

Applying the Jobs-to-be-done Framework to understand Hoteliers' Needs on Accommodation Platforms

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Abstract: When building products, it is important to understand the target audience. User-centric design is the process of building products or services based on the wants, needs and challenges of users. Online accommodation platforms such as online travel agencies (OTAs) and accommodation price comparison platforms have hoteliers as users. Through hoteliers, hotel properties and prices are displayed on their platforms. These online accommodation platforms are important business partners for hoteliers and bring advantages such as increased exposure, higher occupancy rates and lower marketing costs. Understanding the needs of hoteliers is important to online accommodation platforms to inform their Business-to-Consumer (B2C) and Business-to-Business (B2B) products. These insights can help create tailored user experiences and solutions that cater to the distinct needs of independent hotels.

Increasingly, organisations are including UX research in their software design and development process. UX research is the systematic investigation of users and their requirements, to add context and insight into the process of designing the user experience. One framework to understand why people adopt products and services is the Jobs-to-be-done (JTBD) framework. It defines user needs and what they really seek to accomplish as a job in each circumstance.

This study presents the application of the JTBD framework for understanding independent hoteliers needs on accommodation comparison platforms in the context of creating visibility and generating bookings. The framework and its benefits are described, along with a variety of different industry cases where the JTBD framework has successfully been applied.

The focus of this study lays on the research methodology, process, challenges and impact of applying the JTBD framework in the B2B area in the online travel industry. A foundational research project was conducted from January to May 2023 where the research goal consisted of identifying a series of needs and pain points from hoteliers that represent business opportunities while also providing a benefit for travellers. Recruited hoteliers consisted of convenience and random sampling of customers and non-customers. To answer those questions, JTBD qualitative interviews with independent hoteliers were conducted to generate insights for creating a comprehensive JTBD Map. A JTBD Map is a visual depiction to clarify the job users are trying to get done in a specific context, including respective process steps, desired outcomes and pain points.

The JTBD framework helped the product development team, across different job profiles, to have a shared understanding of hoteliers' needs. The framework was applied on both B2C and B2B product development areas. The framework also helped to identify areas where deeper UX Research was needed. Stakeholders were able to assess the different jobs and conclude which ones to focus on.

The results of this study are specifically of value for practitioners and academia in the travel industry and have implications for Product, UX and Research practitioners.

Keywords: UX research, Travel, Hoteliers, Jobs-to-be-Done, User Centricity

1. Introduction

Effective product teams have one thing in common: a consistent focus on the user that allows them to paint a clear picture of the product vision for helping users achieve key outcomes, which are necessary to achieve business goals (Foster and Nerlikar, 2020). Foster and Nerlikar (2020) list a lack of UX Research as one of the top 10 dysfunctions of product management. Too often, research activities take place only on rare occasions. Product teams risk building products that no customer wants or needs (Foster and Nerlikar, 2020).

User needs are the specific requirements and expectations of users that a product or service should fulfill to provide value and enhance their experience. By identifying and addressing user needs, UX designers can create relevant, usable, and possible solutions for the target audience (UXPin, 2023). User needs help define the scope and direction of the product development process, influencing key decisions such as functionality, features, layout, and interaction design.

Pretorius and Penkert (2023) focused on a B2C case study on practice-based insights of methods used to increase the UX research maturity of an online accommodation comparison platform in the travel industry. One of the methods used included the JTBD framework. JTBD is a lens through which customer needs can be effectively

defined and communicated to a wider team. The customer's objective is the JTBD. To systematically uncover the jobs travellers need to get done when planning and going on a trip, Pretorius and Penkert (2023) refer to a diary study with 46 participants in the United States of America and Australia. A diary study is a research method used to understand long-term user behaviour and experiences (Salazar, 2015). Participants were asked to keep a diary and log specific information about activities being studied. Based on the analysis, the JTBD of travellers were derived (Pretorius and Penkert, 2023). The jobs, micro jobs, pain points and desired outcomes resulted in a JTBD map. The resulting JTBD map created a shared terminology, shared understanding and the ability for products team to exchange more efficiently on user's objectives. Additionally, all new staff joining the organisation received training on the JTBD framework to learn the terminology used to address users' needs.

The focus of this study is specific on applying the JTBD framework in a B2B setting, with hoteliers as the target users. The primary research objective discussed in this paper is the application of the JTBD framework: the research methodology, process, challenges and impact of applying JTBD in the B2B area of an online accommodation comparison platform in the travel industry. Online accommodation comparison platforms provide users with the ability to compare accommodation properties and prices, enabling travellers to minimise the cost of accommodation. Hoteliers (B2B users) in turn aim to obtain visibility and bookings. The value-add of this study is practice-based insights on applying the JTBD framework, focusing on the usage and outcomes of the utilised methods.

A theoretical background on the JTBD framework is provided in Section 2. Section 3 explains the research goal and Section 4 the core of our research: the methodology of the study. Finally, Section 5 lays out recommendations and results, concluding in Section 6 with a summary, limitations and suggestions for future research.

2. Theoretical Background

Jobs-to-be-done (JTBD) is a framework to understand why people adopt products and services and creates a mindset for customer-driven innovation (Kalbach, 2020). A job is defined by Christensen et al. (2016) as "*what an individual really seeks to accomplish in a given circumstance*" (p.6). The job types can be a) functional or b) emotional. Functional jobs define the "what" and can be subdivided into microjobs: specific tasks or steps that people might undertake. Emotional jobs reflect the "why" behind a functional job and addresses how humans want to feel. Additional key concept of the framework are desired outcomes and pain points. Desired outcomes are measures of success in relation to the job to assess how well did the job get done using a specific solution. During the execution of jobs, pain points can occur, which are obstacles or difficulties that get in the way of doing the job, or of meeting the desired outcomes.

Overall, when customers decide on a solution to use, such as buying a product or service, customers essentially hire it to get a job done (Christensen, 2010) successfully (meaning quicker and easier); reduce pain points; and not to interact with an organisation (Ulwick, 2017a). Additionally, jobs are solution-free and stable over time, even as technology changes.

2.1 JTBD Map

A JTBD Map is a visual depiction to clarify the job users are trying to get done in a specific context, with respective process steps, desired outcomes and pain points. Ulwick (2017a) lists several characteristics of an ideal JTBD map: a) It describes what the customer is trying to accomplish, not how they are accomplishing it (or the solution they are using); b) It represents the ideal flow for the job; and c) it is not a customer journey map. It doesn't describe the consumption of an offering: i.e., the purchase process, configuration, upgrading, maintaining, etc.

2.2 Benefits of Introducing JTBD Framework

Defining a JTBD Map helps to define vision and direction, discover opportunities and guide customers' needs gathering (Strategyn, 2022). Its implementation also contributes to increasing the UXR maturity of organisations by creating a shared terminology and understanding about users' needs within organisations (Pretorius and Penkert, 2023).

This framework has been adapted in various industries and their respective users (Pretorius and Penkert, 2023), such as understanding students' learning needs to guide digitization activities (Brenk, 2022), understanding consumer needs along the lifecycle of a TV (Hankammer et al., 2019) or developing circular saws (Ulwick, 2017b).

3. Research goal

The research goals of this study were two-fold:

1. The primary research goal is to illustrate how to apply the JTBD framework in a B2B online accommodation comparison platform: the research methodology, process, challenges and impact of applying JTBD.
2. To discover product opportunities for improvements or modifications to the existing organisational B2B products. The research questions of this section are shared below; however, the results of this section is for internal usage by the organisation and is beyond the scope of this paper.

3.1 Application of JTBD

To illustrate the application of JTBD in the B2B area, a foundational research project was selected as pilot project and serves as case study for this research. The project aimed to create a JTBD map to implement the framework in the B2B side of the product and promoting the experienced benefits beyond B2C product areas, such as a shared understanding of users' needs.

The strength of a case study method is its ability to examine, in-depth, a case within its real-life context (Yin, 2006). The case study method helps to make direct observations and collect data in natural settings, compared to relying on derived data. The case study was applied in January 2023 at an online accommodation comparison platform organisation located in Germany. The B2B product for hoteliers serves a travel meta comparison product available in over 50 languages, serving tenths of millions monthly users.

3.2 Discover Product Opportunities

The organisational goal of this study was to discover product opportunities for improvements or modifications to the existing organisational B2B products, in particular, establishing the needs and pain points of independent hoteliers in the areas of generating bookings and creating visibility for their property. The research questions were compiled and aligned from diverse stakeholders and resulted in the following areas:

1. Creating visibility: What are hoteliers pain points on how to differentiate their property from competitors?
 - a. What are the pain points hoteliers have with how their property is featured on the Online Travel Agency (OTA)?
 - b. How does a hotel stand out from other hotels on an OTA?
 - c. What is the typical content a hotelier has that they are struggling to feature on an OTA?
 - d. What are reasons behind deciding for an attribution channel?
2. Generating bookings: How do hoteliers decide on which distribution channels to use?
 - a. What are the challenges hoteliers have with metas?
 - b. What are the challenges hoteliers face with OTAs?

The JTBD map would help to find answers to the questions above.

4. Methodology

To kickstart the application of the JTBD framework, it was needed to systematically uncover the jobs that hoteliers need to get done. This involved collecting internal previous knowledge, creating an assumption-based JTBD map and conducting qualitative interviews for a focused JTBD map.

4.1 Collecting Internal Knowledge

The initial step was to gather existing internal knowledge about the jobs and needs of hoteliers. Collecting previous knowledge also carried the following risks:

- Existing data: Existing research in the organization was from 2015 to 2018, meaning that the data could have been outdated and needed to be updated to reflect the current state.
- Lack of focus on key markets: previous research and insights were derived from a variety of countries and continents.
- Pre-pandemic data: The collected data was pre-pandemic and may not accurately represent the post-pandemic reality.

- Lack of JTBD Focus: The existing data did not specifically focus on the JTBD framework.

To mitigate the risk, new research was conducted (Section 4.4), in a post-pandemic era, focused on new key markets and on JTBD.

4.2 Creating an Assumption-Based JTBD Map

The research team mapped out an assumption-based JTBD map in the online collaboration tool, Mural. It encompassed all job areas from hoteliers to reflect the existing knowledge, ranging from topics such as customer service to guests, house-keeping or monitoring of costs. Due to the challenges highlighted in the previous section, this JTBD map was not reliable, as it was based on outdated data and had missing information, specially regarding desired outcomes and pain points.

However, this step was highly relevant to visualise the possible width of the research project with involved stakeholders and define the focus for continuation of the project. This step helped clarify the direction and objectives of the study, focusing on generating bookings and creating visibility. It ensured alignment and involvement from stakeholders and creating actionable insights.

4.3 Understanding Hoteliers' Context and Existing B2B Product

The researchers of the project focused on product walk-throughs, exchanges with the respective product teams and desk research in order to gain a deeper understanding of the existing B2B products of the organisation and terminology used by hoteliers. Additionally, two members of the team attended the world's biggest tourism fair, the Internationale Tourismus-Börse (ITB) Berlin, to observe first-hand which products and challenges competitors and the visitors were targeting. The outcome was an increased knowledge of the domain-specific terminology used and an overview of capabilities and limitations of the organisation's own products.

4.4 Creating a Research-Based JTBD Map

This research phase aimed to gather insights directly from the target user group to overcome the limitations (Section 4.1 and 4.2) and further evolve the assumption-based JTBD map.

5. Methodology Selection: JTBD interviews

Qualitative research was selected to enable researchers to focus on the experiences and perspectives of the users, exploring the "how" and "why" of behaviours and decisions (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Within the range of qualitative research, JTBD interviews were selected as the method. JTBD interviews involve engaging with participants to explore the circumstances and motivations behind their product or service choices. This method is valuable for uncovering the underlying factors that influence consumer behaviour, as it delves beyond demographic information and focuses on the functional, emotional, and social dimensions of decision-making.

The interviews were conducted remotely via the research platform UserZoom and lasted approximately one hour, following a structured JTBD interview script (Section 5.2) and were conducted by three researchers. The script helped ensure that the data collected would be relevant to the research objectives and the JTBD framework. JTBD interviews were conducted in English to streamline the research process and minimise the need for translation.

Once this is defined, follow-up questions can help understanding subsequent job stages (Boysen, 2018):

- [LOCATE] "What steps do you take to locate and gather the needed inputs?"
- [PREPARE] "What steps do you take to prepare or organize those inputs?"
- [CONFIRM] "What steps do you take to confirm you are ready to execute the job?"
- [EXECUTE] "What steps do you take to execute the core functional job?"
- [MONITOR] "What steps do you take to monitor or verify the execution step is executed effectively?"; "What do you track as you perform the job?"
- [MODIFY] "What steps do you take to make modifications to the execution when something goes wrong?"
- [CONCLUDE] "What steps do you take to properly complete the job, or prepare for the next job cycle?"

Section 5.2 elaborates on the interview questions that can be used for replication of future studies. For note-taking the research team involved several stakeholders for efficiency, engagement on the topic and knowledge

transfer. Additionally, observers and notetakers, mostly experts in the B2B product area, could write questions to the moderator. These were asked at the end of the interviews to the participants to ensure the needs of the stakeholders were met.

5.1 Sample

The target user of this research project consisted of hotel owners, sales managers and marketing managers of independent hotels (no chains) with a minimum of 10 or more rooms, from central Europe. Product intercept surveys, email, panels and phone calls were used for recruitment (see Section 5.1.), leading to both convenience and random sampling. The final sample of the research project consisted of 12 participants from the United Kingdom, Ireland, Germany, Spain, and Greece; three of them existing users of the organisations B2B products and nine non-customers, representing a diverse sample of the European tourism industry.

5.2 Analysis

Following the interviews, the research team analysed the collected data by clustering notes from individual interviews around specific themes related to the jobs hoteliers needed to perform. Subsequently, a JTBD map was produced, highlighting the tasks that hoteliers experience pain points with existing solutions in the market. Additionally, several presentations were done to share the findings to stakeholders and the wider organisation.

6. Recommendations and Results

The following section provides recommendations based on the application of the JTBD framework. A decision tree for participant recruitment (Section 5.1.) and guidelines for applying JTBD interviews within the hotelier sector (Section 5.2.) were developed. The impact of the resulting JTBD map is described in Section 5.3.

6.1 Participant Recruiting

In B2B research, the recruitment of participants is challenging (Kuhn, 2023). Through the project, the research team continuously learned about the response rate and success of each method through trial and error. Table 1 provides decision tree recommendations when choosing participant recruitment methods. The decision tree is based on three criteria: sample size, screening criteria and time scale. The recommended methods as summarised in Table 1 can be described as follow:

- **Intercept survey on the product platform.** An intercept survey is a research method used to gather on-site feedback from an audience (Research and Marketing Strategies, 2021). In analogue context, they are often used at events, restaurants, conferences, and in shopping malls. In the digital context and in this specific use case, an intercept survey was launched to users of a B2B product through the survey tool *Hotjar* which collected on a voluntary basis the e-mail address of interested users.
- **Participant recruitment providers** with broad participant panels. In this use case, our options were *Userzoom* and *Testingtime* as two successful leaders in the European and American markets.
- **Mass emails** to target user in accordance to their legal consent through organisational newsletter address. E-mails were sent to hoteliers who fit the screening criteria.
- **Personal and individual requests** (e-mail or phone) via existing contacts from account managers. Account management refers to a structured approach to managing and growing relationship with customers to achieve mutually beneficial goals (Schultz, 2023).

Table 1: Decision tree to select the most suitable participant recruitment method

Methods	Sample size	Screening criteria	Time scale
Intercept survey	small (N < 15)	loose (< 3 criteria)	long (30+ days)
Participant recruitment panels	small	loose	short (< 30 days)
E-Mail recruitment	large (N > 15)	strict (> 3 criteria)	short
Account Management	small	strict	short

In addition to the relevant criteria to determine adequate recruiting method, the research team experimented with different amounts of compensation for participants to increase participants' motivation and response rate. For each method of recruitment, the initial message to possible interviewees and consequent communication,

as well as storage and use of the obtained information, was aligned with the legal department and terms and conditions always accessible in full to participants.

6.2 Interview script

As preparation for the JTBD interviews, the researchers focused on applying the theoretical framework and guidelines from Boysen (2018) and Ulwick (2017a), into specific research goals and interview questions.

In the use case of this interview the *jobs* were to “generate bookings” and “create visibility” (asked separately to the participants). Table 2 contains the interview questions derived for this study based on the theoretical framework. Additional questions suggested by Boysen (2018) were asked as follow-up questions when needed.

Table 2: Interview questions and research goals

Interview questions	Research goal guidelines
Please introduce yourself shortly: Which is your role? What are your main tasks in this role?	Understanding participants role
Tell us a about the accommodation you are working for: Location and name? Which type of trip is your typical guest taking? How many rooms does it have? How do you represent the accommodation online?	Understanding context: participants accommodation
To understand your task better, we want to first focus on your task of “generating bookings”. Is this a relevant task for you? Why or why not? What are you trying to accomplish (for the accommodation/hotel) when generating bookings? What are your goals and objectives? What problems are you trying to prevent or resolve?	Exploring job of generating bookings
What are the most central tasks that must be accomplished when generating bookings? What needs to be happen before generating bookings can be successfully carried out? Do you need any inputs or resources to ensure success in generating bookings? Which role plays content, such as images or texts? (pain points on content)	Understanding subsequent job stages of generating bookings
Think of a time when generating bookings didn’t turn out as planned? Why do you think that was? What was different about this time than other times? Did you do something differently? Did you do it prior to entering the context (out for a run)? Did something around you have an impact? Have you changed the solution/method you use? How and why did that help?	Understanding pain points and desired outcomes of generating bookings
What products and services do you currently use to generate bookings? You mentioned different approaches to generate bookings: When do you select one solution over another?	Understanding existing solutions in the market and respective pain points
<i>Based on the previous question, a set of solutions and products were identified to generate bookings. For each mention, the following questions were asked:</i> What are you trying to accomplish by using each product/service? What goals or objectives does each product/service help you to accomplish? What problems does each product/service help you to prevent or resolve?	Understanding existing solutions in the market and respective pain points
To understand your task better, we want to first focus on your task of “creating visibility”. Is this a relevant task for you? Why or why not? What are you trying to accomplish (for the accommodation/hotel) when generating bookings? What are your goals and objectives? What problems are you trying to prevent or resolve?	Exploring job of create visibility
What are the most central tasks that must be accomplished when generating bookings? What needs to be happen before generating bookings can be successfully carried out? Do you need any inputs or resources to ensure success in generating bookings? Which role plays content, such as images or texts? (pain points on content)	Understanding subsequent job stages of creating visibility
Think of a time when creating visibility didn’t turn out as planned? Why do you think that was? What was different about this time than other times? Did you do something differently? Did you do it prior to entering the context (out for a run)? Did something around you have an impact? Have you changed the solution/method you use? How and why did that help?	Understanding pain points and desired outcomes of creating visibility
What products and services do you currently use to create visibility? You mentioned different approaches to create visibility: When do you select one solution over another?	Understanding existing solutions in the market

Interview questions	Research goal guidelines
	and respective pain points
<p><i>Based on previous question, a set of solutions and products were identified to create visibility. For each mention, the following questions were asked:</i></p> <p>What are you trying to accomplish by using each product/service? What goals or objectives does each product/service help you to accomplish? What problems does each product/service help you to prevent or resolve?</p>	Understanding existing solutions in the market and respective pain points

6.3 Impact of JTBD Map for Product Development

In the context of this research, 28 jobs were identified and sorted according to the stages of the respective guest journey. The JTBD map was visualised using the online whiteboard tool Mural, where jobs along with respective pain points and desired outcomes were colour coded. Figure 1 provides an illustrative example of the job “monitor customer feedback”.



Figure 1: Simplified example of the job “monitor customer feedback”, with respective micro-jobs (blue), desired outcomes (yellow) and pain points (red).

The JTBD map assisted stakeholders to assess the different jobs and align on which ones to prioritise for upcoming product objectives. Additionally, the framework helped to identify areas where further UX Research was needed. The study also met short-term objectives of answering the specific research questions asked by stakeholders, helping the product team to guide their current initiatives.

In a short interview with involved with the relevant product leads, they described the success and impact:

- *“The JTBD map helped us understand the main challenges that hoteliers are facing and potential B2B product opportunities. We were able to validate assumptions we had and ensure that we did not have any blindspots when scoping out future product offerings.”*
- *“We are still using the JTBD and it is a pivotal part of our 2024 strategic product planning.”*

7. Summary

The primary goal of this research was to illustrate how to apply the JTBD framework in an online accommodation comparison platform, with the focus on B2B. The research methodology can be summarised as follow:

- Collect internal knowledge;
- Create an assumption-based JTBD map;
- Understanding the hoteliers’ context and the relevant product: product walk-throughs, exchanges with the teams owning the product and desk research;
- Create a research-based JTBD map: JTBD interviews.

The results can be utilized to increase success and efficiency in future research projects in the industry. The interview script in Section 5.2 can be utilized to uncover additional JTBD from hoteliers or other target groups within the travel industry by exchanging the respective job in the questions.

The following research goals were created and can be considered as a guideline when creating JTBD interviews:

1. Understanding participants role: to which extend are participants involved in the job?
2. Understanding the context: what external factors influence the job?
3. Exploring the job: focusing on goals and objectives

4. Understanding subsequent job stages
5. Understanding pain points and desired outcomes
6. Understanding existing solutions in the market and respective pain points

Additionally, the decision tree for participant recruiting reflects the learnings on efficient recruitment in the hotelier industry, enabling researchers to find relevant participants who can provide valuable insights into their jobs and needs. A combination of product intercept surveys, email, panels and phone calls can be used for recruitment.

The resulting JTBD Map created a shared terminology, shared understanding and the ability for products team to exchange more efficiently on user's objectives. The key benefit of the map is its longevity and longer-term impact as the B2B product team can use and reference the JTBD Map for years to come when mapping new features to user needs.

The following challenges and limitations were identified:

- The case study being conducted in a single travel organisation was a limitation of the study;
- When recruiting from an existing customer base, participants can show biases in the interviews toward being positive with the organisation to maintain a positive relationship. A key take-away was to broaden the research to both users and non-users of the product, resulting in new product opportunities being identified.

Future research is needed to replicate results in different travel organisations to increase generalisability. Additional methods to build and maintain a JTBD map for hoteliers is also a candidate for future research.

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