**Customer value in a credence service context

Esther Verboon, Gerrita van der Veen, Josje Dikkers**

**Purpose**

Due to the economic crisis competition has considerably increased in legal services in The Netherlands and loyalty of clients can no longer be taken for granted. Because marketing is mostly in its infancy in this sector, especially in small and medium law firms. scientific findings could assist in clarifying the intermediate role of customer value in the development of loyalty. In fact, customer value explains *why* some service aspects contribute to loyalty and others not.
In the last decades the transactional perspective on value has moved towards a paradigm which claims that value creation is based on interaction. Especially in the Service logic (e.g. Grönroos, 2006) the concept of value-in-use in this new perspective is extensively discussed: value is created when services are used by customers and therefore created in interaction because in services production and consumption are simultaneous.
This seems especially the case in credence service contexts like legal services: value creation is conceptualized as joint problem solving which involves specialized knowledge and skills of the service provider and customer resources integrated in an interaction process, in order to create optimal value-in-use (Aarikka & Jaakkola, 2012).
Since value research in credence services is scarce, we employed a qualitative field study in this sector to explore value-in-use, its dimensions and antecedents.

**Methodology**We include small and medium sized business entrepreneurs, which form a very important clientèle for small and medium law firms. The emergence of value was studied in the interaction between lawyers and clients in an explorative way: in-depth interviews with ten lawyers and ten SME’s led to provider and client perspectives on value creation in twenty-eight legal cases.

**Findings**

Field findings show that value dimensions in legal services are functional, social and emotional. The last category emerges not only within but also outside the interaction with the lawyer. Recommendation of others or the trackrecord of lawyers for example, which play a role before or after the service, contribute to emotional values like trust and reassurance and help clients to reduce the perceived purchase risk, which is inherent to the nature of credence services.

Also due to the credential character of legal services we conclude that not only professional skills but also service aspects as client involvement play an important role in the emergence of value because professional skills are difficult to judge even by routine buyers.

**Originality**Our study enriches the limited literature and helps to understand the emergence of value in a credence service context like legal services. Precisely as a result of the information asymmetry between lawyer and client, the value creation outside the service encounter is relevant for clients. This insight contributes to the recent idea that value in this context is not a function of the interaction with the service provider only. Instead it is formed in a highly mental and emotional process which may comprise multiple memories and collective stories (Heinonen et al, 2013).