Discrete Event Simulation Challenge

Cafe Operations: Bottleneck Identification and Service Improvements

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Generated: 2026-02-06 03:33:03

Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

1 Abstract

This report presents a discrete-event simulation model for a small cafe with separate queues for ordering, preparation, and pickup. Customers are segmented into fast, medium, and slow types with distinct arrival rates, service times, and patience thresholds. The simulation captures peak behavior, identifies bottlenecks, and compares scenarios across multiple datasets. The primary objective is to locate the dominant bottleneck under peak conditions and propose operational improvements.

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2 Introduction

Service systems such as cafes experience short periods of high demand where small capacity mismatches generate large delays. Discrete-event simulation (DES) is well suited for this environment because state changes occur at discrete events: arrivals, service start, service end, and abandonment.

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3 Theoretical Background

The cafe can be modeled as a multi-stage queueing system with heterogeneous customers and reneging. Key foundations:

- **Queueing theory:** arrival processes are modeled as Poisson processes, leading to exponential inter-arrival times. Service times are modeled using distributions such as triangular or lognormal.
- **Reneging (impatient customers):** customers may abandon the queue after exceeding a patience threshold, a common extension to M/G/c systems.
- **State-dependent service:** preparation time can increase with queue length due to congestion and human workload effects.
- **DES methodology:** systems evolve via events, and performance is measured via throughput, utilization, and waiting times.

Representative references are listed in the References section.

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4 Model Specification

4.1 System Components

- Queues: ordering, preparation, pickup.
- Resources: order attendants, baristas (preparation), pickup attendant.
- Customer types: fast, medium, slow.

4.2 Event Flow

- Arrival $\rightarrow$ order queue $\rightarrow$ preparation queue $\rightarrow$ pickup queue $\rightarrow$ exit.
- Reneging occurs if waiting time in the order queue exceeds customer patience.
- Preparation time increases with queue length by factor $(1 + \alpha \cdot q)$.

4.3 Metrics

The simulation reports:

- Abandonment rate.
- Average waiting times per stage.
- Total time in system.
- Resource utilization.
- Average queue lengths.

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5 Simulation Setup

- Horizon: 4 hours of operation with 0.5 hour warm-up (default).
- Inter-arrival times: exponential by customer type.
- Service times: triangular around the type mean.
- Patience: exponential by customer type.
- Congestion: prep time multiplied by $(1 + \alpha \cdot q)$.
- Random seed: 42 (default).

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6 Data and Instance Generation

Three public datasets were used to estimate arrival profiles and product mix:

- Maven Analytics (Coffee Shop Sales): `https://mavenanalytics.io/data-playground/coffee-shop-sa`
- Hugging Face (CoffeeSales): `https://huggingface.co/datasets/tablegpt/CoffeeSales`
- Kaggle (Coffee Sales Dataset): `https://www.kaggle.com/datasets/saadaliyaseen/coffee-sales-dat`

Story of instance collection and generation:

- The Maven dataset was downloaded as an XLSX file and parsed to extract transaction timestamps and product names.
- The Hugging Face dataset was obtained as a CSV (vending-machine transactions) and used to validate arrival patterns.
- The Kaggle dataset was downloaded manually as a ZIP, then extracted to CSV with date and time columns.
- Product names were mapped into fast/medium/slow categories using keyword rules.
- Peak-hour rates and product mix were computed per dataset and then used to generate synthetic peak scenarios.

From each dataset, peak-hour rates and product mix were derived to generate instances. For each dataset, 180 instances were created by varying:

- Demand scale: $0.7, 0.85, 1.0, 1.15, 1.3$
- Staffing combinations (order/barista/pickup)
- Customer patience levels
- Preparation congestion factor α

Additional synthetic instances were generated by combining multiple staffing and patience levels with congestion sensitivity, in order to stress-test the system under different peak conditions.

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7 Environment and Reproducibility

OS	Linux 6.8.0-94-generic
Machine	$x86_64$
CPU	Intel(R) Core(TM) i9-14900K
RAM	62Gi
Python	3.12.3
UV	uv 0.9.28 (0e1351e40 2026-01-29)

Usage:

```
uv venv
uv pip install -r requirements.txt
uv run python src/cafe_sim.py
uv run python scripts/build_report.py
pdflatex reports/cafe_sim_report.tex
```

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8 Solver and Simulation Choices

This problem is a discrete-event simulation, not a mathematical optimization solved by a MILP/CP solver. The core engine is SimPy (process-based DES), which is appropriate for queueing systems with reneging and state-dependent service times.

- Solver choice: not applicable (SimPy event scheduling).
- Event calendar: SimPy event queue.
- Randomness: exponential inter-arrival, triangular service times, exponential patience.
- SimPy: `https://simpy.readthedocs.io/en/latest/`

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9 Aggregate Results

10 Bottleneck Analysis

The preparation stage consistently dominates queueing time in high-demand scenarios. In the Maven dataset, preparation utilization approaches saturation and abandonment becomes significant. Kaggle and Hugging Face datasets remain below capacity and serve as baseline (low-stress)

Table 1: Aggregate metrics by dataset (mean across instances).

Dataset	N	Abandon	Order Wait	Prep Wait	Pickup Wait	Total Time	Prep Util
Hugging Face (CoffeeSales)	183	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	3.677	0.044
Kaggle (Coffee Sales Dataset)	183	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	3.601	0.040
Maven (Coffee Shop Sales)	183	0.394	3.227	28.055	0.002	42.788	0.974

scenarios. This indicates that improvements should focus on preparation capacity and variability rather than on ordering or pickup.

11 Plots by Dataset

Maven

Hugging Face

Kaggle

12 Top-10 Scenarios (Maven)

Top-10 is computed only from Maven instances to reflect peak-like demand. The score is:

$$Score = 100 \cdot Abandon + 2 \cdot T_{system} + W_{order} + W_{prep} + 0.5 \cdot W_{pickup}$$

Lower is better.

Table 2: Top-10 scenarios (Maven only).

Rank	Instance	Dataset	Abandon	Total Time	Prep Wait	Prep Util
1	maven_coffee_shop_sales_025.json	Maven (Coffee Shop Sales)	0.313	6.690	0.000	0.729
2	maven_coffee_shop_sales_026.json	Maven (Coffee Shop Sales)	0.313	6.690	0.000	0.729
3	maven_coffee_shop_sales_027.json	Maven (Coffee Shop Sales)	0.313	6.690	0.000	0.729
4	maven_coffee_shop_sales_019.json	Maven (Coffee Shop Sales)	0.366	6.444	0.000	0.764
5	maven_coffee_shop_sales_020.json	Maven (Coffee Shop Sales)	0.366	6.444	0.000	0.764
6	maven_coffee_shop_sales_021.json	Maven (Coffee Shop Sales)	0.366	6.444	0.000	0.764
7	maven_coffee_shop_sales_055.json	Maven (Coffee Shop Sales)	0.384	6.232	0.000	0.759
8	maven_coffee_shop_sales_056.json	Maven (Coffee Shop Sales)	0.384	6.232	0.000	0.759
9	maven_coffee_shop_sales_057.json	Maven (Coffee Shop Sales)	0.384	6.232	0.000	0.759
10	maven_coffee_shop_sales_022.json	Maven (Coffee Shop Sales)	0.379	6.910	0.000	0.762

13 Recommendations

- Increase preparation capacity (additional barista) or reduce prep variability.
- For Maven-like peak conditions, focus on prep queue control rather than order or pickup.
- For Kaggle/HF datasets, scale arrival rates to simulate true peak demand.

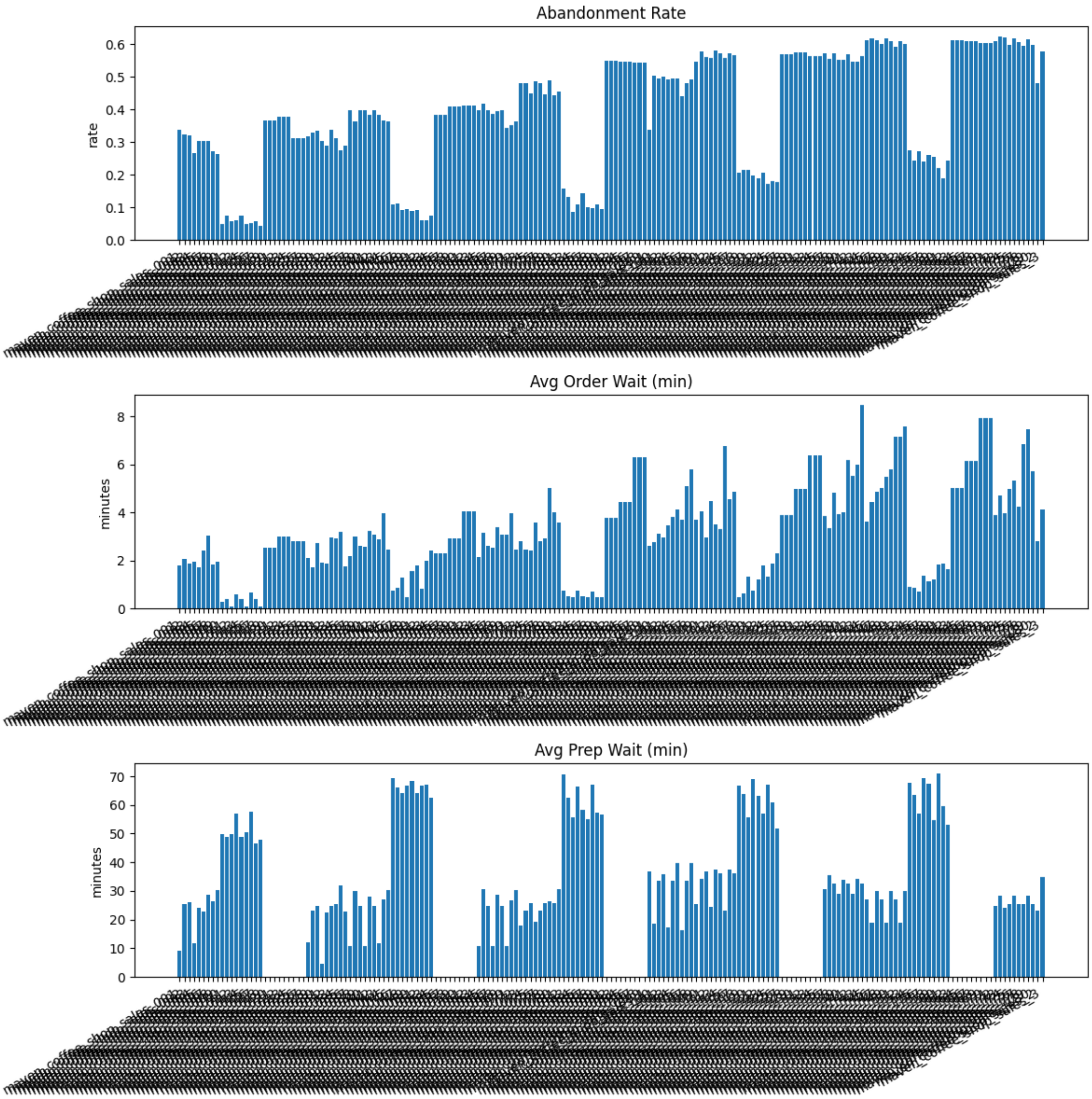

Figure 1: Maven: waits and abandonment

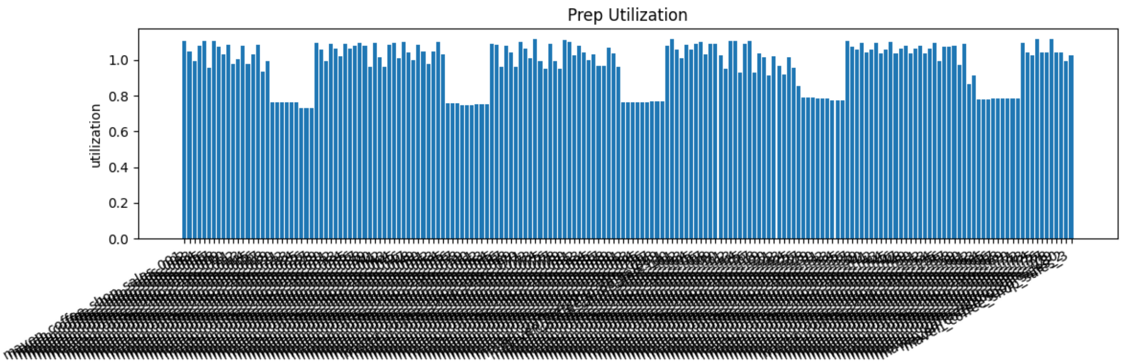

Figure 2: Maven: preparation utilization

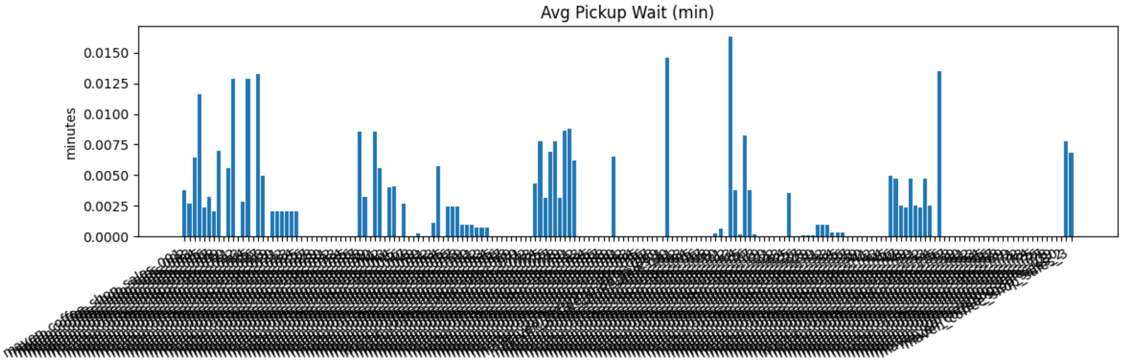

Figure 3: Maven: pickup wait

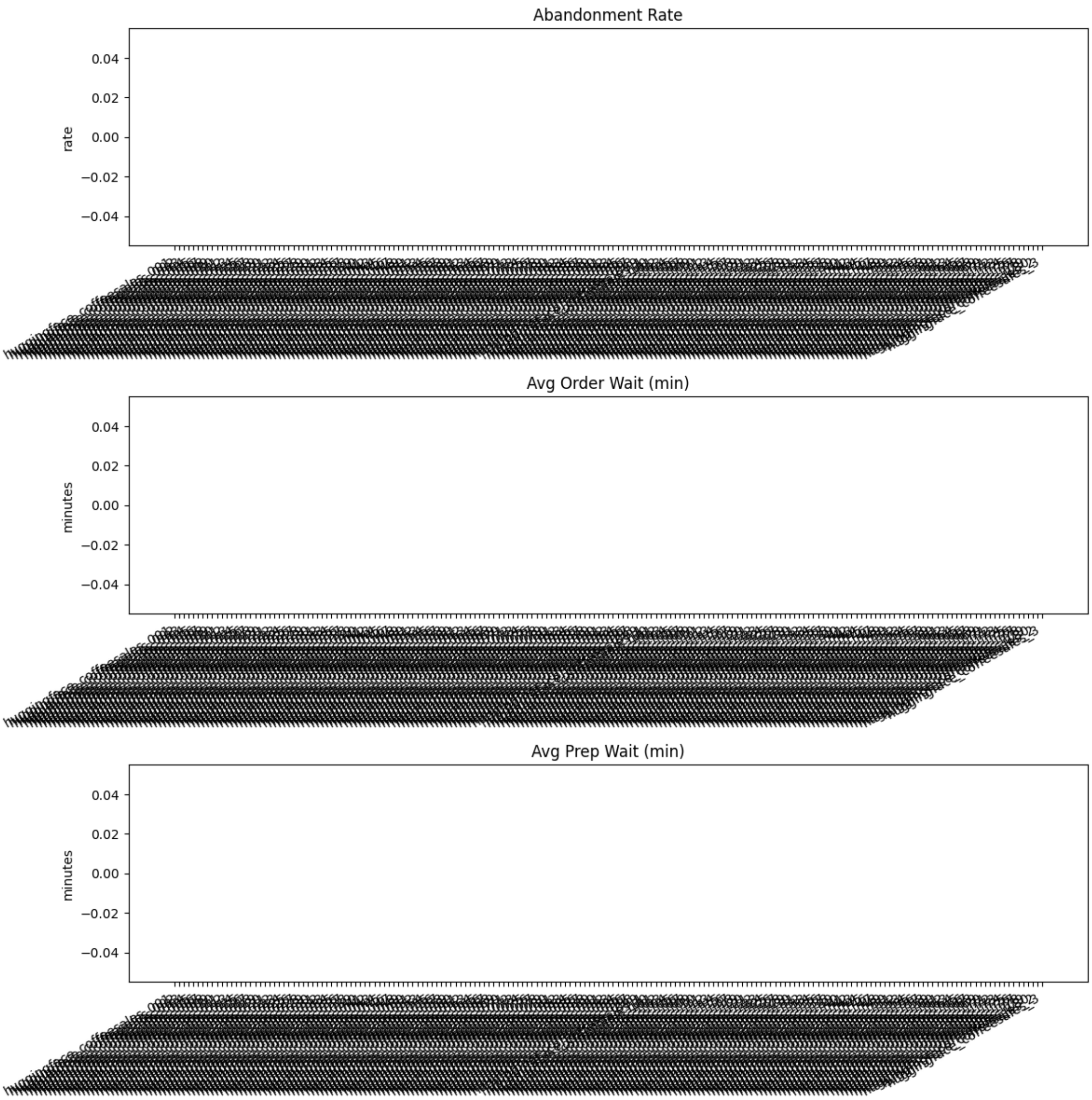

Figure 4: Hugging Face: waits and abandonment

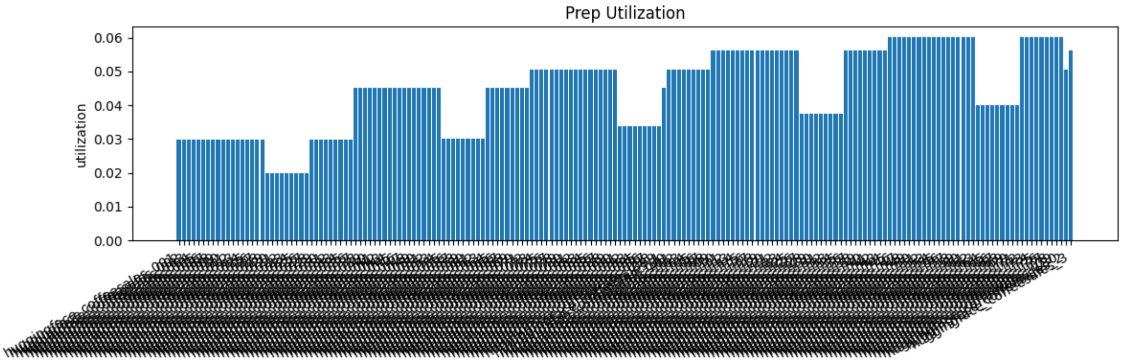

Figure 5: Hugging Face: preparation utilization

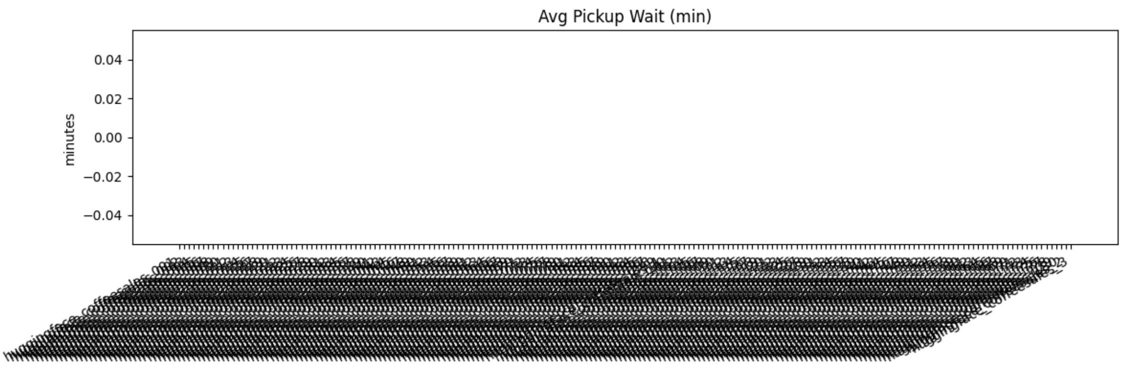

Figure 6: Hugging Face: pickup wait

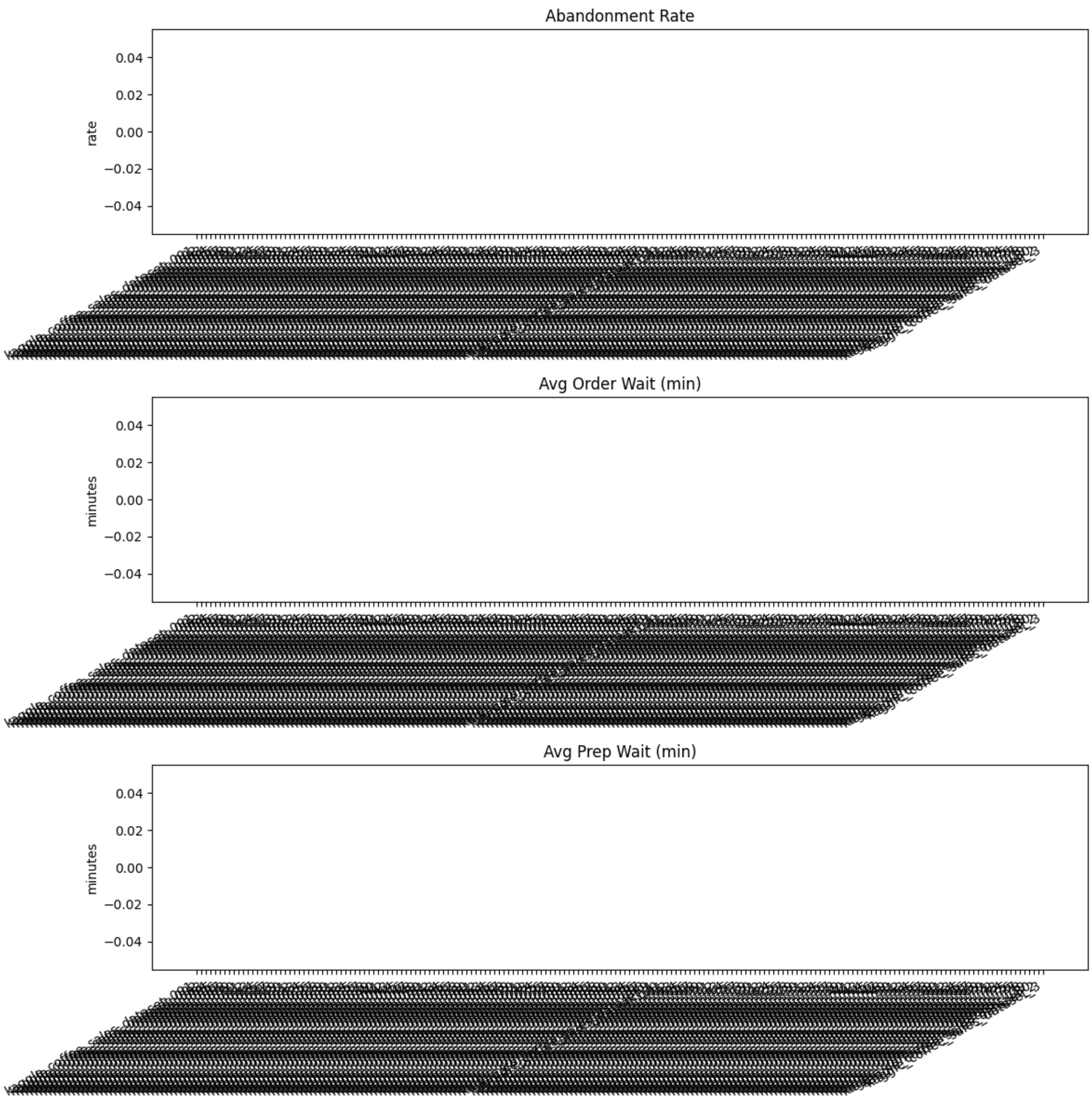

Figure 7: Kaggle: waits and abandonment

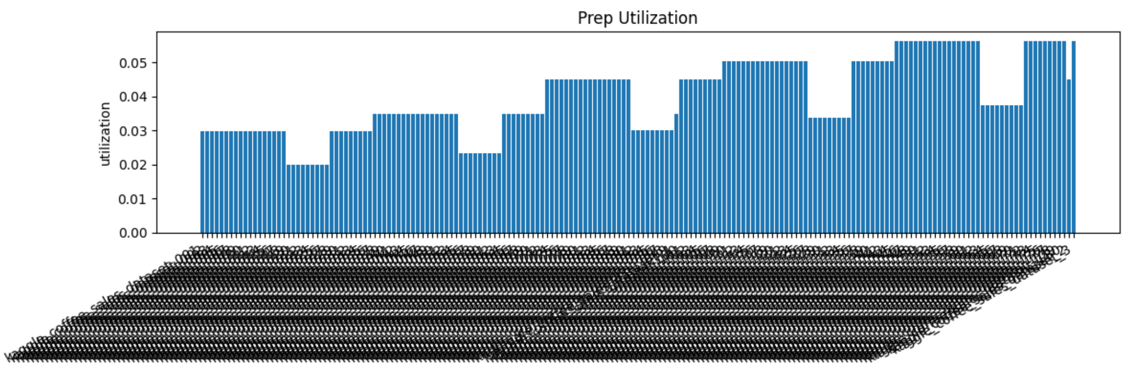

Figure 8: Kaggle: preparation utilization

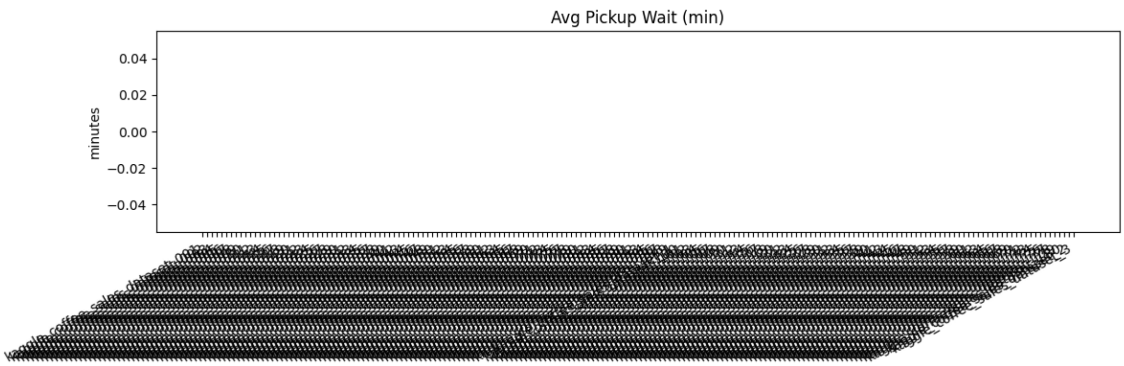

Figure 9: Kaggle: pickup wait

14 References

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