

Generative Artificial Intelligence in Legal Decision-Making: Understanding Client Perceptions

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Project Summary

The goal of this research project is to investigate how the use of generative AI (genAI) in legal services and transparency about its involvement influence client trust in and their willingness to pay for (the monetary value they place on) these services. Understanding client attitudes about genAI's involvement can inform how professionals in the legal industry and other high-trust services sectors, such as healthcare and investment management, should apply genAI and communicate about it to their clients.

To answer this research question, I conducted a randomized controlled trial (RCT) using an online survey. Participants were recruited through Prolific and instructed to complete the survey on Qualtrics. The study was approved by the Bowdoin College Institutional Review Board (Protocol #2025-12).

Participants first answered preliminary questions about their trust in the use of genAI in legal services more broadly. Next, participants were randomly assigned to one of four experimental arms. Each participant read a legal case summary plus a preceding paragraph with information on the degree of genAI involvement in preparing the case summary. Based on the information provided in the introductory paragraph, I characterize the four experimental arms as follows:

1. Human-only legal services (control arm) – legal work is entirely human-driven;
2. GenAI-assisted, no transparency – legal work performed with genAI assistance; no additional details about limited accuracy of genAI or lack of human oversight provided;
3. GenAI-assisted, with transparency but no oversight – legal work performed with genAI assistance; additional details noting limited accuracy of genAI and lack of human oversight provided;
4. GenAI-assisted, with oversight – legal work performed with genAI assistance; additional details noting human review of the output provided.

After reading their randomly assigned case summary, all participants answered the same questions. The first set of post-treatment questions was the same as the preliminary questions, focusing on their trust in genAI use in legal services more broadly. The second set of questions asked about their perceived credibility of the firm that authored the case summary. The last set asked participants about the monetary value they placed on legal services that used genAI to different degrees. For the final question, participants indicated which statement best described their views on the appropriate involvement of genAI in legal services. At the end of the survey, participants reported demographic information.

I have concluded data collection, obtaining a final sample of 356 observations. 23.8% of participants were assigned to the control arm, and 25.8%, 24.4%, and 25.8% were assigned to the other three treatment arms, respectively. 51.1% and 47.2% of the respondents reported their sex as male and female, respectively. 46.3% of the sample is younger than 40 years of age. The majority of participants are white (75.6%) and lack any legal background (91.6%). 43.0% have less than a Bachelor's degree, 37% a Bachelor's degree, and 20.5% a graduate or professional degree.

The next step of the project is to analyze the impact of the treatment on participant trust in and willingness to pay for genAI use in legal services. I will begin data analysis once I have submitted the study pre-analysis plan and registered it with the American Economic Association's RCT Registry. In addition to analyzing the impact of the treatment for the full sample, I also plan to study differences by participant sex and education level. I will be able to control for other participant demographics (such as age, race, and legal background). I plan to write up the final results of the study in a formal research paper and submit it for publication to journals before the end of the 2025-26 academic year.

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