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Week 2 Writeup – Familiar Objects: Over ear Headphones

In a world with a constant influx of products onto the market, design principles are constantly being bent and manipulated to fit into a product and the designer’s vision of that product. However, even with good over arching design certain concepts can come up short. In this case a headset with good affordances but over all a lesser design compared to a better-designed headset with extremely poor affordances.

For an inexperienced user of any group of objects it is important to have a clear way to communicate what does what to the user. This only escalates on more complicated devices, yes buttons are for pushing but this component doesn’t look like a button it looks like a switch and oh the button has multiple set functions not declared on the object. This is what the Sony MX5’s interface is like. While looking at the headphones while aesthetically very neat and coherent it is unclear how they are supposed to go on the head. With the sharper angle the ear cups differing from the left side and the right side are virtually impossible without looking for the markers on the headphones themselves. After getting the headphones on there are two long, thin, switch-like feeling buttons on the back of the left ear cup and a touchpad on the right side’s housing cover. After using the headphones for a while or if someone is more used to this layout it makes sense for a wireless set of headphones, however there is nothing on the headphones themselves that indicates the right side as a touchpad. This goes directly against Don Norman’s definition of affordance being a perceivable action. While the switch-like buttons are better affordance because it indicates some interaction between the user and the headphones the identification markers for these buttons are on the headphones. The problem with this? If the user does not know what the buttons are doing the user would have to take off the headphones to identify what each button does or well at least one function the button does for each button has multiple functions. The problem with having to take off the headphones to identify the button usage is that the headphones are put into a sleep mode whenever taken off the ear, eliminating feedback for the action. That paired with poor affordance is not a good match.

In contrast a headset that shows good affordance is the Jeecoo V2OU’s. The headphones have an external microphone on the left side. With the standard of microphones being on the left side it is much more intuitive the way the headset is supposed to go on. Additionally, there is a control panel on the cord of the headphones that has all the controls in one clear place. There are two dials, a switch control, and one large button on the panel. Switches turn something on and off and this switch is used to turn the mic on or off and which state the switch is in is indicated by symbols on the panel. Dials allow for controllability in ranges, and they manage the intensity of the volume and the microphone, both of which also have indicators on the panel. Lastly the button in the center is for turning on the RGB light display and turns on itself with that feature is active.   
 While the V2OU’s are not as aesthetic of a design and consistent as the MX5’s where the MX5’s fails with affordance the V2OU’s thrive.