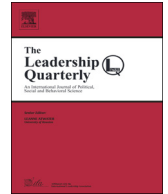




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Perceptions of charisma from thin slices of behavior predict leadership prototypicality judgments

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ABSTRACT

Signaling theory suggests that people use cues transmitted by leaders to form impressions of charisma but the validity of these impressions remains unexplored. Here, we examined whether perceptions of charisma from thin slices of nonverbal behavior relate to inferences based on more information. We tested whether ratings of charisma from 5-, 15-, and 30-s clips (with no audio) of speakers delivering a message predicted evaluations of vision articulation and leadership prototypicality made from 60-s multimedia clips (with audio). The results indicated that thin-slice charisma judgments predicted the criterion scores for leadership prototypicality but not vision articulation from all of the 5-, 15-, and 30-s silent clips. The current data therefore suggest that thin slices of charisma can be valid indicators of leadership.

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Introduction

Charisma has a potential to make a tremendous impact on people and society. Indeed, we make inferences about charisma on a daily basis and in a matter of seconds and often chose to follow individuals we consider charismatic as leaders. Considering the impacts of charisma, however, it is critical to understand whether charisma can be adequately gauged from simply observing other people's behavior. Despite a long history of exploring charisma from a variety of perspectives (Avolio & Bass, 1988; Bass, 1985; House, 1977; Potts, 2009; Weber, 1978; see also Van Knippenberg & Sitkin, 2013), there is currently little exploration of whether the signals and behaviors that people consider charismatic indeed adequately "advertise" leadership, or in other words, whether they accurately trace charisma from behavior. We examine this question in the current work by integrating the signaling perspective on charisma with the research on the accuracy of the thin slices of nonverbal behavior.

Signaling perspective of charisma

Recognizing the lack of a holistic definition, Antonakis, Bastardo, Jacquart, and Shamir (2016) re-defined charisma using signaling theory, viewing charisma as an outcome of a "value-based, symbolic, and emotion-laden" communication style. According to the signaling perspective, leaders emit cues or signals that followers integrate when inferring charisma to leaders (House, 1977; see also Tskhay & Rule, in press, for a review). These signals manifest as leaders' nonverbal expressions (Conger & Kanungo, 1987), as emotions that inspire followers (e.g., Bono & Ilies, 2006; Den Hartog & Verburg, 1998; Newcombe & Ashkanasy, 2002; Offermann, Kennedy, & Wirtz, 1994; Shamir, House, & Arthur, 1993), and as metaphors that leaders use to illustrate

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their visions of the future (e.g., Mio, Riggio, Levin, & Reese, 2005). More broadly, these cues act as shared experiences between leaders and followers and result in an alignment between people towards common goals and actions (Antonakis et al., 2016). Critically, followers process these emitted signals, implicitly compare them to their cognitive templates of leadership, and ultimately decide whether to recognize the individual as a leader (see Lord, Brown, Harvey, & Hall, 2001; Lord, Foti, & De Vader, 1984; Tskhay, Xu, & Rule, 2014). By focusing on the expressive signals that promote its inference, charisma is disentangled from other constructs otherwise considered to be core elements of its definition (e.g., influence; Bass, 1985). Critically, thinking about charisma as a symbolic language allows researchers to identify specific behaviors that directly lead to perceptions of charismatic leadership.

Prior work supports a multifaceted view of charisma and shows that leaders indeed emit a number of cues that people consider charismatic. For example, charismatic leaders use metaphors and other linguistic structures to convince their followers of their idealized vision (e.g., Den Hartog & Verburg, 1998). Furthermore, expressive nonverbal behaviors promote perceptions of charismatic leadership by allowing leaders to share their emotions with their followers. For example, cues like eye contact, facial behavior, and body movement affect perceptions of success and power (e.g., Brooks, Church, & Fraser, 1986; Conger & Kanungo, 1987; Friedman, Riggio, & Casella, 1988; Hall, Coats, & LeBeau, 2005; House & Howell, 1992; House, Spangler, & Woycke, 1991; Newcombe & Ashkanasy, 2002; Shamir et al., 1993). Thus, research demonstrates that leaders generate cues that trigger perceptions of charismatic leadership in their followers. Together, the evidence suggests that charisma can indeed be conceptualized from a signaling perspective.

Thin slices and perceptions of charisma

The notion of charisma as a composition of signals emitted by leaders opens a number of new questions and related avenues of research. In the current work, we examined whether perceptions of charisma from thin slices reflect an informed assessments of a person's vision articulation (a hallmark of charismatic leadership; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Moorman, & Fetter, 1990) and leadership prototypicality (Lord et al., 1984). Some previous work has begun exploring how people arrive at their perceptions of charisma and whether these impressions predict inferences of leadership, showing that the display of nonverbal charismatic signals indeed results in perceptions of charisma (Benjamin & Shapiro, 2009; Friedman, Prince, Riggio, & DiMatteo, 1980; Masters, Sullivan, Feola, & McHugo, 1987; Mio et al., 2005). However, it remains unclear whether perceptions of charisma from thin slices predict leadership.

Research in person perception posits that perceptions made from thin slices of nonverbal behavior are often accurate (Tskhay & Rule, 2013). People can extract information about each other from very brief observations of appearance and behavior for some traits and characteristics (see Rule, Krendl, Ivcevic, & Ambady, 2013). For instance, a large body of research demonstrates that people can perceive each other's personalities (e.g., Borkenau & Liebler, 1993), group memberships (Tskhay & Rule, 2013), and leadership success after only brief observations of their nonverbal behavior (Antonakis & Dalgas, 2009; Benjamin & Shapiro, 2009; Rule & Ambady, 2008; Tskhay et al., 2014). Consistent with signaling theory, social cognition research further suggests that people rapidly and relatively automatically grasp the information from signals emitted by targets (Freeman & Ambady, 2011; Macrae & Quadflieg, 2010). Specifically, people perceive the signals and process them to form a mental representation that continuously adapts as they perceive new signals that eventually settle on an ultimate (but still flexible) impression (Freeman & Ambady, 2011; Gilbert, Pelham, & Krull, 1988; Rule, Tskhay, Freeman, & Ambady, 2014).

Of course, not all information is available or accurately perceived. For example, whereas people intuitively believe that they can perceive others' trustworthiness, and show strong consensus in their opinions, these perceptions often do not predict how trustworthy individuals behave (see Wilson & Rule, *in press*, for review). The said heterogeneity prompted us to investigate whether perceivers can detect individuals' charisma (measured through perceptions of their vision articulation and leadership) from thin slices of their behavior. Supporting this position, the ecological theory of social perception also suggests that charisma should be easily read from cues and signals due to its functional relevance to identifying leaders in the surrounding environment (Tskhay & Rule, *in press*). In other words, from an evolutionary perspectives, charisma may act as a cue to identifying leadership, thereby attuning individuals to the signals that people associate with this trait.

Current study and hypotheses

In the current study, we specifically wanted to know whether impressions of charisma made from snippets of nonverbal behavior correspond to perceptions made in a more information-rich context. We therefore examined how perceptions of charisma from thin slices related to indicators of leadership (i.e., perceptions of vision articulation and leadership prototypicality), as suggested in previous research (see Tskhay & Rule, *in press* for a review). Here, we obtained short video clips from a sample of participants, reduced them to 5-, 15-, and 30-s segments of nonverbal behavior (thin slices), and asked multiple independent groups of participants to evaluate the charisma of the people in the slices. Our criteria for these judgments consisted of evaluations of vision articulation and leadership prototypicality made from longer multimedia segments (i.e., vision plus voice) using validated scales. A significant relationship between perceptions of charisma from thin slices and the criteria would therefore suggest that the clips may represent the target person's actual leadership ability.

Considering the signaling perspective of charisma, we implemented an instrumental variable model to purge the bias from the thin-slice perceptions via six instruments: the target individuals' sex, race, attractiveness, wearing glasses, frequency of eye contact with the camera, and the (experimentally manipulated) strength of the argument that they read in the clip. Given that sex,

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