

1 "The answer is already in my mind": How People Tell Their Own Fortunes Using
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3

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38

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53 1 Introduction

54 Fortune telling has long been a cultural practice sustained across generations and has continually evolved [10].
 55 Throughout history, people have sought ways to anticipate and interpret their futures [14, 31, 64], moving from
 56 observations of natural phenomena such as stars [2, 27, 78] to symbolic systems [33] like tarot cards, Ouija boards, and
 57 other divinatory tools [3]. Across these diverse practices, people engage in divination to manage uncertainty: they seek
 58 to guide actions with a spiritual rationale [26, 83], affirm emotions and find comfort in outcomes [8], envision possible
 59 futures and project their imagination [14, 65], and at times simply find amusement in unexpected predictions [83].
 60

61 Although changes in form and differences in purpose, the essence of fortune telling has remained consistent as an
 62 interactive process sustained by human participation and interpretation [63]. Once, people consulted seers face-to-face,
 63 seeking oracles and readings while finding trust and comfort not only in the dialogue itself but also in the ritualistic
 64 settings that framed the experience. But recent advances in natural-language-based systems, particularly generative
 65 AI(Generative AI) and large language models (LLMs), have introduced alternative ways for people to interact with these
 66 conversational agents for spiritual prediction-making [36, 41]. The conversational capacities of GenAI enable it to
 67 approximate human seers by simulating core practices such as attentive listening [13], symbolic interpretation [88], and
 68 contextual elaboration [69, 79]. It shows that GenAI can reshape divination from a ritual grounded in human interaction
 69 into an accessible, on-demand digital experience.
 70

71 However, little is known about how people specifically engage with GenAI in the domain of divination, what needs
 72 they seek to fulfill, what kinds of inquiries they bring, and how these interactions may reshape the meaning and practice
 73 of fortune telling itself. Prior HCI research has noted that people increasingly turn to GenAI for spiritual and emotional
 74 support [82], such as seeking psychological comfort [48, 85], engaging in role-play (such as therapists [44], mentors [54],
 75 or debaters [89]), or even co-constructing religious experiences [7, 24, 25]. However, unlike creative or collaborative
 76 applications of GenAI, fortune-telling introduces heightened risks [45]: whether through blind acceptance or subtle
 77 subconscious influence, GenAI readings may shape real-world decisions in harmful ways [21]. These risks remain
 78 underexplored, leaving a research gap in understanding how people engage with such tools, how they perceive and
 79 evaluate AI predictions, and how they integrate them into their personal narratives.
 80

81 Moreover, prior work has regarded tarot cards as a powerful medium for reflection [43], highlighting their role
 82 in facilitating storytelling [81] and personal world building [49]. Related research further shows that transforming
 83 personal data into visualizations can deepen self-understanding [60]. Building on this, expressive practices such as
 84 textual summarization and text-to-image generation provide ways to share and reflect on their understandings of tarot
 85 readings.
 86

87 Thus, our research is guided by the following questions:

88 **RQ1:** How do people engage in divination practices using GenAI? (Process & Practice)

89 **RQ2:** How do people perceive and evaluate predictions from GenAI? (Perception & Belief)

90 **RQ3:** How do people represent and express the predictions generated through GenAI? (Visual & Verbal)

91 To explore these questions, we conducted a workshop study with 44 participants, where they engaged with a GenAI
 92 tool for tarot-based divination [49, 68]. Participants interacted with the GenAI to interpret a Romany Spread (7x3 layout
 93 for past, present, and future) [52], then created textual narratives and visual images representing their envisioned
 94 futures. We complemented these activities with semi-structured interviews and analyzed all data (texts, images, and
 95 transcripts) thematically through independent coding and collaborative discussion to enable a qualitative understanding
 96 of how GenAI is used in divination and what it means to participants.
 97

105 Our findings reveal an active process where participants engage with GenAI divination, iteratively refining prompts to
106 push GenAI beyond generic or vague outputs and using contextual dialogue to co-construct personally relevant readings.
107 We show that belief in GenAI divination is not passive acceptance, but rather an act of selective endorsement, where users
108 validate interpretations that resonate with their lived experiences while dismissing others. In terms of representation
109 and expression, their tendency to favor more optimistic interpretations suggests risks of self-deception, particularly
110 when such readings could influence subsequent decision-making. These findings help fill a gap in understanding how
111 humans engage with GenAI in divinatory contexts, highlighting GenAI's role not simply as a source of fortune-telling
112 but as a medium for meaning-making, decision-making, and self-reflection. Our study also sheds light on how people
113 view technology and what they expect from it in spiritually oriented and emotionally delicate contexts.
114
115

118 2 Background

120 2.1 Transitioning from traditional divination to digital divination

122 People often seek divination during periods of uncertainty, major life transitions, or when facing difficult decisions,
123 using it as a coping mechanism for anxiety and a tool for exploring possible futures [19, 77]. Tarot, a popular form of
124 divination today, began as a 15th-century Italian card game and was only linked to divinatory use after its spread to
125 France in the 18th century [4]. In recent years, tarot use has been repositioned as a psychological tool for self-reflection
126 rather than merely a method for predicting the future [32]. Contemporary practitioners turn to tarot and similar
127 divination forms to seek insights into various personal concerns, including romantic relationships, life decisions, career
128 planning, and self-understanding [19].
129

130 With the development of AI technology and the rise of online platforms, early research has begun exploring how
131 digital divination makes tarot more accessible while expanding the imagination around tarot applications. For example,
132 Self Arcana, a role-playing game where players draw and interpret their own tarot cards through storytelling to
133 achieve greater self-insight [18], demonstrates how traditional tarot-based self-exploration can be effectively adapted
134 for digital environments. AI has also expanded the use of divinatory contexts and frameworks to gain insight into
135 problems that resist concrete analysis or to support creative work. For example, Sortilège, a visual analytics system
136 employing tarot card metaphors, encourages users to engage critically with algorithmic insights, demonstrating how
137 metaphorical frameworks can deepen data understanding [46]. Similarly, procedural generation tools like Nostrandomus
138 and Tiphareth highlight the continued importance of human curation in generating meaningful tarot experiences,
139 suggesting that while algorithms can produce novel content, human interpretation remains essential for personalized
140 engagement [61].
141

142 More widely used GenAI fortune-telling tools, like Quin and Tarotoo, which allow users to repeatedly engage with
143 AI predictions, tailoring their experience to personal desires and beliefs, attempt to replicate the customized experience
144 of traditional real-world divination through dynamic interaction. These platforms enable users to actively shape the
145 narrative, illustrating the intersection of technology, self-expression, and belief [39, 43].
146

147 While these digital platforms offer convenience and privacy, they have some limitations in multimodal elements
148 compared to traditional divination. Traditional fortune-telling typically involves physical rituals, face-to-face interaction
149 with practitioners, and embodied ritual gestures that contribute to the overall experience [50, 67]. Additionally, human
150 practitioners can observe users' emotional states and body language, enabling dynamic questioning and responsive
151 guidance throughout the divination process. Current GenAI divination tools primarily rely on text-based interfaces,
152

157 potentially diminishing the tactile and social dimensions that many practitioners consider essential to meaningful
158 divination experiences and affecting the overall effectiveness of the divinatory outcome.
159

160 Despite the growing prevalence of these AI-mediated practices, research has yet to systematically examine how people
161 actually engage with GenAI-generated divination content in their everyday lives. Key areas warranting investigation
162 include how people's divination behaviors change in AI-mediated contexts, what interaction patterns emerge during
163 these sessions, and how users and AI systems collaborate to create meaningful experiences.
164

165 2.2 Perception and reflection in GenAI-based Fortune-Telling

166

167 As a long-standing cross-cultural practice, divination has attracted extensive psychological research examining how
168 people interact with ambiguous outcomes and find personal meaning in vague predictions.
169

170 The Barnum effect [22] offers crucial insight into fortune-telling's universal appeal: when individuals receive
171 vague descriptions with broad applicability, they experience heightened personal relevance through self-referential
172 processing [22, 47]. This phenomenon works synergistically with confirmation bias, leading people to actively seek
173 evidence supporting pre-existing beliefs while dismissing contradictory information [55]. The halo effect further
174 amplifies trust when authoritative symbols or ritual contexts are present [35, 56], leading to systematic overestimation
175 of credibility [23]. These same psychological mechanisms persist when users engage with AI fortune-telling tools [38, 39].
176 This finding suggests a psychological tendency toward "rational superstition," where individuals' belief systems interact
177 with AI outputs to affirm existing worldviews [70].
178

179 Rather than representing mere cognitive errors, these mechanisms create opportunities for psychological flexibility
180 and meaning-making, though their ultimate impact depends heavily on how they are guided and interpreted. Historical
181 Research has identified potential positive psychological dimensions of practices like tarot reading, including emotional
182 processing, meaning construction, enhanced self-awareness, and facilitated self-reflection [4, 28, 62, 84]. These outcomes
183 emerge through collaborative interpretation of ambiguous card meanings, where practitioners and users employ
184 projection, archetypal symbolism, and narrative construction to derive personally meaningful insights from vague
185 imagery and symbols.
186

187 Recent work on AI also demonstrates how computational systems can scaffold self-awareness across diverse contexts,
188 from supporting novice writers [90] to facilitating reflection in collaborative meetings [12] or exploring stress [59, 76].
189 Meanwhile, AI conversational agents can also facilitate creative [40] or critical reflection [17, 20, 37, 42, 51]. Research also
190 demonstrates that integrating time series behavioral patterns [53] or incorporating embodied gestural information [1]
191 can enhance reflective processes in these systems. These systems show promise in facilitating meaning-making
192 by providing external perspectives and encouraging users to articulate and examine their thoughts and feelings.
193 However, interactions based on large language models also carry inherent risks due to their reliance on articulation and
194 interpretation, potentially unconsciously reinforcing certain content or perspectives [75, 76].
195

196 The rise of GenAI fortune-telling tools offers increasingly convenient access to divination practices, potentially
197 democratizing the psychological benefits associated with personal reflection and meaning-making [5]. However, this
198 technological shift introduces unexplored territory in human-AI interaction. Current research has yet to examine
199 whether these interactions carry different psychological risks compared to human-mediated divination practices, or how
200 people perceive and interpret GenAI-generated divination content. The ways users make sense of GenAI fortune-telling
201 predictions—whether they view them as meaningful insights, entertainment, or something in between—may differ
202 from traditional practitioner-client dynamics. Understanding these dynamics becomes crucial as AI divination tools
203 proliferate and potentially reshape how people engage with meaning-making practices.
204

209 2.3 Tarot as a Method for Spiritual Expression

210 Tarot cards have increasingly become a versatile tool in spiritual expression, also offering innovative approaches to
211 ideation and learning [49]. In interaction design, Tarot-inspired cards stimulate divergent thinking and provide a
212 structured framework for exploring design concepts [15]. In education, play-based Tarot decks encourage broader play
213 qualities in teacher training, demonstrating the cards' role in fostering creativity and exploration [73]. The creation of
214 Tarot decks has even been seen as a form of world-building, where designers facilitate personal and collective growth
215 through the artifacts they produce [49]. Additionally, Tarot imagery has inspired various artistic interpretations, such as
216 batik paintings, where the symbolic representations of Tarot cards are adapted into visual art [66, 72]. These applications
217 highlight Tarot cards' enduring appeal and adaptability across design, education, and art.
218

219 The intersection of AI and tarot card design has recently garnered attention, illustrating how AI can enhance the potential of Tarot as a tool for self-reflection, storytelling, and inspiration [57]. For instance, Sullivan [81] developed a
220 tarot-based narrative generation system to create movie-like story synopses, demonstrating the storytelling potential of Tarot. Lustig [43] employed machine learning to generate tarot decks, exploring how AI-generated artifacts can
221 inspire self-reflection among designers. Similarly, Pichlmair [61] applied procedural generation techniques to partially
222 generate Tarot card sets, creating inspiration tools based on divinatory practices. Shin [71] developed an AI system to
223 translate academic design concepts into more accessible, tarot-inspired design cards, further emphasizing AI's potential
224 to communicate complex ideas.
225

226 These studies underscore the growing interest in AI-generated tarot designs and their potential to inspire self-reflection,
227 enhance storytelling, and communicate complex design concepts. They also point to the challenges and opportunities in integrating AI into creative processes, offering a foundation for exploring how AI-powered card-based
228 artifacts, such as Tarot-inspired tools, can be designed to support design thinking, self-reflection, and creative expression.
229 By examining these intersections, our research seeks to understand how AI can empower the creation of personalized
230 and dynamic card-based systems that blend creative expression with predictive technologies, advancing both design
231 practice and user engagement.
232

233 3 Methods**234 3.1 Participants and Recruitment**

235 A total of 44 participants in 6 workshops were recruited through multiple channels, including university campuses,
236 workplaces, and an art museum, as detailed in Table 1. Participants were self-selected volunteers who expressed interest
237 in exploring AI-based fortune telling; prior experience with tarot or other divination practices was neither required nor
238 used as an exclusion criterion. This strategy yielded a demographically diverse sample of participants (ages 18–55)
239 across three major geographical regions (Asia, Europe, and North America) and varied educational backgrounds, while
240 maintaining a balanced gender distribution.

241 The primary limitation of our sample is that the majority of participants were in their twenties, a distribution shaped
242 by both recruitment channels and the relatively higher interest of younger populations in AI-based divination. This
243 provides important insights into Gen Z perspectives but constrains the broader applicability of our findings to older age
244 groups. In addition, more than half of the workshops were conducted with participants based in Asia, while fewer were
245 drawn from Europe and North America, and none from other regions. This geographic imbalance also constrains the
246 extent to which our findings can be generalized across diverse cultural contexts.
247

Participant ID	Gender	Age	Details	Region	Place
P1	Male	21	Recruited from university students	Hongkong, China	Classroom
P2	Female	22			
P3	Female	19			
P4	Male	22			
P5	Female	20			
P6	Male	20			
P7	Male	19			
P8	Male	18			
P9	Female	22			
P10	Female	22			
P11	Male	21			
P12	Male	22			
P13	Female	46	Recruited during art museum on-site events	Seoul, Korea	Art Museum
P14	Female	48			
P15	Male	36			
P16	Male	24			
P17	Female	40			
P18	Male	37			
P19	Female	50			
P20	Female	49			
P21	Male	46			
P22	Male	49			
P23	Male	55			
P24	Female	26			
P25	Male	36			
P26	Female	40			
P27	Female	46			
P28	Female	25	Recruited from working professionals	Shanghai, China	Home
P29	Male	27			
P30	Female	26			
P31	Female	25			
P32	Female	30			
P33	Male	25			
P34	Female	23	Recruited from university students	Roma, Italy	Classroom
P35	Male	24			
P36	Female	27			
P37	Male	25			
P38	Male	26	Recruited from working professionals	New York, USA	Home
P39	Female	24			
P40	Female	24			
P41	Male	26	Recruited from university students	Delft, Netherlands	Online
P42	Male	26			
P43	Male	24			
P44	Male	24			

Table 1. Demographic Information of Participants and Workshop Details

Ethical integrity was upheld throughout the study. All participants provided informed consent in advance and agreed to have their interactions recorded for research purposes. The study protocols strictly adhered to the guidelines of the Manuscript submitted to ACM

institutional Internal Review Board (IRB) [58], ensuring participant privacy and data protection. Upon completion of the workshop, participants were monetarily compensated for their time and efforts.

3.2 Procedure

The workshops followed a four-phase structure: introduction, GenAI fortune-telling, textual and visual reflection, and semi-structured interviews. The procedure details show in Figure2.



Fig. 2. Study Procedure: (1) Pre-survey & recruitment, (2) Introduce the workshop, (3) Choose a tarot card column from "Romany Spread" layout, (4) Use GenAI for fortune-telling, (5) Visualize interpretations with GenAI, (6) Followed by a semi-structured interview.

In the introduction phase, researchers introduced the study's information and procedures, including an explanation of the Romany Spread Tarot Layout. This layout consists of a 7x3 card matrix representing the past, present, and future, and is distinctive in its capacity to accommodate multiple interpretations simultaneously. Unlike common divinatory practices where the card spread is tailored to the type of question posed by the seeker, the Romany Spread was selected for pragmatic reasons: in workshop settings with larger groups and limited time, random card drawing could not be fairly implemented for all participants. The Romany Spread thus provided a standardized yet flexible structure suitable for collective engagement.

In the fortune-telling phase, participants first formulated a personal question for divination and then selected one of the Romany Spread columns to guide the GenAI-generated reading. Large language models (e.g., ChatGPT, Gemini, Poe) were employed to produce tarot interpretations. Participants were encouraged to iteratively prompt and probe the system, refining their queries until they achieved a satisfactory understanding of the reading.

In the reflection phase, participants concluded their interpretations in writing before experimenting with prompts to generate visual representations of their envisioned futures. Using text-to-image generation models (Stable Diffusion, MidJourney, or DALL-E), they iteratively refined these images until the outputs aligned with their intended meanings.

Finally, in the interview phase, participants engaged in 10-min semi-structured interviews reflecting on their overall experience. These discussions centered on how GenAI tools influenced their interpretation of the tarot readings and shaped their personal sense-making and envisioned trajectories.

Each workshop lasted between 60 and 90 minutes, depending on the depth of participant engagement. This structured procedure created space for both individual reflection and critical examination of GenAI's role in facilitating interpretive and creative practices within the context of fortune-telling. Figure 3 illustrates two moments from the workshops.

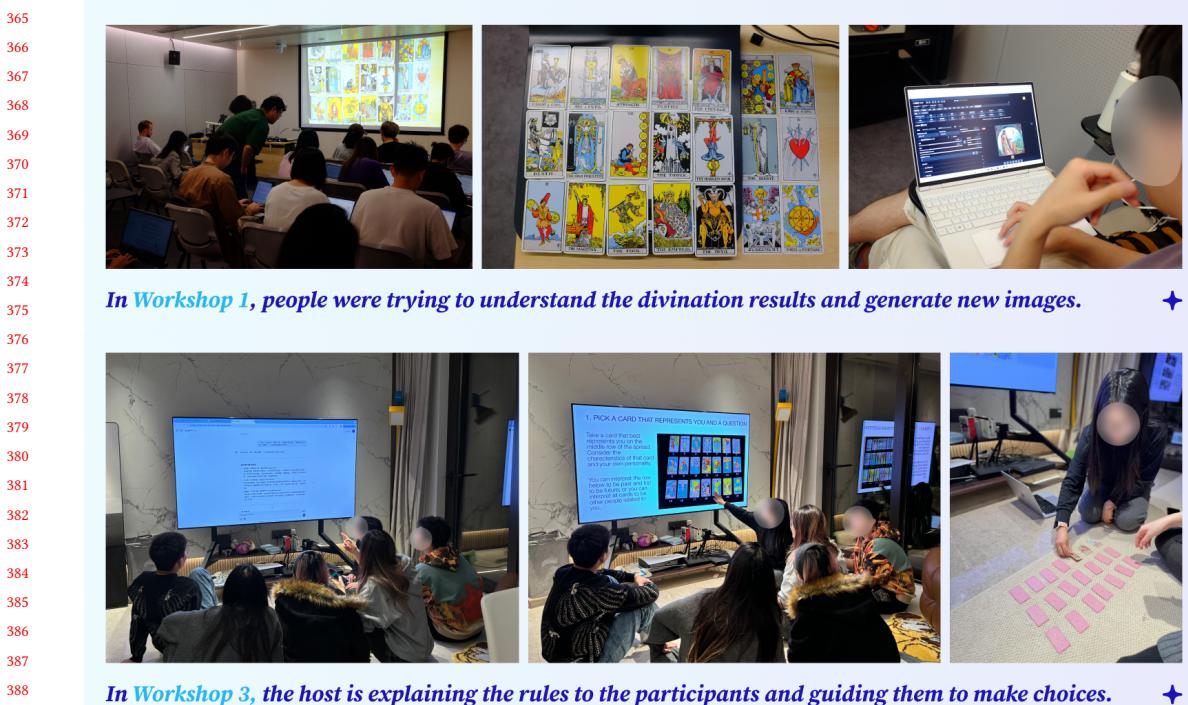


Fig. 3. Two moments from the workshops.

3.3 Data Analysis

We utilized open coding for thematic analysis [9] as outlined in grounded theory [16]. Three researchers independently coded the data collected from workshop content, semi-structured interviews, and participant-created conclusions and artifacts, including tarot readings and AI-generated images, ensuring rigor and impartiality. All potentially identifying information was carefully removed to ensure participant privacy. Based on the shared codebook, we engaged in reflexive dialogue and iterative discussions to identify themes in the data, identifying patterns related to participants' engagement with GenAI tools, their interpretive practices in tarot readings, and their reflections in outputs.

4 Results

In this research, we conducted an in-depth analysis of how individuals engaged with GenAI fortune-telling, identifying a three-stage journey spanning the process of interaction, the perception of generated results, and the representation of envisioned futures. Therefore, we answered *RQ1* in Section 4.1, *RQ2* in Section 4.2, and *RQ3* in Section 4.3. We summarize our main findings in Figure 4: participants navigated the impersonality and vagueness of AI outputs by developing strategies to personalize, selectively believe, and reinterpret them, ultimately reshaping GenAI predictions into meaningful self-narratives that often carried an optimistic bias [87], while also entailing risks of self-deception. Through this analysis, we fill an important research gap in understanding GenAI's role in spiritual and divinatory practices, offering a perspective on how these tools mediate meaning-making, decision-making, and self-reflection ways that extend beyond mere prediction.

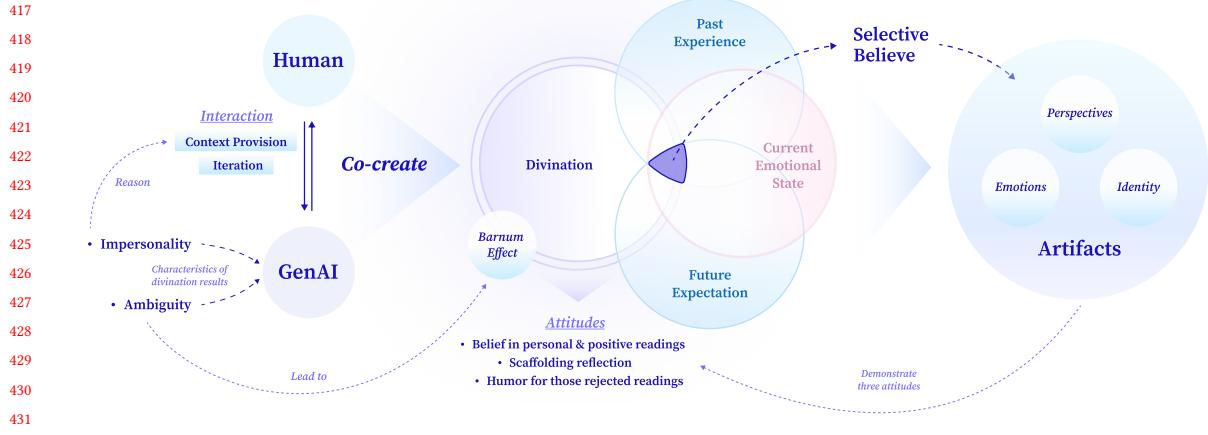


Fig. 4. The summary of our main findings.

4.1 Iterative Prompting of GenAI for Reaching Personal Relevance

Participants' questions to GenAI centered on decisions, future trajectories, and the outcomes of ongoing situations. For example, P42 asked whether to stay working abroad, P16 wondered if their career path would bring happiness, and P14 sought reassurance about passing an interview. While shaped by contemporary contexts such as study, work, and relationships, these concerns echo those raised in traditional divination. While the questions themselves resembled those asked in traditional divination, GenAI's replies were often vague and impersonal, prompting participants to iteratively refine their inputs in order to reach personal relevance.

4.1.1 Challenges Arising from the GenAI's Impersonality. Participants described the GenAI as impersonal and generic, which often made the divination experience feel incomplete or unsatisfying. These limitations highlighted the importance of both well-designed system prompts and more conversational AI personas. Many noted that the system lacked the distinctive presence of a human tarot reader, including the ability to ask spontaneous follow-up questions, offer observational guidance, or provide a sense of privacy and emotional safety. For participants new to tarot, the absence of basic procedural guidance, such as reminding users to ask questions, further complicated the interaction. Figure 5 shows some typical problems mentioned by participants.

P1 reflected on this limitation: "*ChatGPT doesn't really understand me...I don't feel it really knows me unless I ask it to take a role.*" He added, "*It can only provide general information. For example, when it gives advice on financial matters, I don't fully understand it, so I have to ask it to elaborate.*" P30 described a similar experience, expressing frustration that the AI felt like a "*vending machine for answers*" rather than a guide. She emphasized that a human tarot reader would "*look at you and ask follow-up questions,*" offering interactive guidance and a personal connection that the AI could not replicate. P2 also noted that the AI's reliance on text alone limited its interpretive capacity: "*It's difficult for ChatGPT to make judgments based on very little information. A real tarot reader can assess based on appearance and other cues.*"

Novice users particularly struggled with procedural uncertainties. P42, a first-time tarot user, was unsure how to start: "*So do I just ask a question? Is there something I'm supposed to choose first?*" Without explanations about card spreads or the sequence of a reading, participants reported feeling confused and insecure.

Concerns about privacy and emotional safety were also common. P9 said, "*When I'm sharing something personal, I want to feel that it's confidential. With the AI, it feels like anyone could see it, or it might just give a generic answer without*

⁴⁶⁹ *understanding.*" P32 raised similar concerns, noting that the impersonal tone made her hesitant to disclose sensitive
⁴⁷⁰ relationship issues, limiting the depth of her engagement.
⁴⁷¹

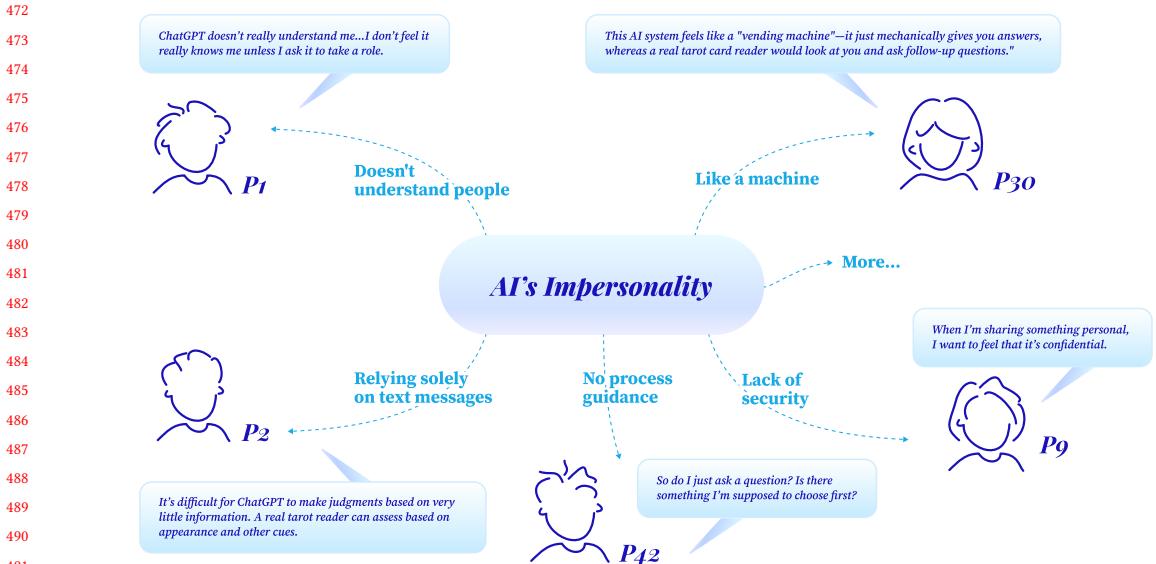


Fig. 5. Participants noted that there are some challenges from GenAI's impersonality.

Together, these accounts highlight that the GenAI's lack of human-like presence, interactive guidance, and procedural support affected both the usability and the emotional resonance of the system. Participants often needed to actively prompt the AI for clarification or elaboration, which disrupted the natural flow of the reading and reduced the sense of personal connection typically associated with tarot interactions.

4.1.2 User Strategies for Directing the Dialogue through Context Provision and Iteration. To counteract the AI's generic tendencies, participants developed strategies to actively shape the conversation. Rather than passively receiving responses, they provided detailed personal context and iteratively reframed their questions, gradually steering the interaction toward more relevant and emotionally resonant outcomes. This transformed the exchange from a simple "query & response" dynamic into a more collaborative process of meaning-making.

For some participants, supplying personal details was a way to "teach" the AI how to respond in ways that matched their lived experiences. P9 described this process as akin to querying a database: "*I feel it's more like a database—the more detailed my questions, the more detailed the responses. I don't fully trust it, but when I use an I Ching style, the answers seem more accurate.*" Similarly, P8 emphasized that combining tarot with personal information yielded answers that felt less generic and more tailored: "*Using tarot with personal information and ChatGPT is different from using GPT alone. It provides extra clues, personalized, specific answers rather than overly generic ones.*"

Other participants employed iterative reframing to align the AI's interpretation with their current concerns. When the AI's initial optimistic reading felt disconnected from her relationship struggles, P34 repeatedly emphasized terms like "*uncertainty*" and "*discord*", which eventually shifted the system's output to better capture her emotional reality. In doing so, she transformed the interaction into a negotiation over meaning, using her inputs as corrective signals to direct the AI's interpretive stance.

Participants also used follow-up questions to refine predictions and test alternative scenarios. For example, as shown in Figure 6, P28 began with the query, "When will my next serious relationship happen?" with *Temperance (upright)*, *The Chariot (upright)*, and *The World (Reversed)*. The AI highlighted "unresolved emotional baggage" in its reading of *The World (Reversed)* and framed this as a call for proactive action, encouraging her to pursue new opportunities through social engagement. P28 was struck by the uncanny relevance of this interpretation, noting that it resonated with her ongoing entanglement with an ex-partner. Motivated by this, she asked whether her ex might contact her, to which the AI suggested that while some emotional connection might remain, any contact would likely be driven by inertia or situational triggers rather than a genuine intention to reconcile. Building on this exchange, she disclosed that she was currently using dating apps and posed another question: "Will I find a partner on a dating app?" This time, the AI responded affirmatively, grounding its reasoning in the symbolism of *The Chariot* and *Temperance*, and presenting a more concrete pathway. Through this iterative questioning and contextual disclosure, P28 gradually anchored the system's broad interpretations in her own lived circumstances, experiencing the reading as both personalized and progressively clarifying.

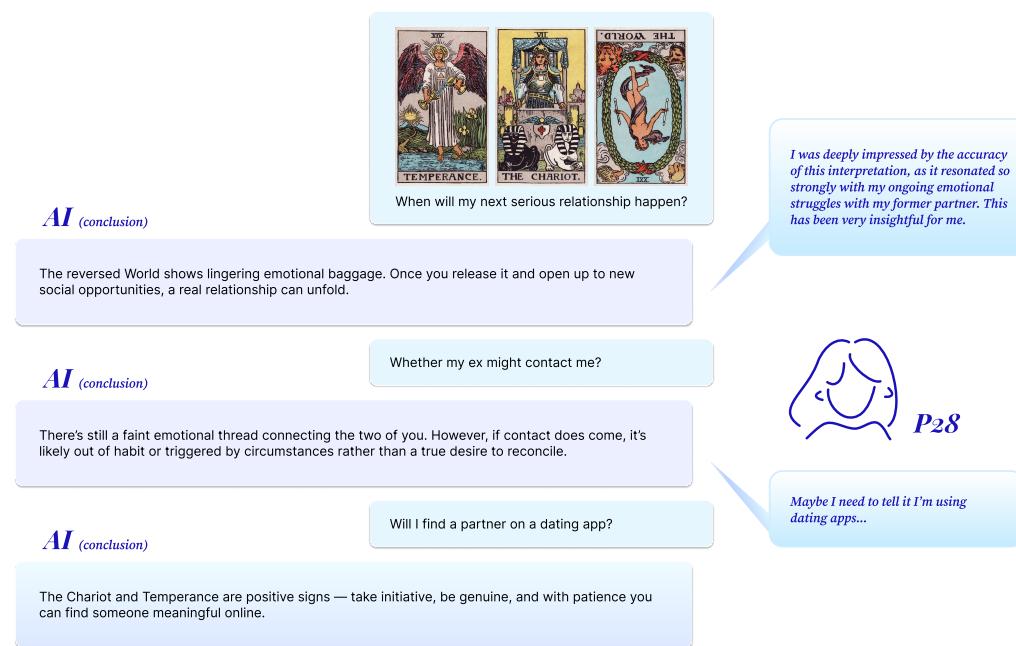


Fig. 6. P28 continuously provided new information and interacted with the GenAI, which facilitates generating divination results that are more personally relevant.

These practices illustrate how participants compensated for the AI's lack of initiative by actively directing the interaction. Providing personal information, reframing prompts, and pursuing targeted follow-ups enabled them to co-construct interpretations that felt personally meaningful. In doing so, users repositioned themselves not as passive recipients of AI outputs, but as active collaborators shaping the trajectory and depth of the divination process.

573 4.2 Co-Constructing Belief as a Pathway to Self-Reflection

574 Participants co-constructed belief in the GenAI's outputs through the ambiguity of readings. This process involved
 575 selectively accepting interpretations that aligned with their experiences, projecting personal meaning onto vague
 576 statements, and using the outputs as a scaffold for reflection and decision-making.

577 4.2.1 *Selective Belief Based on Alignment with Personal Experience.* Participants engaged with AI-generated divination
 578 selectively, validating predictions that resonated with their lived experiences while dismissing those that did not.
 579 This pattern revealed how participants actively filtered GenAI outputs through their own expectations and self-
 580 understandings, treating the system less as a fixed authority and more as a resource to be negotiated.

581 When predictions aligned with participants' realities, they were often embraced enthusiastically. For example, P32,
 582 who sought advice on improving communication with her academic advisor to ensure graduation, described the AI's
 583 interpretation as "*strikingly accurate.*" Her reading featured *Strength (Reversed)* (confidence issues), *The Hierophant*
 584 (*Reversed*) (diverging expectations), and *Judgement (Reversed)* (unresolved planning). She found these insights actionable
 585 and directly relevant, documenting the results with photos and sharing them with friends. Similarly, P17 received a
 586 reading of *The Wheel of Fortune (Reversed)*, interpreted as "*repetitive patterns in relationships*". She immediately mapped
 587 this insight onto recurring arguments with her partner, treating the reading as personally meaningful. The GenAI's
 588 readings were swiftly accepted when they resonated with participants' realities and expectations. These two examples
 589 are in Figure.7.

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The figure consists of two main sections, each showing a participant's interaction with an AI-generated Tarot reading.

Top Section (P32):

- Question:** How has my communication with my supervisor been?
- AI Response:** Three Tarot cards are shown: Strength (Reversed), The Hierophant (Reversed), and Judgement (Reversed).
- Participant Reaction:** A blue speech bubble says, "These results are so on point and useful! I have to take a pic and show my friends!"
- Participant Identifier:** A stylized drawing of a person's head and shoulders labeled "P32".

Bottom Section (P17):

- Question:** How is my emotional state recently?
- AI Response:** One Tarot card is shown: The Wheel of Fortune (Reversed).
- Participant Reaction:** A blue speech bubble says, "I immediately thought of the constant arguments my partner and I have. This reading feels so meaningful to me."
- Participant Identifier:** A stylized drawing of a person's head and shoulders labeled "P17".

Fig. 7. The readings provided by the GenAI surprised P32 and P17, and were quickly accepted.

Conversely, when predictions did not resonate, participants often dismissed them with humor or detachment, which is illustrated in Figure.8. For instance, P29, who inquired about entrepreneurial prospects, received an interpretation of the tarot card *The Wheel of Fortune Reversed* for the past as "*missed opportunities*". Since he had never had any entrepreneurial chances in reality, he laughed it off, remarking, "*It's just AI, just for fun.*" In the interview, he further reflected that it was natural for divination not to match reality and thus not something he took seriously. In emotionally sensitive areas, however, disbelief sometimes functioned more as a defense mechanism. P22, whose career reading suggested potential instability, joked, "*Maybe the AI's trying to make me quit my job so it can take over!*" Unlike P29's casual dismissal, P22's humor masked a refusal to confront an unsettling prediction about the future. He explained that if such a reading had come from a human fortune-teller, he might have felt more discouraged, but with AI he could more easily deflect anxiety by treating it lightly.

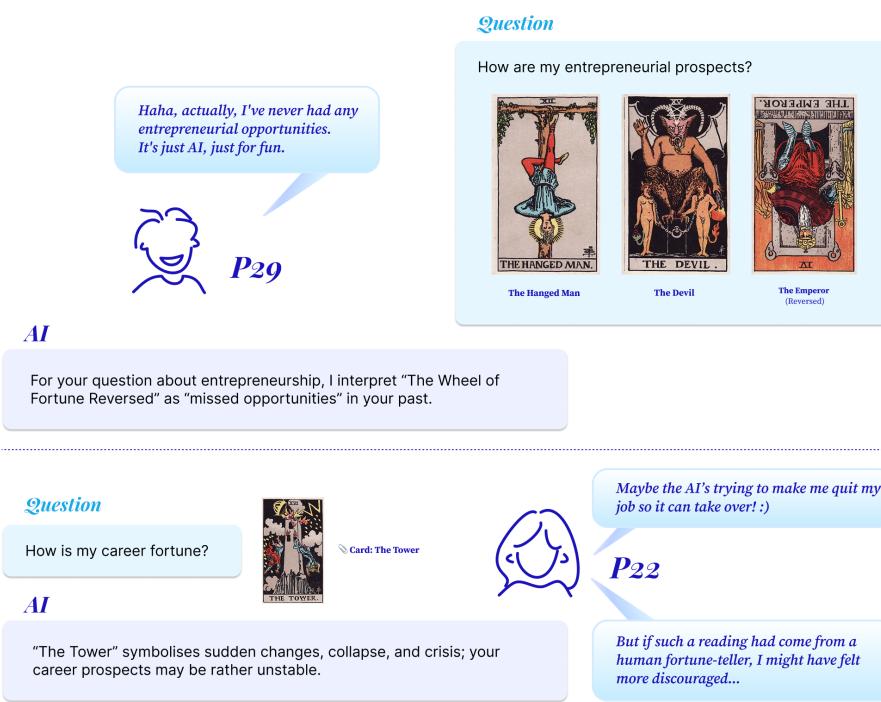


Fig. 8. P29 and P22 did not accept the AI divination and approached it with a playful and humorous attitude.

Interestingly, selective belief even occurred within a single divination session. P10, seeking clarity about her academic prospects, fully embraced the optimism of the future *The Ace of Pentacles (Upright)* and the wisdom of the past *The Hermit (Upright)*. However, when presented with *The Two of Swords (Upright)*, which suggested indecision in the present, she dismissed it outright, stating, "*That doesn't apply to me, I know exactly what I want. The answer is already in my mind.*" This illustrates how participants negotiated AI predictions piecemeal, embracing elements that aligned with their aspirations while rejecting those that challenged their self-narratives.

Taken together, these behaviors highlight participants' agency in making sense of GenAI divination. By selectively affirming outputs that aligned with their expectations, participants positioned themselves not as passive recipients but as co-constructors of meaning. The casual dismissal of irrelevant or threatening insights further reveals the cognitive

677 strategies they employed to preserve coherence between algorithmic suggestions and their self-concept. This dynamic
 678 underscores a broader human tendency to mold external inputs into narratives of personal significance, even when
 679 those inputs originate from GenAI systems.
 680

681 **4.2.2 Ambiguity in AI Divination Trigger the Barnum Effect.** Although many participants criticized GenAI's readings
 682 for being overly vague, this very ambiguity often triggered the Barnum Effect, where users projected their own specific
 683 circumstances onto generalized statements and experienced them as personally relevant. In contrast to selective belief,
 684 which involves actively filtering outputs, the Barnum Effect reflects a more passive psychological tendency in which
 685 participants naturally interpret broad descriptions as uniquely applicable to themselves.
 686

687 Much like the generalized language of horoscopes, GenAI's results invited users to translate ambiguous interpretations
 688 into individualized insights. For the example in Figure 9, P5 consulted about her career prospects with *Judgement*
 689 (present), *The Devil* (past), and *The Wheel of Fortune* (future). GenAI interpreted these cards as indicating a period of
 690 self-reflection, the need to break free from past constraints, and the potential for upcoming changes in fortune. Building
 691 on this broad interpretation, P5 extended it into her own narrative: "*I have to stay true and keep pursuing my interests,*
 692 *and I will find a rewarding job as a communication graduate.*" Although the AI's reading was phrased in highly general
 693 terms, she aligned the interpretation with her academic background and career aspirations, thereby experiencing the
 694 output as accurate and encouraging.
 695

696

697 **Question**

698

699 What does my future career look like?

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718 **AI**

719 These cards as indicating a period of self-reflection, the need to break
 720 free from past constraints, and the potential for upcoming changes in
 721 fortune.

722

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727

728

Fig. 9. The vague GenAI divination triggered the Barnum effect, leading P5 to quickly relate it to her own situation and internalize it.

729 This tendency to anchor vague information to personal circumstances also emerged in decision-making scenarios.
 730 P23, asking whether he should quit his job to pursue a personal project, received a reading involving *The Tower*, *Eight*
 731 of *Wands*, and *Judgement*. GenAI described these as signaling "*an event that will force you to change with a potential*
 732 *for success as long as you approach the transition with courage, adaptability, and a clear sense of purpose.*" While the
 733 interpretation was relatively neutral and multifaceted, P23 distilled it to a single keyword "*rebirth*", and took it as a
 734 clear affirmation that aligned with his entrepreneurial ambitions.

735 Similarly, P33 consulted GenAI about the future of his romantic relationship with *The Sun (Upright)*, *The Wheel of*
 736 *Fortune (Reversed)*, and *The Chariot (Reversed)*. The AI's reading was broadly positive but noted that "*the reversed Wheel*
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729 of Fortune shows that your relationship sometimes goes in circles with recurring arguments, and the Chariot reversed means
 730 you might face external challenges, like family or financial issues." P33 immediately mapped the notion of "obstacles" onto
 731 his relationship, perceiving the reading as highly accurate. However, during the interview reflection, he acknowledged
 732 that neither external pressures nor recurring conflicts were present; rather, the real issue was his own hesitation about
 733 marriage. Nonetheless, the vague language of "obstacles" had resonated strongly in the moment, creating a sense of
 734 meaningful alignment.
 735

736 These cases illustrate how GenAI's ambiguity provided participants with interpretive flexibility, enabling them to
 737 project personal significance onto generalized statements. The Barnum Effect thus functioned as a key psychological
 738 mechanism in AI divination, transforming vague outputs into experiences of clarity and personal insight.
 739

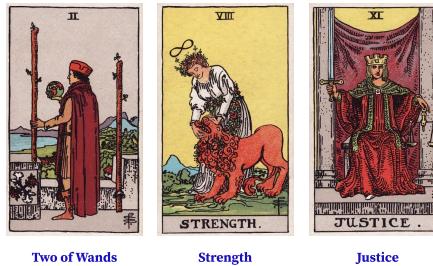
740 **4.2.3 Scaffolding Reflection and Decision-Making.** While many participants did not treat AI-based divination with the
 741 same seriousness as human fortune-telling, the interaction often functioned as a scaffold for reflection. Regardless
 742 of whether the predictions were judged as "accurate" or ultimately accepted, engaging with the workshop prompted
 743 participants to reconsider their situations from new perspectives and, in some cases, to take concrete actions.
 744

745 **Question**

746 What is the future of this messy relationship

747 **AI**

748 Your tarot reading reflects significant
 749 dynamics about your relationship,
 750 highlighting inner strength, decision-
 751 making, and balance. Let's interpret the
 752 cards in the context of your question: The
 753 Strength card represents inner courage...



754 Two of Wands

755 Strength

756 Justice

757 After several rounds dialog, P24 made a conclusion.

758 My messy, unresolved relationship might not have any resolution ahead unless he
 759 decides to address his own limitations to us meeting halfway. But this is the least
 760 important thing of this process, because this journey is more about my personal growth
 761 and healing than mending what has been broken between us. It's a path I can walk
 762 alone, of letting go of closure, moving on with my inner strength, remaining true to my
 763 values and setting my boundaries. I can remain at peace knowing that I have done
 764 enough and demonstrated emotional intelligence and willingness to handle it well.
 765



P24

766 Fig. 10. P24 was struggling with emotional issues, but the GenAI's reading helped her reflection and self-affirmation, which
 767 strengthened her inner resilience.
 768

769 For example, P24 asked in Figure.10, "What is the future of this messy relationship" with a spread of Two of Wands (past),
 770 Strength (present), and Justice (future). The AI interpreted this combination as suggesting that while the relationship
 771 was complex, its resolution would depend on honest evaluation, patient effort, and fairness. P24 was deeply moved by
 772 this interpretation, not because it offered a definitive outcome, but because it resonated with her ongoing struggles.
 773 She concluded: "My messy, unresolved relationship might not have any resolution ahead unless he decides to address his
 774 own limitations to us meeting halfway. But this is the least important thing of this process, because this journey is more
 775 about my personal growth and healing than mending what has been broken between us. It's a path I can walk alone, of
 776 letting go of closure, moving on with my inner strength, remaining true to my values, and setting my boundaries. I can
 777 778 779 780

⁷⁸¹ remain at peace knowing that I have done enough and demonstrated emotional intelligence and willingness to handle it well." Here, the reading provided not a prediction but a structure for reframing the situation, empowering her to see value in growth and closure independent of her partner's choices.

⁷⁸⁵ Similarly, P42 used the system when deciding whether to return to China or remain in the Netherlands for work. The AI's reading, framing the choice as a matter of balancing "logic" and "intuition", was seen as vague and unconvincing as a prediction. Yet, rather than dismissing it outright, he appropriated the framing as a way to articulate competing priorities. The language of "balance" allowed him to weigh family connection against career advancement, helping a reflection process that was more valuable than the system's literal answer.

⁷⁹¹ In some cases, participants translated insights directly into follow-up actions. As noted earlier, P28 decided to let go of her ex-partner and explore new opportunities in dating after iterative questioning helped her anchor the cards' meanings to her current life. P32, meanwhile, reacted strongly to the AI's reading of *Judgement (Reversed)* as "*unresolved planning*" regarding her future. Disturbed by the possibility of leaving her academic path "*unresolved*", she was motivated to schedule a timely discussion with her supervisor about her graduation plan. Months later, she voluntarily updated us that her doctoral project had been approved, explicitly crediting the workshop for prompting her decisive action.

⁷⁹⁹ Moreover, this help was not limited to AI's textual interpretations; it also extended to the visual outputs generated by the GenAI. P35, after personalizing a visual representation of *The World (Reversed)*, used the fragmented globe and surrounding question marks to articulate his feelings of uncertainty in career decisions. This image, enriched with his edits, served as a reflective tool, leading them to actively consult mentors and reconsider goals.

⁸⁰³ Across these cases, the divination did not simply deliver answers but scaffolded reflection, enabling participants to articulate priorities, reframe challenges, and in some instances make consequential decisions.

⁸⁰⁷ 4.3 Constructing Future Narratives with Optimism Bias

⁸⁰⁹ Participants actively constructed their future narratives not just through text, but by modifying the AI-generated visual artifacts. They reshaped these images to resolve personal ambivalence and align the symbolic elements with their identity and aspirations. However, during this process, we have also observed some overly optimistic interpretations, which may entail risks.

⁸¹⁴ *4.3.1 Modifying Symbolic Elements to Align Visuals with Personal Perspectives, Emotions, and Identity.* In our workshops, participants engaged with AI-generated visuals not as static outputs but as materials for co-construction, reshaping images to better reflect their perspectives, emotions, and identities. While the GenAI generated visual representations of participants' abstract conclusions of readings, they often found these pictures misaligned with their self-image. Their interventions revealed three recurring strategies: playful rejection, metaphorical generation, and identity-driven personalization, as seen in Figure.11.

⁸²² *Playful rejection.* Some participants resisted the AI's interpretations by exaggerating or parodying them through visuals. For instance, P43 received a reading suggesting he was becoming "*robotic*", which he found absurd to the point of humor. Rather than internalizing the critique, he instructed the AI to generate an image of himself literally transforming into a robot. This humorous exaggeration turned the reading into a form of self-expression that undermined the GenAI's authority.

⁸²⁸ *Metaphorical generation.* Others used visualizations as a way to externalize and reflect on personal dilemmas. As mentioned before, P42, faced with the decision of whether to return to China or remain in the Netherlands, asked the system to generate an image of two diverging paths. He projected his own interpretations onto the output: the "*scenic*



Fig. 11. Three different strategies for presenting divination results by P43, P42, and P34: playful rejection, metaphorical generation, and identity-driven personalization.

"beauty" of one path resonated with his comfortable life abroad, while the other evoked the professional opportunities in China. In this way, the AI's imagery became a handle for deeper reflection, helping him articulate the trade-offs of his decision.

Identity-driven personalization. For some participants, modifying the symbolic elements of AI visuals was crucial for aligning them with their self-concept. P34, for example, felt alienated by the masculine imagery of the *King of Wands*. She instructed the AI to replace the figure with a queen in a flowing pink gown holding a diamond-encrusted wand against a rose-gold background. As she explained, *"By changing the image, I wasn't just fixing the prediction. I was making it mine."* Similarly, P36 reworked her initial output to emphasize "*confidence and material success*", directing the system to add a Baroque-style dress, black high heels, and golden coins. These iterative edits transformed generic imagery into artifacts of empowerment and aspiration.

By rejecting or metaphorical personalizing visual elements, participants actively reclaimed interpretive authority, transforming AI-generated outputs into co-created symbols that spoke to their identities and lived contexts. Rather than passively accepting the system's artifacts, they modified symbolic details to align with their own values and aspirations. This process of co-creation not only personalized otherwise generic predictions but also turned them into resonant artifacts that reinforced participants' sense of self and belief.

4.3.2 Overly Positive Summarization of Outcomes. Across sessions, many participants distilled GenAI's readings into highly optimistic takeaways, often amplifying the affirmative elements while downplaying or omitting cautionary advice. The examples are shown in Figure 12. This tendency illustrates how users appropriated the system's outputs to reinforce self-belief and aspirational narratives, sometimes at the expense of critical reflection.

For instance, P18 asked, *"Should I move from my current department to a different department where I'm doing something new?"* After receiving the reading, she summarized it simply as: *"Believe in my abilities and have confidence in myself to take on new paths."* While the prediction offered her encouragement and strength, it also carried an element of untested certainty, reinforcing confidence without prompting careful consideration of potential risks. Similarly, P25, asking about his career prospects in AI, concluded: *"I will have lots of opportunities to advance my career in AI, but I will need to make choices that align with my passions and leverage my emotional intelligence in order to maximize my success."*

885 To anchor this positive vision, he generated an image of himself standing confidently in a field of flowers, portraying
 886 success as both inevitable and personally flattering.
 887



903 Fig. 12. The positive and optimistic images generated by P18, P25, P24, and P33.

904
 905 In some cases, participants actively ignored the conditional aspects of GenAI's advice, focusing instead on triumphant
 906 or celebratory framings. P23, who asked about the timing of leaving his job to pursue a personal project, was told that
 907 success was possible "*as long as you approach the transition with effort, courage, adaptability, and a clear sense of purpose.*"
 908 However, in summarizing, he reduced the outcome to a single word—"rebirth"—and visualized it as a phoenix rising
 909 from flames. The conditions of effort and adaptability disappeared from his narrative, replaced by a symbolic affirmation
 910 of inevitable success. Likewise, P33, previously described as acknowledging the AI's mention of "*resistance*" in his
 911 relationship reading, still condensed his takeaway into words such as "*happiness, joy, light, high potential, and wealth.*"
 912 Even when the system's interpretations contained warnings or obstacles, his future-oriented summaries emphasized
 913 only the most positive possibilities.
 914

915 These patterns suggest that participants often transformed GenAI's outputs into motivational affirmations, reframing
 916 conditional or ambivalent predictions as unequivocally positive visions of the future. In doing so, they used the
 917 visualization less as a cautious guide and more as a tool for self-encouragement and aspirational projection.

918 5 Discussion

919 Our study investigated how people engage with fortune-telling practices by GenAI. The findings shed light on the
 920 process of GenAI divination, focusing on how participants enacted the practice itself (RQ1), how they perceived and
 921 evaluated the predictions they received (RQ2), and how they represented and expressed these predictions through
 922 visual and verbal forms (RQ3).

923 5.1 Key Findings

924 The findings we talk about aim to deepen understandings of how people engage with GenAI systems in emotionally
 925 sensitive contexts like fortune-telling. Similar topics have been raised in other studies. For instance, one paper discusses
 926 how integrating mystical and spiritual practices with technology can create "miracle machines" that foster profound
 927 emotional and spiritual connections [30]. Another study highlights how incorporating spooky, ethereal, or supernatural
 928 Manuscript submitted to ACM

elements can alter how users interact with and understand technology, creating unique and evocative experiences [11]. Our study extends those works by showing how people domesticate the impersonality of GenAI divination.

937 5.1.1 *Subjective agency in the GenAI divination process.* Divination has always been less about information retrieval and
938 more about meaning-making. When GenAI produces vague outcomes, the ambiguity resembles an unfinished canvas
939 that invites people to "fill in the blanks." This reflects a Gestalt [34] completion tendency: participants add their own
940 stories, emotions, and details to make the reading coherent and personally relevant. We also observed that participants
941 often disclosed highly personal information, things they would not usually share with strangers. This was not simply
942 a functional strategy to obtain more accurate answers, nor only a reaction to AI's uncertainty. Online interaction,
943 especially with non-human or anonymous agents, reduces feelings of shame and fear of judgment in Suler's study [80].
944 Participants perceived the AI as a nonjudgmental listener, which lowered the social risks of disclosure. Unlike human
945 fortune-tellers, who may evaluate or react, GenAI was experienced as socially "safe." This shifted participants' privacy
946 boundaries, making them more willing to reveal intimate details in order to shape the divination process.
947

948 5.1.2 *Selective belief and Barnum Effect for the GenAI divination results.* A key pattern in our study was selective
949 belief, which complicates the binary of belief versus disbelief common in traditional divination. Participants embraced
950 predictions that resonated with their experiences, emotions, or expectations, while downplaying or even joking away
951 parts that felt irrelevant. On the surface, this resembles confirmation bias [86]. At a deeper level, selective belief
952 helps individuals maintain psychological coherence and agency. By accepting only certain elements, participants
953 could integrate positive or meaningful insights into their narratives while defending against dissonant or threatening
954 interpretations. In this way, selective belief functioned as a form of identity work [74]: participants did not treat GenAI
955 outputs as objective prophecies but as raw material for reinforcing self-understanding and worldview.
956

957 Interestingly, participants showed a more casual and playful attitude toward GenAI readings than toward human
958 fortune-tellers. With human seers, participants faced interpersonal accountability, emotional expectations, and the
959 aura of authority, which limited their willingness to dismiss or mock predictions. GenAI, by contrast, was framed as a
960 socially lightweight and nonjudgmental partner. This lowered the social costs of disbelief and allowed participants to
961 move fluidly between serious reflection and entertainment.
962

963 The Barnum Effect [22] also manifested differently in the GenAI context. Like horoscopes or astrological charts, AI
964 divination relied on vague, generalized language that invited projection. Yet there was a subtle psychological difference.
965 Traditional astrology is anchored in cultural frameworks and collective authority, while GenAI's responses are generated
966 in real time and lack institutional legitimacy. This made predictions simultaneously more personalizable and more
967 fragile, as they could be easily dismissed as arbitrary text.
968

969 5.1.3 *Personal relevance and Optimistic Bias when representing the GenAI divination.* Belk's (1988) theory [6] of the
970 extended self suggests that people use external objects, such as art, consumer goods, and technologies, to extend
971 and project aspects of themselves. When participants modified the symbolic elements of GenAI outputs, such as
972 colors, symbols, or character features, they were not only expressing identity but also incorporating the output into
973 their extended self. This act transformed the divination into part of their personal narrative. Much like how painters
974 sometimes embed traces of their own features into portraits, participants projected themselves into the generated visuals.
975 Such projection fostered a sense of ownership and control over what might otherwise feel abstract or impersonal.
976

977 Optimistic bias was also evident when participants represented or reinterpreted their readings. Optimistic bias
978 refers to the systematic tendency to expect more positive outcomes for oneself and fewer negative ones (Weinstein,
979

989 1980) [87]. We observed this in how participants reframed GenAI readings with a distinctly positive tone. Drawing on
 990 Gross's emotion regulation theory [29], this can be seen as a process of reappraisal: participants reshaped ambiguous
 991 or potentially negative predictions into more comforting or empowering ones. By modifying symbols, they re-coded
 992 uncertainty into hope. Optimistic bias in this context thus served not only to protect self-esteem but also to generate
 993 affirming narratives that reinforced agency and psychological resilience.
 994

995 However, this tendency also carries risks. In the context of GenAI divination, overly optimistic interpretations may
 996 lead users to downplay challenges or ignore warning signals, potentially encouraging risky decision-making. This
 997 highlights the double-edged nature of optimistic bias: while it can foster positive self-reflection and resilience, it may
 998 also create blind spots when navigating uncertainty through AI-mediated predictions.
 999

1000 5.2 Design Implications

1001 Our workshops reveal a fundamental shift in the divination experience. Unlike traditional practices, where the fortune-teller
 1002 serves as the central authority, GenAI divination places agency in the hands of the user. External guidance
 1003 becomes weaker, while users' own thoughts and interpretations take on a stronger role in shaping the outcome. In
 1004 this shift, GenAI does not operate as a fortune-teller in the conventional sense. Instead, it assumes six alternative
 1005 roles that reflect different modes of engagement: mentor (guiding reflection through questions), counselor (offering
 1006 decision support), mirror (aligning outputs with self-image for identification), co-creator (enabling shared authorship),
 1007 playmate (supporting playfulness and entertainment), and friend (providing emotional value and companionship).
 1008 We used Gemini Fast 2.5 model to generate illustrative images of these roles, shown in Figure.13, with the prompts
 1009 provided in the Appendix. We suggest that emotionally sensitive GenAI systems, such as those for divination, can
 1010 benefit from adopting this role-based perspective to shape the agent's interaction logic, tone, and communication
 1011 style. Some participants also noted that the experience could feel more ritualistic in form; even if it is only used on an
 1012 electronic device, a greater sense of engagement can still be achieved through ritual-like guidance, visual design, and
 1013 interactive divination behaviors.
 1014

1015 Several design strategies for fortune-telling content also emerge from our workshops. First, GenAI divination systems
 1016 should actively promote self-awareness and critical thinking. Features such as explanations of predictions ("This reading
 1017 suggests X, which might indicate a shift in your approach to Y") and a "Why this prediction?" option can increase
 1018 transparency and trust. Providing mechanisms for users to fine-tune predictions, emphasize specific challenges or
 1019 opportunities, and explore alternative interpretations can help balance affirmation with constructive reflection, thereby
 1020 mitigating the risks of overly optimistic bias. Meanwhile, emotional validation features, for example, prompts that
 1021 normalize uncertainty and frame outcomes as opportunities for growth, can further support users when they encounter
 1022 difficult or ambiguous predictions.
 1023

1024 Second, systems should carefully manage the Barnum Effect. Ambiguity itself is not inherently positive or negative;
 1025 its value depends on context. To enhance emotional resonance, systems can deliberately preserve a level of vagueness
 1026 and generality, making outputs broadly relatable through universal symbols such as the tarot Strength card. Conversely,
 1027 when clarity is needed, systems should provide more specific and context-driven predictions grounded in the user's
 1028 real-life events or decisions. This balance allows users to experience both emotional engagement and actionable insight.
 1029

1030 Third, GenAI systems should broaden opportunities for personalized expression. Our findings show that participants
 1031 often modified symbols, colors, and imagery as a way to align readings with their own perspective and identity. Such
 1032 visual personalization fosters ownership and deepens self-reflection. Future systems could extend personalization into
 1033 other modalities—for example, through calming audio, narrative scaffolding, or interactive visualizations—that allow
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 1035



Fig. 13. Six roles GenAI takes in divination: Mirror, Co-creator, Friend, Playmate, Mentor, Counselor.

users to reframe predictions across multiple sensory channels. These features not only enrich personal resonance but also reinforce active meaning-making.

Finally, this design logic extends beyond fortune-telling to other emotionally sensitive domains, such as emotional support systems, mental health tools, and personal growth platforms. In these settings, the tension between users' desire for affirmation and their need for genuine insight becomes even more critical. Our findings suggest that GenAI systems must evolve to both accommodate emotional needs and promote healthier forms of reflection. This requires mechanisms to distinguish subjective desires from objective truths, especially in high-stakes contexts like healthcare or law, where outcomes must rely on verifiable facts. For this, a strategy is using visual cues, such as color-coded highlights of emotionally charged versus neutral content. It could help users identify their own reactions and reflect critically on system outputs.

In sum, designing GenAI for emotionally sensitive contexts requires moving beyond a single functional system. By embracing a role-based framework that balances affirmation, play, and reflection, GenAI systems can create engagements that are not only emotionally resonant but also safe, constructive, and empowering in the face of uncertainty.

1093 5.3 Critical Reflections and Risks

1094 While our findings highlight how the ambiguity of GenAI divination can stimulate self-disclosure, trigger select beliefs
 1095 and the Barnum effect [22], and encourage reflection, these benefits must also be viewed with caution. At its core,
 1096 the GenAI does not perform divination in the traditional sense. Rather, it relies on probabilistic language prediction,
 1097 producing outputs that synthesize patterns in data rather than offering meaningful foresight. Participants' active
 1098 engagement, providing personal details and interactively guiding the reading, may foster a sense of insight, but it
 1099 also risks amplifying self-confirmation, where users interpret results in ways that simply reinforce their pre-existing
 1100 thoughts and emotions.

1101 This raises concerns about overestimating the informational weight of AI-generated outputs. While ambiguity
 1102 can create space for exploration, it does not provide a structured framework for critical reasoning. Instead, it often
 1103 magnifies users' immediate emotional states and implicit biases, which may not always be the most reliable basis for
 1104 decision-making. Some participants expressed feelings of empowerment or clarity (e.g., P32), yet it remains unclear
 1105 whether such experiences reflected genuine self-discovery or subtle misdirection. The same mechanisms that spark
 1106 positive introspection may also lead to overconfidence, tunnel vision, or risky choices—outcomes that are difficult to
 1107 predict or control.

1108 Moreover, the absence of the ritualistic atmosphere and symbolic gravitas that characterize traditional divination
 1109 often left participants treating GenAI readings as entertainment rather than serious guidance. Without a sense of
 1110 mystery or ceremonial framing, the system risks trivializing the practice, limiting its ability to offer the same depth of
 1111 meaning that human fortune-tellers provide.

1112 Taken together, these reflections suggest that future GenAI divination systems must proceed with caution. Designers
 1113 should remain mindful of the double-edged nature of ambiguity, balancing its potential to foster self-reflection with
 1114 safeguards against misinterpretation, overconfidence, and uncritical acceptance of system outputs.

1121 5.4 Limitations

1122 This study, while providing insightful observations into GenAI fortune-telling, is subject to several limitations that
 1123 warrant consideration.

1124 *5.4.1 Scope of Practices and Modalities.* Finally, our study was limited in scope, focusing narrowly on tarot-based
 1125 divination. Although tarot provided a productive entry point, other practices—such as astrology, numerology, or Chinese
 1126 systems like Bazi and I Ching—may involve distinct forms of interaction and meaning-making. In addition, our emphasis
 1127 on visual generation overlooked other expressive modalities, including sound, narrative, or embodied ritual. Future
 1128 research should expand the scope to encompass a wider range of cultural practices and multimodal expressions, enabling
 1129 a more comprehensive understanding of how GenAI can support diverse forms of spiritual and emotional reflection.
 1130 Furthermore, while our participant pool was cross-regional, it was not globally representative, and future work should
 1131 attend to cultural differences in how GenAI divination is interpreted and valued.

1132 *5.4.2 Ecological Validity.* One limitation concerns the ecological validity of our study design. The workshop context
 1133 differed in important ways from how divination typically unfolds in everyday practice. For example, participants were
 1134 asked to generate images directly with GenAI, whereas in traditional divination, symbolic materials are usually provided
 1135 and interpreted by the seer rather than created by the seeker. The workshop also lacked the ritualistic atmosphere

and cultural embedding that often lend authenticity to divination practices. These differences may have shaped how participants interpreted and engaged with GenAI readings, constraining the generalizability of our findings.

5.4.3 *Workshop Setting.* The workshop format also introduced specific social dynamics. Although participants worked individually, they were situated alongside others, which may have introduced subtle peer influences. This contrasts with the more private and introspective settings in which divination often takes place, such as practicing alone. As a result, the reflections and behaviors we observed may not fully capture the nuances of solitary engagement with GenAI, where social expectations and self-disclosure boundaries might unfold differently.

5.4.4 *Lack of Longitudinal Data.* Another limitation stems from the short duration of our observations. Each workshop session lasted 60–90 minutes, which limited our ability to examine how interactions with GenAI divination evolve over time. While we were able to document immediate reactions, selective belief, and visual modification strategies, we could not track whether these behaviors persist, intensify, or transform through repeated engagement. Longitudinal methods—such as diary studies or recurring sessions—would provide richer insight into how users' trust develops, how their interpretive strategies mature, and how AI-generated insights become integrated into their broader meaning-making processes.

6 Conclusion

Through workshops with 44 participants, we investigated how people engage with GenAI-powered fortune-telling, how they perceive and evaluate the predictions they receive, and how they express these predictions through visual and verbal forms. Participants enacted divination as an active practice rather than a passive reception of AI outputs, selectively believing, reinterpreting, or playfully rejecting results. They also used GenAI as both an oracle and a creative partner, blending mystical guidance with personal storytelling. Our findings suggest the need to design AI oracle systems that preserve mystery while supporting user agency, enabling reflection and self-expression without reinforcing narrow confirmation biases.

7 Acknowledgments

We used Gemini 2.5 Fast moael to generate the Teaser Figure.1 and Figure.13. Details can be found in the relevant section and prompts in Appendix A. The authors take responsibility for the output and use of AI in this paper, and we confirm that AI was not used for generating any part of the paper except for illustrative figures.

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A Prompts for Figures

- **Teaser Figure.1:** "Imitating Michelangelo's *The Creation of Adam* composition of fingertip touch, generate an image where a robot's hand and a human hand's index fingers are about to touch, with the robot's palm facing up on the left and the human's palm facing down on the right. A tarot card is in between. Style: minimalist, line art, abstract, black and white/gray."
- **Figure.13 Mirror:** AI holds up a mirror to a nearby human, symbolizing AI helping people see themselves better. Style: black line art on white background.
- **Figure.13 Co-creator:** AI and a human collaborate to assemble a puzzle.
- **Figure.13 Friend:** AI embraces and comforts a human.
- **Figure.13 Playmate:** AI appears as a clown/magician, tossing cards into the air while the human laughs nearby.
- **Figure.13 Mentor:** AI points to a book to show the human.
- **Figure.13 Counselor:** The human asks questions and AI provides answers.