_resources/pdf/guidelines/lda-supervision-handbook.pdf

London South Bank University (LSBU) prioritises intellectual property production and preservation for academic advancement in scholarship, research, teaching, and entrepreneurship. Supervisors must be knowledgeable of intellectual property while guiding or referring research students for support. Research can lead to the creation of new intellectual property by students. It could suggest they need to defend it. I plan to uphold these standards to the best of my ability by understanding that IP is any original creation that may be bought or sold. The Copyright and Patents Act 1988 defines IP as creative work that can be considered assets or physical property, mostly in four areas: copyright, trademarks, design rights, and patents.

Intellectual Property Rights are legally protected by patents, design registrations, and trademarks. They can be protected as copyright, know-how, or trade secrets. Students may have developed unique intellectual property with commercial potential. To use it commercially, they may require intellectual property protection. Take into account intellectual property and confidentiality before speaking at a conference or publishing a paper.

In accordance with LSBU's policies on research data, IP, and research students, London South Bank University will own APTEL's primary research data (audio recordings, interview transcripts, field notes, pseudonymised datasets, and associated documentation). I will process and curate the data under LSBU's jurisdiction; participants, any funders, and others will not receive copyright or IPR.

If anonymised data are suitable for sharing, they will be deposited in an appropriate institutional repository (e.g., LSBU Research Data Online) under a non-exclusive licence that allows non-commercial scholarly reuse with proper attribution. Sensitive or consent/ethical items will be restricted, mediated, or not shared.

Validated psychometric or theological instruments, published scales, and proprietary papers utilised in the research will stay under copyright and be used under licence or fair-use terms. No shared dataset will include such content. LSBU-approved partnership or consortium agreements will formalise shared IPR arrangements if further institutional partners join the project.
Staff can find information on University Non-Disclosure Agreements (NDA) and student confidentiality practices in the Guide for Academics: Winning and managing research and enterprise income

generating projects. blog.lsbu.ac.uk/corporate-strategy/other-information/rei-guide

Storage and Backup

How will the data be stored and backed up during the research?

Data storage and backup.

Honouring the London South Bank University Data Protection Policy and the Safeguarding Good Scientific Practice references, we plan to store and back up data accordingly with the IT team at LSBU. Every project at LSBU must plan, document, safeguard, properly register, maintain, and (if possible) distribute its research data in accordance with legal and ethical requirements and good scientific practice.

APTEL study data will be stored at LSBU, not locally. My safe LSBU home drive / permitted research storage will store primary working files (audio recordings, transcripts, consent logs, and pseudonymisation keys) that LSBU IT automatically backs up to secure, controlled servers regularly. This guarantees two institutional copies (live storage + IT backup) at all times.

Audio data will be uploaded from the secured recording device to LSBU storage and erased the same day following each interview. Short-term working copies on my encrypted LSBU laptop will be destroyed after they are safely saved on the networked drive. Unencrypted USB sticks, computers, and external hard drives will not save personal data.

A third logically separate copy of the cleaned, pseudonymised dataset will be stored in a clearly labelled “APTEL – anonymised” directory in LSBU-managed storage, with the pseudonymisation key in a restricted-access location.

London South Bank University (LSBU) stores research data securely on university systems like OneDrive, using password protection, encryption (for sensitive data), and GDPR compliance. The LSBU Research Data Online (RDO) repository handles backups and long-term preservation, ensuring data is safe, managed, and accessible for its minimum 10-year retention period. Use secure university platforms for active work, create backups, use encrypted external drives, and archive completed datasets in the RDO. The policy applies to all LSBU researchers, including staff, research students, honorary staff, and guests. It is part of the University's overarching framework for research governance on the following key points:

- Legal, ethical, and contractual compliance
- Rights and IPR
- Data Management Plans (DMPs)
- Registration of research data
- Secure, managed storage and retention
- Deposit in repositories or data enclaves
- Data sharing where feasible
- Citation of research data
- Resourcing RDM

How will you manage access and security?

Cybersecurity.

The largest data security dangers are losing or stealing fieldwork instruments, accessing identifying data without permission (such as audio recordings or consent forms), and mistakenly disclosing private information like mental health and religious beliefs. LSBU will only employ password-protected, regularly backed-up network storage to reduce these hazards. They will also tightly pseudonymize data and store little personally identifiable info. This meets LSBU's Data Protection Policy (2024), UK GDPR, and Data Protection Act 2018.

The researcher will be the only one who can see audio recordings, consent papers, and the pseudonymisation key. My LSBU supervisors can only see this data when needed through their LSBU accounts and role-based permissions on secure network drives. The key will be stored in a secret folder separate from the pseudonymised transcripts. LSBU offices with limited access will store paper documents like signed consent forms in a locked cabinet. Unencrypted USB sticks, personal cloud services, and gadgets will not save personal data.

LSBU employees can only view pseudonymized content through secure systems or shared network files. Outside collaborators will get fully anonymised datasets using LSBU-approved secure repositories or transfer mechanisms or work under a written data-sharing agreement that outlines security, access, and reuse limitations.

Field interviews will be recorded on an encrypted digital recorder or LSBU laptop. After each interview, audio files will be sent securely to LSBU network storage as soon as possible, but no later than the end of the working day. They will then be checked and deleted from the recording device and temporary local directories. No data will be transferred over public Wi-Fi without VPN protection or retained on portable devices for long.

Selection and Preservation

Which data are of long-term value and should be retained, shared, and/or preserved?

Data preservation.

The Research Data Management Policy and Code of Practice for Research Ethics and Integrity at LSBU stats that Project APTEL's main research data will be preserved for at least five years after the study is over. It may be kept longer if it has scientific, ethical, or policy significance openresearch.lsbu.ac.uk:

"Safeguarding Good Scientific Research states that research data must be retained for a minimum of 5 years following project completion, with the recognition that third party requirements that have a longer retention period will take precedent."

This includes the main analytic codebook, interview transcripts with names changed, and important documents including the README, data dictionary, and methodological comment. If it is morally and legally okay, these anonymised materials will be curated and made available for preservation and controlled dissemination through LSBU Research Data Online or another relevant repository chosen by LSBU or the sponsor.

After five years, or as long as it takes to meet governance standards and allow for verification or investigation, LSBU will securely destroy audio recordings, permission forms, and the pseudonymisation key. If the transcripts are complete, the audio files will be destroyed sooner. However, the ethics panel or funder may demand them to be kept for a longer time.

Because mental health and religious beliefs are so personal, what to keep beyond the minimum will depend on (a) whether the data directly support published findings, (b) whether they can be properly

anonymised to protect participants, and (c) how likely they are to be reused for validation, secondary analysis, or teaching. We will get rid of drafts, copies, and records that are used by many people. Only carefully chosen, well-documented, and anonymised data that can be reused will be kept and shared with the right access constraints.

What is the long-term preservation plan for the dataset?

Long-term plan.
According to LSBU's Research Data Management Policy, APTEL shall be kept. The cleaned-up interview transcripts, core codebook, README, and data dictionary shall be kept and put in LSBU Research Data Online, the University's research data repository, or another repository that LSBU and the funder agree on.

This will make sure that information and a permanent identity are always available, even when the project is over.

There shouldn't be any fees for depositing data in LSBU Research Data Online. The biggest "costs" are staff time for curation, which includes anonymising transcripts, reviewing files, providing documentation (README, data dictionary, codebook), and changing proprietary formats to ones that are better for preservation. There is time in the project's workplan for these actions in the last phase. Highly sensitive or non-anonymizable data, like information about mental health and religious beliefs, will only be accessible in LSBU's managed storage for the smallest amount of time needed to keep them or will be securely destroyed after being verified. The repository will only accept data that is stored ethically and securely and has long-term value for validation, secondary analysis, or education.

Data Sharing

How will you share the data?

Data sharing.
LSBU's Code of Practice clearly promotes open communication and sharing, including getting the public involved, as long as the research follows ethical, legal, and data-protection rules.

Instead of raw identifiable data, you will share anonymised or pseudonymized data. If it's ethical, anonymised interview transcripts and core documentation (README, data dictionary, codebook) that back up the main conclusions should be put in LSBU Research Data Online or another repository that LSBU and the funder agree on. This will provide researchers a permanent identification (like a DOI) and a lot of metadata to help them identify and cite the dataset.

Access is based on sensitivity. Sharing not-for-profit fully anonymised snippets or datasets for scholarly usage may be considered. Due to the risk of deductive disclosure, sensitive information on mental health and religion will either be subject to restricted or mediated access (contingent upon a data access request and agreement) or will remain exclusive to the research team.

All important research outputs, like theses, journal publications, and reports, will have a data access statement that links to the repository record and explains the dataset and how to get to it. Data shall be accessible following first analysis and primary publications within a fair timeframe post-project completion, in accordance with LSBU and funder stipulations. Books, media, social media, YouTube, speeches, and other forms of media shall use anonymous quotes and combined results, as agreed

upon by the participants and approved by LSBU's ethical committee.

Are any restrictions on data sharing required?

Restrictions on sharing data.

Yes. Due to the confidential nature of the information (including mental health, religious beliefs, and clergy/clinicians), data sharing will be restricted. This is also due to the requirements of LSBU's Data Protection and Research Data Management policies, the UK GDPR, and the Data Protection Act 2018. Following the conclusion of the retention period, audio recordings, consent forms, and pseudonymization keys will be securely destroyed and will not be shared outside the research team. We will exclusively provide transcripts and additional materials with meticulous attention.

Nevertheless, deductive disclosure—combining role, location, and complete narrative—poses a risk; therefore, certain or all documents may require restricted or controlled access. Secondary users would request access and consent to the stipulated regulations, which may encompass restrictions such as maintaining anonymity, refraining from sharing the information with third parties, and utilising it solely for academic purposes. When necessary, utilise a standard agreement for data sharing or repository access.

I expect to have exclusive access to the data throughout the duration of the study and for the initial outputs, including the thesis and the preliminary journal articles. Subsequently, anonymised data with demonstrable long-term value may be shared, provided that such sharing does not contravene consent, ethical approval, or the participants' reasonable expectations. Data will not be disclosed outside of the study team if such restrictions cannot be circumvented without violating confidentiality or consent. This remains accurate even when the repository gives a high-level overview.

Responsibilities and Resources

Who will be responsible for data management?

DMP.

This Data Management Plan is implemented, reviewed, and revised by the researcher, myself, the creator of Project APTEL, under LSBU supervision. The DMP will be reviewed at ethics approval, mid-project review, and pre-submission and modified if methodology, storage, or sharing plans change.
I will conduct field interviews, obtain consent, anonymise data, create documentation and metadata (README, data dictionary, codebook), conduct quality checks, and prepare datasets for archiving and sharing.

I will use LSBU IT Services' managed storage environment, routine backups, and access controls on network drives properly (e.g., avoiding keeping data on personal or unencrypted devices).

LSBU's School Research Ethics Panel, Data Protection Officer, and relevant institutional policies (Data Protection Policy, RDM Policy, Code of Practice for Research Ethics and Integrity) govern and oversee compliance; researchers and supervisors ensure it.

LSBU leads APTEL, which has no external partners as of yet. A documented partnership or consortium agreement approved by LSBU will outline RDM data ownership and duties (including controller/processor roles, storage, and data exchange) if other institutional collaborators are added.

What resources will you require to deliver your plan?

Resources.
LSBU infrastructure and assistance will be used for the APTEL project, therefore additional resources are minimal. All digital data will be stored on LSBU's secure network and backed up regularly, and documentation will be done using institutional software like Microsoft Office. I expect to use qualitative analysis software (e.g., NVivo or a comparable tool) under LSBU's existing provision. If not available via site licensing, a single user licence may be needed for systematic qualitative analysis and coding.

In-person interviews require a secure encrypted digital audio recorder. Where possible, the doctoral researcher will transcribe; if necessary, a professional transcription service will be hired under confidentiality and data-processing agreements and costed as a project expense.

I will use LSBU training in research ethics, data protection (UK GDPR), and research data management to verify methods comply with institutional rules. No repository fees are expected for deposit in LSBU's institutional research data repository; the main resource requirement is researcher time for anonymisation, curation, and documentation (README, data dictionary, codebook) at project completion.