

Survival Analysis of Questions Posted on the iFixit Answers Forum

Lisa Oshita^a, Anthony Pileggi, Shannon Pileggi

Department of Statistics, California Polytechnic State University

^aFrost Research Fellow, recipient of the Frost Undergraduate Student Research Award

Overview

iFixit's online Q&A forum, *Answers*, features over 120,000 questions related specifically to device repair. Analysis of question response times can reveal factors that affect how quickly questions receive answers, which can lead to suggestions for how users can ask better questions to minimize response times and for how forum design can be improved.

► **Objective** Develop a Cox proportional hazards model to predict the survival probability (probability that a question remains unanswered beyond a certain time t), of questions on the forum, with the goal of identifying variables significantly associated with response time.

Data

- 7,760 questions from April 2017 to July 2017.
- 63.8% received an answer
- Shortest response time: 0.5 hours
- Longest response time: 2,159 hours (90 days)
- Median response time: 8.79 hours

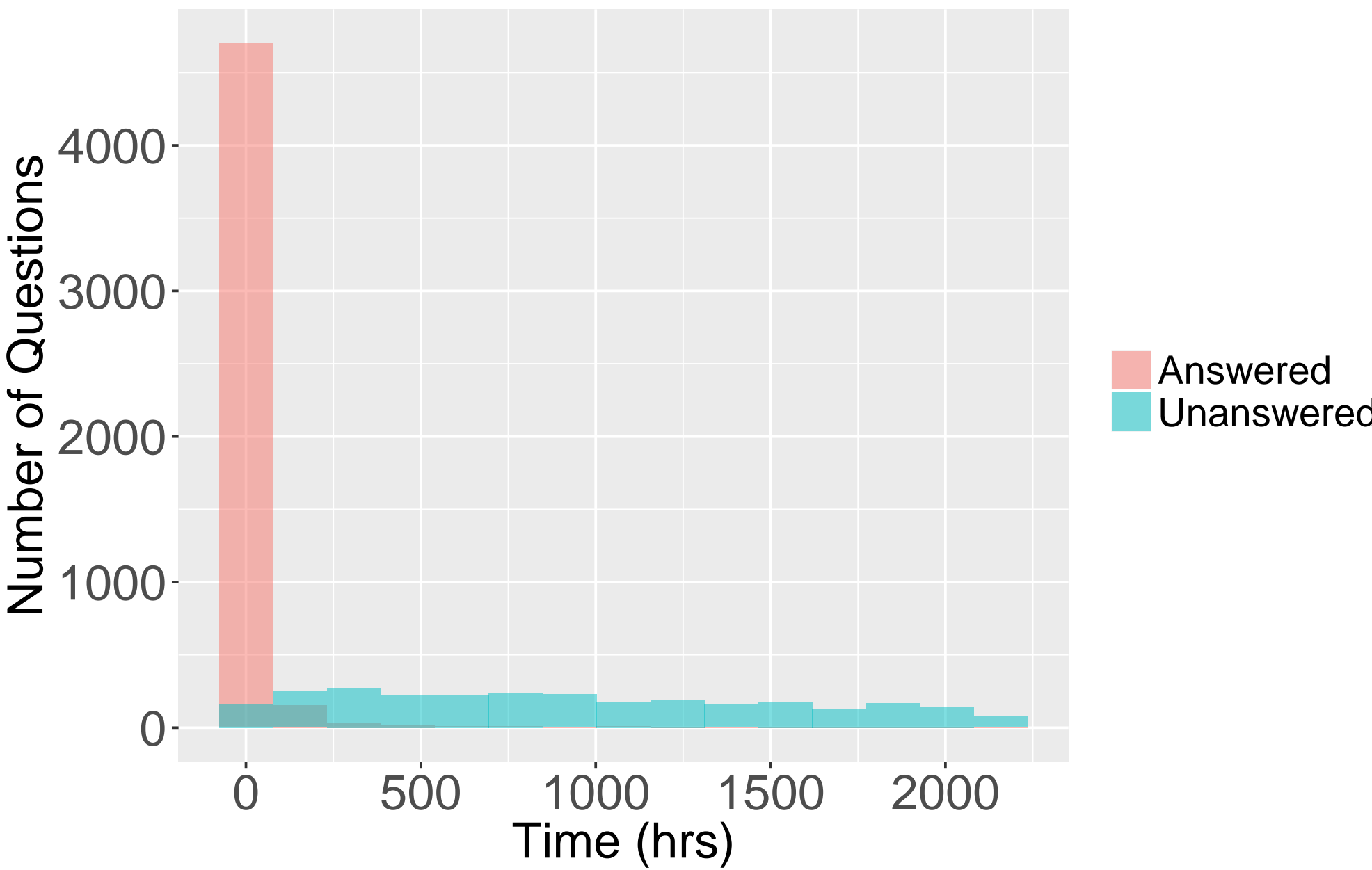


Figure 1: Distribution of response times

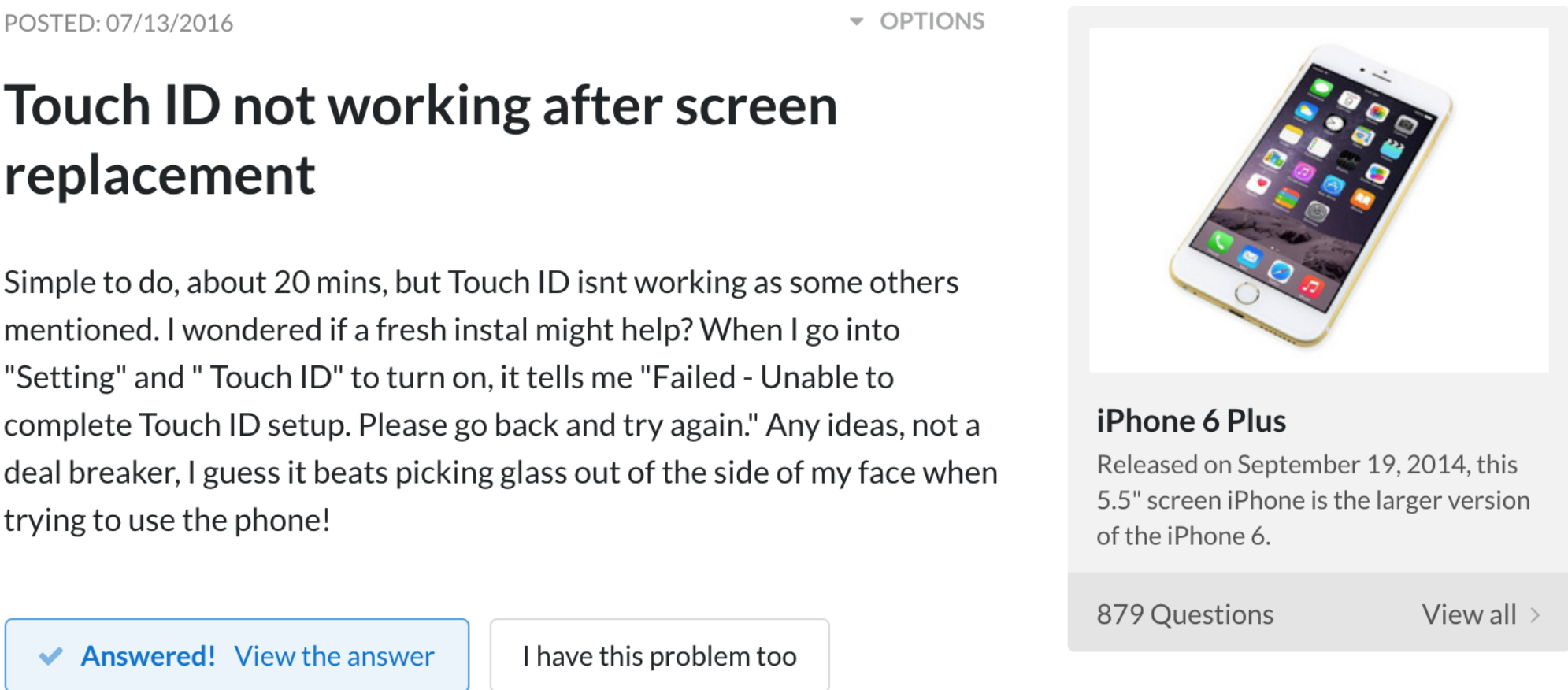


Figure 2: Example of a question posted on the forum

Methods

► Univariate Analysis

Used to identify which variables to include

► Five Fold Cross-Validation

Model was built on the training set and used to predict hazard ratios on the test set

Predicted hazard ratios were entered into separate Cox models; resulting statistics were averaged over each iteration and assessed

► Final Model

Model was fit to the full data and proportional hazards assumption was assessed

	HR	LR	p-value	R^2	Dxy	C
Training	2.03	937.39	<0.0001	0.14	0.27	0.63
Test	1.99	220.83	<0.0001	0.14	0.26	0.63
Full	2.03	1165.03	<0.0001	0.14	0.28	0.63

Table 1: Performance metrics achieved in cross-validation and for the model fit to the full data (HR: Hazard Ratio, LR: Partial Likelihood Ratio, C: Concordance)

Final Model Statistics

- LR = 1265.29 (p-value <0.0001)
- $R^2 = 0.15$
- Somers' $Dxy = 0.27$
- Several levels of the device categorization variable violated the proportional hazards assumption

Variable	Coefficient (SE)	p-value
Device Category		
Apple Product	0.93 (0.048)	<0.0001
Camera	-0.32 (0.090)	
Electronics	-0.01 (0.078)	
Game Console	0.24 (0.083)	
Home	0.34 (0.070)	
Other	-0.13 (0.056)	
PC	0.28 (0.060)	
Tablet	-0.16 (0.081)	
Vehicle	0.40 (0.069)	
Android/Other Phone (reference)	—	
Weekend	-0.13 (0.033)	<0.0001
Text contains end punctuation	0.03 (0.050)	0.613
Text is in all lower case	-0.18 (0.064)	0.006
Title contains terms considered frequently-used among answered questions	0.05 (0.042)	0.260
Title contains terms considered frequently-used among unanswered questions	-0.28 (0.034)	<0.0001
Title ends in a question mark	0.26 (0.033)	<0.0001
User edited or added to the question's text after posting it	0.30 (0.086)	0.001
User was a member for less than one day before posting	-0.11 (0.036)	0.003
User made an effort to solve the problem prior to asking the question	-0.07 (0.036)	0.045
Square root of the average tag frequency	2.23 (0.720)	0.002

Table 2: Coefficients for predictors in the final model (Continuous predictors fit with restricted cubic splines (text length, average tag length, device name length, ratio of number of newlines to text length) are not shown)

Select Interpretations

Controlling for all other predictors, the estimated hazard of receiving an answer is:

- 154% higher (95% CI (132%, 179%)) for Apple products vs. Android/other phones
- 13% lower (95% CI (7%, 18%)) for questions posted on the weekend vs. weekday
- 25% lower (95% CI (19%, 29%)) for questions with titles containing at least one frequently-used word among unanswered question titles vs otherwise

Forum Design Suggestions

- Rather than allowing users to enter any tag or device name, restrict options to a drop-down list
- Include more tips to guide users when asking questions

Acknowledgements

This research was supported by the Bill and Linda Frost fund of the California Polytechnic State University of San Luis Obispo. We also thank iFixit for providing access to the *Answers* data.