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Week 1 Writeup – Physical Objects: Mugs

The designs analysis was of two different styles of mugs. Similarities between the two mugs consist of: their volume, purpose, and not being dishwasher safe, however only the better designed mug explicitly stated that it was not dishwasher safe while the poorer designed mug left it open for interpretation by stating “handwashing recommended”. This is not a good starting difference between the mugs. It is important to be clear with the user the bounds in wish the product can be used, clearing up any miscommunications will make the experience easier for the consumer which is the goal when designing. The major differences between the two mugs are the materials of the mug, the shape of the mug, and the biggest difference is the design of the handle.

The better designed mug, a Zen mug that has a matte hand sprayed textured glaze. In contrast, the poorer designed mug, a Target mug that has a pearlized glaze. The difference of the types of glazes impacts the ability to hold the mugs. Not everybody decides to hold a mug by the handle and with cleaning which must be done by hand the consumer will be holding onto the body of the mug. The Zen mug’s textured body creates friction between the body and the user’s hand creating a studier grip. This is more helpful with hand washing, making the mug less likely to slip out of the user’s hand and accidentally break. The Target mug’s glaze is completely smooth and there is no texture to create more grip. This means that the mug can easily slide out of the user’s hand because of the mug’s almost frictionless surface. This risk only increases while washing the mug by hand, which is recommended.

In pairing with the material of the mugs their individual shapes play an equally important design role. In addition to Targets almost frictionless mug the body is short and thick. This means that not a lot of hand sizes can wrap around the body of the mug to hold. The body of the mug is also completely straight, there is no flaring that would make holding the mug less of a strain having gravity work in the user’s favor. The Zen mug, however, has a slight flare base at the bottom and is a longer mug, not as wide as the Target mug. Because of the flare in the body of the mug, different hand sizes have different resting places on the body of the mug making it more versatile to different audiences.

The biggest difference between the two mugs is their handles. The Zen mug as a straight wooden handle that angles away from the body of the mug. The handle also only attaches at the top leaving the bottom open for fingers of hands of any size. Additionally, there is a thumb rest at the top of the handle for added stability and room for fingers to rest at the top. With the handle having an open bottom design it allows for different hand sizes, holding styles, and the possibility for accessibility tools that can be slid through the bottom of the handle. The handle was made with the consumer in mind. The Target one is the complete opposite. The consumer was not in mind with the design of the handle. The Target mug’s handle is a small circle in the center of the body. With the placement of the handle onto the body there is no place for fingers that cannot fit into the handle to rest against the mug, which is necessary given the impractical design of the handle. The inner diameter of the mug’s circle handle is so small that the average size hand cannot comfortably fit more than one finger into it, so users with bigger hands are out of luck. With so little support with the handle and the size there is also no counterbalance with the mug making the user fight against the mug putting more strain on the wrist. Target’s mug allows the opportunity to hurt the consumer without risk of any reward.

While the Target mug may fit into a household aesthetic the consumer was not at the center of the design process while the Zen mug was must more consumer centered. With this the Zen mug is the better designed mug.