



## Examining the Factors Predicting Online Tarot Exposure and Its Association with Emotional Well-Being among International University Students in Thailand

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### Abstract

This study examined the psychological factors predicting exposure to online tarot and explored its association with emotional well-being among 217 international university students in Thailand through an online survey. Three independent variables were examined as predictors of online tarot exposure: coping motivation, belief in tarot accuracy, and emotional uncertainty. The analysis demonstrated that all three variables significantly predicted online tarot exposure, collectively accounting for 49.5% of the variance. Emotional uncertainty emerged as the strongest predictor, followed by coping motivation and belief in tarot accuracy. A subsequent simple linear regression revealed that online tarot exposure significantly predicted emotional well-being, accounting for 30.8% of the variance. These findings mainly support the application of Uses and Gratifications Theory, Stress and Coping Theory to the study of online spiritual media use among international university students.

**Keywords:** Online Tarot, Emotional Well-Being, Coping Motivation, Uses and Gratifications Theory, Digital Media

### Introduction

In recent years, digital media has transcended its function as a tool for entertainment, emerging as a significant space for emotional connection and self-reflection. In contemporary digital contexts, tarot has been transformed into a widely accessible mass media format, enabling viewers to engage with tarot content without requiring a face-to-face reading, thereby offering international university students novel channels through which to seek information and emotional support (Au-Yeung, 2025).



This practice reflects the broader commercialization of digital divination, in which mass-audience content serves as a gateway to more personalized interactions (Credence, 2022). While some users engage with online tarot primarily for entertainment, a substantial proportion report using it to connect with intuition or spirituality, support emotional healing (Hong & Henrich, 2024). This study therefore examines three psychological predictors of online tarot exposure - coping motivation, belief in tarot accuracy, and emotional uncertainty, and investigates the relationship between such exposure to online tarot and emotional well-being among international university students in Thailand. Despite growing interest in digital spirituality, existing literature has focused primarily on general populations in Western contexts, with limited attention to the unique psychological challenges faced by international students navigating cross-cultural transitions. International university students in Thailand represent a particularly relevant demographic due to their dual vulnerability: the well-documented psychological stressors of studying abroad, including cultural adjustment, language barriers, and social isolation, combined with limited access to formal mental health services in their host country (Naslund et al., 2020). This study addresses this gap by examining how psychological factors drive online tarot engagement and how such engagement relates to emotional well-being in this underrepresented population.

### Objectives

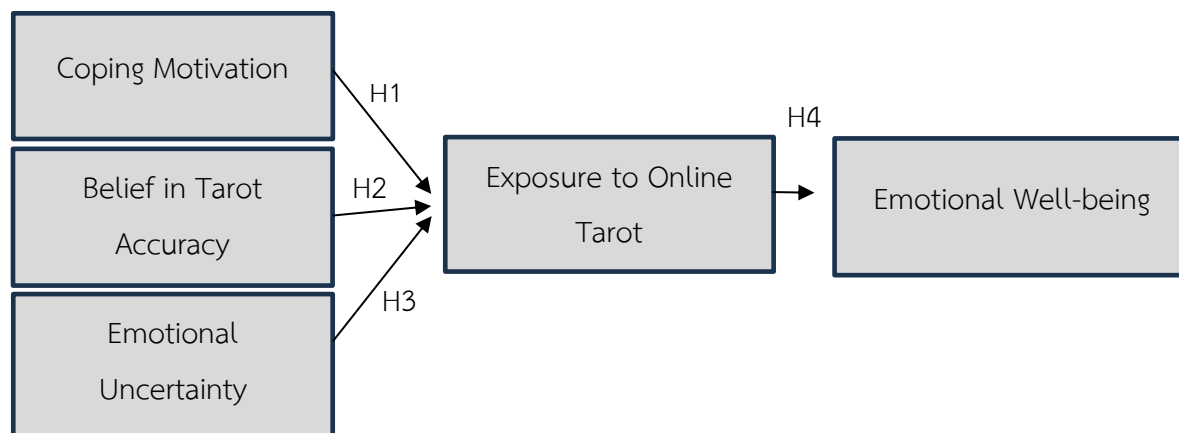
1. To examine how coping motivation, belief in tarot accuracy, and emotional uncertainty predict exposure to online tarot content among international university students in Thailand.
2. To assess the relationship between exposure to online tarot content and emotional well-being.
3. To propose the communication strategies for developing online tarot content that supports emotional coping based on empirical findings.

### Concept Theory Framework

This study integrates three theoretical frameworks together. Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz et al., 1973; Ruggiero, 2000) as the primary framework, which states that audiences are active media users who intentionally select content to satisfy their specific psychological and social needs. Addition with Stress and Coping Theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) for coping motivation and Meaning-Making and Uncertainty Reduction Theory (Berger & Calabrese, 1975; Park, 2010) as the role of emotional uncertainty.



### Conceptual Framework



**Figure 1:** Conceptual framework adapted from Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz et al., 1973; Ruggiero, 2000); Stress and Coping Theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984); and Meaning-Making and Uncertainty Reduction Theory (Berger & Calabrese, 1975; Park, 2010).

### Materials and Methods

This study employed a quantitative survey design which an online questionnaire was developed and distributed to 217 international university students who were currently residing in Thailand. Participants constituted a convenience sample recruited through university international student networks and social media groups at Bangkok University. Following the recommendation by Hair et al. (2019), the final valid sample of 180 respondents exceeds the recommended 20:1 ratio for the five constructs studied, which is adequate for regression analysis.

The questionnaire contained with five sections. The first section collected demographic information including age, gender, and nationality. The second section captured platform use and weekly engagement hours. The third section measured by using four items on a five-point Likert from strongly disagree to strongly agree for the three independent variables: coping motivation (CM), belief in tarot accuracy (BL), and emotional uncertainty (EU) and online tarot exposure (EX), each measured using four items on the same scale. The final section measured emotional well-being (EW) using five items assessing feelings of emotional stability, inner peace, relaxation, and comfort that associated with engaging with online tarot content.



Reliability analysis confirmed strong internal consistency across all scales, with Cronbach's  $\alpha$  values ranging from .808 to .879, all exceeding the accepted threshold of .70. SPSS was used to conduct descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation analysis, multiple regression for H1 through H3, and simple linear regression for H4. As for ethical considerations, all the participation volunteer entirely, all respondents provided informed consent, and no personally identifiable information was collected.

## Results

The majority identified as female (54.4%), with male respondents comprising 27.8% and LGBTQIA+ respondents 17.8%. Vietnamese participants constituted the largest national group (22.8%), followed by Burmese and Chinese or Taiwanese participants at 17.8% each. Most respondents accessed online tarot content primarily through social media (82.2%), and the majority reported engaging with such content for fewer than two hours per week (36.1%).

**Table 1:** Descriptive Statistics and Reliability (N = 180)

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Cronbach's $\alpha$
Coping Motivation (CM)	180	3.42	0.75	.879
Belief in Accuracy (BL)	180	3.25	0.69	.878
Emotional Uncertainty (EU)	180	3.35	0.66	.808
Online Tarot Exposure (EX)	180	3.23	0.77	.865
Emotional Well-Being (EW)	180	3.56	0.62	.876

Table 1 shows that all mean scores were moderate to moderately high, ranging from 3.23 to 3.56 on a five-point scale, with emotional well-being recording the highest overall mean (M=3.56) and online tarot exposure the lowest (M=3.23). Furthermore, all



Cronbach's  $\alpha$  values exceeded 0.80, confirming strong internal consistency across all scales. In addition, Pearson correlation analysis was conducted among all five variables to provide an overview of the strength and direction of linear relationships prior to regression analyses. All five variables were positively and significantly correlated with each other at  $p < 0.01$ . The two strongest correlations were between belief in tarot accuracy and emotional well-being ( $r = .641$ ), and between coping motivation, belief in tarot accuracy ( $r = .590$ ). Online tarot exposure also showed significant positive correlations with all three predictors, namely coping motivation ( $r = .585$ ), belief in tarot accuracy ( $r = .566$ ), and emotional uncertainty ( $r = .587$ ), as well as with emotional well-being ( $r = .555$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

**Table 2:** Multiple Regression Coefficients - Predictors of Online Tarot Exposure

Variable	B	Std. Error	$\beta$	t	Sig.
(Constant)	.089	.244	--	.365	.716
Coping Motivation (CM)	.277	.072	.269	3.835	.000*
Belief in Accuracy (BL)	.280	.076	.251	3.676	.000*
Emotional Uncertainty (EU)	.386	.074	.333	5.207	.000*

Note.  $R^2 = .495$ , Adjusted  $R^2 = .487$ ,  $F(3,176) = 57.533$ ,  $p < .001$ . \* $p < .05$

From Table 2, the overall regression model was statistically significant,  $F(3, 176) = 57.533$ ,  $p < .001$ , with the three motivational predictors collectively accounting for 49.5% of the variance in online tarot exposure ( $R^2 = .495$ ). All three predictors were statistically significant, where emotional uncertainty was the strongest predictor ( $\beta = .333$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Then followed by coping motivation ( $\beta = .269$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and belief in tarot accuracy as the least ( $\beta = .251$ ,  $p < .001$ ). These results support H1, H2, and H3.

**Table 3:** Simple Regression - Online Tarot Exposure Predicting Emotional Well-Being

Variable	B	Std. Error	$\beta$	t	Sig.
(Constant)	2.103	.168	--	12.551	.000



Variable	B	Std. Error	$\beta$	t	Sig.
Online Tarot Exposure (EX)	.449	.050	.555	8.905	.000*

Note.  $R^2 = .308$ , Adjusted  $R^2 = .304$ ,  $F(1,178) = 79.300$ ,  $p < .001$ . \* $p < .05$

Given the significant positive correlation between online tarot exposure and emotional well-being ( $r = .555$ ,  $p < .001$ ), a simple linear regression was conducted to examine the extent to which exposure predicted well-being. Online tarot exposure accounted for 30.8% of the variance in emotional well-being ( $R^2 = .308$ ), and the relationship was statistically significant ( $\beta = .555$ ,  $p < .001$ ). This supports H4.

**Table 4:** Summary of Hypothesis Testing Results

H	Hypothesis Statement	Result
H1	Coping motivation positively predicts exposure to online tarot content.	Supported
H2	Belief in tarot accuracy positively predicts exposure to online tarot content.	Supported
H3	Emotional uncertainty positively predicts exposure to online tarot content.	Supported
H4	Online tarot exposure significantly predicts emotional well-being.	Supported

## Conclusions and Discussion

From the results, this demonstrated that psychological motivations play a significant role in predicting why international university students in Thailand engage with online tarot content. After all, all four hypotheses were supported, providing empirical evidence for the application of Uses and Gratifications Theory, Stress and Coping Theory, and Meaning-Making and Uncertainty Reduction Theory to the study of online spiritual media use. Emotional uncertainty appeared to be the strongest predictor of online tarot exposure. With this finding, this is consistent with Meaning-Making and Uncertainty



Reduction Theory (Berger & Calabrese, 1975; Park, 2010), which suggest that individuals seek interpretive framework to restore clarity when unable to construct meaning from life events. This finding also aligns with research by Graça and Brandão (2024), who stated that spiritual coping was a significant predictor of emotional well-being among international university students dealing with uncertain circumstances.

The applicability of Stress and Coping Theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) within this digital context can be confirmed by the significant of coping motivation. International university students who experiencing emotional distress may engage with online tarot as an accessible, private, and low-barrier form of emotion-focused coping (Carver et al., 1989), consistent with broader research demonstrating that users actively select spiritually or emotionally resonant digital content to address personal coping needs (Naslund et al., 2020). The significant role of belief in tarot accuracy is consistent with the core premise of Uses and Gratifications Theory that audiences actively select content based on perceived relevance and personal value (Katz et al., 1973; Ruggiero, 2000): individuals who perceive online tarot content as personally relevant and accurate are more likely to actively seek it out, consistent with findings from paranormal belief research in which belief in the accuracy of divinatory tools reflects a broader meaning-seeking orientation that shapes media selection behavior (Tobacyk, 2004).

While the cross-sectional design prevents causal conclusions, the strength of this association indicates that the reflective and meaning-making processes involved in tarot engagement may help users organize their emotional experiences, reduce feelings of uncertainty, and experience inner peace and comfort, consistent with the operational definition of emotional well-being employed (Feller et al., 2022). This also suggests that Stress and Coping Theory may need to be reconsidered in digital spiritual contexts, as the coping mechanism here is not a direct stress-reduction behavior but rather an interpretive practice that works through symbolic meaning, which points to a potentially distinct pathway that existing coping frameworks have not fully addressed.

As contribution, for content creators and digital platform designers, the prominent role of emotional uncertainty and coping motivation indicates that online tarot audiences are users with genuine psychological needs. Since emotional uncertainty was the strongest predictor of exposure, content that offers clear interpretive frameworks and structured guidance may be particularly effective in addressing this need. Belief in tarot accuracy further suggests that perceived credibility of the content is important to this audience, meaning that content quality and consistency matter beyond entertainment value alone. For mental health practitioners and university support services, these findings raise awareness that international university students are



increasingly utilizing digital spiritual resources as informal coping tools. Hence, programs may need to acknowledge these needs while also promoting mindful and balanced use of digital media, so that it can contribute to more effective coping strategy development.

There are some limitations to be considered when it comes to interpreting these findings. First, data were collected at a single point in time, which limits the ability to examine whether motivations or well-being change because of tarot exposure over time. Second, the sample was limited only to international university students in Thailand, which means the findings reflect a specific geographic and demographic context and may not generalize to international students in other countries or to domestic student populations. Third, online tarot exposure and emotional well-being were measured through self-report, which may lead to response bias. Future research could address these limitations through longitudinal designs, cross-cultural comparative studies, or the use of platform-based behavioral data.

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