

UX research mini project: Aeropress coffee maker

By Petra Kabátová

SHORT DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT

I decided to use for my user research Aeropress coffee maker. This device is composed of two cylinders and few more parts, it is supposed to be easy to use. Its purpose is to offer the experience of “real” coffee without proper coffee machine at hand, at least that’s what I, total coffee ignorant, understand it.

MAIN QUESTION OF RESEARCH

My main interest here is: “What are the real world best practices for this device?”



Aeropress coffee maker

POSSIBLE PROBLEMS ASSUMPTIONS

Coffee maker is really simple device, I have seen instruction video how to use it. I am curious if the use is seamless when I see almost none instructions on the device itself. Are the two cylinders self-explanatory enough for users?

Some parts seem to be unnecessary – unless for me – you can use a million other things from your kitchen instead. I would assume that at least one half of the stuff to produce is just the waste of resources.

Interview Protocol

[Overarching Questions]

Is the use of Aeropress intuitive and seamless?

Are there any redundant parts of the set?

[Introduction]

Hello, my name is Petra Kabátová and I am here to collect information, how do people use coffee maker Aeropress.

This interview will take cca 45 minutes, during this time I will be giving you different questions about the device and processes.

I am not very familiar with coffee machines and coffee itself at all, so please feel free to explain in detail following questions, I am here to learn from you.

Before we start, I would like to mention few things:

I would like you to keep in mind, that the whole interview is confidential, I will use the answers for my study research. I will collect answers from several interviews and in the final report your responses will be not easily traced to you. If I quote you in final report it will be done without your name. If there is anything you really don't want on the record, even if it's anonymized, just tell me.

This interview is voluntary on your part – If you will want to stop for any reason, please let me know. I don't expect any uncomfortable questions, but if you will feel that you are not comfortable with any question, just tell me and we can exclude that question. Also we can end the interview at any point. If you do not wish me to use anything that we've discussed prior to stopping the interview, I will certainly respect that and will not use it.

I may have a few follow-up questions after I complete all my interviews, so I may be in touch again. Also, I can send you a copy of the report that will be written based on this interview if you would like.

Do you have any questions for me or can we start?

Would it be OK for you if I take an audio recording? I want to be sure I don't miss anything, only I will have access to this record. Thanks

[Warm up]

First a couple of background questions:

How often do you drink coffee?

What is your favorite style of coffee preparation?

[Recent use]

1. I would like you to think about the last time you used Aeropress. Can you tell me about it?
 - When and where did you prepare the coffee?
 - What cup did you use?
 - How long did it take?
 - Was it for you or someone else?
 - How did you prepare the coffee?
 - When and where did you drink it?
 - What coffee did you use? Do you prepare it before use?
 - What parts of the set did you use and how?
 - Did anything unusual happened by preparation?
 - Would you say that that was a typical process?

2. Now, I'd like you to think about a recent coffee preparation that was unusual or uncommon for you. For example, if you prepared coffee for more people or you had some kind of problems during the preparation.
 - What made it unusual?
 - How did you handle the situation?
 - Do you have any trick how to prevent the situation?
 - Is this common situation? Did it happen to anyone else you know?

2b) Can you describe typical process?

[Care]

3. What was the last time you washed the coffee maker? Do you remember it?
 - How did you wash the device?
 - Did you use any detergent?
 - How long does it take to wash the device?
 - How do you dry it?
 - What did you do with the used coffee substance?

4. Where is the device now?
 - Is it often there?
 - Where do you store it when it is dry and where when it is wet?
 - How much rood does it occupy?

5. How do you find the manipulation with filters?
 - Did you order new one already?
 - How long does the process take?

6. Do you use every part of the set?
 - Which do you use?
 - Where do you keep the rest?

[Overall feeling]

7. How do you feel about the device?
 - Would you recommend it to your friend or buy it again? Why?
 - Would you inform your friend about some issues regarding the device?
 - Were you considering any other similar device?
 - Were your expectations fulfilled? Why?

[Other questions]

I am interested in any weak points during the preparing of coffee, can you think of anything that makes you think or spend extra time before preparing the coffee?

[Conclusion]

Thank you for your time, if anything else occurs to you regarding this topic, please don't hesitate to contact me by email. I may contact you to ask new follow-up questions. If you wish, I can send you the report based on this interview. Do you have any questions? Thank you again!

Affinity notes

Quotations by interview participants;

- 1) S1: "It takes 4 minutes to prepare one coffee. I don't mind to prepare coffee for more people."
- 2) S2: "I hate prepare coffee for more people. It takes so much time."
- 3) S1: "Sometimes I forget about the coffee, instead of 2 minutes I leave it there for 10 minutes, It is stronger then."
- 4) S2: "Other parts (mixing stick, measuring spoon and some mysterious part) I don't use. We wash everything in hands, so it would be more work for me."
- 5) S2: "Coffee from this device is fairly good. My mum offered me similar metal device, but it didn't use paper filters, so it didn't work properly. But I miss foam 😊."

Observations and interpretations:

- 1) S1: When you prepare coffee for more people, it is not ready at the same time (it takes at least 4 min preparation and 2 minutes washing)
- 2) S2 poured boiling water to the wrong opening (on pressing cylinder), says she was not concentrated. The design is not helping in this problem.
- 3) S2: Bottom part should be wider to be more stable. User S2 has concerns it could turn over with hot coffee when children are around.

- 4) S2: Device is not for everyone, some people do not want to use it at all (mum).
- 5) S1+S2: Time savers – start preparation with boiling water, water pour in one step, use grinded coffee.

Factual statements

- 1) You need to be concentrated when preparing coffee.
- 2) Coffee maker is not intuitive to use.
- 3) Design should lead user how to use the device: clearly visible difference between pressing cylinder and cylinder for holding coffee –shape/color.
- 4) Issues are: time, no foam, you have to be concentrated
- 5) Good for travelling (camping), cottages and everywhere you don't have budget for proper coffee machine.

Mix

- 1) Pressing the cylinder seems to be wobbly, you need skill and force, but participants seems to be OK with it and doesn't perceive this as problem.
- 2) S1: "It takes time (to prepare coffee), but it is good value for money."
- 3) How do you know when it's time to turn over the device with coffee?
- 4) Did you burn your hands when using this device?
- 5) There are two very similar possibilities how to prepare the coffee. It is confusing for user, there should be just one promoted way.

Affinity wall

PREPARATION TAKES TIME, ESPECIALLY FOR MORE PEOPLE DRINKING COFFEE.

You need to wait the device. It can be hot at the beginning

Coffee for more people takes more time to prepare

It takes 4 minutes to prepare 1 coffee

Users sometimes forget about the coffee

- Q1: Is it safe to touch the device?
- Q2: How long does it take to prepare coffee for people?
- Q3: I don't like the paper coffee filter because it takes long time.
- Q4: Coffee for some people on the machine is not ready at the same time. (So will there be a queue?)
- Q5: I prefer to use a paper coffee filter.
- Q6: I don't like the paper coffee filter because it takes long time.
- Q7: I don't like the paper coffee filter because it takes long time.
- Q8: I don't like the paper coffee filter because it takes long time.
- Q9: I don't like the paper coffee filter because it takes long time.
- Q10: I don't like the paper coffee filter because it takes long time.
- Q11: I don't like the paper coffee filter because it takes long time.
- Q12: I don't like the paper coffee filter because it takes long time.
- Q13: I don't like the paper coffee filter because it takes long time.
- Q14: I don't like the paper coffee filter because it takes long time.
- Q15: I don't like the paper coffee filter because it takes long time.
- Q16: I don't like the paper coffee filter because it takes long time.
- Q17: I don't like the paper coffee filter because it takes long time.
- Q18: I don't like the paper coffee filter because it takes long time.
- Q19: I don't like the paper coffee filter because it takes long time.
- Q20: I don't like the paper coffee filter because it takes long time.

MIXING STICK AND PART ARE REDUNDANT.

Some parts are not necessary to use

User needs to find out the right amount - the granular spoon is good better at helping

- Q1: I don't like the paper coffee filter because it takes long time.
- Q2: I don't like the paper coffee filter because it takes long time.
- Q3: I don't like the paper coffee filter because it takes long time.
- Q4: I don't like the paper coffee filter because it takes long time.
- Q5: I don't like the paper coffee filter because it takes long time.
- Q6: I don't like the paper coffee filter because it takes long time.
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- Q9: I don't like the paper coffee filter because it takes long time.
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- Q15: I don't like the paper coffee filter because it takes long time.
- Q16: I don't like the paper coffee filter because it takes long time.
- Q17: I don't like the paper coffee filter because it takes long time.
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- Q20: I don't like the paper coffee filter because it takes long time.

DEVICE SHOULD HAVE ONE-CLICK DIFFERENCE BETWEEN TOP AND BOTTOM CYLINDER.

There should be (pressure to turn part) the device should be more stable

Users find it difficult to distinguish between the two cylinders. They have to concentrate when operating the device

You have to be concentrated when operating the device

- Q1: I don't like the paper coffee filter because it takes long time.
- Q2: I don't like the paper coffee filter because it takes long time.
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EXPERIENCES USERS HAVE NO ISSUES WITH MANIPULATION WITH DEVICE

Manipulation with device is not problematic

Turning part is to turn the device with the coffee and press the cylinder down

No explanation - feeling

- Q1: I don't like the paper coffee filter because it takes long time.
- Q2: I don't like the paper coffee filter because it takes long time.
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- Q20: I don't like the paper coffee filter because it takes long time.

GOOD VALUE FOR MONEY

Users are missing foam at the coffee

Users appreciate the value for money in this device

Users don't really care about coffee experts

Device takes out much space

- Q1: I don't like the paper coffee filter because it takes long time.
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FINAL REPORT

Analysis of semi-structured interview was mapping the question if the use of Aeropress is intuitive and seamless and if all the parts of the set are used. From the analysis I was able to come to some conclusions.

Users are overall content with the device.

S2: *"Coffee from this device is fairly good."*

They appreciate its low price and low space requirements:

S2: *"It is good when you don't have space and money for real coffee machine."*

They also like easy enough manipulation and low maintenance.

S2: *"You need to press the piston hard, but it is OK."*

S2: *"I just wash it very quickly, only this part (top of the piston) is dirty. I don't use any detergent."*

However they see limitations of device such as time needed especially for preparing coffee for more persons:

S2: *"I hate prepare coffee for more people. It takes so much time."*

Quite surprising was the frustration with missing foam, which led to the termination of using the device (together with the fact, that it takes too much time to prepare more cups of coffee.)

S2: *"With foam it is better (coffee). I like the esthetics of it."*

Users also forget the prepared coffee in process on the table:

S1: *"Sometimes I forget about the coffee, instead of 2 minutes I leave it there for 10 minutes, It is stronger then."*

Affinity wall analysis has discovered two main issues within user experience research of Aeropress coffee maker that could be fixed with some effort.

Redundant parts

The set contains some parts that users don't use: mixing stick and crater.

S2: *"Other parts (mixing stick, measuring spoon and crater) I don't use. We wash everything in hands, so it would be more work for me."*

S1: *"I don't know what it is used for. (about the crater)"*

However there is one part - measuring spoon, that was useful at beginning, when users didn't know, how much is 5 mg of coffee according to instructions. This measuring spoon was a good help at that time so they could measure it properly and learn it gradually.

S2: *"At the beginning I used the measuring spoon, but now I prepare the coffee by estimating."*

I would recommend to consider if it is really necessary to attach mixing stick and crater to the basic set. I can imagine someone uses crater for smaller cups, so he could buy it as additional

feature. I cannot see a real use of mixing stick, I cannot see any problem to replace it by a regular tea spoon. Some resources could be saved to produce unnecessary parts.

Design suggestion

Problem 1:

Two cylinders are looking too similar but their functionality is absolutely different. It is hard to recognize one from other, design is not intuitive to use and doesn't lead users how to use the product.

S1: "You have to concentrate yourself, while preparing coffee."

S2 poured boiling water to the wrong opening (on piston cylinder), says she was not concentrated.

S2: "Device is not for everyone, some people do not want to use it at all (mum)."

Problem 2:

When users are waiting for coffee to lime, they are afraid the cylinders are not stable.

User S2 has concerns it could turn over with hot coffee when children are around.

This two clusters could be solved by widening the bottom part so the bottom part is more stable and it would also provide more visible clue, which part is the bottom part. Other possibility is to add colors to the scheme or have more visible shapes at end parts. Solution could be also to hermetically close the opening on piston (on both sides) so the user is not tempted to pour water to piston.

Counclusion

The problems suggested to solve didn't cause the termination of product. Missing foam and time needed for preparation of coffee are main issues of this concept of coffee preparation. It could be interesting to experiment with some other kinds of filter options or creating foam after filtrating process. Users take this method as emergency. Overall they like the coffee maker and think that under certain circumstances it is a very good choice:

S1: " Good for travelling (camping), cottages and everywhere you don't have budget for proper coffee machine."