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ABSTRACT

The purposes of this study were to analyze two variables in the communication situation which may affect the influence of polls: the "ideology" of the individual respondent, consisting of three dimensions, conservative, liberal, and moderate; and the "attitude" of the individual as to information contained in the poll, consisting of two dimensions, perceived poll credibility and behavioral intention. It was hypothesized that differences between liberalism and conservatism tend to focus on issues of equality, change, and social reform, and that there is a positive relation between degree of behavioral intention and liberalism. A total of 105 questionnaires were administered to undergraduate students at two colleges in metropolitan New York. It was concluded that ideology was not a factor in the respondents' perception of poll credibility, and that the more conservative the respondents were, the more disposed they were to be influenced by the polls. (RB)

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IDEOLOGY, ATTITUDE AND THE INFLUENCE OF PUBLIC OPINION POLLS

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IDEOLOGY, ATTITUDE AND THE INFLUENCE OF PUBLIC OPINION POLLS

Introduction

Public opinion polls have provided a new perspective to campaign politics during the past four decades. Polls have become an integral part of the political process. They have fostered changes and have modified and reshaped expectations of both political parties and candidates--including, for example, campaign efforts, candidate selection, techniques of mass influence and persuasion, issue and image orientation. Nimmo has stressed that public opinion polls "reveal the issue and ideological orientations of voters, permitting candidates to plan their campaigns accordingly."¹ Gallup and Rae have ascribed public opinion polls with the purpose of providing "a swift and efficient method by which legislators, educators, experts, and editors, as well as ordinary citizens throughout the length and breadth of the country, can have a more reliable measure of the pulse of democracy."²

This study accepts the basic proposition offered by Mendelsohn and Crespi that, in addition to television, public opinion polls "have already induced massive indirect effects upon the political process per se in America and undoubtedly will continue to influence the political process in the future."³ This study of public opinion polls is a practical application in the realm of social influence.

The poll, as an instance of mass communication, possesses the potential for massive persuasibility. The purpose of this study is to analyze two variables in the communication situation which may affect the influence of polls: (1) the ideology of the individual respondent, consisting of three

dimensions--conservative, moderate and liberal; and (2) the attitude of the individual as to information contained in the poll, consisting of two dimensions--perceived poll credibility and behavioral intention. The basic research question of this study is, are there attitudinal differences to the information contained in the polls between the various ideological groups?

Public opinion. Initially, it should be beneficial to clarify what is meant by public opinion. This concept refers to a metaphor for expressions of thought and will. The attribute of a single mind (i.e., a public opinion) is really an aggregate of the attitudes expressed (i.e., opinions) by many minds. Public opinion is conceived as a composite opinion about issues formed from many individual opinions; individual opinions are collectively attached to an issue of public concern. Public opinion comes into existence as a natural response to a certain situation or issue.⁴ In a system of representative government, consensus of public opinion is seen as an ideal prerequisite for governmental action.⁵ Public opinion varies temporally with the changing scope of governmental action or inaction in respect to its vested properties of latency, intensity, stability, and direction.⁶

Public opinion polling. Public opinion polls or surveys are used to measure the popular sentiment with regard to candidates or issues. Polls are used to gauge public opinion, not only on alternative candidate popularity, but for popular sentiment on issues as well. The opinion poll has become the most widely employed technique of campaign research over the past several decades. As a scientific survey technique, Gallup and Rae have described this development as progressing "from a glorified kind of fortunetelling into a practical way of learning what the nation thinks."⁷

This study contends that direct, manipulative effects of public opinion polls as persuasive mass communications are improbable. Public opinion polls exist in this society as an instance of mass communication since their information is usually dispersed to the public through the channels of the mass media. The media have a major influence in producing an interest in public affairs and continuously bringing polls to citizens' attention. However, the effect of the polls upon the public is mediated by predispositions of the individual and by the social situation.⁸ Individual predispositions give rise to the inherent selective processes of perception and interpretation. The social situation provides the individual with reference groups which shield him from direct impact of the media, and which are instrumental in molding his political ideology.

Ideology. This study, thus, assumes that some individuals or groups are more susceptible to persuasive mass communications than others.⁹ By influence is meant the manipulative potential of public opinion polls on one categorical group--conservative, moderate or liberal--as opposed to another. Ideology should not be confused with "political party." While the political party may serve as a reflector and molder of public opinion, it contains more than a single ideology. Ideologies should not be considered as inherent labels affixed to various elements within the society; they exist as the outgrowth of an interaction between reference group influence and predispositions or attitudes which are bound within the internal value system of beliefs.

An ideology entails an organization of attitudes and beliefs. In American politics it divides the electorate on questions of fundamental democratic

values and ideals, procedural rules of the game, and rules of conduct or a moral code; it is a means of enhancing competitive politics upon which the American political system thrives. It is a factor which influences electorate decisions by providing the individual with the feeling that his belief is the way things ought to be. Ideology is a cluster of percepts and attitudes which color and determine the individual's external reality; it serves as a mediating process between internal needs of the individual and external demands of his environment. In this study, "ideology" refers to degrees of liberal or conservative philosophies. Differences between "liberalism" and "conservatism" tend to focus on questions of change and traditionalism, equality and elitism, social reform and laissez-faire.¹⁰

Attitude. The second independent variable attempts to ascertain the persuasive potential of the poll's reported information. How does the respondent perceive and react to the poll's information? Attitude is measured on two levels: perception of poll credibility and behavioral intention or disposition to act in accordance with the information contained in the poll.

Hovland, Janis and Kelley have defined credibility in terms of several interdependent factors which, upon being perceived by the audience result in a trust and believability for the source of information. Thus, persuasive effects or influence of the information are mediated by attitudes toward the source with regard to such factors as trust, admiration, intent, believability, confidence, sincerity, logic, expertise, validity, consistency and knowledge. These acquired cues of perception of credibility significantly affect receiver reactions.¹¹

With regard to the second dimension of attitude, behavioral intention, this study is concerned with the individual's self-ratings on scales of susceptibility to influence by the polls. This study utilized neutrally established issues so that concern is not with agreement or disagreement of the respondents with the information reported in the polls.¹² It is interested in the effect that the poll's reporting of that information has on the behavioral intention of the individual; i.e., not whether it moves him from one pole of action to another, but whether it could induce him to "go along" with the popular opinions as reported by the polls.

Hypotheses. Differences between liberalism and conservatism tend to focus, as previously stated, on issues of equality, change and social reform. According to Lipset,

The conservative right has defended entrenched prerogatives, privileges and powers; the left has attacked them. The right has been more favorable to aristocratic position, to the hierarchy of birth or of wealth; the left has fought for equalization of advantage or of opportunity, for the claims of the less advantaged.¹³

For the purposes of this study we will not adhere to a dichotomy between liberalism and radicalism, or between the conservative and the reactionary. The term "conservative" will be used to express a philosophical ideology whereby people want to keep the rules of political conflict unchanged. The conservative vision sees the role of government in society to be that of a watchman; it limits government intervention in society. The conservative is

reluctant to disturb the existing order of relationships in society.¹⁴ The conservative viewpoint is that the masses seldom judge or determine rightly. According to Lipset, "The ideology of conservatism has frequently been based on elitist values which reject the idea that there is wisdom in the voice of the electorate."¹⁵

The term "liberalism" expresses a philosophical ideology whereby people want to change some of the rules of political conflict. The liberal conception sees room for improvement in societal relationships by changing them in desired ways. The liberal viewpoint identifies with and has confidence in the people. It stresses political equality and is responsive to issues when they arise.¹⁶ Liberalism regards societal reforms of the past as positive and necessary goods and "as a means of enlarging the opportunities and extending the freedom of groups who have historically been deprived and disadvantaged."¹⁷ Thus, the concept of "liberalism" denotes the philosophy of seeking change and innovation, believing in the will of the masses, but not at the expense of minority rights. Consequently, it is hypothesized that:

H1: There is a positive relation between perception of poll credibility and liberalism.

As a result of the liberal philosophy being desirous of change and belief or confidence in the will of the populace, it is believed that the more liberal the respondent is, the more credible he or she will perceive the information stated in the polls.

Furthermore, relying upon the tenets of consistency theory which explains attitudes and behavior by the tendency for the individual to be self-consistent,

and with the assumption that those who regard the source or poll as more credible will also be more apt to be favorably influenced by the popular opinion reported in the polls, it is felt that:¹⁸

H2: There is a positive relation between degree of behavioral intention and liberalism.

Briefly then, what is predicted is that first, the more liberal the respondent is, the more credible he will perceive the data reported in the polls. Second, the more liberal the respondent is, the more favorably disposed he will be to indicate behavioral intent in accordance with the information reported in the public opinion polls.

Methods

A questionnaire was administered to 105 undergraduate students at two colleges in metropolitan New York in April 1972. Questionnaires were anonymous and self-administered.

Survey. Questionnaires consisted of a scale to measure ideology, and four statements of public opinion polls each followed by two self-rating scales of perception of poll credibility and behavioral intention. To control for possible confounding effects of initial responses to specific polls, no one poll was named as appearing in the survey. The respondents were instructed that the information reported in the several polls should be regarded as a summary or consensus of national public opinion surveys.

The study was concerned with discovering whether ideology and attitude affected the influence of public opinion polls among newer voters. Therefore, the possible intervening effects of respondents' beliefs about the issues were neutralized by pretesting 40 different issues of domestic and foreign policy

and choosing the four issues with the most central means and the least deviation from the means in the actual study. The following four issues were utilized in the questionnaire:

1. We have to impose greater restrictions on the amount of foreign goods we allow into this country.
2. The activities of the CIA in foreign countries are necessary to maintain this country's security in the world situation.
3. This country should stay out of international agreements with any foreign nation or bloc.
4. Our country would benefit from the nationalization of all industries.

Credibility scale. The credibility dimension of the attitude variable was measured by a scale consisting of five, 5-point rating indices. Each of these rating scales was a bipolar adjective pair relevant to the perception of poll credibility. Respondents indicated their degree of positive or negative feeling across each scale to each of the five adjective pairs for each poll, from "extremely positive" (5) to "extremely negative" (1). The responses to the five indices of the four polls were summed and divided by the number of polls to yield a score indicating the respondent's perception of poll credibility. The Credibility Scale, thus, provided a measure of the evaluative dimension of the attitude variable, and enabled a comparison of the credibility perception of the three ideologic groups.

Behavioral intention scale. The behavioral intention dimension of the attitude variable was measured by a scale consisting of five, 5-point, multi-category rating indices. These Likert-type scales consisted of a series of attitude items to which the respondent was asked to react. Respondents indicated their degree of agreement or disagreement with each statement of

the set of five attitude items in regard to each poll, from "strongly agree" (5) to "strongly disagree" (1). The responses to the five items of each of the four polls were summed and divided by the number of polls to yield a score indicating the respondent's behavioral intention with regard to the information reported in the polls. The Behavioral Intention Scale, thus, provided a measure of the behavioral dimension of the attitude variable, and enabled a comparison of the degree of behavioral intent of the three ideological groups in response to the information reported in the polls.

Ideology scale. To determine the ideology of each respondent, he was asked to respond to a series of statements of the "Conservatism Scale" (McClosky, 1958) in order to measure his degree of liberalism-conservatism. The Conservatism Scale was designed to measure agreement with a general, conservative philosophical ideology of preference for the status quo and respect for traditionalism.¹⁹

The modified form of the Conservatism Scale employed in this study consisted of seven items of ideological attitude with response categories of "agree" (3), "not sure" (2), and "disagree" (1).²⁰ The scores of the seven items were summed--the higher the score, the greater the degree of conservatism. Respondents who scored 7 through 10 were grouped under the liberal heading (N=35), those who scores 11 through 14 were categorized as moderate (N=35), and respondents who scored 15 through 21 were placed in the conservative group (N=35).

Results

Main effects. The main effect of each of the two independent variables was found to be significant at the .01 level. First, the total means of the

three ideologic groups--liberal ($\bar{X}=13.4$), moderate ($\bar{X}=13.7$), and conservative ($\bar{X}=14.9$)--differ significantly ($F=5.48$; $df=2,102$; $p < .01$). The three ideologic groups differ significantly then with respect to their rating scores on the attitude variable, indicating the varying interpretation and felt influence of the polls between the three groups. As Table 1 demonstrates, the conservative group seems to indicate more susceptibility to poll influence than either the moderate or the liberal groups.²¹

Second, Table 1 also reveals that the total means of the two dimensions of the attitude variable--perception of poll credibility ($\bar{X}=16.1$) and behavioral intention ($\bar{X}=12.6$)--differ significantly ($F=119.83$; $df=1,102$; $p < .01$). Thus, it is difficult to claim a relationship between how credible the respondent perceives the poll's reported information and his behavioral intention with regard to that information.

Interaction. While the main effect holds (i.e., the credibility and behavioral intention means differ significantly), the interaction between the two variables--ideology and attitude--is not significant. This seems to indicate that the relationship between the means of the credibility and behavioral intention dimensions are stable for each ideologic group--i.e., there are no significant differences between ideologic groups in this respect. However, there are significant differences within the conservative group, as well as within the liberal and moderate groups, between perception of poll credibility and behavioral intention.

For internal comparisons to determine the reason for this finding of lack of interaction and for consideration of the two hypotheses of this study, orthogonal weighting coefficients were utilized. First, comparing

the differences between the credibility group mean scores and the behavioral intention group mean scores (see Table 1), differences of 4.0, 3.6, and 3.0 for liberal, moderate, and conservative groups respectively are observed. These three differences in scores, as was the main effect of the attitude variable, are highly significant. This also points to the reason why the interaction is not significant--the credibility scores within each of the three ideologic groups are consistently greater than the behavioral intention scores. Furthermore, this finding would seem to demonstrate the strength of the behavioral intention dimension to achieve the main effect.

Credibility hypothesis. It was predicted that the more liberal the respondent is, the more credible he would perceive the information reported in the polls. This hypothesis received no support. None of the mean credibility scores of the three ideologic groups--liberals (\bar{X} =15.4, moderates (\bar{X} =16.5), and conservatives (\bar{X} =16.4)--differ significantly.²² This seems to indicate that ideology was not a factor in the respondent's perception of poll credibility. Table 2 shows these results.

In fact, as can be seen in Table 2, the ordering relationship was in the reverse of prediction. The lack of significant findings here indicates that the significant main effect of the ideology variable was dependent upon the behavioral intention dimension of the attitude variable. Thus, ideology would not seem to be a determinate in the respondent's perception of poll credibility--the first hypothesis cannot be accepted.

Behavioral intention hypothesis. It was also predicted that the more liberal the respondent is, the more he would be behaviorally disposed to act in accordance with the statement of the poll. Although this hypothesis received no support, its antithesis did. In other words, it would seem that

the more conservative the respondent is, the more disposed he would be to indicate behavior influenced by the polls. While there were no significant differences between moderates ($\bar{X}=12.9$) and conservatives ($\bar{X}=13.4$) on behavioral intention mean scores, there were significant differences found between liberals ($\bar{X}=11.4$) and both the moderate and the conservative groups.²³

These findings are revealed in Table 3.

Liberals differed significantly from conservatives on behavioral intention scores ($F=8.20$; $df=1,102$; $p < .01$). Liberals also differed significantly from moderates on the behavioral intention dimension of the attitude variable ($F=4.50$; $df=1,102$; $p < .05$). What this seems to indicate is that liberals were significantly less prone to influence by the polls with regard to their behavioral intent. The liberal group was less apt to indicate behavior in accordance with the information reported in the polls than were both moderates and conservatives. In addition, the ordering relationship of scores in ascending order, particularly on this behavioral intention dimension, should be noted. Thus, it would seem that ideology may be a factor in the respondent's behavioral intention as influenced by the public opinion polls. While the second hypothesis cannot be accepted, its antithesis deserves study in subsequent research efforts.

Discussion

Briefly, the findings of the study should be reiterated. While the main effects of both the ideology and attitude variables are significant, the interaction between the two variables is not. Consistent higher ordering of credibility scores to behavioral intention scores appears to be the reason for the lack of interaction. In addition, while there are no significant

differences between the credibility scores of the three ideologic groups, there are significant differences in two group comparisons of behavioral intention scores--between liberals and moderates, and liberals and conservatives. Liberals seem less likely to indicate behavior in accordance with the statement of the polls than do moderates and conservatives. Consequently, the two hypotheses initially offered in this study cannot be accepted. However, the antithesis of the second hypothesis which would predict a positive relation between the degree of behavioral intention and degree of conservatism--that the more conservative the respondent is, the more favorably disposed he will be to indicate behavioral intent in accordance with the information reported in the public opinion polls--warrants investigation in future studies.

This study has focused upon the individual within his political society. It has raised the question of ideological and attitudinal influence on the effects of public opinion polls. The results discovered in the study defy the theoretical framework formulated to explain the predictions offered. Conservatives, rather than liberals, indicated that their behavior would be more influenced by the beliefs of others as reported in the public opinion polls. This finding perhaps contradicts the conception of liberalism, or for that matter of explaining any ideology, as a belief in the will of the masses--i.e., in popular sentiment. The traditional "liberal" and "conservative" labels frequently imposed within the society then, perhaps provide a misleading conception of the nature of the present political state. There may be a need to re-evaluate analyses of ideological types in other than "liberalism" or "conservatism" terms.

Thus, the present use of the Conservatism Scale needs to be questioned in terms of its validity and reliability. The scale possibly has limited utility today. Its formulation in a mid-western culture of the late 1950's may severely limit its applicability to an urban, eastern culture of the 1970's. This view is consistent with that expressed by Edelman who explained the drastically changing response to symbols and roles in society by stating that the student of the political process would be making a serious mistake if "he takes political perceptions and verbal justifications of political attitudes as fixed entities that predict future behavior and attitudes. They will do so only as long as the respondents continue to respond to the same symbols through taking the same roles."²⁴ In addition, the applicability of such instruments to a more "elite"²⁵ and well-educated segment of society does not establish its validity and reliability when applied to a poorer informed and less aware segment of the society.²⁵

Furthermore, the contentions of consistency theory must be questioned in light of the findings concerning the main effect of the attitude variable. There doesn't appear to be a relationship between how credible the respondent perceives the poll and his behavioral intention in response to it. Thus, this would seem to indicate that possessing an attitude toward the source of political information, specifically with regard to its credibility, does not necessarily reflect a corresponding disposition to behave in the same direction as a result of possible source or poll influence.

In conclusion then, public opinion polls have been conceived as an instance of mass communication in the society. As such, their effects are mediated, specifically by audience predispositions and reference group impact which both establish and formulate an individual's political attitudes and

ideology. Although the study has failed to demonstrate the effects of perception of poll credibility, it has pointed to the relationship between ideology and behavioral intention with regard to the interpretation and influence of public opinion polls.

Finally, studying the concept of public opinion has had both practical value (e.g., decision-making in a political campaign) and heuristic value in stimulating extensive research. However, as suggested by Field, much of the research to date has "treated public opinion essentially as a static entity measured at a single moment in time."²⁶ Mass communication research needs to move further in the direction of studying public opinion formation and change as a process occurring over a period of time, functioning in relation to specific communicative events.

NOTES

¹D. Nimmo, The Political Persuaders, Englewood Cliffs, N. J., Prentice-Hall, 1970, p. 91.

²G. Gallup and S. F. Rae, The Pulse of Democracy, New York, Greenwood Press, 1968, p. 14.

³H. Mendelsohn and I. Crespi, Polls, Television and the New Politics, Scranton, Pa., Chandler, 1970, p. 7.

⁴F. W. Allport, "Toward a Science of Public Opinion," Public Opinion Quarterly, vol. 1, 1937, p. 23.

⁵The recent inability to gather public support for his performance of the necessary functions of the office and the resultant resignation of Mr. Nixon from the Presidency is a prime example of this conception.

⁶For a discussion of the properties of public opinion see: R. E. Lane and D. O. Sears, Public Opinion, Englewood Cliffs, N. J., Prentice-Hall, 1964; V. O. Key, Public Opinion and American Democracy, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1961.

⁷Gallup and Rae, p. 5.

⁸J. T. Klapper, The Effects of Mass Communication, New York, Free Press, 1960.

⁹For a discussion of susceptibility of persuasion see: C. I. Hovland and I. L. Janis, eds., Personality and Persuasibility, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1968.

¹⁰S. M. Lipset, Political Man, Garden City, N. Y., Doubleday, 1960.

¹¹C. I. Hovland, I. L. Janis and H. H. Kelley, Communication and Persuasion, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1971, pp. 19-46.

¹²Neutrality or the least polarizing issues were determined by a pre-test of forty issues of foreign and domestic concern.

¹³Lipset, p. 232.

¹⁴A. Hacker, "Inquiry into the New Conservatism," New York Times Magazine, Feb. 16, 1964, p. 7.

¹⁵Lipset, p. 124.

¹⁶E. J. McCarthy, "The Liberal: What He Is and Isn't," New York Times Magazine, Sept. 1, 1963, p. 8.

¹⁷J. C. Livingston and R. G. Thompson, The Consent of the Governed, New York, Macmillan, 1966, p. 225.

¹⁸For a discussion of consistency theory see: P. Lecky, Self-Consistency, New York, Island Press, 1945.

¹⁹H. McClosky, "Conservatism and Personality," American Political Science Review, vol. 52, 1958, pp. 27-45.

²⁰While McClosky's revised Conservatism Scale contained nine statements of attitude, two of the items failed to differentiate effectively between agreement and disagreement to the conservatively worded statements, and were disregarded as criteria to measure ideology in this study. The level of effective differentiation was set a twenty percent "agree" plus "not sure" responses to each statement.

²¹Five equals the lowest degree, and 25 equals the highest degree of poll influence.

²²Five equals the lowest degree, and 25 equals the highest degree of perceived poll credibility.

²³Five equals the lowest degree, and 25 equals the highest degree of intention to behave in accordance with the statement of the polls.

²⁴M. Edelman, The Symbolic Uses of Politics, Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1970, p. 186.

²⁵For example, when a pre-test of this study was attempted with several members and their wives at an American Legion Post in New York City, 71 percent of the respondents were not only unable to fully complete the questionnaire, but also scored as "liberal" on the ideology scale. This was a rather surprising result in that the American Legion is not known for a "liberal" membership. In fact, subsequent discussions with the respondents supported the belief that they certainly could not be categorized as "liberal" according to the theoretical explanations of "liberalism" previously offered.

²⁶M. D. Field, "The Political Process and the Research Process," Paper presented at the American Association for Public Opinion Research Conference, Asheville, North Carolina, May 1973.

Table 1. Ideologic Group Means on the Attitude Variable

	<u>Poll Credibility</u>	<u>Behavioral Intention</u>	<u>IDEOLOGY Means</u>
Liberal	15.4	11.4	13.4
Moderate	16.5	12.9	14.7
Conservative	16.4	13.4	14.9
ATTITUDE Means	16.1	12.6	

5 = lowest degree of poll influence.

25 = highest degree of poll influence.

Table 2. Ideologic Group Means on the Credibility Dimension.

Adjective Pairs:	<u>Liberal</u>	<u>Moderate</u>	<u>Conservative</u>
logical- illogical	16.3	17.0	17.0
believable- unbelievable	16.6	17.8	17.3
reliable- unreliable	14.4	15.4	15.8
representative- unrepresentative	15.0	15.6	15.5
reasonable- unreasonable	14.9	16.5	16.3
CREDIBILITY Means	15.4	16.5	16.4

5 = extremely negative perception of poll credibility.

25 = extremely positive perception of poll credibility.

Table 3. Ideologic Group Means on the Behavioral Intention Dimension.

Attitude Statements:	<u>Liberal</u>	<u>Moderate</u>	<u>Conservative</u>
When making my decision on a referendum at election time, I would tend to rely upon the information reported by the poll.	10.5	11.6	12.9
I might make use of the poll as factual evidence in trying to sway a friend to my position.	12.5	14.6	14.6
Even if I did not agree before with the information reported by this poll, it might lead me to change my position on the issue.	11.8	12.3	13.3
If a candidate for public office was in accord with the majority opinion reported by the poll, I would probably vote for him.	10.8	12.5	12.8
Since the poll is a reflection of what the majority in our country want, we should enforce the decision on our government.	11.3	13.4	13.3
BEHAVIORAL INTENTION Means	11.4	12.8	13.4

5 = lowest degree of behavioral intention to act in accordance with the statement of the polls.

25 = highest degree of behavioral intention to act in accordance with the statement of the polls.

IDEOLOGY, ATTITUDE AND THE INFLUENCE OF PUBLIC OPINION POLLS

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ABSTRACT

Since their information is generally disseminated to the public through the channels of the mass media, public opinion polls are felt to exist in this society as instances of mass communication. This study investigated the relationship between two receiver variables, ideology--conservative, moderate or liberal--and attitude--perception of poll credibility and behavioral intention, on the influence of public opinion polls. Positive relationships were predicted between: (a) the respondents' liberalism and their perceptions of poll credibility; and (b) the respondents' liberalism and their behavioral intentions to act in accordance with the statements of the polls.

While the study revealed a significant main effect between ideology and attitude, the interaction between the two variables was not found to be significant. The credibility hypothesis received no support--ideology was not found to be a factor in perception of poll credibility. In addition, although the behavioral intention hypothesis was also not supported, support was found for its antithesis--it would seem that the more conservative the respondent was, the more disposed he would be to indicate behavioral intent influenced by the statement of the polls.

(Abstract of a paper prepared for presentation at the International Communication Association Convention, Mass Communication Division, Chicago, April 1975).