Julienne Deluso

Built to Last?

How planned obsolescence affects your iPhone's performance and the relationship with consumerism.

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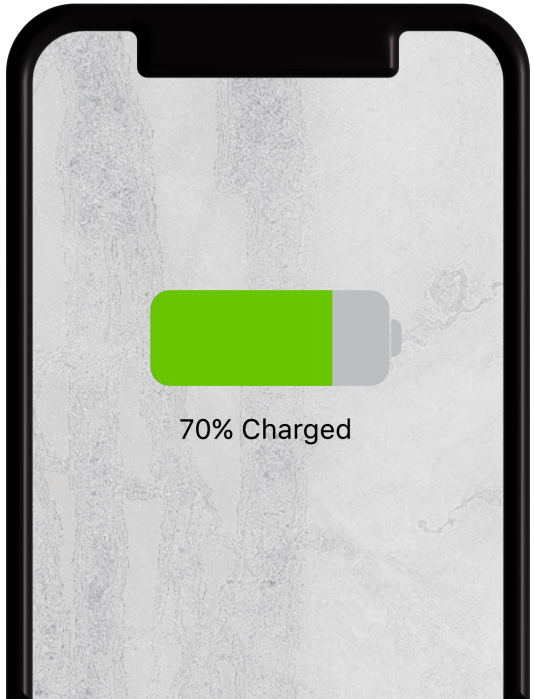
How often do you replace your phone? We all know how expensive it is to repair mobile phones, so the easiest solution is to buy a new one - or upgrade to the latest model. But have you ever noticed how we've fallen into a rabbit hole of overconsumption? This results from a simple business strategy used by Apple: planned obsolescence. Changes in production have intentionally reduced the performance of the iPhone series throughout the years, which perhaps reflects the paradigm of unsustainable consumerism & overconsumption.

The iPhone has evolved throughout the years, and production has significantly changed the battery performance. The changes in processors have favoured Apple's planned obsolescence strategy to increase sales because buying new is more reliable & cost-effective. For example, dismantling the iPhone 11 following a 44-step process without damage is impossible. Even with technical expertise from third-party repair centres, a constant reminder about battery performance will appear despite successful replacement. This is due to a microprocessor in the battery Apple introduced in their models since iPhone XS in 2018 (Apple Support, n.d.) to monitor its overall performance, which only the company itself or company-approved repair centres can configure. (Bisschop et al., 2022). In response to this, Apple discourages these practices and directs consumers to replace the phone or go to their licensed repair shops—this is the foundation of Apple's planned obsolescence.



In major markets including Europe, the USA and China, smartphones are typically replaced within 24 months of purchase, a strikingly short lifespan compared with other consumer goods, let alone similarly expensive ones (Kantor World Panel, 2017; Troger et al., 2017). As new models add more features, many updates cannot be shared with earlier versions of the iPhone and because of changes in processors, battery health depletes drastically. According to Miller, 2019, Apple's limited $29 battery replacement program replaced over 11 million batteries in 2018, which is 11 times more than the usual 1-2 million stand battery replacements per year. Repairing is not cost-effective as parts are limited or expensive (Solomon et al., 2000) therefore, consumers opt to buy new, increasing consumer demand & sales. According to Apple Support, products are considered obsolete if they stopped sale distribution more than seven years ago, and will no longer offer hardware service for obsolete models & "vintage" iPhones. This practice results in a profitable strategy that allows the

consistent production & consumption of the iPhone series.

There is an undeniable connection between consumers, obsolescence & the consequences of overconsumption. With the interplay of the replacement, trends & structural planned obsolescence, the overconsumption of the iPhone has led to several social and environmental issues. M. A., S., Sehrawat, A. and P. K., S. describe, “consumerism has transcended materialism and become semiotic where what we buy is an indication of our apparent fitness.” With every release, the iPhone has become a symbol for consumers. Products are consumed increasingly for their mental associations (brand image) than for their actual physical utility, (M. A. et al., 2019), reflecting the relationship between greedy consumer behaviour and the iPhone’s unsustainable obsolescence. From structural changes in production to the “buying new” mindset correlated with image & trends, favouring Apple. Social consequences from overconsumption of the iPhone series have developed class associations & divisions among consumers.

The phenonmenon is also unsustainable from an environmental perspective, and has resulted in a range of severe problems. Overconsumption results in higher demand and overproduction, leading to excessive levels of toxic substances and e-waste; directly contributing to climate change. Furthermore, Apple’s trade-in recycling program is inefficient as the overproduction of the devices overshadows the fact most consumers replace their iPhones within 24 months; where there is a clear imbalance between repurposed materials & e-waste and brand-new materials & production. From these factors, we can merely speculate the future of the iPhone series through the forces of environmental repercussions, social & consumer demand and Apple’s unsustainable overproduction.

Long story short, Apple’s planned obsolescence and consumerism have led to unsustainable overconsumption. As consumers, we have variety, but we are limited by the power major tech companies wield. So is the iPhone really built to last? The short answer is no. But in the long run, unless Apple changes its ways, most of us will start to see a growing collection of old iPhones in our drawers.

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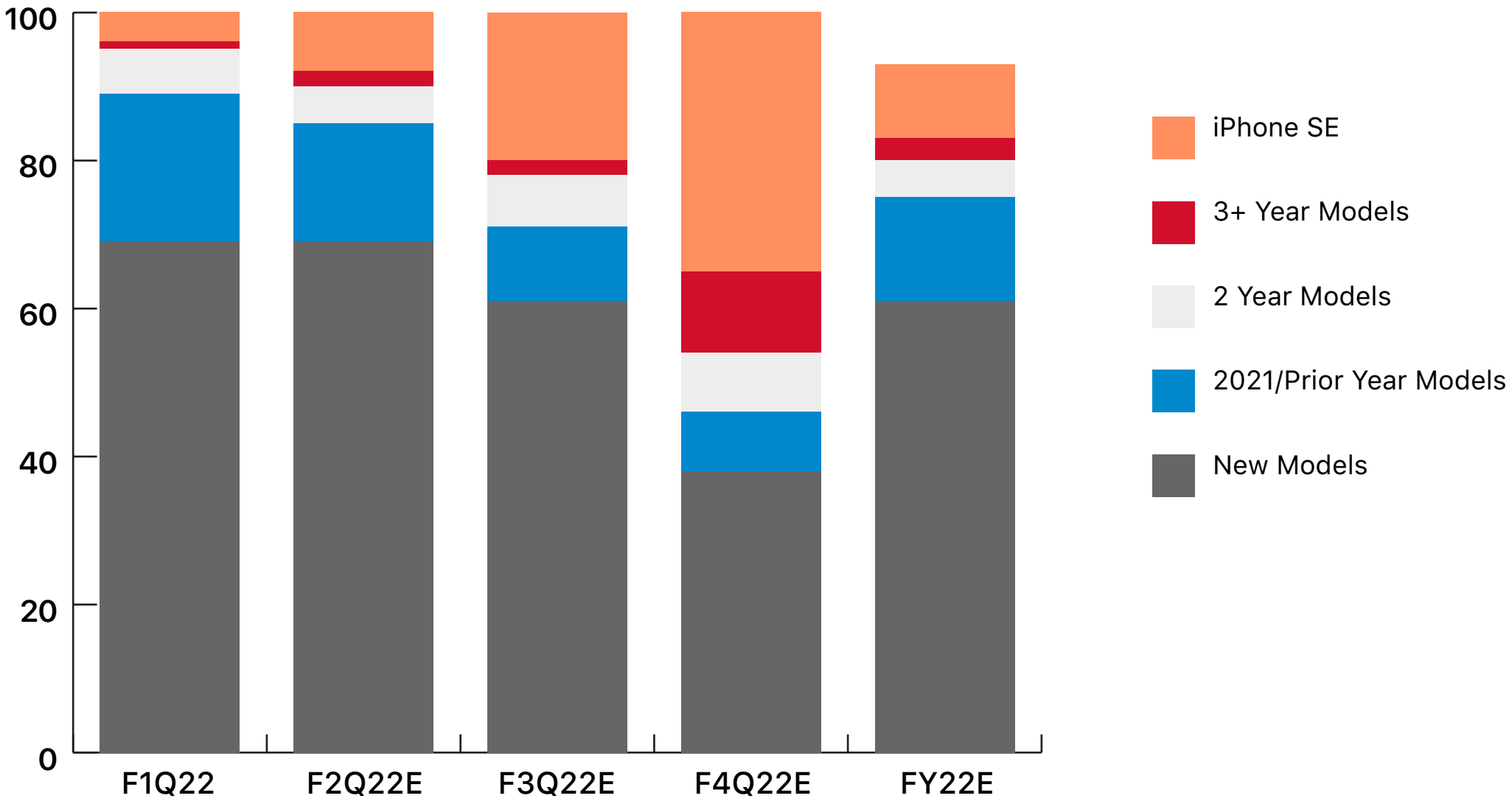
Finacial Year 2022 iPhone Shipment Mix



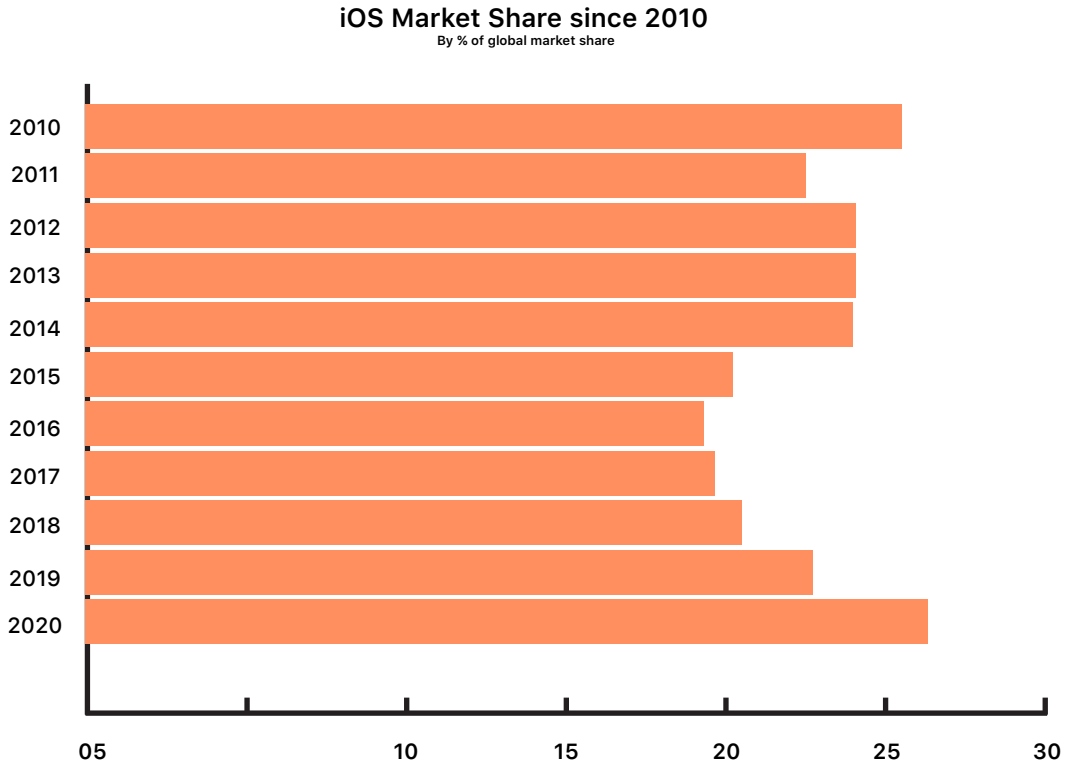
From: Company Data, IDC, Morgan Stanley Research

iPhone Processors by Model & Release Date

2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
A4	A5	A6	A7	A8	A9
iPhone 4	iPhone 4s	iPhone 5	iPhone 5c iPhone 5s	iPhone 6 iPhone 6s	iPhone 6s iPhone 6s Plus

2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
A10	A11	A12	A13	A14	A15
iPhone 7 iPhone 7 Plus	iPhone 8 iPhone 8 Plus iPhone X	iPhone XS iPhone XS Max iPhone XR	iPhone 11 iPhone 11 Pro iPhone 11 Pro Max	iPhone 12 mini iPhone 12 iPhone 12 Pro iPhone 12 Pro Max	iPhone 13 mini iPhone 13 iPhone 13 Pro iPhone 13 Pro Max

From: everymac.com



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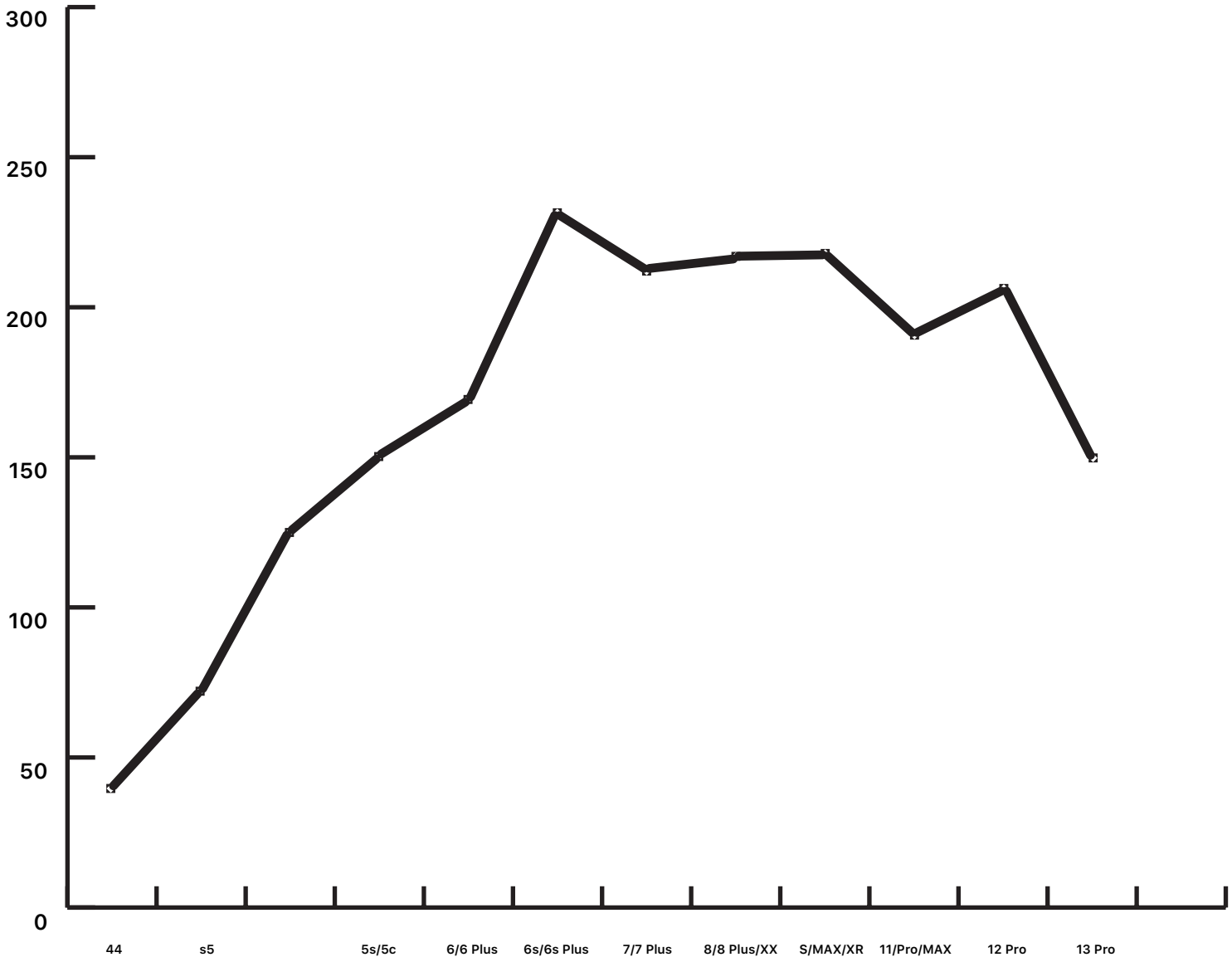
iPhone Units Sold Worldwide by Model 2022

Measured by Millions Units



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