

The Hong Kong Polytechnic University
Department of Logistics and Maritime Studies
Research Seminar

**The Impact of Waiting on Customer Response Delay:
Field Evidence from an Online Contact Center**

by

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Date: 21 September 2017 (Thursday)
Time: 2:30pm - 3:30pm
Venue: M714, Li Ka Shing Tower
The Hong Kong Polytechnic University

(Conducted in English)

Abstract:

It is well-known that the waiting time customers experience in a service system is determined by the service processing time, among other factors. We propose that a directionally opposite effect, which diffuses from waiting time to service time, also exists in the online service context where a significant fraction of the service time is contributed by the customer. We test this hypothesis using a unique operational dataset that combines server log information with instant-messaging transcripts collected from the live-chat contact center of an S&P 500 service firm. Our results show that waiting before service (i.e., queue wait) accelerates customer engagement – one dimension of customer instigated service time. However, this effect is “short-lived”: it disappears after the first chat message posted to the conversation. On the contrary, we find that waiting during service slows down customer responses – another dimension of customer instigated service time. This negative effect attenuates as the conversation progresses. These findings contribute to the service operations literature by showing the significance of the feedback from waiting to (customer- instigated) service time. We also discuss two practical implications of these findings for online contact center managers: when to admit customers for their faster engagement and potential adjustments to agents’ multitasking levels.

Bio:

I am a native of Ningbo, China. My college time was mostly spent at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, except for a one-semester exchange program at Seoul National University. In 2010, I obtained my undergraduate degree with a major in Supply Chain Management and a minor in Applied Mathematics. Then, I moved to University of South Carolina to continue my PhD study in Operations Management. My dissertation, *Three Essays on Consumer Product Returns*, was chaired by Mike Galbreth. After finishing my PhD in 2014, I was hired by Florida State University as an Assistant Professor of Operations Management.

My current research centers around the emerging topic of consumer returns. Due to the huge cost and benefit implications of return policies (a.k.a Money-Back-Guarantees), return managers at leading retailers and OEMs, as well as business solution providers, gather every year to exchange insights on the management of returns. The right photo was taken when I was presenting my research at the 2013 annual conference. I look into the returns problem from a variety of angles, such as a retailer's optimal pricing, the forecasting of return quantities, and the measurement of a return policy's value to consumers.

Please email to irene.lam@polyu.edu.hk for enquiries.

All are welcome!