PhD Title: Universal Product Design for Elderly Living: A Comparative Case Study of User Behaviour between Elderly Living Alone and in Residential Care Homes in Hong Kong

Keywords: Universal design, inclusive design, user behaviour, elderly living alone, residential care home

Research Abstract: Loneliness can cause depression and loss of meaning in life. Older persons may face some identical problems in their daily life usually not easily recognized by their family members. The situation will get worse especially when they lived alone without any substantial support in their regular activities or they are living in residential care homes that sometimes this kind of places are not well designed and equipped. The research aims to explore and identify directions for designing an user-friendly and universal environment for the older persons who are living alone or in residential care homes and generate new knowledge and experience for the understanding of the proposed topic. Some specific objectives are to identify the deficiencies of current public housing and to enhance the scope of inclusive product design research involving older persons.

Research Question: What are the experience (and cases) of the design of elderly home in other cities/countries? What are the discrepancies of difficulties, if any, of elderly who lived in Residential Care Homes and the living alone elderly are facing in Hong Kong?

Research Methodology: Various research methods were applied including the background studies of Government documents and reports. Field observation will be taken placed to 20 living alone elderly with the helping hands of Senior Citizen Home Safety Association (Hong Kong). The researcher will randomly identify the potential interviewees lived in Public Housing and Housing for Elderly in different district in Hong Kong, and to visit 5 Residential Cares Home in Hong Kong to conduct focus group interviews, so as to compare the user behaviour the elderly may possess differently and the problems they may face from time to time. The researcher will talk with them and take photos (with consents) to capture their daily lives within residential cares home in term of health, safety, security, functionality, efficiency, work flow, psychological, social and cultural aspects (Raleigh, 1997). Through a synthesis of the current knowledge, it identifies a number of strategies that can be used to design future residential care homes and public housing to address the safety and mobility needs of an aging population in an inclusive, universal manner.

Results / outcomes:
1. To identify the discrepancies of difficulties between the elderly in residential care homes and living alone elderly so as to provide relevant data findings and analysis in different aspects as well as the design solutions for the elderly involving living alone in Asian countries.
2. To extend the design principles of universal design, reorganize and integrate the principles that already developed.
3. To collect and suggest design direction to large corporations in Asia including Integrated Display Technology Ltd and Elite Industrial Holdings Ltd for research and commercial purpose.