

# 2021

## Usability Study



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## Introduction

*Southwest.com* is the official consumer booking engine of Southwest Airlines. It is designed to allow the customer to book flights, hotels, or vacation trips as packages that include hotel, flight, rental cars, and other add-ons to make the trip enjoyable. Southwest airlines partners with vendors within the travel/hospitality industry to make this possible and offers discounts and the option to earn extra points as a member of their rewards program known as Rapid Rewards, for booking a vacation package. The website is created and maintained by Southwest Airlines Co.

This thirty-minute usability study was conducted to test various functions, as well as the overall satisfaction ratings of *Southwest.com*. The live website was used for the usability study. All participants had a computer system that allowed them to connect to the site [www.southwest.com](http://www.southwest.com). The key features tested in the usability study were booking a flight only, booking a vacation package, booking a hotel, and using southwest travel funds<sup>1</sup> as a form of payment.

The participants in the study included people between the ages of 18 and 46, which gives a range of adult persons who are interested in travel and can pay to do so. This would be the targeted audience for the airline. There were three participants, one of which was male, and the other two female. All the participants had extensive computer skills. None of the participants had ever used the website before, nor were familiar with it. Specific tasks were given to perform this study, and these tasks were completed in the participants' homes. Completed questionnaires were submitted online (see Appendix).

## Methodology

Five people were invited to participate and only three responded positively. Participants were chosen based on education, computer skills, and interest in travel. The following table includes the demographic, education, and computer experience information of the study's participants:

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<sup>1</sup> Southwest travel funds are earned when a Wanna Get Away plane ticket is cancelled. Southwest Airlines charges no penalties for cancelling flights. 100% of the cost of the Wanna Get Away fare is converted to credit, and the traveler has up to one year from the original date of booking to complete another trip using these funds.

Name	Gender	Age	Education	Internet usage proficiency
Ignasia	Female	46	High School Graduate	Intermediate
Jade	Female	18	First year College	Advanced
Joshua	Male	31	Master's degree	Very Advanced

The test was conducted via Zoom and Whatsapp video calling. The questionnaires were delivered to the participants via email, and they were completed and returned via email. Tests were done with each participant over a three-day period (one tested per day). Each test took approximately 30 minutes to complete from start to finish. I conducted the test by watching each participant complete the tasks given and recorded their experiences.




## Tasks

Participants were asked to:

-  Create a flight reservation for either one-way or round trip
-  Create a hotel only reservation
-  Create a vacation package
-  Determine the cost of plane ticket(s) in points
-  Find the low-fare calendar that shows all fare prices for an entire month
-  Determine which cities that Southwest Airlines services
-  Determine the final cost of the trip

As subsets to these tasks, participants were asked to attempt to use Southwest Travel Funds<sup>1</sup> as a form of payment for their itineraries. No actual reservations were created as this was not required.

Both survey and interview questionnaires were used to determine the degree of usability. The interview allowed for the collecting of the participants' experiences while attempting the tasks, and the survey questions recorded their opinions. The participants gave information about the website's:

-  Navigation
-  Visual and logical layout
-  Features and functions

## Positive and negative features

Also noted, was the overall satisfaction rating and the likelihood that the participant will use the site again and recommend it to a friend.

## Results

All the participants gave positive and negative reviews of their experience with the website. The most notable positive reviews were the attractiveness of the website and the ease of navigation. The most notable negative reviews were the obliviousness of being routed out of the site, and misleading links. For example, *Figs. 1* and *2* show what happened when Joshua clicked on the “Book Now” call-to-action button (*Fig. 1*); it took him to the **Low Fare Calendar**

page (*Fig. 2*). He did not understand how to enter the dates for his preferred month/time frame and had to use the back button to return to the landing page. This featured promotion is at the top of the landing page and it led him to assume that he could customize his booking from there.

There was another issue highlighted by Joshua when he attempted his hotel-only booking task. He said that he was not able to determine the cancellation policies for the hotel (*Fig. 3*) because the same information appeared in two places, and even though one said, “*Free Cancellation*”, he was not able to understand the difference because the prices and features were the same.

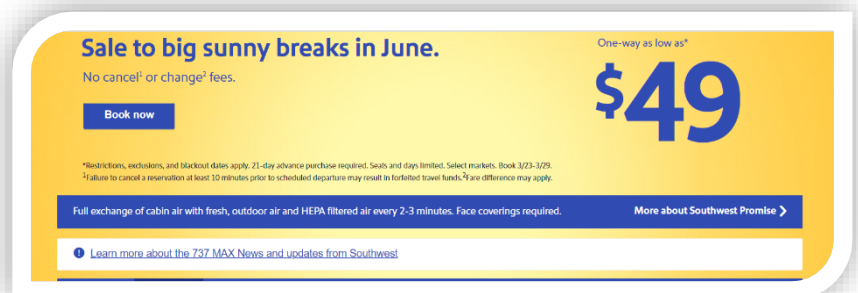


Fig. 1: Limited time promotion located in header banner.

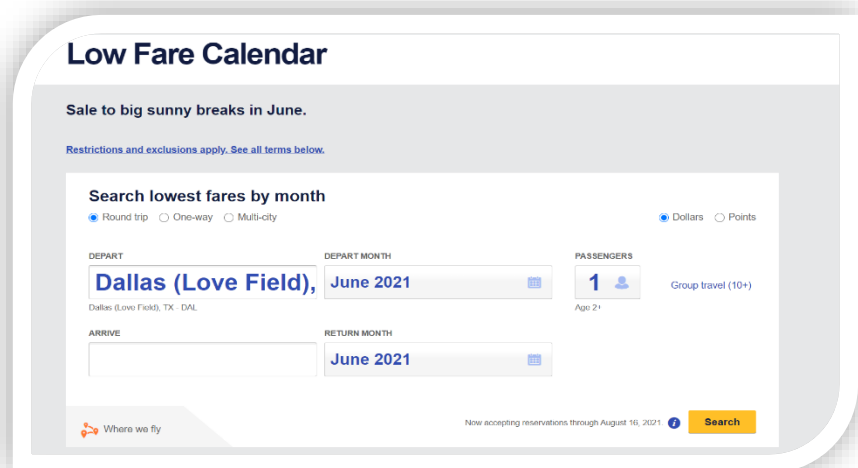


Fig. 2

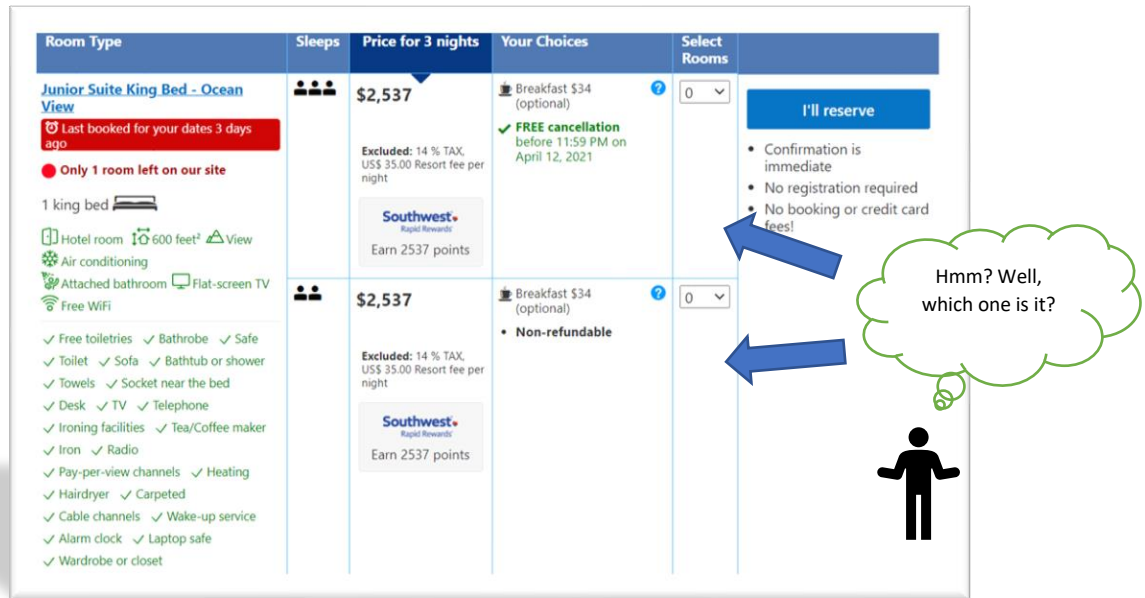


Fig. 3

When doing the booking hotel only task, **none** of the participants realized that they had left the *southwest.com* website and were now using *booking.com*. Nobody noticed the little box with the triangle poking out at the top-right that indicates that you will be leaving one site and going to another.

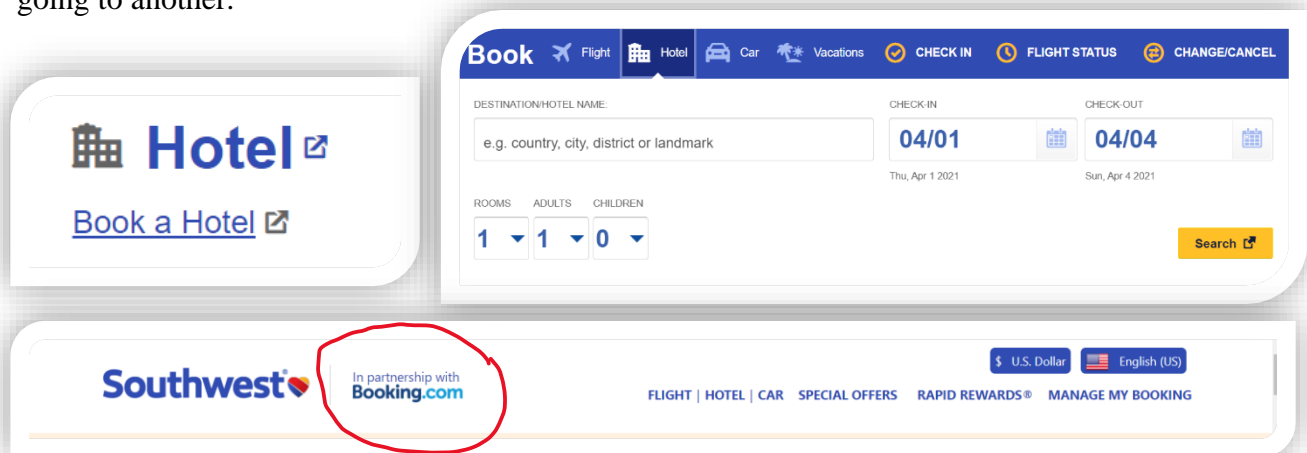


Fig. 4

Participants glimpsed the Southwest Airlines branding and logo but did not notice the “In partnership with Booking.com”. Booking.com is a United Kingdom based hotel booking engine.

When attempting to use Southwest Travel funds as a form of payment, all participants had trouble understanding fully how to proceed.

Joshua said he could not differentiate between Travel Credit and Southwest Travel funds. Jade said though she realized which payment method to use, she could not figure out how to use an additional form of payment after selecting the Southwest Travel Funds option.

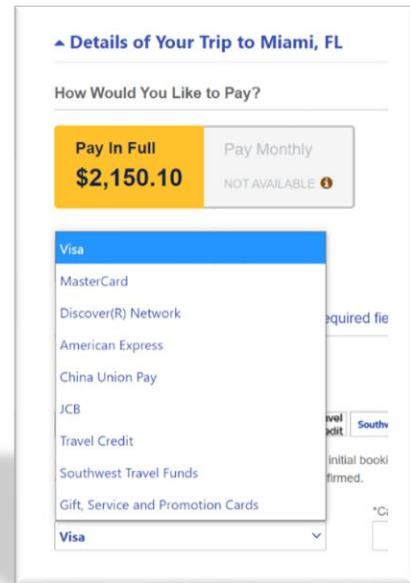


Fig. 5

## Recommendations

Listening to the concerns of the site's interactors after this usability test, these are the recommendations for the improvement of the website. It is recommended that:

1. Information that advises the customer when he/she takes an action to navigate to book a hotel only should be clearly visible. To achieve this, a pop-up advising that the visitor is leaving the *southwest.com* site and being routed to another can be implemented
2. *Southwest Travel Funds* and *Travel Credit* need to be clearly defined so that these are not ambiguous to the person who wishes to use them. Instructions on how to apply them as a form of payment in conjunction with another payment option should be explained. This can be indicated by a button with a question mark that can say, "*Using travel funds or travel credit?*" When hovered over or clicked on, these instructions will be made visible
3. Promotions placed in the header's banner that highlight specials on the site should have links that route the visitor to the correct destination. Ambiguity can cause high bounce rates and thus reduce sales conversion

## Appendices

# Travel Website – Questionnaire

**Name:**

**Age:**

**Gender:**

- 1. Were you able to navigate through the site easily? Please explain you experience.**
- 2. Do you find the layout appealing? Consider the elements ‘visually appealing’ and ‘logical placement’ for your response.**
- 3. Was it easy to create an itinerary?**
- 4. Were you able to see the final cost of the trip?**
- 5. Was it easy to find how to use Southwest Travel Funds as a form of payment? Please explain your answer.**
- 6. Was it easy to find how to determine the cost of your airfare in points?**
- 7. Were you able to locate the Low Fare Calendar to see fares for an entire month?**
- 8. Were you able to find which cities Southwest Airlines provides service to?**
- 9. Were you able to see where you can look at vacation package options?**

**10. When you attempted to book a hotel only, did you notice that you had left southwest.com?**

**11. What did you find easiest about using the site?**

**12. What did you like about using the site?**

**13. What did you dislike about using the site?**



# Survey Questions

**1. How satisfied were you using this site?**

- ☐ Very satisfied
- ☐ Somewhat satisfied
- ☐ Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- ☐ Somewhat dissatisfied
- ☐ Not at all satisfied

**2. Will you consider southwest.com as an ideal site for booking travel?**

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ Sort of
- ☐ No

**3. How likely are you to use this site again?**

- ☐ Very likely
- ☐ Somewhat likely
- ☐ Maybe
- ☐ Not at all likely

**4. Would you recommend this southwest.com to a friend?**

- ☐ Definitely
- ☐ Probably
- ☐ Not at all

# Travel Website – Interview Questionnaire

**Name:** Joshua

**Age:** 31

**Gender:** M

**1. Were you able to navigate through the site easily? Please explain your experience.**

Yes. I had no problems really finding the things that I was looking for. I could see the labels clearly, and everything was laid out in a logical way.

**2. Do you find the layout appealing? Consider the elements ‘visually appealing’ and ‘logical placement’ for your response.**

Yes. The design and color choice matched with the Southwest Airlines brand colors and it encouraged me to visually enjoy the experience while I was looking around and making choices on what I wanted to add to my itinerary.

**3. Was it easy to create an itinerary?**

Yes.

**4. Were you able to see the final cost of the trip?**

Yes.

**5. Was it easy to find how to use Southwest Travel Funds as a form of payment? Please explain your answer.**

Not really. I was able to see where I would select to access the area to add the code, but I wasn't sure if it was Southwest Travel Funds or Travel Credit that I needed to choose. For something like this, I wouldn't feel comfortable doing it myself so, I would call the Customer Service number for help.

**6. Was it easy to find how to determine the cost of your airfare in points?**

Yes.

**7. Were you able to locate the Low Fare Calendar to see fares for an entire month?**

Yes.

**8. Were you able to find which cities Southwest Airlines provides service to?**

Yes.

**9. Were you able to see where you can look at vacation package options?**

Yes.

**10. When you attempted to book a hotel only, did you notice that you had left southwest.com?**

No, I did not notice that. I saw the Southwest logo at the top, so I thought that I was still using the southwest site. For the hotel that I chose, I was not able to figure out what the cancellation policy was for the room. Both boxes had the same information and same price, but one said I could cancel for free and the other one said non-refundable. This was confusing.

**11. What did you find easiest about using the site?**

The site was very responsive and there was no lagging when selections were made.

**12. What did you like about using the site?**

The layout, and it is user friendly. I also like the fact that there are filters that help you narrow down your search. This made things more streamlined for me. There were no annoying pop-ups like I have seen on other travel sites.

**13. What did you dislike about using the site?**

Some of the information was not clear, like I mentioned above about the travel funds vs the travel credit, and the information about the hotel room. I did not select another hotel, so I do not know if this issue exists for all hotels on the site. I had another problem when I first went to book a flight. I selected the 'book now' at the very top and it took me to a page where I couldn't understand how to enter my preferred dates. I had to back out and scroll to the section underneath it to enter my travel dates. Also, I didn't notice that I had left the southwest site when I tried to book a hotel only. A customer needs to know that he/she is being routed out to another website. If this information is not clear, that would make me skeptical about using the site that I was on in the first place.

# Survey Questions

## 1. How satisfied were you using this site?

- ☐ **Very satisfied**
- ☐ Somewhat satisfied
- ☐ Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- ☐ Somewhat dissatisfied
- ☐ Not at all satisfied

## 2. Will you consider southwest.com as an ideal site for booking travel?

- ☐ **Yes**
- ☐ Sort of
- ☐ No

## 3. How likely are you to use this site again?

- ☐ **Very likely**
- ☐ Somewhat likely
- ☐ Maybe
- ☐ Not at all likely

## 4. Would you recommend this southwest.com to a friend?

- ☐ **Definitely**
- ☐ Probably
- ☐ Not at all

# Travel Website – Interview Questionnaire

**Name:** Jade

**Age:** 18

**Gender:** F

**1. Were you able to navigate through the site easily? Please explain your experience.**

Yes. It was easy to see everything. The titles and links were clear and easy to read, and when I clicked them, they were not broken and gave me the additional information that I was looking for.

**2. Do you find the layout appealing? Consider the elements ‘visually appealing’ and ‘logical placement’ for your response.**

Yes. The design is very lively and makes browsing the site very encouraging. I felt like I wanted to book a trip for real.

**3. Was it easy to create an itinerary?**

Yes.

**4. Were you able to see the final cost of the trip?**

Yes. Couldn't miss it, especially on the 'Check Out' page.

**5. Was it easy to find how to use Southwest Travel Funds as a form of payment? Please explain your answer.**

Yes and no. I saw the section where it said, "Southwest Travel Funds, Luv Voucher, or Gift Card". However, I could figure out how to enter another form of payment after I selected Southwest Travel Funds. The total cost was more than the amount of the travel funds and I could not see how to enter the balance if I was using a credit card also.

**6. Was it easy to find how to determine the cost of your airfare in points?**

At first I did not notice it, but eventually I saw the 'points' button.

**7. Were you able to locate the Low Fare Calendar to see fares for an entire month?**

Yes.

**8. Were you able to find which cities Southwest Airlines provides service to?**

Yes.

**9. Were you able to see where you can look at vacation package options?**

Yes.

**10. When you attempted to book a hotel only, did you notice that you had left southwest.com?**

No, I did not notice that at all because I saw the Southwest logo at the top of the page. I had no idea I had left the site.

**11. What did you find easiest about using the site?**

The navigation.

**12. What did you like about using the site?**

It was user-friendly, and easy to find things. The wording is not complicated, and the design is visually appealing.

**13. What did you dislike about using the site?**

I did not like that I was routed out to another site without me knowing.

# Survey Questions

## 1. How satisfied were you using this site?

- ☐ **Very satisfied**
- ☐ Somewhat satisfied
- ☐ Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- ☐ Somewhat dissatisfied
- ☐ Not at all satisfied

## 2. Will you consider southwest.com as an ideal site for booking travel?

- ☐ **Yes**
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- ☐ No

## 3. How likely are you to use this site again?

- ☐ **Very likely**
- ☐ Somewhat likely
- ☐ Maybe
- ☐ Not at all likely

## 4. Would you recommend this southwest.com to a friend?

- ☐ **Definitely**
- ☐ Probably
- ☐ Not at all

# Travel Website – Interview Questionnaire

**Name:** Ignasia

**Age:** 46

**Gender:** F

**1. Were you able to navigate through the site easily? Please explain your experience.**

I did not find it difficult to understand how to search for items.

**2. Do you find the layout appealing? Consider the elements ‘visually appealing’ and ‘logical placement’ for your response.**

Yes. I did find the site to be visually appealing. Important information like cost as you moved through to select things was very visible.

**3. Was it easy to create an itinerary?**

Yes.

**4. Were you able to see the final cost of the trip?**

Yes.

**5. Was it easy to find how to use Southwest Travel Funds as a form of payment? Please explain your answer.**

Not really. I did see the area to select it, but then I wasn't sure what to do next.

**6. Was it easy to find how to determine the cost of your airfare in points?**

Yes.

**7. Were you able to locate the Low Fare Calendar to see fares for an entire month?**

Yes, but not at first.

**8. Were you able to find which cities Southwest Airlines provides service to?**

Yes.

**9. Were you able to see where you can look at vacation package options?**

Yes.



**10. When you attempted to book a hotel only, did you notice that you had left southwest.com?**

No. I was surprised when that was pointed out. There was nothing that popped up saying that I was leaving the site.

**11. What did you find easiest about using the site?**

Finding the things that I wanted when I was building my trip.

**12. What did you like about using the site?**

I was mostly attracted by the colors, the design, and the images, and that I could see the prices all the time.

**13. What did you dislike about using the site?**

The information was not clear about how to use travel funds, luv vouchers and gift cards.

# Survey Questions

## 1. How satisfied were you using this site?

- ☐ Very satisfied
- ☒ **Somewhat satisfied**
- ☐ Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- ☐ Somewhat dissatisfied
- ☐ Not at all satisfied

## 2. Will you consider southwest.com as an ideal site for booking travel?

- ☐ Yes
- ☒ **Sort of**
- ☐ No

## 3. How likely are you to use this site again?

- ☐ Very likely
- ☒ **Somewhat likely**
- ☐ Maybe
- ☐ Not at all likely

## 4. Would you recommend this southwest.com to a friend?

- ☐ Definitely
- ☒ **Probably**
- ☐ Not at all

## References

Cover page image. EyeImage. (N.d). Southwest Airlines wing tip. [Digital image]. Retrieved from <https://pixabay.com/photos/southwest-airline-transportation-730505/>

Figure 1. Cumberbatch, M-T. (2021, Apr 1). Screenshot1. [Digital image]. Retrieved from <https://www.southwest.com/>

Figure 2. Cumberbatch, M-T. (2021, Apr 1). Screenshot1. [Digital image]. Retrieved from <https://www.southwest.com/>

Figure 3. Cumberbatch, M-T. (2021, Apr 1). Screenshot1. [Digital image]. Retrieved from [https://www.southwesthotels.com/hotel/us/eden-roc-miami-beach.en-us.html?aid=961823;label=SWA-GSUBNAV-HOTEL-BOOK;sid=18983326bd17a83da7b33f1439a2d697;all\\_sr\\_blocks=26268809\\_291371702\\_4\\_2\\_0;checkin=2021-04-30;checkout=2021-05-03;dest\\_id=20023182;dest\\_type=city;from\\_beach\\_non\\_key\\_ufr=1;group\\_adults=2;group\\_children=0;hapos=1;highlighted\\_blocks=26268809\\_291371702\\_4\\_2\\_0;hpos=1;no\\_rooms=1;sr\\_order=popularity;sr\\_pri\\_blocks=26268809\\_291371702\\_4\\_2\\_0\\_171700;srepoch=1617491439;srpvid=342da2f7318e00d7;ucfs=1&&rmhotel=L3NIYXJjaC9mM2E3YzliYy03MjY1LTRkMDAtYTBmMi1mNjVmODQ5NTVhNjMvcmVzdWx0cy8yNjI2NC9yb29tcy8zMdAwMD9zaWQ9OWJjM2Y4YjYzMzI2NDc3YTlhYWJiMjA0MDdjYzAzNjMtWFg=](https://www.southwesthotels.com/hotel/us/eden-roc-miami-beach.en-us.html?aid=961823;label=SWA-GSUBNAV-HOTEL-BOOK;sid=18983326bd17a83da7b33f1439a2d697;all_sr_blocks=26268809_291371702_4_2_0;checkin=2021-04-30;checkout=2021-05-03;dest_id=20023182;dest_type=city;from_beach_non_key_ufr=1;group_adults=2;group_children=0;hapos=1;highlighted_blocks=26268809_291371702_4_2_0;hpos=1;no_rooms=1;sr_order=popularity;sr_pri_blocks=26268809_291371702_4_2_0_171700;srepoch=1617491439;srpvid=342da2f7318e00d7;ucfs=1&&rmhotel=L3NIYXJjaC9mM2E3YzliYy03MjY1LTRkMDAtYTBmMi1mNjVmODQ5NTVhNjMvcmVzdWx0cy8yNjI2NC9yb29tcy8zMdAwMD9zaWQ9OWJjM2Y4YjYzMzI2NDc3YTlhYWJiMjA0MDdjYzAzNjMtWFg=)

Figure 4. Cumberbatch, M-T. (2021, Apr 1). Screenshot1. [Digital image]. Retrieved from <https://www.southwest.com/>

Figure 5. Cumberbatch, M-T. (2021, Apr 1). Screenshot1. [Digital image]. Retrieved from <https://www.southwest.com/>