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## Brand Charisma: Word-Of-Mouth and Gender

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## Brand Charisma: Word-Of-Mouth and Gender

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*Conceptual Framework:* Charisma can be defined as “the quality which is imputed to persons, actions, roles, institutions, symbols, and material objects because of their presumed connection with ultimate, fundamental, vital, or order-determining powers” (Smothers, 1993, p. 100). A charismatic brand can be defined as a product, service, or company for which people believe there is no substitute (Neumeier, 2005). All brands have imagery, symbolism, and prestige, to some degree. The difference is that brands with product charisma build on imagery, symbolism, and prestige to generate extraordinary levels of buyer attachment and motivation. Characteristics of a charismatic brand include integrity and a distinct competitive position (Neumeier, 2005). Determining if a brand has charisma means demonstrating it has exceptional qualities as believed by those who consume it (Smothers, 1993). Brand charisma is important in successfully launching an innovative brand (Neumeier, 2005).

Marketers’ role in a successful launch is to produce customers in significant numbers eager to spread the word about the product (Hatch & Schultz, 2013). A good predictor of word-of-mouth (WOM) communication is a customer’s emotional involvement with a product (Rosen, 2000). High ratings on product charisma indicate emotional involvement. Females have been found to be higher in product involvement (O’Cass, 2004), therefore, females might rate their favorite brand higher on charisma. Based on previous research, it can be predicted that consumers who perceive their favorite brand as having charisma will engage in higher levels of WOM. However, little research has examined brand charisma. Although there are a few scales for assessing human charisma (e.g., Vercic & Vercic, 2011), there is no instrument for measuring brand charisma. Thus, it is meaningful to examine if a human charisma scale can be adapted for brand charisma, and to investigate brand charisma with regard to WOM and gender.

*Purpose of this study.* Therefore, the purpose of the study is to examine if 1) a human charisma scale can be adapted to measure brand charisma, particularly to fashion brand, 2) men and women differ in ratings of brand charisma and 3) higher ratings on brand charisma are related to higher levels of WOM.

*Method.* Data were collected in large classes from college students who completed the questionnaire. Scales used were the WOM scale (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006) and an adaptation of the human charisma scale (Vercic & Vercic, 2011) for measuring brand charisma. The original scale included 24 items; 17 items which were able to applied to brand products were selected and adapted for this research (e.g., This is a brand that has significant influence on other people’s opinion; A brand that exuberates power). Participants provided their opinions for the items based on a fashion brand they listed. Each item was accompanied by a 7-point scale (1=strongly

disagree; 7=strongly agree). Data analysis included descriptive statistics, factor analysis, Cronbach's alpha reliability, and M/ANOVA.

*Results.* Participants were 269 students (138 males, 131 females) at a large mid-western US university in 50 majors (mean age = 21.96). Cronbach's alpha for each scale ranged from .934 to .946; scale reliability was highly acceptable. The brand charisma data were analyzed through factor analysis with principle components and varimax rotation. Four dimensions of brand charisma were discovered accounting for 71.9 % of the total variance - *Communicative* (20.9% of variance), *Powerful and Dominant* (19.56% of variance), *Attractive* (17.93% of variance), and *Honest and Reliable* (13.62% of variance). Cronbach's alpha for each factor ranged from .841 to .894. MANOVA with gender and WOM (high vs low; divided based on median) as the independent variables, and four factors of brand charisma as the dependent variables was performed. There was no significant effect for gender on brand charisma. There was a significant effect for WOM on brand charisma [ $F(4, 260) = 21.88, p < .0001$ ]. ANOVA revealed that high WOM participants scored significantly higher ( $p < .0001$ ) than low WOM participants on all four factors of brand charisma; *Communicative* ( $M^{\text{high}} = 6.10; M^{\text{low}} = 5.32$ ), *Powerful and Dominant* ( $M^{\text{high}} = 6.06; M^{\text{low}} = 5.09$ ), *Attractive* ( $M^{\text{high}} = 6.06; M^{\text{low}} = 4.97$ ), and *Honest and Reliable* ( $M^{\text{high}} = 6.26; M^{\text{low}} = 5.53$ ).

*Discussion & Implications.* Cronbach's alpha for the adapted brand charisma scale was .934, implying that this scale designed to measure human charisma can be effectively applied to measurement of fashion brand charisma. Finding four factors indicated that brand charisma is a multidimensional construct. This study revealed that men and women did not differ in ratings of any factor of brand charisma. This may mean the adapted brand charisma scale can be applied to fashion products without gender bias. Results found that consumers who recognize their favorite brand as having charisma tend to spread the word about the fashion brand more than those who do not. Understanding the link between brand charisma and WOM may lead to fashion marketing or retailing advantages. For further study, it would be valuable to investigate brand charisma and WOM within and across cultural contexts.

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