

## **SUPERSTITION IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY: TRADITION MEETS TECHNOLOGY**

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### **Abstract**

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, even though there has been remarkable progress in science and technology, superstitious beliefs continue to influence individual actions and society in general. This study examines the survival and adaptation of superstitions in contemporary society, noting their psychological underpinnings and the contribution of technology in their dissemination. It explores the rituals of the net and the social media phenomenon to consider their influence on individuals' beliefs. This research also aims to account for the continuity of superstitions since the psychological comfort they bring in periods of uncertainty. This predisposition cuts across all ages, but the manner in which people practice it varies in line with age. The elderly are more associated with traditional superstitions rooted in culture, religion, and family rituals. Conversely, digitally connected youths are introduced to modern-day superstitions such as angel numbers, manifestation practices, and astrology apps. These are framed as part of spirituality, wellness, or "positive energy," hence more palatable and trendier. The research aims to complete the picture of the blend of tradition and technology on superstitious activities, i.e. the research provides insights into how superstitious practices are transforming in the modern era.

**Key Words:** Superstition, Technology, Tradition, Modernity, Technological superstition

### Introduction

Superstitions are often considered as false beliefs that aren't based on scientific evidence. According to Austrian psychologist Gustav Jahoda (2007) superstition refers to "A belief that one event is happening because of another without any natural process that links the two." They usually arise from cultural traditions or personal experiences and are not supported by scientific reasoning. Merriam-Webster defined superstition as a practice or belief that arises from ignorance, a fear of the unknown, faith in magic or chance, or an illusion of causation. Most individuals act upon superstitious things out of routine or to sense control over unpredictable events. They can also provide a sense of comfort in uncertain situations. For instance, believing in a lucky charm may help reduce person's anxiety. A person is more likely to stick with a superstition in the future if it appears to "work" because it gets reinforced. Even if there is no real connection, the belief persists because of the perceived positive outcome. Superstitions are conditioned by a combination of psychological, societal and cultural, individual experience. They offer an avenue whereby individuals are able to feel more control of live in unpredictable circumstances. Superstitions have existed throughout history since ancient times, typically based on religious rituals, mythologies, and primitive efforts to explain natural events. When scientific knowledge was scarce, superstition was used as a means of explaining the unpredictability of life and keeping society together.

**Table-1: Most common superstitious activity and belief response for it**

| Sl. No. | Most Common Superstitious Activity           | Belief Responses           |
|---------|----------------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1.      | Use of lemon and chillies outside house door | To reduce the evil effects |
| 2.      | Eating curd and sugar before heading out     | Brings good luck           |
| 3.      | Adding one rupee coin to a gift of sum       | It is a blessing           |

### Contours of the Contemporary Mind

|     |                                                                 |                                          |
|-----|-----------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| 4.  | Women not allowed to enter kitchen, temples during menstruation | Women are impure and unclean             |
| 5.  | Sneezing while starting a new work or stepping out of house     | Face some problems                       |
| 6.  | Avoiding the number 13 or "Unlucky 13"                          | Brings bad luck                          |
| 7.  | Not looking at oneself in a broken mirror                       | Brings Poverty in Home                   |
| 8.  | Itchy palm has financial repercussions                          | Gains wealth                             |
| 9.  | Pregnant women not allowed to go out during eclipse             | Protect unborn baby from any deformities |
| 10. | Making a wish when you see a falling star                       | Will make the wish come true             |

Technological advancement, the process of creating and applying new technologies that improve upon existing ones, leading to more efficient, effective, or powerful solutions. The 21st century has brought with it an extraordinary pace of technological change, altering nearly every aspect of human life—from how we communicate and work to how we think and make decisions. But this rapid transformation didn't appear overnight. It is the product of centuries of scientific exploration and technological advancement that started as far back as the Industrial Revolution in the 18th century. That period was marked by starting the mechanization of diligence and the development of machines that would gradually replace manual efforts. The 20th century next led to electricity, the telephone, the computer, and ultimately the internet—each innovation remaking human societies in fundamental ways. Now, the digital world has carried this momentum ahead with artificial intelligence (AI) technology, machine learning, robotics, and biotechnology becoming part of daily life. In today's highly interconnected and technologically driven world, we find people endowing human emotions in robots, performing ritualistic acts when operating devices, or having faith in unexplained powers governing algorithms or results. Such tendencies reflect that although technology has progressed, human cognition continues to have magical

or superstitious modes of thinking. In spite of replacing tradition, technology seems to be blending with it, and this is forging a new ground where the traditional superstitious beliefs are resurrected in contemporary contexts.

Across history, technological advancement has generally been linked to modernity. This era of modernity where rational thinking, empirical evidence, and scientific reasoning are meant to displace, the presence of the traditional irrational beliefs based on superstition is undeniable. Still, superstitious thinking has not vanished in this era of technology. Instead, it has evolved to present an intriguing paradox at the core of contemporary society. In the digital world of today, there are numerous individuals who still practice behaviours and beliefs that resemble old-fashioned superstitions. Whether it is attributing poor internet connectivity to bad luck, addressing a failing device as though it possesses intention or emotion, or over-relying on algorithms and automation, contemporary people are progressively combining new technology with old belief systems. This phenomenon which is also referred as *technological superstition* or *superstitious technological belief*, illustrates the way that psychological patterns of magical thinking endure even in hyper-rational settings.

The aim of this research paper is to examine in what ways superstitious beliefs continue to exist and evolve during the modern 21st century, particularly in the technologically advanced societies. It will inquire into how traditional superstitions are adapt, reinterpreted, or reinforced through contemporary digital and technological contexts. By examining the intersection of tradition and technology; and drawing from interdisciplinary sources in psychology, cultural and social studies, and science, the paper seeks to understand why and how superstition remains relevant in 21st century which is known as an age of data, logic, and machines and what this says about the human condition in modern times.

## **Review of Literature**

### **Evaluation of Superstition as a Modern Invention**

Superstition, the unreasonable beliefs or practices based on the

presumption of a supernatural cause-and-effect connection, frequently in absence of any empirical rationale, has had an important contribution in the history of shaping human knowledge of the world. In its earliest forms, superstition was extremely dependent on religious belief, nature and survival. Early cultures such as Egyptians, Greeks, and Indians accounted for eclipses, diseases and crop harvests in terms of supernatural explanations like gods, spirits, or ancestral powers. They provided psychological reassurance, particularly during periods of uncertainty, and helped communities develop rituals that provided them a sense of order and mastery over their existence.

Superstition often tended to be institutionalized and deeply entangled with religious beliefs, during the medieval era. Practices like using talismans, performing rituals to stave off evil, and believing in omens were usuals. Although the Renaissance and Enlightenment brought scientific inquiry and logical reasoning to the forefront, superstition was never completely eliminated. Rather, it was marginalized or reframed as folklore, cultural legacy or irrational beliefs. In the modern era, especially the 20th and 21st centuries, rapid advancements in science, education, and technology led many people to predict that superstition would disappear. Lindeman & Aarnio (2007) found that analytical thinking and scientific reasoning are negatively correlated with superstitious beliefs.

However, contrary to these expectations, superstition has not only persisted but adapted to contemporary life. This marks a significant transition: from overt traditional rituals to subtle, often digital, expressions of belief. In the 21st century, superstition has increasingly merged with technology and modern living. According to Hendrix (2019), Superstition developed its modern meaning during the nineteenth century, when anthropologists reified the concept of superstition in contradistinction to religion. This settling of boundaries between what is religion and what is superstition was part of the process of “self-conscious distancing from a past or a situation regarded as naive.”” The definition of superstition, as understood today in Western settings, is

not just a byproduct of pre-modern thought but a construct concurrent with modernity. This redefinition functioned to mark off acceptable kinds of knowledge (science and reason) from irrational ones. This new type of superstition is usually disguised in terms of “harmless habits” or individual rituals but operates through the same psychological forces as with classic beliefs: seeking control, anxiety reduction, and meaning-making with uncertainty. For instance, some users have the belief that they will somehow “magically” resolve issues by repeatedly rebooting a device.

Hendrix (2019), also added that, “in the Habermas’s publication of *The Theory of Communicative Action*, it became impossible to miss the fact that religion stubbornly refused to disappear and continued to demonstrate strength as a legitimizing force in the public sphere.” Modernity promoted the belief that science and reason would replace superstition over time—a view known as the secularization thesis. Hendrix shows that this idea is historically biased and overly simplistic. In reality, superstition isn’t obsolete—it’s just changed form, and sometimes even become more widespread in new media.

### **Technological Mediation of Superstition**

In 21<sup>st</sup> century, Technology becomes a vessel through which superstition is expressed, not eradicated. Jinhee Kim (2015), reimagines superstition as something that can coexist with, adapt to, and even be expressed through modern media technologies. Her work consists of interactive installations like a robot that sketches lucky charms, a fortune-telling mechanical bird, and machines that dispense blessings or prophecies through electronic means like code, sensors, and mechanical parts.

Furthermore, Kim’s work demonstrates how agency and personification of machines play a role in sustaining superstitious behaviour. When users interact with robots or AI-driven interfaces that “predict” or “bless,” they often anthropomorphize these tools, attributing them with intentionality or power. This aligns with that people often ascribe human traits or supernatural abilities to technology,

especially in uncertain or emotionally charged situations. The genius of it is in the intentional marriage of magical thinking and algorithmic reasoning. Take the fortune-telling gadgets, for instance. They seem goofy and illogical but are run on ordered, calculable programming. The contradiction speaks to the essence of technological mediation: harnessing rational technology to mimic irrational practice. The user's interaction with the devices is analogous to their use of conventional superstitious artifacts—getting comfort, control, or direction in precarious situations. Therefore, it can be argued that technology can be utilized not only as a utility tool but as a vehicle of belief, ritual, and symbolism. Moreover, where people once relied on shamans or talismans, they now engage with technology—such as apps, bots, and AI-driven rituals. Rather than eradicating superstition, technology recontextualizes it, blending tradition with innovation, belief with design.

### **Internet Superstition**

In the digital era, traditional superstitions have not disappeared; rather, they have transformed and found new life within online spaces. This phenomenon, known as internet superstition or technological superstition, is an irrational belief or ritualistic practice that occurs on online platforms—such as forwarding chain messages to prevent misfortune, trusting algorithmic horoscopes, or performing symbolic digital rituals like copying a specific emoji, username, or “lucky” reposts. Young adults specially Gen Z and millennials are not immune to traditional superstitious thinking; they simply manifest it through modern platforms—web-based rituals, viral luck-based memes, and gaming superstitions. Lou & Li (2021), found that online superstitious behaviours are widespread among younger users and often linked to emotional coping. Internet superstition reflects the psychological need for control and comfort in uncertain circumstances, just as traditional superstitions did in pre-modern societies. Li (2017), uses Hobsbawm's concept of “invented tradition” to show that this is not just a continuation of old beliefs, but a reinvention—where tradition is adopted for a new social context. Other examples of Hobsbawm's concept such as digital horoscopes,

angel numbers on TikTok, or ritualized tech habits, arguing they are all modern “inventions” rooted in tradition.

### **Superstitious Technological Beliefs (STBs)**

Simon, G., Sosa, A., Sweetman, R., Rupp, M., & McConnell, D. (2022) [8] define STBs as irrational beliefs about technology’s capabilities or behaviours, including assumptions about luck, intention, or supernatural influence behind technical functions. Individuals who believe in paranormal phenomena (e.g., ghosts, astrology) are more likely to also believe in STBs. It was discovered that increased STB scores were linked to greater trust in technology – i.e., those who had higher levels of superstitious beliefs in technology were more likely to trust machines, automation, and robots. Interestingly, unlike early assumptions, anthropomorphism by itself did not directly lead to trust. Rather, STBs served as an intermediary, mediating between machine personality belief and technological trust. Instead, STBs acted as a mediator, bridging belief in machine personalities and technological trust. To ensure scientific rigor, Simon et al. (2022) developed a novel STB measurement scale, verified through factor analyses and found to correlate strongly with established superstition measures, thereby confirming its reliability and validity. For instance, individuals who heavily use technology but lack deeper technical understanding may be more likely to believe that the “algorithm” rewards them for certain actions – akin to believing in a digital form of karma or fate. STBs thus act as a bridge between traditional magical thinking and modern technological environments, reconfiguring superstition in a way that feels intuitively compatible with 21st-century digital life.

### **Cultural Transmission of Superstition**

Cultural transmission refers to the passing on of beliefs, values, and customs from one generation to the next. For superstitions, that includes oral tradition, group rituals, family routines, mass media, and now electronic technology. Superstitions are not disappearing in the 21st century – they are revamped and disseminated through traditional and technological venues. While families, rituals, and oral tradition

still pass along cultural superstitions (e.g., walking behind black cats, evil eye prevention), virtual spaces now play the same function. In 2018, American psychologist S. A. Vyse has written one of his articles on superstition; *Superstitions: A Culturally Transmitted Human Behaviour*. Here, Vyse points out that superstitions are transmitted through observational learning, imitation, and social reinforcement, particularly in situations of uncertainty. This goes a long way in explaining how traditional beliefs end up being carried over and even evolving within new digital spaces. Even China, the Asian nations like China, India exhibits a parallel co-existence of tradition and modernity where an individual can employ AI, smartphones, and digital banking but still refer to horoscopes.

S. Bag & B. Panda (2019), have released their article on *Prevalence of Superstitions in Indian Society in the 21st Century*. They've stated that Indian cultural practices such as astrology, Vastu, and evil-eye rituals continue to exist because of deeply ingrained social beliefs and education deficits. The authors state that superstition evolves instead of disappearing, even in educated groups. This article brings out how technology is a new avenue for irrational beliefs. For instance, virtual poojas and astrology apps are technology-enabled forms of superstition. Moreover, Li (2017), has explained about the invented tradition of auspicious mobile phone numbers in China.

The studies have quoted that the social beliefs like Vastu, astrology, and evil-eye ceremonies in India exist because they are highly rooted and because of educational gaps. The authors note that superstition progresses rather than decreases, even among educated groups. This article highlights the manner in which technology is exploited as a new medium for irrationals. Astrology applications and virtual poojas are technology-enabled versions of traditional superstition.

### **Psychological Comfort behind the Superstition**

Even in the 21st century, with so much advancement in science and technology, there are still superstitions that go deep in people's lives. This is because they offer something technology cannot always provide which is a psychological

comfort. Superstitions help people cope with uncertainty, fear, and lack of control. Whether it's wearing a lucky charm, following astrology apps, or avoiding certain dates, these beliefs give individuals a sense of safety and assurance. Today, rather than going to astrologers, people consult their horoscopes on the internet; rather than religious ceremonies, they perform virtual rituals such as manifesting on social media or applying "positive energy" apps. They may appear in a different form, but they serve the same emotional and psychological needs. In his article, "Superstitions in the Digital Age: How Technology Shapes Our Beliefs" (2024), Sagar Bakshi focuses on the fact that old superstitions remain because they satisfy a deep-seated human need, which is control over situations of uncertainty.

Participating in rituals such as crossing the fingers before making a presentation or tossing salt over one's left shoulder provides people with a feeling of control, particularly when the outcome is in doubt. In our rapidly changing, technology-drenched lives, where change is ubiquitous and sometimes infuriating, these traditions are anchors, a source of emotional comfort, that help alleviate anxiety. Individuals continue to find comfort and control in superstitions, either by refraining from walking underneath ladders or by conforming to online rituals like applying "evil-eye" on social media sites' posts.

## Discussion

It is generally assumed that scientific progress and technological development would deter superstitious activities and beliefs. Although it is true to a certain extent, our findings suggest a different reality. Superstition is still present and also relevant in the 21st century; it has just changed its form. Rather than diminishing, superstitious beliefs have adapted to modern circumstances, particularly through using digital technology. Among young adults, we can observe a visible transition from old superstitions – like beliefs in omens, rituals, or astrological prognoses – to new technological superstitions. These include algorithm-oriented beliefs, artificial intelligence (AI) -related beliefs, and perceived "mysteries" of digital machinery. This evolution illustrates how superstition adapts itself according to the environment and instruments that people are normally exposed to on a regular basis.

Research by Simon et al. (2022) supports this trend, showing that superstitious beliefs related to technology (or Superstitious Technological Beliefs – STBs) are influenced by factors such as computer use, technological skill, paranormal beliefs, and anthropomorphic tendencies. In other words, people who attribute human-like qualities to machines or hold beliefs in the supernatural are more likely to develop superstitions connected to technology.

Furthermore, Luo and Li (2021) found that younger generations are especially prone to engaging in online superstition, often using it as a way to cope with uncertainty or emotional stress. This suggests that, even in a highly digital age, the emotional and psychological functions of superstition remain relevant. People continue to seek comfort and control in uncertain situations—only now, they do so through the digital world. The increasing complexity and opacity of technology, especially algorithms and automated systems, create conditions where people may feel a lack of control or understanding. This can give rise to new kinds of superstitious thinking, such as believing that posting at a certain time improves visibility on social media, or that certain apps act irrationally differently depending on user activity.

Ultimately, this discussion points to an important insight: technology has not eliminated superstition, but instead has reshaped and relocated it. Today's superstitions are less about ancient rituals and more about digital habits, online behaviours, and algorithmic beliefs. In this way, superstition in the 21st century reflects a blend of tradition and modernity, revealing how deeply rooted psychological needs continue to influence human thinking, even in an age defined by logic and innovation.

## **Conclusion**

During the age of modernity, superstition demonstrates not its vanishing, but its evolution. Though ancient beliefs may be in decline, superstitious reasoning still remains—reformed through technological advancements and psychological needs. Nowadays, superstitions among young people tend to be expressed as beliefs regarding algorithms, digital

rituals, and the seeming behaviours of machines. This change stresses that superstition is still embedded in fundamental psychological processes including controlling emotions, perceived control on emotions, and handling uncertainty. Superstition has evolved to fit technology and not be abolished by it, proving the resilience of belief in the human mind in a time of reason and innovation.

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