

SDM COLLEGE OF ENGINEERING AND TECHNOLOGY

Dhavalagiri, Dharwad-580002, Karnataka State, India.

Email: cse.sdmcet@gmail.com

DEPARTMENT OF COMPUTER SCIENCE AND ENGINEERING

A Report on Usability Review of Two Software Interfaces

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By

Mr. Sujay R Bhakri USN: 2SD22CS110



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Usability:

Usability is one of the most important factors that affects the user experience of any application, website, or any other piece of software. Usability principles like Visibility, User control, etc. are make or break for many applications. In simple words, usability is the ease with which a user can use a product, or software to perform the core tasks for which the product or software has been created.

Attributes of Usability:

1. **Learnability:** How long does it take a new user to become productive with the system?
2. **Speed of Operation:** How well does the system response match the user's work practice?
3. **Robustness:** How tolerant is the system of user error?
4. **Recoverability:** How good is the system at recovering from user errors?
5. **Adaptability:** How closely is the system tied to a single model of work?



Let us understand Usability and its attributes by looking at the UIs of two majorly used media players-

- **VLC Media Player**
- **Windows Media Player**

1. VLC Media Player:

VLC media player is a free and open-source, portable, cross-platform media player software and streaming media server developed by the VideoLAN project. VLC is available for desktop operating systems and mobile platforms, such as Android, iOS and iPadOS.

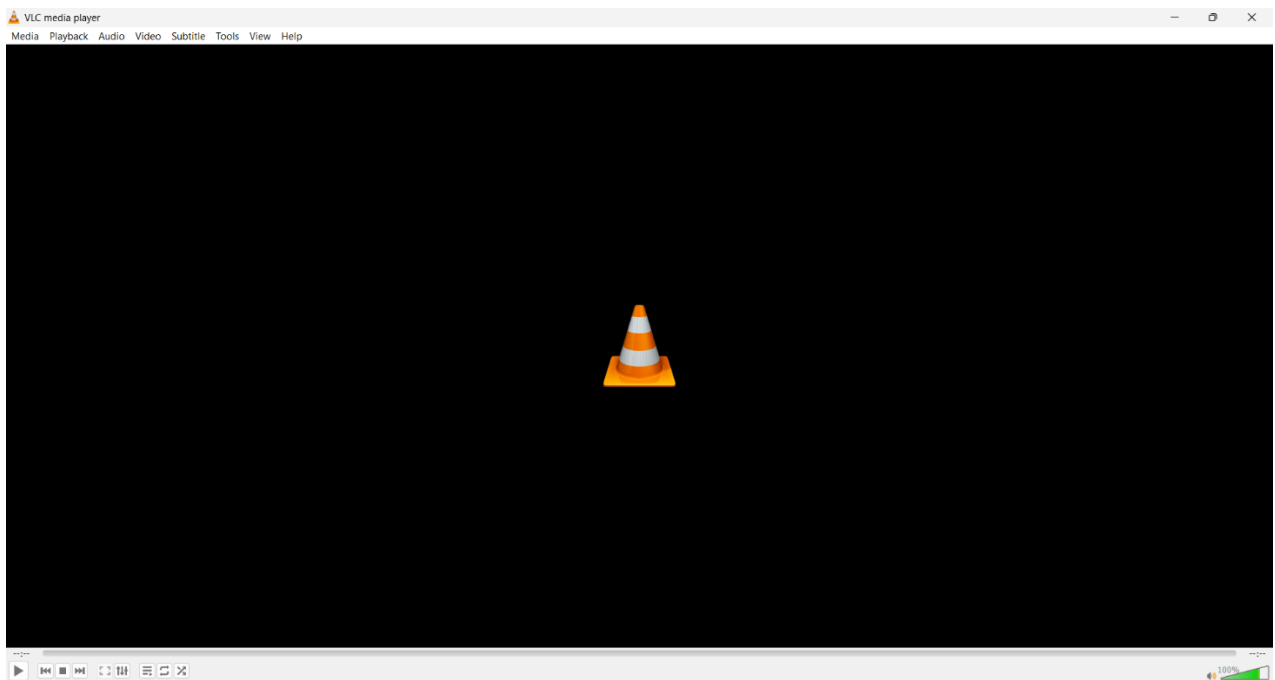


FIGURE 1- VLC MEDIA PLAYER UI

- **Learnability:**
 - i. The Minimalistic interface is straightforward, with a clear focus on media playback, which helps users quickly understand how to use the software.



- ii. The use of easily recognizable icons for functions like play, pause, stop, and volume control makes it intuitive for users of all skill levels.

- **Speed of Operation:**

- i. The menu bar at the top provides fast access to various features such as media, playback, audio, video, subtitles, tools, and help.
- ii. VLC offers numerous keyboard shortcuts for frequent actions, enhancing efficiency for experienced users.

- **Robustness:**

- i. Actions like playing or pausing a media file are met with immediate visual and auditory feedback, which reassures users that their commands have been recognized.
- ii. The volume slider is easily accessible and allows for quick adjustments, which is essential for media playback.

- **Recoverability:**

- i. When users attempt to close the application or remove a playlist, confirmation prompts help prevent accidental loss of data or progress. This feature is crucial for recoverability, ensuring users have a chance to reconsider their actions.
- ii. When VLC encounters an issue (e.g., unsupported file format), it provides clear error messages and suggestions for resolving the problem, allowing users to take corrective action.



- **Adaptability:**

- i. While VLC primarily uses a standard interface, users can download and apply different skins, allowing for visual adaptability to suit personal tastes.
- ii. VLC is available on various platforms, including Windows, macOS, Linux, Android, and iOS. This cross-platform functionality allows users to adapt to different devices while maintaining a consistent experience.

- **Areas Of Improvement:**

While basic playback is intuitive, some advanced features may require a learning curve. A guided tutorial or tips for new users could enhance overall usability.



2. Windows Media Player:

Windows Media Player is the first media player and media library application that Microsoft developed to play audio and video on personal computers. It has been a component of the Microsoft Windows operating system.

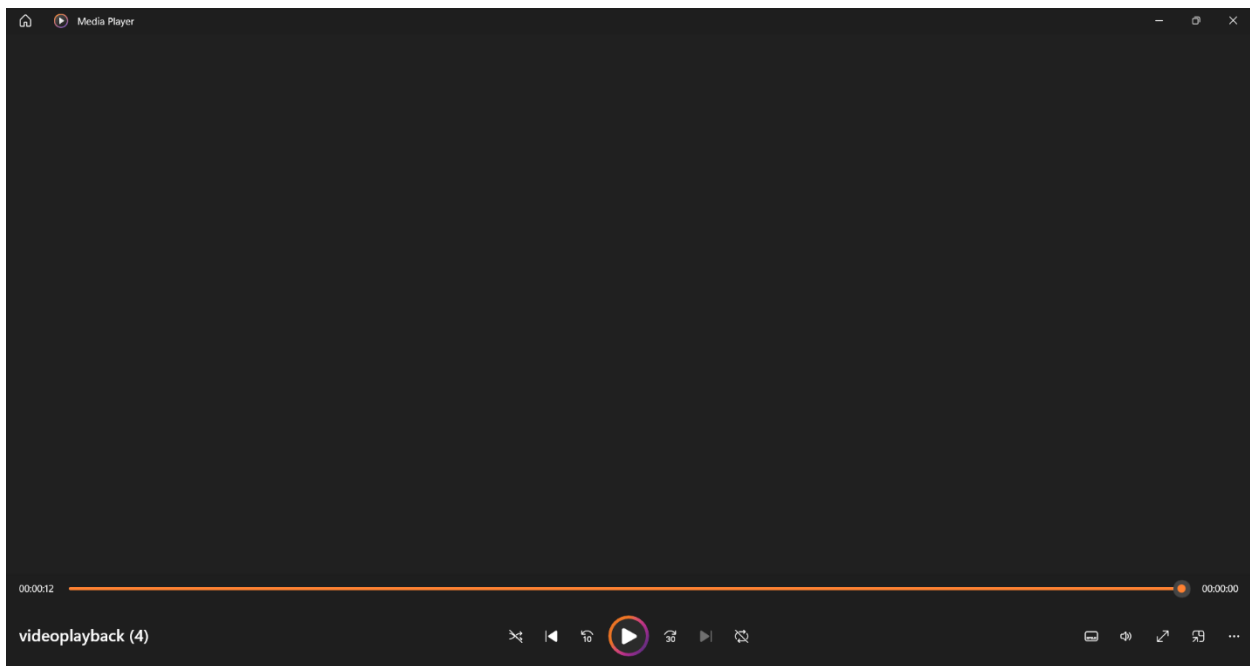


FIGURE 2- WINDOWS MEDIA PLAYER UI

- **Learnability:**

- i. The layout of Windows Media Player is straightforward, making it easy for new users to navigate without extensive instructions. The essential controls are prominently displayed, allowing users to quickly learn how to operate the player.



- **Speed of Operation:**

- i. Windows Media Player opens quickly, allowing users to start playing media almost immediately. This rapid startup enhances user satisfaction by minimizing wait times.
- ii. Users can swiftly browse through their media library, with fast search capabilities that allow for quick retrieval of desired files or playlists.

- **Robustness:**

- i. Windows Media Player is known for its stability, with few occurrences of crashes or freezes during playback, which contributes to a positive user experience.
- ii. Users can adjust settings for buffering, playback quality, and other features, allowing for personalized configurations.

- **Recoverability:**

- i. If a playback error occurs, the player often attempts to resume from the last successful point, minimizing disruption and allowing users to continue enjoying their media without significant interruptions.
- ii. In the case of a crash, Windows Media Player is designed to recover the previous session's state, including open files and settings, allowing users to quickly resume their activities without extensive reconfiguration.



- **Adaptability:**

- i. When streaming media, the player automatically adjusts the quality based on the user's internet connection, ensuring smooth playback even in fluctuating network conditions. This adaptability enhances the viewing experience by reducing buffering and interruptions.
- ii. Windows Media Player offers users the ability to customize the appearance of the interface. Users can choose from various skins and themes, allowing for a personalized experience that caters to individual preferences.

- **Areas of Improvement:**

- i. While Windows Media Player supports many common formats, expanding support to include more contemporary formats (e.g., FLAC, OGG, etc.) and codecs would make it a more versatile player.
- ii. The minimalistic design while more visually appealing might disappoint some users who desire some advanced functionalities

