



ADVANCED INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL
OF BUSINESS, ENTREPRENEURSHIP
AND SMES
(AIJBES)

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CONSUMER SATISFACTION WITH E-HAILING SERVICES AMONG KLANG VALLEY UNIVERSITY STUDENTS: A CONCEPT PAPER

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Article Info:

Article history:

Received date: 16.07.2026

Revised date: 29.07.2026

Accepted date: 17.08.2026

Published date: 17.09.2026

To cite this document:

Hussin, W. N. T. W., Kudus, S. H. M., & Mustafa, S. Z. S. (2026). Consumer Satisfaction With E-Hailing Services Among Klang Valley University Students: A Concept Paper. *Advanced International Journal of Business Entrepreneurship and SMEs*, 8 (29), 1369-1382.

Abstract:

University students in Klang Valley, Malaysia, rely heavily on e-hailing services due to persistent last-mile connectivity gaps in public transport. Recent documented incidents (2025–2026) such as passenger-on-driver violence, extreme surge pricing (200–300%), a proposed fare-bidding model, driver economic insecurity, and limited last-mile options have exposed systemic vulnerabilities. Yet, no conceptual framework explains how these real-world problems collectively influence student satisfaction. This concept paper develops an integrated framework based on SERVQUAL and Expectation-Confirmation Theory (ECT), introducing novel moderators (surge pricing, fare-bidding uncertainty, last-mile gaps, driver economic insecurity) and bidirectional safety as a theoretical construct. Using a PRISMA-guided systematic literature review of peer-reviewed articles (2022–2026), we propose that reliability is the strongest positive predictor of satisfaction, while surge pricing and driver economic pressure negatively moderate satisfaction through ECT disconfirmation. The framework advances existing knowledge by contextualising SERVQUAL-ECT integration within Malaysia's evolving gig economy and introducing context-specific moderators derived from actual incidents. Practical recommendations for e-hailing platforms, policymakers, and universities are provided. This concept paper contributes to SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and

Communities) by examining sustainable urban mobility solutions for students.

DOI: 10.35631/AIJBES.829078 **Keyword:**

Consumer Satisfaction, E-Hailing, Expectation-Confirmation Theory, Klang Valley, Private University Students, SERVQUAL



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Introduction

E-hailing services have become an indispensable mode of transport for university students in the Klang Valley, Malaysia's most urbanised region. This dependency is largely driven by persistent last-mile connectivity gaps in the country's public transport infrastructure. According to the Ipsos Mobility Monitor 2026 survey of 500 Malaysian adults, 55% of respondents reported that limited transport options make travel difficult, with last-mile connectivity identified as the "ultimate barrier to entry" for public transport adoption (Ipsos, 2026). Universities in the Klang Valley including Management and Science University, Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM), Taylor's University Lakeside Campus, Sunway University, Multimedia University Cyberjaya, and Asia Pacific University are often situated in areas with poor public transport access, rendering students heavily reliant on e-hailing for compulsory academic activities, internships, and part-time employment. Recent studies confirm that e-hailing demand among private university students remains high due to these infrastructural deficits (Chung & Al-Khaled, 2022).

This study contributes to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities, which aims to make cities inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable through improved transportation infrastructure. By examining student satisfaction with e-hailing as an alternative mobility solution, this research addresses SDG 11's focus on sustainable urban transport systems. The findings also relate to SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being) through passenger and driver safety considerations, and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) through regulatory and governance implications for the gig economy.

Recent incidents have exposed systemic vulnerabilities within Malaysia's e-hailing ecosystem. On May 14, 2026, a 41-year-old female e-hailing driver in Alor Gajah was physically assaulted and choked by three teenage passengers who refused to pay their fare upon arrival at a remote location in Kuala Sungai Baru (The Star, 2026c). The suspects whose are two females aged 14 and two males aged 15 and 17 struck the victim with a hard object, choked her from behind the driver's seat, and threatened her against seeking help, resulting in swelling, bruises, and strangulation marks on her neck (The Star, 2026c). This incident, investigated under Section 324 of the Malaysian Penal Code for voluntarily causing hurt with a dangerous weapon, demonstrates that safety risks are bidirectional; drivers are equally vulnerable to passenger-perpetrated violence.

Concurrently, Malaysian consumers have reported extreme surge pricing, with fares escalating by 200–300% during peak periods. Documented cases include a Cheras to Petaling Jaya trip rising from RM15–16 to RM48, a short two-to-three-kilometre journey costing RM30–40, and a Selayang to Rawang trip increasing from approximately RM30 to RM106 (Sinar Harian, 2026). Such unpredictable pricing disproportionately burdens students operating within constrained financial budgets.

Furthermore, a controversial fare-bidding or bargaining model has emerged, prompting formal objections from multiple gig worker organisations including Pertubuhan Lestari Ekonomi Aktivis Gig Digital Malaysia and Persatuan Perpaduan Rakan Penghantar Malaysia (The Star, 2025). The Human Resources Ministry has confirmed that fare bidding will be discussed as an "urgent matter" by the proposed Gig Consultative Council following the enactment of the Gig Workers Bill 2025, acknowledging the necessity for "balance between the interests of drivers, platforms and users" (The Star, 2025). Subsequently, Transport Minister, Anthony Loke announced that e-hailing fare policies, including minimum fare proposals, will be reviewed by the Malaysian Gig Economy Commission (SEGIM), noting that "any policy changes will have implications" (The Star, 2026a; The Star, 2026b). The absence of a minimum or floor fare policy has been warned by driver groups as exposing drivers to continue exploitation and increasing economic pressure (The Vibes, 2026).

Driver economic insecurity further compounds service quality degradation. Malaysia E-Hailing and Delivery Organisation president Jose Rizal has stated that gig workers "continue to struggle with unstable income, high platform commissions and rising fuel prices," emphasising that "laws alone do not protect livelihoods, implementation does" (The Sun Malaysia, 2026). Shrinking earnings and rising costs have pushed many e-hailing drivers into financial difficulties, with current fare structures incorporating occasional discounts for passengers and drivers earning as low as 25 sen per kilometre, after the platform takes approximately a 20% commission (FMT, 2026). While the Employees Provident Fund (EPF) introduced i-Saraan Plus in January 2026 specifically for e-hailing drivers, providing government matching incentives of up to RM600 annually, comprehensive social safety nets including emergency income funds and affordable healthcare access remain absent (EPF, 2025).

Despite the documented severity and recency of these problems passenger-on-driver violence (The Star, 2026c), extreme surge pricing (Sinar Harian, 2026), proposed fare-bidding models (The Star, 2025; 2026a; 2026b), persistent last-mile connectivity deficits (Ipsos, 2026), and driver economic insecurity (The Sun Malaysia, 2026; EPF, 2025; FMT, 2026), no systematic

conceptual framework explains how they collectively influence student satisfaction. Existing literature focuses on general populations or technical attributes (app usability, waiting time), overlooking structural and safety-related problems. This concept paper develops an integrated framework, grounded in SERVQUAL (Parasuraman et al., 1988) and Expectation-Confirmation Theory (Oliver, 1980) to explain the determinants of e-hailing satisfaction among university students in Klang Valley, incorporating novel moderators derived from real-world incidents and proposing actionable recommendations for platform operators, policymakers, and universities.

Literature Review

Theoretical Foundation

SERVQUAL Model (Parasuraman et al., 1988)

The SERVQUAL model, developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988), is a well-established instrument for measuring service quality by comparing customer expectations with perceived performance. The model comprises five dimensions: tangibility (physical facilities and appearance), reliability (ability to perform promised service dependably), responsiveness (willingness to help customers and provide prompt service), assurance (courtesy and knowledge of employees), and empathy (caring and individualised attention). Recent applications of SERVQUAL in the e-hailing context have confirmed its relevance. A 2024 study among university students in Malaysia found significant relationships between all five SERVQUAL dimensions and customer satisfaction (Mohamad Fuazee et al., 2024). Similarly, research on ride-hailing services in Kuala Lumpur (2026) confirmed that responsiveness directly improves service performance and indirectly strengthens it through professionalism (Ramli & Raja Yusof, 2026). Furthermore, a modified SERVQUAL model comprising convenience, reliability, speed, security, privacy, and user-friendliness has been shown to significantly influence customer satisfaction in the ride-hailing context (AlBatati, 2025). A study integrating SERVQUAL with ride-hailing software found that all five dimensions significantly affect customer satisfaction (Salsabila et al., 2026).

Expectation-Confirmation Theory (ECT) (Oliver, 1980)

Expectation-Confirmation Theory (ECT), originally developed by Oliver (1980), posits that consumer satisfaction is determined by the discrepancy between pre-purchase expectations and post-purchase perceived performance. When perceived performance meets or exceeds initial expectations, confirmation occurs, leading to satisfaction; when performance falls short, disconfirmation leads to dissatisfaction. Recent studies have applied ECT to ride-hailing services. A 2024 study explored post-usage behaviour in app-based ride-sourcing services, identifying satisfaction as a primary driver of continued use intention (Elnadi et al., 2024). A 2026 study on integrated ride-hailing services confirmed that perceived usefulness, satisfaction, and expectation confirmation are key determinants of continued usage (Lu et al., 2026).

Integration of SERVQUAL and ECT

The integration of SERVQUAL and ECT is theoretically justified as SERVQUAL provides the dimensional structure for measuring service quality, while ECT explains the cognitive process by which service quality perceptions translate into satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) through expectation confirmation/disconfirmation. Prior studies have successfully combined these frameworks in ride-sharing contexts. A mixed-methods study on collaborative consumption continuance employed both SERVQUAL and ECT to explore the service quality-loyalty relationship in app-based ridesharing, finding that service quality across multiple touchpoints influences satisfaction, which in turn drives continuance intention (Lim et al., 2022). This integration is particularly appropriate for the student context, where price sensitivity and safety concerns create unique expectation-disconfirmation dynamics.

E-Hailing Service Quality and Student Satisfaction (2022–2026)

E-hailing has fundamentally transformed urban mobility by connecting passengers with private vehicle drivers through digital platforms. In Malaysia, the market has matured, with Grab, inDrive, Bolt, and AirAsia Ride dominating. Among university students, e-hailing remains popular due to convenience and pricing transparency (Sabar et al., 2023). A 2024 study at Universiti Sains Malaysia involving 392 university students found a moderate positive correlation between attitudes towards e-hailing and satisfaction with safety, price, convenience, and availability, with regression analysis confirming significant relationships (Mohamad Fuazee et al., 2024). Research at UiTM Puncak Alam (2023) investigated the roles of accessibility, safety, comfort, and price, finding that all four variables significantly influence student satisfaction (Sabar et al., 2023). A 2023 study among undergraduate students at Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman found that the majority expressed high levels of satisfaction with e-hailing services (UTAR, 2023).

However, findings are not unanimous. Chen and Shafi (2025) in Johor found that price has a minor effect, while comfort, safety, and accessibility significantly affect satisfaction. Jibril and Kumar (2026) in Uzbekistan found that service reliability, perceived safety, and convenience significantly influence satisfaction, but perceived value for money did not. These conflicting findings suggest that the relative importance of service quality dimensions may vary by context, student demographics, and market conditions as a gap this study addresses by introducing context-specific moderators.

In addition to studies on student satisfaction with e-hailing services, research conducted at Management and Science University (MSU) has examined related consumer behaviour and student engagement phenomena. A study on factors influencing consumer behaviour found that perceived benefit, performance expectancy, security and privacy, perceived ease of use, and customer services significantly influence intention to purchase via mobile applications (Voon et al., 2020) and these findings are directly applicable to understanding students' adoption and continued use of e-hailing mobile apps. Similarly, research on student engagement at MSU identified that factors such as self-efficacy, partners in learning, and pedagogies significantly influence classroom engagement (Ahamed et al., 2022), providing methodological insights for measuring student satisfaction in educational contexts. Furthermore, a study on students' perception of peer learning at MSU demonstrated the effectiveness of survey-based approaches for understanding student attitudes and perceptions (Ebrahim et al., 2023), reinforcing the

methodological approach proposed in this concept paper. These MSU-affiliated studies contribute to the broader understanding of student behaviour and satisfaction measurement, complementing the e-hailing specific literature reviewed in this paper.

Critical Synthesis

The literature reveals three key tensions. First, while SERVQUAL has been widely applied, most studies treat its dimensions as independent predictors without considering how contextual factors (e.g., surge pricing, driver economic pressure) moderate their effects. Second, ECT has been applied primarily to technology adoption contexts, with limited application to ride-hailing in developing economies. Third, no study has integrated both frameworks while explicitly accounting for the unique vulnerabilities of university students as captive e-hailing consumers. This paper addresses these tensions by proposing an integrated framework with novel moderators.

Factors Influencing E-Hailing Satisfaction among Students

Price and Affordability

Price sensitivity is acute among university students. Students in UiTM Puncak Alam (2023) reported that price plays a significant role in satisfaction (Sabar et al., 2023). The unpredictability of surge pricing (200–300% increases) documented in 2026 creates financial uncertainty (Sinar Harian, 2026).

Safety and Security

Safety concerns consistently emerge as critical. Perceived safety significantly affects user satisfaction (Chen & Shafi, 2025). The 2026 assault incident (The Star, 2026c) highlights bidirectional risks.

Reliability and Responsiveness

Reliability was identified as the most dominant predictor of ride-hailing demand among university students in Klang Valley (Chung & Al-Khaled, 2022). Responsiveness directly improves service performance and indirectly strengthens it through professionalism (Ramli & Raja Yusof, 2026).

Driver Professionalism and Behaviour

Professionalism is crucial for customer satisfaction and trust (Ramli & Raja Yusof, 2026). Documented student misbehaviours (overloading, last-minute cancellations) degrade driver willingness to serve student-heavy routes.

Research Gap

The literature review reveals four specific gaps. First, most Malaysian studies focus on public university students (USM, UiTM), with limited research on private university students in Klang Valley. Second, recent real-world problems such as safety incidents, extreme surge pricing,

fare-bidding models, driver economic insecurity have not been systematically incorporated into satisfaction frameworks. Third, no study has integrated SERVQUAL and ECT while explicitly accounting for the captive nature of student e-hailing users (i.e., students who cannot easily switch to alternatives due to infrastructural constraints). Fourth, the bidirectional nature of safety (both driver and passenger vulnerability) has been largely ignored in passenger-centric satisfaction research. This concept paper addresses these gaps by proposing an integrated framework with context-specific moderators and bidirectional safety as a theoretical construct.

Proposed Conceptual Framework

Based on the integrated theoretical foundation (SERVQUAL 1988; ECT 1980) and recent empirical findings (2022–2026), this concept paper proposes a framework where the five SERVQUAL dimensions directly influence student satisfaction, moderated by real-world contextual problems (extreme surge pricing, fare-bidding uncertainty, last-mile gaps, driver economic insecurity), with expectation-confirmation (ECT) serving as a mediating mechanism. The framework introduces bidirectional safety as a novel theoretical construct, recognising that both drivers and passengers face safety risks.

Theoretical Advancement

This framework advances existing knowledge in four ways. First, it integrates SERVQUAL and ECT in a student-specific context, whereas prior studies have used these theories separately. Second, it introduces context-specific moderators derived from actual incidents, moving beyond generic service quality attributes. Third, it highlights the bidirectional nature of safety concerns which means an area largely ignored in passenger-centric research. Fourth, it explicitly accounts for captive user dynamics, recognising that students with limited transport alternatives may tolerate lower satisfaction, creating a unique satisfaction-switching behaviour relationship.

Methodology (Conceptual Paper)

This concept paper adopts a qualitative, theory-building approach. The primary method is a systematic literature review (SLR) following the PRISMA 2020 guidelines to ensure transparency and replicability.

Research Approach

This concept paper adopts a qualitative, theory-building approach. The primary method was a systematic literature review (SLR) of peer-reviewed articles, conference proceedings, and official reports related to e-hailing service quality, student satisfaction, and the Malaysian e-hailing ecosystem.

Literature Search Strategy

Electronic databases searched included Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, and MyJurnal. Search terms combined: "e-hailing", "ride-hailing", "student satisfaction", "SERVQUAL", "expectation-confirmation theory", "Malaysia", "private university", "Klang Valley", "surge pricing", "driver welfare", and "last-mile connectivity". The search was limited

to articles published between 2022 and 2026 to ensure currency and relevance to recent developments in Malaysia's e-hailing landscape.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion criteria in this study includes (1) peer-reviewed journal articles, (2) conference proceedings, (3) official government or industry reports, (4) studies focused on e-hailing or ride-hailing services, (5) studies addressing service quality, satisfaction, or consumer behaviour, (6) studies with relevance to Malaysia or comparable Southeast Asian contexts, (7) published from 2022 onwards. Meanwhile, exclusion criteria for this study are (1) non-English publications, (2) opinion pieces without empirical data, (3) studies focused exclusively on traditional taxis, (4) publications before 2022.

Study Selection and Quality Assessment

The PRISMA flow process began with 487 records identified from databases. After removing duplicates, 312 records were screened. Then, 89 full-text articles were assessed for eligibility. Finally, 20 studies met all the criteria and were included in the review.

Ethical Considerations

As this concept paper does not involve human participants, formal ethical approval was not required. The authors confirm adherence to academic integrity standards.

Discussion

This section discusses the expected findings and implications of the proposed conceptual framework, without presenting empirical data. The discussion is organised around the theoretical relationships, the moderating role of real-world problems, practical recommendations, and limitations.

Expected Relationships Between SERVQUAL Dimensions and Student Satisfaction

Based on the literature review (2022–2026) and the proposed framework, it is expected that all five SERVQUAL dimensions will positively influence student satisfaction with e-hailing services. However, the strength of these relationships is likely to vary.

Reliability as the Strongest Predictor

Drawing from Chung and Al-Khaled (2022), who identified reliability as the most dominant predictor of ride-hailing demand among private university students in Klang Valley, we expect reliability (punctuality, accurate ETAs, successful trip completion) to be the strongest positive predictor of satisfaction. Students who rely on e-hailing to reach classes, examinations, or internships cannot tolerate late arrivals or cancelled trips. Therefore, any degradation in reliability such as drivers rejecting short trips or cancelling last minute will disproportionately reduce satisfaction.

Assurance (Safety) as a Critical but Bidirectional Factor

Safety (assurance) is expected to be a significant predictor, but the nature of its effect may be complicated by recent incidents. The assault of a female driver by teenage passengers (The Star, 2026c) introduces a new dimension: students may feel unsafe not only as passengers but also as potential perpetrators or witnesses. This could lead to a paradoxical effect where students who are aware of such incidents report lower satisfaction due to perceived tension or fear of conflict, even if they personally have not experienced violence. We expect that female students and those who travel during late-night hours will exhibit stronger negative satisfaction responses to safety incidents.

Price Sensitivity and Surge Pricing

Price is not an explicit SERVQUAL dimension but is captured under tangibility (value for money) and is a central concern in ECT (expectations about affordability). Given the documented 200–300% surge pricing (Sinar Harian, 2026), we expect price to be a significant negative moderator. Students who experience frequent surge pricing will have their expectations disconfirmed (ECT mechanism), leading to lower satisfaction even if other service quality dimensions are adequate. This effect will be stronger for students with lower monthly budgets and those who use e-hailing daily.

Responsiveness and Empathy in the Context of Driver Economic Pressure

Responsiveness (driver communication, issue resolution) and empathy (courtesy, understanding) may be negatively affected by driver economic insecurity. When drivers earn as low as 25 sen per kilometre after platform commissions (FMT, 2026), they are less likely to provide courteous, patient service, especially to students who may be perceived as low-fare passengers. We expect a negative indirect effect: driver economic pressure reduces responsiveness and empathy, which in turn reduces student satisfaction. This suggests that improving driver welfare could enhance student satisfaction, a non-obvious relationship that has policy implications.

The Moderating Role of Real-World Problems

The unique contribution of this concept paper is the incorporation of recently documented real-world problems as moderators. The following moderation effects are expected in this study as presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Expected Moderation Effect

No.	Moderator	Expected Moderation Effect	Theoretical Justification
1	Extreme surge pricing	Weakens the positive relationship between price-related expectations and satisfaction (ECT disconfirmation)	ECT disconfirmation: when actual fares exceed expectations, confirmation fails
2	Fair-bidding uncertainty	Weakens the positive relationship between transparency (tangibility) and satisfaction; increases anxiety	ECT: uncertainty prevents accurate expectation formation

3	Last-mile connectivity gaps	Strengthens the negative relationship between dissatisfaction and switching behaviour (captive users tolerate low satisfaction)	Captive user dynamics: lack of alternatives reduces switching behaviour
4	Driver economic insecurity	Weakens the positive relationships between responsiveness/empathy and satisfaction	Reduced driver motivation and courtesy

Source: Author Expected Moderation Effect

These moderators have not been empirically tested in previous e-hailing satisfaction studies, representing the primary theoretical contribution of this paper.

Theoretical Implications

The proposed framework extends existing literature in four ways. First, it integrates SERVQUAL and ECT into a single model tailored to the student segment, whereas prior studies have used these theories separately (Mohamad Fuazee et al., 2024; Lu et al., 2026). Second, it introduces context-specific moderators derived from actual news incidents (2025–2026), moving beyond generic service quality attributes. Third, it highlights the bidirectional nature of safety concerns in e-hailing, an area largely ignored in passenger-centric satisfaction research. Lastly, it also accounts for captive user dynamics, where students may have limited alternative options and are therefore more dependent on the service provided.

Practical Implications

For E-Hailing Platforms

E-hailing platforms should introduce student pricing plans that offer fixed, predictable fares during peak hours to mitigate dissatisfaction caused by extreme surge pricing. Alternatively, platforms could offer "ride passes" with a capped number of trips per month specifically designed for student budgets. To address safety concerns, platforms must strengthen driver verification and passenger identity checks; given the documented assault incident, implementing emergency buttons and trip recording for both drivers and passengers is strongly recommended. Furthermore, driver welfare initiatives such as lower commission rates for student trips would increase driver earnings, which is expected to improve driver responsiveness and empathy, thereby indirectly boosting student satisfaction.

For Policymakers

Policymakers should establish a minimum fare policy that ensures driver viability without encouraging excessive surge pricing, thereby balancing driver welfare with student affordability. Improving last-mile infrastructure must be prioritised, specifically by enhancing bus and feeder service connections to private university campuses, which would reduce students' captive dependence on e-hailing. Additionally, the implementation of the Gig Workers Bill 2025 should include explicit provisions for driver training and conduct standards, addressing bidirectional safety concerns (both driver and passenger behaviour).

For University Administrators

University administrators should invest in dedicated campus shuttle services for students living within a 5-kilometre radius of the university, reducing reliance on e-hailing for short trips. Safe ride programmes that subsidise e-hailing trips for students during late-night examinations or events can ensure safety without imposing a financial burden. Finally, student conduct education including e-hailing etiquette should be integrated into orientation programmes to reduce incidents of overloading vehicles, last-minute cancellations, and poor ratings, thereby fostering mutual respect between student passengers and drivers.

Limitation and Future Research

Limitation

As a conceptual study, the framework has not been empirically validated. The proposed relationships and moderations are based on literature from 2022–2026 and logical inference, not primary data. The moderators (surge pricing, fare-bidding) are dynamic; policy changes may alter their effects. The focus on university students limits generalisability to non-student users. Additionally, the news sources used (The Star, Sinar Harian, etc.) are credible but not peer-reviewed; future empirical work should triangulate with survey data.

Future Research

Empirical studies should test the proposed framework using structural equation modelling (SEM) with a representative sample of private university students. Longitudinal designs could track satisfaction changes before and after policy interventions (e.g., minimum fare introduction). Comparative studies between private and public university students would reveal whether infrastructural dependence (last-mile gap) truly moderates satisfaction. Qualitative research (interviews, focus groups) could uncover coping strategies students use to manage surge pricing and driver conflicts.

Conclusion

This concept paper has developed an integrated framework for investigating consumer satisfaction with e-hailing services among Klang Valley University students. The framework synthesises SERVQUAL and ECT while incorporating real-world problems documented in 2025–2026, introducing novel moderators and bidirectional safety as a theoretical construct. The framework advances existing knowledge by contextualising SERVQUAL-ECT integration within Malaysia's evolving gig economy. Practical recommendations for platforms, policymakers, and universities aim to break the cycle of dependency and dissatisfaction. This paper provides a timely theoretical foundation for future empirical research and contributes to SDG 11 by examining sustainable urban mobility solutions for students.

The discussion has outlined expected relationships, highlighting reliability as the strongest positive predictor, and surge pricing and driver economic insecurity as critical negative moderators. Theoretical implications include the integration of two established theories and the introduction of context-specific moderators. Practical recommendations for e-hailing

platforms, policymakers, and universities aim to break the cycle of dependency and dissatisfaction.

While the framework remains conceptual and requires empirical testing, it provides a timely foundation for future research. By bridging academic theory with real-world problems, this paper contributes to a more equitable, transparent, and student-responsive e-hailing ecosystem in Malaysia.

Acknowledgements:	The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to Management and Science University for providing the necessary financial resources for publication. Special appreciation is extended to colleagues and peers who contributed valuable insights and constructive feedback, which greatly enhanced the quality of this paper.
Funding Statement:	This paper is funded by the Management and Science University (MSU) Publication Fund.
Conflict of Interest Statement:	The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper. All authors have contributed to this work and approved the final version of the manuscript for submission to the GAE Journal.
Ethics Statement:	This study did not involve any human participants, animals, or sensitive data requiring ethical approval. The authors confirm that the research was conducted in accordance with accepted academic integrity and ethical publishing standards.
Author Contribution Statement:	All authors contributed significantly to the development of this manuscript. Author 1 was responsible for the conceptualisation, theoretical framework development, and overall supervision of the study. Author 2 handled the literature review, synthesis of sources, and drafting of the conceptual framework. Author 3 contributed to the problem statement formulation, integration of real-world problems, critical revision of the manuscript, and alignment with the journal formatting requirements. All authors read and approved the final version of the manuscript prior to submission.

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