



TRYMYUI
UX WARS CASE COMPETITION

STUDENT UNIVERSE & STA TRAVEL

TARAH HOLLAND
JORDYNN MCKNIGHT
ERIN TURNER
NICOLE MCEWAN



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Both StudentUniverse.com and STATravel.com are student-centered travel booking websites. Both websites provide flight, hotel and tour booking services for students who are planning for individual or group travel. Each website boasts cheap rates, discounts and deals for their target users. Both websites also allow users to find flights, hotels and tours from prominent navigation at the top of their homepages.

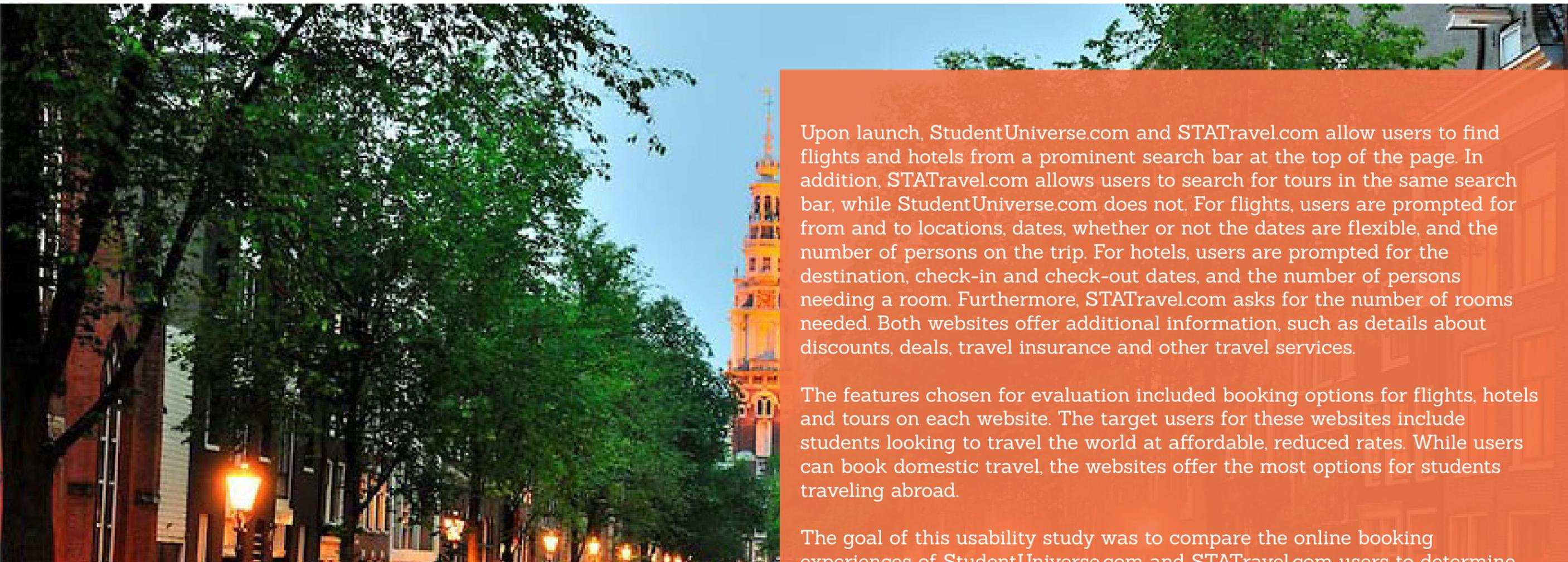
The purpose of this usability study was to compare the online booking experiences of StudentUniverse.com and STATravel.com users to determine the overall effectiveness of each website's design, the ease-of-use of booking features, and whether or not the flow or process of information on each website is efficient. Points of interest included whether or not participants could successfully book a flight from and to specified airports and within a determined budget, successfully book a hotel room within a determined budget and distance from the destination airport, locate hotel ratings, and book a tour in the destination city. To answer these research questions, a scenario was created to test users' ability to book a flight, hotel room and tour on both websites.

The scenario and task list, presented digitally via TryMyUI Usability Testing Services, asked participants to plan a seven-day trip to Phuket, Thailand, during March 18-28, 2016. Following an impression test of each website, participants needed to find a round trip flight departing from Raleigh-Durham International Airport (RDU) to Phuket International Airport (HKT) under \$1700, find a four or five star hotel within 30 miles of the airport for less than \$200 a night and book a tour during the trip to Phuket.

Prior to the start of the usability test, facilitators provided participants with instructions from a predetermined script to ensure a uniform experience for all. A total of eight participants were tested and each was administered a pre- and post-test questionnaire. TryMyUI Usability Testing Services was used to record screen captures of each user's clicks and audio of each user's verbal feedback during testing. Usable testing data was obtained from all eight participants.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Upon launch, StudentUniverse.com and STATravel.com allow users to find flights and hotels from a prominent search bar at the top of the page. In addition, STATravel.com allows users to search for tours in the same search bar, while StudentUniverse.com does not. For flights, users are prompted for from and to locations, dates, whether or not the dates are flexible, and the number of persons on the trip. For hotels, users are prompted for the destination, check-in and check-out dates, and the number of persons needing a room. Furthermore, STATravel.com asks for the number of rooms needed. Both websites offer additional information, such as details about discounts, deals, travel insurance and other travel services.

The features chosen for evaluation included booking options for flights, hotels and tours on each website. The target users for these websites include students looking to travel the world at affordable, reduced rates. While users can book domestic travel, the websites offer the most options for students traveling abroad.

The goal of this usability study was to compare the online booking experiences of StudentUniverse.com and STATravel.com users to determine the overall effectiveness of each website's design, the ease-of-use of booking features, and whether or not the flow or process of information on each website is efficient. Participants completed a pre-test questionnaire, then began the test by completing a visual impression test of the websites to gain a sense of their understanding of what the websites are about and what they offer. During the test, participants interacted with booking components for flights, hotels and tours, which included entering destination details, dates and other factors. These booking components are the core functions of both websites, therefore, their functionality, organization and effectiveness are critical to each website's ability to attain and retain users. After the test, participants completed a post-test questionnaire and rated their experiences with each task.

PURPOSE

Both StudentUniverse.com and STATravel.com are student-centered travel booking websites. Both websites provide flight, hotel and tour booking services for students who are planning for individual or group travel. Each website boasts cheap rates, discounts and deals for their target users. Both websites also allow users to create accounts, however, this is not necessary to utilize search features of the website.



METHODS

PARTICIPANTS. Test participants included eight users, all age 22, who had no prior experience using StudentUniverse.com or STATravel.com. Participants were selected via in-person requests. The entire group consisted of undergraduate and graduate college students, of which six were female and two were male. Under no segmentation criteria, four participants were selected to test StudentUniverse.com and the remaining four were selected to test STATravel.com.

Two participants had prior experience using StudentUniverse.com and/or STATravel.com. Six participants had previously used online booking/travel websites to plan travel, and all but one had traveled abroad 1-3 times in one year. All participants planned their travel online, half via third party websites and half via airline website. Individual flights booked in the past year by the eight participants varied from 0-6. All participants were interested in traveling abroad, and three had plans to study abroad.

According to Alexa.com, the average users of both StudentUniverse.com and STATravel.com are overwhelmingly college-educated females in the United States who access the website mostly at work, but also at home or school. Considering these demographics and the target user demographics outlined by each website, the participants of this usability test are among the intended audience for both StudentUniverse.com and STATravel.com. users ability to complete each booking task.

TASKS. Participants were introduced to TryMyUI Usability Testing Services, which was the online tool used to conduct the usability tests. Within the system, participants were presented with a scenario and five tasks, which included an impression test and reading the “frame of mind” or scenario out loud. The scenario was designed to test an individual user’s complete booking experience, from travel to activities in the destination. The following content was provided to each participant via TryMyUI:

Scenario

You are going on a spring break trip to Phuket, Thailand to explore the area on your own. Plan a seven day trip between March 18th-28th to Thailand. Leaving from the Raleigh-Durham Airport (RDU) to Phuket International Airport (HKT).

Tasks

1. Perform a short impression test.
2. Read the frame of mind scenario out loud.
3. Find a round trip flight from Raleigh Durham International airport to Phuket, Thailand under \$1700
4. Find a 4 or 5 star hotel within 30 miles of the airport for less than \$200 a night
5. Book a tour during your trip to Phuket, Thailand

The scenario and tasks were chosen to test the overall effectiveness of each website’s design and the ease-of use of booking features. Furthermore, the tasks were chosen to test whether the flow or process of information on each website is efficient. It was assumed that the variance in the organization of each website, specifically an abundance of information versus a simple structure, would greatly impact each users ability to complete each booking task.

FACILITIES. Participants were tested on Mac desktop and laptop computers in the Interactive Media Masters Program editing bays on the second floor of Elon University's Powell building. Testing facilitators remained in the room for the pre-test questionnaire, and observed testing and the post-test questionnaire through a glass wall from outside of the room.

Test Administrator Tools

The identities of test participants will remain confidential. In the report, participants are referred to by number rather than by name. The TryMyUI tool used the computer's webcam and microphone to record screen captures of each user's mouse movements and clicks and audio of each user's verbal feedback during testing. The system also included post-task questions, which asked participants if they were able to complete the task and how difficult they thought each task was. Pre- and post-test questionnaires were presented to participants in printed, physical form.

The pre-test questionnaire included 10 open- and closed-ended questions that centered on each participant's prior experience with online travel booking websites and their interest in traveling abroad and/or plans to travel abroad. Demographic questions regarding each participant's age and sex also were asked. The post-test questionnaire included 13 questions about each participant's experience booking on the website in which they tested. In addition to users rating their overall experience using the website and an open-ended question about what they felt were the most glaring difficulties or problems during their test, the remaining questions were presented using Likert scales, from 1-5. Please refer to the Appendices for the complete post-task,

PROCEDURES. Facilitators greeted participants and introduced themselves as participants arrived to the second floor of the Powell building. Participants were then taken to editing bays for privacy and to minimize distractions while testing. Next, facilitators used a predetermined script to relay the nature and purpose of the testing and to give instructions to each participant. Participants were then asked to read and sign consent forms, followed by the completion of the pre-test questionnaire.

Participants were encouraged to think out loud while completing tasks. Mouse movements and clicks and audio of each participant were recorded via TryMyUI throughout testing. Facilitators observed participants from outside of the editing bays, in case assistance was needed for any technical difficulties during testing. Upon completion of all tasks and post-test questions within the TryMyUI system, facilitators administered printed post-test questionnaires to each participant, leaving and observing from outside of the room. Finally, participants were thanked for their cooperation and dismissed without compensation.





STUDENT UNIVERSE RESULTS

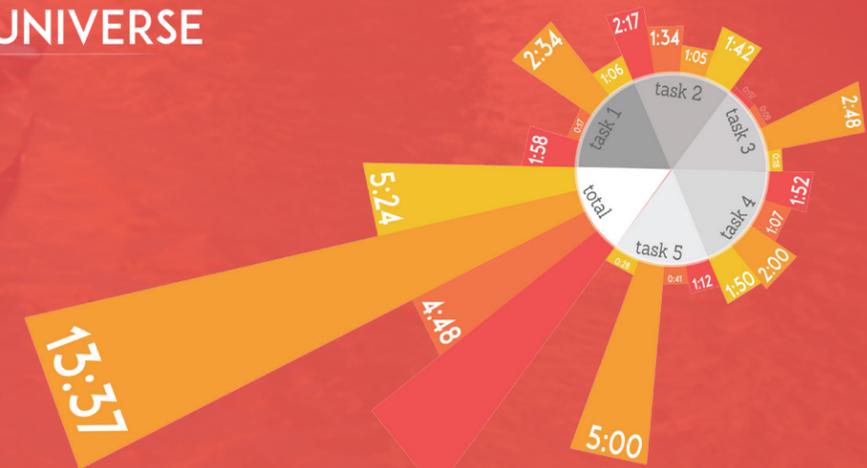
TASK COMPLETION RATE A total of four college-aged students tested the studentuniverse.com website. All participants were able to complete task 1, 75% of the participants were able to complete task 2 and 50% were able to complete task 3 during the usability test. Each participant made verbal or written notes about what they felt was unclear, confusing and/or frustrating during a particular part of their testing experience.

TASK TIME AVERAGE On average, it took 1 minute and 53 seconds for all four participants to complete task 1 “perform a short impression test”. For task 2 “read the frame of mind scenario out loud,” it took an average of 1 minute and 49 seconds for all participants to complete the task. When it came to task 3 “find a round trip flight from Raleigh Durham International airport to Phuket, Thailand under \$1700” it took an average of 41 seconds for all participants to complete this task. For task 4 “find a 4 or 5 star hotel within 30 miles of the airport for less than \$200 a night” it took 1 minutes and 52 seconds. Lastly, for task 5 “book a tour during your trip to Phuket, Thailand” it took an average of 5 minutes and 35 seconds for all participants to complete. Based off of the average it can be seen that most participants struggled more with task 5 the most during the usability test.

STUDENT UNIVERSE

- Participant 1
- Participant 2
- Participant 3
- Participant 4

- Task 1 - Impression Test
- Task 2 - Frame of Mind
- Task 3 - Book a Flight
- Task 4 - Book a Hotel
- Task 5 - Book a Tour
- Total Time on Test



SATISFACTION RESULTS. Overall, studentuniverse.com received a usability average of 68.75% with a letter grade of a “C”. Like STA Travel, for every test question each participants was able to rate their overall experience ranging from 1(indicating the task was very difficult to complete) to 7(indicating the task was very easy to complete). The below chart indicates the numeric grade that each participant gave the corresponding task based off of the above feedback scale. Aside from participants rating each task numerically, we also asked each participant to provide verbal or written feedback after each task or at the point of confusion.



PARTICIPANT COMMENTS

Participant 1 :

- “The worst thing about my experience were the pop-up windows. I hate that.”
 - “I would improve the color scheme/textual hierarchy of information.”
 - “I enjoyed the amount of photos on the landing page, offered some solid brand identity.”
- “Overall,I feel like overall design could be improved. Certain buttons/elements could be augmented so they’re easier to find.”

Participant 2:

- “The worst thing about my experience was not being familiarity with the website.”
- “I would not improve anything, I felt the website was fairly easy to navigate.”
- “I really enjoyed that the website was really visual, not just a standard website with a ton of external ads.”
- “Overall, a really cool website.”

Participant 3:

- “I hated how there was no alphabetical order. That was terrible. For a first time user I began to see that this site was organized but after seeing the lack of organization with the “country list” or “continent list” it just upset me.”
- “The appearance of the lists that are clearly not in alphabetical order.”
- “I like how professional it was! The feature that stood out to me the most was definitely how I was allowed to compare flights with leading competitors in flight booking.”
- “I think this site is great aside from the alphabetical order. Is this site real? If so I will be doing my travel booking on here. I just want to make sure that this is not just third party booking like “cheap-o-air” and I’m not able to actually be seated on a plane without my seat being secure.”

Participant 4:

- “Finding the hotel was hard because it didn’t connect to the finding the flight process, like when I am checking out buying my flight ticket I would of wanted to see hotel listing near the airport below my ticket purchase.”
- “I didn’t like how it connected me to an entirely new site when I looked for a tour, I felt like I had to learn an entirely new layout and site and that is confusing.”
- “The simplistic (for a travel site) layout and clear, obvious buttons (except the feedback button is tiny idk why).”
- “I would advise the owner of the site to: put as much energy as you did making the flight ticket finding and purchasing aspect, into the tour and hotel areas of the site. Those two aspects of the site should be of equal importance as the flight purchase aspect but it seems like when this site was created those were thought of as added perks and not created as thoroughly as the flight ticket part.”

ERROR RATE.

Participant 1

Error: During task 2 the participant accidentally pressed a “pop up” that generated during the test directing the participant to a third-party site

Participant 2

Error: During task 4 the participant felt the need to complete a Google search to find hotel rating because she failed to see this option on the actual site.

Error: During task 5 the participant had a hard time finding a tour when they searched by the full name of the destination using both the city and country.

Participant 3

Error: During task 5 the Participant had a hard time finding a tour when they searched by the full name of the destination using both the city and country.

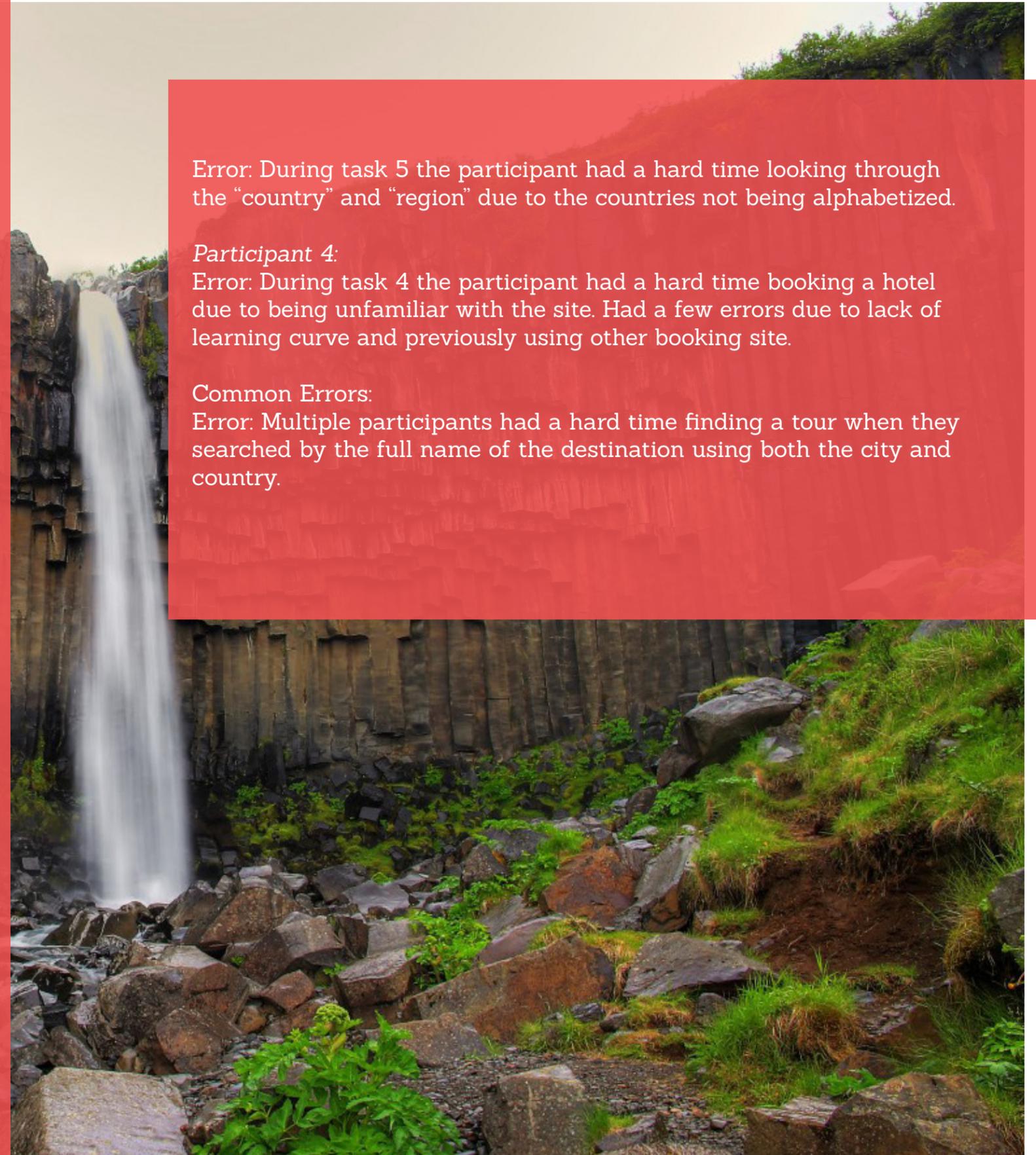
Error: During task 5 the participant had a hard time looking through the “country” and “region” due to the countries not being alphabetized.

Participant 4:

Error: During task 4 the participant had a hard time booking a hotel due to being unfamiliar with the site. Had a few errors due to lack of learning curve and previously using other booking site.

Common Errors:

Error: Multiple participants had a hard time finding a tour when they searched by the full name of the destination using both the city and country.



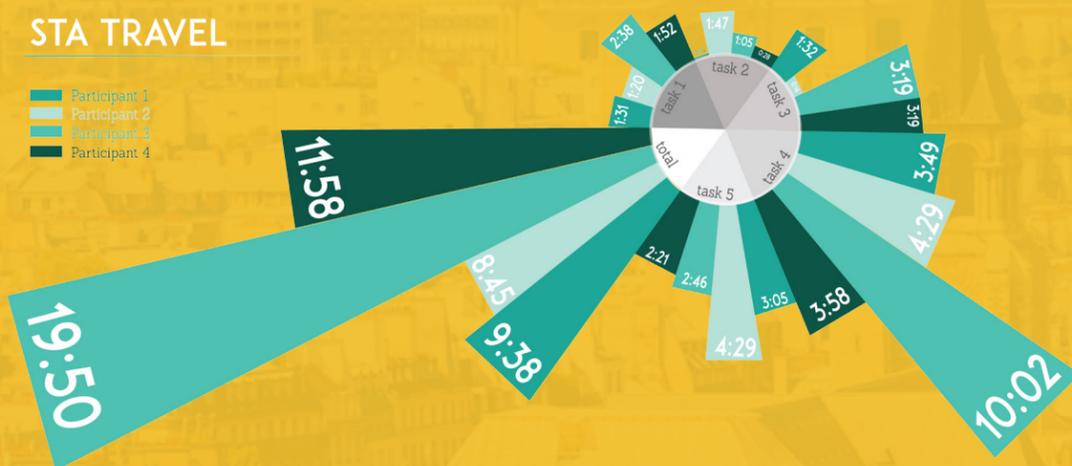
STA TRAVEL RESULTS

TASK COMPLETION RATE. A total of four college-aged students tested the statravel.com website. All participants were able to complete each test question presented during the usability test. Although each task was completed by all of the participants, every participant made either verbal or written notes about what they felt was unclear, confusing and/or frustrating during a particular part of their testing experience.

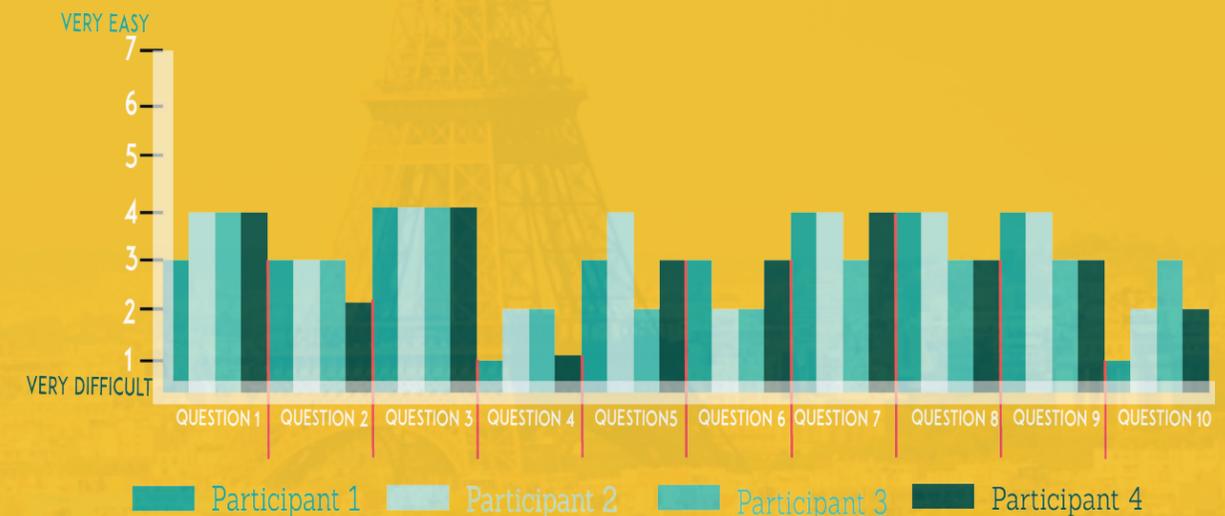
TASK TIME AVERAGE: On average, it took 1 minute and 50 seconds for all four participants to complete task 1 “perform a short impression test”. For task 2 “read the frame of mind scenario out loud,” it took an average of 0.75 seconds for all participants to complete the task. When it came to task 3 “find a round trip flight from Raleigh Durham International airport to Phuket, Thailand under \$1700” it took an average of 2 minutes and 24 seconds for all participants to complete this task. For task 4 “find a 4 or 5 star hotel within 30 miles of the airport for less than \$200 a night” it took 5 minutes and 34 seconds. Lastly, for task 5 “book a tour during your trip to Phuket, Thailand” it took an average of 2 minutes and 21 seconds for all participants to complete. Based off of the average it can be seen that most participants struggled more with task 4 and task 5 the most during the usability test. Coincidentally, these task generated the most comments from participants when it came to providing feedback.

STA TRAVEL

Participant 1
Participant 2
Participant 3
Participant 4



SATISFACTION RESULTS: Overall, statravel.com received a usability average of 64.38% with a letter grade of a “C”. For every test question each participants was able to rate their overall experience ranging from 1(indicating the task was very difficult to complete) to 7(indicating the task was very easy to complete). The below chart indicates the numeric grade that each participant gave the corresponding task based off of the above feedback scale. Aside from participants rating each task numerically, we also asked each participant to provide verbal or written feedback after each task or at the point of confusion. With this, many participants commented on the a wide variety of things from the speed of the website and usability functions such as booking a hotel. Coincidentally, the task that received the highest rating received little to no negative feedback. Whereas the task with the lowest numbers were not only consistent, but the comments were consistent as well.



PARTICIPANT COMMENTS

Participant 1

- “The load time while booking a flight and a hotel was horrible”
- “The drop down section for the hotels was a bit overwhelming”
- “The worst thing about my experience was booking the tour. It was very challenging. I didn’t know how to specify specifically where I was going in Thailand. The page was also very different from the flight and hotel pages.”
- “The website could be better marketed towards students. I didn’t really get that at first glance.”

- “I liked the simplicity of it. The site didn’t have a lot of extra elements in the way.”
- “The load time was horrible. It took too long. I would definitely try another site before this one.”

Participant 2:

- There were a lot of things going on while I was using the site”
- “I found it hard to filter through the hotel section of the site”
- “It was hard to filter through when trying to find a hotel. You had to click in a certain area in order to receive the correct search.”
- “There was a lot of things going on. It was a little distracting looking at everything and then reminding myself of the task at hand.”
- “I liked how the website had multiple tabs at the navigation. It was super easy to select what you were looking for. However, the search bar needs some work because what I was looking for did not show up but then when I clicked on a different part of the website it did show up.”
- “I think the website would be more efficient if the search bar was updated to find all the cities though I know that is a lot to ask for sometimes.”
- “I really liked how the ONE website allowed me to search for THREE different things that relate to traveling abroad where usually I feel like I would have to book my flight through one site, hotels through another, tours through another, etc.”

Participant 3:

- “The worst thing about my experience was probably navigating from the flight page to the hotel page. I was thinking that it was going to be a combined experience, so I just assumed there was going to be a “book a hotel” link right from the flight landing page.”
- “Making it clear what other selections I had made in the past could have been improved. I don’t believe there was a “cart” or anything that I could refer back to.”

- “It was well-designed given the amount of information on the pages. I liked how based on what you clicked (find hotel, flight, etc.) the “booking” section was right in the middle of the page. Travel sites are tough just because of the amount of info.”
- “The website was solid and welcoming, good first impression which is super important.”

Participant 4:

- “Navigating from flight to hotel was hard to do.”
- “I didn’t like how once I had my flight selected I had to go all the way back to the home screen to search for hotels and tours around there.”
- “It would be awesome if after selecting the flight different options for hotels and things to book to do in the area would then show up.”
- “I realize that this system is likely having to reach out to other servers and things to pull information relating to flight and hotel prices but it still seems like it takes too long. I, as someone in this program who understands these things was fine waiting for it but other, less patient people, might not be.”

Repeating Comments

- “Hard time differentiating between “Adult” or “Student” option when selecting a flight.
- “long waiting time throughout the website”
- “There are items on the site i.e. finding a location that I feel can be simplified”

ERROR RATE:

Participant 1:

Error: During task 3, the participant was asked to find a 4 or 5 hotel within 30 miles of the airport. The participant clicked on the Hotel/Hostel link in the navigation page which led her to the hotel booking page. While on the page the participant was asked "Where would you like to go"

Error: During task 4 the participant selected "adult" when finding a hotel but chose "student" when booking a hotel.

Participant 2

Error: During task 4 the participant entered the hotel abbreviation rather than typing her desired city when booking a hotel.

Error: During task 5 the participant had a hard time finding a tour because she was unable to locate an area on the page where she could select and/or enter her desired city.

Participant 3:

Error : During task 3 the participant had a hard time deciphering between being a "student", "under 26" or being an "adult". Due to this the participant select two different options "student" and "under 26" which caused price confusion when booking a flight. Since the participant chose two different options the website displayed prices for two people.

Participant 4:

Error: During task 4 the participant had a hard time figuring out how to book a hotel room. The participant found his own error during this process which was: He selected his flight and expected to see a link where he would be able to find a hotel, but that was not the case.

Error: During task 5 the participant looked at the Google map to see his proximity to the airport, but realized while on Google map that the information he wanted to find was not accessible on the map. He ended up guessing his proximity to move forward with the task.

Common Errors:

Two out of four of the participants did not select the "student" option when booking a flight.

All participants showed frustration and/or confusion while trying booking a hotel room after booking a flight.

Three out of four of the participants verbalized confusion while booking a tour at some point during the task.





FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

STUDENT UNIVERSE SITE. Student Universe's current site is seen as professional, fun, and geared toward the student traveler, but our study shows that the lack of credibility, flow of information, and information hierarchy loses users through the purchasing process.

Results from 75% of users stated that credibility was not established initially. This can be reversed by eliminating the new window for price comparison with sites like "Priceline" and making it a new page within the current site. Users also noted that the comparison sites tended to load faster than the host site, Student Universe, diminishing credibility there as well.

The navigation design of the interface guides users through various parts of the site with a specific order of action. Users expressed frustration navigating from the flight page to both the hotel and tours pages. They felt that they should be walked through from step to step.

In this case, booking a hotel should be clearly highlighted as the next thing to do after selecting a flight and the option of a tour should follow. When searching for a location users often got misdirected when inputting both the city and country. The search database didn't recognize both, but that was not communicated to the users. Some users unknowingly spelled the location wrong and couldn't find results. These minor problems can be fixed by using an auto-fill search bar that guesses the input of the user to avoid spelling errors and eliminate confusion.

On the tours page some users noticed an interface change while others did not. The changed interface suggests a completely new site forcing users to take time and figure out if this site is credible and how to use the site to continue their task. Once on this new site users cannot navigate back to the newer site design and must use a new browser to get to other parts of the site. To eliminate this, the tours page can be designed just as the other parts of the site and coded to work in tandem with the other pages. Another point of frustration was with the order of various lists found on the tour page. Users commented that the country and dates lists found on the left navigation bar was not in any apparent alphabetical or chronological order and seemed unorganized and unprofessional.

By streamlining the design of this page and arranging information in a specific order, Student Universe can gain credibility and users can easily use the site as intended



STA TRAVEL SITE. STA Travel's current site is seen as casual, clear, and welcoming, but our study shows that the primary issue with the site was the flow of information throughout the purchasing process. Many of these issues were due to inconsistencies with design and unclear guidelines. One major issue was on the flight page when users were asked to select if they were an adult, student or under 26. Many users noticed that this question was not all-inclusive and chose more than one option, thus creating an error on the system later that attempted to book for more than one person. A common suggestion was an inclusion of a "cart" function that saved the flight information making it possible for users to move from the flight page to the hotel page without losing their flight information. Minor recommendations from users were to see an exact number of days once the travel time was chosen on the calendar. Another point of frustration was pop-ups experienced by one user, slow loading times that can easily be adjusted through web development.





POINTS OF COMPARISON

Both STA Travel and Student Universe are both seen as fun and welcoming sites geared towards the student traveler. While Student Universe's site struggles to establish credibility with some issues in information hierarchy, both sites can improve the flow of information from one page to the next. Interlacing design interfaces and concepts from page to page helps the user smoothly through the purchasing process without losing focus and getting frustrated. Both sites can achieve this seamless flow by linking to the next "step" or page after each task is completed. For example, after one selects a flight there should be a link to book a hotel in close proximity to the flight confirmation button. Overall, both sites have a strong foundation for a successful student centered booking site that impressed and encouraged the users to use the site in the future.

