

Assignment 1

HELGA RYKOV IBSEN, MCV462

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1 Wake-up light alarm: Product description



Figure 1: A traditional alarm clock

In the paper at hand, I will take my point of departure in the HCI paradigm and its UX perspective in particular and analyse a contemporary counterpart to a traditional alarm clock — a wake-up light alarm. The importance of the alarm clock can hardly be underestimated, as I use it almost every day, except, perhaps the weekends.

While traditional clocks can have high pitch, making them rather annoying, wake-up light alarms offer such pleasant sounds as, say, bird songs or piano play. However, its their innovative light technology that makes light alarms unique and truly admirable.

Every day I wake up to a pleasant and warm yellow light that starts out as red and slowly gets more and more intense in brightness, turning eventually yellow. That leaves me feeling positively nourished during the bleak winter months.

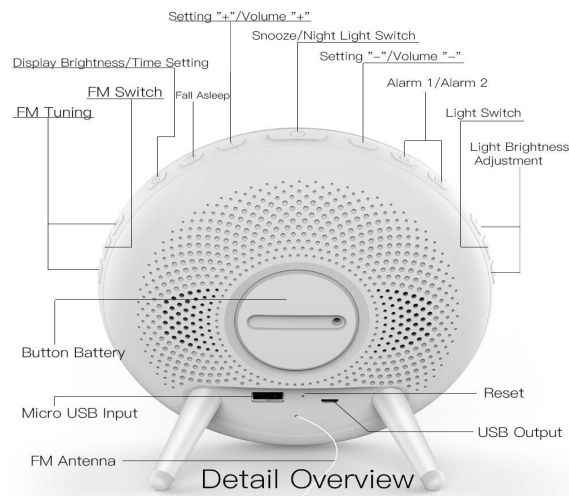
Besides, the delicate sounds of bird chirping are heavenly to wake up to. In the week days, I usually get up right away, without activating the snooze. But in the weekends, I allow myself the pleasure of pressing the snooze button several times. The snooze button is placed at the very top of the disk, which makes it very easy to make the alarm go off. It is also in the weekends that I enjoy using its extra feature — a DAB radio and being woken up to my favourite morning radio programs, which I seldom have time for during the week.

Alongside functionality, the issue of aesthetics is perhaps of most importance to me, because contemplating beautiful things gives me a special pleasure, and I simply love the way my wake-up light clock looks, because, among other things, its elegant round shape and shiny surface fit organically into the interior design of my bedroom. To me, it is not only an ordinary alarm clock, but an object of art and design that would decorate a bedside table of any bedroom.

Last but not least, my kids are still occasionally sleeping in my bedroom, which is why I usu-



(a) The light is on when the alarm gets activated



(b) Technical specifications

Figure 2: Philips wake-up light alarm

ally activate the Night Light before going to bed, which functions more or less like night light for children.

2 Theoretical principles of user centered design

In their book *An Introduction to Human-Computer Interaction* the authors (K. Hornbæk, 2000) define the user centered approach in the field of the HCI research as a focus on people or users, rather than a focus on the interactive systems as such.

Interestingly, Nielsen (1993) writes that this is a relatively new approach and that prior to the focus on humans, there was a belief that rational thinking is enough, which is why developers concentrated on the functionality and effectiveness of computer systems. That is partly because back that time the first computer systems were highly complex and usually required extensive expert knowledge. In other words, the purpose of those systems was first and foremost to accomplish complex problem settings rather than being an object of pleasure and entertainment.

However, as Nielsen (1993) points out, the focus has changed with the introduction of the first computer games, graphical user interfaces (GUIs) in particular, in the early 1980s. Since then the field of HCI became increasingly interested in such aspects as (1) the psychology of users and their needs and motivations; (2) engaging users in product development through iterative testing of the product; and finally (3) ethical considerations on the way interactive systems may directly or indirectly influence people.

In addition to those three main principles of HCI, in their article (K. Hornbæk, 2011) also mention the present-day focus on hedonic qualities of use, which they define in terms of aesthetics or self-actualization. The principle of "no hurt being done" implies the idea of interactive systems being made for men, and not vice versa. The process of interacting with products is being increasingly associated with positive emotions.

Finally, Nielsen (1993) defines the notion of *usability* in terms of such five usability attributes as:

- *Learnability* that simply means the level of accessibility of the system.
- *Efficiency* that is associated with a high level of productivity of the system.
- *Memorability* that is pretty obvious and means that the system should be easy to remember, even after not having used it for some time.
- *Errors* should be few and there should not be any fatal errors.
- *Satisfaction* speaks for itself and implies that users like using the system

3 Wake-up light alarm: Product analysis

In the following I am going to delineate the positive and negative aspects of my experience of interacting with the wake-up light alarm. Due to the confines of the present paper, I will analyse the product by drawing on (Nielsen, 1993) four attributes of the concept of *usability*.

1. *Learnability*: According to this concept, the product is supposed to be user centered if it is easy to learn. The ideal scenario for that could be the idea of "one key fits all" (just like with Ipods) or "one size fits all" (e.g. onesies). That is definitely not the case with the wake-up light alarm. In terms of *learnability*, traditional clocks are much more user centered as they only have two or three buttons to press on.
The product at hand, on the other hand, is less intuitive than the traditional clock and is hard to navigate through without first studying the manual.
2. *Easy to remember*: It is similarly doubtful whether it is easy to remember all the functions of this alarm — simply because it contains no less than eight (or even more) different functionalities. That means, that from that perspective, it does not pass the test of being user centered either.
Yet, I believe that it is very rarely the case that we need to use all the functions available in a product — just like we may have several dozens of apps in our mobile phones, but in the actual fact use just a few of them.
3. *Efficient to use*: The question of whether this clock is efficient or not is also quite subjective. As far as I am concerned, I believe that it would definitely pass the test of user-friendliness, because it is a nice quality watch that operates seamlessly without glitches or interruptions. I cannot say either that it does not do its job, because I do get up every time the alarm sets off.
And yet, the same cannot be said about my husband, who rarely gets up at its alarm, simply because the sound and the light are not loud and irritating enough.
4. *Satisfaction*: The wake-up light alarm has been clinically tested and is claimed to be used as light therapy to treat seasonal affective disorder (SAD). Even though I do not suffer from seasonal depression, the slowly growing red-tinted light that simulates the sun rise has a soothing and pleasant effect on me.
Finally, the alarm is beautifully designed and is a true pleasure to the eye.

References

- Hornbæk, K., K. & Bargas-Avila. (2011). Old wine in new bottles or novel challenges? a critical analysis of empirical studies of user experience.
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