

The Influence of Social Media Tarot Content on Young Users' Emotional Awareness and Emotion Regulation

Yucheng Pang

Qingmiao School, Haidian Sijiqing
Campus, Beijing, China
Corresponding author:
MichaelPang29HDA@bibs.com.cn

Abstract:

This study examines the influence of social media tarot content on the emotional perception and regulation of young people aged 20–29. An online questionnaire (43 valid responses) and subsequent phone interviews were employed. Descriptive statistics, group comparisons by usage frequency and thematic analysis of open-ended responses indicate that individuals who engage more often with tarot report more positive feelings, clearer self-awareness and a greater likelihood of consulting tarot when making major decisions. However, they also display mild anxiety and a risk of dependence. Women engage more often and derive greater benefit than men; educational level appears to have little effect; and greater social media use is associated with more frequent tarot engagement. These findings reflect an experiential pattern comprising constructive self-reflection, oscillation between entertainment and guidance, and risk of dependence. The study offers an early view of how online mystical content affects users psychologically and socially, while noting limitations such as the small sample, cross-sectional design and self-report bias. Future work should include more participants and longitudinal tracking to balance emotional benefits against potential risks.

Keywords: Social media tarot; young users; emotional awareness; emotion regulation; risk of dependence.

1. Introduction

This study examines the current Chinese social media landscape. As job pressure grows, relationships become more complex and the future seems more uncertain, people aged 20–29 increasingly seek emotional support [1]. Tarot readings have been popular-

ized on apps such as Douyin and Xiaohongshu by recommendation algorithms and are now distributed through short videos and posts. What was once a one-on-one, offline service has been transformed into an online activity accessible to all, offering young people prompt, personal comfort [2,3]. This indicates how online mysticism shapes the emotional lives

of young people and raises new questions for platform governance and mental health services, making it a worthwhile topic of study.

This study addresses how social media tarot content affects young users' feelings and emotion regulation. A review of domestic and international literature on tarot dissemination, online emotion regulation and digital mysticism was conducted to establish the study's context. Convenience and snowball sampling were then used to distribute an online questionnaire, yielding 43 valid responses, supplemented by three telephone interviews for additional depth. The questionnaire included demographic details, measures of tarot usage and Likert-scale items on emotional perception and regulation; data were summarized with descriptive statistics and comparisons by usage frequency. Open-ended responses and interview notes were coded to identify key themes. This mixed-methods approach captured both general trends and individual narratives.

The aim is to illustrate both the emotional support and potential dependence associated with social media tarot use among youth. The findings provide initial evidence for studies with larger samples and longitudinal designs, and offer guidance for platform management and mental health interventions.

2. Research Methods

2.1 Questionnaire Design

There are three reasons for using an online questionnaire. First, an online questionnaire reaches many dispersed social media users at low cost and high speed. Second, answers can be easily converted into numerical data for later comparison. Third, similar recent studies use this method, and the question design now reflects real online scenarios, with both positive and negative wording to minimize mechanical responses [4].

The questionnaire had six parts. The first gathered basic details like age, gender and education for grouping. The second recorded tarot use — first platform, how often, preferred content and ways of interaction — to measure how much contact they have. The third and fourth were two five-point Likert scales: one for feelings (four positive items and four negative), the other for emotion regulation (also eight items). Higher scores mean stronger experiences. The fifth part had three yes/no questions to see if people rely on tarot for important decisions. The sixth part was an open question to collect typical stories to explain the numbers.

2.2 Data Collection

The questionnaire link was distributed via Wenjuanxing: convenience sampling in campus groups was followed by participant referral, forming a snowball sample. The target sample size was 40–50, and 43 valid questionnaires were obtained. In addition, three respondents participated in 10–25-minute phone interviews.

The sample had 55.8% women and 44.2% men; the numbers aged 20–24 and 25–29 were similar; and 60.5% had a bachelor's degree or above. Thirty-three people spent more than three hours online a day and ten less than three. This information provided the basis for later grouping into high and low frequency users and cross-comparisons.

2.3 Data Analysis

After data collection, the 43 valid questionnaires were imported into a spreadsheet and the mean scores and proportions for each item were calculated to describe the sample. The respondents were then divided into 'high-frequency users' (19 people) and 'low-frequency users' (24 people). The average scores on the feeling and emotion regulation scales were directly compared to see which group scored higher or lower, without complicated tests of significance. The open-ended answers and interview notes were read carefully, similar statements grouped, and three themes identified: 'positive experiences, mixed feelings and dependence risk.' This approach shows overall trends while preserving respondents' stories, thus providing dual support for the discussion.

3. Research Results

3.1 Detailed Analysis of Results

A total of 43 valid questionnaires were collected. Among the sample, 55.8% were female and 44.2% were male; the age groups were divided into 20–24 and 25–29, with similar numbers in each; 60.5% had a bachelor's degree or above. These basic facts show that the participants were generally well educated and slightly more female — essentially the main audience for the tarot reading content commonly seen on social media.

3.1.1 Tarot usage intensity and emotional experience

Dividing users into high-frequency (19) and low-frequency (24) groups revealed clear differences in emotional experience. The high group scored 4.1 on 'pay more attention to my inner self when watching' compared with 3.5 for the low group; 3.9 versus 3.4 on 'helps me understand my emotional state'; 4.0 versus 3.5 on 'more clearly recognizing my emotional needs'; and 3.8 versus 3.3 on

‘perceiving subtle changes in emotions.’ Across these items, higher engagement was associated with a stronger sense of understanding one’s emotions. With 5 as full marks, scores above 4 indicate a pronounced effect. On the four negative items, the high group’s scores for ‘emotional confusion’ and ‘feeling of uncertainty’ were 2.2 and 2.3, both below the midpoint of 3 and lower than the low group’s 2.6 and 2.8. Greater exposure was therefore associated with both enhanced insight and reduced confusion. The difference in emotion regulation was even more pronounced. The high group scored 4.2 on ‘feeling hopeful’ compared with 3.4 for the low group; 4.0 versus 3.3 on ‘relieving anxiety and stress’; 3.9 versus 3.4 on ‘seeing difficulties more positively’; and 4.3 versus 3.5 on ‘emotional comfort and support.’ These positive scores increased stepwise, suggesting that tarot provides immediate relief for high-frequency users. On the negative side, ‘exacerbating anxiety and worry’ in the high group was 2.9 compared with 2.5 in the low group, and ‘losing self-regulation ability’ 2.7 versus 2.1. This suggests that immediate relief may have side effects: the more one dwells on tarot, the greater the worry and weaker the self-control.

3.1.2 A warning about dependence behaviors

Beyond positive affect, dependence was assessed through three yes/no questions. In the high group, 68.4% would ‘consult tarot when faced with important decisions,’ equivalent to 13 of the 19 people; 42.1% would change their original plans because a prediction was unfavorable, about eight people; and 31.6% would hesitate without tarot, about six people. Moreover, 21.1%, i.e., four people, answered ‘yes’ to all three questions, a typical ‘complete reliance’ type. In the low group, the ‘yes’ proportions for the three questions were only 12.5%, 12.5% and 8.3%, respectively, making the difference obvious. This indicates that for high-frequency users, tarot is not merely entertainment but gradually becomes a decision-making aid. The negative item ‘exacerbate anxiety and worry’ on the scale corresponded closely to dependence. The high group’s 2.9 was close to the midpoint of 3 — not severe but 0.4 points higher than the low group’s 2.5; ‘more uneasy about the future’ at 2.9 overall was also closer to the midpoint than the other negative items. These two numbers remind us that when tarot influences decisions, it magnifies feelings of uncertainty. The interview produced a case of ‘panicking after drawing an inverted Tower card,’ in which a 22-year-old man cancelled a trip because of an unfavorable prediction, vividly illustrating this dynamic.

3.1.3 Content preferences behind gender differences

The proportion of high-frequency users among women

was 62.5% versus 21.0% among men; in terms of content choices, 95.8% of women focused on emotional topics compared with 78.9% of men. Men, on the other hand, scored higher on career (31.6%) and fortune (26.3%) than women at 16.7% and 8.3%. The average emotional perception score for women was 3.9 versus 3.3 for men. These patterns suggest that women are more likely to use tarot to discuss feelings and seek comfort, whereas men are more interested in ‘career’ and ‘wealth’ forecasts and are overall less engaged. This difference aligns with traditional gender roles and patterns of emotional expression: women have greater needs for expression and sharing on social media, and tarot provides immediate feedback; men are curious about predictions regarding ‘career’ and ‘wealth,’ but a layer of rational caution still separates them from truly relying on it.

3.1.4 Time investment and algorithmic recommendations

Of the sample, 33 people spent more than three hours a day on social media, 54.5% of whom were high-frequency tarot users; of the other ten people who spent less than three hours, only 10% were high-frequency users. This sharp contrast reflects algorithmic logic: the longer one watches, the more precise the recommendations become, and the more often tarot appears, forming a cycle of ‘interest → recommendation → further clicks.’ A total of 81.4% said their first exposure channel was Douyin or Xiaohongshu, indicating that short video feeds are the main avenue for tarot to spread. Staying on the platform long enough brings more similar content; over time, tarot becomes a constant presence in the feed. A single interaction may label a user as interested in tarot, leading to even denser recommendations and fostering high-frequency usage.

3.1.5 The blurred impact of educational background on usage differences

The rate of high-frequency use among those with a bachelor’s degree or higher was 46.2%, and 41.2% among those with a junior college degree or lower — not a big gap. In terms of content preferences, the bachelor’s group preferred ‘emotional topics’ (92.3%) and career topics (30.8%), while the junior college group preferred ‘emotional topics’ (82.4%) and career topics (11.8%). The junior college group had a higher interest in daily fortunes and financial fortunes. These numbers show a difference in interest rather than trust: education level does not decide whether someone is a heavy user, but it affects what they watch. Those with higher education look more at career predictions, maybe because they care more about career planning; those with lower education look more

at daily and financial fortunes, reflecting practical needs. In general, education level does not strongly separate dependence or positive scores, which means tarot appeals to young people across education levels, and its effects depend more on personal usage and content context [5,6].

3.1.6 Content format and online preference

Among respondents, 69.7% clearly preferred online tarot, far higher than the 7% who preferred offline; another 23.3% said they ‘don’t actively seek readings,’ but they still come across tarot content without trying. The high online preference comes first from the low entry barrier: just open a short video to ‘hear the reader flip the cards’; second from the relaxed atmosphere created by anonymity and interaction in the comments. This forms a chain: low-cost try → timely emotional feedback → positive reinforcement → gradually higher frequency. Offline tarot, on the other hand, requires an appointment and a clear payment, which is obviously less convenient for young people who just want to try it or adjust their mood at any time [7].

3.1.7 A three-layer framework of positive and negative experiences

In the open-ended question and interviews, positive experiences mainly centered on ‘emotional reflection,’ ‘psychological comfort’ and ‘self-discovery.’ Many respondents wrote ‘drawing a card makes me stop and think about what I am really worried about’ and ‘hearing the interpretation feels like someone understands me.’ This matches the high scores on positive items in the high group. The conflicting experiences revolved around ‘the tug-of-war between reason and intuition’ and ‘the blur between entertainment and reliance.’ Someone said ‘I know it is not necessarily accurate, but I still can’t help looking,’ and another mentioned ‘sharing it with friends as a joke, yet taking it seriously myself.’ Negative experiences focused on ‘over-reliance’ and ‘a decline in decision-making ability,’ corresponding to the dependence indicators of the high group. Taken together, these insights resemble three concentric circles: the outer layer represents emotional comfort; moving inward is habitual consultation; and further in is reliance on divination for decisions. Crossing into the innermost circle is associated with rising anxiety.

3.2 Summary

Synthesizing all the data and interview accounts leads to a straightforward conclusion: tarot on social media functions as a readily available source of emotional relief. Frequent use does not necessarily lead to immediate dependence, yet for some it has become an integral part of daily life. The high-frequency group recorded more positive

feelings, but they also tended to rely on tarot for guidance during decision-making, retaining some residual anxiety. Women found resonance in emotional content, whereas men treated tarot more as a trend indicator; the longer one scrolls, the more recommendations appear and the more persistent tarot becomes in the feed. Education level has little effect on use intensity but shapes what users watch and care about. Overall, the emotional value of tarot coexists with a risk of dependence: not everyone will become reliant, but using it as the primary decision-making tool is associated with mild anxiety [8-10].

4. Conclusion

The results show that young users who frequently engage with social media tarot content gain more comfort and are more aware of their inner feelings, but when making important decisions are more inclined to rely on tarot and experience mild anxiety. Women as a whole use tarot more often and invest more emotionally than men; the more time spent on social media, the more often tarot appears, while educational differences are not obvious.

This finding suggests that online tarot may be a convenient tool for self-regulation yet also carries a risk of dependence. It provides evidence for research on digital mysticism and youth psychology, and offers direct pointers for platform content reminders, mental health education and media literacy, helping to provide emotional support while reducing potential side effects.

Future research should include more participants, track them over time or use objective behavior data, and compare the effects of different formats — such as short videos, live streams and posts — on dependence and emotions, to reveal more clearly how online tarot affects young people’s emotion regulation.

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