700 Million Unbreakable Smartphones!

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By Vimal Mohan

The personal experience..

One wouldn't be wrong to say "a phone with a display that won't crack is really a necessity and not a premium! Well, unbreakable displays have been around for a long time. It is very likely that we have been using them for years but it just never occurred until that screen on the phone cracked! Those good old laptops (before the touchscreens) and all those LED/LCD monitors! and then some laptops with anti-glare touch screen seems flexible enough to not crack yet we don't see them on the phone?

For all these years, since the first smartphone was created, we took it for granted that its a phone with a big piece of glass and its going to shatter when dropped.
Dropping a phone you just unboxed.. the very thought give jitters and literally shatters! and the word for it is *"Phone-Xiety "*. I wonder what would the doctors prescribe for this condition, antidropsol ?! The damn thing costs half the phone's price for replacement and what do we do? keep using if its a manageable crack and if there is no hope, junk it, get a new one.

Mobile E-Waste

Yes that's the word for the topic at hand. Everyone has heard enough of E-waste let talk mobile E-waste. According to statistical data, in 2019 alone we generated around *50 Million Tons of E-waste globally* , of which, *phones contributed around 10%*. Out of the 50M tons *only about 17%* was recycled says a report by united nations

> *they don't want to reduce but produce,*
> *they don't want to reuse but replace*

What about the 83% going to the landfills? how would one comprehend the health and environmental consequence? and every year E-waste is growing at a rate of about 4%. Its only obvious then, to get a taste of convenience and comfort that smart phones offer, more and more people are going to switch from the super strong feature phones to the super fragile smartphones! which only adds to the problem and then there are more of us who have broken phones and tablets in our stashes which soon shall be dumped.

Corporate irresponsibility?

Reducing carbon emission, sourcing materials responsibly, not using conflict minerals, using renewable energy sources, switching to LED lighting, reducing plastic use in packaging… we have all heard enough of it. How about "reduce, reuse and recycle"? a popular environmentalist mantra. Well the corporates don't like it, they don't want to reduce but produce, they don't want to reuse but replace and they simply don't want to recycle!

Recycling is a messy business with very little return on investment. Making money is the corporate game, but at least shouldn't they prove their technological proves prudently by designing reliable phones with replaceable/repairable parts? instead of mindlessly running in the "Me first" race and filing hundreds of patents on mundane ideas, some are crazy!

> interacting with a tangible device like a
> phone is what makes it a great experience!

Shoving 5 more cameras on a phone seems to be an innovation. They could manage to put the fingerprint sensor under the display! Punch a hole right into the display, integrate a fingerprint sensor in the power button, make a phone only 6mm thick by gluing the component (more chemical use and impossible to repair) and yet somehow putting that non-glare laptop touch screen on to the phone is a challenge! I'm sure the material engineers have a valid reason for not been able to do it, hope they are busy cooking the flexible glass with exotic minerals from out of this world.

Ah the foldable phone! the answer to the cracked display you say? , its just an expensive hi-tech toy and not many will have a taste for it in my opinion. Any alternative to glass will scratch and smudge.

E-commerce Industry responsibility?

Lets admit, we all love the convenience of online shopping, thanks to the pandemic, just about everything is going online, food, work, entertainment and payment and so on. That literally translates to more people going online, more phones!

Buy
Recycle?
One data shows, as of 2020 there are about 700 Million smart phones users in India and by 2030 that number is estimated to be 1.3 Billion, current population in the country. The exchange program sure looks like a solution but its just a sprout appearing in the right direction. Also you cannot exchange a phone with a cracked screen and those handful of services that do are only interested in particular models. Obviously then, my broken phone is going for the trash or so I thought.

City municipal Corporation?

For now, No thanks, we should let them figure out how to solve the city's garbage crisis first, let alone handling e-waste. There are some E-waste collection initiatives by certain organizations, though commendable their reach is limited and not many are aware of

such programs. We need thousands of such E-waste disposal <u>initiatives</u> particularly in Metros that can reach every household.

There is a need for a shift in processing of e-waste from the informal sector to organized disposal units with better working conditions for workers. Photo from Global E-waste Monitor 2017.

Lets do some justice to the blog title. I look at it in a couple of perspectives..
 First , we need it badly. a phone that wont crack, that doesn't have to bend and it doesn't have to be so thin, a phone that should reach the next billion hands globally and stay there for another year or two. On an average people switch to new phones every two years.
 Second , interacting with a tangible device like a phone is what makes it a great experience. Don't we all like to have a computer in our pocket? This device is going to be here for a long time and in that slab-y form factor hence "unbreakable" in a mortal sense.

 Conclusion
It is our collective responsibility to deal with this problem but if there is something that can be done right now to avert about 5M tons of possible future Mobile E-waste every year it is to make "<u>The Unbreakable Phone</u>" in the first place. this onus lies with the manufacturers and just like a " <u>Buy</u> " button, wouldn't a " Recycle " button make more sense to drive E-waste collection?

Thanks for your time.

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