

iPhone Duo: Twice the fun or double trouble?

By Lim Sun Sun

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Innovation is stripping away the inconvenience that helps us put down our screens.



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Within hours of the new foldable iPhone Duo being launched, the online memes came fast and furious.

Samsung Mobile US swiftly alluded to its status as the industry's foldable-phone front runner, posting on its X account: "Let us know when you're done reheating our leftovers." KitKat posted a picture of its chocolatey wafer treat cracked in half right down the middle, while Merriam-Webster Dictionary quipped: "Not to brag, but our product has been foldable since 1828."

The memes reflect the general consensus that Apple is deplorably late to the foldable phone party, given that Google, Motorola and Chinese brands like Honor, Oppo and Huawei have launched and shipped many foldable phone models in the past 10 years.

As large as a passport, the Duo unfolds from a 5.4-inch outer display to a 7.6-inch inner screen – the largest display ever put on the iPhone.

That Apple has finally surrendered to the foldable is telling. But beyond the brand rivalry, the broader impact of this technology on human behaviour needs attention.

BIGGER BETTER?

Apple has brandished the Duo's capability to supercharge multitasking, gaming, content viewing and entirely novel ways of interacting with its operating system iOS.

Marketing claims aside, understanding how users interact with devices can be illuminated by the theory of affordances.

In design theory, an affordance refers to what an object enables us to do. Importantly, however, we must also recognise that affordances impose constraints. A mug affords drinking, but you wouldn't serve a main course in it. A trolley affords conveying heavy loads, but is virtually useless for mounting the stairs.

Similarly, a smartphone affords communicating, navigating, photographing, shopping,

watching and working, all on the go.

Indeed, the killer affordance of smartphones has always been their portability. But as they say, what you gain on the swings, you lose on the roundabouts. A phone that fits neatly in your palm is just too small for serious work.

EVERYTHING, EVERYWHERE

We live in a world where our homes and workplaces are now littered with devices, and we have begun to compartmentalise – our phones for communication and transactions, our laptops for work and our tablets for entertainment.

What happens when a device like a foldable phone allows us to do everything everywhere all at once? The foldable removes one more reason to switch devices.

We have long complained that phones are too small for serious work.

We already carry a device that constantly blurs the lines between our personal and professional lives – replying to work e-mails at the family dinner, taking a call from your client during your workout, reviewing the pitch deck as your plane takes off for your holiday.

The better our smartphone becomes at doing everything, the harder it may be to leave it alone.

This can lead to device intensification. With apps already loaded with algorithms to keep us engaged, a larger phone that affords more comfortable reading and viewing may be difficult to resist.

When a small screen makes an activity inconvenient, we are more inclined to call it a day. A larger screen removes that barrier, making some behaviours easier, more appealing and perhaps even more compulsive.

RULE OF THUMB

For a country where 85 per cent of the population travels daily by public transport, with most people passing the time on their devices, manipulating your phone with one hand while grabbing the MRT pole with another is a regular balancing act. And yet, you will be impressed by just how much people can do on their phones with just one thumb.

This is no accident but a function of design. Research reveals that the ideal phone size is not merely based on personal preference and individual dexterity, but can also be assessed by objective measures. The study of smartphone ergonomics has long shown that size influences how comfortably and efficiently we can use a device.

Studies examining different screen sizes, hand dimensions



and grip postures consistently find that larger phones are more strenuous for the thumb and forearm, particularly during one-handed use.

There is also a gender divide here, as women on average have smaller hands. An Ipsos study of American consumers in 2025 found that men are more willing than women (55 per cent versus 43 per cent) to accept "a heavier, larger device if it means I have more screen space for media and reading". And women are more likely than men (56 per cent to 45 per cent) to agree that "modern

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smartphones are becoming too wide to grip securely and comfortably".

Another study found that 4.6- and 5-inch screens offered the best balance of usability for most users, while a 5.7-inch screen slowed down task completion, introducing more errors and greater thumb fatigue.

Considering the range of transactions we complete via our smartphones, from banking to shopping to government services, user interface design that minimises errors is more critical than we realise.

The bigger the phone, the more it constrains reach, grip, comfort and ease of use. By wrapping a massive screen into a manageable, pocketable package, foldables effectively destroy even that boundary.

The foldable may not create a new need so much as remove the friction that once kept us from doing more on our phones. That can change lifestyles.

The device that handles e-mail, spreadsheets and video calls more comfortably may make mobile work easier. It may also make it harder to tell whether we are truly "off work".

Apple has spent decades making complex technologies feel intuitive and desirable. With its overdue foray into the foldable

market, it need not teach consumers what a foldable is because Samsung, Huawei and others have already done that.

Apple's task is simply to make the Duo an aspirational iPhone.

Market forecasts suggest this to be the case. Consumer intelligence company Counterpoint projects that Apple could take about 28 per cent of the global foldable market in 2026. Reuters reports substantial pent-up demand among existing iPhone users, even though foldables are still expected to remain a niche category.

Apple's legacy is built on the idea that good design removes friction. Yet, in an era of compulsive scrolling and constant connectivity, we should ask whether some friction is protective.

Perhaps the most human-centred device is not the one that removes every kink, but one that is actually easier to put down.

Lim Sun Sun is vice-president of partnerships and engagement at Singapore Management University and Lee Kong Chian professor of communication and technology at SMU's College of Integrative Studies. Her latest book is Humanising Technology: Reflections On Design, Ethics And Inclusion.

The new iPhone Duo displayed on-screen at an Apple store in New York. The Duo unfolds from a 5.4-inch outer display to a 7.6-inch inner screen – the largest display on an iPhone. When a small screen makes an activity inconvenient, we are more inclined to call it a day, says the writer. A larger screen removes that barrier, making some behaviours easier, more appealing and perhaps even more compulsive. PHOTO: BLOOMBERG