Do you want to believe?

A radio documentary exploring the phenomena of believe in supernatural

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ABSTRACT

Since the dawn of human civilization, people have tended to explain the unexplainable by seeing nonexistent images and seeking help from higher powers. This dissertation aims to complement the radio documentary *Do you want to believe?* by explaining the scientific and historical aspects of the phenomenon of belief in the paranormal and the reasons for people's interest in extrasensory perception.

This written report also addresses the psychological prerequisites involved in the formation of belief in the supernatural and analyzes its manifestations across different historical periods. It examines the probable reasons for the continued existence of this belief in the modern world.

Additionally, the report presents an analysis of how the topic of extrasensory practices is represented in other radio documentaries, podcasts, and TV shows.

The dissertation also covers the creative and technical process of producing the radio documentary *Do you want to believe?* —from defining the topic and format to sound design decisions and final editing.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS:

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Reasoning about supernatural phenomena is an integral and enduring aspect of human cognition.

Cristine H. Legare

The importance and relevance of the topic are justified by the fact that people still continue to turn to the same supernatural practices, wrapping them in a new form and reinventing them. Even in technologically advanced countries like Russia, many people combine modern medicine with traditional healing practices and seek help from psychics and fortune-tellers in difficult life situations.

According to the Kyiv Post (2025), almost two-thirds of Russians talk with fortune-tellers at least once, and about a quarter of them believe that they can really forecast the future. The size of the occult services industry is believed to be 2.4 trillion rubles (the equivalent of 24 billion US dollars). Further, approximately half of women and a third of men in Russia follow astrological forecasts, which indicate the strong cultural persistence of these beliefs despite scientific progress. The speed of the development of occult and esoteric services in Russia is also marked by Russiapost.info (2025) which considers this growth as being caused by social uncertainty and economic problems as well as psychological needs which promoted many people to turn to psychic consultations to find a path.

Academic discourse explains the psychological aspect of recognizing the existence of things that are not physically present, as well as the human need to find answers. Psychics are perceived not only as "interpreters of the unknown," but also as "emotional and therapeutic coaches," providing social affiliation and interpretive value that cannot be found in typical medical or religious contexts (Lavin, 2016). Trust in psychic readings is informed by thinking biases, especially confirmation bias; as Kuhn (2016) demonstrates, confirmation bias has a significant role in recreating the adherence to psychic phenomena. While psychic services cannot be considered a complete replacement for therapy sessions, they can bring "hope and emotional support," although skeptics emphasize their commercial and controversial nature.

Social condemnation and accusations of fraud surround psychic practices yet aggressive propaganda comes from both sides of the debate. However, psychic and esoteric programs continue to be legalized and appear openly in various public settings—such as tents at themed fairs, shops in city centers, and stalls at flea markets. While these may not always be taken seriously by the broader public, they remain consistently present and active.

An example of such activity, as seen in Dublin, is available in arguably unexpected places, including The Nightmare Realm scream park where customers may optimally have access to psychic readings and other esoteric activities. The given phenomenon supports the ability of established cultural traditions to evolve and survive by consolidating with modern practices of entertainment and the urban ways of life irrespective of the existing skepticism.

The distribution and coverage of psychic phenomena is not limited to the post-Soviet world but also includes Europe. The distribution and coverage of psychic phenomena is not limited with the post-Soviet. The most vividly represented examples are the United Kingdom and Ireland. Such practices have gained institutional legitimacy in these jurisdictions through similarly organized societies like the Irish Society of Mediums (ISM) and the Irish Spiritist Federation (ISF). These organizations manage fairs and community events to spread the teachings of spiritualists and provide psychic readings in formally approved contexts.

The purpose of my project, which is to produce a radio documentary investigating why people believe in the paranormal and what effects this has, arises from the persistent fascination and widespread curiosity that exists in nearly every society, regardless of time or place. This interest is far more than a passing trend; rather, it reflects multilayered, psychologically complex, and culturally inscribed processes that cut across generations and national state borders.
Due to the sensitive nature of the topic in question that touches upon themes of personal trauma, bereavement and fear, the project uses a methodology that is carefully balanced and ethically sound. As a journalist, I take on the responsibility with sensitivity, impartiality, a clear dedication to portraying a multiplicity of perspectives, and consequently make sure that the work not only enlightens and entertains listeners but also honors the dignity of interviewees.

I have a personal interest in the topic, but I don't particularly contribute to the narrative; rather, I aim to lower the degree of formality with my interjections between the connecting historical points and interview segments.
In the radio documentary, the position taken by the narrator remains neutral by letting both sides explain their corresponding point of view and remaining silent on the aspect of evaluation. This kind of position creates a free, unbiased environment in which parties to communication can share thoughts freely. This is not to test the truth or validity of each statement but instead, the objective is to enable a plurality of opinions to be voiced in a natural manner. This methodology fosters respectful dialogue and encourages honest communication, which is especially important in exploring sensitive or controversial topics. By refraining from imposing personal biases or conclusions, the discourse remains inclusive and authentic, enabling the audience or participants to engage critically and form their own informed opinions.

The chosen audio medium, especially radio documentary, is specifically chosen due to its magnified availability of expression. In case of investigation of a sensitive topic, the lack of visual representation provides interviewees with a more sympathetic and less obtrusive environment. This characteristic reduces the potential of being distracted or self-conscious, that might develop in a case where recordings are based on a visual medium, which promotes frankness and openness. Additionally, an audial platform will provide the audience with the ability to fully use their imagination and focus their full attention on the spoken material, which increases emotional appeal and cognition. By these means, the format of the radio documentary balances the sensitivity with expressive freedom, and this makes it perfectly suitable to introduce sensitive and complex subjects.

Radio as a whole and radio feature programs are still relatively up to date and popular, where RTE Radio 1 is listened to by over 1 million people per week as of early 2025. Programs such as Morning Ireland attract up to a half a million listeners every day and various other programs maintain strong audiences throughout the day and weekend. Its resilience in the face of other changes in consumer habits highlights the strong position of the station in the Irish media landscape. However, the target audience of the radio station is still the older generation, and my personal experience supports this statement: being a Gen Z member, I hardly listen to the radio now, which can be seen as evidence of an intergenerational discrepancy in media consumption behaviors.
The possible alternative solution is to present the project in the form of a podcast, which can considerably extend the reach to the target audience, particularly among younger generations, including Generation Z. As opposed to traditional broadcasting, the podcast offers an accessible interface and similar potential access in terms of reach which allows bridging the generation gap of media consumption.

The background music is an important aspect of the development of the experience of a radio documentary audience. The emotional tone is set with the help of carefully crafted audio elements,

including ambient sounds, music and some subtle effects, as they help to immerse the audience into the topic. Sound design helps to support the narrative progress and to make the verbal speech more powerful by redirecting the attention into sound perception and causing emotional responses. This audio environment helps to connect more to the material, sustaining listener engagement throughout and reinforcing the intended message. Concerning sensitive or complicated content, a well-balanced use of sound may turn into an inviting but intriguing sound space, thus bringing sympathetic and attentive listening.

In the written report, I provide important accompanying information about the conducted research, the process of finding participants, coordinating interviews, material selection, and sound design. The combination of the project and the written report should provide a comprehensive picture of my immersion in the subject and constitute an engaging and informative product.

The structure of the radio documentary is built around four interviews. For a balanced narrative, both sides—skepticism and belief—are presented in equal proportions, with two interviewees representing each. First, a believer shares her experience of receiving predictions that strengthened her faith in the power of certain people to see the past and the future, and then she talks about her grandmother, who had strong healing abilities through the warmth of her hands. Then the skeptic contributes by questioning the likelihood that anyone possesses supernatural abilities and reframes any interaction between psychics and believers as commodity-market relations. The middle of the podcast, serving as the climax, features an interview with a medium who discusses her personal journey in discovering her abilities and her work experience. The narrative concludes with the opinion of a psychologist.

CHAPTER TWO: EVIDENCE OF RESEARCH

This chapter examines the research analyzed for the creation of this radio documentary. The sources included academic works, scientific articles, internet sources, as well as relevant media sources.

Radio

As a foreign student who had no prior knowledge of Irish radio broadcasting, I recognised early in my research process that local context is vital to producing radio documentaries relevant and appealing to Irish audiences. Since the final product of my dissertation is inherently situated within the Irish cultural environment, I first needed to immerse myself in this media landscape and systematically analyse the country's most influential radio stations.

There is no surprise at the fact that the most listened to Irish radio stations are stations of the Irish broadcasting company RTE; to be exact, these are RTE Radio 1 and RTE 2FM. According to data from the Joint National Listenership Research (JNLR), RTÉ Radio 1 is listened to by over 1.3 million people weekly. The station has a flexible array of contents to be accommodated to various categories of people, majorly to the mature audience.

This audience places great importance on current, both news and cultural, content—something the station fulfills through flagship programs such as Morning Ireland, which covers news and the latest events and attracts over 466,000 listeners daily. Another key program is the weekday afternoon show The Ray D'Arcy Show, which combines entertaining and cultural topics, engaging nearly 200,000 listeners.

However, my intended primary audience for the radio documentary is young adults, which does not fit the target audience of RTE Radio 1, adults of age 35-54 years old. However, the critical analysis of RTE Radio 1 documentaries is still necessary, as the radio channel still plays the major influencer and pioneer roles in the Irish radio environment. Moreover, a number of RTE Radio 1 documentaries revolve around themes that are closely related to my research, which is why they can be deemed as relevant as a comparative framework.

Besides, the RTE Radio 1 is strongly dedicated towards documentary programming that explores various themes. These cover the historical and modern day aspects and some of the most trending recent documentaries as far as their topics are concerned are social, cultural as well as supernatural themes under the spotlight. A memorable one such as that of the last century is the Documentary on One episode titled as the Witchcraft which was first released in 1976 can still be listened by people today on the official RTE website under the same title. A later example is the 2015 Documentary on One program titled Ghosts of Grangegorman, which concerns the Grangegorman Psychiatric Hospital, in which among others, the staff members of the facility, chaplains and former nurses report anomalous encounters with unseen presences and other unexplained phenomena. This program incorporates both history and testimony to discuss the overlapping between mental health and supernatural experience. Even though themes of the supernatural have not been directly addressed within the program in that context of frequency since then, threads of the theme remain in shows such as Documentary on One: Where is J Jon? This is a series based on a case of a missing person called Jon, and it is quite interesting to note that it was documenting the flow of psychic and clairvoyant messages to his family, at the time of the search. These messages emphasize the fact that the Irish society still believes in the supernatural, which affects their attitude towards personal tragedy.

Notably, these radio programs are balanced and ethical to the topic that they address. They do not engage in blind acceptance, as well as do not disregard the topics simply because of the blind skepticism. On the contrary, they bring forth the issues in a manner that is both respectful and unbiased. I followed the same position within my own radio documentary practice, as my main objective was to provide the listeners with an opportunity to make their own conclusions with the help of discussing the opinions and viewpoints of each of the contributors equally and showing their position in equal proportion to each other.

Podcasts

In the modern world of multimedia, such traditional radio broadcasts and podcasts are increasingly indistinct. Despite the title shift, the method of production, and the way of distribution, scholars observe that podcasts and radio documentaries share many common narrative standards, depth of themes, and way of addressing the clients (Morris & Patterson, 2015). Both forms also use sophisticated audio production process, the use of multiple voices or sounds, and the use of documentary research processes as well as artistic means of creating rich and immersive materials. Taking into consideration the angle of media analysis and cultural studies, podcast should not be considered only as a new form of digital audio because it is a natural extension of existing radio formats with new significations and increased variability achieved by interactivity, on-demand availability, and wide range of thematic possibilities (Berry, 2016). This makes podcasts significant points of in-depth investigation into audio storytelling and increases the knowledge of audio-based formats as media platforms. Mia Lindgren also shares the concepts presented by scholars saying that with the possibilities of podcasting, people can time-shift their listening according to their own desires and demands, gaining control over the way they listen to programs and turn the radio experience into the one that suits their individual schedules and preferences (2011). Therefore, for a thorough analysis of audio broadcasting formats and their varieties, it would be highly beneficial, in my view, to include podcasts alongside traditional radio documentaries in research. Such a cross-format approach would better illuminate the dynamics of audio content development, audience transformation, and new modes of engagement, as well as reveal commonalities and distinctive features in the production and reception of audio documentary material.

Among the most popular podcasts that are the closest to the theme of my investigation, there is A History of Ghosts on BBC. The major strength of this podcast is the way the narrator combines the history with personal anecdotes. This fusion makes it much easier to comprehend complex ideas and much easier to be moved by them. Another example is Strange and Unexplained by Daisy Eagan, which discusses many different things that are strange, unexplained, and mysterious, including UFO sightings, hauntings, and sightings of the Bigfoot. The podcast is unique and fascinating as a collection of true stories that are entertaining and terrifying at the same time. It explores the weird and the strange and gives the listeners a tour into the dark unknowns in the world that provides them entertainment mixed with a little discomfort. The combination of storytelling, comedy, and the extensive treatment of paranormal issues in the podcast proves to be a useful template to the psychic-themed radio documentary which is also exploring the thin line between belief and skepticism.

Science

At the planning stage of the interviews, it became clear that carrying out interviews would not have been enough in order to bring my work as an aspiring journalist to real life and to provide a relevant result. That is why I chose an independent, combined approach: I studied the essence of the most important topic, esotericism, its historical roots and the peculiarities which appeared in

various periods and in various cultures. This holistic approach provided me with a broad picture of the phenomenon and made sure that the end piece of work represented a complex view

In seeking truth, you have to get both sides of a story.

–Walter Cronkite

The widely accepted precondition that naturalistic and supernatural explanations are mutually exclusive contradicts empirical evidence on how human beings think. An increasing number of studies have shown that people normally use these two directions of explanation in their interpretation of the same phenomenon. This tendency is observed in Evans-Pritchard (1937) analysis of the Azande incident: termite infestation is accepted as the proximate cause of the collapse of a granary, but at the same time, the collapse is explained by witchcraft in order to explain the presence of certain people at the time of the event regarding the proximate causes of the event. Azande are not the only people who experience such dualism; it is a global discourse. As an example, answers that people give when asked questions about the origins of species tend to blend creation stories and evolution theories, and understanding of illness thus tends to involve both biological causes and supernatural ones. In addition, neurodevelopmental research indicates that supernatural explanations are not moderated by maturation or formal education in proportion to the increase therein; instead, in most sociocultural contexts, these explanations increase and in some cases peak during the developmental processes. Therefore, to come up with a conclusive and factual evaluation of supernatural belief, it becomes crucial to put aside the binary division and see how alternative explanatory modalities exist concomitantly and interdependently in different cultures. There is a common belief that each individual must wholly commit to a single truth: one either believes in the supernatural or one does not. Nevertheless, the reality is much more diverse and complicated, as it is being proved by the wide range of cross-cultural researches.

As a starting point of the research, I decided to focus on exploring how psychic predictions are made. The construction of psychics as predictors of the future is often made without confining them to intuitive action and is also cast in the terms of emotional and spiritual healing. According to the ethnographic study by Melissa F. Lavin, On Spiritualist Workers: Healing and Divining through Tarot and the Metaphysical (2016), psychics perform two roles at the same time: they are interpreters of the unknown, and they are emotional and therapeutic coaches. Lavin also mentions that psychics can help people feel connected and find meaning, and it is often lacking in the mainstream medical or religious environment (2016). They also provide solace and advice, in short, play a therapeutic role as well as make predictions, and this role is also discussed in the radio documentary with the medium's interview. The radio documentary is proving the point that the psychic consultation does more than reading and predicting, also helps to self-explore and heal spiritually. Lavin also claims that psychics act as intermediaries of culture, which allows the clients to have a place to receive spiritual and emotional help (2016). This is a multi-faceted dimension, and it is core to the documentary as it addresses the way psychic practices are viewed as a necessity to those who are faced with feeling uncertain or making choices of which are of grave importance in their lives.

The work of psychics is rather versatile, not only in the therapeutic and cultural role they play, but in the cognitive biases and functions of the mind, which determine how one interprets and validates readings.

The psychic beliefs are often based on cognitive biases which filter the way in which people interpret ambiguous information. An example of such cognitive mechanisms is presented by Gustav Kuhn (2016) in his Experiencing Misinformation: The Effect of Pre-Exposure Warnings and Debunking on Psychic Beliefs. According to Kuhn (2016) reports, the likelihood of people believing the authenticity of psychic readings is less likely in the case of prior exposure to warnings

regarding the fallibility of such psychic readings. This finding emphasizes the fact that confirmation bias, i.e. the inclination to seek out information compatible with the pre-existing assumptions, is a major factor in reproducing the commitment to psychic phenomena.
These issues are examined in the current radio documentary by addressing how people make sense of psychic readings, which are frequently identified through the perceived patterns found in random or even indeterminate happenings. The psychologist has been interviewed defining how these cognitive prejudices made people vulnerable enough to believe in psychic powers.

Psychic determinism as the belief that psychics can unveil the set routes in advance serves as a psychological tool that grants people the feeling of comfort and some sort of security in the uncertainty. Robin Gordon Brown (2013) has written a study titled On Psychic Determinism in which she contends that psychics employ storm-trooping tactics that insert a sense of order onto the very turbulent world, thereby fulfilling an intense psychological desire to see order and predictability even influencing the personal crisis. A similar opinion is expressed by the psychologist presented in the radio documentary that is under consideration, who admits that, despite the fact that any psychic sessions cannot be an alternative to therapeutic interventions, they may bring hope and emotional support. A more judgmental tone is expressed by another interviewee in the same radio documentary, the skeptic, who does so by likening psychic services to any commercial service like selling courses, to indicate how controversial they are.

Spiritualism

The interviewee in the radio documentary, who is a medium and a spiritualist, claims a particular embodiment of esoteric practice. Any serious analysis of her worldviews would need to take a bearing on the religious peculiarities of her system of beliefs. This question can be best placed within context of spiritual and religious belief systems, where psychics serve the same purpose as priests and spiritually influential people in other belief systems. Psychic phenomenon acceptance is deeply rooted within the larger cultural and religious establishment. Individuals adhering to movements that include New Age spirituality, spiritualism, and esotericism are more likely to be prone to believing in some aspects of the paranormal, as shown by Anne Finlayson Smith and Janette Graetz Simmonds (2007). In trying to substantiate their argument, the pair of scholars argue that such individuals give psychics the role of a trusted source of guidance, which they often give a higher status compared to religious leaders (Smith & Simmonds, 200). In effect, psychics act not only as prophets but as conduits of spiritual information and personal wisdom, between the secular and the transcendent worlds.

This point of congruence between psychic enterprise and cultural greats historically exemplifies how spiritualist credence pervaded down the social ladder. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, author of Sherlock Holmes, came to be one of the most well-known advocates of spiritualism, following the personal loses during World War I, such as the loss of his son Kingsley. This participation marked a fundamental change in Doyle, as a writer whose identity was his commitment to rational thought, to an identity who believed in the new truth of spirit communications, and a calling to share this with a world that seeks meaning (Sandford, 2020). He was in stark contrast to exponents like Harry Houdini, master illusionist and skeptic who made it his business to disparage spiritualist claims publicly despite the similarly emotional effect of reputed mediumistic phenomena. Other historical figures like Charles Dickens and Abraham Lincoln also experienced mesmerism, seances and clairvoyance therefore pointing at the social spread and societal deep roots of ideas among them. Instances of this testify to the paradoxical situation involving the spiritualist and psychic practitioner as he stands squarely within religious, cultural, and individual spheres.

Animism and shamanism

In the context of my research on the radio documentary, I tried to present a historical reference to the problem of vision and interpretation of supernatural events during various times and cultures. The first part of it is dedicated to animism, characterized by an intrinsic human tendency to perceive a unity between organism and environment, mediated through motor-affective reactivity—a dynamic extensively documented by Jack Schmertz in "Animism As A Basis Of Human Relationships" (1973). Schmertz harkens to the principle of homeostasis and points out that humans have an inbuilt desire to take their destiny and the world under their control which is seen in the attribution of agency and vitality to objects and events in the natural world, the essential keystone of the animistic approach. This work highlights the continuity of these perceptions from early developmental stages, where, as Heinz Werner (1957) demonstrates, perception is inseparable from movement and affect, leading children and members of so-called primitive cultures alike to interpret landscapes or objects as animate and emotionally expressive. Additionally, Schmertz equates these processes with psychoanalytic notions that human beings are motivated by the need to have omnipotence as noted by Freud (1938) and Fenichel (1945), that the egocentric force is a need to remove frustration and have complete control, adding more strength to how these psychological parameters shaped animistic beliefs. What Schmertz refers to as the social identification (Kohut, 1971), expressed in the terms of self-psychology, described by Schmertz, as the tacit knowledge (Polyani, 1968), explains how humans can take emotional part in other people experiences, which is how shamanistic practices such as the one where individuals were mediators between the human and spirit worlds arose. This academic context clarifies how animistic and shamanistic explanations of the supernatural are established both on developmental psychology and socio-cultural adjustments, providing the important insights into the perception of lasting human interactions with the supernatural throughout the processes of time and space.

Indigenous cultures

In the next stages of the research on the historical aspect and seeking parallels in other cultures, I have found that Barrett and Wuetherick (2021) have developed a modern scholarly conception of what animism is, which can be related to most of the Indigenous cultures due to the emphasis that is placed upon how the concept leads to communicative relationships among human people and other persons existing in non-human spheres such as animals, plants, and spirits in ancient civilizations. They contend that even when considered as a western construct of anthropology, animism is an expression of a kind of forgotten knowing that is present in most cultures and can frequently be explored via dreams, visions and tendencies toward understanding (Barrett & Wuetherick, 2021). Such conceptualization brings parallels to the shamanistic traditions recorded in ancient cultures such as those of Mesopotamia and India whose spiritual mediators carried out rituals to unite the worlds of humans and spirits. Michael Winkelman (2009) expounds further on biogenetic structural paradigm of shamanism explaining its evolutionary origin as being founded on the hominid ritual behaviours relating to vocalization ceremonies, drumming and symbolic dancing which were already used to transform consciousness and deliver curative wellness. Winkelman continues to emphasize the universalism of shamanic rituals by characterizing them with the following features: death and rebirth, magical journeys, and animal spirit assists which provided such rituals as “a spectacle unequaled in the world of daily experience”. Such ancient societies were not only reflections of complicated cosmologies but they also served crucial social and psychological needs, protecting life and health against existential peril (Winkelman, 2009). Collectively, these academic insights reveal the biological, psychological, and cultural nature of ancient animistic/shamanistic modes of thought in cultures such as India and Mesopotamia that is fundamental in the context of explaining why supernatural beliefs and practices have persisted throughout the course of human history.

Middle Ages

Moving forward with the chronology of human civilization, I explored cultural beliefs regarding death and the supernatural one in the Middle Ages; in this case, I was mostly relying on the analysis provided by Stephanie Victoria Violette in the work entitled 'Cultural Belief in the Supernatural from 500 to 1500' (2018). Violette underlines that death as a universal and existential human experience spawned permanent tales of ghosts and spirits as cultural implements to find methods to deal with the grief and theorize about the afterlife. She cites the book by Jean-Claude Schmitt, Ghosts in the Middle Ages (1994) explaining that the ghost stories are an attempt to deal with the fear of the unknown and be in touch with the dead by implying that life continues beyond the grave.

This pre-Christian theory persisted even during the stormy times of the Protestant Reformation and the Enlightenment, to evidence by continuous reports of apparitions, of exorcisms and of visions of the dead having an influence upon the living. Violette observes the variety of supernatural phenomena in the medieval books: ghosts who come in visions or bodily, who come posing as devils or angels or loved ones, souls of the dead who ask to be prayed out of Purgatory, and saints as intercessors. She also points to intellectual controversies of the times, including those of Nicole Oresme, who criticized demonological explanations in favor of the natural and of Marsilio Ficino, who saw a synthesis of classical thought about daimones or guardian spirits of individuals in the 15th century. This multi-dimensional and sophisticated supernatural world perception shows how the medieval societies found ways of dealing with existential fears and anxieties with the help of narratives and rituals erasing the borders between the living world and the spirit realm.

CHAPTER THREE: CONSTRUCTING AND DESIGNING THE DOCUMENTARY

This chapter offers a description of the creative and technical process behind the making of the radio documentary *Do You Want to Believe?* which examines the phenomenon of belief in the supernatural and psychics. Its purpose is to give the reader a clear understanding of the entire production process and the producer's decision-making, through a detailed account of my thought process, choices, and ways of resolving uncertainties—from gathering material for narration, preparing for interviews, to selecting content and editing the final version.

As researcher Mia Lindgren notes in her thesis, *Journalism as research: Developing radio documentary theory from practice* (2011) (Translated and adapted from Hedemann (2006)): "Radio documentaries start with people's stories and it will be the producers themselves – their interest in the subject, their commitment, creativity and their skills – who will determine how the story is developed." Still the editing process remains incredibly important because, although my interviewees were not only open but also highly engaging, it is not enough to simply be fortunate in finding such participants. The quality, credibility, informativeness, and overall appeal of the final product rely on my abilities as a producer to shape unique and interesting content within a thoughtful sound environment and to craft a compelling documentary.

The production of *Do You Want to Believe?* took about three months and was informed by the knowledge and discoveries I made during my Master's course.

To give the reader a complete picture of how the idea for the radio documentary was chosen, I must mention my personal experience.

Since my childhood, every evening on the state channel (with repeats in the morning), the program "Battle of the Psychics" was broadcast. My family was never particularly interested in such topic but in the early 2000s in Russia and other former Soviet Union countries, this TV-show was considered to be quite ordinary. The plot of the TV-show revolves around people competing and by completing challenges and solving crimes or paranormal phenomena trying to prove their supernatural abilities.

This phenomenon, in this context, seems to be explained by the legacy of Anatoly Kashpirovsky, whose healing and "charging" water rituals with positive energy were broadcast live on national TV in the 1980s. As The Guardian journalist Marc Bennetts wrote in his article 'Faith healer Anatoly Kashpirovsky: Russia's new Rasputin' (2010), this was due to the Soviet Union's path to collapse, and citizens were offered a substitute for the confidence once given by Marxism-Leninism, as if underground magic, long waiting for its moment, easily took root in people's minds. Thus the palaces of culture that used to be covered with congresses of the Communist Party were stuffed up with psychics and predictors, with sleepy eyes and soothing voices who promised to cure the country from its ills. It seems that time moves on, but if the spread of this phenomenon was driven by hard times, then it's as if these times never went away since "Battle of the Psychics" still tops the TV ratings today. Unfortunately, for various reasons it is currently impossible to find official statistics on the scale of the show's popularity, especially in English-language sources. But even in 2013, BBC journalist Olga Smirnova, citing opinion polls by the independent Levada Centre in her article "Why do so many Russians turn to psychics?" (2015), wrote that a fifth of Russians have visited a psychic. Today, the popularity of the show can only be judged by its airtime and the fact that the main show and its spinoffs have over 24 seasons, remaining on air since 2007.

Furthermore, it is impossible to ignore the influence of the Russian-Ukrainian war on the confusion and fear of peaceful Russian citizens, who, in a fit of helplessness, turn to higher powers and to psychics and fortune-tellers who skillfully exploit the situation. In The Moscow Times in the article about the rebound of esoterics in the country: Esoterics See Resurgence in Russia Amid War, Pandemic, journalist Samantha Berkhead covered the story of fortune-tellers placing tarot videos forecasting the end of the war and its impact.

In Ireland, belief in psychics is not as prominent, and if belief in the supernatural exists, it has different roots. According to the Irish Times article 'Irish people are drawn to spiritualism but not as a religion' (2020) by Karen Frances McCarthy, the Irish are less eager to know the future and more driven by a desire to contact deceased relatives, so they consult spiritualists, not psychics, healers, or fortune-tellers. Despite the clear difference in requests and expectations, once I confirmed that the topic remains relevant, my journalistic interest pushed me to investigate further, combining two cultures: for despite the differences in questions, an interest in higher powers and the unexplained exists in both.

"With a first-person story, especially controversial ones or those narrated by someone with a strong point of view, issues of balance, representation, and context emerge."

- Mia Lindgren, 2011, "Journalism as research: developing radio documentary theory from practice"

Despite my own genuine interest and personal connection to the topic, in order not to turn the radio documentary into mere childhood recollections rather than a broad exploration of the subject, I decided it would be necessary to minimize references to "Battle of the Psychics" and my home country. The documentary, the chosen topic, and my aim to make it entertaining and free of any political context require me to avoid such tangents, especially since mentioning Russia these days, unfortunately, almost inevitably brings in political associations.
So it is an ethical choice too, I am not ashamed, I just see no need to make people who might be listening to this be sensitive to what is happening in Russia when it may not have any relevance to them because they have bad feelings about Russia. My intention is to keep the audience's focus on the main topic: psychics.

The opening scene of the radio documentary unfolds with a voice-over reading from Agatha Christie's story "The Last Seance". The blend of foggy anticipation with the unknown aligns with the project's central theme and ambient sound in the background emphasizes, enhances, and deepens the feeling that listeners are becoming part of an unfolding mystery At the same time, the characters in the excerpt raise the question of the complexity of the act from the very beginning, revealing both the scientifically understood aspect of the time and the genuine belief in the truth of what is happening, where proving its reality is only a matter of time. This strategy allows creating the right emotional tone right at the beginning and subtly eases the audience into the subject, forging an excellent bond with the audience.

The choice of this particular text highlights how deeply belief in the supernatural and psychic practices is rooted in different cultural layers of society, and how well-known figures like Agatha Christie playfully engage with the phenomenon —sometimes presenting it as authentic, other times debunking characters' beliefs in the supernatural. Thus, the introduction does not only set the general tone in the documentary but also points out the significant cultural currency of the subject.

Although I would have liked to keep a longer excerpt, I had to limit it to 30 seconds, or it would have turned the documentary into an audiobook. Therefore, after a musical transition, I thought it appropriate to explain the reason for choosing this excerpt with a voice-over, so as not to mislead

the listener. This approach prevents excessive pomposity and formality, helping to maintain the listener's attention.

From the very beginning of planning the documentary, I knew it was essential to present this phenomenon from at least two perspectives: belief and disbelief, the supernatural and science. However, it quickly became apparent that, within a tight timeframe, it would be difficult not just to choose a specific expert but even to decide on the branch of science that could serve as the counterpart. So, instead of pitting these two entire fields against each other, I concentrated my efforts on exploring why humans reach for supernatural powers It became evident that personal challenges, and societal difficulties often prompt individuals to consult psychics and mediums thereby making me to consider psychology, as the exact opposite to belief in the supernatural. This set the direction for my search for interviewees.

Surprisingly to me, it did not take as much time to find an expert in esotericism as it did to find a psychologist, even though I started both processes at the same time. To search for a psychic, a fortune teller, or a medium, I used Google to search for ads for services in this area. I kept in mind that I had seen booths with predictions at flea markets, in 'The Nightmare Realm' scream park, but physically getting there would be time consuming, and I wanted to talk to a person who does not depend on any organization. Therefore, it was decided to contact experts with personal websites, giving preference to those with personal experience and descriptions of services. Thus, I sent 5 emails to different specialists, looking for an individual approach to each of them, noting the uniqueness of their experience and the significance for my documentary. As a result, I received a response from 3 of them, but after a couple of clarifying emails, one of them refused to participate, explaining that she was not interested in participating in student projects, since she already had media experience and wanted to develop it. Another psychic was interested in participating, but she couldn't take part until September, explaining that she was extremely busy with clients' sessions and couldn't fit participation in my project into her schedule. However, one medium, Susan Hughes, nevertheless agreed, and after preliminary clarification of the format of my project, the interview was agreed. Even at the stage of preliminary preparation and studying of her website, it became clear that in practice she uses an extremely personal approach, touching on the topics of trauma and help in difficult life situations. 'Interview is a moral endeavor and being involved in an interview affects the interviewee' (Kvale, 1996,). Therefore, it was especially important to keep in mind the journalistic code of ethics when preparing and writing an interview question.

The process of preparing interview questions was also very careful to avoid infringing on the interviewee's personal boundaries. This caution proved highly appropriate because, after the initial general question, "How do you describe yourself and your abilities?", Susan revealed in response to the next question, "When did you first realize you had these abilities?", that her experience was connected to personal trauma. Human curiosity may encourage a follow-up question but as a journalist I adhered to the ethical principle from the journalistic code: "Journalists should treat sources, subjects, and the public with respect and avoid causing unnecessary harm. This includes protecting vulnerable individuals, respecting privacy, and avoiding the spread of misinformation." Thus, I did not ask leading or probing questions to avoid making Susan go into a state of discomfort and distress as she could only share what she was willing to share. To make the conversation more trusting and comfortable, it was critically important to conduct it in person. Accordingly, the decision was made to invite Susan to the radio studio at Griffith College, and local equipment was used for the recording to ensure high sound quality.

The search of a psychologist, as I said before, took me considerably longer. At first, I tried the same method I used for finding a medium. This meant that I was sending out eight emails to

psychology clinics and practitioners that had websites, but I did not receive a single response. I did not have any better luck searching for them on Facebook. As a result, I had to make my search even more restrictive. As a last resort, I began looking for Russian specialists who spoke English, reasoning that perhaps I was too culturally estranged from the norms or unspoken rules regarding specialists in other countries. Using this method, I was able to book interviews with four psychologists. It, however, became apparent that the richness of their vocabulary did not equate with any depth of expertise, and the interviews lacked any substance. At that moment, I needed to explore more personal avenues to get in contact with a psychologist. That led me to the professor Tatyana Fill (PhD in Psychology) who, fortunately, had the right language skills. Because of the distance, it was not possible to meet for an in-person interview, so the interview could only be conducted via videoconference, which, of course, impacted the audio quality.

Since the age group of the medium and psychologist consisted of women over 60, and to attract a more age-diverse audience and represent the interests of different genders and generations, it was decided to expand these opposing views in the topic of esotericism by including a believer in the supernatural and a skeptic from varied groups. Thus, I chose to interview a friend who had often offered to do a tarot reading for me and told stories about her grandmother's remarkable ability to heal illnesses using the warmth of her hands. Still aiming for high sound quality and a comfortable atmosphere, I also conducted this interview in the college's radio studio.

Finding a skeptic did not take much time, as my older brother has always been my main skeptic. In attempting to escape the trap of subjectivity, it felt like it may be suitable to present this personal relationship to the story as part of how this particular story reader adds a layer to the entertaining quality of it. However, there was again the challenge of distance, since my brother lives in Madrid, and the interview could only be conducted via video call.

Post-production

Beyond the image, radio can also 'create in the mind's eye the owner of the voice'

McLeish, Robert. 2005. Radio Production.

Making decisions about which interview materials to use in the radio documentary is a central step in editing since it shapes the definitive result of the product. Of course, the first full impression of the complete picture was formed during the final interview, but since English is not my first language, some of the facts were distorted by my mind and required careful selection. Each of the participants gave incredibly detailed and honest answers, making it very difficult to cut certain parts that, as someone who had already developed a personal sympathy for each of them, seemed incredibly important for revealing their personalities.

For example, the medium Susan spoke at length and with great enthusiasm about her family members, often making digressions to unrelated topics. Nonetheless, in my efforts to be professional I realized that there were certain restrictions on the running duration and the documentary style. A similar situation, though without stories about charming grandchildren, arose with the skeptic, who, under the pressure of his professional background, provided many examples from marketing. Moreover, being related to each other, an interview was rather informal, and he made jokes on different (also irrelevant) problems, reflecting on our childhood and parents, which probably was not of any interest to the listeners, although it was definitely meaningful to me as a person.

It was important to ensure that from these varied fragments a linear narrative was formed, supported by the historical narration of esotericism. However, I believe this was achieved. I tried to structure all parts in such a manner that it would be possible to conclude the interview by starting

the historical part, it was not always about chronological order, but always about logical one. For example, the interview with the believer, where Alisa talks about her grandmother's healing abilities, connects with the story about healing in ancient Mesopotamia.

Radio producers can tell important stories about people and society as effectively as reality television but with different messages. Because of the strong emotional impact of radio and the medium's ability to get listeners to identify with interviewees, the radio documentary can be seen as a way to increase empathy and tolerance in the world

Hedemann , Berit. 2006. Hør og Se. Kristiansand: IJ-forlaget (translated and mentioned by researcher Mia Lindgren in her thesis, Journalism as research: Developing radio documentary theory from practice (2011))

The technical design of the radio documentary plays a role no less important than finding interview subjects and selecting the information they share. Therefore, extensive use was made of sound design to enhance the immersive effect of the production. The unique ability of radio documentaries to create a deep affective experience by using sound is presented, and the given work takes advantage of it to establish a dimensional listening experience. The interpretation of sound effects and soundscapes is the highlight of the atmosphere, tension, and inter-specimen of psychic phenomena.

Hugh Chignell states in Key Concepts in Radio Studies (2013) that sound can create intense emotional reactions and can employ listeners in a more profound, intimate manner involving having an experiential engagement with a narrative to the extent that visual media is not able to do. The documentary uses this principle effectively by using sound to create the atmosphere of every segment, whether it would be the unsettled mood created by a spiritual séance, or the thoughtful meditations brought by birds chirping, the rhythm of running waters, and crickets chirping. Chignell also argues that this kind of sound design creates a possibility to foster the atmosphere that is immersive and emotionally involving (2013). Ambient sound is also used during the production, when certain historical periods can be recreated; in particular, one can hear the echoing sound of clanking swords when one comes to the segment devoted to the Middle Ages. Such sound effects not only create atmosphere but also pull the listener into the narrative, thus creating intimacy and sense of closeness with the topic of discussion. In the Guide to Radio Documentary Jürgen Hesse supports the viewpoint of the previous author, emphasizing that "radio documentaries work best when they combine narration with sound, allowing atmosphere to speak just as much as words" (Hesse, 2014).

Despite the variety of sound design options, it was decided not to overlay any sounds on top of the interviews to avoid creating emotional bias toward the speakers. Complete silence in the background serves as the most vivid silent accompaniment. Effective use of narrative sound bridges is a key editing technique whereby a smooth flow of continuity is created between documentary parts. According to Hesse, the sound bridges can be used to preserve the dynamics of the documentary, thus offering seamless continuities that make the listeners interested as well as coherent (Hesse, 2014). In the documentary, the conscious and repeated use of individualized sound bridges, or the purposeful repetition of certain audible elements, helps to achieve a sense of narrative continuity and retain interest in viewers when audiences transition between subjects or narrative voices.

DISCUSSION

In this chapter I provide a reflective analysis of the research subject and a critical evaluation of the creative processes that were involved. As it was already pointed out, personal interest in the supernatural and psychic phenomena was a key motivation toward creation of the radio documentary Do You Want to Believe?

Another question that weighed heavily on my mind prior to selecting such a theme to the documentary was whether it was of any real journalistic significance. The lack of any scientifically proven facts proving that there are people with supernatural powers, or even any examples of actual communication with the other world, left me doubting if that was worthy of media representation. However, after conducting research, I realized that this subject is rather an exception—one that does not necessarily require scientific validation to deserve attention. It also requires a large dosage of an open mind.

In the words of Robert A. Steiner in I Am Not a Giraffe, And I Can Prove It (1999):

"What I hold about unicorns is not a disbelief. Rather, it is the absence of belief. I am a skeptic—an unbeliever. Try unbeliever: it is a wonderful word. When someone brings up 'the open mind argument,' I have a ready answer: 'I do have an open mind. I am willing to evaluate your evidence. I am further willing to revise my beliefs—even my world view—as soon as there is credible evidence presented. Until such credible evidence is presented, I shall live my life as if it does not exist. I have the absence of belief, not a disbelief.'"

This openness, however, is not the same as that suggested by Steiner in the sense of earnest conviction in the reality of the paranormal, which would involve a redefinition of science. My documentary's goal is by no means to prove or disprove the existence of supernatural forces but to explore the reasons behind and the nature of why people believe in them.

My first thought that only a limited number of people can be interested in the esoteric world and that it has no practical functionality proved to be incomplete. On the one hand, it is factual that the extrasensory phenomena are non-scientific concepts, which on the other hand is factual that the concepts have existed, and have drawn considerable interest over the centuries.

In many countries, some of extrasensory perception practices are officially banned; for example, in China and Russia, laws prohibit certain types of psychic and supernatural claims. Nevertheless, during times of uncertainty, such as geopolitical conflicts, the demand for underground or online-format extrasensory services continues to grow in popularity. As an example, psychic predictions about the end of the war have received millions of views in numerous videos, as a sign of mass interest among people.

These practices are taught and followed not only in developing countries but also across most European nations, as well as in the United States. Nevertheless, it often seems that the field has a certain tension due to veering perspectives of different organizations. Of particular note there are two groups in the British Isles: The Irish Society for Psychical Research (ISPR) and the British Society for Psychical Research (SPR) who operate side by side although sometimes with opposite standpoints in regards to the validation of psychic phenomena or extrasensory practices. Both of the groups conduct investigations and state that they perform serious tests to determine whether the psychic things are real, but the methodology of these investigations and how they interpret information is often very different leading to often disparate results. This divergence is further exemplified by the existence of the Harry Houdini Award which is bestowed by some skeptic groups to challenge claims of supernatural abilities and to expose fraudulent practices. The award

embodies the critical and often skeptical stance taken by certain sectors within the paranormal research community, underscoring the ongoing need for scientific rigor and skepticism in evaluating extraordinary claims.

Notable examples also include the British show *Britain's Psychic Challenge* and its American counterpart, *The American Psychic Challenge*. These programs featured competing psychics demonstrating their purported abilities and attracted sizable audiences, maintaining the genre's popularity despite ongoing scientific skepticism and further fueling public curiosity and demand.

At the same time, it is impossible to establish an official rate of growth or decline in interest toward specialists in the psychic field overall. The psychic industry itself is very fragmented, with a large majority of freelancers, sole traders and small businesses with no centralized elements of licensing or registration so that the practitioners can be tracked in a systematic manner. Because no organized registries exist, approximate counts of the number of new psychics entering the market each year depend largely on indirect measures including media involvement in psychic challenge contests, anecdotal accounts and commercial market research instead of official government records. These dynamics point to the culture as well as business importance of the psychic practices although they are not scientifically validated.

Moreover, in spite of the criticisms which have been generally hurled against psychic phenomena, certain psychologists acknowledge that such practices might not be as psychologically damaging as has been projected. They can provide a valuable emotional support and coping skills instead, as cultural environments would serve sophisticated psychological demands. Psychics also have two-fold character, they are the readers of the unknown and the emotional and therapeutical custodians. They make people feel connected and modern psychology and medicine cannot offer the sense of meaning which is so usually lacking in medical or religious contexts, according to Melissa F. Lavin (Lavin, 2016). Thus, I came to realize that the topic of extrasensory perception is not simply nonsense.

The deeper I got into this subject, the more convinced I became that a documentary about extrasensory abilities truly holds journalistic value. My research led me to the understanding that consulting psychics is by no means a marginal or obscure practice—although it lacks scientific proof, it enjoys impressive demand among diverse populations around the world.

All this popularity and cultural relevance show that extrasensory things cannot as a whole be denied as daydreams. Rather, they illustrate a complicated social and emotional process that is worth to be explored by the media. The subject matter also triggers the concerns of human psychology, belief system, or cultural practices with some information on how people get meaning, comfort, and direction outside the established structures.

The radio documentary can then serve an essential journalistic purpose documenting this phenomenon and exploring why people still hold such beliefs, the effect they have upon people, and what they say about fears and needs of the larger society. That is how the topic of extrasensory can be seen as an object of cognitive discussions that will have relevance to the contemporary forms of human lives and cultural diversities and not just a domain of pseudoscience.

I realize that the news on such vague or even controversial issues may seem to be too oversimplified to the general audience, so I decided to provide a straightforward and narrowed down presentation of the plot with a scientific point of view in mind. Moreover, I recognize that despite all my research efforts, I am not an expert on the subject myself, and my interviewees speak on my behalf. Therefore, it was crucial to provide an equal platform for each of them while

avoiding dullness, ensuring that the radio documentary still maintains a clear entertaining direction.

The goal of radio documentary is to spark people's interest in extrasensory phenomena and encourage them to reflect on their own attitudes toward the topic rather than provoke disputes between opposing sides. In the documentary, I have attempted to provide arguments to both sides such that listeners can be able to make their own informed judgments. Both sides seem logical and justified: the voices of skeptics that warn of the risks of fraud and how to take advantage of the grief of others have merit and so are the psychics in their suggestion that they, despite not having scientific backing to their methods, can assist people.

Overall, working on the radio documentary *Do You Want to Believe?* was an extremely engaging experience that taught me a great deal about gathering and processing information, presenting polarized opinions impartially, and gave me valuable experience in ethical journalism.

CONCLUSION

The process of researching, preparing, and producing the radio documentary Do You Want to Believe? can be characterized as a both a byproduct of the journalistic curiosity about a controversial issue of the possibility and applicabilities of extrasensory perception and a more subjective experience of gaining the power to tear down a preconceived notion and replace it with a more neutral point of view.
The main goal of the documentary was to create an engaging product that addresses a debatable and contentious subject through impartial and balanced storytelling. A deliberate decision was made to give the majority of the documentary's time to the interviewees' perspectives, who openly shared their experiences and viewpoints without fear of judgment or condemnation.

I hope that through listening to the documentary and reading this written report, I have succeeded in creating a comprehensive picture in the minds of the audience of the entire research journey—from defining the product's format to the final editing.

I am convinced that the topic of people's belief in the paranormal and their appeal to higher powers or individuals with supernatural abilities deserves deep analysis and further study, as its essence, causes, and influence run much deeper than might appear at first glance. Although it rarely receives serious professional examination in the media environment, the continued public interest in it imposes a journalistic duty to keep covering the subject.

Due to objective circumstances, the professional and evidence-based qualification of specialists in the esoteric field remains impossible. Examples of organizations claiming to test supernatural abilities (such as the Irish Society of Mediums) still lack scientific validation and are not regarded as relevant within the scientific community.

It also seems important to emphasize that, despite maintaining neutrality in my project, I did not attempt to impose the opinion that these practices have no negative consequences whatsoever. Instead, I wanted to cause people to think critically of these practices.

> *Critical thinking involves examining assumptions, evaluating evidence, assessing conclusions, and generating alternative explanations for questionable claims*
>
> *- Myers & DeWall, 2021*

But, as I have indicated above, the documentary was not supposed to expose and discredit those who got involved with this industry.

As the author, I hold the view that an exclusively analytical and contextual narrative can best facilitate the listener's formation of their own independent opinion.

Undoubtedly, this is why the radio documentary format appears to me as the most objective medium for creating a conducive environment for the development of autonomous perspectives. The only element that could potentially influence the listener's emotions is the use of music or sound design. Nevertheless, the conscious decision to avoid the use of any background music in the interviews efficiently prevented the risk of developing any prejudiced feelings toward the documentary participants. One might say that in creating this project, I underwent a journey similar

to what I hope the listener will experience. Through the production process, I learned the personal stories of interviewees alongside scientific insights provided by a psychologist.

Although I tried to ensure sufficient space giving representations to various groups such as gender differences, age categories, working background, and attitude to extrasensory perception, I admit that it might have been more diverse. As an example, adding the point of view of those whose opinion has altered as time has passed, or academics whose credentials allow them scientific distinction, even though they are active in practicing spiritualism, would have broadened the spectrum. Unfortunately, such expansions were not possible in this project due to limitation of running time and compass of expertise and the resources that such coverage demands.

The thoroughness of the final product may not satisfy me perfectly as the author, but I hope that Do You Want to Believe? will still inspire people to further explore extrasensory phenomena and human preoccupation with supernatural.

APPENDICES

Interview questions:

Believer – **Alisa De Courcy** (master's student in NSCI)
- When and why did you first become interested in supernatural phenomena and psychic readings?
- Can you describe your most memorable experience you had with a psychic? What impact did it have on you?
- How do friends or family members react to your belief in psychics?
- Have you ever faced skepticism, and how do you respond?

Psychologist - **Tatyana Fill** (PhD in Psychology)
- What factors contribute to people's belief in psychics and supernatural phenomena?
- How do cognitive biases, such as confirmation bias or pattern recognition, shape the way people interpret psychic readings?
- What psychological benefits might individuals gain from consulting psychics, even if the abilities themselves are unproven?
- Can belief in psychic determinism—seeing one's future as predetermined or guided—offer a sense of control or comfort during uncertain times?

Medium – **Susan Hughes**
- How would you describe your supernatural abilities?
- When did you first realize you had these abilities?
- What does your work involve daily?
- In what situations do people usually seek your help?
- Can you share the most unusual or memorable experience you've had in your practice?
- How do you handle skepticism or criticism of your work?

Skeptic – **Vladimir Gromozdin** (IT specialist)
- Have you ever had a personal encounter with a psychic or participated in a psychic reading? If so, what was that experience like for you?
- In your view, why do you think so many people believe in psychics or seek out psychic readings?

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