

# The future of Tarot: Fortune predication and spirituality in the Digital Age

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**Figure 1:** Tarot Nova, taken from an AI Tarot tool.

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## Abstract

Tarot, originating as Chinese playing cards [Nas17], has evolved into a Western divination game shaped by geography and technology. Today, technology is once again reshaping Tarot. This exploration examines Tarot's evolution, its contemporary role in nonreligious spirituality, and the potential challenges, including spiritual bypass [Goo22] and misuse as therapy substitutes [Hol08]. It also highlights its strengths as a tool for delving into the subconscious, aligning with Jungian therapy [Fai21]. The study reviews together with a Tarot expert the results of Tarot's digitalization and contemplates its future evolution while preserving its intuitive essence. It encompasses remote Zoom-mediated sessions for remote readings, the potential of reader-absent AI tools, and the limited self-reflective depth found in YouTube Tarot videos.

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## 1. Introduction: A Brief Introduction to Tarot

The origin of the Tarot is in Chinese playing cards, which were built of 4 suits clubs, hearts, spades, and diamonds, the same as today's playing cards. Like many Eastern ideas, Tarot traveled from China to the West as a game through the Silk Road [Arm13]. The cards traveled through Istanbul, there, the 4 original suit symbols were adapted to local symbolism and changed to sticks, coins, swords, and cups. In addition, in Istanbul the court cards were added to the

card pack, now each suit contained ten pip cards and three court cards: malik (king), nā'ib malik (viceroy), and thānī nā'ib (deputy viceroy) [Nas17].

While the court cards of the Ottoman version, the Topkapi deck 2, were purely symbolic images because Islam prohibited human representation when the card decks reached Europe, where no such proscriptions applied, the court cards acquired faces. The queen may have been added to the uniformly masculine court. The

oldest known Tarot decks as we know them today date from the early 15th century in Italy. Tarot hand-drawn designs were ordered by Italian aristocrats during the Renaissance a time of flourishing interest in different cultures and history. The first documented Tarot was hand-drawn and included the full arcana as used today. After half a century with little interest in the cards, a renewed interest in Tarot was revived by the occultist Jean-Baptiste Alliette (1738–1791), the first-known professional Tarot reader. His book How to Entertain Yourself With the Deck of Cards Called Tarot (1770) restarted the interest in Tarot which lasted till our days. The name Tarot is the French pronunciation of the original Italian name Tarocchi (which is still the Italian name), from Latin Triumphorum (= victory pl.) [Nas17].

The Tarot's aesthetics and spread were from the very beginning affected by technology. Cards were produced on paper using woodcut printing techniques, both paper-making and printing were technologies invented in China and spread to the West. In the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Etching and engraving cards allowed finer details to be produced cards in contrast to woodblocking. Later on in the 16<sup>th</sup> century the Japanese color printing technique, allowed mass production of colorful vivid cards, which till then were mostly hand-drawn or colored. The biggest revolution came at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century together with the best seller Waite-Smith deck, which used emerging printing methods. The Cards were reproduced by a chromolithographic technique, or, from 1940 onward, by photographic techniques. Digital images allow hand painting and drawing aesthetics as in the first Italian decks [Nas17]. After the recent renaissance of hand-drawn decks, a new design technology emerged, AI art, which allows creation of detailed illustrations without an artist's assistant. Even printing the cards is no more needed, and cards can be produced digitally and be sold as an NFT for example the "Arcana Crypto Tarot" NFT deck [3](#) that includes AI-generated and VR-painted all digital only cards [Mil21].

## 2. Related Work: Spirituality and Technology

With the increasing accessibility of technology, mystical tools are more accessible and take a bigger role in people's lives. In the past, the average encounter with the esoteric might have occurred through a morning TV show's psychic, a weekend newspaper horoscope, or a Medieval Fair's fortune teller. Today, however, websites, apps, and social media platforms are brimming with mystical content. It was proven that people under high stress who consult astrologers will be "prepared to use astrology as a coping device" even though under low-stress conditions they will not believe in it [Tys82], and as known with the rapid economic development, chronic stress has become an epidemic in our modern society, and people almost accept it as a way of life. Particularly for teenagers [XLZ\*16], which means people are more prone to believe in alternative mystical sources. At the same time, mystical beliefs became more mainstream every year, for example, a typical horoscope post on the website got 150% more traffic in 2017 than the year before [Bec18].

When it comes to self help and therapy, the way people seek help has transformed widely in the past few years, especially after the Covid-19 pandemic. In a study among mental health therapists, the majority of respondents (87%, 270) reported that their professional

use of online video technology had changed 'to a great extent' since the introduction of the COVID-19 pandemic regulations. Of these 270 respondents and the majority (76%) felt that their overall experience of using online video technology professionally was positive. Some respondents were surprised at how many clients expressed a preference for working online over meetings in the clinic or consulting room [MKGPB21]. Together with the increasing trust and convenience of online therapy, the lack of commitment and anonymity drives people to use unqualified consulting online services [Hol08]. People also choose to not go to therapy because of a high fee, or stigma [Blu05]. Therefore people in need of therapy may turn to alternative counseling resources such as couching and self help videos.

One of the risk factors of using alternative consulting instead of therapy is being caught by spiritual bypass. In her book "Toxic Positivity", Whitney Goodman explains how spiritual bypass is being used to prevent people from acknowledging what they are feeling and distances them from both themselves and others. Some examples of spiritual bypassing include: avoiding feelings of anger, believing that traumatic events must serve as "learning experiences" and focusing only on spirituality, and ignoring the present. A tarot reading can easily be used wrongly to leverage those feelings and avoid dealing with real-life problems [Goo22]. In her experiment, psychologist Semetsky proves that when used by a certified therapist, Tarot, like Rorschach, can help treat patients in a method called the *projective technique*. For example, one of her patients found the means to freely express herself and to "reveal something that sometimes she is unable (subconsciously) or is unwilling (consciously) to put into words. Both aspects provide significant therapeutic material to work with as, using the words of the man who coined the term *projective technique*, 'the most important things about the individual are what he cannot or will not say'" [Sem06]. The *projective technique* is not the first method that collaborate Tarot reading within treatment. Carl Jung was a loud enthusiast of Tarot as a reflective tool and used Tarot to support the archetype and shadow theories [Sem06]. As Jung once said "Tarology and Psychology, these two "human sciences," enrich each other [...] they have the same objective: the knowledge of the self. Both aim at an understanding of the human being and the conscious and unconscious mechanisms that sustain the dynamic of decision-making and individual and collective actions". [Fai21] As demonstrated, Tarot reading can yield negative consequences when employed incorrectly; yet, when wielded by a properly trained practitioner, it can facilitate positive psychological growth.

## 3. Examine Digital Tarot readings and their effectiveness

This chapter delves into the realm of digital Tarot readings, dissecting their efficacy and inherent qualities in the context of modern spirituality and technology. The methodology employed consists of a qualitative semi-structured interview with an experienced Tarot practitioner, Viviana Druga, and a joint review of 3 digital Tarot reading tools: a Zoom video session, an AI reading tool, and a popular Tarot interpretation YouTube video.

### 3.1. Methodology: An interview and tools review with a Tarot Expert

The interview with a Tarot expert was conducted in a face-to-face setting at the expert's studio. The interview followed a semi-structured format, which included a series of 15 thoughtfully crafted questions prepared in advance. Additionally, a comprehensive review of three distinct AI Tarot tools was undertaken during the interview.

To provide a multifaceted perspective, a volunteer, who had no prior experience with Tarot, was invited to participate. The volunteer was encouraged to ask a personal question of interest that they sought to resolve. This question was then explored using the chosen tools: an AI Tarot website, a relevant YouTube video, and a Tarot reading via Zoom facilitated by the researcher. Subsequently, the volunteer was asked to respond to a set of 7 Likert Scale questions, each pertaining to their experiences with the three different tools. They were also invited to elaborate on their responses, offering valuable insights.

During the interview, the researcher and the Tarot expert collaboratively examined the outcomes of the Tarot readings obtained from each of the three tools, taking into consideration the volunteer's feedback, and drawing conclusions based on each session's results. It is important to note that the content of the volunteer's questions and feedback has been safeguarded to protect their privacy. Following the structured interview and the tool reviews, an open discussion was conducted, delving into the subject of Tarot reading and its intersection with artificial intelligence.

### 3.2. Results

The Tarot expert, Viviana Druga, is an experimental artist, Tarot creator, and reader with twelve years of experience with Tarot. She gained expertise by creating her own Tarot deck using a unique performative process involving photography and learning Tarot symbolism from her mentor, filmmaker, and mystic, Alejandro Jodorowsky. Druga sees Tarot as a divination game that can reveal hidden aspects of the self and provide insights into the subconscious. When asked what is significant about Tarot, she answers that Tarot readings are a way to open up and reveal hidden aspects of oneself, the shadow, and archetypes (Jung) and it allows individuals to explore their subconscious and potentially confront hidden truths.

As mentioned in the previous chapter about spirituality and the digital age, tarot readings can offer positive insights and revelations; however, they should not be mistaken as a genuine substitute for therapy. The expert confirmed and recommends Tarot readings for individuals seeking self-discovery and insight into their subconscious. However, there are times when a client should be refused and sent to a professional traditional treatment "There are sessions that I refused because they seem problematic. . . more like a work for a therapist, to actually even start it. Especially because I noticed a person was very disturbed, but not in a way that they could be taking any information coming from this realm. . . Yeah, There's a couple of times when I said I'm sorry, but I don't think it's a good moment".

Starting with Zoom, a mediator tool, the expert explains she uses

it herself when the client is remote. She believes that the essence of Tarot lies in the connection between the reader and the querent (the person seeking the reading) and that this element is harder to achieve on video. Druga explains that since the mixing of the cards by the querent is essential, and if they don't have their own cards she is using a numeric system in Zoom sessions, where the querent provides numbers that correspond to Tarot cards. However, she stresses the importance of this system being interpreted by a human Tarot reader, and it couldn't be translated for a passive app. When asked if it could be in the future used by an AI she replies it probably could be for the opening itself, but the interruption of the card requires a person, and she again emphasizes this remote system is not as effective as touching, mixing and looking at the cards yourself.

Transitioning to the AI tool, only the querent side is active and the reader is absent. After examining the suggested AI tool, The Self Glazer [sel22], which was built to "promote psychological and spiritual integration, with the goal of guiding individuals towards an enlightened state of collective consciousness." [sel22] the Tarot expert compliments the opening style and choice of the Marseille deck (based on the Italian oldest kept deck, 16<sup>th</sup> century, the origin of Tarot) which is not obvious and show in-depth understanding of Tarot by the creator, but point out the generic interpretations and lacking emotional depth. In her opinion, AI tools may offer straightforward answers but cannot replace the depth and insight provided by a human Tarot reader.

Moving to the third digital tool the YouTube interpretation, where only the reader is present, and the querent is absent and passive, "The truth about your family and their role in your life Pick a Card Tarot Reading" by user Natalie H. [H22]. The expert is horrified: "What does it mean? It's just free speech, a monologue". She finds the videos to be overly theatrical and somewhat superficial in their approach. There are the long nails, elements like candles, crystals, and at least 5 different Tarot decks 4 being used (Probably for product promotion, the researcher) which she considers unnecessary for a genuine reading.

Relevant to mention, that both the AI tool and the YouTube video were attached with a disclaimer. The AI tool reads "The Self Gazer can't diagnose or treat any mental health conditions. For entertainment purposes only", while the video has the "For entertainment purposes only" disclaimer on the bottom of a long affiliation list, both are common legal disclaimers. The Tarot expert concludes that digital versions of Tarot readings, whether through AI tools or other means, have limitations. She firmly believes that Tarot readings should involve a personal connection and interaction between a human reader and the querent.

In summary, the Tarot expert's perspective emphasizes the value of personal connections in Tarot readings, and she expresses reservations about the ability of digital tools, including AI and YouTube videos, to provide meaningful insights compared to in-person interactions with human readers.

### 3.3. Discussion

This investigation of Tarot readings, encompassing both traditional and digital approaches, underscores the importance of Tarot as a

tool for self-examination. It is important for Tarot practitioners, whether in-person, online, or as tool builders, to emphasize that Tarot serves as a valuable tool for self-discovery but should never replace the vital role of professional therapy. This ethical responsibility holds true in both offline and digital realms, ensuring that individuals seeking guidance understand the limitations of Tarot.

In contrast to a Tarot reader side YouTube video [H22], which is mostly performative and lacks the important subconscious interpretation and self-reflection element, the integration of AI as a stand-alone Tarot opening tool [sel22] is potentially possible. However, it is evident that AI's capacity to replicate the depth and emotional insight of human Tarot readers remains in its infancy. While AI may enhance certain aspects of Tarot, with the correct algorithm, it can imitate remote opening. In future work, the researcher will focus on how to translate remote card opening techniques into an AI algorithm and will explore guidelines for building an intuitive AI Tarot tool. Nonetheless, it should be noted that the nuanced interpretation of cards is a domain where the querent should remain actively engaged.

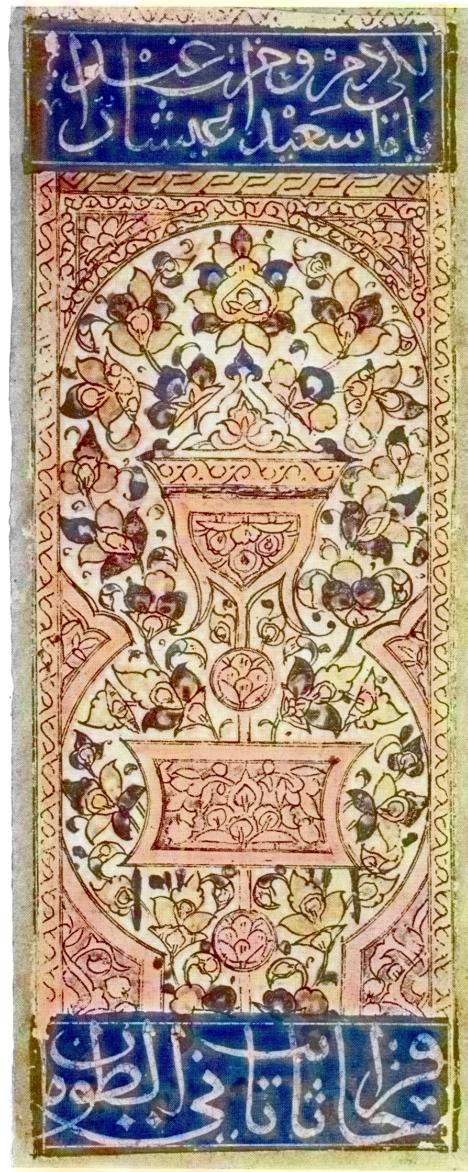
Lastly, the study underscores the historical connection between Tarot and technology. From its origins as a card game along the Silk Road to the emergence of AI-generated Tarot cards, technology has continuously shaped and expanded the Tarot's influence. In the broader context of spirituality and technology, mystical tools like Tarot offer accessible guidance while demanding caution against spiritual bypassing. Whether in-person or online, Tarot retains its profound significance as a therapeutic instrument for self-discovery, introspection, and personal growth in our increasingly interconnected digital age.

## 4. Conclusion and Contributions

### 4.1. Contributions

In this comprehensive exploration of Tarot, its historical evolution from Chinese playing cards to a Western divination practice influenced by geography and technology has been traced. Today, technology, especially AI, is once again reshaping Tarot, opening new avenues for its use as a coaching tool and technological interface.

- The study identifies potential challenges associated with Tarot, including the risks of spiritual bypass and its misuse as a therapy substitute,
- It delves into the digitalization of Tarot, assessing the effectiveness and limitations of various digital tools such as Zoom-mediated sessions, AI reading tools, and YouTube Tarot videos,
- Reaffirms the significance of the personal connection between a Tarot reader and the querent, suggesting that digital tools, while useful, may not replicate the depth of human interaction,
- It underscores the ethical responsibility of Tarot practitioners to emphasize Tarot as a tool for self-discovery rather than a replacement for professional therapy,
- It elucidates the historical interplay between Tarot and technology, emphasizing how technology has continually influenced and expanded Tarot's reach.
- It explores the potential of AI in Tarot, especially as a tool for remote card opening.



**Figure 2:** Second deputy of cups, early Muslim style cards with no figures

### 4.2. Figures

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**Figure 3:** WOCA Artists, NFT Arcana Crypto Tarot



The truth about your family and their role in your life 🍷🔮/ Pick a Card Tarot Reading 🦸

**Figure 4:** A screenshot from the YouTube reading reference

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