

Explore the reason why people deeply believe in occultism practice

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Abstract:

This paper analyzes why people are willing to believe occultism practice such as tarot from a psychological perspective. From four different angles, this work not only analyzes the principle behind the possible operation of tarot cards, but also explores human psychology of tarot cards. The final conclusions can be divided into different schools. According to Jung's collective unconscious theory, tarot cards are a tool for projecting people's subconscious minds, so they can be accurate. From a more scientifically dialectic point of view, people would believe that tarot is due to the Barnum effect, which achieves the illusion of accuracy by substituting their own real experiences with vague descriptions. At the same time, social influences and people's own personalities also affect the degree to which different people believe in tarot.

Keywords: Tarot, Psychology, collective unconscious, cognitive bias

1. Introduction

Since the 15th century, occultism practices like tarot cards have captivated human imagination, offering a sense of connection to the unknown. Nowadays, many people still use tarot for answers to address life's uncertainties or solve difficulties which may confuse them for long time. Understanding why people deeply believe in tarot requires delving into various psychological mechanisms, including collective unconscious, cognitive biases, social influences, and the role of personality traits. This essay aims to explore these different psychological factors to unravel the enduring appeal of tarot.

2. Collective unconscious

The concept is proposed by the psychologist Carl

Jung. Collective unconscious means that people gain some personal acquisition by heredity, but it has never been in consciousness since it may be repressed or forgotten. In addition, the collective unconscious is made from archetypes, which indicate the pre-existent forms seem to be present always. (Carl Jung, 1936) Since these collective unconscious minds are universal, which means that everyone has these ancient memories from their ancestors, people would find connections with cultures, myths, and artistic expressions.

To relate the collective unconscious with tarot cards, we have to first introduce tarot cards. At first, tarot was just a gambling game for people to entertain and had no mystical significance at all. (Farley, 2009) In the early days, people found that tarot could be a tool to build a way to communicate with these angels or

other heavenly hosts. (Mike Sosteric, 2014) These days, the tarot has been seen as a tool to reveal the nonscientific part of the world. (Maitre & Becker 1966) In the Western world, tarot is a magical tool that represents the supreme knowledge of our ancestors. After introducing the history of tarot, I will briefly talk about the constitute of tarot cards. Tarot has 78 pictorial cards, in 78 cards, there are 22 major cards in which portrait images have natural elements and historical figures.

People who interpret the tarot cards will relate the meaning of cards with their real lives, so this connection represents the resonance of people's inner unconscious and archetypes. (Hopcke, 1989) This coincides with another concept Jung called "synchronicity", which means that things occur with coincidences without any causal relationship. (Jung, 1973) For example, if a person is going through a difficult time in real life, they will draw a high card in the tarot, such as a high tower, which represents sudden change or upheaval. Jung gave up this explanation at last, but for me, this alignment would increase the reliability of tarots and attract more people to trust its ability. Although people can't yet use absolute scientific methods to explain this phenomenon, this is undoubtedly to increase the mystical color of Tarot, and also attract more people to try it.

The way that tarot cards are presented is very related to the Jungian concept of collective unconscious. Tarot can be seen as a tool to visualize and reveal the deep unconscious of different people since Jung believed the images on tarot are randomly created but related to inherited personal experiences. (Jung, 1959) According to Jung's theory, the unconscious is like the parts beneath the surface of an island, people can hardly recall these memories. Therefore, since tarot cards have an inseparable relationship with people's unconscious, tarot can reveal people's hidden unconscious. This leads people to reveal their deepest thoughts through tarot cards without even realizing it, so lots of people believe that tarot is accurate. In fact, the tarot cards don't make any predictions, they just show people's unconscious thoughts. As a result, the interpretation that tarot readers make isn't a consequence that can't be changed, instead, it just shows us one result if you don't make any changes.

3. Cognitive bias

When we are seeking a more scientific way to explain the reason why people deeply believe in tarot, we can use one concept in psychology called cognitive bias, which means the tendency to preferentially process information. (Hallion, L. S., & Ruscio, A. M., 2011) Every human is afraid of uncertainty, and the chance to get a glimpse of

their future is very attractive. Now, tarot is well known as a tool to know one's future, so lots of people would like to try it. I will discuss two specific theories that all belong to cognitive bias.

First, confirmation bias is the tendency to search for, interpret, and recall information that confirms one's preexisting beliefs or hypotheses (Nickerson, 1998), which will typically cause the result to be inaccurate and very subjective. When we apply this theory to tarot readings, individuals often focus on the aspects of the reading that correspond with their current situation while ignoring the parts that do not. For example, if someone is seeking validation for a decision to change careers, they are more likely to focus on and remember the parts of the tarot reading that suggest new opportunities and positive changes. Conversely, they might overlook or downplay any negative or unrelated aspects of the reading. This selective attention and memory reinforcement help to solidify their belief in the accuracy and relevance of the tarot, perpetuating the cycle of confirmation bias.

Second, a theory called the Barnum effect also has an effect on people's beliefs. leads people to accept vague, general statements as highly accurate for them personally. In the study, most of the people are able to read their own meaning into the statements they receive, and thus the statement becomes "personal" to them. Tarot readings often consist of broad statements that can apply to a wide range of people and situations. However, individuals perceive these statements as highly specific to their own lives. For example, tarot readers will tend to say phrases such as "You are seeking something more in life" or "You have experienced challenges recently." The phrase is sufficiently vague to lead people to relate to their own experiences. The personal significance attached to these general statements makes the tarot reading feel highly accurate and relevant, thereby reinforcing the individual's belief in the power of tarot.

4. Social influences

Tarot has a rich cultural and historical background, which makes people naturally add mysterious colors to it. As cultural traditions make people believe in their beliefs by providing them with many illusory contexts, there will exist lots of stories which can't be explained by science. So, in this context, it's easy to see the tarot as a powerful guide because it represents the guide of the universe. In Western cultures, for example, tarot cards are used for many occult practices that are themselves culturally significant because of their innovation. When people learn about history and find that tarot is integrated with their own culture, it is easier to reinforce people's belief in the

efficacy of tarot cards.

First, one of the main social factors that make people believe in tarot cards is a psychological concept known as group dynamics, which means the influential actions or changes that occur within and between groups. (DR Forsyth, 2014) Before we analyze the effects of group dynamics, let's look at the basics of social psychology. According to social learning theory, people generally adopt beliefs and practices that they observe in social groups (Bandura, 1977). For example, if a person has a strong interest in tarot cards, then his group is more likely to be interested in Tarot cards, or at least not resistant to tarot cards, or more willing to try Tarot cards than others. Going back to the group dynamics, we can see that it amplifies this effect even further. When people are in communities where tarot is acceptable, they experience a normative form of social influence - conforming to group norms to gain acceptance or avoid conflict (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004). This social pressure can reinforce belief in tarot by validating the practice of tarot cards through social approval and public rituals.

Second, media and popular culture have also played an important role in shaping people's perceptions of tarot cards. Depictions of tarot cards in movies, TV shows, and literature often emphasize their mystical aspects, as this can enhance their appeal (Baker, J, 2018). For example, the media often portrays tarot reading as a dramatic and insightful experience, which can be seductive to people. This description not only reinforced existing beliefs, but also further integrated Tarot into popular culture. In addition, the commercialization of tarot cards brought them into mainstream culture. Anyone can now buy tarot cards at any time on the platform and perform their own divination, or even divination for others as a job to earn money. Many fortune-tellers post messages on social media saying, "Divination has come true," in an effort to bolster the credibility of their readers and make their business even better. This accessibility normalizes practice and can lead individuals to increase their belief when encountering tarot cards in everyday settings (Gordon, 2009).

5. Personality traits

First, the most important personality trait that influences tarot belief is openness to experience. According to the five-factor model of personality, openness to experience includes traits such as imagination, curiosity, and willingness to accept novel ideas and non-traditional beliefs (McRae & Costa, 1997). Therefore, people who have the trait of high openness are more likely and willing to explore all kinds of mysterious things, including tarot cards. They can accept more abstract explanations rather than

empirical, statistical ones.

A study by McRae (1994) found that people with a high degree of openness were more likely to engage in activities involving spiritual or mystical experiences. Coincidentally, this is very similar to how tarot cards work, and as I mentioned earlier, the tarot itself has a lot of symbolism. When people draw the cards, they need to parse through the reader to understand the meaning behind the cards. This resonates with people who are highly open. The appeal of Tarot cards is that they offer unique insights into the future and provoke deep introspection about themselves. These unique aspects are particularly attractive to those who are open to novel and imaginative ideas. For example, when people with high openness get a tarot reading, they first believe the reading, then think about the meaning of the reading, and try to change the bad things about themselves.

Second, influencing people to deeply believe in tarot's personality traits is a need for control, or a desire to influence or predict the future. Research has shown that individuals who perceive themselves to have a lower level of control over their lives may be more inclined to seek out external systems that provide insight into their future (Rotter, 1966). Since tarot cards provide predictions about future events, some people believe that they can use tarot as a tool for stable control of their lives, which is especially exciting for those who feel uncertain or unconfident about their lives. Langer's (1975) research on the illusion of control emphasizes that people often believe they have more control over their lives than they actually do, especially in ambiguous situations. A tarot reading can take advantage of this cognitive bias, giving individuals the illusion of foreseeing and controlling their future. This illusion is especially appealing to those who lack personal agency or are overwhelmed by uncertainty.

6. Conclusion

In the study, we can see that people's understanding of Tarot is still very little. We can't exactly explain why Tarot is a somewhat accurate predictor of the future, but we can explain why people believe in it so much, even if it's not as powerful as social media exaggerates. People believe in tarot for a variety of psychological reasons such as social influence or personality traits. On a psychological level, tarot can be a tool for people to introspect themselves. The imagery on tarot cards can resonate with individuals due to the collective consciousness. Emotionally, tarot readings can offer a sense of control and comfort. When a reading seems to align with an individual's experiences or concerns, it can foster a feeling of connection to something larger than oneself, whether that be fate, destiny, or

a higher power.

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