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I have been working for the RAI, the Italian state broadcasting corporation, for over 40 years.

As a journalist, I have worked as foreign correspondent, special correspondent, documentary maker and presenter of a regular television show.

For the last 25 years, I have dedicated all my time to popularizing science on television. I also write articles for newspapers and magazines and have published 23 books on popular science.

In 1978, I produced five one-hour programs for the RAI on parapsychology which were broadcast on Channel 1 TV, at 10:00 pm Saturday night. The programs were based on over a year's research and were very critical and skeptical. In preparation of these programs, I had contacted CSICOP during a stay in the United States in 1977. That was when I met Paul Kurtz, who helped me get my bearings there and with whom I have never lost contact since. I also met Ray Hyman, Martin Gardner and, above all, James Randi, who has become a close friend. He has come to Italy a number of times and was a great help with the series.

I think that the brief report I am about to present may be useful in understanding how important the mass media are in influencing public opinion. The report is on some surveys carried out before and after my programs on parapsychology went on the air.

The five documentaries dealt with the following subjects:

- 1) The case of Uri Geller
- 2) An overview of well known phenomena (telepathy, clairvoyance, premonitions, psychokinesis, spiritualism, ecc.)
- 3) Statistical research being carried out in various laboratories
- 4) Faith healers
- 5) Mediums

The program aroused all kinds of controversy and I was attacked by parapsychologist and newspapers.

For a couple of months, it was a national affair. People still recall it.

The public opinion on these matters was divided among:

- a small group of skeptics
- a larger group of believers
- and a central group of people who thought these phenomena possible, but believed in them to varying degrees.

I soon realized that it was completely useless to try to offer the believers any kind of information going against their convictions. I nevertheless wanted to see whether correct information could influence those in the large central group.

I therefore asked the RAI office, which carried out popularity ratings daily for RAI television programs, to prepare a special opinion poll: one survey was to be carried out before the program went on the air, to assess the level of belief among Italian viewers with respect to the various phenomena: another was to be carried out immediately after the program was broadcast, to see whether the program had changed the viewers' opinions.

At that time, the RAI had created a sample of viewers made up of 1500 persons who had agreed to express their opinions on programs for a certain period of time. This sample was representative of the viewing audience with respect to sex, education, profession and area of residence.

This kind of opinion poll was particularly suited to our purposes because the sample was not anonymous, that is, we were able to see whether there had been changes in opinions, by comparing the results of the polls name by name.

Before the program went on the air, the 1500 were sent questionnaires with a number of questions that we will look at later.

During the month in which the program was broadcast, the same people were sent other questionnaires repeating the same questions, which were asked immediately after the

program.

Of the 1500 persons who received the first questionnaire, 840 replied.

Of these 840, not all watched the program and, therefore, not all answered the subsequent questionnaires (three in all): on the average, 250-300 people responded to ~~all of~~ these three questionnaires.

These qualifications are necessary to point out that although the original sample consisted of 1500 persons, answers only referred to a much smaller sample.

As mentioned, however, what was important about the survey was that the answers referred to the same people, making it specific rather than merely statistical.

Here are the results of the survey carried out by Giovanna Gatteschi of the RAI office for opinion polls. The questions have been simplified here, but if anyone is interested, the original version is available.

What do you think of TELEPATHY?

	Before %	After %
- NOT TRUE	8	19
- PARTLY TRUE	19	27
- TRUE	61	32
- DON'T KNOW	11	19
- NO INTEREST	1	3
	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>

What do you think of PSYCHIC HEALERS?

	Before %	After %
- NOT TRUE	28	48
- PARTLY TRUE	23	23
- TRUE	30	13
- DON'T KNOW	16	15
- NO INTEREST	3	1
	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>

What do you think of PHILIPPINE PSYCHIC HEALERS?

	Before %	After %
- NOT TRUE	17	53
- PARTLY TRUE	20	22
- TRUE	27	8
- DON'T KNOW	33	15
- NO INTEREST	3	2
	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>

What do you think of ASTROLOGY?

	Before %	After %
- NOT TRUE	28	49
- PARTLY TRUE	34	23
- TRUE	19	9
- DON'T KNOW	16	15
- NO INTEREST	3	4
	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>

What do you think of OCCULTISTS - BLACK MAGIC?

	Before %	After %
- NOT TRUE	66	73
- PARTLY TRUE	14	11
- TRUE	9	5
- DON'T KNOW	8	7
- NO INTEREST	3	4
	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>

What do you think of PSYCHOKINESIS?

	Before %	After %
- NOT TRUE	20	46
- PARTLY TRUE	16	23
- TRUE	39	11
- DON'T KNOW	21	16
- NO INTEREST	4	4
	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>

What do you think of CLAIRVOYANCE?

	Before %	After %
- NOT TRUE	26	58
- PARTLY TRUE	29	22
- TRUE	21	7
- DON'T KNOW	22	13
- NO INTEREST	2	-
	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>

What do you think of LEVITATION?

	Before %	After %
- NOT TRUE	29	56
- PARTLY TRUE	21	15
- TRUE	16	9
- DON'T KNOW	27	16
- NO INTEREST	7	4
	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>

What do you think of PREMONITORY DREAMS?

	Before %	After %
- NOT TRUE	25	35
- PARTLY TRUE	37	37
- TRUE	29	19
- DON'T KNOW	9	8
- NO INTEREST	-	1
	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>

What do you think of DOWSERS?

	Before %	After %
- NOT TRUE	11	30
- PARTLY TRUE	21	31
- TRUE	44	24
- DON'T KNOW	16	13
- NO INTEREST	8	2
	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>

It is interesting to note that when the same questions are asked before and after a broadcast, this generally leads the persons surveyed to stick obstinately to their first response. In this case, however, examination of the answers showed that the program influenced the previous opinions notably - and not only among individuals who had declared themselves uncertain, but also among others groups: real cases of conversion occurred!

Finally, there was a third phase to the study. Two months later, the same people were sent another questionnaire to see whether their changes in opinion had lasted. Answers were compared, person by person, to the answers given in the previous surveys. This step further reduced the sample, since only 150 people answered all the questionnaires. The interesting thing is that changes could be verified individually.

Let's turn briefly to the slides showing the figures. As we expected, after only two months, some (although not many) people had gone back on their changes of opinion.

This occurred with respect to almost all phenomena: faith healers, mediums, astrologists, psychokinesis, clairvoyance, levitation and premonitory dreams.



Only the results regarding dowse~~x~~rs, Philippine psychic healers, and black magic remained constant. A significant variation was seen in the results regarding telepathy, where believers recovered lost ground.

What do you think of TELEPATHY?

	Before %	After %	2 months later %
- NOT TRUE	8	22	18
- PARTLY TRUE	15	26	31
- TRUE	65	30	41
- DON'T KNOW	11	18	10
- NO INTEREST	1	4	-
	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>

80                      56                      72

What do you think of PSYCHIC HEALERS?

	Before %	After %	2 months later %
- NOT TRUE	29	52	46
- PARTLY TRUE	20	18	21
- TRUE	32	13	18
- DON'T KNOW	16	16	13
- NO INTEREST	3	1	2
	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>

52                      31                      39

What do you think of PHILIPPINE PSYCHIC HEALERS?

	Before %	After %	2 months later %
- NOT TRUE	31	67	65
- PARTLY TRUE	9	13	7
- TRUE	12	4	8
- DON'T KNOW	29	14	16
- NO INTEREST	19	2	4
	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>

What do you think of ASTROLOGY?

	Before %	After %	2 months later %
- NOT TRUE	25	45	42
- PARTLY TRUE	34	25	38
- TRUE	21	9	6
- DON'T KNOW	16	16	13
- NO INTEREST	4	5	1
	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>

What do you think of OCCULTISTS - BLACK MAGIC?

	Before %	After %	2 months later %
- NOT TRUE	63	69	70
- PARTLY TRUE	12	12	10
- TRUE	11	5	10
- DON'T KNOW	9	11	10
- NO INTEREST	5	3	-
	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>

What do you think of PSYCHOKINESIS?

	Before %	After %	2 months later %
- NOT TRUE	18	49	41
- PARTLY TRUE	16	20	20
- TRUE	38	11	18
- DON'T KNOW	24	18	18
- NO INTEREST	4	2	3
	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>

What do you think of CLAIRVOYANCE?

	Before %	After %	2 months later %
- NOT TRUE	28	58	53
- PARTLY TRUE	28	21	22
- TRUE	21	7	12
- DON'T KNOW	21	14	10
- NO INTEREST	2	-	3
	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>

49                      28                      34

What do you think of LEVITATION?

	Before %	After %	2 months later %
- NOT TRUE	30	59	51
- PARTLY TRUE	21	11	16
- TRUE	14	8	10
- DON'T KNOW	27	19	20
- NO INTEREST	8	3	3
	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>

35                      19                      26

What do you think of PREMONITORY DREAMS?

	Before %	After %	2 months later %
- NOT TRUE	24	36	32
- PARTLY TRUE	32	32	37
- TRUE	35	19	25
- DON'T KNOW	9	12	6
- NO INTEREST	-	1	-
	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>

67                      51                      62

What do you think of DOWSERS?

	Before %	After %	2 months later %
- NOT TRUE	11	32	32
- PARTLY TRUE	20	27	26
- TRUE	45	24	27
- DON'T KNOW	15	14	14
- NO INTEREST	9	2	1
	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>

65                      51                      53

## Conclusions

We all know that statistical surveys based on personal opinions can be criticized for a number of reasons (even though in this case, everything possible was done to give the best possible results). Nevertheless, the strong variations in opinion resulting from these surveys carried out before and after a television program denote a notable change in opinion.

I feel that this is indicative of two things:

- 1) that information, especially via television, can strongly influence the public
- 2) that a single program is not enough: in the absence of continuous correct information, belief returns.

Thank you