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Communication Adaptation and Customer Loyalty in Platform-Based Ride-Hailing Services: Evidence from Greater Jakarta

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Abstract: This study explores whether drivers' communication skills are positively related to attitudinal customer loyalty, how communication is adaptively enacted within short, platform-evaluated encounters in the Greater Jakarta metropolitan region, and how these adaptive practices relate to loyalty outcomes. An explanatory sequential mixed-methods design was employed. The quantitative phase involved 385 active ride-hailing users and applied descriptive statistics and Spearman's rank-order correlation. The qualitative stage consisted of semi-structured interviews with seven experienced drivers, which were analyzed thematically using Communication Accommodation Theory. The findings show a moderate and statistically significant positive correlation between perceived drivers' communication skills and attitudinal customer loyalty (ρ = .412, $p < .001$). Interview data suggest that each ride functions as a micro-communication arena in which drivers continually recalibrate tone, conversational depth, and embodied conduct in response to passengers' cues, algorithmic visibility, and rating asymmetry. Communicative adaptation unfolds through situational convergence (alignment), strategic divergence (privacy-sensitive silence), evaluative convergence under rating pressure, and multimodal accommodation. These patterned adjustments stabilize brief encounters and shape evaluative judgments. In algorithmically governed environments, communication emerges not merely as a soft skill but as a context-sensitive relational practice linking interactional competence to loyalty intention in low-switching-cost platform markets.

Keywords: Communication Skill, Communicative Adaptation, Communication Accommodation Theory, Algorithmic Evaluation, Customer Loyalty.

Introduction

Digital platforms have reshaped not only economic transactions but also the nature of everyday interpersonal communication. In platform-mediated services, interaction is organized through app interfaces, automated prompts, and standardized workflows that guide how individuals coordinate actions, interpret situations, and respond to one another in real time. Ride-hailing services provide a particularly clear example. Beyond transporting passengers from one location to another, each trip creates a short but socially meaningful encounter. During the ride, drivers and passengers must quickly confirm pick-up points, clarify routes, manage expectations, and maintain relational comfort in a confined, socially charged space. The vehicle thus functions as a micro-communication arena where meaning and alignment are actively negotiated under time pressure and uncertainty.

These encounters do not unfold in a neutral environment. They take place within algorithmically structured systems that make interaction both relational

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and evaluative. Ratings, reviews, performance dashboards, and reputation metrics render behavior visible and consequential, shaping how drivers approach even routine exchanges (Wood, 2021; Milanez et al., 2025). At the same time, elements of platform opacity—such as dynamic pricing or fluctuating arrival estimates—can generate tension that surfaces during driver–passenger interaction (Muralidhar et al., 2022). Under these conditions, communication becomes strategic. Drivers regulate emotions, sustain politeness, and manage impressions with the awareness that a single encounter may influence ratings and future opportunities within the platform ecosystem.

These process-oriented interactions have clear business consequences. In low-switching-cost markets, attitudinal customer loyalty is based on evaluative assessments derived from service experiences, such as safety, comfort, and value (Su et al., 2021; Nguyen & Ha, 2022). While service research has consistently highlighted customer experience as a key determinant of behavioral intention (Helsani & Retnowati, 2025; Kamil & Athar, 2025), communication has been subsumed within a broader service quality framework. Its role is still not well-explored as a specific interpersonal competence exercised in near real time. As such, the role of perceived drivers' communication skills in attitudinal customer loyalty remains under-described in theory and under-examined in research.

The Greater Jakarta metropolitan area provides a compelling background for investigating these dynamics. Heavy mobility flows, high commuter frequency, and socio-cultural diversity lead to repeated short-duration encounters in which ride-hailing is a large part of urban travel (Sunitiyoso et al., 2022; Aritenang, 2024). In this context, culturally embedded expectations of relational warmth meet digitally mediated systems for performance visibility. Communication consequently intersects with social norms and platform governance.

While research on algorithmic management and the quality of ride-hailing services exists, less emphasis has been placed on drivers' communication skills as a measurable relational variable directly related to attitudinal loyalty. Previous research has generally positioned communication within broader service constructs rather than treating it as an explanatory factor in its own right. Thus, they isolate the perceived drivers' communication skills as a central construct and how this correlates with attitudinal customer loyalty in platform-based ride-hailing services.

Drivers' communication abilities were assessed through passengers' ratings of interpersonal competence during service encounters, using the following competencies: clarity, listening and cooperation, empathy, responsiveness, assertiveness, feedback management, and adaptability (DeVito, 2022). In short, algorithmically appraised encounters, these skills are realized through practical strategies such as modifying tone, depth modulation, verifying operational details, implementing tactics of silence, and emotion management.

This study employs Communication Accommodation Theory (Giles et al., 2023) to make sense (or interpret) of these adaptive patterns. CAT explains why and when people modify communicative behavior and what interaction partners look like when evaluating changes. Even if Communication Accommodation Theory was first devised to explain patterns of speech alignment, it has now also been expanded beyond linguistic convergence to include intergroup positioning, cultural negotiation, and interaction in technologically mediated environments (Giles et al., 2023). This dynamic is especially salient in platform-based services. In these contexts, accommodation is not just a form of interpersonal adjustment but rather a reaction to structurally embedded monitoring and rating systems.

From this perspective, convergence, strategic divergence, and multimodal accommodation serve as analytical tools for understanding how drivers calibrate their communication in response to both passengers' situational cues and the governance logics that inform platform infrastructures. Communication is therefore conceptualized not only as alignment between individuals but as adaptive practice performed in digitally regulated interactional contexts. Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual framework guiding this study.

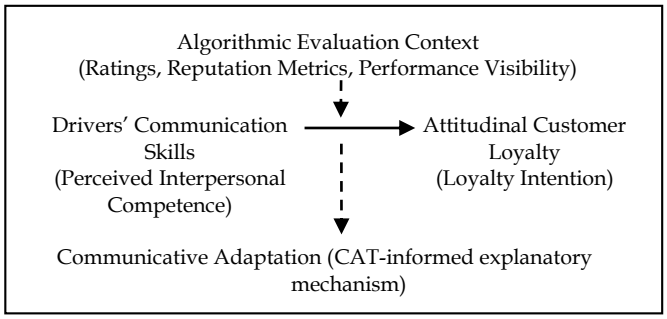

Figure 1. Conceptual framework of communication skills, customer loyalty, and communicative adaptation under algorithmic evaluation.

The solid horizontal association represents the quantitatively tested relationship, while communicative adaptation is examined qualitatively as an explanatory mechanism within algorithmically evaluated encounters.

Adopting an explanatory sequential mixed-methods orientation, this study addresses the following research questions: (1) Is there a significant relationship

between drivers' communication skills and customer loyalty in platform-based ride-hailing services in the Greater Jakarta metropolitan region?; (2) How do ride-hailing drivers adapt their communication styles during short, platform-evaluated service encounters?; and (3) How do drivers' communicative adaptation practices help explain the relationship between perceived communication skills and customer loyalty?

Consistent with the quantitative focus on a direct association between variables, the study tests the following hypotheses:

- H0: There is no significant relationship between drivers' communication skills and customer loyalty among ride-hailing users in the Greater Jakarta metropolitan region.
- H1: There is a significant positive relationship between drivers' communication skills and customer loyalty among ride-hailing users in the Greater Jakarta metropolitan region.

Through this design, the quantitative strand establishes whether drivers' communication skills are statistically associated with customer loyalty (attitudinal intention). In contrast, the qualitative strand clarifies how communicative adaptation operates within algorithmically evaluated service encounters. In platform economies, communication emerges not simply as a soft interpersonal attribute but as a context-sensitive relational practice through which service encounters are evaluated, and loyalty orientations are formed.

Method

Research Design

This study employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design and was conducted in the Greater Jakarta metropolitan region. The quantitative strand utilized a descriptive–correlational cross-sectional survey to examine the relationship between drivers' communication skills (X) and attitudinal customer loyalty (Y) in platform-based ride-hailing services. The qualitative strand subsequently provided explanatory insight into how communicative adaptation is enacted within short, rating-mediated service encounters.

The quantitative phase was grounded in a positivist orientation, in which structured instruments and statistical procedures are used to examine relationships between variables (Sugiyono, 2021). A cross-sectional survey approach was selected to capture passengers' evaluations of recent ride-hailing experiences within platform-mediated environments characterized by performance visibility and rating systems (Stockemer, 2018).

The design reflects the conceptual framework in which drivers' communication skills are quantitatively examined as a predictor of attitudinal customer loyalty. At the same time, communicative adaptation is qualitatively explored as an explanatory mechanism operating within an algorithmic evaluation context.

Quantitative Component

a. Variables

Consistent with the conceptual framework presented in the Introduction, the study examines:

- Independent Variable (X): Drivers' communication skills, defined as passengers' perceptions of drivers' interpersonal communication competence during ride-hailing encounters.
- Dependent Variable (Y): Attitudinal customer loyalty (loyalty intention), defined as passengers' attitudinal intention to continue using and recommending ride-hailing services within competitive, low-switching-cost platform markets (Ricardianto et al., 2024; Su et al., 2021).

In line with the conceptual framework, communicative adaptation is not modeled as a separate quantitative variable but examined qualitatively as the interactional process through which communication skills are enacted within platform-evaluated encounters.

Communication skills are conceptualized as a measurable interpersonal competence enacted within the vehicle as a micro-communication arena. Customer loyalty reflects attitudinal tendencies toward continued usage, recommendation, and platform preference stability in competitive ride-hailing markets (Nguyen & Ha, 2022; Ricardianto et al., 2024; Su et al., 2021).

b. Population and Sampling

The population consists of active ride-hailing users within the Greater Jakarta metropolitan region, an urban mobility system characterized by high-frequency, short-duration service encounters (Sunitiyoso et al., 2022; Aritenang, 2024).

A non-probability purposive sampling technique is employed (Sugiyono, 2021). Respondents must meet the following criteria:

1. Reside in or regularly conduct mobility activities within the Greater Jakarta metropolitan region.
2. Have installed a ride-hailing application.
3. Have used ride-hailing transportation services at least 10 times.
4. Be active ride-hailing users.

Because the total population size is unknown, the required minimum sample size is calculated using Cochran's formula as outlined in Taherdoost (2017:

$$n = \frac{Z^2 pq}{e^2}$$

With Z = 1.96 (95% confidence level), p = 0.5, q = 0.5, and e = 0.05:

$$n = \frac{(1.96)^2(0.5)(0.5)}{(0.05)^2} = 384.16$$

The sample size is rounded to **385 respondents**, consistent with the sampling logic applied in the reference study.

c. Data Collection
Primary quantitative data were collected through a structured online questionnaire. Respondents were asked to provide a recent ride-hailing encounter in an algorithmically evaluated service context, so that their responses would reflect a concrete and identifiable service episode. All questionnaire items were measured using a four-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree), following established measurement practices in communication research (Kriyantono, 2022).

d. Operationalization of Variables
- Drivers' Communication Skills (X).
  Drivers' communication skills are operationalized as passengers' evaluations of interpersonal competence enacted during ride-hailing encounters. Drawing on established domains of interpersonal communication—such as listening effectiveness, clarity of expression, empathy, assertiveness, feedback management, and adaptability (DeVito, 2022)—the construct is contextualized to the dynamics of in-vehicle service interaction. Measurement items reflect communicative behaviors observable in practice, including confirming pick-up details, clarifying routes, responding appropriately to passenger requests, and adjusting conversational style throughout the ride.
- Customer Loyalty (Y).
  Customer loyalty is operationalized as attitudinal loyalty in ride-hailing contexts, reflected in repeat-use intention, cross-service usage within the same platform ecosystem, recommendation behavior, and resistance to competitor attraction (Nguyen & Ha, 2022; Ricardianto et al., 2024; Su et al., 2021).

e. Data Analysis
The quantitative analysis follows a structured sequence consistent with descriptive–correlational research design:
1. Descriptive statistics to summarize respondent characteristics and variable distributions (Sugiyono, 2021).
2. Validity testing using Pearson Product–Moment item-total correlation. Items are considered valid when $r_{count} > r_{table}$ and $p < 0.05$(Ghozali, 2018).
3. Reliability testing using Cronbach's Alpha, with α ≥ 0.70, was preferred; values above 0.60 were considered acceptable for exploratory research (DeVellis, 2016; Hair et al., 2022).
4. Normality testing using Kolmogorov–Smirnov at α = 0.05 (Field, 2018).
5. Hypothesis testing using Spearman Rank Correlation (ρ) when data do not meet normality assumptions, to assess the strength and direction of the relationship between drivers' communication skills and customer loyalty (Field, 2018).

This procedure establishes whether interpersonal communication skills enacted within platform-mediated, algorithmically evaluated encounters are significantly associated with customer loyalty in the Greater Jakarta metropolitan region.

Qualitative Component

a. Purpose
The qualitative strand addresses the explanatory dimension of the study by exploring how drivers adapt their communication styles within short-term, algorithmically evaluated service encounters, thereby providing interpretive depth to the quantitative findings.

b. Participants and Data Collection
Semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven active drivers in the Greater Jakarta metropolitan area who use ride-hailing services. Participants were selected intentionally for their extensive experience in handling a diverse range of passengers and rating-based platform systems. The interviews explored how drivers communicate during typical ride-hailing interactions (such as establishing and maintaining contact), interpret verbal and nonverbal signals, adjust the depth of conversations, address misunderstandings, and manage emotional responses during passenger evaluations. Interviews were audio-recorded in Indonesian with respondents' consent and transcribed verbatim to preserve interactional details for the study.

c. Data Analysis
The qualitative data were analyzed thematically with interpretation informed by Communication Accommodation Theory (Giles et al., 2023). The analysis is iterative and starts with open coding to identify common communication practices the drivers reported engaging in, including greeting strategies, conversational pace, silence management, tone adjustment, clarification of operational matters,

and nonverbal service signaling. These practices were subsequently cross-matched across interviews and aggregated into broader adaptive patterns to reveal drivers' calibration strategies during ride-hailing engagements.

Emerging patterns, including conversational convergence, privacy-sensitive withdrawal, emotional regulation under evaluative pressure, and embodied service communication, were then interpreted through the lens of Communication Accommodation Theory. This step allowed their conceptualization through convergence, strategic divergence, relational alignment, and multimodal accommodation. Thus, in this study, communicative adaptation is not viewed merely as a statistical mediator but as a context-dependent interactional process that provides much-needed explanation of communication in rating-mediated service settings.

d. Analytical Credibility

Coding was iterative, with transcripts continuously compared to reveal patterns repeated across participants rather than favoring isolated individual accounts. Themes were included only when further supported by evidence from multiple interviews, as the analysis aimed to retain the commonalities of communicative tendencies across the platform. To maintain interpretative clarity while avoiding overly focusing on the importance of different expressions in a language, illustrative statements were paraphrased.

The Communication Accommodation Theory served as the interpretative structure, offering conceptual coherence whilst preserving the inductive basis of the empirical data. The qualitative focus concerns the interpretation of a mechanism-oriented understanding of how perceived drivers' communication abilities are enacted and understood in short, rating-mediated ride-hailing encounters, rather than statistical generalisation.

Mixed-Methods Integration

Integration occurs at the interpretive level by comparing findings from the quantitative and qualitative strands. The quantitative results show a significant relationship between perceived drivers' communication skills and attitudinal customer loyalty. The qualitative strand deepens this insight by examining how communicative adaptation is enacted within rating-mediated ride-hailing encounters and how these practices are experienced and evaluated by passengers.

Taken together, the findings position communication skills not only as measurable interpersonal competence but also as context-sensitive relational practices shaped by platform governance. In this framework, communicative adaptation is not treated as a statistical mediator, but as the interactional process through which convergence, strategic divergence, emotional regulation, and multimodal accommodation gain meaning within digitally evaluated service environments. Communication thus emerges as both an observable skill and a situated practice in contemporary platform economies.

Result and Discussion

The Relationship Between Drivers' Communication Skills and Customer Loyalty

a. Sample Characteristics And Eligibility Screening

In total, 385 responses met the purposive eligibility criteria for this study, which required respondents to reside in the Greater Jakarta metropolitan region, to have installed and actively used a ride-hailing application, and to have completed more than 10 trips. The final sample was approximately gender equivalent (male = 193, 50.1%; female = 192, 49.9%). The sample was composed mostly of young adults. The people aged 21–25 were the largest (n = 94, 24.42%), followed by those aged 26–30 years (n = 84, 21.82%) and those aged 16–20 years (n = 82, 21.30%). In terms of occupation, employees accounted for the largest share of respondents (n = 189, 49.10%), followed by students (n = 88, 22.86%).

b. Descriptive Statistics Of Key Variables

The cases were all complete (i.e., no missing data). Passenger-perceived drivers' communication skills had a mean of 64.47 (SD = 3.88; range = 43–72). Customer loyalty had a mean of 42.48 (SD = 3.13; range = 29–48). The low variance in standard deviations indicates that respondents' assessments are comparatively consistent within the sample.

c. Measurement Quality Checks

Measures of item-level validity tested using Pearson item–total correlations revealed that all elements related to drivers' communication skills (18 items) and customer loyalty (12 items) satisfied the validity criterion (all $p < .05$). Internal consistency reliability was acceptable. Cronbach's alpha coefficients are .718 for those with drivers' communicative skills and .648 for customer loyalty (12 items). Altogether, these reliability estimates indicate that the composite measures were sufficiently consistent to proceed with correlational analysis.

d. Normality Assessment

Kolmogorov–Smirnov tests indicated that both composite variables deviated from normality (Asymp. Sig. = .000 for communication skills and customer loyalty). Given this distributional pattern, Spearman's rank-order correlation was employed to examine the relationship between the variables. The

corresponding correlation results are reported in Table 1.

e. Hypothesis Testing: Association Between Communication Skills And Customer Loyalty

Spearman's rank-order correlation indicated a positive and statistically significant relationship between drivers' communication skills and customer loyalty (ρ = .412, p < .001, two-tailed; N = 385). The magnitude of the coefficient reflects a moderate association, suggesting that higher passenger evaluations of drivers' communication skills tend to correspond with stronger attitudinal loyalty. These results are consistent with the proposed hypothesis and do not support the null hypothesis.

Table 1. Spearman's Rank-Order Correlation between Drivers' Communication Skills and Customer Loyalty (N = 385)

Variables	1	2
1. Drivers' communication skills	-	.412***
2. Customer loyalty	.412***	-

Note. Spearman's rho (two-tailed). *** p< .001.

Item/indicator pattern highlights (descriptive index). Among the six communication skill dimensions, Listening Skills achieved the highest average index (92%), followed by Speaking Skills (90%), while Adaptability Skills received the lowest score (88%). Overall evaluations remained high. Within the loyalty construct, Repeat Purchase ranked highest (89%), with Buying Across Product and Service Lines, Referring to Others, and Resisting the Pull of Competitors each at 88%, indicating relatively stable attitudinal tendencies.

These results suggest that attentive listening—especially responsiveness to passengers' expressed needs—is perceived as a key communicative strength. Adaptability, although conceptually important, appears less salient perceptually. This contrast informs the qualitative analysis, where communicative adaptation is explored as an enacted interactional practice rather than merely a perceived attribute.

In ride-sharing markets characterized by low switching costs and abundant alternatives, even subtle interactional differences can influence loyalty intentions. The observed correlation indicates that interpersonal communication competence is not peripheral to the service experience; clarity, active listening, empathy, and adaptability—within brief, platform-mediated encounters—shape how passengers interpret and remember their rides. Micro-level communicative practices thus become a potential source of differentiation in competitive platform ecosystems.

Although the correlation coefficient (ρ = .412) reflects a moderate association, it demonstrates that perceived communication competence is meaningfully related to attitudinal customer loyalty. This aligns with mobility research linking service quality to loyalty outcomes (Su et al., 2021; Ricardianto et al., 2024). However, rather than embedding communication within broad service quality constructs, this study treats it as a distinct interpersonal competence enacted in real time—an important distinction in ride-hailing contexts where encounters are standardized in duration yet interactionally consequential.

Descriptive results further clarify these dynamics. Listening skills received the highest evaluations, indicating that feeling heard is central to passengers' relational assessments. Adaptability, while positively rated, appeared less perceptually salient, suggesting that situational adjustment may operate more subtly. Repeat purchase intention emerged as the strongest loyalty indicator, underscoring that loyalty is primarily expressed through continued use. While the quantitative findings establish statistical significance, they do not illuminate how communication is enacted in practice. The following section, therefore, examines drivers' communicative adaptation in algorithmically evaluated encounters.

How Drivers Adapt Their Communication Styles in Platform-Evaluated Encounters

The qualitative findings reveal consistent patterns of communicative adaptability in platform-mediated ride-hailing interactions. Analysis began with open coding to identify recurring practices described by drivers—such as greeting styles, conversational pacing, tone modulation, clarification of operational details, and the strategic use of silence—derived inductively from participants' narratives rather than predefined categories.

Through cross-transcript comparison, these practices were grouped into broader adaptive patterns that recurred across interviews. The patterns were then interpreted using Communication Accommodation Theory (Giles et al., 2023), enabling analysis in terms of convergence, strategic divergence, relational alignment, and multimodal accommodation. The resulting thematic structure is summarized in Table 2 and elaborated in the following sections.

Table 2. CAT-Informed Thematic Coding of Drivers' Communicative Adaptation (n = 7)

Theme	Description of Adaptive Practice (CAT-Interpreted)	Cross-Informant Pattern
Adaptive Interactional Calibration	Drivers initiate brief probing (greeting + light question) and adjust conversational depth based on passengers' responses (such as length and tone), reflecting convergence through situational alignment.	Observed across all drivers
Privacy-Sensitive Professionalism	Drivers will scale back or disengage from conversation when passengers exhibit signs of fatigue or digital disengagement. In this case, silence is a strategic divergence that indicates an awareness of relational boundaries.	High consistency
Emotional Regulation under Rating Pressure	To avoid negative ratings, drivers tend to modify their tone, explain operational details such as routes and tolls, and steer clear of conflict. These reactions can be interpreted as a type of evaluative convergence driven by platform asymmetry.	Strong consistency
Conversational Micro-Space Formation	When passengers discuss personal issues, the driver is likely to use active listening and a non-judgmental approach. These reactions are crucial in developing relational congruence in short-term interaction.	Moderate consistency
Embodied Service Communication	Nonverbal service cues, including vehicle cleanliness, luggage handling, and safety, are multimodal accommodations that reinforce professionalism and reliability.	High consistency
Cross-Cultural Improvisation	In dealing with foreign passengers, the drivers may use simplified English, gestures, or translation applications. These approaches are indicative of convergence efforts made despite language difficulties.	Emerging pattern

a. Adaptive Interactional Calibration (Observed Across All Drivers)

One of the most observed patterns among the drivers was adaptive interactional calibration. The conversations did not begin with prolonged talk. Rather, the driver usually began the conversation with a greeting and a non-intrusive question, which was followed by an immediate cue from the passenger's response. The length, tone, and affect of the response indicated the level of conversational participation.

If the response was brief or the passenger engaged with their mobile phones, the driver reduced or ended the conversation. However, if the response was warm and elaborated, the driver allowed the conversation to proceed more informally. This is indicative of situational convergence, in which the communicative intensity was calibrated to the passengers' affective cues.

b. Privacy-Sensitive Professionalism (High Consistency)

Across the interviews, drivers exhibited a professional, privacy-sensitive manner. They deliberately moderated the conversation's intensity in the presence of passengers who seemed tired, emotionally distant, or engaged with their devices. In these contexts, silence was not an indicator of disengagement but a form of strategic divergence that communicated attention to privacy boundaries.

The drivers were able to distinguish between light and contextually appropriate conversation and questions that could be perceived as intrusive. Over-inquiry could potentially lead to discomfort and even impact ratings in rating-mediated interactions. The ability to withhold or moderate interaction was therefore a critical aspect of professional performance in platform-mediated interactions.

c. Emotional Regulation under Rating Pressure (Strong Consistency)

The second theme that emerged was that of emotional regulation under rating pressure. The drivers showed a strong understanding of the concept of evaluative asymmetry in the platform system, recognizing that passengers held unilateral rating power. This influenced their communication style in anticipation of the situation. The drivers explained how they clarified toll prices in advance, ensured route preferences, and maintained a non-aggressive tone despite the heated situation to avoid negative ratings. In the context of Communication Accommodation Theory, this can be seen as a form of evaluative convergence, in which communication is adjusted to meet expectations in a rating-transparent setting.

d. Conversational Micro-Space Formation (Moderate Consistency)

Another pattern was found in the transition from routine service interaction to micro-spaces of personal communication. In the ride's spatially and temporally defined environment, passengers would sometimes discuss concerns related to work, family, or relationships. In these instances, the driver would usually engage in active listening and a non-judgmental attitude, permitting the conversation to proceed without increasing intimacy beyond the bounds of the situation.

These interactions facilitated a temporary relational convergence for otherwise transactional interactions. The driver would rarely begin personal communication; the level of communicative engagement would increase only when the passenger demonstrated a willingness to communicate.

e. Embodied Service Communication (High Consistency)

In addition to verbal communication, the communicative message was also constructed through embodied service practices. Keeping the vehicle clean, assisting with luggage, prioritizing safety over speed, and describing road conditions were more than just service operations; they were communicative actions integral to the service encounter.

From the perspective of Communication Accommodation Theory, these actions can be understood as multimodal accommodation. Convergence, in this case, was accomplished through behavioral rather than verbal means. Service behavior was adapted to align with passenger expectations, fostering situational trust within a bounded context.

f. Cross-Cultural Improvisation (Emerging Pattern)

A less consistently reported pattern involved cross-cultural improvisation. When interacting with foreign passengers, drivers often relied on simplified English, translation apps, and gestures to maintain mutual understanding. Although not universally described, these instances illustrate convergence enacted within linguistic constraints.

In such encounters, communicative effectiveness took precedence over linguistic accuracy. The priority was functional clarity—ensuring that routes, destinations, and service expectations were mutually understood—rather than grammatical precision. This pattern reflects adaptive accommodation in intercultural situations, where alignment is negotiated through improvisation rather than shared fluency.

Qualitatively, communicative adaptation in the ride-hailing industry appears as a structured response to algorithmic evaluation frameworks. Through practices of interactional calibration, privacy-conscious professionalism, and emotional regulation under the pressure of rating, drivers modify their tone, level of conversation, silence, and clarification techniques in anticipation of possible evaluative outcomes. Previous studies have found that rating and monitoring systems are deeply ingrained in platform capitalism, influencing workers' emotional regulation and service delivery (Lei & Kaplan, 2023; Zhang, Y. et al., 2025; Zhang, Z. et al., 2025). In ride-hailing services, the lack of transparency in pricing and operational dynamics may further increase interactional friction, positioning communication as a practical conduit through which drivers mediate encounters under the gaze of evaluation (Muralidhar et al., 2022). Governance, in this regard, is not merely carried out through technical systems but also through communicative adaptation in everyday interactions.

Follow-up empirical studies also illustrate that perceived evaluation shapes affective experience and performance outcomes. Perceived injustice in ridesharing evaluations has both immediate and long-term behavioral consequences (Lei & Kaplan, 2023). Algorithmic transparency has been found to correlate with variations in emotional labor strategies and differences in in-role and extra-role performance (Zhang, Y. et al., 2025), while perceived evaluation may have an indirect effect on performance through flow experiences conditioned by contextual constraints (Zhang, Z. et al., 2025). The current study contributes to this area by detailing how communication serves as a micro-mechanism through which regulatory conditions are translated into interactional practice. Preventive clarification, tone-calibrated interaction, and strategic silence exemplify drivers' attempts to mitigate interactional friction that could potentially manifest as rating penalties. This understanding aligns with studies that have conceptualized managerial algorithmic communication as a communicative infrastructure that disciplines driver behavior (El Bourkadi, 2023).

Communication Accommodation Theory provides additional analytical insights (Giles et al., 2023). Interactional calibration and micro-space construction in conversation embody convergence, in which the underlying motivations for communicative responsiveness align with the passengers' affective cues. Privacy-oriented professionalism embodies divergence, in which silence is a boundary-management strategy rather than withdrawal. Emotional self-regulation under rating pressure can be seen as a form of evaluative convergence under asymmetric rating pressure, while embodied service communication and cross-cultural improvisation embody multimodal accommodation through behavioral and linguistic modification. Research on service communication has indicated that adaptive accommodation improves relational outcomes (Pluymaekers et al., 2023); the current study demonstrates how this accommodation is accomplished in brief, algorithmically rated ride-hailing interactions.

Communicative adaptation is also relevant to more general dynamics of service performance. Mobility research has repeatedly shown that service quality is related to satisfaction and loyalty in ride-hailing services (Su et al., 2021; Ricardianto et al., 2024), while platform labor studies have emphasized the role of algorithmic

control in shaping expectations of emotional labor (Zhu et al., 2024; Zhang, Y., et al., 2025). Nevertheless, relatively little research has examined how service performance is accomplished in interactionally brief and spatially constricted service contexts. The current findings indicate that communication, through calibration, emotional self-regulation, embodied communication, and cross-cultural adaptation, is a significant aspect of service performance under platform control.

Taken together, these findings suggest that drivers' communicative accommodations are neither incidental nor individual. Rather, they are patterned and context-responsive, and are shaped by the forces of evaluative asymmetry, monitoring infrastructure, and the temporality of short encounters. Communicative adaptation can thus be theorized as an organized interactional practice through which drivers negotiate platform governance while maintaining relational alignment.

From Communicative Adaptation to Loyalty Formation

The mixed-methods approach enables the quantitative and qualitative findings to be interpreted in an integrated manner. Although the statistical analysis confirms a significant positive relationship between perceived drivers' communication skills and attitudinal customer loyalty, correlation alone does not explain how this relationship unfolds in everyday service encounters. The qualitative strand therefore clarifies how communication is enacted within short, platform-rated rides.

Interview findings indicate that communication skills function as context-sensitive practices shaped by evaluative conditions rather than as fixed traits. Through adaptive calibration, drivers adjust tone and conversational depth to passengers' emotional cues, while privacy-oriented professionalism is enacted through boundary management and strategic silence. Emotional regulation under rating asymmetry involves de-escalation and relational composure, collectively creating comfort, reducing uncertainty, and stabilizing the ride's emotional climate.

This mechanism aligns with mobility research linking service quality to satisfaction and loyalty (Su et al., 2021; Ricardianto et al., 2024), while specifying the interactional pathway through which communication becomes consequential. By reducing friction, managing tension, and signaling professionalism, adaptive communicative practices shape evaluative judgments that underpin loyalty intentions. Communication thus becomes meaningful not only as competence but as enacted relational work.

In algorithmically mediated service environments, communication operates as a relational stabilizer within evaluative systems. Although prior research shows that rating mechanisms influence emotional labor and performance (Lei & Kaplan, 2023; Zhang, Y. et al., 2025; Zhang, Z. et al., 2025), less attention has been paid to how these pressures materialize in real-time interaction. Loyalty formation therefore extends beyond pricing or usability and is also shaped by communicative conduct within time-bound encounters.

These findings extend Communication Accommodation Theory to platform-based service work (Giles et al., 2023), showing that convergence, divergence, and strategic silence carry both relational and economic implications in competitive markets. Strategically, strengthening adaptive listening, emotional regulation, and situational judgment may support customer retention where switching costs are low. Overall, communicative adaptation emerges as the relational mechanism connecting perceived drivers' communication skills to attitudinal customer loyalty in platform-based ride-hailing markets.

Conclusion

This research reveals that communication ability is positively and significantly related to attitudinal customer loyalty in platform-based ride-sharing services in the Greater Jakarta area ($\rho = .412$, $p < .001$). While the correlation is moderate, it does indicate that communication ability significantly affects passengers' intentions to continue using and recommending the service. The qualitative results help explain how this happens. Communication ability is not something that drivers "have" but something they "do" through adaptive interaction. Situational convergence happens in adaptive calibration and in the creation of conversational microspace, where tone and depth are calibrated to passenger cues. Strategic divergence happens in privacy-sensitive professionalism, where silence maintains relational boundaries. Rating pressure and emotional regulation reflect evaluative convergence, while service communication and cross-cultural improvisation illustrate multimodal accommodation. Through these patterned adjustments, communication facilitates frictionless encounters, smooths friction, and influences positive evaluations that ultimately lead to loyalty intention.

There are several limitations to note. The qualitative data were collected from a single metropolitan area, and loyalty was assessed as an intention rather than a retention outcome. Observations about algorithmic governance were based on driver accounts rather than platform data. Future research might explore this topic through cross-metropolitan comparisons, longitudinal assessments of actual

retention behavior, and real-time observation of interaction. Passenger-side adaptation and platform design factors would further help to clarify the relationship between communicative practices and loyalty formation in digitally mediated service markets.

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