

The Concept of Client Perceived Relationship Value in High Contact Service Setting

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Abstract

As core service and price become less important differentiators in today's competitive markets, service organizations search for new ways to differentiate themselves through improved client-organization relationships. For high-contact services in particular, developing strong customer relationships is especially important due to the intangible, experiential and often interpersonal nature of offering. This paper reveals the concept of client perceived relationship value in relationships among individual client and high contact service organization. Typologies of client perceived benefits and costs of relationship when staying in long-term relationships with a high contact service organization are provided and tested empirically. This paper provides theoretical arguments for the proposed dimensions of client perceived relationship benefits and costs that reflect the latest approaches to the value concept, relevant to high contact service markets.

The empirical evidence to date in support of the original model is discussed.

Keywords: relationship value, relationship benefits, relationship costs.

Introduction

Problem and relevance of research:

There is a considerable amount of marketing and management literature supporting the notion that innovative value strategies contribute to the service organization's superior performance as well as help to gain competitive advantage in this dynamic marketing environment. To gain a competitive advantage, service firms today are required to deliver superior value for their clients. Managers need to understand what clients value and where they should focus their attention to achieve competitive advantage (Woodruff, 1997). When considering long-term significance of client retention and understanding the importance of search for innovative marketing solutions that create value, long-term client-organization relationships and client perceived relationship value is becoming a significant field of scientific research (Forsstrom, 2005; Ambler and Styles, 2000; Virvilaite, 2008). It has been reported that relationships with clients are probably one of the most valuable competitive resources

because of the difficulties to 'imitate' them. For high contact service organizations in particular, forging strong client relationships is especially important due to the intangible, experiential and often interpersonal nature of the delivered service (Patterson, 2004), where the client's input and even co-production of the service are often necessary.

Although long-term client-organization relationships receive great attention of researchers, little research has addressed the relationship value concept itself. The majority of research on client value employs a rather transactional approach by focusing on core service related issues (e.g. Petrick, 2002; Sweeney and Soutar, 2001; Zeithaml, 1988) or capturing some relational dimensions of client perceived value. There are only a few studies that focus specifically on client perceived relationship value, considering relationships to be a distinct, independent source of value. There is no scientific research that would analyze client perceived relationship value as an independent value, separate from the core service in the market of individual client-high contact service organization, simultaneously integrating the following most recent attitudes to the concept of value:

- Considering the principle of *value co-creation*.
- Integrating *emotional* aspects of client-organization interactions.
- Analyzing the aspects of *client-to-client interactions* in client perceived relationship value.

Considering the mentioned limitations of scientific research, **the article aims to integrate the elements of long term relationships of client and high contact service organization into a concept of client perceived relationship value, preparing client perceived relationship benefit and cost typologies.**

The following research objectives are set:

- 1) To present typologies of client perceived relationship benefits and costs that encompass the characteristic of client relationships with high contact service organizations.
- 2) To verify empirically the typologies of client perceived relationship benefits and costs in the Lithuanian sports and health club market.
- 3) To present general trends of relationship cost-be-

nefit assessment of long term clients of sports and health clubs.

Theoretical substantiation of client perceived value of relationship with high contact service organization: the development of benefit / cost typologies.

Value is a dynamic and complex concept. Zeithaml (1988) has suggested that perceived value can be regarded as client's overall assessment of the utility of the product (or service) based on perceptions of what is received and what is given. It is described as a comparison of product's or service's 'get' and 'give' or 'benefit' and 'cost' components. Thorough analysis of scientific literature on the concept of client perceived relationship value allows defining relationship value as an additional client perceived value that is experienced over and above the core service. It is acknowledged that the relationship value is separate and distinct from product value, because it refers to the relational interaction between clients and suppliers and not to issues related to core service (Walter et al., 2001). By separating the core service value from the relational aspects (relationship value), it is possible to get more comprehensive understanding about the added value of the relationships. In this study client perceived value of relationship with high contact service organization is examined at a dyad relationship level while integrating relationship variables into the value concept. The numerous categories of client perceived value are found in scientific literature, but only a few of those studies depict relationship value itself. Guidance in the selection of relational variables has been provided from findings in previous research studies (Damkuvienė, Virvilaite, 2007). Desirable and undesirable aspects of relational variables such as *mutual interaction, collaboration through communication and information exchange, organization relationship efforts, interdependence, trust, relational bonds* were taken into consideration when formulating client perceived relationship benefit and cost typologies.

Gwinner et al. (1998), Walter et al. (2001), Liang and Wang (2006) agree that *relationship benefits* are considered to be perceived additional advantages, positive outcomes that regular clients experience in a certain period of time when performing relationship functions. Relationship benefits reveal the positive aspects of the relationship itself and are available only to those clients who are engaged in continuing relationships with the service organization. Client perceived relationship costs are considered as additional losses, inconveniences, disadvantages and annoying moments that a client experiences in long-term relationships with an organization. It is noted that client perceived relationship costs receive much less attention in scientific literature than relationship benefits.

Gwinner's et al. (1998) typologization of relationship benefits is widely studied, discussed and applied in the marketing literature. They conceptualized and tested three types of relationship benefits: social, psychological and special treatment benefits, the latter comprising economic and customization benefits.

The latest approaches to the concept of value emphasize the importance of *client participation* in value creation, recognizing the fact that the role of the service provider has generally been conceptualized as the creator of value while the role of the client has been simplified to that of a passive receiver of the value that is created by a service organization. As service encounters become more participation-based, the boundary differentiating the service provider's role from the client's role becomes less distinct. Recent studies due to the increasing level of client involvement in services recognize the importance to investigate the aspects of value co-creation (Vargo and Lusch, 2004). Latest scientific studies also recognize the fact that client perceived value may be increased namely during *client-to-client interactions* (Gruen et al., 2007). Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) suggest that companies have to recognize that a client is becoming a partner in creating value, and organizations need to learn how to harness client competences. One aspect of this is the engagement of clients in co-creating personal experiences. Acknowledging that social interaction is one of the relational motives (Berry, 1995) and taking into consideration that from a consumer experience perspective, interactions and relationships with companies are only a part of their totality of relational exchanges (Baron and Haris, 2006), it is noted that these aspects of consumer-to-consumer interaction are often overlooked when analyzing relationship value.

Recent scientific studies (Hennig-Thurau, 2006; Baxter, 2006; Vargo and Lusch, 2004; Liang and Wang, 2006) highlight the great significance of *intangible, emotional* aspects of value that relate with client's self-enhancement and self-identification. It is stated that clients in long term relationships with a service organization may fulfill needs of gratification, enabling, and enriching the self (Smith and Colgate, 2007; Marin and Ruiz, 2007). That is why attractiveness of the organizational identity, the human aspects of relationship become of critical importance. Numerous studies highlight the importance of service provider's interpersonal skills that are one of the attributes that clients seek when evaluating organization's performance. Due to intangible nature of the service offering, clients are likely to evaluate an organization's performance through the individual service provider's performance.

With reference to the arguments of the latest

scientific debates on the concept of value, it is proposed to integrate aspects of *emotional closeness*, *client involvement* and *client-to-client interaction* into the typologization of client perceived value of relationship with high contact service organization. Following the presented arguments, six distinct **relationship benefit categories** were identified that reflect positive aspects of client–high contact service organization relationships. Client perceived relationship benefit categories were termed: *involvement, participation benefits, emotional closeness benefits, confidence benefits, communal benefits, tangible special treatment benefits* and *intangible special treatment benefits*. Hereafter they are presented in greater detail.

Emotional closeness benefits are obtained when relationships with a particular service provider arouse feelings or affective states, sense of belonging, relate to social approval and the enhancement of self-image (Sweeney and Soutar, 2001). Recently researchers have elaborated on the importance of identification in consumer-to-business relationships (Fournier, 1998; Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003; Smith and Colgate, 2007; Marin and Ruiz, 2007). This relationship benefit category is similar to Fournier's (1998) *identity-related relational benefits* or Sweeney and Soutar's (2001) *social value* dimension which means that being in a relationship with a specific service provider might add meaning to the consumer's self-concept. Clients feel being inspired by the service employees, the organization, the brand or the other clients. They feel there like "at home", time passes quickly while interacting with the service employees or the other clients.

Communal benefits. Marketing studies have been continually emphasizing the influence of other clients on client perceived value. Value creation through client-to-client exchange occurs when the perceived benefits of a company's offering are increased as a result of clients' interaction with one another (Gruen et al., 2007). Specifically client-to-client interactions have importance in the high contact service settings. Given the increasing acknowledgement of the concept of partnership relationships, *communal benefits* are expected to be an important consideration in relationship value. Research in the area of brand communities shows that client-to-client generated value can be created from the sharing of a variety of resources, such as social, economic, and knowledge (McAlexander et al., 2002). Communal benefits occur when clients come into contact, socialize with each other, exchange knowledge, contacts, processes, concerns, complaints, stories, or recommendations that are enhancing their well-being (Gruen et al., 2007). Enjoyable communication and affiliation with people already known to each other make clients feel closer to each other, portray a desired image to others.

Involvement, participation benefit category

describes those benefits which satisfy important intrinsic, self-oriented goals of the clients of being proud, enthusiastic and passionate playing their role in the relationships with a service organization. It is likely that clients derive self-esteem and prestige from their ability to participate. As discussed in the scientific literature, clients are treated as partial employees or co-producers (Bendapudi and Leone, 2003) and as such it is argued that clients experience the benefits through various "presence" in their relationship with the organization by working together, through shared understanding and perception of mutual benefits (Sweeney and Soutar, 2001).

Tangible special treatment benefits contain monetary and close to monetary advantages that a client derives from maintaining the relationship, and refers to benefits that are utilitarian in nature. Tangible special treatment benefits are experienced when returning clients are rewarded with monetary enticements, such as discounted prices and other forms of pricing incentives. Such benefits also include time saving, convenience, and knowledge accumulation, with the latter resulting from the client acquiring more information about the organization when returning to it repeatedly (Paul et al., 2006).

Intangible special treatment benefits. Although a client may initiate relationships with service organization due to appealing tangible (economic) benefits, social, intangible drivers must be present for relationships with an organization to develop and continue. With regard to clients' social needs, Berry (1995) argued that people long for individual and customized treatment in the context of client-employee interactions. If client-organization relationship is to flourish, clients must feel that they are being adequately rewarded for their patronage (Lacey et al., 2007). Intangible special treatment benefits depict those benefits that clients experience through recognition, individual identification (Christy et al., 1996), recollection a client receives from its employees through more personal interactions. As stated above, human aspects of a relationship are of critical importance, reflecting interpersonal interactions between clients and service providers. These benefits are based on mutual knowledge both the service provider and the client have developed during previous encounters, enabling the employee to better fulfill the client's needs. Although social drivers generally cannot overcome competitive economic value propositions, they can play a critical role in developing relationships when products or services offered lack competitive differentiation (Lacey et al., 2007).

Confidence benefits. According to Berry (1995), clients engage in marketing relationships because they want to reduce perceived risks, and enjoy a state of resource comfort. Confidence benefits include

those aspects of a relationship that focus on the reduction of uncertainty, anxiety (Gwinner et al., 1998). Being in long-term relationship with one service organization clients feel more comfortable and secure, are able to rely on a known organization, recognize service constancy, which improves stability and diminishes risk and vulnerability.

As stated above, to determine the value a client obtains from a relationship, it is inevitable to contrast the perceived relationship benefits with the perceived relationship costs. In line with the definition of relationship benefits **relationship costs** are described as those monetary and non-monetary losses that clients perceive in long term relationships. When identifying the categories of client perceived relationship costs undesirability aspects of relational variables were taken into consideration. *Negative* aspects of relational indicators were grouped into the following four **relationship cost categories**: *time/energy costs, privacy loss, variety loss, and risk of monotony*.

The cost categories that were formed in this paper are in line with Hillebrand and Bloemer's (2004), Arantola's (2002), O'Malley's et al. (1997) studies that uncover reasons why clients do not want to engage in relationships, what disadvantages, annoying moments they are likely to experience being in a relationship with an organization. After review of scientific literature that analyzes the concept of relationship costs, it was revealed that relationship costs encompass direct costs (monetary expenses), *time, effort, energy*, which arise directly from the relationship maintenance, and other disadvantages, annoyances, undesirable negative states and effects of relationship (indirect costs). These indirect costs may arise because of concerns and associated difficulties because of loss of control, personal information or physical privacy concerns. Privacy has become a central issue, es-

pecially in the field of relationship marketing, where development and implementation of individualized client solutions often requires specific deeper knowledge of client history. This may cause client's perceived individualization benefits as well as costs related to individualization (O'Malley et al., 1997; Arantola, 2002; Hillebrand and Bloemer, 2004). With reference to these, the second relationship cost category is named *privacy loss* and is defined as client's perceived risk or concern determining the nature and extent of information about them being communicated to others, also the concern viewing organization relationship efforts as invasions of their physical privacy (O'Malley et al., 1997). Clients may want to remain at a distance, or may hate to be addressed too personally; they might want "some space" (Hillebrand and Bloemer, 2004) between the service provider and themselves. This may cause feelings of loss of personal information control, which can be very disturbing. Another potential cost in long-term relationships with one particular service organization could be named as *risk of monotony*. It depicts concerns about sticking to one place. When patronizing the same service provider clients may get bored seeing the same interior, meeting the same people, doing the same things in the same place (Hillebrand and Bloemer, 2004). *Variety loss* is related with the need for freedom and excitement. Relationships might make clients feel less free to make a choice. This cost category encompasses worries related to concerns of passing off potentially better future alternatives, concerns regarding forgoing alternative providers, a relationship with whom may have been advantageous (Hillebrand and Bloemer, 2004).

The proposed client perceived relationship benefit and cost categories and their descriptions are given in Table 1.

Table 1

Categories of relationship benefits and costs

Proposed categories of relationship benefits and costs		Description
Benefits	Confidence benefits	Comfort or feeling of security in having developed a relationship with a provider. Felling of assurance, reliance on to deliver on its promises.
	Emotional closeness benefits	Sense of belonging with service organization, recognition of personal selves or identities, feeling of affiliation, attachment or connectedness.
	Participation, involvement benefits	Sense of personal importance, value and worth by becoming involved in cooperative activities that foster a sense of teamwork and accomplishment.
	Communal benefits	Sense of community, sharing interests, pleasure from social experiences with other clients.
	Tangible special treatment	Economic advantages (saving time, money, receiving bonuses, extra services).
	Intangible special treatment	Sense of personal importance from being recognized by service employees, feeling personal attention, sincerity, individualized socialization.

Costs	Variety loss	Loss of freedom and excitement, concerns regarding forgoing alternative providers, a relationship with whom may have been advantageous.
	Time, energy costs	Financial, personal and time sacrifices required for maintaining the relationship.
	Privacy loss	Risks associated with privacy violations, concerns viewing organization relationship efforts as invasions of their physical or mental privacy
	Risk of monotony	Concerns of getting bored with sticking to one service provider.

The methodology of research and research findings

Survey method is used to empirically verify the designed benefit and cost typologies of client perceived value of relationship with a high contact service organization. Based on a comprehensive literature review, a set of possible items was generated to tap each category of relationship benefits and costs. All relevant categories of client perceived relationship benefits and costs in terms of their structure, composition, characteristics and coverage, as described in this article and reported in different empirical studies, were included. The content validity of the items was assessed by 8 management academicians, 50 business administration students and representative clients of selected services. The items were screened in order to identify duplicate items and potential sources of ambiguity, after which several of the items were eliminated, some improvements in item wording were made. The final list of thirty-three items for relationship benefits and sixteen items for relationship costs was retained for development of the final version of the scale. Other sections of the questionnaire were designed to collect demographic data.

The research was carried out in Lithuanian sports and health club industry. With reference to Chase (1978), Lovelock (1996), and Patterson (2004), it could be reasonably stated that the sector of sports and health clubs enables to reveal the possibilities to integrate the *emotional*, *value co-creation* and *client-to-client interaction* aspects relevant to high contact service markets emphasized in recent marketing theories into the concept of client perceived value of relationship with an organization. A total of 1325 clients of Lithuanian sports and health clubs participated in the research by responding to a questionnaire. Sports and health club clients were asked to rate the importance of the provided long term relationship benefits and costs on a 4-point scale ranging from “very important” to “not important at all”. Statistical analysis of survey data was carried out by using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences version 11 for Windows) software. Descriptive data analysis methods (percentages, chi-square), factor analysis were used when analyzing research results.

With reference to Gwinner et al. (1998) notion that considerable experience with organization is needed for the clients to be aware of relational be-

nefits, relationship duration was taken into consideration when analyzing survey data. Respondents who have been patronizing service organization for less than one year were excluded from further analysis leaving a usable sample of 831 respondents.

The reliability and validity of the scales was assessed using exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses. First, exploratory analysis (Alpha factor with Varimax rotation) of the items was conducted to investigate if the theorized value dimensions could be extracted from the data. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy of 0.93 for benefits and of 0.90 for costs indicated that the items were correlated and suitable for factor analysis. The selection of Varimax orthogonal rotation ensured that each factor was independent of all other factors and produced a factor solution that was easy to interpret. The analysis was constrained on a hypothesized basis to six benefit factors and four cost factors to correspond to the hypothesized constructs. The use of such a hypothesized determination of the number of factors can be justified on the basis that the aim of this analysis was to assess the extent to which scale items gave a valid representation of identified underlying benefit and cost categories, the existence of which had been justified by a review of literature. All items loaded as expected on their respective factors. Six benefit categories having been identified, confirmatory factor analysis by using alpha reliability coefficients was conducted. The results shown in Tables 1 and 2 support the proposed six-factor benefit categorization, comprising the *involvement*, *participation*, *emotional closeness*, *confidence*, *communal*, *tangible special treatment* and *intangible special treatment* benefits and four-factor cost categorization, comprising the *privacy loss*, *time, energy costs*, *risk of monotony*, *variety loss*. The item-to-total correlations for the six benefit factors ranged between 0.79 and 0.43, and for the four cost factors ranged between 0.58 and 0.80. The coefficient alpha for the benefit factors ranged between 0.74 and 0.94, for the cost factors between 0.79 and 0.89, thus revealing acceptable internal reliability (see Tables 2 and 3). In the single case the low item-to-total correlation of 0.43 did not appear to decrease the coefficient alpha beyond the acceptable level of 0.60 for this research. Hence, the factors are considered a reliable and valid measure of relationship benefit and cost categories.

Table 2

Psychometric properties of the relationship benefit categories

Factor name	Items	Explorative factor analysis		Reliability analysis	
		Factor loadings L	% of Variance	Item to total correlation r/tt	Cronbach Alpha
Participation, involvement benefits	PI1	0.80	18.1	0.76	0.91
	PI2	0.79		0.75	
	PI3	0.77		0.71	
	PI4	0.74		0.70	
	PI5	0.73		0.73	
	PI6	0.72		0.72	
	PI7	0.63		0.63	
	PI8	0.63		0.63	
	PI9	0.61		0.64	
	PI10	0.56		0.53	
Emotional closeness bene- fits	EC1	0.72	9.79	0.67	0.83
	EC2	0.68		0.70	
	EC3	0.65		0.62	
	EC4	0.60		0.57	
	EC5	0.58		0.59	
	EC6	0.50		0.50	
Communal benefits	COM1	0.81	9.72	0.79	0.88
	COM2	0.79		0.75	
	COM3	0.76		0.72	
	COM4	0.74		0.73	
Tangible special treatment benefits	TST1	0.78	6.62	0.69	0.78
	TST2	0.65		0.59	
	TST3	0.65		0.60	
	TST4	0.48		0.47	
Confidence benefits	C1	0.57	6.08	0.60	0.74
	C2	0.57		0.55	
	C3	0.47		0.58	
	C4	0.44		0.43	
Intangible special treatment benefits	IST1	0.58	4.24	0.55	0.77
	IST2	0.49		0.49	
	IST3	0.42		0.63	
	IST4	0.42		0.61	

Table 3

Psychometric properties of the relationship cost categories

Factor name	Items	Factor loadings L	% of Variance	Item to total correlation r/tt	Cronbach Alpha
Risk of monotony	M1	0.72	18.78	0.58	0.80
	M2	0.70		0.58	
	M3	0.59		0.65	
	M4	0.55		0.63	
Privacy loss	PL1	0.76	32.92	0.75	0.89
	PL2	0.71		0.80	
	PL3	0.62		0.79	
	PL4	0.62		0.69	
Time, energy costs	TE1	0.84	32.64	0.72	0.79
	TE2	0.61		0.60	
	TE3	0.57		0.58	
Variety loss	V1	0.80	25.0	0.71	0.81
	V2	0.71		0.66	
	V3	0.63		0.61	

Aside from the typologization of relationship benefits and costs, it was determined which types of relationship benefits and costs were the most important and whether those ratings were different in distinct groups of clients by their demographic characteristics. When assessing perceived **relationship benefits and costs** with a high contact service organization, *confidence benefits*, *emotional closeness benefits* and *tangible special treatment benefits* were given the highest scores (confidence benefits are “very important” and “important” for 92%, emotional closeness benefits are “very important” and “important” for 83%, tangible special treatment is “very impor-

tant” and “important” for 75% of respondents). *Communal benefits* and *intangible special treatment benefits* are treated as “important” or “very important” by 62% (*communal benefits*) and 54% (*intangible special treatment benefits*) of respondents. The clients gave the lowest scores to the importance of *involvement into the processes that develop relationships with an organization (involvement, participation benefits)*: 34% of clients said that involvement, and participation benefits are “important” or “very important” for them. The scores of the importance of the benefits and costs are shown in Figure 1 and Figure 2.

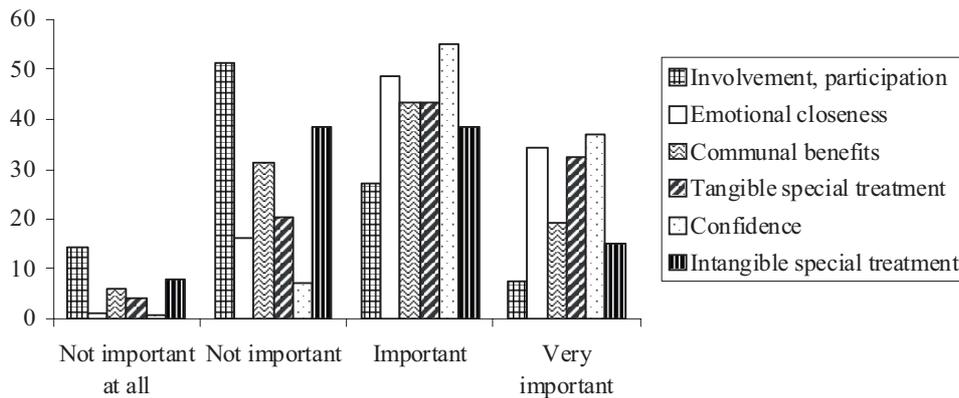


Figure 1. Assessments of client perceived relationship benefits

Consequently, the research findings ground the importance of both emotional benefits and tangible special treatment benefits in long-term relationships with an organization, envisaging higher scores when assessing the importance of *intangible* special treatment benefits.

All the distinguished categories of client per-

ceived costs with a high contact service organization were characterized by a fairly low assessment of importance. The importance of *variety loss costs* and *time/energy costs* received a little higher assessment of importance. The least important was the risk of monotony (“not important” for 54%, “not important at all” for 25% of clients) (see Figure 2).

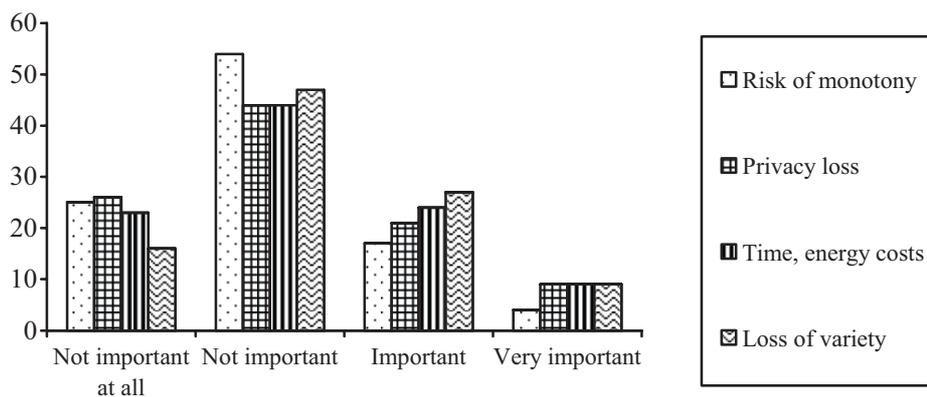


Figure 2. Assessments of client perceived relationship costs

The research findings allow claiming certain conditional priority in benefit component analysis when studying the concept of value mentioned by some authors (Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Jokela, 2006).

It is assumed that client’s socio-demographic

features (gender, education, age), and other situational factors (length of the relationship, type of the patronized sports club, patronage frequency) might impact perception of benefits and costs. Following this, differences between respondents’ responses within

different demographic characteristics and situational conditions were assessed. Chi-square test for independence to determine whether socio-demographic and situational factors are related to benefit and cost assessment was run.

The research findings show that client's socio-demographic features and other situational factors are likely to influence the assessment of importance of relationship benefits and costs (see Table 4).

Table 4

Link between benefit / cost assessment and socio-demographic characteristics (chi- square test)

	Gender	Education	length of the relationship*	Type of the sports club	Patronage frequency
Relationship benefits					
Involvement, participation benefits		X			X
Emotional closeness benefits	X	X	X	X	X
Communal benefits		X	X	X	
tangible special treatment benefits	X	X			
Confidence benefits	X			X	X
Intangible special treatment benefits	X			X	X
Relationship costs					
Risk of monotony		X	X		X
Privacy loss		X	X		X
Time, energy		X	X		
Variety loss		X	X	X	X

* n – 1325;

X – cases of statistically meaningful differences

Results show that there are links between the relationship benefits/costs importance ratings and **education level**. Clients *with higher education* see the greater importance of *tangible special treatment benefits and involvement, participation benefits*. For clients who *do not have higher education* communal and emotional closeness benefits are of higher importance. When estimating relationship costs, the research findings show that clients *without higher education* assess the risk of *privacy loss* more sensitively (“*very important*” and “*important*” for 35.4% of clients who do not have higher education; and “*very important*” and “*important*” for 21.5% of clients who have higher education).

Chi-square test of independence gives evidence of link between benefit/cost assessment and **gender**. *Women* report higher levels of importance when evaluating *emotional closeness, confidence, tangible special treatment and intangible special treatment* benefits. The biggest difference was found in *emotional closeness* benefit category, where items reflecting *emotional closeness* benefits were rated as “*very important*” by 44% of women and only by 24.7% of men.

The results demonstrate that **relationship duration** is not the focal factor when evaluating relationship benefit/cost importance. Minor yet statistically meaningful differences were found in *emotional clo-*

ness and *communal* benefit categories, where the importance level was a little bit higher in the group of *long term clients*. It is interesting to note that clients who have been visiting a sports and health club for a period *shorter than a year* named *privacy loss, variety loss* costs as more important (less desirable).

Chi-square test results show that clients who patronize a sports and health club really frequently (5-7 times per week) see *emotional closeness* benefits as more important (“*very important*” for 51.4% of clients who patronize a sports and health club 5–7 times per week in comparison with “*very important*” for 26.7% of clients who patronize a sports and health club several times per month). Chi-square analysis shows that there is a statistically significant difference of *intangible special treatment, involvement, participation* benefit ratings according to *patronizing frequency* (all those benefits are rated as more important in the group of clients who patronize a sports and health club 5–7 times per week). *Relationship cost* evaluation rates vary by the patronage frequency as well. Statistically meaningful differences are found when estimating *risk of monotony, privacy loss* (“*not important at all*” for 41.6% (*risk of monotony*) and 40% (*privacy loss*) clients who patronize sports and health club 5–7 times per week to compare with accordingly 30.4% and 28.3% for the clients who patronize sports and health club only several times per month). *Varie-*

ty loss was rated as “*important*” by 37% clients who patronize sports and health club 5–7 times per week in comparison with 12.9% of importance in the group of “*rare*” visitors. These results demonstrate the existing link between sports and health club patronage frequency and relationship cost estimation.

The research results reveal link between benefit/cost assessment and *sports and health club type* that clients are patronizing. *Emotional closeness, communal, confidence and intangible special treatment benefits* are rated as more important by the clients who are patronizing *smaller, local* sports and health clubs to compare with those who are patronizing big sports and health club chains. Intangible special treatment benefits were rated as “*very important*” or “*important*” by 64.4% of clients of smaller, non-chain sports clubs and “*very important*” or “*important*” by 46.7% of big chain sports club clients. *Communal benefits* were “*very important*” or “*important*” to 70.4% of clients of smaller, non-chain sports clubs, while they were “*very important*” or “*important*” to 55.7% of clients of big chain sports clubs. *Emotional closeness* benefits also gained higher importance in the assessments in small, non-chain sports clubs clients’ group (“*very important*” for 43.7% of small, non-chain and for 32.3% of big, chain sports clubs’ clients). Client perceived relationship cost importance rate was not associated with the type of a patronized sports and health club.

The research findings show that *emotional closeness* depends on *gender* (women provide higher scores), length of the relationship with an organization and *the type of sports and health club* (clients who visit smaller sports and health clubs for more than one year give higher scores). Long term clients (clients who visit a sports and health club for a period of more than one year) see the greater importance of *communal benefits* as well. The importance of *tangible and intangible special treatment* benefits is greater in *women’s* group.

Conclusions

After summarizing the scientific debates over the concept of value found in scientific literature, it was revealed that client perceived value of relationship with a high contact service organization is considered to be client’s subjective perception interpreted individually and based on a positive and/or negative assessment of long-term relationship indicators that go beyond the boundaries of the core service.

After review of scientific literature on the concept of relationship value, it was revealed that the most recent approaches to value emphasize the principle of value co-creation, the importance of emotio-

nal value components and the significance of integration of client-to-client interactions. It was ascertained that the mentioned principles are poorly reflected in the typologies of client perceived relationship benefits and costs found in scientific works.

After identification and theoretical substantiation of the structure of client perceived value of relationship with a high contact service organization, the typologies of client perceived benefits and costs of relationship with a high contact service organization were formed. Benefit component included six categories (emotional closeness, communal benefit, involvement, participation, tangible special treatment, intangible special treatment and confidence benefits), whereas cost component included four categories (privacy loss, variety loss, risk of monotony, time and energy).

Empirical results supported the proposed six-dimensional categorization of client perceived benefit of relationship with a high contact service organization and four dimensional categorization of clients perceived cost of relationship with a high contact service organization. Psychometrical properties of the formed scales of relationship benefit and cost ensured that valid and reliable scales for measuring client perceived benefits and costs of relationship with high contact service organization were developed.

The paper contributes to the literature on client perceived value by introducing new context relevant relationship benefit dimensions that are needed in value based marketing for high contact services by incorporating reported aspects of emotional closeness, client-to-client interactions and client value co-creation into concept of client perceived relationship value.

When assessing the ratings of client perceived benefits and costs of relationship with a high contact service organization, *confidence benefits, emotional closeness benefits and benefits of tangible special treatment* were given the highest scores. The lowest scores were given to *involvement, participation benefits*. All the distinguished categories of client perceived costs of relationship with a high contact service organization were characterized by a assessment of importance asfairly poor.

The presented research findings show that the assessment of importance of relationship benefits and costs is associated with client’s socio-demographic features and other situational factors.

Consequently, while structure of client perceived benefit and cost of relationship with high contact service organization was proven, a limitation of the study is that it was tested only in one high contact service (sports and health club) industry. Further research in other high contact service sectors is needed for additional validation of the proposed relationship benefit-cost scales with another data set. Despite this con-

cern, the instrument can be used to longitudinally measure relationship benefit and cost perceptions of current clients to better manage these benefits and costs as part of an overall strategy of client retention.

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Klientų suvokiamos ilgalaikių santykių su aukšto kontakto paslaugų organizacija vertės konceptas

Santrauka

Verslui išgyvenant didžiulių pokyčių laikotarpį, kintant klientų lūkesčiams ir preferencijoms, paslaugų organizacijos skatinamos ieškoti išskirtinių vertės klientui kūrimo šaltinių. Pripažįstama, kad pagrindinės paslaugos ribose atliekamas klientui kuriamos vertės vertinimas, remiantis paslaugos kokybės ar klientų pasitenkinimo matavimu, nebetenkina šiuolaikinės organizacijos poreikių, kadangi jis neįgalina nustatyti, matuoti, vertinti ir tinkamai valdyti specifinių, vertę kuriančių veiksnių. Atsižvelgiant į ilgalaikę klientų išlaikymo svarbą, suvokiant inovatyvių, vertę kuriančių rinkodaros sprendimų paieškos aktualumą, ilgalaikiai klientų–organizacijos santykiai traktuojami kaip išskirtinis pridėtinės vertės šaltinis, suteikiantis galimybę organizacijai sėkmingai konkuruoti dinamiškoje verslo aplinkoje. Visa tai įgalina kalbėti apie reikšmingai išaugusią klientų suvokiamos ilgalaikių santykių su organizacija vertės svarbą. Nepaisant to, kad ilgalaikiai santykiai ir ilgalaikių santykių vertė tampa aktualiu mokslinių tyrimų objektu, šie konceptai dažniausia analizuojami pagrindinės paslaugos kontekste, vertę sąlygojančių naudų ir sąnaudų komponenčių sąrangose, menkai atsispindi šie naujausiose vertės konceptualizacijose minimi su ilgalaikiais santykiais susiję vertės aspektai:

- Kliento dalyvavimas kuriant vertę.
- Emociniai kliento–organizacijos sąveikų aspektai.
- Klientų tarpusavio sąveikų aspektai.

Pripažįstant, kad minėti santykių vertės aspektai turi didžiausią galimybę atsiskleisti aukšto kontakto paslaugų rinkoje, reikalaujančioje fizinio klientų dalyvavimo paslaugos teikimo procese, kontakto su paslaugas teikiančiu asmeniu ir pasižymi klientų tarpusavio sąveikomis, iškeltas **straipsnio tikslas** – įvertinant naujausius požiūrius į santykių vertę, parengti ir empiriškai patikrinti klientų suvokiamų ilgalaikių santykių su aukšto kontakto paslaugų organizacija naudų ir sąnaudų tipologijas ir atskleisti klientų suvokiamų ilgalaikių santykių su organizacija naudų ir sąnaudų vertinimo dėsningumus.

Straipsnyje pateikiamas naujausius požiūrius į klientų suvokiamos vertės konceptą atspindinčių klientų dalyvavimo vertės kūrimo, klientų tarpusavio sąveikų ir emocinių santykių aspektų integravimo į kliento suvokiamą ilgalaikių santykių su aukšto kontakto paslaugų organizacija vertę aktualumo teorinis pagrindimas. Aprašytos sufor-

muotos hipotetinės klientų suvokiamų ilgalaikių santykių su aukšto kontakto paslaugų organizacija naudų ir sąnaudų tipologijos. Sudarant naudų ir sąnaudų tipologijas, siekiama atspindėti kliento ir aukšto kontakto paslaugų organizacijos santykių dedamųjų *pageidaujiamumo (naudu)* ir *nepageidaujiamumo (sąnaudų)* aspektus. Kliento–organizacijos **pozityvius** santykių aspektus atspindintys požymiai sugrupuoti į **šešias naudų kategorijas**: *įtakos / dalyvavimo, emocinio artumo, užtikrintumo, bendruomeniškumo, apčiuopiamo specialaus rūpinimosi ir neapčiuopiamo specialaus rūpinimosi*. **Negatyūs** ilgalaikių kliento–organizacijos santykių požymiai sugrupuoti į **keturias** – *privatumo praradimo, įvairovės praradimo, monotoniškumo, laiko / energijos* – **sąnaudų kategorijas**. Lietuvos sporto ir sveikatingumo klubų sektoriuje atlikto empirinio tyrimo (n-1325) pagrindu atliktas suformuotų skalių psichometrinis patikrinimas atskleidžia sklandų nagrinėjamų aspektų integravimąsi į klientų suvokiamų ilgalaikių santykių su aukšto kontakto paslaugų organizacija naudų ir sąnaudų konstruktus.

Klientų suvokiamų ilgalaikių santykių su organizacija naudų ir sąnaudų svarbos vertinimai atskleidžia pasitikėjimo organizacija, emocinio artumo ir apčiuopiamų specialaus rūpinimosi naudų (nuolaidų, išskirtinių pasiūlymų ir kitų privalumų) svarbą. Žemiausiai klientai vertina įsitraukimo į santykius palaikančius procesus, jautimosi įtakingu organizacijos partneriu svarbą. Per tyrimą nustatyta, kad nei viena klientų suvokiamas ilgalaikių santykių su aukšto kontakto paslaugų organizacija sąnaudas atspindinti kategorija neišsiskiria kaip labiau svarbi (nepageidaujama). Tyrimo rezultatai rodo, kad *emocinio artumo* svarbos vertinimai priklauso nuo *lyties* (aukščiau vertina moterys), *sporto ir sveikatingumo klubo lankymosi trukmės ir lankomo sporto ir sveikatingumo tipo* (aukščiau vertina ilgiau nei metus ir mažesnius sporto ir sveikatingumo klubus lankantys klientai). *Ilgiau nei metus* sporto ir sveikatingumo klube besilankantys klientai išvelgia ir didesnę *bendruomeniškumo* svarbą. *Apčiuopiamo ir neapčiuopiamo specialaus rūpinimosi* svarba didesnė *moterų* grupėje. Žemiausiai klientai vertina *įsitraukimo į santykius su organizacija plėtojančius procesus* svarbą.

Pagrindiniai žodžiai: santykių vertė, santykių nauja, santykių kaina.