



Generic charisma – Conceptualization and measurement

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 1 August 2010

Received in revised form 19 October 2010

Accepted 9 December 2010

Keywords:

Charisma

Human brand

Exploratory factor analysis

Questionnaire development

ABSTRACT

In these times, when fame is available to almost anyone, it is worth being able to measure the extent and dimensions of a person's charisma. Most of the research on charisma to date is restricted to the area of leadership. In this article, however, charisma is generalized to take in all human beings and is conceptualized as a multi-dimensional cognitive-affective phenomenon. The article presents a pilot study aimed at providing an adequate operational definition of the construct as well as an initial tool for its measurement. A following literature review shows how authors have developed the concept of charisma and its initial operational dimensions for empirical research. A questionnaire is developed in three stages. The factor analyses applied in stages two and three point towards a six-factor solution (i.e. six dimensions of charisma). Further analysis reveals that the developed instrument is reliable and viable as well as applicable for future theoretical and practical work.

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1. Introduction

Personalization characterizes the present era. Politicians have become personalized (Grbeša, 2008; Stanyer, 2007) at the expense of party bureaucracies and political programs; business is personalized in its leaders defining and sustaining corporate brands (Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004; Ind, 1997) and CEOs directly contribute about half of a company's reputation and/or market valuation (Gaines-Ross, 2003), while social life is preoccupied with celebrities that need not be perceived competent in anything but in their ability to attract attention (Thomson, 2006). Humans are marketable entities and therefore capable of becoming brands.

Human brands are marketing entities that are similar, yet different from line (product or service) and corporate brands (Hatch & Schultz, 2008). They are similar in clustering functional and emotional values promising a particular experience (de Chernatony & Segal-Horn, 2003), yet different in that the brand entity is a human person.

Human brands have been described in the context of celebrity-making, referring to “any well-known persona who is the subject of marketing communications effort” (Thomson, 2006, p. 104). Yet, by agreeing with that “people can be manufactured into marketable products” (Rein, Kotler, & Stoller, 1997, p. 57), limiting the notion of a human brand only to celebrities, is too restrictive. Relations between humans and their brands parallel relations between products, services and corporations and their brands. Any entity has a potential for becoming a brand and that also holds true for humans.

Charisma has been proposed as the core component of a celebrity (Rein et al., 1997). While originally in Ancient Greece denoting a divine gift, exceptionality, in modernity engineering charisma is seen as a normal part of marketing (Rein et al., 1997) or public relations (Bromley, 1993) efforts. So far as charisma is expressed in behavior, to that extent it is also

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susceptible to training (Bromley, 1993). Furthermore, stores are full of handbooks offering how-to advice literally to anybody (see Nessmann, 2009, for a list of self-help literature).

Secularizing charisma enables the application of the construct to any human person to a varying degree. Yet, the problem is that there is no adequate operational definition of the construct or a tool for its measurement. Through an analysis of previous research on charisma this study proposes a conceptual framework for examining generic charisma. The proposed framework is derived from theories in political science, sociology, social psychology and leadership studies. This framework further guides the development of a scale for generic charisma through a series of validation studies. A standardized scale for generic charisma offers numerous implications for research and practice in various areas of business.

2. Literature review

2.1. Concept of charisma

Modern usage of the term charisma derives from classical sociologist Max Weber, who at the turn of 19th into 20th century introduces the construct as one source of authority, rational-legal being the second, and tradition the third. The last one derives its power from personal loyalty and customs, the second one from normative expectations regarding rights and duties of legally positioned officials and the charisma from a leader's exceptional personal powers or qualities. A charismatic leader is gifted, exceptional, even superhuman and supernatural (Weber, 1947). Weber is also interested in stabilizing and transformational powers of authorities and proposed rational-legal authority as stabilizing and charismatic as transformational.

Weber's idea on the transformational power of charismatic authority is further developed in the political sciences by Burns (1978) in a typology of transformational and transactional leaders. The latter are those who exchange votes for favors (jobs, roads, contracts. . .) while the former engage their followers into a joint production of change. Bass (1985) develops Burn's ideas into a Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire to be used in an organizational setting, with three transformational components (charisma, individualized consideration and intellectual consideration) and two transactional components (contingent award and management-by-exception).

Literature in Organizational leadership is interested in charisma through which leaders influence organizational members concerning major changes in the workplace (Groves, 2002). House (1976) defines charisma as "the term commonly used in sociological and political science literature to describe leaders who by force of their personal abilities are capable of having profound and extraordinary effects on followers" (p. 2).

Conger and Kanungo (1987) identify several elements essential for the identification of charismatic (i.e. transformational) leaders, among which are: vision to changes (as opposed to preservation of status quo), persuasiveness (prophecy or advocacy), willingness to take personal risk, expertise in transcending the existing order through the use of unconventional or extraordinary means, unconventionality and revolutionary. They hypothesize that there are behavioral components of charismatic leadership that are interrelated and that as such they form a constellation of components, and propose a model in which charisma operates both as a set of dispositional attributions by followers and as a set of leaders' manifest behaviors. House (1976) also notes that a charismatic leader can be described by a specific set of personal characteristics. He derives three from his literature review: extremely high levels of self-confidence, dominance, and a strong conviction in the moral righteousness of his/her beliefs.

In this article a concept of charisma is generalized and labeled generic charisma. The basic premise of the concept is the notion that every human can be described within a certain constellation of attributes that constitute the concept of charisma. However, Jayakody's (2008) suggestion that charisma needs to be conceptualized as a multi-dimensional cognitive-affective phenomenon is followed. He defines the concept to consist of leader extraordinariness, leader archetypality, and leader group prototypicality. But while Jayakody restricts the notion of charisma to leaders, here it is generalized to include all human beings.

In times of fame being available to everybody for at least 5 min, it is worth being able to measure the extent and dimensions of charisma to be able to predict the extent of a person's charisma. As further democratization in global society seems unstoppable, charismatic personalities might get higher exposure with whatever their structural capabilities might suggest.

2.2. Existing instruments for measuring charisma

As previous literature review has shown, charisma was already secularized by Weber (1947) who revived the notion of charisma for modernity. And while he used it as a description of a certain type of authority, and thus able to be present at different degrees, his followers mainly use the term in a binary proposition for the identification of a certain type of leadership (a leader is charismatic or something else). Furthermore, as Jayakody (2008) already notes, neo-charismatic studies mainly use the term as being unidimensional, referring to the presence or absence of extraordinariness of a leader. So, the objective of this article is to pilot test a hypothesis that generic charisma as a multidimensional rather than a unidimensional concept.

The two most commonly used instruments for assessing leadership charisma are the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ-5X) and the Conger and Kanungo Scale (CKS, Conger & Kanungo, 1994). The MLQ-5X measures nine different subscales of leadership (including transformational and transactional leadership). Conger and Kanungo use their model (1987) to develop a 25-item questionnaire measure of six perceived behavioral dimensions of charismatic leadership (Conger &

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