

Elevator Interface Design

From the famous remote control example of too many buttons and functions allocated into one interface to why we still have a QWERTY keyboard as the standard, bad user interface is still relevant to our everyday lives.

One example that can be brought up is the example that was explained to me from one of my foreign friends as he visited Japan. Even at his initial arrival to the airport, he was confused on what button to be able to press to keep the door open for the elevator. Because he was not able to relate to the characters that were supposed to be “open” and “close” and the colours that represent them, this led to awkward situations that led him to close the door on people. This bad design interface that happens with elevators is not only applicable to foreigners, but also to locals as well. Because the design of the characters are very similar in practice, it is sometimes hard for people to distinguish the two. One



obvious design change could be to use universal signs that are more common in western platforms and have a guided interface with lighting that shows the user when the action is taking place. With the current design that is implemented with elevator button interface, the user is restricted in terms of how long an action must be and if the action is tied to a certain function. Some European standard elevators even go as far as to not include the close button as the one that I was exposed to at my time in Finland, last year. This is not only because many of the elevator close buttons in Europe are / or perceived to be placebo buttons or fake buttons that are created to give the illusion of control to the user.



Improvements that we can consider on local design is also how we treat the conception of “Ground floor” for foreigners coming into Japan. In US, it would be firstly considered “First floor / Second Floor / Third floor”, but in UK for example “Ground floor / First floor / Second floor” is the norm. Because of this, many people who come from European countries are baffled by intricate systems in railways such as Shibuya or Shinjuku where there are multiple levels of floors that lead to different railway systems. Not only would implementing universal signs help systematically with how trains system this is the fact that some of the elevator buttons . As the technology improves and we can imagine “Willy Wonka” elevators that can also move sideways, it could be imagined that the interface would break away from the vertical line up of elevator buttons and give meaning to what the rows mean for the buttons.