

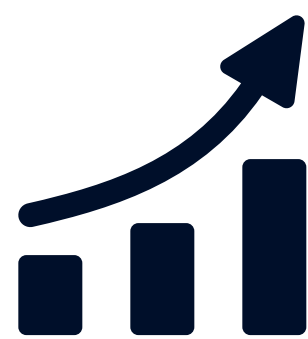
British Airways User Research

Caleb Monk – MPS in UX Design

Design Research Feasibility with Professor
Lauren Schaefer — May 6, 2026

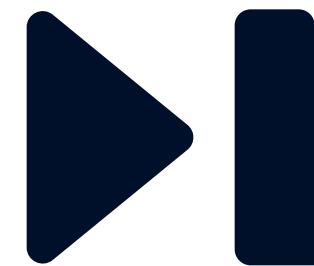


Executive Summary



BA is Looking to Increase Add-ons & Upgrades

British Airways is currently undergoing a transformational period. Improving clarity and increasing add-on/upgrades, while retaining their strong brand presence, is key to that strategy



Major – Most Users Miss an Immediate Upgrade

The landing page is most customers' first stop on ba.com. Users are skipping the autofilled Travel Class field, one of BA's first upsell moments in the booking flow.



Major – Users Are Spending a Long Time Booking

While booking their flights, users are spending more time searching for information than evaluating their booking options. Only 1 of 5 users was able to complete their outbound booking in under 45 seconds



Minor – Extra Baggage Terminology Disrupts the Booking Flow

Baggage terminology was not standardized and confused multiple users. 2 of 4 confused users left the Extras page/step searching for additional explanation

Research Goals

- **Identify** friction points in key add-on and upgrade steps for long-haul flyers
- **Discover** and give recommendations so British Airways can increase clarity and upgrade conversion
- **Enhance** the usability and overall booking process for British Airways customers

Participants & Methods

Behavior

Must have booked at least 1 flight online within the last 2 years and at least 1 long-haul flight (7+ hours) within the last 2 years

Demographics

Middle to High Income Adults (household annual income £40,000–£85,000 or \$62,000–\$125,000); ages 25–65; mix of genders

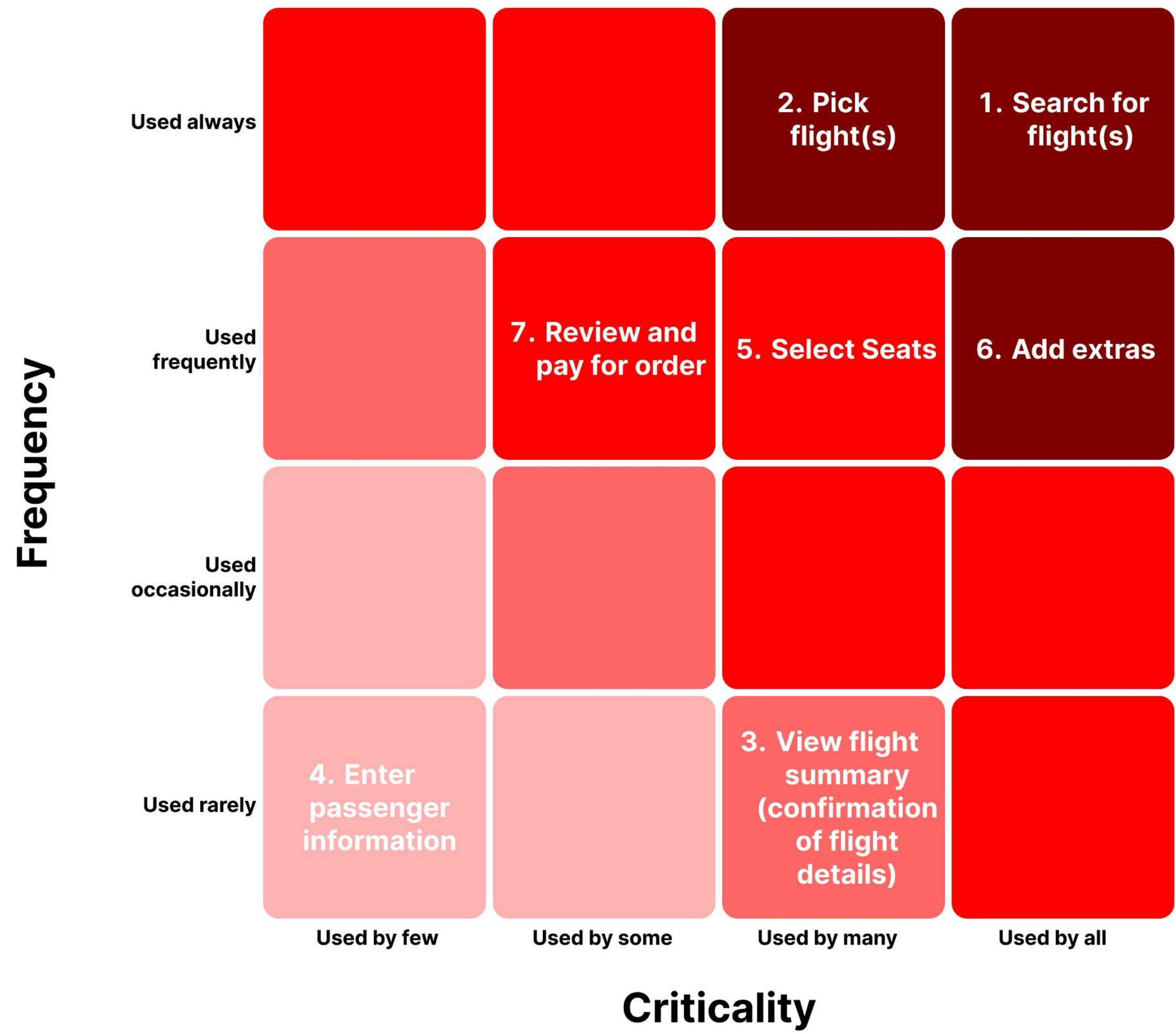
Exclusions

Participants do not currently work in or have ever worked in the travel industry

Participant Criteria

BA Red Routes

Based on hierarchical and cognitive task analysis, **searching for flights**, **choosing flights**, and **adding extras** during the extras step were mandatory or near-mandatory steps the user had to go through to complete their booking and were identified as **key add-on/upgrade steps**



Participant	Test Type	Participant Source	Test Date
P1	Unmoderated (self-recruited)	Extended family	April 7, 2026
P2	Unmoderated (self-recruited)	Extended family - outside of desired participant segment, last long haul booking 3 years ago (desired <2 years)	April 8, 2026
P3	Unmoderated (Userbrain)	Userbrain	April 12, 2026
P4	Unmoderated (Userbrain)	Userbrain	April 12, 2026
P5	Moderated (self- recruited)	Userinterviews	April 14, 2026
P6	Moderated (self- recruited)	Userinterviews	April 15, 2026

6 Participants Usability Sessions — 3 Tasks

What Went Right

WHAT WENT RIGHT

The Good

Safe

No matter the hiccups, most users were able to successfully complete their booking

Confident

Even users who experienced challenges throughout their booking process felt confident their booking choices

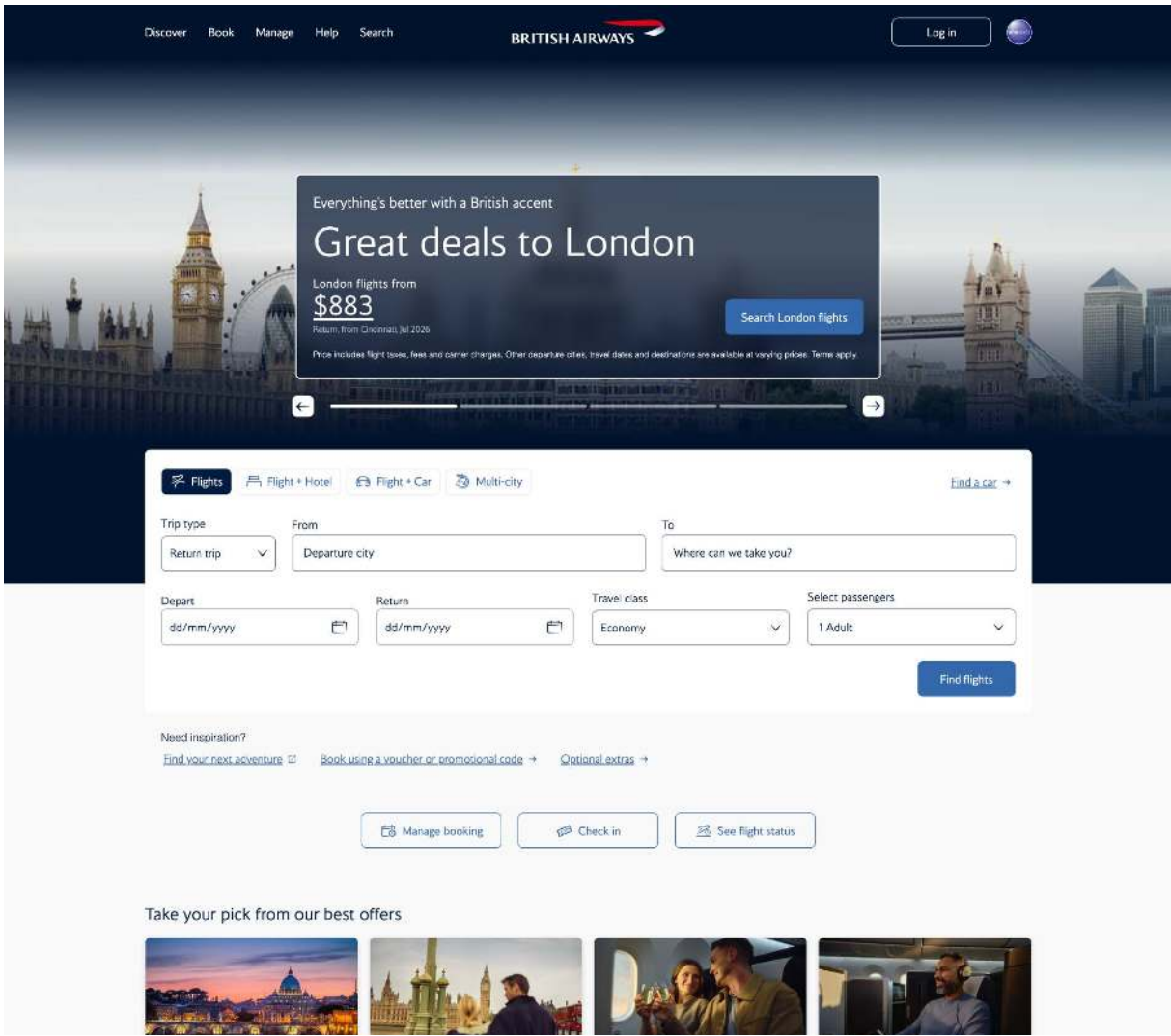
Premium

Website offers a high visual fidelity vs competitor sites. BA offers all customers a premium brand experience whether at an airport lounge or booking their next flight

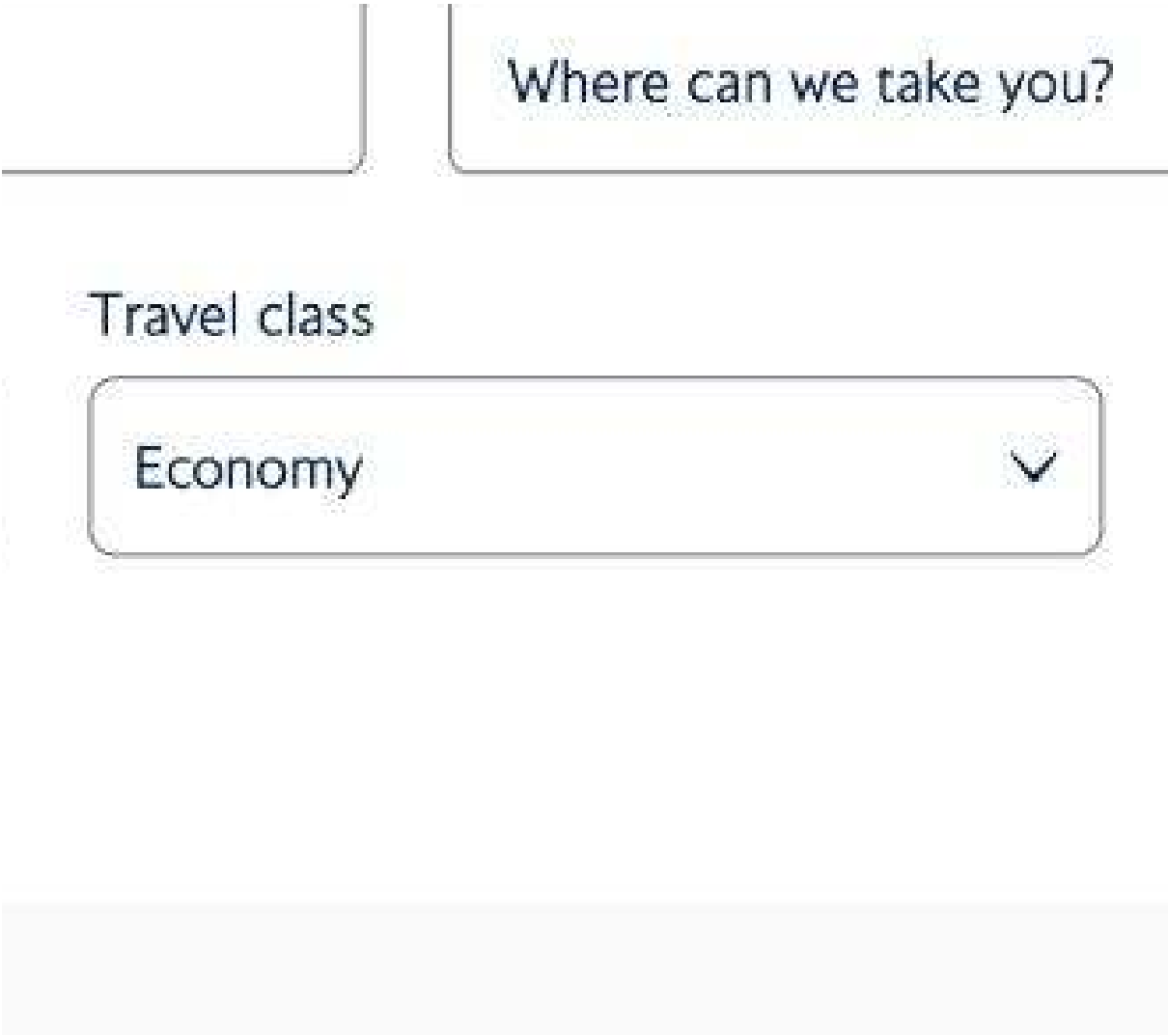
What Went Wrong

WHAT WENT WRONG

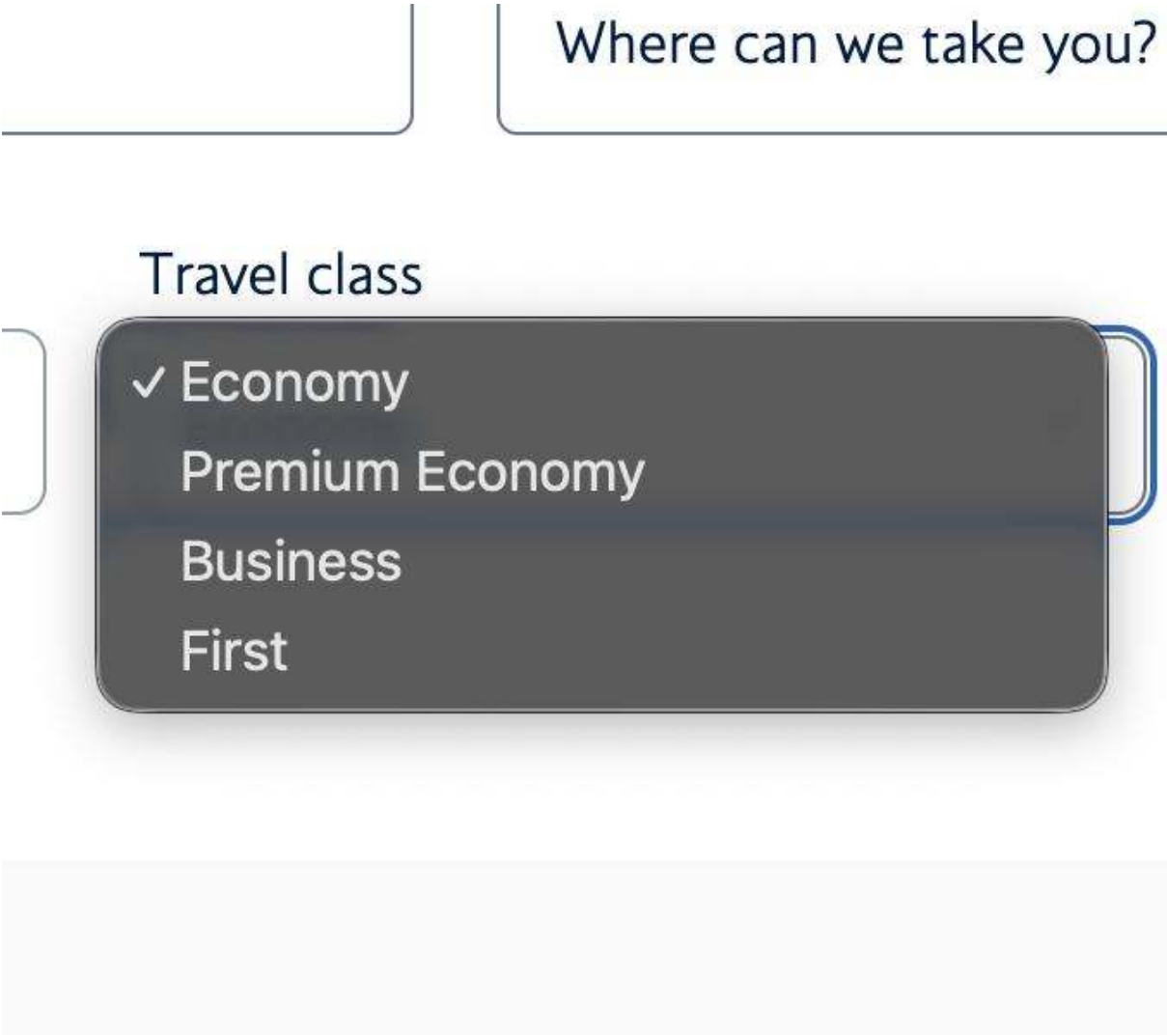
Landing Page: What’s a Travel Class?



The **travel class field** on the landing page is **one of the first upgrade steps** in the booking flow and is **overlooked by most users**



4 of 6 participants did not evaluate travel class when booking



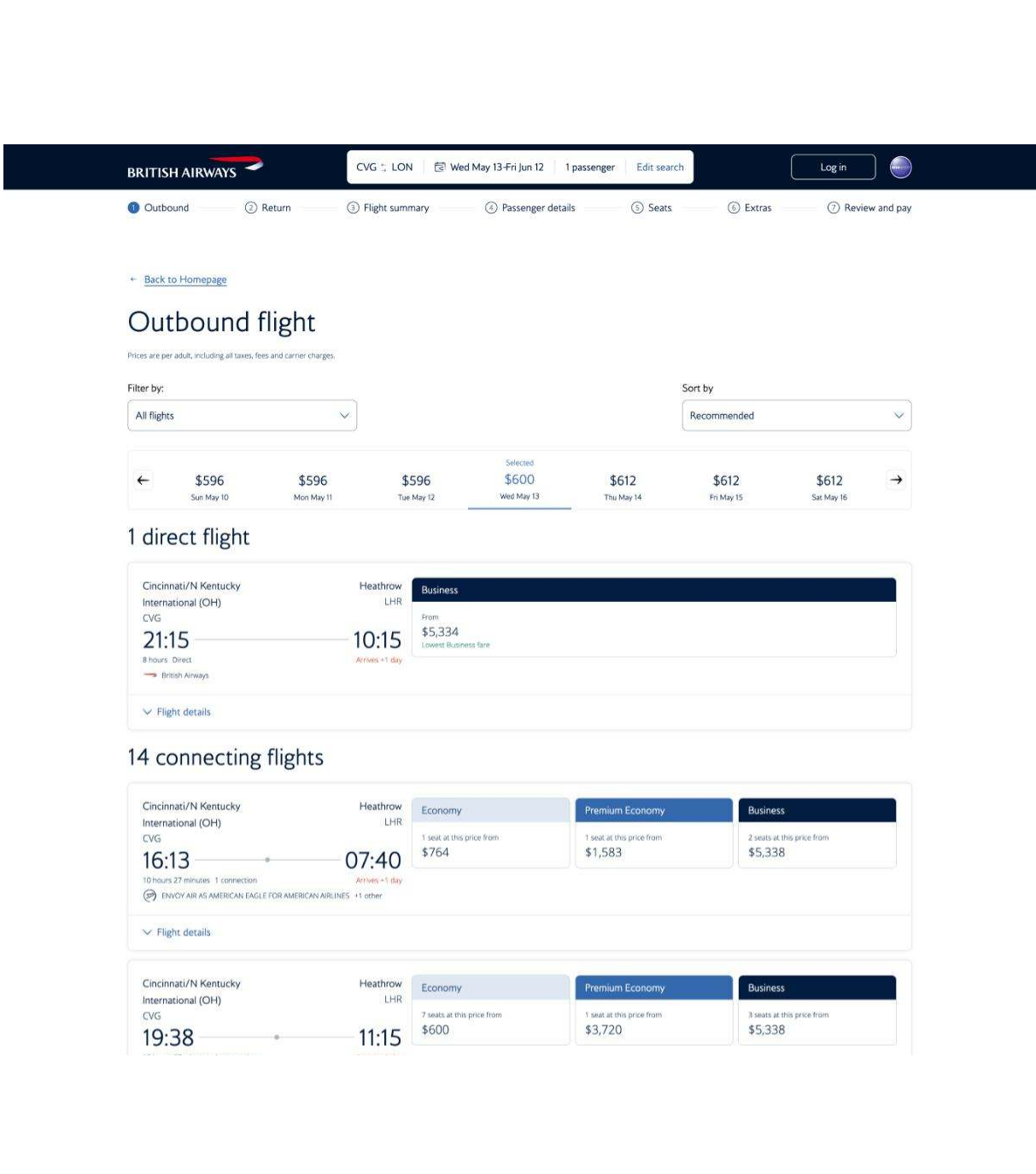
The field is **autofilled by default**, resulting in users **accepting the default fare without considering upgrading**

*“I guess it would be long haul **without me having to put anything else in**”*

– Participant 3

WHAT WENT WRONG

Booking: The Hunt for Information



Users **expect the booking information** to be **presented immediately**, without having to search for it

Only **1 of 5 users** completed the outbound booking in **under 45 seconds** (average: 72). Most users were hunting for information they expected to be presented up front

Economy	Premium Economy	Business
1 seat at this price from \$764	1 seat at this price from \$1,583	2 seats at this price from \$5,338

Business \$5,338 Per adult	Business Flex \$5,588 Per adult	Business Fully-Flex \$9,088 Per adult
Bags ✓ 1 handbag & 1 cabin bag ✓ 2 checked bags (32kg / 70lb) Seats ✓ Free seat selection 24 hours before departure Changes and refunds ✓ No change fee, pay for fare difference only ✗ Non-refundable	Bags ✓ 1 handbag & 1 cabin bag ✓ 2 checked bags (32kg / 70lb) Seats ✓ Free seat selection from the time of booking Changes and refunds ✓ No change fee, pay for fare difference only ✓ Fully refundable before departure	Bags ✓ 1 handbag & 1 cabin bag ✓ 2 checked bags (32kg / 70lb) Seats ✓ Free seat selection from the time of booking Changes and refunds ✓ No change fee, pay for fare difference only ✓ Fully refundable at any time
Select	Select	Select

This information only applies to your flight from Chicago to London.

Flight details			
✈ Cincinnati to Chicago 1 hour 38 minutes			
Departs:	Wednesday, May 13, 2026	Arrives:	Wednesday, May 13
Cincinnati/N Kentucky International (OH)	19:38	O'Hare International (IL)	20:16
REPUBLIC AIRWAYS AS AMERICAN EAGLE FOR AMERICAN AIRLINES • BA 2463 • EMBRAER 175			
✈ 0 hours 59 minutes connection In O'Hare International (IL)			
✈ Chicago to London 8 hours			

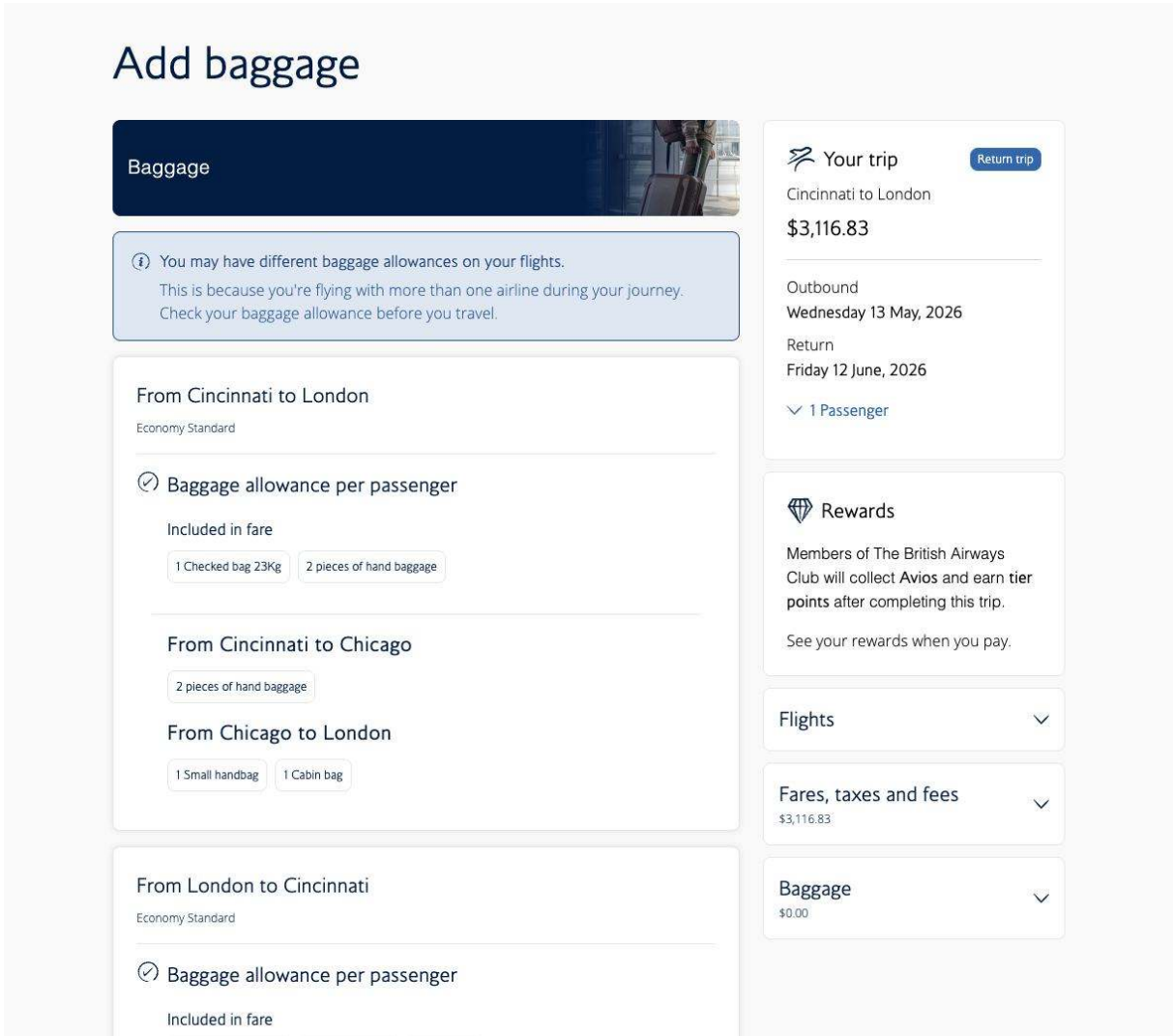
Users needing to **search for information** is **increasing booking time** and **risking abandonment**

“What is the difference between premium economy and business? **I'm not sure** what kind of option they're adding if I choose business class over economy.”

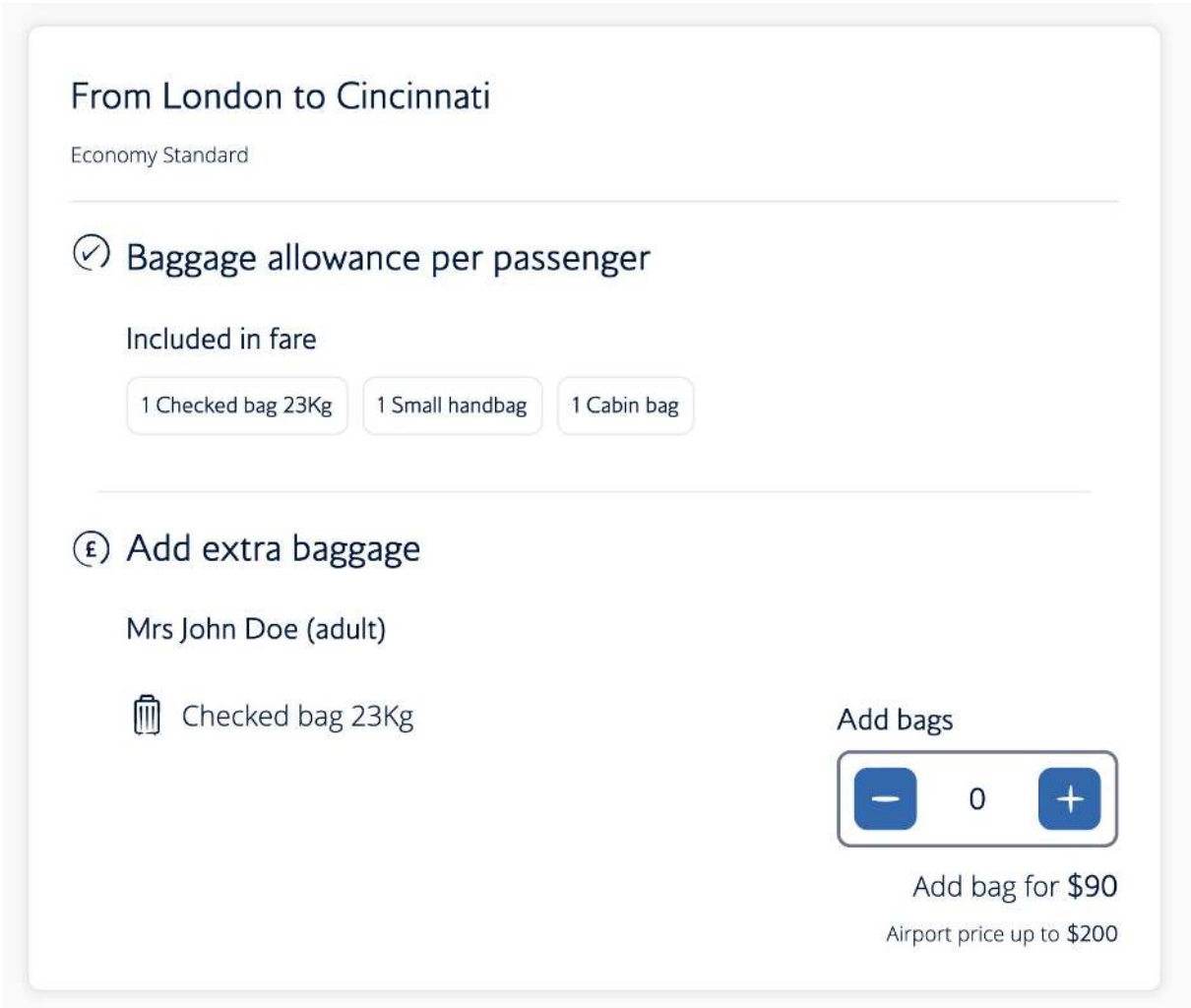
– Participant 4

WHAT WENT WRONG

Extras: Time to Leave



Baggage information presentation display is currently **dependent on the flight(s)** chosen



Due to **inconsistent** and **sparse information** presented on this page, users were **forced to backtrack** and/or **leave the page searching for clarifications** about the information already on the page

From Cincinnati to Chicago

2 pieces of hand baggage

From Chicago to London

1 Small handbag

1 Cabin bag

2 of 4 participants **left** this part of the booking process to find more information about the baggage allowances; leaving the booking process **risks abandonment**

*“I would prefer to see the extras before I go ahead and put my information.
Definitely disappointing.”*

– Participant 4

Recommendations & Priorities

RECOMMENDATIONS

Key Priorities

P1 — Major (Quickest Win)

Travel Class Awareness

Frequency: High
Severity: High
Effort: Low

P1 — Major

Booking Information Presentation

Frequency: High
Severity: High
Effort: Medium

P2 — Minor

Extras Verbiage & Mental Models

Frequency: Medium
Severity: Medium
Effort: Medium

RECOMMENDATIONS

Major (Quickest Win) – Landing Page

What's a Travel Class?

I recommend **increasing the awareness of the travel class field** on the landing page because we found that due to the field being autofilled **4 of 6 users skipped** the field and didn't evaluate any fare upgrades, defaulting to the cheapest fare, Economy, and losing the potential upgrade

The field **autofills to Economy** with no signals, so skipping it locks in the cheapest cabin by default. The upgrade fares do show up on the next screen, but since Economy is already selected, most users moved past the fare upgrades without comparing them.

This will help us see more fare upgrades on the landing page, which will help British Airways with their goal of achieving **more paid upgrades**

"It's a long flight, it'd be quite expensive. I'll go, not the lowest, I'll go premium economy."

– Participant 3

RECOMMENDATIONS

Major – Booking Page

The Hunt for Information

I recommend **simplifying the booking page** because we found users expect booking information to be presented immediately

This will help us see a quicker booking experience, which will help British Airways with their goal of **reducing friction in long-haul bookings**

Competitors like **KLM** have easier to scan tier cards with clearer taxonomies. BA should consider simplifying their own taxonomy and tier cards, following similar best practices

“I feel like it’s a lot of confusion if someone is not really sure which option to choose, it would definitely be a lot of work”

– Participant 4

RECOMMENDATIONS

Minor – Extras Step

Time to Leave

I recommend keeping the explanatory information and standardizing the add-on baggage verbiage on the Extras page because we found **2 of 4 participants left the page** searching for baggage definitions, **risking abandonment**

Keeping the users in the booking flow will help us see fewer exits from the Extras page and a higher baggage add-on rate, which will help British Airways with their goal of **increasing paid add-ons**

“It tells me that I have two check bags, a small handbag, a cabin bag, and two pieces of hand bags.

Which I have no idea what the difference between [1 small handbag and 1 cabin bag] and [2 pieces of hand baggages] is”

– Participant 5

RECOMMENDATIONS

Additionally Notable

80% Confidence Gap

The confidence gap current British Airways users are experiencing is real. **Across all tasks 80% of participants who failed the task were confident in their choices**

The Takeaway

High false confidence creates 'silent failures.' Users believe they've made the best choice when they've actually just accepted the default. This is likely suppressing upgrade conversions significantly.

Reflection & References

Hindsight 20/20

Research Reflection

Recruiting is hard and expensive

Recruiting is one of the more difficult parts of research. Unable to self-recruit moderated participants, I had to go with my Plan B: UserInterviews.

Memory gap

During my pilot tests, I struggled to moderate, take notes, and remember everything, so I modified my script to include everything I would need to remember and started short-handing in my daily life for practice.

Paper to digital

I had issues translating my paper usability test scenarios into the unmoderated format UserBrain format. I learned both UserBrain and UserInterviews during this research.

Take breaks

Research for my other course hit the same timeline as this research, which led to burnout at various points in my research. So learning to take care of myself a bit more and giving myself scheduled breaks is on the agenda for next time.

References & Sources

Testing platform: UserBrain — userbrain.com

Recruitment platform: User Interviews — userinterviews.com

Various methodology references: Nielsen Norman Group — nngroup.com

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easyJet — easyjet.com (accessed April 2026)

KLM Royal Dutch Airlines — klm.com (accessed April 2026)

United Airlines — united.com (accessed April 2026)

More References & Sources

Claude (Various Models), Anthropic — claude.ai — used for research planning, draft review, and project organization

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Sustainable aviation fuel transformation: British Airways Media Centre — mediacentre.britishairways.com/pressrelease/details/13810 (accessed May 2026)

London landing fees context: ShermansTravel — shermanstravel.com/advice/what-are-air-landing-fees-london-why-theyre-getting-higher (accessed May 2026)

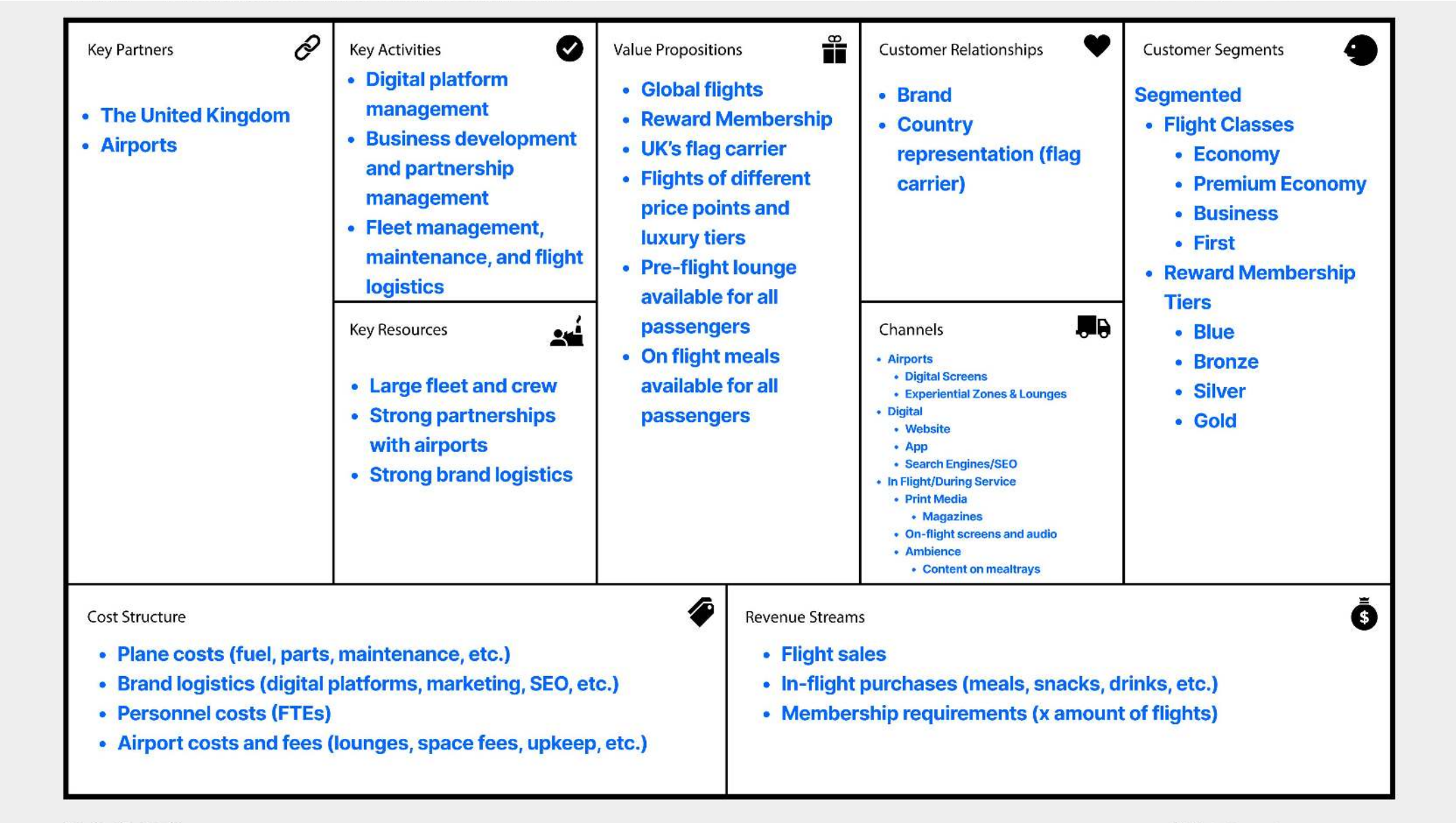
Questions?

Appendix

Diagrams and any additional information for the research that was not used in the main deck

APPENDIX

Business Model Canvas



British Airways Business Model Canvas

Before diving into competitor sites and analysis, I needed to better understand BA themselves as a business. After conducting extensive secondary research I was able to put together this canvas outlining how British Airways operates

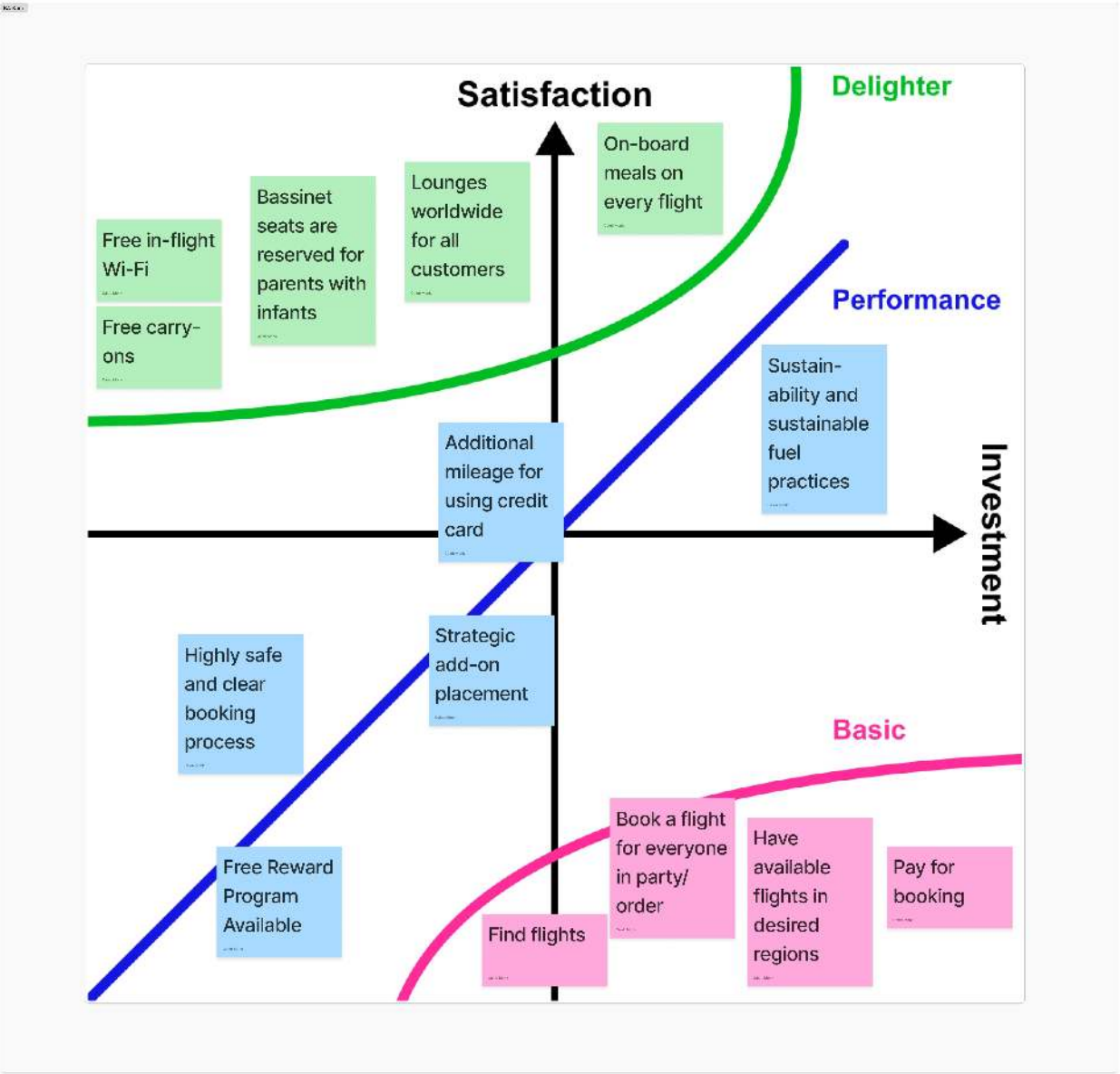
APPENDIX

Competitive Analysis

British Airways SWOT	
Strengths - Strong and strategic paid upgrades and add-ons presence throughout booking process - Clear error handling throughout the booking process - Minimized error points throughout the booking process; overall very safe - Only one payment method - Fleshed out error handling	Weaknesses - Differences in fare tiers is not abundantly clear - Low amount of mental models used for upgrades and add-ons - Very long booking pages with lots of text - Currency stays in Euros even when booking from another region
Opportunities - Safe payment connectors (Apple/ Google Pay, PayPal, etc.) - Page simplification - Increased add-on and upgrade paths available at seat selection - Always available chat support - Parallel add-on prompting for return flights	Threats - Smaller and cheaper growing regional competitor becoming an increasing threat to British Airways despite more difficult user experience - Other major players have simpler (less steps) booking experiences

SWOT

Overall British Airways offers a strong booking experience, but has clear room for improvement.



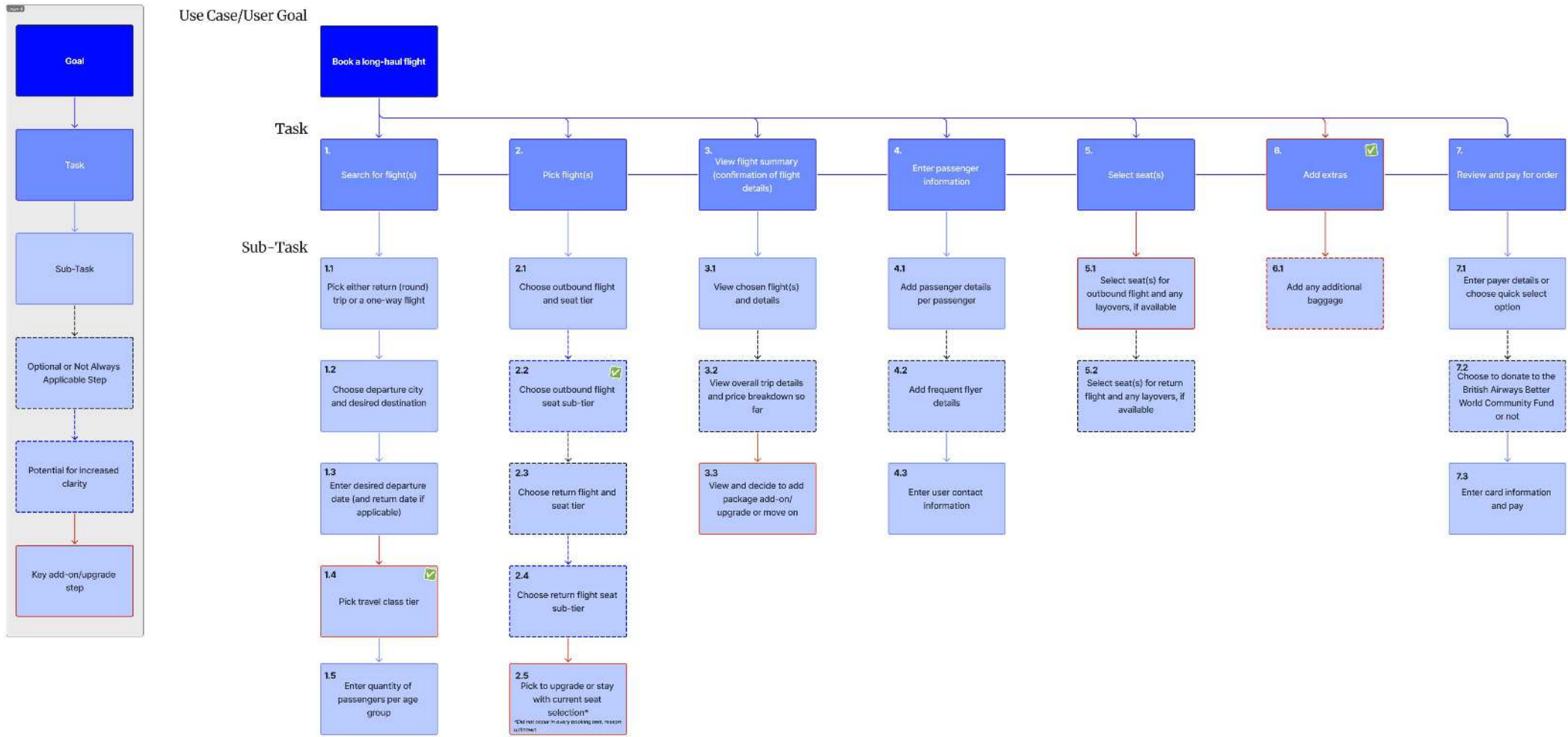
Kano

British Airways offers a premium experience to all customers worldwide by including certain add-ons as standard, what competitors charge for.

APPENDIX

HTA & CTA

Hierarchical Task Analysis (HTA)



Hierarchical Task Analysis (HTA)

The HTA is a way to view the entire booking process and flow. This helped identify key add-on/upgrade moments throughout the process

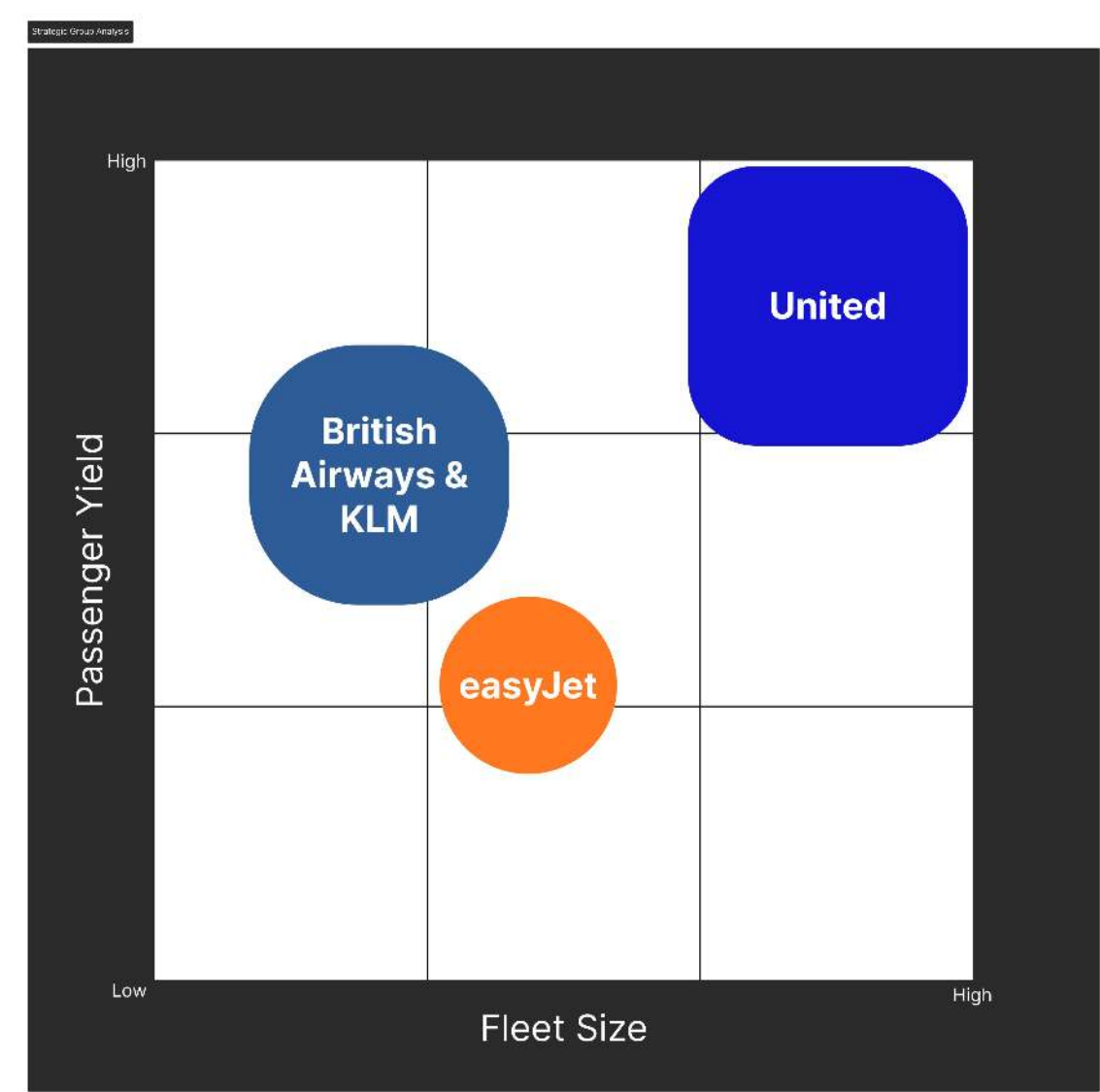
Step	Thinking	Decision	Issues Considered
1.4 – Pick travel class tier	What's the differences between each of these classes?	Choose the lowest because it's the cheapest option or choose another option the user has done before.	User has no indication at this point of class tier differences, price or general information.
2.2 – Choose outbound flight seat sub-tier	Why are there so many additional options? Is there a real difference between these additional choices?	User chooses whichever option is recommended or price-relevant option.	Lots of small text with poor mental models, potentially causing information overload and confusion.
6. – Add extras	What extras, add-ons, and/or upgrades are offered? Are these all of the available extras?	Add an extra bag if needed and cost-appropriate.	Unclear if there are additional extras not being shown to the user (low-trust).

Cognitive Task Analysis (CTA)

The CTA is based off of the HTA. By diving into the specific tasks, I was able to ground the usability test scenarios in what matters to the business.

APPENDIX

Competitive Analysis



Strategic Group Analysis

For competitive analysis we chose easyJet due to being a strong regional competitor, KLM for having a very similar experience as BA, as well as size, and United being the aspirational competitor given their strong passenger yield and fleet size that BA is moving towards.

Key Factors				
Booking				
Fares presentation and clarity	Very Clear	Not Clear	Very Clear	Clear
Seat selection process	Very Easy	Difficult	Very Easy	Easy
Easy to add upgrades, add-ons, and attachments?	Very Easy	Easy	Easy	Easy
Add upgrades, add-ons, and attachments presentation	Very Clear	Very Not Clear	Not Clear	Clear
Error handling	Clear	Very Not Clear	Not Clear	Very Clear
Price breakdown and confirmation details clarity	Clear	Not Clear	Very Clear	Clear
Booking flow # of steps	7	8	6	4
Booking flow (overall) UX; Simplicity; Progress Tracking	10/10	2/10	6/10	8/10
Payment				
Payment options	Debit/Credit	Debit/Credit	Debit/Credit; Brand Visa Credit Card; Miles; Paypal	Debit/Credit; Brand Visa Credit Card; Financing via flexpay; Miles; Credits (Rewards); Paypal; Alipay + partners; Paze
Error handling	Very Clear	Very Not Clear	Clear	Clear
Price breakdown and confirmation details clarity	Very Clear	Not Clear	Not Clear	Clear
Ease of payment process	Very Easy	Easy	Difficult	Easy
Add upgrades, add-ons, and attachments presentation	Very Clear	n/a (none present)	Clear	Clear
Payment flow (overall)	10/10	4/10	6/10	8/10

Competitor Feature Matrix & Pattern Audit

At this time, British Airways offers a higher quality experience than their competitors. Only being outshined by select areas and features.