Selected Papers of #AoIR2025:
The 26th Annual Conference of the
Association of Internet Researchers
Niterói, Brazil / 15 – 18 Oct 2025

DeepSeek AI Meets Divination: Algorithmic Syncretism, Data Consecration, and Accuracy Politics

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Introduction

"Oh my god, DeepSeek's fortune-telling results are so accurate! You all have to try this!" Following DeepSeek's sensational debut in January, one of the earliest trends in its use across China was, surprisingly, AI fortune-telling. On social media, users eagerly shared their prompts and AI-generated readings, repurposing an advanced machine-learning model for spiritual and metaphysical insight. However, this research does not seek to examine the philosophy of ancient mythology. Instead, it situates AI divination at the intersection of socio-technical systems, posing a central yet deceptively simple question: When users claim AI divination is accurate, what does accuracy really mean?

This concept is interrogated through three key steps of AI use in users' divination: techno-mythological context, dialogue, and reflection, each corresponding to a research question. First, what socio-technical and cultural contexts shape users' perceptions of accuracy, and how do they make sense of this hybrid techno-mythological algorithm (RQ1)? Second, how do users interact with AI divination systems, and what practices emerge around prompt crafting, data sharing, and accuracy negotiation (RQ2)? Third, what does accuracy mean in the AI-fortune-telling activities (RQ3)?

Through a mixed-methods approach, this study examines AI fortune-telling by crafting prompts designed to elicit a recognizable form of storytelling (Gillespie, 2024), analyzing textual artifacts such as prompt templates, AI-generated divination readings, and social media discourse. In-progress semi-structured interviews will further explore how users interact with AI-generated divinations, negotiate accuracy, and engage in meaning-making practices. Currently, I encapsulate preliminary findings through three techno-mythological metaphors: algorithmic syncretism, data consecration, and accuracy politics. These dimensions illuminate the ways in which AI divination entangles computation, cultural beliefs, and personal interpretation, transforming algorithmic processes into spiritually charged engagements.

Suggested Citation (APA): Zhu, S. (2025, October). *DeepSeek AI Meets Divination: Algorithmic Syncretism, Data Consecration, and Accuracy Politics.* Paper presented at AoIR2025: The 26th Annual Conference of the Association of Internet Researchers. Niterói, Brazil: AoIR. Retrieved from http://spir.aoir.org.

Algorithmic Syncretism: Blending Machine Logic with Mythology

Syncretism refers to the blending of different religions, philosophies, or ideas. In this study, algorithmic syncretism describes the fusion of technological rationality with spiritual traditions, where AI's computational logic intertwines with ancient cosmological frameworks such as astrology and I Ching. This fusion not only creates a hybrid algorithm but also a belief system, where the authority of the algorithm merges with mythological authority, forming a new epistemology of digital divination.

The public's perception of technological authority emerges through multiple mechanisms. Natale (2019) describes the algorithmic imaginary, where AI is framed through historical tropes of telepathy and mindreading, reinforcing its perceived supernatural insight rather than its computational origins. While Nagy & Neff (2024) argue that this effect is deliberately engineered, as tech companies design AI as a narrative device, using illusion and mystique—a process they term the "conjuration of algorithms". Within this dazzling effect, the inaccessibility of an AI model's decision-making does not erode trust; instead, it amplifies its perceived divinatory power.

Explainable AI (XAI) research seeks to counter this opacity-driven authority, advocating for transparency and interpretability (e.g., Doshi-Velez & Kim, 2017). Methods have been developed to help users better understand how AI systems reason (Alizadeh et al., 2021), but this raises a key question: Does greater explainability enhance perceived accuracy and legitimacy, or does opacity make AI appear more authoritative? By embedding algorithms within divine texts that inherently carry metaphysical authority, this study presents an extreme case that challenges conventional assumptions in XAI research, expanding the conversation on algorithmic trust, belief, and interpretability.

Data Consecration: Ritualizing Interaction with AI

A widely circulated prompt on social media reads:
"I am a [gender], and my Gregorian birthdate is [Year/Month/Day]. Please use #Blind School Technique Foot Analysis Bazi [Topic]# to analyze my life's fortune in detail, including luck cycles, my education, and marriage. After determining an accurate relationship model, provide the final result with an honest evaluation—there is no need to use overly mild language."

What stands out in the pursuit of accuracy is that users not only request a harsher, more direct tone in their AI-generated readings but also voluntarily "sacrifice" their personal data, treating their privacy as a sacred offering in exchange for divinatory insights. In Chinese mythology, disclosing one's Bazi (birth date and time) is believed to make an individual vulnerable to spiritual manipulation or spells. However, within the sacralized context of AI divination, sharing even the most intimate personal data appears acceptable, reinforcing the idea that data itself is ritualized and consecrated within this process. AI fortune-telling unfolds through distinct steps—prompt engineering, data input, fortune reading, dialogue, and communal sharing—each contributing to the participatory ritualization of the experience.

Data consecration, then, refers to this ritualized engagement with AI divination, where personal information is not only sacralized as a meaningful offering (Ruah-Midbar, 2014) but also transforms the algorithm into a co-created spiritual medium. Accuracy, in this context, is not an inherent property of the AI itself but an emergent meaning-making process, shaped by how users interpret, refine, and inscribe significance onto its outputs. Rather than perceiving AI-generated readings as purely arbitrary or deterministic, users actively participate in practices of refinement and iterative self-confirmation, mirroring the feedback loops found in traditional fortune-telling consultations, such as tarot readings. AI divination, then, is not merely an automated process but a collaborative act of meaning construction, where algorithmic randomness is ritualized and accuracy is collectively produced.

Accuracy Politics: Negotiating Faith, Trust, and Algorithmic Authority

Accuracy politics interrogates how AI fortune-telling redefines the epistemology of correctness, trust, and belief in computational outputs. In domains such as surveillance, advertising, and medical AI, accuracy is typically measured in relation to predictive efficiency and verifiable outcomes. However, within AI-powered divination, accuracy is not determined by data precision or empirical validation but by subjective resonance—the degree to which an AI-generated reading feels true to the recipient.

Explainability, as mentioned, assumes that trust in AI arises from a user's ability to grasp its internal logic. Yet, in AI fortune-telling, trust emerges precisely from what cannot be explained. Lustig & Rosner (2022) challenge orthodox notions of explainability by introducing ineffability—the inability to fully articulate why something feels true. This concept is valuable because it suggests that AI does not always function as an instrument of rational knowledge; rather, it can serve as a site of interpretative engagement, where meaning is generated through experience rather than formal explanation.

The interplay between explainability and ineffability reflects how accuracy is negotiated in AI fortune-telling, shaping new epistemologies of algorithmic faith. The ineffability of accuracy in AI divination stems from the fact that users often experience AI-generated results as deeply meaningful, even when they cannot fully articulate why. When users describe a reading as accurate but simultaneously say, "I just feel this way; I don't know how to explain," they are not asserting that AI predicts the future with scientific precision. Rather, they refer to an ineffable alignment between the reading and their inner world as an affective and interpretative experience. This shift from transactional accuracy (rooted in empirical validation) to relational accuracy (rooted in meaning-making and affective trust) challenges dominant paradigms in explainable AI.

As an in-progress study, this paper aims to contribute to broader discussions on techno-spirituality, explainability in AI, and algorithmic mysticism. The rise of AI-powered divination is not merely a technological novelty but a site of cultural and epistemic transformation, where belief in data, mythology, and computational systems converges to create new forms of algorithmic faith.

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