Exploring Charismatic Leadership Based on the Case Study of Franklin. D. Roosevelt

Ziyou Guo *

Beiwai College, Beijing Foreign Studies University, Beijing, 100081 China

*Corresponding author: 15834075118@sjtu.edu.cn

Abstract. This paper is based on the theory of charismatic leadership from Max Weber, analyzing several aspects of charisma and its use in politics. Such research would provide suggestions for political leaders in modern days to improve their public image. The paper takes Franklin Roosevelt's presidency as a case study, using the methods of the case study. In the research, Roosevelt's personal factors of his communication, vision, and expertise are examined and discussed. Besides, the paper also takes the social background into account. The study gains the conclusion that communication, vision, and expertise are three factors of charismatic leadership. In this study, the author finds that Roosevelt had great communicative skills, including his use of media. He also formed a great vision to prepare for the Great Depression and Wartime. Additionally, the power of Roosevelt's presidency was of socialized orientation that he took advice from the public, especially the scholars in universities. In conclusion, political leaders in modern days should learn from Roosevelt's experience to become excellent communicators, making full use of modern media. They should also take suggestions from experts and the public to form a strong vision and gain professional knowledge.

Keywords: Max Weber, Charismatic leadership, Franklin Roosevelt.

1. Introduction

Max Weber raised his idea of charisma legitimacy which served as a source of power in politics, which means that the personal characteristics and the super power of political leaders would be of vital importance to make the public follow and support their policies and plans [1]. The idea of charisma legitimacy focuses more on people's inner feelings and emotional reactions instead of analyzing the institutional system of a country. Some scholars would argue that the charismatic leadership is provisional and those leaders who are strong and popular enough would lead to the dictatorship of the political environment and their wills would be put into practice even if they are consistent with the interests of the whole country. In the modern democratic political system, the heads of states are usually under supervision and their decisions must get the permission of congress in most democratic countries. However, as politicians, the leaders still need to express their opinions and measures facing the general public. And during the time of turbulence and instability, the voters and citizens would also call for a strong leader with great vision and capability to lead them overcome the problems. In the 21st century, many people think they are suffering from the economic globalization, multi-polarization, terrorism, hedonism and other potential threat. As a result, the political strongmen and charismatic leadership appeared again in many countries such as Trump in the U. S. , Putin in Russia and Orban in Hungary. A close examination of former charismatic political leaders would help the scholars judge the decision made by existing leaders.

The research is mainly focusing on the theory of charismatic leadership and use a case study to examine the elements of charisma in a famous American president Franklin Roosevelt, who had the longest presidency in the history of the U. S. and generally receive positive comments among the greatest presidents of all time. Under his leadership, the American people overcame the Great Depression and the challenges of the Second World War. The research would provide three main aspects to examine the manifestation and effects of Roosevelt's political charisma.

In the former researches of Franklin Roosevelt's presidency, many scholars would mainly focus on the effects brought about by Roosevelt's policies and his decisions. But this paper would pay more weight to Roosevelt's personal characteristics and his individual public image to figure out why he

could gain the support from the public and eventually obtain and hold the longest presidency. As for the papers working on Weber's theory of charisma, they are focusing mainly on the personal image and personal qualities of leaders. But according to Weber, when the society needs drastic changes, it is more likely to call for the leadership of charisma. So the paper would also briefly clarify the social context when Franklin Roosevelt became president.

In Weber's theory, "charismatic legitimacy is resting on devotion to the exceptional sanctity, heroism or exemplary character of an individual person, and of the normative patterns or order revealed or ordained by him. "This explanation means that the charismatic leadership is not a traditional one that it requires the great capability of an individual. Some scholars like Yukl stated that the leaders' behavior, expertise and aspects of the situation are the main factors for follower attribution of charismatic qualities to a leader [2]. Which means leader himself and the situation faced by him are both factors for charisma to take place in political environment. R. Mark. Bell had done a case study of Ronald Reagan's charismatic leadership and he selects the angles of communication, vision, trust, impression management, expertise and situational context, which provides an inspiring standard to analyze the leader's charisma [3]. Conger and Kanungo stated that charisma is difficult to describe without directly referencing particular behaviors, traits or individual characteristics [4]. So in the study of charismatic leadership, the abundant and persuasive evidence are important to classify whether the leader's charisma took place and helped strengthen his leadership.

The whole case study would be presented in 4 aspects. For the former three parts, the paper would analyze three sources of charisma from Franklin Roosevelt himself, and quoted other people's judgement to conclude how he would bring about beneficial effect and gain popularity. In the fourth part, the paper would present two major elements of social context during Roosevelt's presidency. One is the Great Depression, which is a domestic issue needed to be settled, the other one is the World War 2, which is more related to the security and safety of the whole nation and its foreign affairs. The two huge events are the main external factor for Roosevelt's charismatic leadership to take place. Then in the Discussion part, the paper analyze some causing factor for the results of findings and provides suggestions for further research and for the political leaders in modern days as well.

2. Theoretical Foundation

The research is based on Weber's theory of Charisma legitimacy. Weber defined charismatic authority as "certain quality of an individual personality". In this sense he means the charismatic leader is more excellent than ordinary people, who is blessed with exceptional power or qualities, which are nearly inaccessible for common citizens. Sometimes such source of power would be related with divine origin [1]. Comparing with the other two legitimacy of legal-rational one and traditional one, the charismatic legitimacy is more likely to appear when the society is facing specific problems and calling for changes. As a result, when analyzing a certain leader of great charisma, the research on the history and situational background is also necessary. The research methods adopted mainly are text analysis and document analysis. Scholars' opinions, the original text material like speech script and the public image would be the major source of the paper. Based on the specific traits of charisma, including communication, vision and expertise are all discussed in the paper. Besides, the research would also analyze the situational and historical background as the outward reason for the inauguration of FDR.

3. Case Study

3.1 Communication

For leaders, the effective communication skills are really necessary to attract his audience and transform them into voters and supporters. Some scholars summarize the characteristics of great communicative skills as "Proactive-Attracting, Benevolent-Competent and Authoritarian [5]." Such

style would help narrow down the gap between the political leaders and the ordinary people, making the citizens feel they are involved in national affairs and are cared by the government.

FDR's great communication skills were greatly shown in his "fireside chats". Fireside chats were radio programs with president talking to his audience during the time of hardship. From the period of Great Depression to the outbreak of World War Two, FDR delivered 30 programs and received 18 percent audience during peacetime while 58 percent during the war [6]. In these programs, the president FDR explained his policies to the public. As Roosevelt's press secretary Stephen Early said," It cannot misrepresent or misquote. It is far-reaching and simultaneous in releasing messages given for transmission to the nation or for international consumption [7]." Besides the informative function, president's tone always communicated self-assurance during times of despair and uncertainty. His chat always began with "My friends" or "My fellow Americans". Roosevelt also employed the idioms of mass culture to close the perceptual gap between him and his mass audience [8].

Table 1 shows the chronological list of Roosevelt's addresses in the programs of Fireside chats. From the date and the topic of these shows, a brief conclusion could be gained that Roosevelt mainly focused on the issues concerned by the American citizens such as the financial crisis and the warfare worldwide. In these programs, Roosevelt would also explain his own understandings about these domestic issues and foreign affairs, further illustrating the decision made by president and central government. People used to gather such information from the report of newspaper or other media platform edited by journalists or officials. But in the programs of fireside chat, they had a chance to listen to the political leader directly. Such an efficient communicative channel exerted the personal charisma to the audience and created a sense of assurance during the tough time while the main objects and plans of the whole country would be understood better by the citizens, which is more likely for Roosevelt's government to get support from the public.

Table 1. Chronological list of Roosevelt's addresses [9]

NO.	DATE	TOPIC
1	Sunday, 1933.3.12	On the Banking Crisis
2	Monday, 1933.7.24	Outlining the New Deal Program
3	Monday, 1933.7.24	On the National Recovery Administration
4	Sunday, 1933.10.22	On Economic Progress
5	Thursday, 1934.6.28	Achievements of the 73rd U. S. Congress and Critics of the New Deal
6	Sunday, 1934.9.30	On Government and Capitalism
7	Sunday, 1935.4.28	On the Works Relief Program and the Social Security Act
8	Sunday, 1936.9.6	On Drought Conditions, Farmers and Laborers
9	Tuesday, 1937.3.9	On the Reorganization of the Judiciary
10	Tuesday, 1937.10.12	On New Legislation to be Recommended to Congress
11	Sunday, 1937.11.14	On the Unemployment Census
12	Thursday, 1938.4.14	On the Recession
13	Friday, 1938.6.24	On Party Primaries
14	Sunday, 1939.9.3	On the European War
15	Sunday, 1940.5.26	On National Defense
16	Sunday, 1940.12.29	On the "Arsenal of Democracy"
17	Tuesday, 1941.5.27	Announcing Unlimited National Emergency
18	Thursday, 1941.9.11	On Maintaining Freedom of the Seas and the Greer Incident
19	Tuesday, 1941.12.9	On the Declaration of War with Japan
20	Monday, 1942.2.23	On the Progress of the War
21	Tuesday, 1942.4.28	On Our National Economic Policy and Sacrifice
22	Monday, 1942.9.7	On Inflation and Progress of the War
23	Monday, 1942.10.12	Report on the Home Front
24	Sunday, 1943.5.2	On the Coal Crisis
25	Wednesday, 1943.7.28	On the Fall of Mussolini
26	Wednesday, 1943.9.8	On the Armistice with Italy and the Third War Loan Drive
27	Friday, 1943.12.24	On the Tehran and Cairo Conferences
28	Tuesday, 1944.1.11	On the State of the Union
29	Monday, 1944.6.5	On the Fall of Rome
30	Monday, 1944.6.12	Opening the Fifth War Loan Drive

3.2 Vision

A charismatic leader always has far-reaching vision which is quite different from other leaders. As Fiol points out that "Charismatic leaders engage followers in radical changes", their different and innovative prospective helps the charismatic leaders stand out and attract followers for them [10]. Yukl believes that the followers would internalize the new theories once they accept the leader's unconventional idea. But those voters and citizens wouldn't be transformed into supporters without clear explanation and action of the leader [2]. During the time of instability and turbulence,such unique and inspiring vision would be even more effective and persuasive with the help of great communication skills mentioned before.

Roosevelt's vision on national affairs is quite unconventional and effective. His great vision was shown in the New Deal to settle the problem caused by the Great Depression. Instead of insisting on liberalism like Hoover did, Roosevelt came up with the idea of government's assisting plans. The paper would focus on this topic in next sector and mainly discuss Roosevelt's vision in his thought of diplomacy. Before the outbreak of World War 2, the major thoughts of international affairs in the U.S. is isolationism, which means American people cared little about the political situation in Europe and other continents as long as such conditions didn't damage their own interests. Roosevelt's first diplomatic policy "Good Neighbor Policy" followed such trend, showing his focus on domestic issues. When the war broke out, in response to people's fear that the U. S. would be drawn into the war, Congress passed the Neutrality Act preventing the trade with belligerents. Roosevelt, however, showed his support for China in Asia, and for France and Britain in Europe. Roosevelt was quite sensitive about the international affairs, he planed to expand the navy and provide supplies for the countries against fascism. The president cut off the oil supply for Japan after its conquest in Asia showing his great vision for the threat from Japan. In one of the fireside chat, Roosevelt described America as an "Arsenal of Democracy". Before the attack at Pearl Harbor, the president appointed the Secretary of War to make war plans. Such series of action helped the U. S. quickly get into the state of warfare after the Attack of Pearl Harbor.

3.3 Expertise

A leader with great communication skills and sharp vision couldn't make himself persuasive if the knowledge or expertise of the problems he wants to solve are missed. Political leaders would obtain such skills and knowledge from his former experiences. But sometimes the issue faced by leaders is so complicated that one single individual couldn't handle properly. As a result, a charismatic leader would turn to experts and his subordinates for help. Compared with personalized power orientation, socialized power orientation is more likely to cause positive charisma for the leader [11]. Positive charisma is supposed to allocate the power by appointing the subordinates to provide assistance. As for president Roosevelt, he was majoring in laws and he took a job with a famous law firm, working in its admiralty law division. But Roosevelt's first term of presidency required him to settle the problem of Great Depression, which hadn't been solved by any politicians before. Roosevelt hadn't systematic strategies to cope with it and he worked like national congress to listen to the opinions from all walks of life. In the group of Roosevelt's consultants, the most famous ones were called Brain Trust. Such consultants were the supporters of the governments' measures to regulate the development of economy. These people didn't form a exact group but each of them would provide advice for the president. During the implementation of the first New Deal, some professors from Columbia Law School took their part in Brain Trust. While during the implementation of the Second New Deal, the Brain Trust mainly consisted of people having connection with the Harvard law firm. Having a big team of consultants didn't weaken the power of president, instead they helped to put more effective policies into practice.

3.4 Situational Context

The traits of leaders themselves have been discussed, which could surely influence their charisma and leadership. Besides these personal characteristics, one thing causing charismatic leaders call the

shot is ignored often, which is the situational context. The social and historical background in a specific period, usually a critical turning point, would encourage the charismatic leaders to communicate with their audience, to express their visions and to settle the tough problems. According to Weber, when the society is undergoing crisis, the charismatic leader would appear and come up with a radical vision, which points out the key to settle the problem [1]."

The time period when FDR obtained his presidency was a really critical and special one. His four terms covering the era of Great Depression and World War 2. As for the economical crisis, no politician had the experience to cope with it before. Such disruption caused decrease in industrial production, wholesale prices and foreign trade while it increased the rate of unemployment. The former government led by president Hoover still kept to the policy of liberalism and insisted on depending on the mechanism of market to deal with the crisis, but their policies failed. During the time of instability of great poverty, the public was more likely to listen to Roosevelt's reassuring chat and his brand new policies to settle the problem.

The Second World War, on the other hand, was the most serious military conflict in human history, causing 70 million casualty in total. At the beginning, the American people still believed in isolationism and weren't willing to participate in the warfare. President Roosevelt didn't change his mind to make preparation for the combat. So once the attack on the Pearl Harbor happened, the people of the U. S. was forced to get involved in the war. Such situation required a leader who had a detailed overall plan and took action in advance. Under such circumstances, Roosevelt had the chance to break the tradition of maximized two turns of presidency and maintain his leadership for four turns.

4. Discussion

In the part of 3.1, the research shows the great function of fireside chats and its influence on citizens' thought. The newly developed media, the radio program, would be one of the key factors to ensure Roosevelt's success on the connection with the public. Only when the radio system was invented and such platform was generally used by the mass public could Roosevelt get the chance to have such informal communication with the people nationwide and transform them into his supporters or make them better understand his policies and decisions. Compared with the political leaders before him, whose thoughts and ideas could only be delivered in a relative formal channel, Roosevelt's personal image would be a more populist leader with a stronger connection with the voters.

In the part of 3.3, Roosevelt showed his respect for the experts and scholars in the field of economy to settle the financial crisis. Such phenomenon pointed out that the public governance in modern days requires much higher expertise than in the era of monarchy, when the leader could decide everything on their own and the counselors' opinions would be ignored frequently. But in modern age, the governance of a whole country is much complicated when the economy, politics, culture and international relationship have developed greatly throughout the history. In every single nation, the leader couldn't make the most rational and beneficial choice and policy only on their own or based on their preference. In this research, Roosevelt turned out not to be an expert in the field of economy, but he accepted advice from all social groups especially the professors and researchers from universities. Later, many countries in modern days established think tanks to provide the most professional ideas from the scholars to the leaders, in order to put most suitable and effective policies into practice.

This research has some shortcomings that the definition of charisma and its expression is different from people to people that the researchers couldn't provide an overall standard to judge a leader's charisma with quantitative methods. In this research, the author mainly focus on three aspects of FDR's charisma. But such classification would fail to grasp every aspects of the president's charisma. Besides, the research is made mainly based on the method of text analysis and only applies a few data analysis. The effect brought about by Roosevelt's charisma is not shown directly with the examination of the public opinion, instead by the arguments provided by scholars and public figures. As a result, the research on Roosevelt's charismatic leadership could be focusing more on the public opinions.

Analyzing the charisma could be achieved based on different standard and classification, more supportive evidence of existing aspect would also be a compliment parts for the research.

5. Conclusion

The research is mainly based on the theory of charisma legitimacy from Max Weber and uses a case study with Franklin Roosevelt to examine the aspects of charismatic leadership and its effects. Three main aspects of Roosevelt himself is discussed, which are the communication, vision and expertise. In the analysis with evidence and scholars' opinion, the research concluded that Franklin Roosevelt is a political leaders with proficient communicative skills, who has a good use of newly emerged media platform served as a tool to narrow down the gap between the political leaders and the general public. He had great visions that Roosevelt made preparation for the war before the attack on Pearl Harbor and he also found solutions to settle the problem of Great Depression. Besides, instead of making decisions on his own, FDR tended to listen to the opinions from the public, especially from experts of certain field to address specific problems, which made his policies and plans reasonable and effective. Besides the individual factors, the social context when Roosevelt's presidency took place is also analyzed in the paper. The unprecedented problems faced by the country of Great Depression and the Second World War were the driving force that the public was calling for a strong leader with great capability to help the people get through the tough time. These external and internal elements all contributed to Roosevelt's great charismatic leadership and his popularity among the voters and throughout the history.

The case study of Roosevelt would provide inspiring and useful suggestion for the political leaders in modern time. For example, his communicative skills and use of media could also help other leaders to gain their popularity. In modern days, the political leaders such as Modi, Macron, Biden and many other head of state would create social account on Twitter and other media platform. This is a good way to narrow down the distance between them and the public. Expression of private life, explanation of their policies and speeches to encourage people or make them feel assurance during tough time would be a chance to improve their charisma and gain more support. Besides, the leaders could also stress more on the advice and suggestions provided by their counselors and think tanks, which would provide the most professional and effective solutions to the problem they are faced with.

References

[1] Weber, Max (1978). Economy and Society. University of California Press. Ma Kunlong.

[2] Yukl, G. A. (2010). Leadership in organizations. (7th ed.). Prentice-Hall.

[3] Bell, R. M. (2013). Charismatic leadership case study with Ronald Reagan as exemplar. Emerging Leadership Journeys, 65(1), 83-91.

[4] Conger, J. A., & Kanungo, R. N. (1987). Toward a behavioral theory of charismatic leadership in organizational settings. Academy of Management Review, 12(4), 637- 647. doi:10.5465/AMR.1987.4306715.

[5] R. Signorello, F. Derrico, I. Poggi and D. Demolin, "How Charisma Is Perceived from Speech: A Multidimensional Approach," 2012 International Conference on Privacy, Security, Risk and Trust and 2012 International Confernece on Social Computing, 2012, pp. 435-440, doi: 10.1109/SocialCom-PASSAT.2012.68.

[6] B. Craig, Douglas (2005). Fireside Politics: Radio and Political Culture in the United States, 1920-1940. Johns Hopkins University Press. p. 156. ISBN 978-0-8018-8312-5.

[7] Reedy, George E. (Winter 1992). "The First Great Communicator (book review, FDR and the News Media by Betty Houchin Winfield)". The Review of Politics. University of Notre Dame. 54 (1): 152–155.

[8] Ryfe, D. M. (1999). Franklin Roosevelt and the fireside chats. Journal of Communication.

[9] Article topic: Recorded Speeches and Utterances of Franklin D. Roosevelt, 1920-1945 Website name: Franklin D Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum. Website location https://www.fdrlibrary.org/utterancesfdr, 2022.11.26.

[10] Fiol, C. (1999). Charismatic leadership: Strategies for effecting social change. Leadership Quarterly, 10(3), 449.

[11] Howell, J. M., & Shamir, B. (2005). The role of followers in the charismatic leadership process: Relationships and their consequences. Academy of Management Review, 30(1), 96-112. doi:10.5465/AMR.2005.15281435.