

**The Rising Popularity of Tarot Cards in the Digitized World: Trust and
Commercialization**

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Capstone Project in Sociology

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Introduction:

This project is focused on investigating the rising popularity of Tarot cards that transformed from simple playing cards to the ones used for divination. Recent digitalization led to the spread of the cards throughout the world, noticeable by increasing numbers of Tarot content in social media and increasing numbers of those who provide Tarot services. Only in TikTok number of posts with #Tarot reached 13 million, and in Instagram the number is even higher - 30 million posts. Tarot cards market is also one of the indicators of the sphere's rising popularity, according to the 4 year forecast by Technavio (2024), Tarot cards market size gradually increases and will continue to increase at least in the following period- until 2028.

The research is focused on studying Tarot in Kazakhstan, where the topic of rising popularity of Tarot cards was raised in national media. Dzhakupova (2023) for local "Golos Naroda" media try to explain why Tarot became popular, connecting it with COVID-19 when people had a desire to find what will be tomorrow, and if there is tomorrow. Markova (2024) for "Kursiv" media also writes about the popularity of Tarot cards in Kazakhstan, showing Google Trends statistics with increasing numbers of google searches on the topic of Tarot and other spirituality like numerology, astrology and fortune telling; she is also interested in a commercialization of the Tarot, focusing on how much money spiritual workers gain from their services. Additionally Technavio (2024) estimated that 55% of the Tarot market growth will originate in Asia, the infographics in the research include such countries as China, South Korea, Japan, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and others.

Since the topic of Tarot's popularity gains the interest of local media and Tarot content is spreading in social media, it is important to study it from a sociological perspective. This capstone will also cover several aspects of the phenomenon of popularity of Tarot cards, trying to draw a picture of general relationships and interaction between those who do Tarot and post content with their audience, potential clients. The main research question is: how does digitization of spirituality and its commercialization affect the popularity of Tarot cards and trustworthiness?

The research implies studying Tarot in three main aspects: digitalization of spirituality, its commercialization and trustworthiness. To be able to answer the main research question, it is important to understand how spirituality and magical rituals are digitized and commercialized today, which will also cover the reason behind doing Tarot: whether people do Tarot to make money and become popular. The other part of the project is based on studying trustworthiness of Tarot readers, which reveals many aspects of trust: how

people keep their trustworthy image, as well as why people trust Tarot readers, Tarot content creators, and even Tarot cards in the first place.

Literature Review

Rising popularity of Tarot cards

Tarot cards have a long history, through which, it was transformed from a deck of playing cards, to a divination tool with occult meaning. Originally cards with no symbolic and spiritual meaning were used for playing games, but during secularization in the West, Tarot in contrast became more sacred and gained its esoteric meaning in Occult Revivals of that time (Farley, 2009). In the past, Tarot was considered as a tool with too much power that only “selected few” (Farley, 2009, p. 3), who have enough knowledge and skills, could use, today accessibility of Tarot cards is valued, and anyone who has time and resources can buy deck of Tarot cards, and instructions to read and interpret them (Farley, 2009). Those, who do the reading and interpretation, are called ‘Tarot readers’, what is important in reading Tarot is not only to memorize symbolic meaning of each card, but working with and trusting your intuition to see what cards are telling (Gregory, 2018). Since there are those who do the Tarot readings, there are those who are interested in these readings and rely on interpretations of Tarot readers, those will be further called ‘clients’. Tarot can be studied from interactions between these 3 agents, cards, readers and clients, where clients ask questions from the cards, readers interpret what cards tell through communication with their clients.

Only on the Chinese platform Bilibili Tarot related content had more than 910 million in 2021 (Fu, Li & Lee, 2022), while total numbers of views in all platforms around the world are expected to be a lot higher. Numbers of Tarot related studies also increased, and it started to gain its sociological significance and interest that it lacked before (Sosteric, 2014, p.358), many studies like those of Fu, Li and Lee (2022) and Gregory (2018) address theoretical gaps that were there because of lack of this sociological perspective on the topic of Tarot. Even if there is a limited amount of Tarot related literature, it mostly focuses on the history of Tarot and its meaning, while only few uncover the interactions behind doing Tarot, commercialization of the field or its digitalization.

Many scholars recognize the rising popularity of Tarot cards, but connect it to different reasons. Fu, Li and Lee (2022) study the popularity of Tarot through the concept of ‘techno-cultural domestication’, where Western cultural practice of doing Tarot was embedded in local techno-cultural space. Interaction of the audience with Tarot related content created demand for such content, and thus affected the popularity of Tarot in China. Similar to this, Gregory (2018) also notes that Tarot became popular because of different content related to it, starting from books, online forums, websites for Tarot reading, blogs of Tarot

readers and the way audiences actively interact with this content. And what Gregory (2018) additionally points out is that Tarot is also embedded in online markets, where readers can offer and sell their services. Variety of online Tarot related content, and the way it is easier to reach than offline places like psychic fairs or occult shops also played its role in popularization of Tarot.

However, a completely different approach to explaining the popularity of Tarot can be seen through studying the way it is used as a decolonizing model, which can apply to Kazakhstan, due to its historical past as a colony of Russia and a member of the Soviet Union. In the modern world mind, body and spirit have separated, while Tarot readings, in contrast, provide an interconnected, non-hierarchical model of understanding the world and knowing (Greenberg, 2023). According to Greenberg (2023), imagination and interpretations of cards during tarot reading serve as a valid mode of perception of the world, which is opposite to the colonial power driven model based on rationalization. The author describes this imaginary realm, manifested through metaphor and symbolism, also touching on the aspect of randomness and chance during Tarot readings, which disrupts control of the reader, opening possibilities for imagination, interpretation and thinking (Greenberg, 2023). Unlike other studies, Greenberg's (2013) research focuses not on how Tarot became popular through different content, and interaction of people with this content, but why it is popular - because it is against the colonial way of thinking, and because it gives opportunities to interpret what you see, and think outside of the power driven model.

This capstone paper, however, is based on studying Tarot in Kazakhstan. Lack of literature on Tarot in Kazakhstan can affect the understanding of Tarot in their cultural context, which is primarily connected with the Soviet historical past. New age spirituality, including Tarot, is more egocentric and individualistic (Berghuijs, Bakker, & Pieper, 2013), in contrast to the collectivistic values of the Soviet period. To participate in spirituality today people only need access to the internet, all activities can be done individually or directly with a professional like a Tarot reader. Renunciation of collectivistic nature, where people used to do many things together, pray together, do rituals together, and its transition from 'shared' and 'collectivistic' to more 'egocentric' and 'intimate' may be a contributing factor in increasing interest about Tarot and other new forms of spirituality. The lack of resources on Tarot in this region is also connected with the Soviet past, where divination and magic were not worthy of studying. Because of which a huge gap in the literature is present.

Theoretical framework.

Tarot is not often studied from a sociological perspective, which creates gaps in its theoretical and empirical framework (Sosteric, 2014). However, Sosteric (2014) then proves that Tarot has a much more sociological significance than it was expected. Symbolism behind Tarot cards is connected to its history, where it shows lives of Italian elites, social authorities, elite practice, had icons representing symbols of power, the symbolism changes when it becomes a tool of religious sects that manage occult authority and then becomes a tool to imprint elite ideology into consciousness of the masses (Sosteric, 2014). Tarot can be studied from symbolic interactionism perspective since Tarot implies interactions between people, it includes interactions of 3 agents, Tarot readers, their clients, and Tarot cards themselves, and in the digitized world there is interaction of audience and Tarot content creators. Each digital media user goes under various interactions with content and people that construct their understanding and meaning of the world around them (Fernback, 2007). Fernback (2007) also points out that the concept of ‘community’ does not explain all complexities of online interaction, like symbolic interactionism does.

Digitized or augmented spirituality is a concept of transition of spiritual practices from offline modes to new digital environments (Kaewkitipong, Beaunoyer, Ractham & Guitton, 2023). Shift to augmented practices allow people to easily find spiritual communities that are important for support and sense of belonging, enhancing the spiritual experience of people (Kaewkitipong, Beaunoyer, Ractham & Guitton, 2023), and it allows those, who are interested in Tarot to easily find and engage with Tarot related content and people. Concept of domestication of religion, discussed by Sered (1988) through studying Jewish women activities where he analyzes rituals women are engaged in, discussing how their spirituality is affected by different social and cultural factors. There the concept of domestication of religion is described as “personalization of religion” and how people adapt their practices in their personal lives, and worldview (Sered, 1988), showing how religious practices can be domesticated, and drawing a contrast with domestication of spiritual practices such as Tarot reading, where domestication implies availability and accessibility of performing spiritual rituals, that are no longer limited by ‘selected few’ (Farley, 2009).

Methodology

The study implies analysis of digital media content related to Tarot, since the study focuses on digitalization of spirituality. Digital ethnography, as a broad term, covers different approaches to studying digital media. When doing digital ethnography, it is important to rely on Airoidi (2018), where he highlights that the digital environment is constantly evolving and changing, and

researchers should learn to adapt to it. The author argues that the digital field is dual, because a lot of social interactions are somewhat stable and bounded to certain environments and online communities, while most experience of social media users is made through more fluid environments like feeds, content aggregators, content based on searched hashtags and words Airoidi (2018). According to Airoidi (2018) most online interactions happen at more fluid fields, thus it is relevant to study those by analyzing posts and videos and interaction of people in comments under those posts in Instagram and Tik tok social media, and analyzing separate social media pages related to Tarot. Those fluid fields are chosen by searching relevant hashtags about Tarot reading, like #Tarot, #TarotCards. Fluid fields tend to change rapidly (Airoidi, 2018), to see transformation of the field and how trends change within time, it is important to study data within different time periods, so the research will include half most recent and half most popular posts and videos with more likes and comments.

Interview is one of the essential methods, and it is important to identify why selecting an interview as a method is important for the study (Mashuri, et al., 2022). It addresses previously mentioned gaps such as devaluation of spirituality with its rising popularity in the digitized world, namely whether audiences feel that Tarot is less valuable because it became digitized and reached popularity in social media platforms. Also, it is useful to cover why people choose to be spirituality workers, through interviewing Tarot readers and their motivations to work and spiritual self-entrepreneurs.

Research design

This capstone is based on a mixed methods approach, including qualitative interviews and content analysis

Study of the digital media includes qualitative content analysis of 6 Tarot related accounts, 3 in Instagram and 3 in Tik tok. To choose accounts I searched relevant hashtags in social media, like #Tarot #TarotCards #TarotReadings #Tarotologs (#Таро #КартыТаро #РаскладыТаро #Таролог), and 3 most popular and frequently posting accounts were selected for further analysis. Content analysis is based on several aspects and variables like: Popularity of account, general content, visuals, commercialization, trustworthiness, and engagement. This is helpful to find trends and patterns that Tarot content creators use in making their videos, and in engaging with their audience, which allows to analyze how concepts of digitization and commercialization of magic are embedded into their profiles and social interactions.

Qualitative nature of the study implies targeting less number of participants and focusing on relevant selection of informants. Interviews

included 2 Tarot readers who post content on their social media accounts, 3 former Tarot readers who practiced Tarot in the past, but now only watch social media content about the cards, and 1 participant who has never done Tarot, but watches the content and has received tarot reading services. 2/6 interviews were in person in Astana city, while other 4 interviews were through zoom/telegram calls. These differences of participants are helpful to make comparisons in the way people perceive commercialization and digitization of Tarot cards. Sampling strategy included purposive non-probability sampling focusing on those who fit the criteria. Participants were recruited through Telegram chats and Instagram, addressed directly through social media accounts.

Both methods are built in the way to cover gaps of previous research on the topic of Tarot and to answer the main research question, explaining how commercialization and digitalization of Tarot is connected with popularity of Tarot, and identifying trends about implementing trustworthy images. Also, it allows one to study this from both perspectives: of Tarot readers and their clients.

The research is feasible in terms of access to sampling population, and in terms of time available to recruit participants, interview them, code interviews and analyze obtained data.

Ethical considerations

All participants were instructed about the voluntary nature of their participation, and a written consent form was signed. Possible ethical issues include breach of confidentiality; however, ways to prevent it to the highest degree possible, through coding personal information of the participants, ensuring protected access to digital audio files with recorded interviews, destroying all information about participants in case of voluntary withdrawal.

Analysis strategy

Interviews were transcribed and coded to analyze it using thematic analysis. The Nvivo app was used to do interview coding. The steps included: first cycle coding, second cycle coding, thematic analysis and incorporating theory. Participants were talking about COVID 19 as a period when Tarot started gaining its popularity, people during lockdown were stressed, they were isolated and worried about the future, desperate to know if everything will be alright in the future. This represents initial codes: 'COVID 19', 'uncertainty about the future', 'tarot as reassurance', 'stress', 'anxiety', 'lockdown isolation', 'fear', 'need to know the future'. Others mentioned the rise of TikTok during quarantine, with initial codes: 'COVID 19', 'first tarot content', 'popularity of tiktok', 'social media algorithms', 'tarot is interesting'. Second

cycle coding included connecting these initial codes into subtopics like “Tarot as emotional support”, “Tarot as response to uncertainty”, “Social media content as diffuser”. They all are subtopics of the broader theme of Tarot becoming popular during COVID 19. Other themes related to the popularity of Tarot are related to “supply-demand chain” and “Tarot being interesting”.

Content analysis included analysis of pages based on 6 variables: popularity of account, general content, visuals, commercialization, trustworthiness, and engagement. This is helpful to find trends and patterns that Tarot content creators use in making their videos, and in engaging with their audience, which allows to analyze how concepts of digitization and commercialization of magic are embedded into their profiles and social interactions. Variables and implications of those variables then are incorporated with exciting literature and theory.

Findings

Popularity of Tarot

Popularity of Tarot is perceived differently by all participants, ideas of future popularity trends are also different among them. Tarot, according to some interviewees, started gaining its popularity in 2020-2021 during COVID pandemics, most of them connect it with TikTok that become popular, and participant 4 adds that during shut down people were stressed and worried about their future, that lead to the interest in divination. Participants connect the rise of Tarot with supply-demand schemes, where interest of people created demand for the topic of Tarot, and thus led to its spread. However, this demand might not stay at the same level.

Opinions of participants regarding the future of Tarot popularity are divided into 3: it will rise, it will stay at the same level, it will decrease. P4 states that “*if everything will be fine in the world, [tarot] will not become more popular [than it is now]*”, this is related to Tarot being popular in times of stress, as it is a tool for reassurance. P2 also thinks that there will not be any further rise in popularity, and they both agree that the popularity of Tarot can stay at the same level, without following decrease. This is connected with ‘Tarot being interesting’, and interesting things cannot vanish, but when reaching its peak (like Tarot after COVID 19), they cannot become more popular. On the other hand, participants 1 and 5 think that it will gain more popularity, since “*Tarot hasn’t reached its peak*” (Participant 1), as a working Tarot reader, P1 shares that currently they receive more and more clients every day, and demand for the Tarot services did not decrease. Participant 3, however, states that Tarot popularity will fall due to the rise of numbers of people who practice religion in Kazakhstan, emphasizing numbers of practicing muslims. Indeed, religion can

be one of the factors that lead to conflict with divination practices. There are no exact statistics of practicing muslims throughout the years, for 2024 the number is estimated to be 2.245 million people (AIFC). However, there is an increase in numbers of muslims in Kazakhstan comparing 2009 and 2021, absolute numbers rose from 11.2 million to 13.3 million. There is a distinction of ‘practicing’ muslims and a person who counts themselves as a ‘muslim’ related to the following of all religious rules and practices, including 5 time prayer and living by canons of islam. Since an increase in numbers of overall muslims in the country, the number of practicing muslims could also be increasing.

Additionally, participants shared their internal conflicts of Tarot practices and their religious beliefs, and for Participant 4 it was one of the reasons to give up Tarot reading and consumption of Tarot related content.

Trust

All of the participants understand importance of trust and keeping a trustworthy image in content and during Tarot reading practices. Participants find different factors and abilities that lead to trustworthy images of tarot readers both online and offline. Participant 1, who is a Tarot reader and content creator, tries to show their personality and their face in their content to gain trust. Another Tarot content creator, participant 6 thinks that it is important to show your professionalism and knowledge, while showing the face is not that important. While Participant 1 and 6 are both Tarot content creators, their content has certain differences: Participant 6 never shares their face, while P1 shows themselves all the time. Content of P 6 is based on Tarot cards, their explanation and general Tarot readings, while P1 also tries to integrate humor and trends into their content, adapting popular sounds and trends into Tarot field.

Former Tarot readers like participant 5 tries to gain trust through changing their intonation and voice to sound professional, participant 3 also agrees that it is important to have a certain calm intonation, they add that when Tarot content creator publish videos or any other posts, absence of “clickbaits” is important for trustworthiness. Participant 3 also pays attention to establishing connection with the client, and P5 as a client agrees with that. For participant 4 reviews of other people are important, if they see good reviews they see a Tarot reader as a trustworthy one; for participant 2 reviews are also important, but they only trust reviews and recommendation of people they know, additionally they do not trust online tarot readers, they prefer offline face to face sessions.

Commercialization

All participants agree that commercialization of the Tarot sphere is a normal phenomenon, because all work must be paid. “*That is what should be, because it requires a lot of energy*” (participant 4). Many people included the fact that some clients, mostly close people, do ‘symbolic payment’ or “*a cup of coffee, donation*” (participant 3), because what is important is to have “*energy trade*” (participant 2, 5). This energy trade can be seen as an engaging technique that motivates people to contribute to the extent comfortable for them. This symbolic payment was discussed by all former and current Tarot readers.

For Participant 1 and 6 commercialization of Tarot is important because they make money out of that, currently for P1, Tarot services and their blog is a main source of income, while P6 it is an additional source of income. Participant 1 shared the way the cost of their services changed with time: when they had less experience they tried to have a lot of clients with little cost, while now they prefer to focus on less people, higher cost and better quality.

Digital spirituality

Most of the participants think that commercialization and digitization of Tarot are the main factors that led to the popularity of Tarot cards, connecting it with the way media content establishes trends. When there is demand there is supply, mentioned participants 1, 3, 5, 6; implying that with increasing numbers of Tarot content, people become more interested in Tarot and more people become Tarot readers themselves, or their clients. However, participant 2 states that “if the thing itself is interesting, it will eventually become popular... and Tarot is interesting”, implying that the fact that Tarot itself is interesting helped it to become popular. Additionally, overall digitization and digitalization of spirituality made Tarot more accessible for people: if the person is interested in Tarot, they can easily find Tarot content with all necessary information, they can easily access Tarot readers, tools to learn how to do Tarot and nearly anything related to Tarot.

Participant 1 additionally raised the problem of Tarot popularity and stated that it would be good to somehow hold the rise of popularity of this sphere, because people, seeking profit, do tarot reading with the help of AI, damaging Tarot sphere and trust to other Tarot readers. This breaks the whole systems of interactions behind Tarot, where certain agents interact with each other, clients interact with the Tarot reader, Tarot reader interacts with Tarot cards and interpret it based on their knowledge and experience from other interactions. AI does not only damage trustworthiness, but the Tarot sphere and its main point.

Content analysis

There are different types of Tarot content creators, most accounts show their own faces in the videos and posts (4 out of 6), to gain trust, while others post the Tarot content focusing on cards, without showing themselves. All users who post online content share links to their telegram channels or websites, those platforms have all information regarding services that they provide, mainly tarot readings, and courses on Tarot. In Instagram Tarot content creators commercialize their blogs, through advertising third party goods like Tarot deck cards, which was absent in TikTok.

Overall, each content creator follows a certain pattern in their posts, either visual, thematic, or verbal. In TikTok it is important to use trending sounds or adapt Tarot content into trends to gain more views and seek more potential clients. It is important for people to divide their personal and professional lives in social media posts, however, in Instagram content creators add their personal lives, but only in stories, not in publications on the page.

How Tarot readers show their knowledge and quality of the content play a vital role in engagement of auditory, not all however, answer back when auditory is engaging with their content through comments. In TikTok it is popular to make videos as an answer to a comment, creating connection with the audience and potentially increasing trustworthiness.

Discussion

6.1 How do Tarot readers keep their trustworthy image and why do people trust Tarot readers?

It is evident that both Tarot readers, including those who publish content in social media, and their clients/audience understand that maintaining trust is important. Participants mention strategies to establish connections when communicating with a new client, because during first sessions it is possible to identify if the client trusts them. These identifiers include how open the clients are, what questions they ask, if they ask to prove the 'qualifications' like certificates, if they intentionally ask questions they already know the answers to. Even if there are differences in things connected to trustworthy images, and in the ways Tarot readers themselves maintain this image, both groups can identify those factors. Maintaining trust, especially online, is important for Tarot readers to attract more clients, since for some people it is becoming the main source of income.

Tarot readers use certain strategies to reach more potential clients online, including engagement with their audience, developing professional image, using trends and sounds to gain more views. Content creators separate their personal lives from Tarot content to be compatible in the digital marketplace, as

professional image is one of the trust factors. For those who work as a Tarot reader, keeping the identity of a Tarot reader is a way to show their professionalism, as outlined by Gregory (2018) Tarot readers divide their professional lives from personal ones to keep this trustworthy professional image. Still, what is 'professional' and how a Tarot reader can be professional is not fully covered. Participants connect knowledge, speech, certificates, reviews as indicators of professionalism. If a Tarot reader shows that they have certificates of accomplishing courses on how to do Tarot, it can signify their professionalism. However, the question is who gives these certificates and provides these courses? As seen in the analysis of social media pages, Tarot content creators include links to their Tarot services, and providing Tarot courses where they teach people how to become a Tarot reader is one of the options. Thus, learning from people who are already perceived as professionals with more experience, those who are already popular in social media and have more followers (about 1M) can be a sign of professionalism.

Interactions between Tarot readers and their clients/audience, as well as professional portraits play an important role in gaining trust. The audience pays attention to those things and they value reviews, personal brands and communication with the readers. Still, outcomes of the study prove that offline communication of Tarot readers and their clients is important, including nonverbal ways. Because participants find in person communication and practices more bonding and trustworthy. This is the way for Tarot clients to observe how the reader works, how they speak, how they communicate and how engaged they are. They can be sure that the reader works from their own knowledge and experience without relying on outside sources, including AI. Former Tarot readers point out how they change their voices and manner of speech to sound more professional, as well as creating a non-judging, supportive atmosphere with a client during Tarot rituals to show that they can be trusted.

6.2 How and why is Tarot commercialized?

Digitalization led to the transition of spirituality markets into online modes, where Tarot readers as well as other spirituality workers can offer and sell their services, this creates change in digital labor, where people should manage their presence in social media account, by using platform and engaging with their audience, advertising their services and developing their personal brands in some cases (Gregory, 2018). It is seen how many tarot content creators add links to their websites/channels, engage with audiences and show their presence in media to advertise themselves and their services. And that

corresponds to what Gregory (2018) additionally points out is that Tarot is also embedded in online markets, where readers can offer and sell their services.

For some Tarot readers, including participants of the study, Tarot is the main source of income, because of that they try to develop their blogs and advertise themselves to stand out from their opponents. Commercialization of the sphere includes services like paid Tarot readings and Tarot teachings at different prices, but is not limited to that and might also include monetization of the blog or advertisement of third party products and services in their content, which is seen mostly in Instagram. Commercialization is connected with increased interest in this sphere, which created demand, and those who saw an opportunity to profit from it did it.

Additionally, participants, who work as Tarot readers, shared the ways they establish prizes for their services. Participant 1 mentions how prizes changed with her gaining more experience in the field. In the beginning of their Tarot path, they tried to set lower prices due to lack of experience, people were attracted to prices and P1 was able to establish her “*base of clients*” and gain experience. With time P1 increased their prices after analysis of the market, looking at prices of other Tarot readings with the same experience and same ‘popularity’ of their blog in social media. Participant 6 also analyzed the spiritual market to establish prices. Increasing costs for Tarot readings practices allowed Participant 1 to have less number of clients a day and focus more on their blog to advertise themselves and their services. Additionally their blogs are the way to gain even more clients and advertising third party goods like Tarot card decks in the blog, which is seen in Instagram pages of popular and frequently posting Tarot readers.

6.3 How does commercialization of digitized spirituality affect the popularity of Tarot cards and trustworthiness?

It is seen how interaction of the audience with Tarot related content created demand for such content, and thus affected the popularity of Tarot in China (Fu, Li & Lee, 2022), which is applicable to CIS region as well, participants connect rise of popularity of Tarot with popularity of TikTok during COVID19 pandemic, when a lot of content was published. Spiritual practices became a real full time job for some practitioners, their main source of income, which can be unstable, because of that Tarot readers feel a need to develop their skills, intuition, entrepreneurial skills to fit into the market and be able to make enough profit. (Gregory, 2013). Tarot readers try to maintain not only trust, but qualities of a professional tarotology. Gregory (2013, 2018) shows how important it is for spiritual workers to advertise themselves and their personal brand, offering different services, mainly tarot readings and teaching how to read tarot. In their blogs tarot readers balance their identities as a spiritual

worker and as an ordinary individual, or try to cut off the 2nd part (Gregory, 2018). Participant 1 shares that it is important for her to divide her personal life and professional one, that is why she does not post any personal videos to her Tiktok account, while on instagram people tend to add their personal lives to instagram stories. This is also seen in TikTok and Instagram accounts of Tarot readers, where people usually do not mix personal content and professional content.

Each digital media user goes under various interactions with content and people that construct their understanding and meaning of the world around them (Fernback, 2007). This explains why Tarot content creators try to engage with their audience, the whole Tarot sphere is about interaction between different agents: Tarot reader and their clients/audience, Tarot reader and Tarot cards, Tarot audience and Tarot related content. According to Greenberg (2023), imagination and interpretations of cards during tarot reading serve as a valid mode of perception of the world, and as a form of interaction can tell about its agents. Tarot readers try to interpret cards from their own knowledge of symbols that they learned and dealt with. This experience helps them to develop over time and become more professional, which is important to gain trust, increase their content views and engagement. All former and current Tarot readers agree that it is important to know and learn symbolism behind cards and the way each card can be interpreted in different situations. Interpretation of the reader can affect the mind of their client, setting a lens through which they perceive their future. As participants mention, if a person hears negative outcomes, he is more likely to set their expectations and thoughts to a more negative light. Generally, This transition into online modes made spirituality more available, but also more intimate, Tarot readers try to engage with their clients individually, creating a comfortable supportive atmosphere, allowing them to dive into the world of divination alone. Changes in the way Tarot rituals are performed now can also be a contributing fact to its popularity.

Overall, study outcomes agree that commercialization and digitization of Tarot led to its rising popularity, however, not every participant thinks that it will increase, some of participants connect it with contradiction of divination and religion, while others connect it with the thought of Tarot being used in hard times like during COVID lockdown.

Conclusion

Commercialization and digitization of Tarot play an important role in the popularity of Tarot cards. With the increasing number of Tarot related content, especially when TikTok spread throughout the world, people became more

interested in this topic, creating demand. Demand leads to an increasing number of suppliers- Tarot readers, for whom it becomes a real full time job and a main source of income. They develop their social media blogs to reach more audience and potential clients, using strategies to gain trust.

Since this project was limited in data collection time, it is limited in number of participants and scale of research. For further analysis it is required to interview more people and include participant observations, interacting with Tarot readers in their professional habitat. Expanding the geographical scale of the research would increase the quality of the project as well.

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Appendix:

Interview Guide English version

You are invited to participate in a study called “The Rising Popularity of Tarot Cards in the Digitized World: Trust and Commercialization”

The aim of the study is to identify why Tarot cards are becoming popular on social media and how it is connected with trust to those who perform Tarot as well as with commercialization and digitalization.

This research is based on qualitative interview methodology, which includes separate questions for Tarot readers and content creators, and their audience/clients. The interview will take approximately 20 to 30 minutes to complete.

The potential risk of participating in this study - the researcher(s) do not anticipate any risks associated with participating in the study; however the researcher(s) may not foresee all the risks of participating in this research. Any information obtained during this study will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by the law. All efforts, within reason, will be made to keep personal information of participants in your research record confidential; however total confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

No tangible compensation will be given. Results of the research, and its copies will be available after the study is completed. More information can be obtained by contacting the research PI.

Participation in this study is strictly voluntary, and if you agree to participate, it can be withdrawn at any time by any reason without any negative consequences for the participant.

This interview will have 15 following questions related to popularity, digitization and commercialization of Tarot, however, it may contain any additional, elaborating questions.

I want to ask for your consent to conduct this interview. If you agree to give me your consent, please sign the consent form.

1. How did you become a Tarot reader? (For how long have you been doing Tarot readings?)
2. How do you usually provide Tarot readings and other Tarot related services? (What is the setting? How long does 1 service last? How many clients do you usually have per day, per week?)
3. What are the most common reasons for clients to get Tarot readings? (What questions do they ask? Do you specialize in certain types of questions?)
4. What is important in being a Tarot reader? (Do you think Tarot reading requires special abilities? What are they?)
5. Do you possess such abilities? (How did you acquire these abilities?)

6. How do you keep a trustworthy image? (Do you see when a client is not trusting you? How? How do keep trustworthy image online?)
7. Do you publish Tarot related content? What is interesting about your content? (Do you publish it along with personal content? If yes, how do you keep both your personalities as a Tarot reader and an ordinary person? Why do you publish certain types of content?)
8. How do you show your strengths [as a Tarot reader] through your content?
9. Would you still be a Tarot reader, if this sphere were not digitized? Why?
10. Is engagement with your content important for you? Why?
11. Why do you publish Tarot related content? (How do you advertise your services? Is content creating a main way to gain new clients? Is a potential income the most important motivator for you to perform Tarot?)
12. Do you find Tarot readings as your main source of income? (How did you come to commercialize Tarot readings? How did you set prices for your services?)
13. How do you make yourself stand out from other Tarot readers in the spiritual market?
14. How do you communicate with your potential clients and audience? (What is the most important in communicating with clients?)
15. Do you think Tarot is popular? (When and how did you notice it? Why is it becoming popular? Are digitalization and commercialization of Tarot one of the main factors?)

Interview guides for clients of Tarot readers

You are invited to participate in a study called “The Rising Popularity of Tarot Cards in the Digitized World: Trust and Commercialization”

The aim of the study is to identify why Tarot cards are becoming popular on social media and how it is connected with trust to those who perform Tarot as well as with commercialization and digitalization.

This research is based on qualitative interview methodology, which includes separate questions for Tarot readers and content creators, and their audience/clients. The interview will take approximately 20 to 30 minutes to complete.

The potential risk of participating in this study - the researcher(s) do not anticipate any risks associated with participating in the study; however the researcher(s) may not foresee all the risks of participating in this research. Any information obtained during this study will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by the law. All efforts, within reason, will be made to keep personal

information of participants in your research record confidential; however total confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

No tangible compensation will be given. Results of the research, and its copies will be available after the study is completed. More information can be obtained by contacting the research PI.

Participation in this study is strictly voluntary, and if you agree to participate, it can be withdrawn at any time by any reason without any negative consequences for the participant.

This interview will have 14 following questions related to popularity, digitization and commercialization of Tarot, however, it may contain any additional, elaborating questions.

I want to ask for your consent to conduct this interview. If you agree to give me your consent, please sign the consent form.

1. Do you believe in Tarot, magic, superstitions, spirituality?
2. Have you had any Tarot readings? (How many times? Were they paid or unpaid? What topic was it related to?)
3. At what times and situations do you rely on Tarot readings?
4. Do you think Tarot reading requires special abilities? What are they? (How do you look for them in people?)
5. What is the image of a trustworthy Tarot reader? (What do you look for in a Tarot reader?)
6. Do you watch Tarot related content? (In what social media platforms do you watch it more often? What type of content do you enjoy the most? Do you search for certain content or do you only watch what you see on recommendations? Why?)
7. Do you believe in general Tarot readings that you see in your feed?
8. How do you choose whose content to watch? (What are the characteristics of a Tarot reader or their content that you pay attention to?)
9. Do you usually engage with Tarot related content? How? (Why do you engage only with certain types of content? Why does some content “deserve” your likes, and some doesn't?)
10. Would you still have an interest in Tarot, if this sphere were not digitized?
11. Does the content you see persuade you to buy services from a Tarot reader? (Do you think that is the main motivation of Tarot readers? Do you think the Tarot sphere is commercialized? Why and what is your opinion on it?)
12. Have you ever bought any Tarot services? (What were they? What was your motivation? Would you pay for other Tarot related services?)

13. What made you choose a specific Tarot reader among many other people in a spiritual market? (What do you pay attention to before buying Tarot services?)
14. Do you think Tarot is popular? (When and how did you notice it? Why is it becoming popular? Are digitalization and commercialization of Tarot one of the main factors?)

Russian version

Руководства по интервью для тарологов/создателей контента

Вы приглашены принять участие в исследовании под названием «Растущая популярность карт Таро в цифровом мире: доверие и коммерциализация».

Цель исследования — определить, почему карты Таро становятся популярными в социальных сетях и как это связано с доверием к тем, кто занимается Таро, а также с коммерциализацией и цифровизацией карт. Это исследование основано на качественных интервью, которая включает отдельные вопросы для тарологов и создателей контента, а также их аудитории/клиентов. Интервью займет около 20–30 минут.

Потенциальный риск участия в этом исследовании — исследователь (исследователи) не ожидают каких-либо рисков, связанных с участием в исследовании; но исследователь (исследователи) могут не предвидеть все риски участия в данном исследовании. Любая информация, полученная в ходе этого исследования, будет храниться в тайне в той мере, в какой это разрешено законом. Будут приложены все разумные усилия для сохранения конфиденциальности личной информации участников вашего исследования; однако полная конфиденциальность не может быть гарантирована.

Никакой материальной компенсации не будет. Результаты исследования и их копии будут доступны после его завершения. Для этого вам нужно связаться с руководителем проекта.

Участие в этом исследовании строго добровольное, и если вы согласны на участие, вы можете отказаться от него в любое время по любой причине без каких-либо негативных последствий для участника.

Это интервью будет содержать 15 основных вопросов, связанных с популярностью, цифровизацией и коммерциализацией Таро, однако оно может содержать любые дополнительные, уточняющие вопросы.

Я хочу попросить вашего согласия на проведение этого интервью. Если вы готовы дать мне свое согласие, пожалуйста, подпишите форму письменного согласия.

Вопросы:

1. Как вы стали тарологом? (Как долго вы занимаетесь раскладами Таро?)
2. Как вы обычно проводите гадания на Таро и другие услуги, связанные с Таро? (Какова обстановка? Как долго длится 1 услуга? Сколько клиентов у вас обычно бывает в день, в неделю?)
3. Каковы наиболее распространенные причины, по которым клиенты обращаются за гаданиями на Таро? (Какие вопросы они задают? Специализируетесь ли вы на определенных типах вопросов?)
4. Что важно для того, чтобы быть тарологом? (Как вы думаете, требуются ли особые способности для гадания на Таро? Каковы они?)
5. Есть ли у вас такие способности? (Как вы приобрели эти способности?)
6. Как вы сохраняете заслуживающий доверия имидж? (Вы видите, когда клиент вам не доверяет? Как? Как сохранить заслуживающий доверия имидж в сети?)
7. Вы публикуете контент, связанный с Таро? Что интересного в вашем контенте? (Вы публикуете его вместе с личным контентом? Если да, то как вы сохраняете и свою личность как таролога, и обычного человека? Почему вы публикуете определенные типы контента?)
8. Как вы показываете свои сильные стороны [как таролога] через свой контент?
9. Вы бы все еще были тарологом, если бы эта сфера не была цивилизована? Почему?
10. Важно ли для вас взаимодействие с вашим контентом? Почему?
11. Почему вы публикуете контент, связанный с Таро? (Как вы рекламируете свои услуги? Является ли создание контента основным способом привлечения новых клиентов? Является ли потенциальный доход самым важным мотиватором для вас заниматься Таро?)
12. Считаете ли вы гадания на Таро своим основным источником дохода? (Как вы пришли к коммерциализации гаданий на Таро? Как вы устанавливаете цены на свои услуги?)
13. Как вы выделяетесь среди других тарологов на рынке?
14. Как вы общаетесь со своими потенциальными клиентами и аудиторией? (Что является самым важным в общении с клиентами?)
15. Как вы думаете, Таро популярно? (Когда и как вы это заметили? Почему это становится популярным? Являются ли цифрализация и коммерциализация Таро одним из главных факторов?)

Руководства по интервью для клиентов

Вы приглашены принять участие в исследовании под названием «Растущая популярность карт Таро в цифровом мире: доверие и коммерциализация».

Цель исследования — определить, почему карты Таро становятся популярными в социальных сетях и как это связано с доверием к тем, кто занимается Таро, а также с коммерциализацией и цифровизацией карт. Это исследование основано на качественных интервью, которая включает отдельные вопросы для тарологов и создателей контента, а также их аудитории/клиентов. Интервью займет около 20–30 минут.

Потенциальный риск участия в этом исследовании — исследователь (исследователи) не ожидают каких-либо рисков, связанных с участием в исследовании; но исследователь (исследователи) могут не предвидеть все риски участия в данном исследовании. Любая информация, полученная в ходе этого исследования, будет храниться в тайне в той мере, в какой это разрешено законом. Будут приложены все разумные усилия для сохранения конфиденциальности личной информации участников вашего исследования; однако полная конфиденциальность не может быть гарантирована.

Никакой материальной компенсации не будет. Результаты исследования и их копии будут доступны после его завершения. Для этого вам нужно связаться с руководителем проекта.

Участие в этом исследовании строго добровольное, и если вы согласны на участие, вы можете отказаться от него в любое время по любой причине без каких-либо негативных последствий для участника.

Это интервью будет содержать 15 основных вопросов, связанных с популярностью, цифровизацией и коммерциализацией Таро, однако оно может содержать любые дополнительные, уточняющие вопросы.

Я хочу попросить вашего согласия на проведение этого интервью. Если вы готовы дать мне свое согласие, пожалуйста, подпишите форму письменного согласия.

Вопросы:

1. Верите ли вы в Таро, магию, суеверия, духовность?
2. Делали ли вам какие-либо гадания на картах Таро? (Сколько раз? Платные или бесплатные? С какой темой это было связано?)
3. В каких случаях и ситуациях вы полагаетесь на гадания на картах Таро?
4. Как вы думаете, гадания на картах Таро требуют особых способностей? Какие они? (Как вы ищете их в людях?)

5. Каков образ заслуживающего доверия Таролога? (Что вы ищете в Тарологе?)
6. Смотрите ли вы контент, связанный с картами Таро? (В каких социальных сетях вы смотрите его чаще? Какой тип контента вам нравится больше всего?)
7. Ищете ли вы определенный контент или смотрите только то, что видите в рекомендациях? Почему? Верите ли вы в общие гадания на картах Таро, которые видите в своей ленте?)
8. Как вы выбираете, чей контент смотреть? (Каковы характеристики Таролога или его контента, на которые вы обращаете внимание?)
9. Вы обычно взаимодействуете с контентом, связанным с картами Таро? Как? (Почему вы взаимодействуете только с определенными типами контента? Почему какой-то контент «заслуживает» ваших лайков, а какой-то нет?)
10. Вы бы все еще интересовались Таро, если бы эта сфера не была цифрализована как сейчас?
11. Убеждает ли вас контент, который вы видите, покупать услуги у таролога? (Как вы думаете, это главная мотивация тарологов? Как вы думаете, сфера Таро коммерциализирована? Почему и каково ваше мнение об этом?)
12. Покупали ли вы когда-нибудь какие-либо услуги Таро? (Какими они были? Какова была ваша мотивация? Платили бы вы за другие услуги, связанные с Таро?)
13. Что заставило вас выбрать определенного таролога среди множества других людей на духовном рынке? (На что вы обращаете внимание перед покупкой услуг Таро?)
14. Как вы думаете, популярно ли Таро? (Когда и как вы это заметили? Почему оно становится популярным? Являются ли цифрализация и коммерциализация Таро одними из главных факторов?)

Observation sheet for digital ethnography

Digital ethnography will include analysis of 6 social media accounts of Tarot readers who provide different services and publish different types of content, 3 of them from Instagram, and 3 from Tik Tok.

Topics of interest	Variables
Popularity of account	number of followers, number of likes in Tik tok account, average number of likes and comments on

	videos, number of likes and comments under most popular videos.
General content	patterns in content, personal information, personal content not related to Tarot
Visuals	analysis of visuals of the page, pinned posts/videos, settings of videos, highlights of stories in Instagram.
Commercialization	advertisements of their own services, advertisements of other goods and services, prices for services.
Trustworthiness	tools for persuading the audience, showing personal strengths, presence of any certificates showing qualification.
Engagement	content of comments, engagement of authors with their audience in comments, engagements directly in videos, engagement in stories or highlights.

Form of written consent

Written Informed Consent Form

Introduction. You are invited to participate in a research study entitled “*The Rising Popularity of Tarot Cards in the Digitized World: Trust and Commercialization*”

Procedures. The purpose of the research is to investigate the ways of how Tarot cards are becoming popular on social media and how it is connected with trust to those who perform Tarot as well as with commercialization and digitalization of spirituality through lenses of social interaction between Tarotologists and their customers both online and in real life. This interview will take approximately 20 to 30 minutes to complete.

Risks. The potential risks of participating in this study are: the researcher(s) do not anticipate any risks associated with participating in the study; however the researcher(s) may not foresee all the risks of participating in this research.

Benefits. Anticipated benefits from this study add the potential benefits to studying Tarot cards

Compensation. No tangible compensation will be given. A copy of the research results will be available at the conclusion of the study. More information can be obtained by contacting the research PI.

Confidentiality & Privacy. Any information that is obtained during this study will be kept confidential to the full extent possible. All efforts, within reason, will be made to keep your personal information in your research record confidential but total confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

By total confidentiality, we mean that the real names, workplaces, and other personal information of the informant would be hidden and not used in future publications, reports in other open-access resources.

To the extent possible coded pseudonyms will be used. Access to the digital audio files of the interviews will be limited to the research team. The identifying information will be kept separately from the audio and transcripts of the interviews. All audio files, written materials and transcripts will remain the property of the research team and will not be used for other purposes without your additional permission. The audio files will be destroyed if the consultant withdraws and requests their destruction.

Voluntary Nature of the Study. Participation in this study is strictly voluntary, and if agreement to participation is given, it can be withdrawn at any time without prejudice.

Points of Contact. It is understood that should any questions or comments arise regarding this project, or a research related injury is received, the Principal Investigator, Edelweiss Azubayeva, +77064076626, edelweiss.azubayeva@nu.edu.kz should be contacted. Any other questions or concerns may be addressed to the Nazarbayev University Institutional Research Ethics Committee, resethics@nu.edu.kz.

Statement of Consent.

I, _____

Give my voluntary consent to participate in this study.

The researchers clearly explained to me the background information and objectives of the study and what my participation in this study involves.

I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary. I can at any time and without giving any reasons withdraw my consent, and this will not have any negative consequences for myself .

I understand that the information collected during this study will be treated confidentially.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher: _____

Signed _____ Date _____

Письменная форма информированного согласия

Введение. Вы приглашены к участию в исследовании под названием «**Растущая популярность карт Таро в цифровом мире: доверие и коммерциализация**».

Процедурная часть. Цель исследования — изучить, как карты Таро становятся популярными в социальных сетях и как это связано с доверием к тем, кто занимается Таро, а также с коммерциализацией и цифровизацией духовности через призму социального взаимодействия между тарологами и своих клиентов как онлайн, так и в реальной жизни. Это интервью займет примерно 20–30 минут.

Риски. Потенциальные риски, связанные с участием в проекте, включают следующее: исследователь (исследователи) не ожидают каких-либо рисков, связанных с участием в исследовании; но исследователь (исследователи) могут не предвидеть все риски участия в данном исследовании.

Положительные стороны. Предвидимые положительные аспекты участия в данном проекте включают вклад в изучение карт Таро.

Компенсация. К сожалению, никакой материальной компенсации не предполагается. Результаты исследования могут быть доступны после завершения исследования. Если вы хотите знать больше, свяжитесь с руководителем проекта.

Конфиденциальность. Любая информация, полученная в ходе исследования, будет иметь статус конфиденциальной. Будут предприняты все разумные усилия, чтобы сохранить в тайне ваши личные данные, но мы не можем гарантировать абсолютной конфиденциальности.

Под полной конфиденциальностью мы подразумеваем, что настоящие имена, места работы и другая личная информация информатора будут скрыты и не использованы в будущих публикациях, отчетах на других ресурсах открытого доступа.

По мере возможности будут использоваться закодированные псевдонимы. Доступ к цифровым аудиофайлам интервью будет ограничен исследовательской группой. Идентифицирующая информация будет храниться отдельно от аудиозаписей и стенограмм допросов. Все аудиофайлы, письменные материалы и стенограммы останутся собственностью исследовательской группы и не будут использоваться для других целей без вашего дополнительного разрешения. Аудиофайлы будут уничтожены, если участник откажется и потребует их уничтожения.

Добровольный характер исследования. Участие в этом исследовании является строго добровольным, и даже если вы дали согласие на участие, вы оставляете за собой право беспоследственно отозвать свое участие в любое время.

Контактное лицо. Предполагается, что в случае возникновения каких-либо вопросов или необходимости оставить комментарий относительно этого проекта, или в случае получения какого-либо ущерба, связанного с данным исследованием, вы должны связаться с руководителем проекта: Азубаева Эдельвейс, +77064076626, edelweiss.azubayeva@nu.edu.kz

По любым другим вопросам обращайтесь в Комитет институциональной исследовательской этики Назарбаев Университета: resethics@nu.edu.kz.

Удостоверение согласия.

Я, _____
_____, даю мое согласие на участие в исследовании. Исследователи ясным образом объяснили мне базовую информацию и цели данного исследования, а также возможные последствия моего участия.

Я понимаю, что мое участие является добровольным. В любой момент без объяснения причин я могу отозвать свое согласие, и это не повлечет никаких отрицательных последствий для меня лично.

Я понимаю, что информация, собранная в ходе данного исследования, будет иметь статус конфиденциальной.

Подпись: _____ Дата: _____

Исследователь: _____

Подпись: _____ Дата: _____

Recruiting message:

Dear ...,

I am Edelweiss Azubayeva, senior Sociology student at Nazarbayev University, Astana. I am writing to find out if you would like to take part in an interview for a capstone research project on the topic of the popularity of Tarot cards. This project aims to investigate the ways of how Tarot cards are becoming popular on social media and how it is connected with trust to those who perform Tarot as well as with commercialization and digitalization of Tarot cards.

Participation is voluntarily and fully anonymous. Interview takes 20 to 30 minutes to complete in online format or in offline format in Astana. Please let me know if you are interested

Уважаемый(-ая) ...,

Я, Азубаева Эдельвейс, студент последнего курса Назарбаева Университета в городе Астана, пишу вам, чтобы узнать не хотели бы вы принять участие в интервью для исследовательской работы на тему популярности карт Таро. Проект нацелен на исследование того, как карты Таро становятся популярными в социальных сетях и как это связано с доверием к тем, кто использует Таро, а также с коммерциализацией и цифрализацией карт Таро.

Участие добровольное и полностью анонимное. Интервью занимает 20-30 минут и может быть в формате онлайн либо в офлайн формате в городе Астана. Пожалуйста дайте знать если вы заинтересованы.