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Algorithmic Clairvoyance As A Digital Offering

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ALGORITHMIC CLAIRVOYANCE AS A DIGITAL OFFERING

TREO Paper

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Abstract

More and more experiences are being converted into digital format using digital technologies. In the face of this transformation, even the most intangible cultural practices render themselves ready for a digitalized version. This study analyses the digital transformation of clairvoyance, a cultural practice which used to be attributed to the born paranormal abilities of a clairvoyant, into algorithmic clairvoyance via digital mobile application. We collected trace data from an independent discussion forum, and we will also interview users and providers of an algorithmic clairvoyance mobile application. Our preliminary analysis uncovers different types of value-in-reading from user perspective, pointing to the evolution of clairvoyance consumption from belief-centric to probability-centric. We will explore mechanisms behind the design of algorithmic clairvoyance as a digital offering from provider perspective. We contribute to the discourse on digital transformation of intangible cultural practices and digital offering design.

Keywords: algorithmic clairvoyance, digital transformation, intangible cultural practice, digital offering

1 Introduction

What will become of us in the future? Can we foresee future events? These questions capture humanity's enduring fascination with clairvoyance. While skepticism persists, the appeal of insights beyond ordinary perception continues to captivate individuals across cultures—as portrayed in "Look into My Eyes", a recently released documentary film through a series of intimate clairvoyance sessions in New York City. The film points to the sense of reassurance and solace in times of uncertainty (e.g., COVID-19 pandemic) which keeps fueling the appeal of clairvoyance and other divination techniques.

The term clairvoyance has originated in the mid-19th century from the union of two French words *clair* meaning clear and *voir* meaning to see. It is defined as "the supposed faculty of perceiving things or events in the future or beyond normal sensory contact" (Oxford Languages, n.d.). Clairvoyance is often practiced alongside other divination techniques, such as tasseography. Clairvoyance and tasseography have historically been a social and nurturing activity, particularly in feminized forms, and has been passed down through generations (Avetisian, 2022; Park, 1963). In recent decades they have been transformed to commodified public service known as fortunetelling cafés (Korkman, 2015), institutions which have established themselves as local gathering space and tourist attractions alike.

With the advancement of digital transformation, artificial intelligence and platform economy, we observe the popularity of a digital-centric approach to experiencing and offering clairvoyance service which we refer to as *algorithmic clairvoyance*. Such a development is counterintuitive, because

clairvoyance used to rely on the belief of individual's born extrasensory perception—but algorithmic clairvoyance applications have still gained popularity. This study seeks to explore and understand algorithmic clairvoyance from user and provider perspectives. We expect to contribute to the ongoing discourse on digital transformation of intangible cultural practices (Chandra Kruse and Drechsler, 2022; Lorenz *et al.*, 2023; Xiao *et al.*, 2017) as well as digital offering design (Lehmann *et al.*, 2022; Ross *et al.*, 2019). We address two research questions: (1) How do users experience algorithmic clairvoyance? (2) How do providers design algorithmic clairvoyance as a digital offering?

2 Data Collection and Analysis

We choose Faladdin as a prominent example of algorithmic clairvoyance applications. Faladdin is a mobile application offered for both Android, iPhone, and Huawei operating systems. It offers different clairvoyance services such as coffee reading and tarot reading. It has gained significant popularity, boasting over 100 million downloads on Google Play, making it the most preferred clairvoyance application compared to others in the same category, such as Fal Yolu and Faloglan Coffee Fortune Teller. Users can access these services either by subscribing to the premium paid version or by earning credits through watching advertisements on the free version. For coffee reading, users have the option of providing three photos of their own coffee cup or allowing Faladdin to drink for them (i.e., the application generates cup images for them). The reading's topic, such as love, career or money, health, and general matters, can be chosen by the users. Once selected, users typically wait for 15 minutes for their coffee reading, although this waiting time can be shortened by watching advertisements. In the end, users get a reading of approximately 350-words long, and they can interact with it by rating, commenting, or liking it.

We seek to triangulate trace data and interview data to understand user experience of algorithmic clairvoyance. Trace data was collected using Jsoup library on Eclipse IDE for Java Developers from an independent discussion forum about Faladdin. We will interview users in their native language to delve deeper into their perception of value-in-reading. We will also conduct a participant observation of Faladdin to understand its mechanisms in an in-depth manner. The insights will be complemented with interview data with people involved in the design, programming, and marketing of Faladdin. Our data analyses apply the Grounded Theory Method (Seidel and Urquhart, 2013), specifically content analysis, with both computational and manual techniques (Miranda *et al.*, 2022). Conventional and directed content analysis methods will be used in a combined manner (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005).

3 Preliminary Insights and Outlook

Our preliminary insights point to three emerging themes: (1) belief in divination, (2) value-in-reading manifestation, and (3) perception of discourse style. Belief in divination describes the way users express their belief in the efficacy of each reading. By perception of discourse style, we refer to user's perception of the language structure and discourse pattern in the delivered reading report. Mindful of the space limitation, we focus on value-in-reading manifestation in this TREO submission—the reported forms of value user experiences while using the application. Some users highlighted the hedonic aspect of the experience:

> "*I felt happy for no reason.*"
>
> "*…downloaded it to spice up my daily entertainment."*

Others gained motivation and a sense of guidance for their action:

> "*Although we cannot know the future, it is very enjoyable and boosts the motivation to believe that what is in the fortune will happen.*"
>
> "*…it can make very congruent and somehow accurate detections in most cases, its language is also beautiful, its discourses are also motivating.*"

We discerned other manifestations of value-in-reading, but all of them indicate a shift in the loci of clairvoyance: From belief-centric to probability-centric and from clairvoyant-centric to algorithm-centric. Traditionally, individuals with born extrasensory abilities were trained to become clairvoyants through apprenticeship under experienced practitioners, and practical trainings in performing readings (Moore, 1957; Park, 1963). The shift of loci in clairvoyance is counterintuitive, and we aim to gain a deeper understanding. We will also collect and analyze additional data as outlined in section 2.

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