

## Plan Overview

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*A Data Management Plan created using HKUL DMPTool*

**Title:** When AI Speaks For the Dead: Ethical Axiology of AI Griefbots and Policy Implications

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**Template:** HKU Template

**Project abstract:**

Generated from the footprint left behind by the deceased, AI griefbots operate within a highly ethically sensitive application context. The practices surrounding griefbots encompass not only the general ethical issues with generative AI, such as data privacy or accountability, but may entail more specific concerns relating to the bereavement process, including emotional dependency and the erosion of autonomy. It is therefore necessary to examine whether existing policies can guarantee the ethical practice of AI griefbots. However, existing AI ethics evaluation approaches frequently employ predefined checklist frameworks, which may lack sufficient explanatory power and generative capacity for the ethical complexities and controversies of emerging technologies such as griefbot.

The study proposes a 3-layer generative axiology to investigate the mechanism by which ethical practices surrounding the use of AI griefbots are guaranteed. Rather than predetermining a checklist of ethical dimensions relevant to griefbot, it will first employ a comparative policy analysis to synthesise ethical themes and provide a policy mapping of the existing political context. This will be followed by semi-structured interviews to identify ethical dimensions and controversial scenarios from various actors' practices surrounding the full lifecycle of griefbots. These will then be subjected to structured testing of the negotiation process and decision-making of actors in varying scenarios via Discrete Choice Experiments (DCEs). Finally, Focus group studies will be employed to facilitate discussions on ethical standardisation. The study endeavours to formulate an actionable controversy resolution mechanism, and thereafter to propose some suggestions for the ethical design, use and oversight of griefbots.

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# When AI Speaks For the Dead: Ethical Axiology of AI Griefbots and Policy Implications

## Data Collection

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### What data will you collect or create?

The project will mainly collect **Personal data from non-clinical research with HREC approvals**.

Project data primarily comprises two main categories: firstly, audio recordings, de-identified transcripts, and analytical notes derived from semi-structured interviews and focus groups; Secondly, preference and choice data generated from Discrete Choice Experiment (DCEs) questionnaires.

Data analysis will combine qualitative and quantitative methods. As for qualitative materials, NVivo will be used for thematic analysis and coding in the qualitative component. As for quantitative parts, Ngene will be adopted for DCEs design, and R for statistical modelling. To facilitate preservation and sharing, key findings will be exported in non-proprietary formats (e.g. CSV/PDF), accompanied by codebooks and analysis scripts.

### How will the data be collected or created?

Data will be generated through two approaches:

- (1) Semi-structured interviews/focus group discussions recorded with participants' consent will undergo verbatim transcription and de-identification before analysis using guided thematic analysis with coding schemes in NVivo software.
- (2) Discrete Choice Experiments (DCE) questionnaire will be designed in Ngene (or equivalent tools), pilot-tested, and implemented via online surveys, with analysis conducted using R.

Data will be organised throughout the project using a standardised folder structure and naming conventions. Quality assurance measures include: standardised templates, spot checks of audio transcriptions, secondary anonymisation reviews, alongside piloting, validation and reproducible cleaning or analysis of DCEs design and datasets.

## Documentation and Metadata

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### What documentation and metadata will accompany the data?

This project will provide comprehensive, sustainably interpretable documentation and metadata for the data, including: 1) background information, including data type, purpose, contributor and date, 2) metadata containing demographic profiles, 3) transcripts, code books and thematic framework from raw materials to final themes maintained in NVivo, and 4) attributes, profiles, variables and modelling of the DCEs survey conducted in R.

All files shall prioritise open formats (e.g. CSV/PDF) and include a file inventory with explanatory notes to facilitate future reuse.

## **Ethics and Legal Compliance**

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### **How will you manage any ethical issues?**

This study strictly adheres to the ethical guidelines of the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) of the University of Hong Kong. The research protocol will be reviewed and approved by HREC prior to commencing the study. All procedures comply with national and institutional standards for ethical research involving human-related data, including those for digital and internet-based research.

During the interviews, the researcher will ensure that participants have been granted informed consent, that they have the right to withdraw at any time, and will be provided with a list of support resources following the interview. During the DCEs, respondents will be furnished with skip or exit options to avoid potentially triggering descriptions. All participants in this study will receive a booklet that will contain information regarding knowledge and coping strategies for bereavement, as well as resources regarding available psychological supports following their involvement.

As for data processing, data that includes personal identifiers will be anonymised during analysis and reporting to protect individual privacy. Raw data will be stored on secure, password-protected servers accessible only to the research team. After analysis, data will be securely archived in accordance with the university's data management policies.

### **How will you manage copyright and Intellectual Property Rights (IP/IPR) issues?**

This project is without external funding. Copyright and Intellectual Property Rights for research outputs including relevant sub-research and raw datasets, belong to the researcher and the University of Hong Kong.

If this research project officially signs a cooperation agreement with the relevant institutions and is approved, specific written documents will clearly stipulate which part of data can be shared and used.

## Storage and Backup

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**How will the data be stored and backed up during the research? i. e. until stored in the final location (e.g. on your password protected laptop)?**

Data will be stored on a password-protected local device and backed up to HKU's secure cloud storage (OneDrive).

Backup and recovery remain the researcher's responsibility. In cases of accidental deletion, device failure, or security incidents, rollback recovery will utilise version histories from the cloud or weekly archives, followed by integrity verification.

**How will you manage access and security?**

All project data shall be prioritised for storage within the HKU-provided storage platform (OneDrive). Accounts shall be protected through strong passwords, full-disk encryption, and timely patch updates. Only the researcher will have access to the accounts.

Sensitive materials containing personally identifiable information, raw audio recordings, or signed consent forms shall have restricted access and retention period according to HKU's policy.

## Selection and Preservation

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

Data that should be retained for future reference includes:

- 1) Cleaned and de-identified research datasets that contain both qualitative transcripts and quantitative modelling.
- 2) Key materials supporting reproducibility, including code books, questionnaires, interview guides, thematic framework, DCEs attributes and profiles designs, data processing and analysis scripts.

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

Anonymised data will be preserved for a minimum of 5 years post-publication according to HKU's policy.

Original audio recordings and other identifiable raw materials will be deleted once the doctoral thesis has been officially submitted.

## Data Sharing

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### How will you share the data?

Research findings concerning the cleaned and de-identified will be disseminated through doctoral theses, peer-reviewed journals, and other channels such as international conferences.

### Are any restrictions on data sharing? If yes, Why?

Original audio recordings and unanonymised transcripts or questionnaire datasets are restricted from sharing in accordance with HKU's policy, respect for participants' privacy rights, and protections of the participants from potential harm.

## Responsibilities and Resources

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### Who will be responsible for data management?

Principal Researcher: Liu Yuyan holds primary responsibility for the entire data lifecycle, including collection, anonymisation, and secure storage.

Academic Supervision: Monthly progress reports and data management audits will be conducted under the supervisor at HKU to ensure compliance with ethical norms and operational feasibility.

### What resources will you require to deliver your plan?

Analytical Software: licenses of NVivo and Ngene are required to facilitate systematic coding, thematic synthesis, and the design of DCEs attributes.

Secure Infrastructure: Access to HKU's encrypted servers and OneDrive for Business is necessary for the daily storage and backup of the data.

Reciprocity Resources: Potential budget and materials for the creative co-construction project, including the production and distribution of mental health support booklets.

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