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THE BEST- AND WORST-RATED TRAVEL APPS

Determining the mobile quality leaders and laggards within the U.S. travel industry.

By Ben Gray

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The average app quality score of the 40 most popular travel apps in Google Play and Apple App Store, on a 100-point scale.

Travel Better With Apps Customers Love

The travel industry is being disrupted by digital. Sure, most bookings are made by PCs but smartphones and tablets influence planning decisions. Some clear mobile quality leaders and laggards are emerging, according to ARC's measurement of app store star ratings and user reviews. *ARC* from *Applause*, the 360° app quality company, revisited the state of app quality in the U.S. as rated by customers of the 40 most popular travel brands. What did we discover? Travel booking apps have mastered their mobile moments. Sharing economy travel brands are winning with mobile-first experiences. Traditional travel brands are underserving their mobile-savvy customers. Just in time for travel season, discover the best- and worst-rated travel apps so you don't get stranded with subpar apps.

8 Popular Brands Earn High Quality Marks

ARC from *Applause* authored this report to help travel brands understand how U.S. customers perceive their flagship Android and iOS app quality. In all, 40 of the most popular brands qualified for our biannual Applause Travel App Quality Index, comprised of the apps that earned more than 150 app store ratings and reviews— totaling nearly 400,000.

TRIPADVISOR STUDY

Forty-two percent of travelers worldwide use smartphones to plan or book their trips.

Just 8 travel apps earned quality scores of more than 67 with more than 5,000 user reviews:

- **Booking.com** [*Android* | *iOS*]
- **Alaska Airlines** [*Android* | *iOS*]
- **Kayak** [*Android* | *iOS*]
- **TripAdvisor** [*Android* | *iOS*]
- **TripIt** [*Android* | *iOS*]
- **Hotels.com** [*Android* | *iOS*]
- **Zipcar** [*Android* | *iOS*]
- **Orbitz** [*Android* | *iOS*].

What are the commonalities? Most are travel booking apps that are optimized for a traveler's mobile moments (see Figure 1). For example, one tap to see the best deals, seamless switching across devices, content and alerts pushed at the perfect moment and more. These experiences were born from customer-obsessed developers who fundamentally understand what their mobile users value.

Travel Apps That Have Room To Improve

On average, the 40 most reviewed travel apps lag all others in quality by 20 points—as compared with ARC's calculation of a 67 average app quality score from our analysis of more than 30 million apps globally, including but not limited to the travel industry (see Figure 2). This suggests that brands born in the Web era need to prioritize mobility given how quickly mobile is influencing decisions and serving as the preferred device used by Connected Travelers, according to *TripAdvisor*.

Reviews of travel apps also reflect the level of customer experiences. If a person uses an app to fly to Chicago in February and a storm delays or cancels her flight, app stores are increasingly serving as a channel through which to share brand experience. Six brands received more than 2,000 reviews and were rated by their customers with average app quality scores less than 40:

- **United Airlines** [*Android* | *iOS*]
- **Delta Airlines** [*Android* | *iOS*]
- **Hilton** [*Android* | *iOS*]
- **American Airlines** [*Android* | *iOS*]
- **Marriott** [*Android* | *iOS*]
- **Southwest** [*Android* | *iOS*]
- **Hertz** [*Android* | *iOS*]
- **US Airways** [*Android* | *iOS*].

Note that the four largest airlines and two of the three most popular hotel chains offer the poorest-rated apps, suggesting it's time for the leading brands to realize the opportunity cost of letting users down in terms of brand equity—and lost bookings.
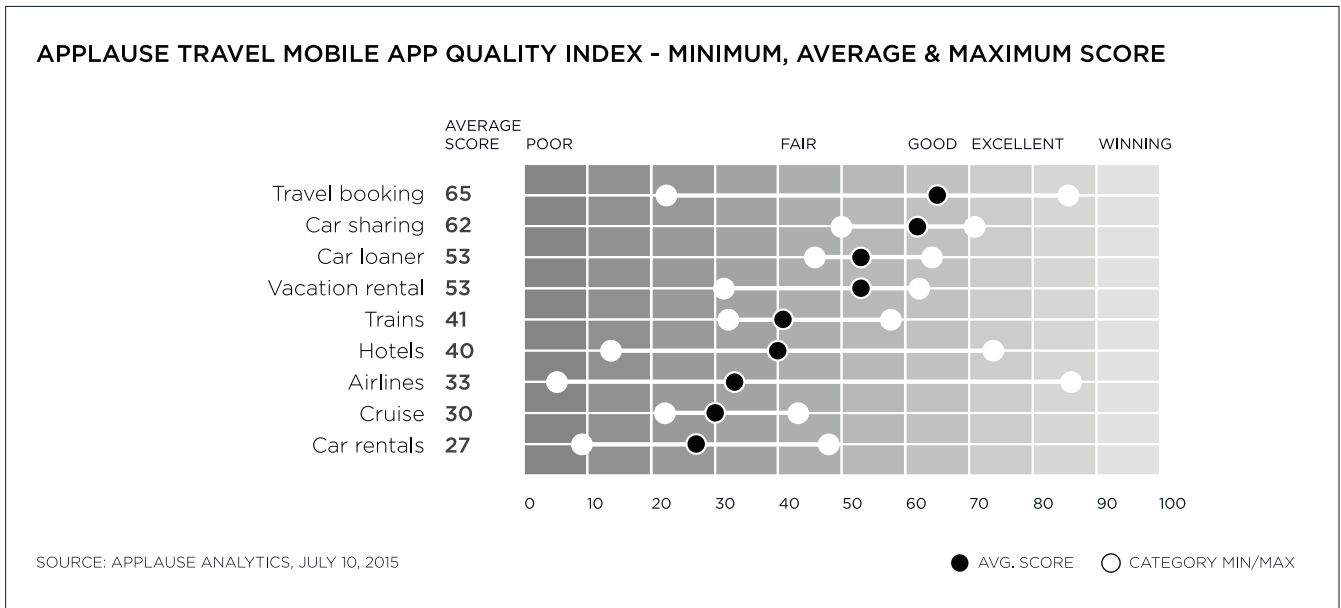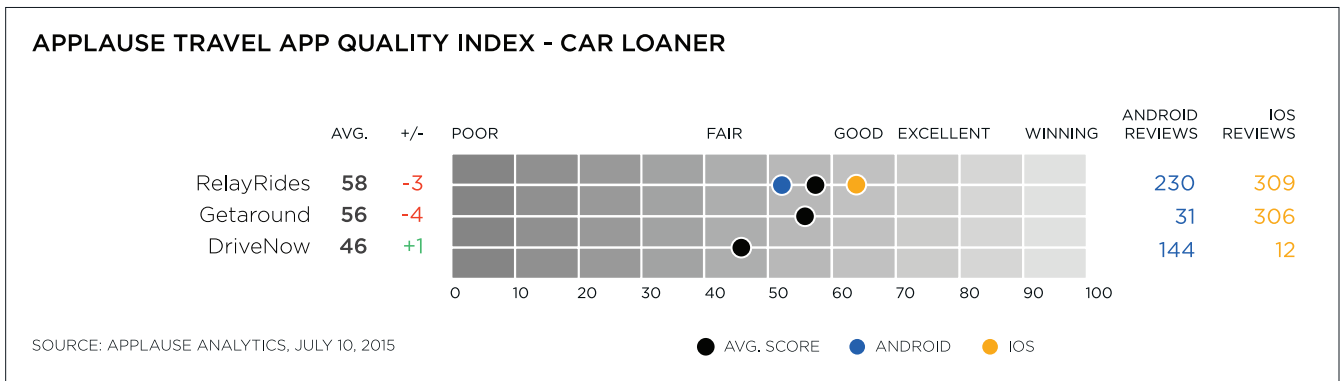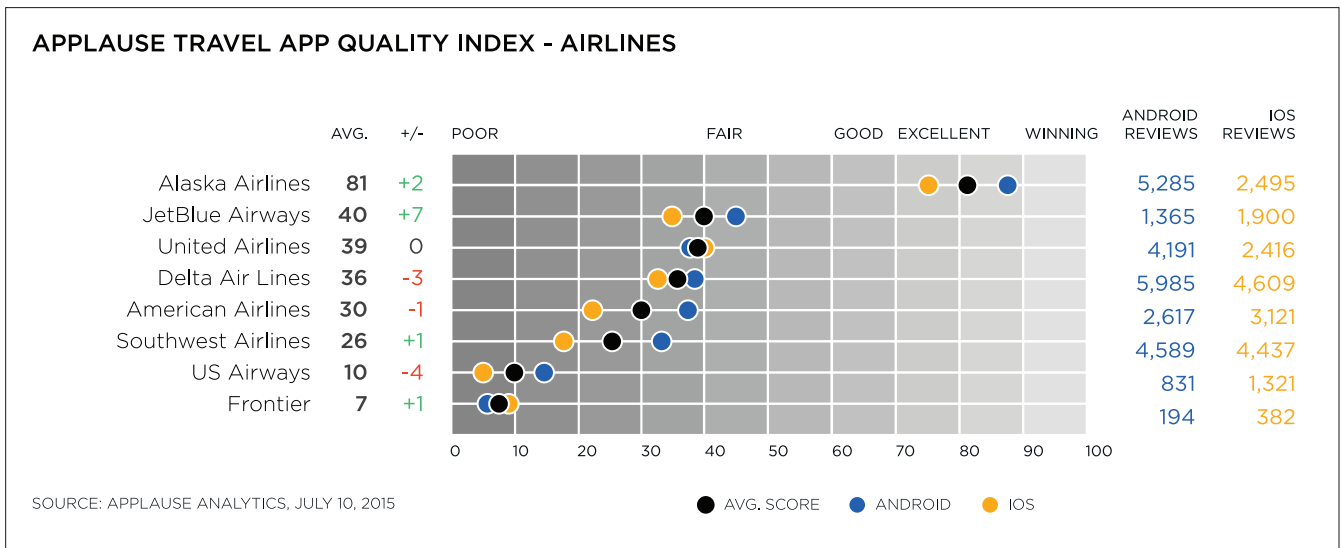
FIGURE 1

FIGURE 1

APPLAUSE TRAVEL MOBILE APP QUALITY INDEX - MINIMUM, AVERAGE & MAXIMUM SCORE

AVERAGE SCORE		POOR		FAIR		GOOD	EXCELLENT	WINNING
Travel booking	65							
Car sharing	62							
Car loaner	53							
Vacation rental	53							
Trains	41							
Hotels	40							
Airlines	33							
Cruise	30							
Car rentals	27							

SOURCE: APPLAUSE ANALYTICS, JULY 10, 2015

● AVG. SCORE   ○ CATEGORY MIN/MAX

FIGURE 2

APPLAUSE TRAVEL APP QUALITY INDEX - AIRLINES

	AVG.	+/-	POOR	FAIR	GOOD	EXCELLENT	WINNING	ANDROID REVIEWS	IOS REVIEWS
Alaska Airlines	81	+2						5,285	2,495
JetBlue Airways	40	+7						1,365	1,900
United Airlines	39	0						4,191	2,416
Delta Air Lines	36	-3						5,985	4,609
American Airlines	30	-1						2,617	3,121
Southwest Airlines	26	+1						4,589	4,437
US Airways	10	-4						831	1,321
Frontier	7	+1						194	382

SOURCE: APPLAUSE ANALYTICS, JULY 10, 2015

● AVG. SCORE   ● ANDROID   ● IOS

APPLAUSE TRAVEL APP QUALITY INDEX - CAR LOANER

	AVG.	+/-	POOR	FAIR	GOOD	EXCELLENT	WINNING	ANDROID REVIEWS	IOS REVIEWS
RelayRides	58	-3						230	309
Getaround	56	-4						31	306
DriveNow	46	+1						144	12

SOURCE: APPLAUSE ANALYTICS, JULY 10, 2015

● AVG. SCORE   ● ANDROID   ● IOS

APPLAUSE TRAVEL APP QUALITY INDEX - CAR RENTALS

	AVG.	+/-	ANDROID REVIEWS	IOS REVIEWS
National	46	-8	170	181
Avis	29	+3	391	391
Hertz	19	+3	1,012	2,226
Budget	14	0	166	78T

Scale: POOR · FAIR · GOOD · EXCELLENT · WINNING (0–100)

● AVG. SCORE ● ANDROID ● IOS
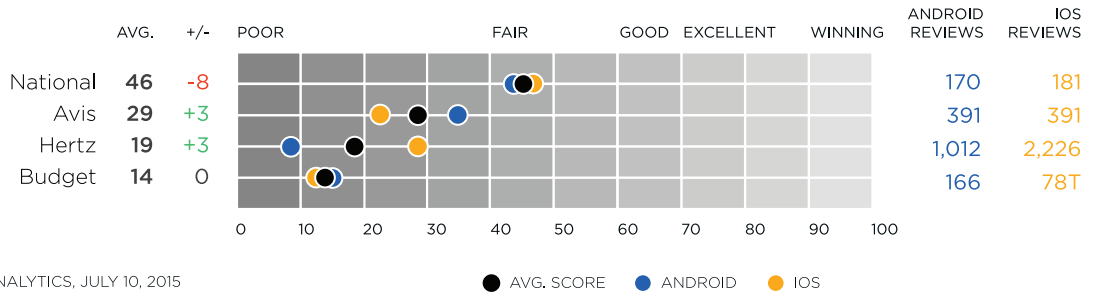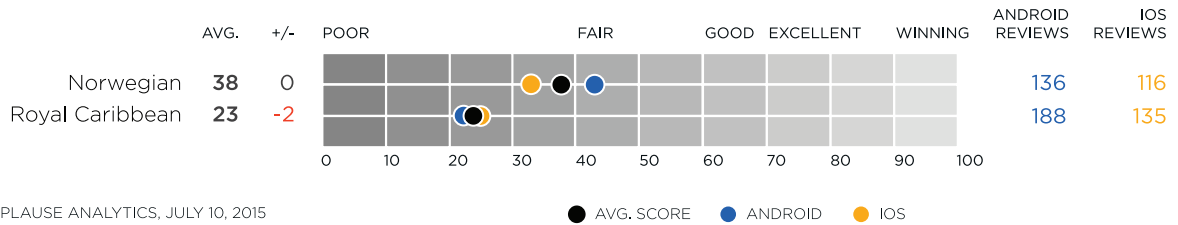
APPLAUSE TRAVEL APP QUALITY INDEX - CAR SHARING
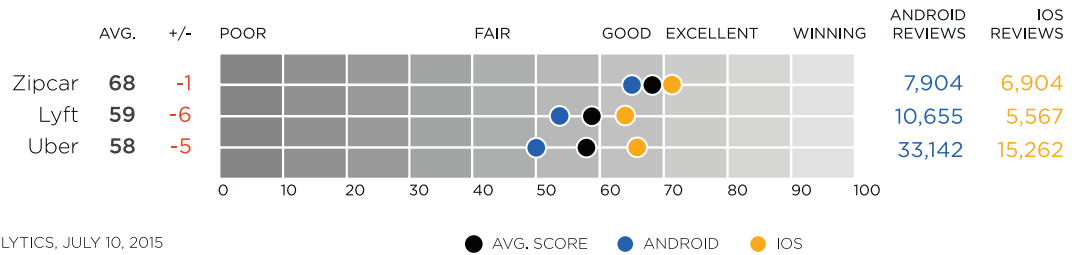
	AVG.	+/-	ANDROID REVIEWS	IOS REVIEWS
Zipcar	68	-1	7,904	6,904
Lyft	59	-6	10,655	5,567
Uber	58	-5	33,142	15,262

Scale: POOR · FAIR · GOOD · EXCELLENT · WINNING (0–100)

● AVG. SCORE ● ANDROID ● IOS

APPLAUSE TRAVEL APP QUALITY INDEX - CRUISE

	AVG.	+/-	ANDROID REVIEWS	IOS REVIEWS
Norwegian	38	0	136	116
Royal Caribbean	23	-2	188	135

Scale: POOR · FAIR · GOOD · EXCELLENT · WINNING (0–100)

● AVG. SCORE ● ANDROID ● IOS

APPLAUSE TRAVEL APP QUALITY INDEX - HOTELS

	AVG.	+/-	ANDROID REVIEWS	IOS REVIEWS
Intercontinental	59	-1	1,034	2,692
Starwood	58	-2	686	1,565
Hilton	39	+15	634	1,367
Best Western	32	-9	949	224
Hyatt	30	-4	186	281
Marriott	28	-2	1,671	1,486

Scale: POOR · FAIR · GOOD · EXCELLENT · WINNING (0–100)

● AVG. SCORE ● ANDROID ● IOS

APPLAUSE TRAVEL APP QUALITY INDEX - TRAINS

	AVG.	+/-	ANDROID REVIEWS	IOS REVIEWS
Amtrak	41	-2	2,117	1,637

● AVG. SCORE ● ANDROID ● IOS
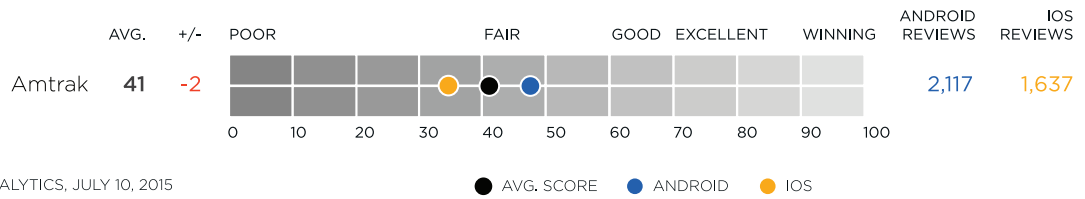
APPLAUSE TRAVEL APP QUALITY INDEX - TRAVEL BOOKING

	AVG.	+/-	ANDROID REVIEWS	IOS REVIEWS
Booking.com	86	+1	29,763	8,337
Kayak	77	0	18,889	13,831
TripAdvisor	77	-1	35,863	23,622
TripIt	74	+1	9,689	13,089
Hotels.com	69	+2	20,108	9,227
Orbitz	68	+1	7,391	5,132
Agoda	67	0	8,571	313
Priceline	55	0	7,445	4,678
Expedia	48	-3	7,993	3,603
Travelocity	26	-1	947	712

● AVG. SCORE ● ANDROID ● IOS
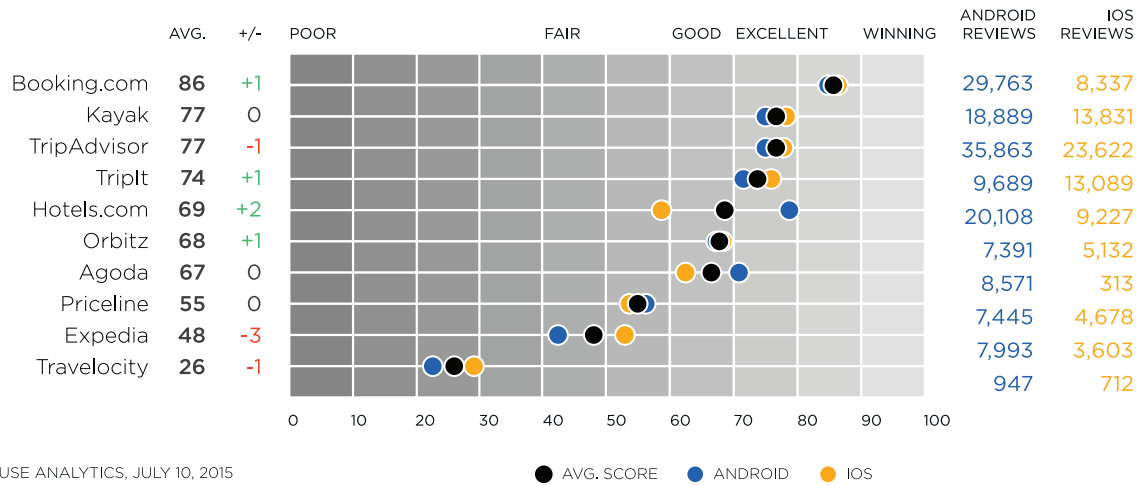
APPLAUSE TRAVEL APP QUALITY INDEX - VACATION RENTALS

	AVG.	+/-	ANDROID REVIEWS	IOS REVIEWS
Airbnb	60	-4	5,107	4,097
HomeAway	54	+2	1,393	1,285
Couchsurfing	44	0	1,336	535

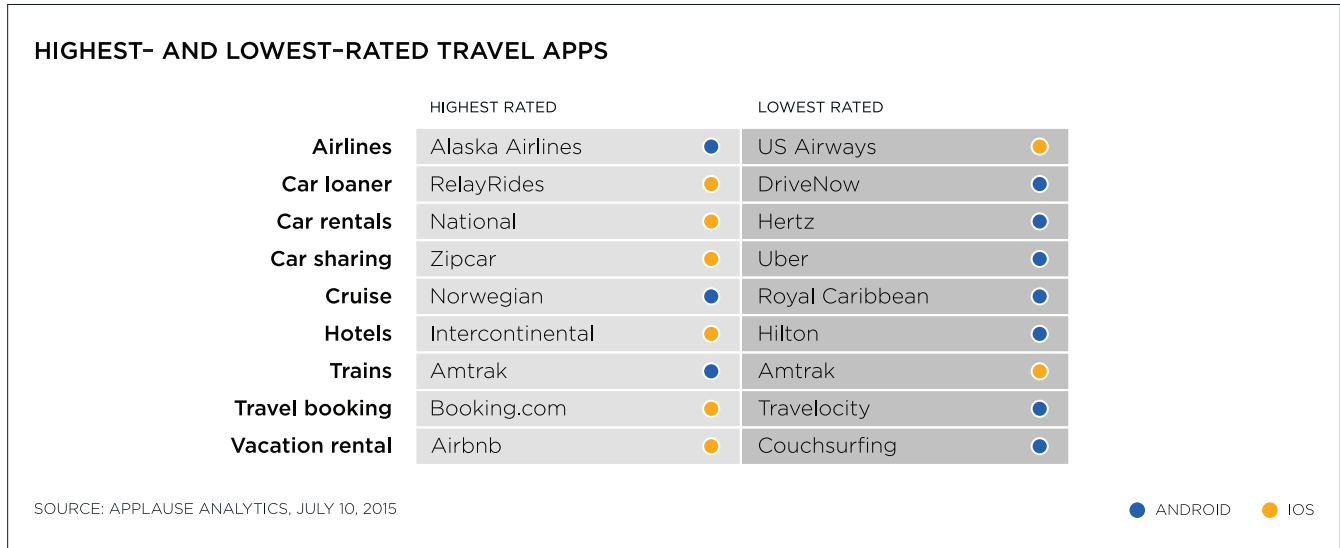● AVG. SCORE ● ANDROID ● IOS
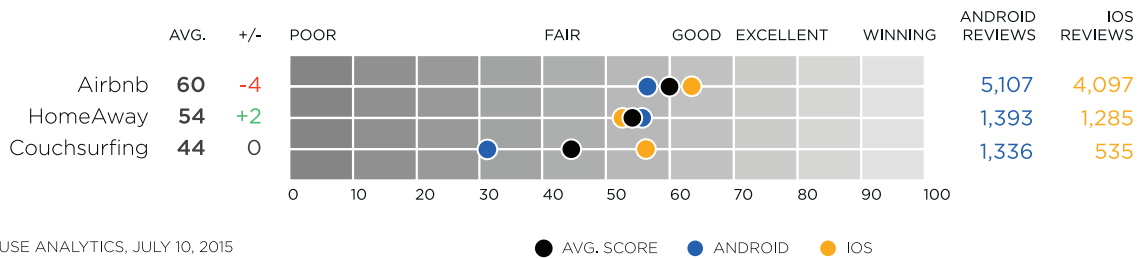
The Best- And Worst-Rated Travel Apps

Some travel apps emerged from the crowd with amazing reviews, such as Alaska Airlines for Android. Others stood out for all the wrong reasons. Seven of the nine lowest-rated apps were on Android while six of the nine highest-rated apps were on iOS (see Figure 3).

FIGURE 3

HIGHEST- AND LOWEST-RATED TRAVEL APPS

	HIGHEST RATED		LOWEST RATED	
Airlines	Alaska Airlines	●	US Airways	●
Car loaner	RelayRides	●	DriveNow	●
Car rentals	National	●	Hertz	●
Car sharing	Zipcar	●	Uber	●
Cruise	Norwegian	●	Royal Caribbean	●
Hotels	Intercontinental	●	Hilton	●
Trains	Amtrak	●	Amtrak	●
Travel booking	Booking.com	●	Travelocity	●
Vacation rental	Airbnb	●	Couchsurfing	●

SOURCE: APPLAUSE ANALYTICS, JULY 10, 2015   ● ANDROID   ● IOS

Some Brands Had Large Sentiment Swings

Since ARC's *inaugural travel report* in November 2014, most brands didn't experience significant changes in user sentiment. But two brands earned substantial improvement. Hilton introduced a new iOS build in June 2015 that enhanced booking rate transparency and simplified reservation field entry. JetBlue Airways added flight status on its Today view and introduced Touch ID login to TrueBlue in December 2014. Their customers have taken notice and applauded.

MOVERS & SHAKERS	
Hilton	+15
JetBlue Airways	+7
Uber	-5
Lyft	-6
National	-8
Best Western	-9

SOURCE: APPLAUSE ANALYTICS, JULY 10, 2015

But with the good, comes the bad. Uber, Lyft, National and Best Western earned poor distinctions with scores that declined 5 points or more. These brands have work to do to stem their user sentiment decline and win more mobile customers and greater loyalty. **arc**

About ARC

ARC from *Applause* is a research group dedicated to providing insights and data on the apps economy. ARC leverages data from a variety of sources, including proprietary Applause data, to provide a 360° view of app quality. ARC combines this data, with analysis, into reports to help brands and app developers understand what is happening in the apps economy.

Learn more at *http://arc.applause.com*.

About Applause Analytics

Combing through half a billion ratings and user reviews submitted across more than 30 million apps in the Android and iOS app stores around the world, Applause Analytics closes the gap between mobile app developers and their customers, generating actionable insights and quantifiable metrics based on what users are actually saying about their app experiences.

Learn more at *www.applause.com/analytics*.