



## Religion and Communication Working Group

Abstracts of papers presented at the 2022 Online Conference of the  
**International Association for Media and Communication Research**

**IAMCR**

**beijing2022.iamcr.org**  
**July 2022**

Version: 17/08/22

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# Christian game reviews and its moral and theological assumptions: a comparative content analysis

## Authors

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## Abstract

Games are undeniably affecting the way we socialize and communicate and the way we think about the world. This perception of the importance of games in contemporary society is one of the main reasons why studies in games are increasing their expressiveness. As an emerging field of research, game studies currently face the challenges of creating its own identity and maintaining an active dialogue with other disciplines (MÄYRÄ, 2008, p. 4). Before the end of the 20th century, game studies were limited to historical and anthropological approaches, with emphasis on Johan Huizinga (1872-1945) and Roger Caillois (1913-1978) and their respective seminal works – *Homo Ludens* and *Les Jeux et les Hommes*. It was only with the emergence of digital games from 1980 onwards that the multidisciplinary interest of the academy in this theme grew.

One of the academic fields that also focuses on analyze gaming is religious studies, for whom games are “an important site of exploration into the intersection of religion and contemporary culture that helps us understand what religion is” (CAMPBELL; GRIEVE, 2014, p. 2). However, there is a disqualifying treatment of games as objects of academic investigation when it comes to the relationship with the study of religion. One of the reasons is the observation that games are commonly considered simple means of entertainment, being often seen as artificial, violent or immoral forms of expression (BOSMAN, 2019, p. 2 and 3). Besides, especially from some strands of theological and religious studies, games are analyzed from conservative assumptions, such as the idea that pop culture are profane, perverse, and/or morally degrading.

In the Christian context, especially among Conservative Evangelicals, there is a variety of responses about the consumption of games by Christians, ranging from harsh criticism to enthusiastic praise, as pointed by Schut (2013). This scenario explains the fact that religion is a determining factor in how Christian experience the video game medium “with regard to the choices and behaviors they exhibit during the course of gameplay”, and “with regard to how they interpret the contents of their games” (LUFT, 2014, p. 155).

Therefore, in this relationship of tension between Christians and games, the present work proposes to identify the moral and theological assumptions behind this attitude, based on evaluation criteria of game reviews in Christian gamers websites. The chosen websites – *Christcentered Gamer*, *GameChurch*, *Video Games and The Bible*, *Geeks Under Grace*,

and *Guide2Games* – represent, in English, a consistent amount of Christian gamers reviews, whose objective is to provide Christians with guidance on gaming from a religious and moral perspective. Therefore, the article proposes to carry out a comparative content analysis of the criteria of game reviews on these websites in order to identify which are the moral and religious assumptions most present in the recommendations, revealing which are the views that conservative Christian culture throws on the game industry and gamer culture.

## **Submission ID**

324

# **To Zoom or not to Zoom: Dealing with distance learning in the Ultra-Orthodox Sector in Israel during COVID**

## **Authors**

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## **Abstract**

The Corona epidemic has forced education systems to adapt a suspension of the routine activities of education frameworks and to make a transition to distance learning (DTL: Distance Teaching Learning). The vast majority of institutions have been assisted by web-based distance learning systems. In the Israeli context, at the beginning of the period, these were online classroom learning spaces combined with synchronized lessons produced by the Ministry of Education and broadcast from such dedicated studios for age distribution. Within a short time, the system itself adapted to integrated learning that allows two-way interaction using software between the classroom of Google and the Microsoft team, and soon most of the learning was based around the 'zoom' software that enables a variety of communication and pedagogical functions (Stephanil, 2020). It seems that it is not surprising that the word 'zoom' is ranked at the top of the Google search table in Israel after the first outbreak of the epidemic (Leshem, 2020).

The ultra-Orthodox sector, whose attitude to the digital space is complex and negative - certainly when it comes to the involvement of children and youth in this space - has had to adapt to the new challenges posed by the epidemic and offer distance learning

alternatives in a way that conforms to social norms and conservative values. Indeed, during the Corona period, a variety of alternative learning channels were tried in the ultra-Orthodox educational institutions, including independent guided learning with the help of textbooks, listening to asynchronous voice lessons by telephone and synchronous lessons on "content lines", dedicated telephone exchanges. Only a few institutions use video software such as Zoom for learning purposes (Katzburg, 2020, Nachshoni, 2020; Rabina, 2020).

The aim of this study is to describe the characteristics of distance learning in the Corona period in the ultra-Orthodox sector, to examine the variety of alternatives developed and tried for this purpose and to analyze the attitudes of parents, teachers and principals regarding the quality of learning in their various channels, their limitations and their effectiveness. We believe that these findings will help the ultra-Orthodox educational institutions to improve the efficiency of distance learning in accordance with the unique media climate in the sector, and the supervisory and authority bodies in the Ministry of Education to assist, support and refine learning, in future emergencies.

## **Submission ID**

534

# **Ethical aspects of the mediatization of religion in the era of Neo-Globalisation**

## **Authors**

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## **Abstract**

The author attempts to identify and discuss the more important ethical aspects of mediatization of religion in the era of progressive processes of neo-globalisation (Hjarvard, 2013; El Namaki, 2017), which include: the elimination of the sacred from human life, the question of the truth as a reference point for media interpretations of the doctrinal foundations of religion in the era of neo-globalisation, understanding the determinants of religious life in the media space. The consequence of the elimination of the sacred is the individualization and privatization of religion, which means that a person treats experiencing his own reference to the Absolute as a private matter, to which the community has no access or it is significantly reduced. The reduction of the community dimension of prayer in favour of individualized actions is one of the consequences of mediatization and is exacerbated by the processes of neo-globalisation. Media, as belonging to the sphere of the profane, may,

however, treat religious values that are part of religious life, instrumentally, manipulatively, consumingly and scandalously, which highlights the antagonism between the spheres of the profane and the sacred (StępniaK, 2020; Flew, 2020). The departure from the correspondence definition of truth is noticeable in the culture of post-truth and postmodernism, which have significant consequences for the way journalists fulfill their professional duties when dealing with the agenda of religious topics. Mediatization of social life, and thus also of mediatization of religious life, is largely marked by the above cultural context (Sim, 2019; Zackariasson, 2018). All the world's major religions (Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism) reject the features of postmodern culture and proclaim the value of voluntary renunciation of material goods and radical asceticism as a way to liberate and intensify spiritual forces (Franck, 2021). Proper understanding and use of the media by religious leaders proves their responsibility and proves that mediatization processes related to religious life have certain limits of usefulness and applicability, also taking into account the context of neo-globalisation (Guzek, 2019; González Gaitano, 2016). The methods of analysis and synthesis were used in this research.

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## **Submission ID**

678

## **Marketing and the Synagogue**

### **Authors**

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### **Abstract**

The information age opens new vistas for marketing among religious clerics and places of worship which did not exist in the pre-computer and pre-Internet era. The subject has been little researched in the media and religion field. This is surprising given the central role which the rabbi and the synagogue fulfill in Jewish religious life. In an attempt to fill the vacuum, a survey of rabbis in Israel was carried out by this author in order to gather data about the usage of rabbis and synagogues in Israel to new media. Questions include the rabbi's use of the Internet and social networks to run blogs and to respond to questions of religious law and faith. For the synagogue itself the creation of a website offers the potential to strengthen links between the synagogue and members the community.

. Overall, a clear difference was found between the non-orthodox rabbis and orthodox rabbis regarding their absorption of new media in their pastoral work. There was little or no difference between the Conservative and Reform rabbis and communities. No less significant was the wide gap within the orthodox between, on the one hand, the modern orthodox and the Hardal rabbis and communities and on the other hand the Haredi rabbis communities. It suggests that orthodox rabbis in general and Haredi rabbis in particular require both to recognise the value of new media in the current era, as well as receive the appropriate computer training. Less difference was noted between the Orthodox and non-Orthodox communities regarding the synagogue running a website.

## **Submission ID**

725

# **Theologizing and Preaching to an Invisible Audience. Social Media – The Probable Seamless Outreach Tool During Pandemics.**

## **Authors**

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## **Abstract**

The dawn of Covid-19 super ignited an emergence of virtual churches and ministries, creating a rise in the invisible audience now known as the 'online congregants'. Ministry and church leaders quickly adopted and adapted the use of technology to bridge the cultural and geographical gaps minimizing the barrier for worship, preaching, and hearing the word of God in a locked down world. Social Media has therefore become a platform for eradicating the geographical limitations. Mediated preaching, and cyber theology have consequently redefined church communication, connection, interaction and even its transaction with many pros and cons. This study, which is theological netnography based, set out to investigate the effects of cyber theology on the Christian community as well as probing the benefits and dangers of preaching to an invisible audience. The main purpose of the study was to determine interventions at virtual church policy and operational levels which may be useful in marshalling resources, mitigating the abusive of social media and promoting continued connectedness and interaction with Christian values intact.

## **Submission ID**

844

# **Did the online Catholic media misinform about the COVID-19 vaccine?**

## **Authors**

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## **Abstract**

The COVID-19 pandemic took centre stage in the media, partly because it matches almost all newsworthy criteria (O'Neill & Harcup, 2009; Vasterman & Ruigrok, 2013). Online media were the most widely used source of scientific information by citizens, and often the only source on science-related topics (Catalan-Matamoros & Elías, 2020). However, research conducted after the pandemic showed that much of the information available on the Internet regarding the health crisis lacked scientific rigor (Hernández-García & Giménez-Júlvez, 2020). Misinformation generated around the COVID-19 disease was labelled by the WHO as an "infodemic", and misinformation on health issues can pose a threat to public health (Montagni et al., 2021). It was detected that millions of Catholics are against COVID-19 vaccination based on "fake," misled religious arguments. In this context, Google News Initiative awarded the project "Vaccine and prejudice in the Catholic community" to Aleteia.org and a consortium of Catholic media, fact-checkers, a scientific committee and research centres. This project includes academic research to monitor the situation of misleading information about the Covid-19 vaccine. This research analyzed publications about the vaccine in Catholic online media with the aim of understanding the presence of the information (and misinformation) in this community. We compiled the publications via an algorithm designed for each website that scraped all publications that included keywords related to the COVID-19 vaccine. We analyzed a total of 1238 publications from 109 Catholic media outlets in five different languages in two periods; one prior to the launch of a verification portal and the second one after the Catholic media accessed the verified news. The 1238 publications (970 from the first period and 268 from the second period) were categorized to find out which were the predominant journalistic genre, type of headlines, sources of information and topics. The results indicate similar trends before and after the implementation of the verification portal in the predominance of informative journalistic articles and valorative titles, the access to the vaccines as the prevalent theme, and the use of religious sources as the main type of source. However, some differences are identified in the type of opinion headlines, in the thematic focus (shifting from the ethics or morality of getting vaccinated to the pandemic and the safety of getting the vaccine), and in the linking of the vaccine with abortion, which in the second period drops by half.

## **Submission ID**

980

# **Mediatization, Poetics and Performance of Ghanaian and Nigerian Pentecostal Deliverance Ministries**

## **Authors**

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## **Abstract**

This study takes a critical look at the religious communication experiences of the rapidly evolving media-mediated Pentecostal deliverance ministries in Ghana and Nigeria. The phenomenon of deliverance occupies a significant place in the African Pentecostal milieu as this strand builds theologies around the existential realities of their adherents within the African cosmologies. The proliferation of media-mediated Pentecostal deliverance ministries over the last two decades in Africa has changed their narrative in terms of the poetics, performance and liturgical rites. While this development has been analyzed from the spiritual competencies of prophets highlighted online, this paper explores and analysis the poetics and performance of Ghanaian and Nigeria media—mediated deliverance ministries, drawing on four case studies: Mountain of Fire and Miracles; Christ Apostolic Church in Nigeria, as well as the Alabaster International Ministry and the Anointed Palace Chapel in Ghana. With this objective, the study analyzes 20 sermons spanning from January 2020 - January 2021, taking them as representative of the poetics and performance of Ghanaian and Nigeria media—mediated deliverance ministries. The data is complemented with a content analysis of deliverance prayers and books as primary sources while secondary sources entail review of relevant literatures on the subject of media and religion discourse. We argue that the sermons and deliverance prayers are inundated with imageries, similes and metaphors that are gleaned from the secular and African indigenous constructs. We explore how Nigerian and Ghanaian Pentecostal deliverance ministries creatively use language, symbols, similes and metaphors which might be secular which constitute the core ideas and praxis of the movement through various media platforms.

**Keywords:** Mediatization, Poetics, Performance, Pentecostal Deliverance Ministries, Religion and Media

## **Submission ID**

1318

## **Patriarchal Megachurch visuals in Korea**

### **Authors**

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### **Abstract**

I observed images of Jesus the Good Shepherd produced in various mediums in several of the megachurches I visited. These images are often located in prominent places such as the façade of the building, in the front garden, and on the main entrance. I explored how patriarchal megachurches in Korea promoted the pastor's charismatic leadership and the patriarchal order in the church visually.

### **Submission ID**

1367

## **The perception of religious communities regarding religious freedom in Catalonia**

### **Authors**

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### **Abstract**

The right to freedom of religion and conscience is a fundamental right. "Freedom of ideology, religion and worship of individuals and communities is guaranteed, with no other restriction on their expression than may be necessary to maintain public order as protected by law" (Spanish Constitution). Therefore, it is not only a task for religious communities to protect this right, but also for administrations, politicians, media, academics... As a consequence, the Chair on Religious Freedom and Conscience was born in Catalonia to focus on the research and on the dissemination and awareness of this right as religious tolerance can "increase the chances of mutual toleration across religions" (Sayia, 2019).

Furthermore, every year there are many motivated incidents against religious communities, including hate speech graffiti in temples, discrimination towards women wearing the hijab... In other words, obstacles as well as violations of this right are present in the day-to-day life of the organizations. And, in addition, these ones have been aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic due to the restrictions and limitations it brought. Consequently, some religious communities have carried out some new practices as “it is an opportunity to reformulate the sense of community” (Moreno, 2021).

This research aims to analyze the perception of religious communities regarding religious freedom in Catalonia. How do they cope with the violation of this right? Do they count with the public administration’s help? How have pandemic restrictions affected the religious communities pursuit of religious freedom?

Methodologically, through a focus group and in-depth interviews with representatives and members of all the religious communities, including catholics, evangelists, muslims, buddhists..., in Catalonia, the project aims to find answers to those posed questions and develop proposals to improve the legislation, regulations and public policies, regarding freedom of religion and conscience.

All in all, religious freedom is a right many consider self-evident (Fox, 2021), but it is sometimes perceived differently from religious communities. However, there are some common obstacles that hinder the right to freedom of religion and conscience. The first step to tackle this challenge is by registering the incidents and working with public administrations which will enhance the religious diversity and education in the Catalan society.

## **Submission ID**

1436

# **SPIRITUALITY AND THE NOTION OF COMMUNICATION IN THE DIGITAL AGE A challenge for communication research**

## **Authors**

Dr. PATRICIA CORTES - CEPIES - UMSA

## **Abstract**

The spiritual experience in the digital age occurs between rites, words, symbols and images, between the sacred and the profane. Actually, spirituality is in everything because it

is the essence of being human. At this time, still a pandemic in the world, various manifestations of spirituality are evident that digital media – rightly or not – spread massively.

However, research in this field is not enough. Communication research in the era of neoglobalization needs to take into account the development of the notion of communication and its current state in the digital age with its respective spiritual and ethical implications.

From this perspective, our initial questions can be formulated as follows: How to understand communication in the digital age? What does the notion of communication contribute to the understanding of spirituality and vice versa?

To address these questions, we start from the main results of our research on the notion of communication (dialogue and cognitive decentration) in order to now delve into aspects related to spirituality and ethics.

It is a theoretical-documentary investigation that will develop three areas that dialogue with each other. In the first place, we will present some general aspects of the notion of communication and some currents or theories of communication, emphasizing the study of media reception. This introduction will allow us, in a second moment, to capture the influence of these theories in the experiences of media education in different periods and contexts, from where the analyzes related to spirituality will arise. Finally, based on the contributions of the critical and cognitive currents, we will be able to identify the elements that will form part of our own definition of communication in the digital age.

Our research is based on the theoretical contributions of Raymond Colle, Michèle Debideur, René Souylayrol, José Martínez, Jean-Pierre Meunier, Jacques Piette, Paul Ricoeur, Paulo Freire, Mario Kaplún, José Ignacio Aguaded, among others.

As a general conclusion, it has been observed that the controversy to find the meaning of the notion of communication inevitably leads us to the issue of interrelationship (pragmatics) and its cognitive, spiritual and ethical implications. Within the critical current, it implies a human and social vindication. This study could serve as a basis for understanding communication in the digital age where neoglobalization is manifested with all its benefits and threats and, thus, rethink communication research agendas.

## **Submission ID**

2166

# **Journalists' and religious leaders' perceptions of media engagement in the context of interfaith dialogue in a newly secularized Nepal**

## **Authors**

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## **Abstract**

This study explores the perceptions of journalists and religious leaders on media engagement in the context of interfaith dialogue in Nepal, a newly secularized democracy, and until not long ago, world's only Hindu nation. Data was drawn from a series of focus group discussions participated in by over 35 journalists and 35 religious leaders. Perceptions were analyzed using a conceptual model on interfaith dialogue proposed by Raja (2011) and by focusing on dialogue with the media, along these dimensions: meanings of interfaith dialogue with media; roles, types, levels, effectiveness, and objectives of engagement; hindrances on the way of dialogue, and suggestions on advancing interfaith dialogue. This study demonstrates that both journalists and religious leaders see the need for dialogue with the media to promote interfaith understanding in Nepal, mainly through engagement and outreach activities such as public events, news placements and media programming. While religious leaders cite media's generally antagonistic attitude towards covering religions, journalists find issue with lack of cooperation from religious leaders. They view "interfaith" as intersectional among religiously defined groups and "interfaith dialogue" as a positive and cooperative exchange between faith communities. In terms of roles of media in interfaith dialogue, they emphasize informational and persuasive roles over other roles. Emphasis is laid more on coverage-focused engagement or outreach activities. Journalists and religious leaders find engagement efforts inadequate and less than effective and call for a comprehensive strategy and a greater cooperation to enhance it. Communication skills are viewed as key to media activities for interfaith outreach efforts. They identify cooperation, peace, harmony and understanding as major objectives of media outreach or engagement. Negative reporting and narrow interests are viewed as among the main hindrances in interfaith dialogue. Finally, in their views, professional standing of religious leaders and prevailing prejudices are among the major issues in the advancement of interfaith dialogue. The findings have implications for interfaith efforts in countries where faith communities and the news media are adjusting to new-found freedoms.

## **Submission ID**

2188

# The role of pets and public discourse in shaping the persona of Pope Francis in digital culture

## Authors

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## Abstract

In January 2022, Pope Francis attracted considerable attention for public comments seemingly condemning those individuals who chose to adopt animals instead of having children. News media reporting on his comments highlighted Pope Francis's rhetoric of "selfish" directed at families choosing to remain child-free while devoting financial and emotional resources to animals. Such comments also received strong reactions on social media, with users utilizing TikTok and Twitter to mock his condemnation of pet ownership. Few media reports provided context to the comments made by Pope Francis, primarily due to the sensationalized nature of the headline. However, Pope Francis has previously made similar pronouncements throughout the course of his papacy. Animals have become a dominant theme in his public relations tactics, ranging from the branding associated with his choice of papal name to the Vatican communications team frequently distributing images of Pope Francis posing with animals to his over 8 million Instagram followers. In 2016, the news media misattributed Pope Francis with saying that animals go to heaven, which was cited as evidence of his progressive papal approach by cultural intermediaries ranging from *The New York Times* to *The Daily Show with Trevor Noah*. This paper analyzes how Pope Francis's comments about pet ownership – a practice which has taken on further meaning during the Covid-19 pandemic – are situated within this larger thematic trajectory which has become a dominant motif structuring his public image. This research builds upon previous literature addressing persona and the media representation of Pope Francis in public discourse and popular culture (Marshall 2010; Narbona 2016; Lundgren 2017). Comprising a non-random critical case sample, this research will be conducted through a textual analysis of Pope Francis's public addresses along with news and social media coverage of his comments on animal ownership. Particular attention will be directed towards interrogating how Pope Francis has relied upon animal imagery and rhetoric to establish a warm and progressive persona, and the disconnection caused when his comments challenge the identity that underlies his public image. The research will also account for how social media users have also responded to these headlines on Twitter and TikTok, providing insight into the way the rhetoric of religious leaders enters popular discourse. This research highlights the ways in which Pope Francis's persona is communicated by the news media and negotiated by social media users to examine how issues pertaining to religion and religious leaders circulate in contemporary digital culture.

## Submission ID

2293

# Truth and Fiction: The Construction of Monks' Images in Early Chinese Newspapers

## Authors

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## Abstract

In the late Qing and Republican periods (1840-1949), along with the cultural collision between the "old" and the "new" in China, the image of monks often appeared in newspapers and magazines as the main body of news or fiction. It is noteworthy that early newspapers often added imaginary and exaggerated parts to the news related to "monks". These processed news stories became a unique kind of story, combining truth and fiction.

Monks in the news are often closely associated with "sex", "violence" and "witchcraft". The news images of senior monks and ordinary monks are also very different. The Press Image of Religious Leaders is often associated with politics, while local ordinary monks are the objects of public curiosity. In addition to news, there are comics, poetry, novels, and other expressions. They construct a complex "Monk" media image, which is presented in the public's field of vision. Religious news in the early mass media often had elements of mythology and folklore, with no clear news sources or names of people or times. It dealt with the private and religious life of the monks and specifically recorded their reactions to exposure to modern society and new technologies. Moreover, there were news reviews and letters from readers about different views of monks in the mass media of this period, forming a unique field of public opinion.

This article will use the newspapers in Late Qing and Republican China (1840-1949) as the basis to discuss the construction of monks' image of media in this period. Also, I use material from contemporaneous magazines and old documents for comparison. The difference from traditional research methods lies in the use of multiple databases and the use of digital humanities tools to process and analyze the materials. And I also try to use digital humanities research tools to analyze hidden emotional tendencies in Chinese news, such as statistical and frequency analysis of dozens of titles for monks in the news, comparing positive, negative, and neutral monastic titles.

## Submission ID

2506

# Destiny in the Hands of 78 Tarot Cards: A Study of the Influencing Mechanism of Tarot Divination Behavior in Bilibili

## Authors

Ms. Xuejiao Qin - Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University

## Abstract

Traditional Western occultism has become increasingly popular among Chinese young people as a result of the promotion of emerging social platforms. According to statistics from Ecosia, 62.05 percent of young people under the age of 30 have used a horoscope compass or tarot divination to tell their fortune. Tarot cards belong to the category of Western occultism. It is believed to be able to predict the direction and trend of things through the interpretation of the information on the cards. After the founding of New China, Marxist atheism as an official ideology dominated the ideological sphere of society. In the new media environment, however, metaphysics, which was formerly dismissed as superstition, has taken on a new face and sparked a wave of mysticism on the Internet.

Bilibili is one of China's most popular cultural communities and video platforms, with a large concentration of youthful generations, so this paper chooses Bilibili as the research field to analyze the influence mechanism of users' online divination behavior. The audience of Bilibili tarot divination is chosen as the research object, and three distinct sub-studies are designed. The first sub-study was conducted by sampling the top Uploaders of Bilibili in tarot divination, conducting textual analysis and symbolic research on their short video content, copywriting and fan interaction in the comment section, and analyzing the characteristics presented in the production and dissemination of their short videos. The second sub-study employs the qualitative research method called grounded theory. Through in-depth interviews, the interview content was coded at three levels. Finally, several factors influencing audience involvement in tarot divination were acquired, from which the early structural framework of grounded theory was derived. The third sub-study adopted a quantitative research method, a questionnaire survey. The SPSS and AMOS software packages were used to evaluate, build, and test the theoretical model.

In terms of theoretical significance, on the one hand, tarot divination as Western occultism takes root in China through the emerging platform of the Internet, which is a complement

to interdisciplinary and cross-border research in the era of Neo-Globalization. On the other hand, humanistic concern for contemporary people can be incorporated into the theoretical analysis. From the perspective of the actual research object, the current international studies focus on western social media platforms such as youtube, while Chinese social media platforms such as Bilibili also have a large and active user base and a unique interaction mode, so they can provide new social media cases for the original research and have more local characteristics.

## **Submission ID**

2509