

Expedia

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Team Odyssey

Comparative Analysis Report

SI 622 Winter 2017 Section 001

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Words - 2,905

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Executive Summary

Our client, Expedia, is an industry leading travel booking site and mobile app. Our teams focus is directed toward the travel bundle booking workflow, which incorporates booking flights, hotels, and/or rental cars in one booking. For our competitive analysis, we have focused on other mobile apps (for the most part) that utilized either all of the functions of the bundle flow, or some of/similar functions such as booking either hotels or flights, travel packages but no mobile app, or even similar search functions we thought could be useful.. We broke down these competitors to a list of the ten most helpful for our research purposes. These ten competitors included Priceline.com, Studentuniverse, Yantra, CheapOAir, Kayak, Booking.com, Delta.com, Costco Travel, Airbnb, and Meetup.com. We analyzed these sites and apps, and then sorted our data into three different categories, binary, quantifiable, and usability.

After using the information gathered from our competitors sites, we have developed several key findings and recommendations. Our findings include long loading times when booking multiple aspects at once for many sites, and the benefits of concise reviews which can be achieved through taglines and paraphrasing to avoid long strings of text. Our recommendations gleaned from the best of their competitors include: launching interactive loading screens, such as those used by Studentuniverse, incorporating suggestions for alternate travel dates for lower prices, such as those used by Kayak, as well as utilizing something similar to Kayaks confidence value, suggesting whether changes in pricing may be coming, and better organizing the bundle workflow into a more intuitive process. These findings help us to better understand both the strengths and weaknesses of Expedias current features, but are still limited by the small frame of reference for users. Our overall understanding will be strengthened by further testing and surveys from a wider range of users.

Introduction

Expedia is a famous travel company that operates through an smartphone app and a website. Through Expedia, customers worldwide can book flights, hotels, holiday packages and leisure activities. Since 2007, the penetration of smartphones has increased the number of customers accessing travel services through apps. In order to target the growing smartphone user segment, Expedia's goal for this project is to improve the user experience of Expedia's iOS app users. Expedia has asked us to focus on the "Bundle" feature of the iOS app that allows the users to book flights and hotels in a combined deal.

Comparative analysis is a method by which we compare Expedia to some of its peer platforms in terms of features, functionalities, ease of navigation etc. By comparing Expedia to its comparators, we were able to benchmark the features against the expectations from products in the travel industry. The research goal of competitive analysis is identify comparable companies and then compare the features to understand their strengths and shortcomings. The comparators' strengths can be then used as areas of improvements for Expedia platform.

To accomplish this, we focussed our analysis on three major types of feature comparison, discussed in further details later on:

1. Binary comparison: Features which are either present or not
2. Quantitative comparison: Features which can be quantified
3. Usability comparison: qualitative features based on users experience with the product

By comparing and contrasting partial or parallel customers which do not have a bundle feature on a smartphone app, we aim to learn lessons that may be applicable towards improvement of the Expedia's customer experience partially in the steps of booking a vacation package through the bundle feature.

Methods

Expedia offers various services such as booking flights, hotels, car rentals, activities and booking Bundle deals, which essentially lets an individual book hotels and flights in a single flow. To identify comparators, we first established the basic criteria of comparison. We decided to go with the feature of booking flights and accommodation as the target feature, since our area of focus - the Bundles feature is basically combination of the two aforementioned features. Since our project scope is limited to Expedia's iOS app, we decided to compare it

against other apps that fit the determined criteria. Other apps would be then compared against this criteria to classify them as one of the different types of comparators.

The list of potential competitors/ comparators was created by visiting blogs, searching the internet, using data from interviews and using the data from the client. A diverse group of companies was formed, with some brands catering to a population outside the USA. This was done to ensure diversity and to scout for some features that a certain app does better, which could be drafted as recommendation(s) for the client.

Following Mark Newman's taxonomy of types of comparisons, we made a list of all the apps that offered same/ similar functionality/ inspiration.

- Direct comparators : Apps that offer the same functions as Expedia (flights + accommodation booking)
- Indirect comparators : Apps that offer the same functions as Expedia, through a different medium
- Partial comparators: Apps that cover some but not all the features of Expedia
- Parallel comparators: Apps that provide the same kind of service (flights + accommodation booking) to a similar audience via a similar channel
- Analogous comparators: Apps that are essentially non-comparators of Expedia but can serve as a source of ideas as to how Expedia's functions can be improved

We analyzed each of the apps and decided to categorize them in the categories mentioned above. From a total of 15 apps, we narrowed it down to 10 apps to generate high quality findings. The 10 final comparators were -

1. Direct comparators -

a. Priceline.com

Priceline is an American company that helps users obtain discount rates for airline tickets and hotel stays. It is not a direct supplier of these services, but it facilitates the provision of travel services by its suppliers to its customers.

b. StudentUniverse

StudentUniverse is the world's leading travel booking agency for students and youth. It offers discounted pricing and terms on flights, hotels and tours through negotiations with a network of global partners.

c. Yatra.com

Yatra.com is an Indian online travel agency and a travel search engine. They offer travel-related services, which include domestic and international air ticketing, hotel bookings, homestays, holiday packages, bus ticketing, rail ticketing, activities and ancillary services.

d. CheapOair

CheapOair is an online travel agency that allows customers to book airfare, hotel rooms, rental cars and vacation packages through mobile app, telephone or even live chat.

2. Indirect comparators -

a. Kayak

Kayak, a subsidiary of the Priceline Group, is a travel fare aggregator website and travel metasearch engine. The mobile app is available in 20 languages and includes 40 international sites.

3. Partial -

a. Booking.com

Booking.com is a travel fare aggregator website and a travel metasearch engine for lodging reservations. Booking.com does not offer the service of booking flights.

b. Delta.com

Delta is a major American airline, which along with its subsidiaries and regional affiliates operate over 5400 flights daily and serve as an extensive domestic and international network that includes 319 destinations in 54 countries on six continents.

4. Parallel -

a. Costco Travel

Costco Travel is a subsidiary of Costco Wholesale and offers leisure travel to Costco members of the United States and Canada. It offers vacation packages to the Caribbean, Europe, Florida, Hawaii, Las Vegas, Mexico and South Pacific and services such as car rentals, cruises, guided vacations and theme park packages.

5. Analogous -

a. Airbnb

Airbnb is an online marketplace and hospitality service, enabling people to list or rent short-term lodging including vacation rentals, apartment rentals, homestays, hostel beds, or hotel rooms. It has over 3,000,000 lodging listings in 65,000 cities and 191 countries.

b. Meetup.com

Meetup is an online social networking portal that facilitates offline group meetings in various localities around the world. Meetup allows members to find and join groups unified by a common interest.

To assess the features of products to be compared, we came up with a list of tasks/ features that a user would encounter while using Expedia app. After listing all possible questions, they were divided into three parts - Binary, Quantifiable and Usability related. Binary Questions were based on simple Yes/ No questions, while Quantifiable questions had raw quantitative data.

Usability related questions/ features were also found but since they cannot be compared as they are subjective, we just decided to list them out and provide our own experience.

Examples of some binary features :

- Needs a login to access the features
- Availability of Social Login option
- Company has a website, alongside an app
- Viewing Miles, Points on User Profile option

Examples of some quantifiable features :

- Number of interactions to complete booking
- Number of required fields to fill to complete a booking

Findings and Recommendations

For listing down the comparators, we were able to come up with 8 direct comparators, 1 indirect, 3 partial, 1 parallel and 5 analogous comparators (Appendix B) which we then narrowed down by bisecting the bundles feature into two sub-features: hotel booking and flights booking and evaluating the comparators against these two features. This was so because Expedia was the only one that offered the bundles feature wherein a user can book flights (inbound and outbound) as well as hotels in a single user flow. Other comparators either offered an entire user flow for booking round-trip flights or another one for booking hotels. This was clearly one of the distinguishing features of Expedia. Although distinguishing, this appears to be a mere pairing of the two features. In our previous report regarding user interviews, we recommended that Expedia change the flow of bundles from hotel, inbound flights, outbound flights to inbound flights, hotel, outbound flights which we still recommend after evaluating major comparators. Our other recommendations, which are listed below, pertain to the features aspect of Expedia. These recommendations have been drawn from various points that make the user experience of those comparators better. While analyzing we found out how trivial things can add up to improve the experience of a content, loyal or impatient user holistically.

Key Findings

Aggregating a huge number of flights and hotels in a single page and fetching this data often takes a significant while and Expedia is the innocent victim of this fact. This results in long loading times and might affect the user who is planning and booking a trip on the last minute. This trivial aspect can be mitigated by making use of the unresponsive loading screen to make it into an interactive playground until the results are fetched. A good example of this comes from StudentUniverse (Appendix C.1), one of the direct comparators of Expedia.

StudentUniverse shows general travel tips which the user can swipe across to kill the time. This not only serves its purpose of making the load time appear less long but also serves to provide valuable information to the eager traveller. Expedia's load screens are a part of the summary page itself (Fig. 1), which is fairly intuitive, but does not contribute in mitigating the consequences of long load times.

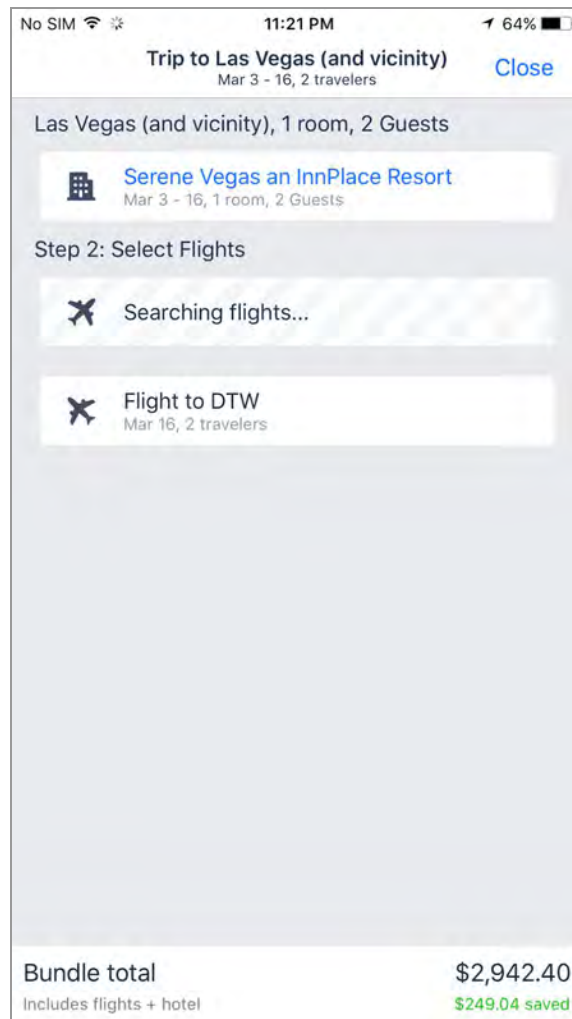


Fig. 1. Loading screen within the summary screen

As deduced from the user interviews, most of the people do not rely on booking hotels online which makes ratings and reviews crucial in making a decision regarding selecting a hotel for the stay. While Expedia does a fairly good job of categorizing hotel reviews into “Recent”, “Favorable” and “Critical” (Fig. 2), the user reviews are presented verbatim which leads to long strings of text sometimes. It is one of the golden rules of user experience that users do not read long stretches of texts so it would be advisable for Expedia to incorporate something like Priceline (Appendix C.3). Priceline’s unique way of presenting favorable and critical portions of a review on the same page allows a user to make a quick decision regarding a hotel in two ways: positive and negative comments from the same user gives credibility to the review and do not reflect on the experience of one grumpy traveler who writes only negative thoughts which might be triggered by one bad experience. And secondly, the user does not have to do an extra interaction to switch between favorable and critical comments. The ratings and review section has always remained a point of debate and it will be worthwhile to delve into this aspect deeper. For our surveys, it is going to be one of our prime agenda to find out the target audience’s content or dissatisfaction with user reviews and then combine the results with this recommendation to suggest an effective rating/review feature that Expedia can incorporate directly into their app.

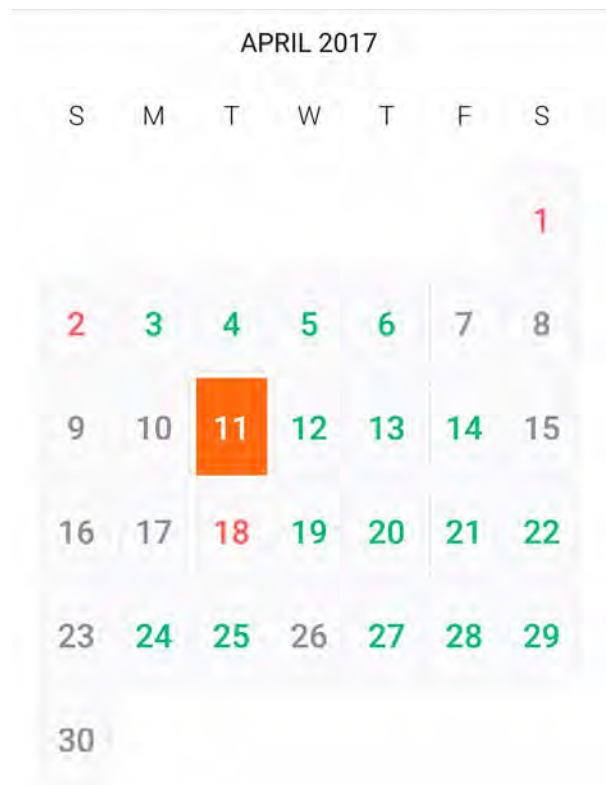


Fig. 2. Expedia - Segregation of reviews into Recent, Favorable and Critical

We also found that Expedia does not have a provision to suggest or show dates of travel round the actual dates that might be cheaper. Kayak, on the other hand, does a pretty good job for this by color coding the dates to reflect the relativity of the prices: green for prices below average and red for above average, as shown in Fig. 3. This simple feature lets a user save money and is one of the most popular features of Kayak (which is not even Expedia's direct comparator). Expedia can incorporate something similar and this can prove very helpful for users who are planning vacations and can afford to offset their trip schedule by 1 or 2 days.



Expedia's date selection



Kayak's date selection

Fig 3. Color coding of dates to inform users about flight prices above or below the average price

Recommendations

Below are some of the key recommendations that we conclude from our comparators:

1. **Improve the Bundles workflow**

The Bundles feature sets Expedia apart from its competitors but, as mentioned before, this feature is a mere pairing of the flight booking user flow and the hotel booking user flow. Expedia should sub-divide its flight booking flow and insert the hotel booking flow in between to make a user flow that maps to a traveler's mental model: fly there, stay there and come back. The section of hotel highly depends on the airport the user is flying to. Once this recommendation has been implemented, we believe that users will be more likely to book hotels through the Expedia app. We are planning to validate this in our surveys and usability tests.

2. Better progress bar

This recommendation stems from the situational awareness aspect of human behaviour. A progress bar lets the user know which step of the flow are they in and serves to provide the user a sense of control over the system. Knowing that the process is almost done (through a progress bar), the user would be more likely to complete the entire process. This is cleverly implemented by Cheapoair (Appendix C.2)

3. Improve the loading screen

The loading screen can be made interactive by providing useful information to the user/traveller pertaining to their destination. This recommendation has been drawn from StudentUniverse (Appendix C.1)

4. Summarize user reviews

The user reviews current implementation reflects some sort of aggregation but it can further improved by picking the most vital points in a single review and classifying them as "favorable" and "critical" and perhaps even color coding them so the user can quickly glance over them and make a quick decision regarding the hotel. The same is implemented by Priceline (Appendix C.3).

5. Suggest cheaper flight dates during trip date selection

This recommendation draws direct inspiration from Kayak wherein the dates are color coded to reflect which dates have relatively low prices for flights. Currently, Expedia does not have such a feature and will benefit significantly in terms of improving their users' experience by letting the user have an option to offset their travel even before selecting a flight or hotel. StudentUniverse has a similar feature called "Flexible dates" which does the same thing.

Discussion

In this section of comparative analysis, our focus is to benchmark the features of the products in travel industry and compare it with current available features on Expedia app. Our current findings help us to have a better understanding and position Expedia to the current market and make according suggestions later on.

Though at current stage for this class, there is one shortcoming in our findings that is the usability feature, we are unable to conduct more specific research (e.g. conduct surveys with users) in this assignment time frame to test and compare the comparators' application features. So, the current understanding of the listed usability features could be biased due to the subjective nature of the experiences.

Our next step is to conduct surveys of the comparators' app features with users if possible and consolidate the current findings of user behaviors and needs. We will conduct further studies including surveys, heuristic analysis and usability testing for us to better understand the users' behaviors and needs.

Conclusion

In summary, the comparative analysis helped us better understand the current features that are available in peer platforms and the strengths and shortcomings of different features. From 10 different peer applications evaluation, we have listed different findings and recommendations above. In our major findings of the competitor app features when comparing with Expedia, we found that the loading page interactive design, organized user review system and color coded price comparison are features that Expedia would consider in adoption, for better user experiences. We also have recommendations listed accordingly based on the findings of competitive analysis, which are improve bundle workflow, better progress bar, improve loading screen, summarize user reviews and suggest cheaper flight dates during trip date selection.

References

Pal, J. (2017, February 3). Comparative Analysis [PowerPoint Slides]. SI-622 Lecture conducted from Ann Arbor, Michigan. Retrieved February.

Appendix A

Appendix A.1

Comparators against binary attributes.

	Direct				Parallel
	Priceline	Student Universe	Yatra	Cheapoair	Costco
Login required	N	N	N	Y	N
Has social login	Y	Y	Y	Y	N
Ratings and reviews	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Flexibility of travel dates	N	Y	N	Y	Y
Sorting/filtering	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Pickup and dropoff	N	N	N	N	N
User profile	N	N	Y	Y	Y
Android counterpart	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y

Continued on next page.

	Indirect	Partial		Analogous	
	Kayak	Booking.com	Delta	Airbnb	Meetup
Login required	N	N	N	Y	Y
Has social login	N	Y	N	Y	Y
Ratings and reviews	N	Y	N	Y	N
Flexibility of travel dates	Y	Y	Y	Y	N/A
Sorting/filtering	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Pickup and dropoff	N	N	N	N	N/A
User profile	Y	N	Y	Y	N/A
Android counterpart	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y

Appendix A.2

Comparators against quantifiable attributes.

	Direct				Parallel
	Priceline	Student Universe	Yatra	Cheapoair	Costco
Maximum no. of interactions required to complete a booking	4	3	4	6	5
Minimum no. of fields required to fill to view results	4	4	5	7	4

	Indirect	Partial		Analogous	
	Kayak	Booking.com	Delta	Airbnb	Meetup
Maximum no. of interactions required to complete a booking	At least 7*	4	6	5	3
Minimum no. of fields required to fill to view results	4	4	4	3	3

* Varies on the vendor website Kayak redirects to.

Appendix A.3

Comparators against usability attributes.

	Direct				Parallel
	Priceline	Student Universe	Yatra	Cheapoair	Costco
Ratings/reviews	Rating and Reviews are all available. Very clearly marked and well organized.	Rating and Reviews are all available. Using TripAdvisor review system. Limited reviews shown on the page, will direct to TripAdvisor if need to see more.	Ratings and reviews are viewable on selection of hotels page and clickable for more details	For hotels, ratings (5 star) are visible on the results page itself	Only ratings are available. No reviews
Ease of access	Easy to access.	Easy to access but limited options in filter and sort.		Very good, minimal and intuitive interface	Average friendliness
Ease of modification of travel dates	Medium. Several steps for modification.	Easy to modify and well signified of travel details, just one tap on the top of the menu bar.		Option to choose Flexible feature which lets you choose series of dates	
Price comparison	Very straightforward.	Very straightforward.	easy comparison on the selection page	Yes!	Easy comparison on the packages page
Sort/filter option	Lot of options and visually appealing.	Less options than Expedia.	sorting of hotels is available	Sort via Price, Depart, Return time and Stops. Filter via Airline,	available through price

				Price, time, Stops and Airport	
Displaying inbound and outbound flights	Yes, showing on the menu bar	Yes, showing on the menu bar	yes, both flights are available on the same page	Yes!	no
Loading page	Very clear details (e.g. "Searching Departing Flights" with a progress bar)	Loading speed is slow. But well designed loading page with detailed searching information with "Travel Tips" feature that users can interact with in the mean time.	bad experience. Empty page with no information	Good, asks for location if location services is not enabled	not much details on the loading page

	Indirect	Partial		Analogous	
	Kayak	Booking.com	Delta	Airbnb	Meetup
Ratings/reviews	N.A.	Ratings are for each feature such a Comfort,Cleanliness, Location ,etc and then an average rating, also some pros and cons	No ratings or reviews	Ratings and reviews, both available.	No ratings or reviews
Ease of access	Pretty good, minimalistic interface	Clean, easy to understand interface	Very clear and easy to understand	Good	Basic searching, few options to sort, a little opaque
Ease of modification of travel dates	Takes back to the initial fields page instead of letting date changes in the	One press on the back button and you land up on the search page with all the	Have to redo your search to make changes, but it does save previously	Pretty good, the dates slide in from top, this serves as the summary page when	eAsy to change search parameters

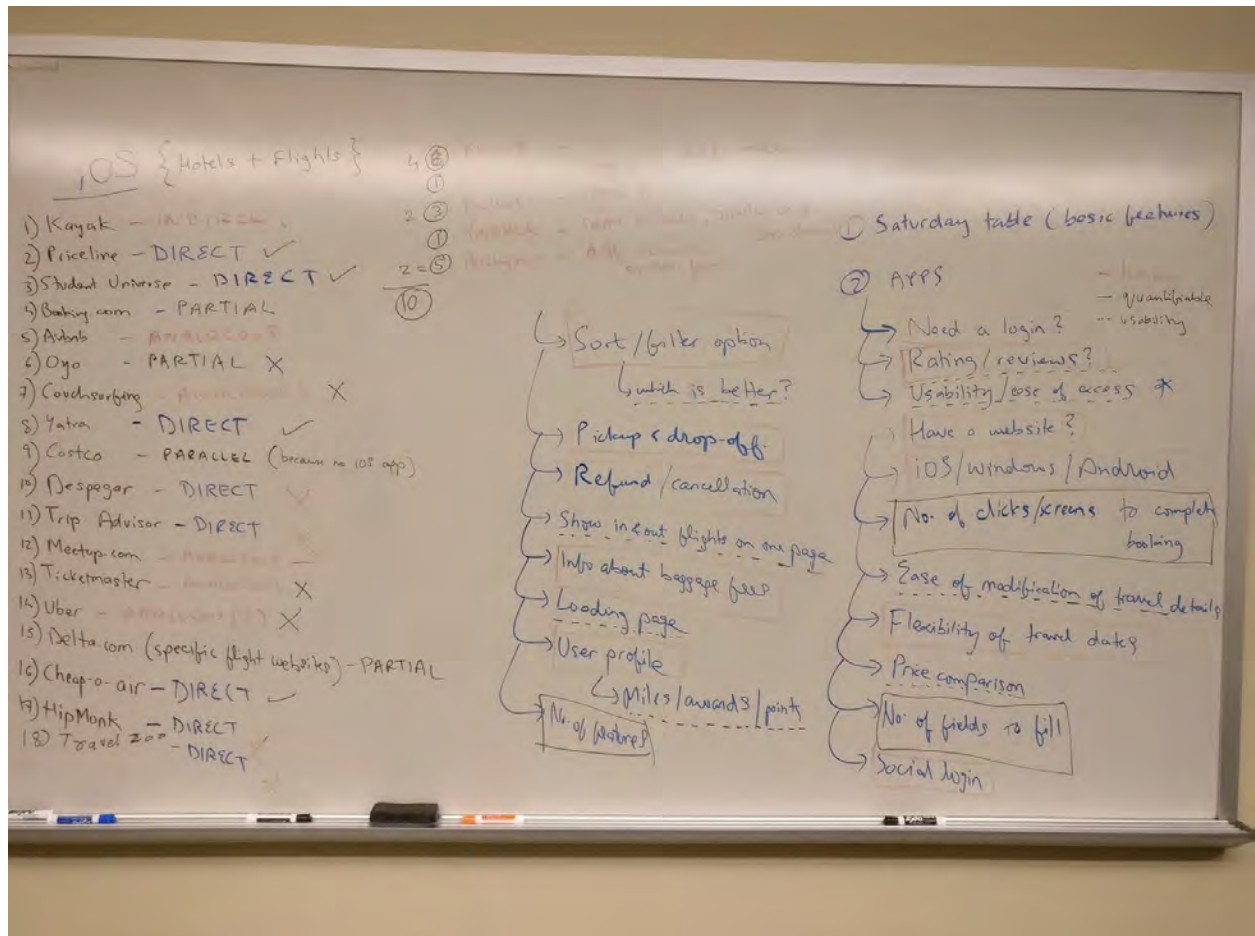
	same screen.	results of the search you had done	entered information	minimized too (show screenshot)	
Price comparison	Fairly straightforward	N/A	Very easy to compare	On one screen, can view only two prices so comparison is pretty limited	N/A
Sort/filter option	Lot of options and visually appealing but having the options on a separate page and then coming back to the results page makes the user feel that the results were not updated at all. (will word better - navdeep)	Sorting can be done via Popularity, ratings, deals, price	Can sort by price, times, class	Pretty neat. The button updates the no. of results available with the combination of filters selected.	Few options for sorting, but simple searching features
Displaying inbound and outbound flights	Available on the same page and consolidated price is displayed	N/A	You pick the flights separately, but are shown together after selection	N.A.	N/A
Loading page	not much details on the loading page	Too many prompts/ dialog boxes on the loading page	Fast speeds, advertises rewards card on screen	Simple loader	No loading screen

Appendix B

Appendix B.1

Brainstorming session resulting in:

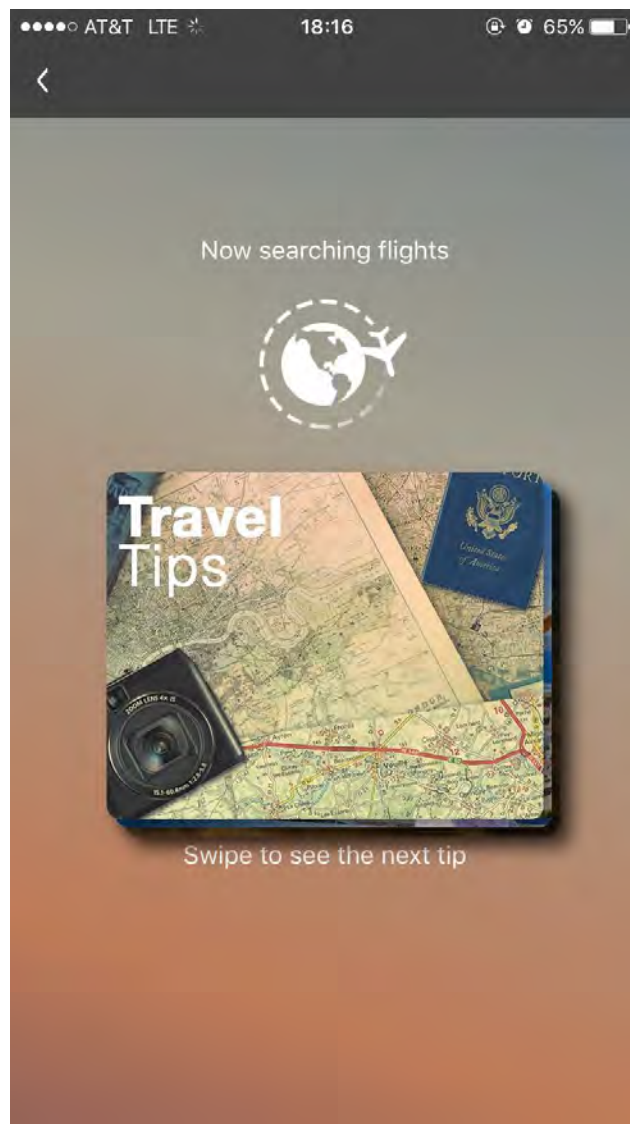
- Listing down significant comparators
- Eliminating insignificant/irrelevant comparators
- Finding attributes/factors for comparison
- Categorization of these attributes



Appendix C

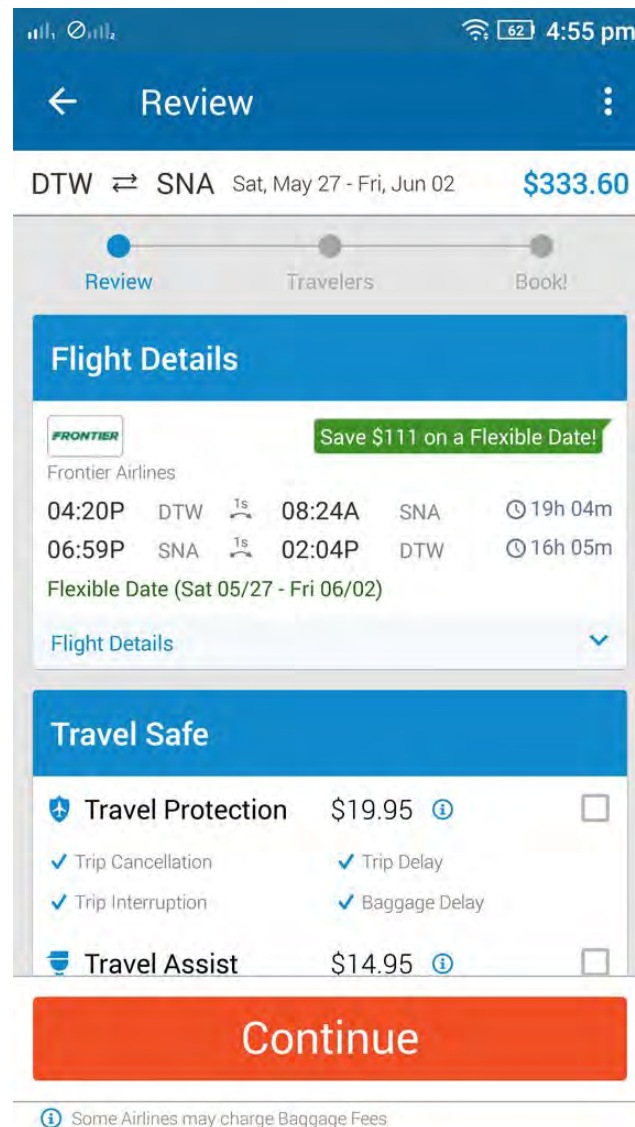
Appendix C.1

StudentUniverse iOS app screenshot showing an interactive loading screen.



Appendix C.2

Cheapoair screen showing the progress bar that acts as a source of situational awareness for the user.



Appendix C.3

Priceline screenshot showing summarize user reviews with proper color coding.

●●●●○ AT&T LTE17:51📶📶📶 72%🔋

<Reviews

Guest Score

(Based on a scale of 10)

8.9

Excellent

Staff

9.6

Cleanliness

9.4

Location

9.0

Reviews

(34 reviews are from verified Priceline.com guests)

7.0

Angela - Rockford, MI - Jul 4, 2016

● Friendly staff

● Slow wifi

10

Lisa - St. Joe, IN - Mar 24, 2016

● Everything was great.

● The hotel pool was being worked on for the next day. The kids were disappointed they could not swim bef...

10

Jeanette - Midland, MI - Feb 15, 2016

● The rooms were clean, neat, spacious and reasonably priced!

● Not one thing comes to mind.

Rooms from:

\$91 USD/night

Choose Room