INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ACADEMIC RESEARCH IN BUSINESS & SOCIAL SCIENCES

Vol 16, Issue 1, (2026) E-ISSN: 2222-6990

Service Quality Determinants of E-Hailing Performance: The Mediating Role of Professionalism in Kuala Lumpur

Mr. Muhammad Shahman Shahfiq Bin Ramli
School of Business and Economics, Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), 43400 Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia

Associate Professor Dr. Raja Nerina Raja Yusof
School of Business and Economics, Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), 43400 Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia
Corresponding Author Email: shahman91@gmail.com

DOI Link: http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v16-i1/27451

Published Date: 22 January 2026

Abstract

This research examines how responsiveness affects e-hailing service performance through the mediating role of professionalism. Despite Malaysia's rapid digital transformation in public transportation, empirical insights into behavioral drivers of service quality remain limited. Adopting a quantitative approach, data were gathered from 391 e-hailing users in Kuala Lumpur using structured questionnaires. The responses were analyzed using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) via SmartPLS to test direct and indirect effects. The study integrates SERVQUAL and Sociological theories to provide a multidimensional explanation of how responsiveness and professional behavior shape performance outcomes. Findings reveal that responsiveness directly improves service performance and indirectly strengthens it through professionalism. Drivers' courteous communication, punctuality, and commitment to ethical conduct are identified as crucial contributors to customer satisfaction and trust. This research expands the application of SERVQUAL theory by empirically validating professionalism as a mediating construct, contributing both theoretically and practically to service management and e-hailing quality improvement in Malaysia.

Keywords: E-Hailing, Professionalism, Responsiveness, Service Quality, Malaysia, SERVQUAL

Introduction

The rapid advancement of digital technology has significantly transformed urban transportation systems worldwide. In Malaysia, the emergence of e-hailing platforms such as Grab, MyCar, and JomRides has reshaped mobility by integrating real-time digital interfaces with service delivery. What was once a conventional taxi-based industry has evolved into a highly competitive, platform-driven ecosystem characterized by immediacy, personalization,

and data-driven operations. Beyond technological efficiency, this transformation has intensified customer expectations regarding responsiveness, professional conduct, and overall service performance (Ali & Raza, 2020).

Despite the technological sophistication of e-hailing platforms, the quality of human interaction between drivers and passengers remains a critical determinant of service outcomes. In Kuala Lumpur, user complaints reported by the Land Public Transport Agency (APAD, 2022) frequently highlight issues such as delayed pickups, ineffective communication, and unprofessional driver behavior. These concerns suggest that operational efficiency alone is insufficient to ensure positive service performance. Instead, service encounters that lack responsiveness and professionalism can undermine customer satisfaction, weaken trust, and damage platform reputation in an increasingly competitive market.

From a theoretical perspective, responsiveness is a core dimension of the SERVQUAL model proposed by Parasuraman et al. (1988), which emphasizes an organization's ability to provide prompt, efficient, and attentive service. Within the e-hailing context, responsiveness extends beyond speed of service to include drivers' capacity to address passenger needs, manage unexpected situations, and communicate clearly. While prior studies have examined responsiveness primarily as a technical or operational attribute, the behavioral processes through which responsiveness translates into perceived service performance remain underexplored, particularly in developing economy contexts such as Malaysia.

Professionalism represents a key behavioral mechanism that may shape this relationship. Conceptualized as a set of ethical standards, interpersonal competencies, and role-based conduct guiding service delivery (Lee, 1994), professionalism influences how service actions are interpreted by customers. Responsive behavior that is delivered without courtesy, respect, or accountability may appear impersonal or transactional, thereby reducing its positive impact on service performance. Conversely, professional conduct enhances the credibility, sincerity, and perceived quality of service interactions, strengthening customer evaluations and loyalty (Putnam, 2000).

This study draws on both SERVQUAL theory and sociological perspectives to develop a conceptual framework explaining how responsiveness influences e-hailing service performance through the mediating role of professionalism. SERVQUAL provides the operational foundation for assessing service responsiveness, while sociological theory (Durkheim, 1895; Parsons, 1951) emphasizes professionalism as a social mechanism that reinforces normative behavior, trust, and organizational legitimacy. By integrating these perspectives, the study extends traditional service quality models to incorporate the social dynamics of professional conduct in digitally mediated service environments.

Empirically, Malaysia's e-hailing industry offers a relevant setting for examining these relationships. Although the sector has experienced rapid digital adoption, it continues to face challenges related to service inconsistency and behavioral variability among drivers (Rahman et al., 2022). As the nation's economic and transportation hub, Kuala Lumpur reflects both the opportunities and operational complexities of urban e-hailing services. Understanding how responsiveness and professionalism interact in this context is therefore essential for improving service standards, regulatory oversight, and customer trust.

Accordingly, this study pursues three objectives. First, it examines the direct relationship between responsiveness and e-hailing service performance. Second, it investigates the influence of professionalism on service performance, with emphasis on ethical and behavioral dimensions. Third, it tests the mediating role of professionalism in the relationship between responsiveness and service performance.

The study makes a distinct scholarly contribution by positioning professionalism as a mediating mechanism within the SERVQUAL framework in the context of e-hailing services. Unlike prior research that focuses primarily on technological efficiency or customer satisfaction, this study highlights the social and behavioral foundations of service performance in platform-based transportation. By doing so, it advances service quality theory and provides practical insights for e-hailing firms seeking to enhance customer experience, brand differentiation, and sustainable performance.

Literature Review

Concept of Service Quality in Digital Mobility Services

Service quality has long been recognized as a central construct in understanding customer satisfaction and organizational performance across industries. In the digital mobility sector, service quality extends beyond physical encounters to include virtual responsiveness, communication, and reliability facilitated by mobile applications (Parasuraman *et al.,* 1988; Zeithaml *et al.,* 2018). The integration of digital technology within e-hailing services has redefined the expectations of timeliness, transparency, and professionalism, as customers now perceive service quality through both technological and interpersonal dimensions.

Unlike traditional taxi services, e-hailing platforms rely heavily on real-time responsiveness and human interaction mediated through digital interfaces (Choudhury and Maheshwari, 2021). Customers expect prompt driver responses, accurate estimated arrival times, and courteous communication. Any failure in these areas can immediately translate into negative app reviews and customer attrition. Therefore, in highly competitive digital platforms, responsiveness becomes not only a technical function but also a strategic determinant of service performance and brand loyalty (Kuo *et al.,* 2020).

Responsiveness and E-Hailing Service Performance

Responsiveness refers to the promptness and willingness of service providers to assist customers and address their needs efficiently (Parasuraman *et al.,* 1988). Within e-hailing, responsiveness encompasses behaviors such as quick acceptance of ride requests, timely arrival, and effective handling of customer inquiries or route adjustments (Wu and Chen, 2022). A high level of responsiveness signals service reliability and customer orientation, which in turn enhances the perceived performance of e-hailing firms.

Previous studies in the broader service management domain consistently link responsiveness to customer satisfaction, trust, and organizational performance (Adu-Brobbey and Asare, 2020; Ndubisi, 2006). In the context of e-hailing, where customer experience is shaped by moment-to-moment interactions, responsiveness serves as a real-time indicator of service quality. Drivers who respond promptly to messages, updates, or complaints create a perception of care and reliability, strengthening customer loyalty.

However, responsiveness alone may not fully explain variations in service performance. Without professional behavior and ethical consistency, responsiveness may appear mechanical or transactional. Thus, this study posits that responsiveness contributes to e-hailing service performance more effectively when mediated by professionalism, which shapes how responsiveness is perceived and internalized by customers.

Professionalism as a Mediating Construct

Professionalism represents a multidimensional construct encompassing attitudes, ethics, and interpersonal competencies that define appropriate conduct within a service context (Lee, 1994). It reflects a commitment to integrity, respect, and accountability, all of which are essential to sustaining customer trust and service excellence (Hogan *et al.,* 2013). In e-hailing services, professionalism manifests in drivers' communication etiquette, adherence to safety standards, respect for customer preferences, and conflict management (Rahman *et al.,* 2022). From a sociological perspective, professionalism operates as a social control mechanism that ensures behavioral consistency within organizations (Durkheim, 1895). It establishes shared norms and expectations that regulate how service providers interact with customers, fostering a climate of mutual respect and social legitimacy. Parsons (1951) further argues that professionalism enhances social cohesion within institutions by promoting competence and ethical responsibility.

In the e-hailing industry, professionalism is often the differentiating factor between acceptable and exceptional service. Even when technical responsiveness is high, unprofessional conduct such as rudeness or lack of empathy can undermine service performance. Conversely, professional drivers who exhibit empathy and discipline enhance the value of responsiveness by transforming it into a trust-based experience. This dynamic mediating role of professionalism has been validated in healthcare (Dyer *et al.,* 2019) and hospitality (Kim and Lee, 2020), but remains underexplored in digital transportation.

Accordingly, this study proposes that professionalism serves as a behavioral bridge through which responsiveness translates into enhanced service performance. It provides a humanized dimension to digital service quality, reinforcing organizational reputation and customer retention.

SERVQUAL Theory and Its Relevance to E-Hailing

The SERVQUAL model, introduced by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988), remains one of the most widely used frameworks for measuring service quality. It conceptualizes service quality through five dimensions: tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. Among these, responsiveness has received particular attention as a determinant of perceived performance and satisfaction (Zeithaml *et al.,* 2018).

In e-hailing services, SERVQUAL offers a valuable lens for examining how responsiveness influences customers' perceptions of reliability and efficiency. However, the digital service context introduces new layers of complexity, where interpersonal professionalism interacts with algorithmic features such as driver ratings and automated dispatch systems. Integrating professionalism into the SERVQUAL framework allows this study to extend its applicability beyond traditional service encounters into digitally mediated and behaviorally sensitive contexts.

Sociological Theory and Professionalism

Sociological theory provides the complementary foundation for understanding why professionalism is essential in service-based organizations. According to Durkheim (1895), professionalism functions as a collective moral code that regulates conduct and sustains social order. In service industries, it reinforces trust, cooperation, and legitimacy between providers and consumers (Putnam, 2000). Parsons (1951) emphasized that professional norms not only guide individual behavior but also enhance organizational stability and public confidence.

Applying this theoretical lens to the e-hailing industry suggests that professionalism transforms individual responsiveness into institutional trustworthiness. When drivers act with courtesy and ethical awareness, they uphold social norms that reflect positively on the organization, contributing to better service performance. Thus, professionalism serves both as a moral anchor and an operational enabler of service excellence.

Hypotheses Development

Building upon the theoretical synthesis of SERVQUAL and Sociological theory, this study develops three hypotheses to examine the relationships among responsiveness, professionalism, and service performance:

- **H1:** Responsiveness positively influences professionalism among e-hailing drivers.
- **H2:** Professionalism positively influences e-hailing service performance.
- **H3:** Professionalism mediates the relationship between responsiveness and e-hailing service performance.

These hypotheses form the conceptual framework of the study, which integrates operational efficiency and behavioral ethics into a unified model of e-hailing service quality. The next section outlines the methodological design and analytical procedures used to test these hypotheses empirically.

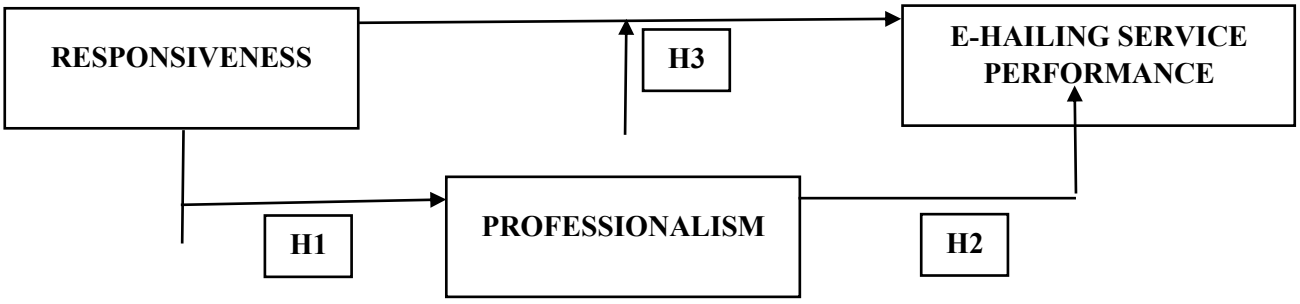

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional design to empirically examine the relationships among responsiveness, professionalism, and e-hailing service performance in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The quantitative approach was chosen for its ability to objectively test hypothesized relationships using numerical data and statistical analysis. Cross-sectional data collection allowed for an efficient snapshot of user perceptions at a single point in time, consistent with previous service quality research (Hair *et al.,* 2021).

A positivist research paradigm guided the study, emphasizing hypothesis testing, generalizability, and empirical validation. The conceptual framework was grounded in SERVQUAL theory (Parasuraman *et al.,* 1988) and Sociological theory (Durkheim, 1895; Parsons, 1951), allowing the integration of behavioral and structural constructs. The framework positions responsiveness as the independent variable, professionalism as the mediating construct, and e-hailing service performance as the dependent variable.

Population and Sampling Procedure

The target population comprised active e-hailing service users in Kuala Lumpur who had used platforms such as Grab, MyCar, or JomRides within the preceding six months. Kuala Lumpur was selected as the study area because it represents Malaysia's largest and most technologically advanced e-hailing market, with a diverse user demographic and high ride volume (APAD, 2022).

A non-probability purposive sampling method was employed to identify respondents who were both frequent users and capable of evaluating service quality dimensions. While probability sampling provides greater generalizability, purposive sampling was deemed appropriate given the need for respondents with relevant experiential knowledge (Sekaran and Bougie, 2020).

A total of 1,200 questionnaires were distributed via online survey platforms (Google Forms, WhatsApp, and e-hailing community groups) and through in-person distribution at public transportation hubs such as KL Sentral and Bukit Bintang. After data screening for completeness and reliability, 391 valid responses were retained for analysis, representing a 32.6% response rate, consistent with typical rates in urban consumer research (Dillman *et al.,* 2014).

Demographically, respondents were balanced across gender (52% female, 48% male) and represented diverse age groups, with the majority aged between 21 and 40 years. Approximately 85% of respondents used e-hailing services at least twice per week, indicating strong familiarity with the service experience.

Instrument Design and Measurement of Constructs

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire developed from validated scales in prior studies. The instrument consisted of four main sections: demographic information, responsiveness, professionalism, and e-hailing service performance. All items were measured using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree), enabling consistency and statistical robustness in the measurement of latent constructs (Hair *et al.,* 2021).

- Responsiveness was measured using items adapted from Parasuraman *et al.* (1988) and Yu *et al.* (2014), focusing on timeliness, prompt assistance, and communication effectiveness (e.g., "Drivers respond quickly to ride requests," "Drivers communicate clearly when there are delays").
- Professionalism was operationalized using indicators from Lee (1994) and Rahman *et al.* (2022), including ethical conduct, courtesy, reliability, and adherence to service standards (e.g., "Drivers treat customers with respect," "Drivers follow ethical and safety protocols").

- E-hailing Service Performance was measured based on user perceptions of overall satisfaction, service reliability, and intention to reuse, adapted from Kuo *et al.* (2020) and Kim and Lee (2020).

The questionnaire was pre-tested with 30 pilot respondents to ensure clarity, reliability, and face validity. Minor adjustments were made to wording to improve comprehension and cultural relevance for Malaysian respondents. Cronbach's alpha values from the pilot study exceeded 0.80 for all constructs, indicating strong internal consistency.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection was conducted over a three-month period (January–March 2025). Respondents were informed about the study's purpose and assured of confidentiality and anonymity. Participation was voluntary, and no identifying information was collected, aligning with ethical guidelines established by the authors' institutional review board.

Both digital and physical methods were utilized to maximize response diversity. Online distribution reached younger, tech-savvy participants, while face-to-face distribution captured older or less digitally active users. This mixed-mode approach helped reduce sampling bias and increase representativeness within Kuala Lumpur's e-hailing population.

Data Screening and Preparation

Data were screened using SPSS Version 28 before being imported into SmartPLS 4.0. Missing data were minimal (<2%) and treated using mean substitution. Outliers were identified via Mahalanobis distance ($p < 0.001$) and removed to ensure multivariate normality. Skewness and kurtosis values for all items were within the acceptable range of ±2.0, confirming normal distribution for SEM analysis (Hair *et al.,* 2021).

Data Analysis Technique

The study employed Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) using SmartPLS 4.0. This method was selected due to its suitability for complex models involving mediation, latent constructs, and small-to-moderate sample sizes (Hair *et al.,* 2019). PLS-SEM enables simultaneous assessment of measurement and structural models, providing comprehensive insights into reliability, validity, and predictive relationships.

Analysis proceeded in two stages:

1. **Measurement Model Assessment**: testing reliability and validity through factor loadings, Cronbach's alpha, Composite Reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). Convergent validity was confirmed when loadings exceeded 0.70, CR > 0.70, and AVE > 0.50.
2. **Structural Model Assessment**: evaluating hypothesised paths through bootstrapping (5,000 resamples). Mediation was examined using indirect effects, and significance was determined at $p < 0.05$. Model fit was assessed using SRMR (<0.08) and R^2 values for endogenous constructs.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical integrity was maintained throughout the research process. Participants were provided with an informed consent statement prior to completing the survey. All responses were kept confidential, and data were used solely for academic purposes. The study adhered to the

ethical guidelines of the authors' institution and complied with the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki (2013) for research involving human participants.

Summary

In summary, this study utilized a rigorous methodological design grounded in SERVQUAL and Sociological theory to examine how responsiveness influences e-hailing service performance via professionalism. The use of SmartPLS enabled robust testing of the hypothesized model and provided empirical validation for theoretical assumptions. The methodological rigor ensures both internal validity and external relevance for academic and managerial audiences.

Results and Discussion

Measurement Model Evaluation

The reliability and validity of the constructs were evaluated using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) in SmartPLS 4.0. The measurement model was assessed based on indicator loadings, Cronbach's alpha, Composite Reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE).

All indicator loadings exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating that each item contributed substantially to its respective construct. Cronbach's alpha values ranged from 0.87 to 0.93, exceeding the minimum criterion of 0.70 (Hair *et al.,* 2021). Similarly, Composite Reliability (CR) values ranged between 0.91 and 0.95, demonstrating high internal consistency. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for all constructs was above 0.60, confirming convergent validity.

Discriminant validity was established using both the Fornell–Larcker criterion and the Heterotrait–Monotrait (HTMT) ratio. The square roots of AVE for each construct exceeded the inter-construct correlations, and all HTMT values were below 0.85, indicating clear distinction among responsiveness, professionalism, and service performance constructs.
These results confirm that the measurement model demonstrated satisfactory psychometric properties and provided a strong foundation for assessing the structural relationships among the constructs.

Structural Model Evaluation

The structural model was tested to examine the hypothesised relationships. Multicollinearity was assessed prior to analysis, and all Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values were below 3.0, confirming the absence of collinearity issues. Bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples was applied to estimate the significance of the path coefficients and mediating effects.

The results indicate that responsiveness has a significant positive effect on professionalism ($\beta = 0.63$, $t = 14.27$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H1. This finding suggests that higher levels of responsiveness among e-hailing drivers such as prompt communication and swift problem solving foster stronger perceptions of professionalism among customers.

Professionalism, in turn, had a significant positive effect on e-hailing service performance ($\beta = 0.72$, $t = 18.03$, $p < 0.001$), confirming H2. This result demonstrates that courteous, ethical, and competent driver behavior enhances overall service outcomes, reinforcing the view that professionalism is a key determinant of customer satisfaction and loyalty.

The mediating analysis further revealed that professionalism partially mediates the relationship between responsiveness and service performance (indirect effect $\beta = 0.45$, $t = 11.62$, $p < 0.001$), confirming H3. Although responsiveness independently improves service performance, the effect is significantly amplified when mediated through professionalism. This finding implies that responsiveness is more impactful when embedded within professional conduct, reflecting both operational and ethical service quality.

The R^2 value for professionalism was 0.40, indicating that responsiveness explains 40% of the variance in professionalism. The R^2 value for service performance was 0.64, suggesting that professionalism and responsiveness collectively explain 64% of the variance in service performance a substantial predictive power for behavioral studies (Hair *et al.,* 2019). The model's Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) was 0.054, below the recommended threshold of 0.08, confirming a good model fit.

Discussion of Findings

Responsiveness as a Determinant of Professionalism

The strong positive relationship between responsiveness and professionalism confirms that timely and efficient service behaviors foster perceptions of competence and ethical reliability. In Malaysia's e-hailing context, where service encounters are brief and highly transactional, responsiveness functions as an indicator of respect and commitment to customer satisfaction. This aligns with the SERVQUAL perspective, which positions responsiveness as a key dimension of perceived quality (Parasuraman *et al.,* 1988).

From a sociological standpoint, responsiveness also reflects adherence to implicit social norms that govern service interactions. As Durkheim (1895) proposed, consistent behavior within a system reinforces social order; in this study, driver responsiveness represents conformity to these behavioral expectations, strengthening perceptions of professionalism and reliability.

Professionalism and Service Performance

The finding that professionalism significantly influences service performance underscores the critical role of behavioral standards in the digital service environment. Professionalism transforms operational efficiency into meaningful customer experiences. Courteous interaction, ethical communication, and situational awareness reinforce the perception of reliability, thereby enhancing performance outcomes (Rahman *et al.,* 2022).

These results resonate with Sociological theory, which emphasizes the importance of professionalism as a stabilizing social institution (Parsons, 1951). In e-hailing, professionalism ensures that customer interactions remain consistent despite technological mediation, maintaining social legitimacy and organizational reputation.

Mediation of Professionalism

The mediation analysis provides compelling evidence that professionalism acts as the behavioral bridge linking responsiveness and performance. Responsiveness alone may indicate operational competence, but professionalism translates this responsiveness into trust-based value. This mediating role reflects the dual nature of service quality: technical efficiency and social ethics.

The partial mediation observed in this study implies that while responsiveness directly influences performance, its full potential is realized when coupled with professional behavior. This insight extends existing SERVQUAL literature by highlighting the interaction between operational behavior and ethical conduct as co-drivers of service performance in digital environments.

Theoretical Implications

The integration of SERVQUAL and Sociological theory offers a more comprehensive understanding of service performance in digitally mediated contexts. While SERVQUAL focuses on customer perceptions of responsiveness, the sociological lens explains how professionalism sustains these perceptions through normative behavior. This dual-theory approach contributes to management literature by linking micro-level service interactions with macro-level social structures, emphasizing that service performance is not merely a function of technology or speed but also of moral and behavioral integrity.

Managerial Implications

For practitioners, these findings emphasize the need to balance technology-driven efficiency with human-centered professionalism. E-hailing companies should invest in driver training programs that reinforce communication skills, ethical awareness, and responsiveness. Implementing real-time performance feedback systems and professional certification modules could strengthen driver accountability and elevate service standards. Moreover, integrating behavioral metrics into driver evaluation systems may enhance both operational performance and customer retention.

Summary of Key Findings

Hypothesis	Path Coefficient (β)	t-value	p-value	Result
H1: Responsiveness → Professionalism	**0.63**	**14.27**	**<0.001**	**Supported**
H2: Professionalism → Service Performance	**0.72**	**18.03**	**<0.001**	**Supported**
H3: Responsiveness → Service Performance (Mediated by Professionalism)	**0.45**	**11.62**	**<0.001**	**Supported**

The model explains 64% of the variance in service performance and demonstrates that professionalism significantly strengthens the effect of responsiveness on customer outcomes, validating the proposed mediation model.

Conclusion and Implications

Summary of Findings

This study examined how responsiveness influences e-hailing service performance, with professionalism functioning as a mediating factor. Grounded in SERVQUAL and Sociological theory, the research provides empirical evidence on how behavioral and ethical dimensions of service delivery shape overall performance within Malaysia's rapidly evolving e-hailing industry.

Using data collected from 391 active e-hailing users in Kuala Lumpur and analyzed via SmartPLS 4.0, the study confirms that responsiveness exerts a significant positive influence on professionalism and service performance. Furthermore, professionalism partially

mediates the relationship between responsiveness and performance, highlighting its pivotal role in converting operational efficiency into customer trust and satisfaction. The structural model explained 64% of the variance in service performance, underscoring the robustness of the conceptual framework.

These findings demonstrate that e-hailing service performance depends not only on technological responsiveness but also on the professional conduct of service providers. Responsiveness may attract customers initially, but professionalism sustains their loyalty and confidence over time.

Theoretical Contributions

This research contributes to the academic discourse on service quality and behavioral management in several ways.

First, it extends SERVQUAL theory by empirically validating the mediating role of professionalism, an aspect often overlooked in digital service environments. While SERVQUAL traditionally focuses on customer perceptions of tangibility, reliability, and responsiveness, this study integrates the behavioral ethics dimension that enhances the explanatory power of the model in e-hailing contexts.

Second, the incorporation of Sociological theory provides a theoretical bridge between individual service behavior and organizational legitimacy. By framing professionalism as a social mechanism that enforces ethical norms and trust within service interactions, this study adds depth to the understanding of how interpersonal behavior influences systemic performance outcomes.

Third, the study contributes methodologically by employing PLS-SEM to test a mediating model that captures both operational and behavioral constructs. This dual-theoretical and quantitative integration advances the literature on digital service management and professional ethics in emerging economies.

Managerial Implications

For e-hailing service providers, the findings carry practical significance. Responsiveness should not be treated solely as a metric of speed but as a strategic dimension of customer engagement. Managers must view responsiveness as a behavioral competency that can be enhanced through training, performance evaluation, and customer feedback mechanisms.

E-hailing platforms are encouraged to:

- Implement professional development programs focused on communication skills, conflict management, and ethical decision-making.
- Introduce driver evaluation systems that integrate both quantitative (response time, ride completion rate) and qualitative (customer reviews, professionalism scores) indicators.
- Establish service codes of conduct that define expectations for respectful, transparent, and courteous interaction.
- Use real-time monitoring tools and customer analytics to detect patterns of unprofessional behavior and deliver corrective coaching.

These initiatives can help transform responsiveness from reactive service behavior into a proactive strategy that strengthens both customer trust and corporate image.

Policy Implications

At a policy level, the study underscores the need for national regulatory bodies such as APAD (Land Public Transport Agency) to formalize professional standards within Malaysia's e-hailing sector. Regulatory frameworks could incorporate mandatory training and licensing programs emphasizing ethical behavior, communication competence, and customer service excellence. Government collaboration with e-hailing companies could also facilitate public awareness campaigns promoting driver professionalism and safe conduct. Establishing standardized professional benchmarks can enhance service accountability, protect consumers, and strengthen Malaysia's position as a model for sustainable and ethical digital transportation systems in Southeast Asia.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Although the study achieved its objectives, several limitations provide opportunities for further investigation.

First, the sample was confined to urban users in Kuala Lumpur, which may limit the generalizability of findings to rural or intercity contexts. Future studies could employ comparative designs across Malaysian regions or include other ASEAN countries to examine cross-cultural variations.

Second, the research adopted a cross-sectional design, which captures perceptions at a single point in time. Longitudinal studies could explore how responsiveness and professionalism evolve as users gain more experience with e-hailing platforms.

Third, future research could expand the framework to include technological trust, perceived safety, or customer emotional experience as moderating variables. These extensions would offer a more holistic understanding of service quality dynamics in the digital era.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study highlights that responsiveness and professionalism jointly constitute the foundation of e-hailing service excellence. Responsiveness delivers operational efficiency, while professionalism sustains the ethical and emotional dimensions of service quality. Together, they drive superior performance outcomes and reinforce customer loyalty.

By integrating SERVQUAL and Sociological theory, this research provides both theoretical advancement and practical guidance for enhancing service management in Malaysia's digital transport sector. The findings affirm that professionalism remains the defining element that converts responsiveness into a credible, trust-based experience the true hallmark of quality in modern service organizations.

References

Adu-Brobbey, D., & Asare, N. (2020). Responsiveness and service performance in customer relationship management. *International Journal of Service Science, Management, Engineering, and Technology*, *11*(2), 45–59.

Ali, M., & Raza, S. A. (2020). Service quality perception and customer satisfaction in app-based transportation: Evidence from developing markets. *Journal of Service Theory and Practice*, *30*(3), 289–308.

APAD. (2022). *Annual report on Malaysia's e-hailing and transport performance*. Land Public Transport Agency, Government of Malaysia.

Choudhury, S., & Maheshwari, A. (2021). The role of responsiveness and digital experience in consumer satisfaction: Evidence from mobility platforms. *Journal of Services Marketing*, *35*(6), 809–823.

Dillman, D. A., Smyth, J. D., & Christian, L. M. (2014). *Internet, phone, mail, and mixed-mode surveys: The tailored design method* (4th ed.). Wiley.

Durkheim, E. (1895). *The rules of sociological method*. Free Press.

Dyer, S., Keller, J., & Farmer, T. (2019). Professionalism and ethical behaviour in service industries: A conceptual synthesis. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *157*(4), 981–994.

Hair, J. F., Hult, G. T. M., Ringle, C. M., & Sarstedt, M. (2019). *A primer on partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM)* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications.

Hair, J. F., Hult, G. T. M., Ringle, C. M., & Sarstedt, M. (2021). *A primer on partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM)* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.

Hogan, R., Chamorro-Premuzic, T., & Kaiser, R. B. (2013). Employability and career success: Bridging the gap between theory and practice. *Industrial and Organizational Psychology*, *6*(1), 3–16.

Kim, H., & Lee, S. (2020). Professional ethics, customer satisfaction, and service quality: Evidence from the hospitality industry. *Service Industries Journal*, *40*(7–8), 553–575.

Kuo, Y.-F., Chen, J.-Y., & Hsu, C.-W. (2020). Investigating the impact of service quality on customer satisfaction in ride-hailing services. *Transportation Research Part A: Policy and Practice*, *136*, 1–13.

Lee, T. W. (1994). Professionalism and organizational performance: A sociological perspective. *Management Review Quarterly*, *9*(1), 45–58.

Ndubisi, N. O. (2006). Relationship marketing and customer loyalty. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, *24*(1), 98–106.

Parasuraman, A., Zeithaml, V. A., & Berry, L. L. (1988). SERVQUAL: A multiple-item scale for measuring consumer perceptions of service quality. *Journal of Retailing*, *64*(1), 12–40.

Parsons, T. (1951). *The social system*. Free Press.

Putnam, R. D. (2000). *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community*. Simon & Schuster.

Rahman, M. S., Ahmad, N. H., & Ali, S. (2022). Behavioural determinants of professionalism and customer satisfaction in e-hailing services: Evidence from Malaysia. *Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics*, *34*(9), 1903–1922.

Sekaran, U., & Bougie, R. (2020). *Research methods for business: A skill-building approach* (8th ed.). Wiley.

Wu, J., & Chen, M. (2022). The effects of service responsiveness on consumer trust in digital transportation: A cross-national perspective. *Transportation Research Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, *15*, Article 100671.

Yu, W., Jacobs, M., Salisbury, W. D., & Enns, H. (2014). The effects of supply chain integration on customer responsiveness and financial performance. *Journal of Operations Management*, *32*(7–8), 682–697.

Zeithaml, V. A., Bitner, M. J., & Gremler, D. D. (2018). *Services marketing: Integrating customer focus across the firm* (7th ed.). McGraw-Hill Education.