

# Foldable Phones All The Rage Now But Will They Have A Purpose?

By Maciej Duraj

## The Foldable Phone Wars Commence



The next big trends in phones is upon us with multiple products from various manufacturers competing to unleash the latest folding phone upon us. We have the Samsung Galaxy Fold and Huawei Mate X as the two most serious contestants in this race right around the corner, but [Motorola](#), [Google](#) and even [Apple](#) may be gearing up for their own variants of a foldable smartphone come this year or in the [near future](#).

Is this just a fad or a technological shift for mobile devices? Will these upcoming phones and future variants replace the design of current smartphones ranging in sizes we can purchase for what seems like more than half or a third of the price of these models that have been announced? The Galaxy Fold will retail around \$2k and launch just around the corner, or next month, while Mate X [is said to retail](#) for around \$2600 and launch around summer of this year.

## 2 Main Competitors for Now



My own design based on various assets mentioned above

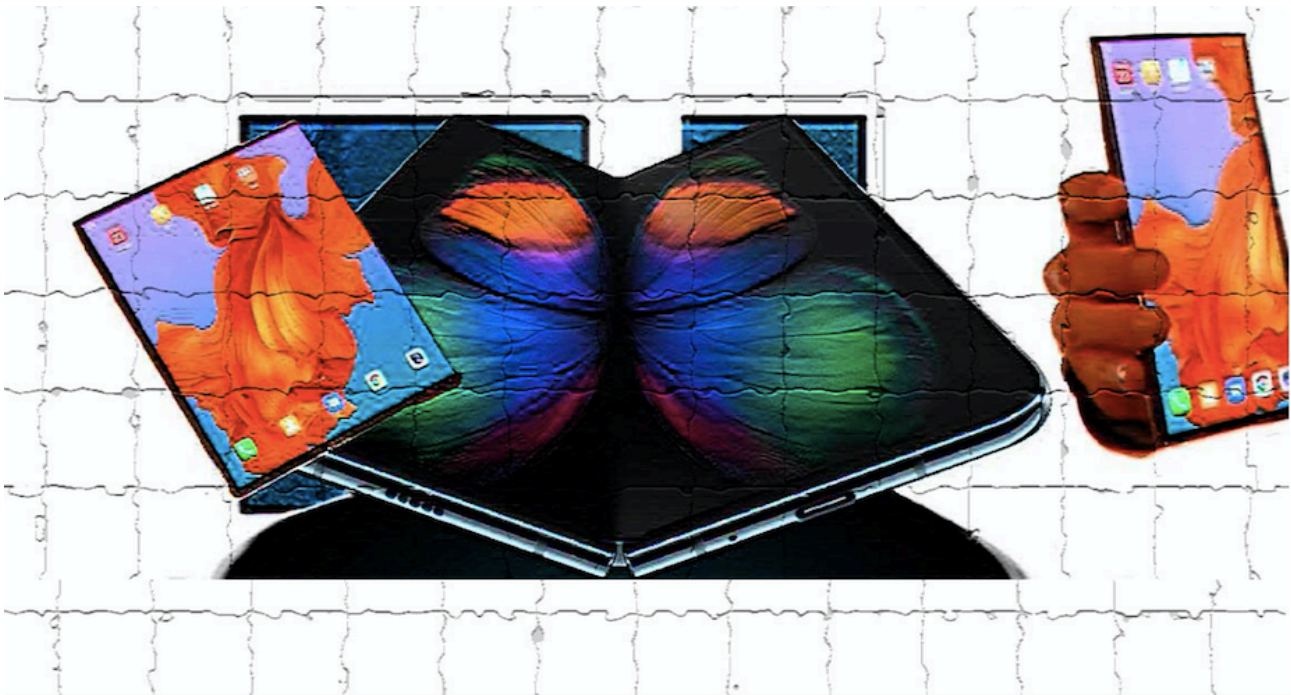
The difference between these two Android phones amounts to the way they fold more than anything else and the fact that the Fold has three displays attached to the chassis. The Fold folds inward with the third smaller display being on the outside while the Mate X folds outward with one of the displays being used in a folded fashion as it encloses on a clamshell design.

Both of these phones have top-notch specs in very regard from the batteries included to 5G network support among 512GB of internal memory. They will unfold and basically become Android mini tablets or phablets, as they will not unfold to a 10" size, but more alongside 8" or less.

### **Comfort May Play a Role**

I can see this being a useful feature for many things because I carry my iPad everywhere I go despite also owning an iPhone. A simple carry-on bag does this trick for me, so will a foldable phone really make a difference for those of us who own both tablets and smartphones? I don't know. Again, keep in mind you can purchase

both a tablet and a standard smartphone together for much less than what these models will retail at.



My own design based on other assets I found and put together

There is the cool factor alongside the comfort however. It may be nice to not have to carry a bag with us for additional devices and just unfold a phone to start watching Netflix without having to squint our eyes. But many of us carry bags on us anywhere due to other devices like external bluetooth keyboards for our tablets, headphones, magazines and women in particular tend to carry purses. The main spect I see is the coolness factor these phones bring rather than revolutionary step of a technology they seem to unleash.

## Gaming Potential

However, I am not just a mobile enthusiast, but also a gamer and I have seen foldable designs in action to great affect. I also currently own a gadget or portable gaming system in the form of a Nintendo 3DS that I use regularly for gaming. Thus, I can see the benefit of such a design in certain instances although these phones are much different than what Nintendo did with the 3DS, a system now [pretty much dead](#) with support, unfortunately for some of us who enjoy it

in favour of the company's much more tablet-like design of the Switch.

For gaming, dual screens are great and can allow for a display area to function independently of the control mechanics. However, there is a clear display separation on a 3DS and physical controls are also present, so you don't have to look down on the screen to make sure your fingers are on a virtual analog or button. These upcoming phones appear to have a single connected display when unfolded thus they probably will function just like standard tablets with app navigation or control mechanics within apps. They also rely on the touchscreen with no physical controls of any sort as gaming isn't their primary focus.

(Pocket Gamer actually has a [recent article](#) out on how gaming can benefit from this design or foldable phones in general.)

Despite my woes, this is a great step to see what sort of experimentation is possible now that two screens are a reality. We may see more variants, some with physical keys or control mechanics, like [Sony Xperia Play](#) had, in the future. But gaming is only one aspect of this design as is watching video. What other purpose do foldable phones serve and why should we be excited about them?

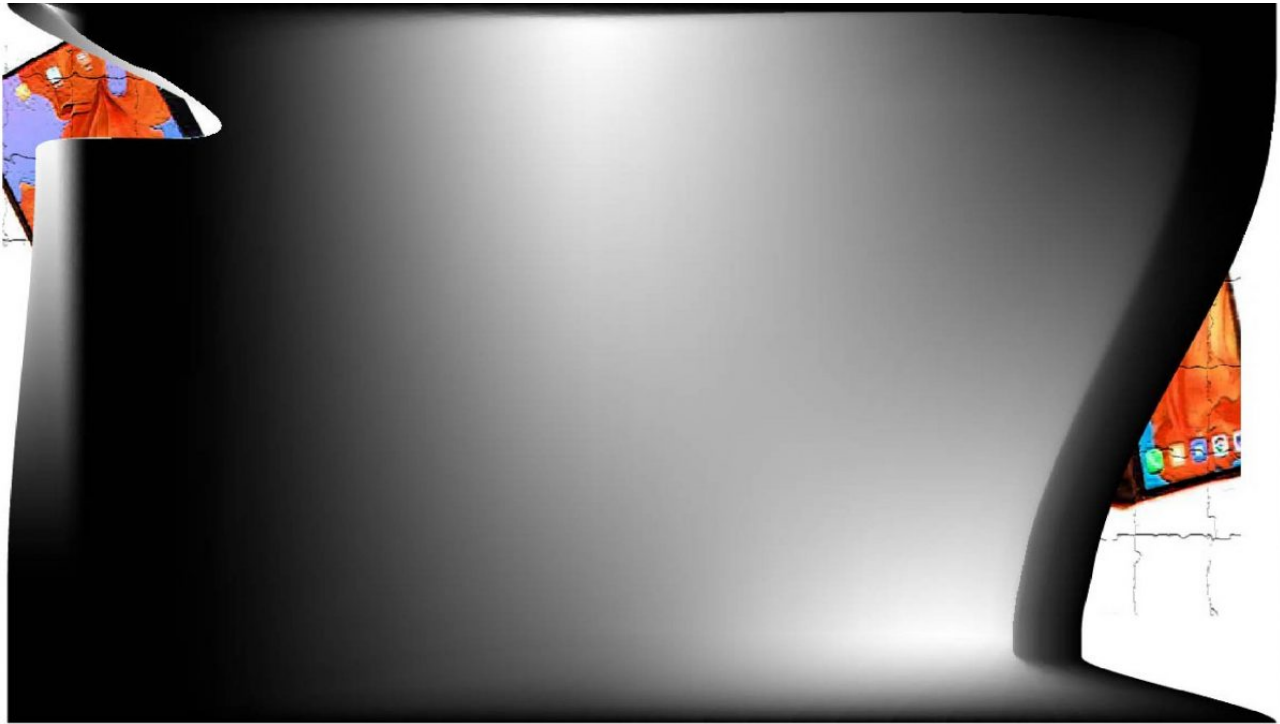
## **Other possibilities in terms of features**

Video conferencing can definitely benefit from a larger display as you can see more users simultaneously rather than the one contact you have and without having to fiddle around the screen of a conference. Again, this is something us tablet fans already know. Typing and running word processing apps can also be a lot easier on a larger display, but is much more efficient with a Bluetooth external keyboard.

People who never found a need for a tablet in their life may pick these phones up and realize what they were missing. I can see such a group being quite mesmerized by what they offer. The GUI



possibilities of apps when unfolded are much more interesting than many apps standard phone variants.



Folding Phones graphic design I created using some other assets I mentioned above

There is a video of the Galaxy Fold in action as an app is running and it seemed to have a very seamless app switching for both the folded and unfolded variants of a single app. As the phone changes form factor, apps respond accordingly. This is good to see in action as there appears to be no delay between the way the app showcased transitions.

Watch from around 3:05 to see the app transition on the Galaxy Fold (courtesy of Unbox Therapy):

[youtubevid id="TQkvstOEnl8"]

The other thing to consider is that with the Case of the Mate X, at least, the more powerful rear-facing camera will now be available to be used also as a front-facing camera. As the phone gets folded outward, the camera can be shifted to be facing the user and things like video conferencing can be used with a better camera than the

standard front-facing cameras, which are always inferior to the rear-facing offerings.

CNET [has a story out](#) from last month's Mobile World Congress event and delved into what they offer. The gist I got reading it is that these phones stole the spotlight from even 5G network coverage, which will be making a presence this year as well.

At at Mobile World Congress, there was far more buzz about the Samsung Galaxy Fold and Huawei Mate X than about the early 5G devices being shown off. The lack of attention paid to all the 5G phones makes you wonder whether all the racing and chest-beating was truly necessary, and serves as a reminder that the next-generation wireless technology is still in its early days.

It is interesting how the idea of folding phones can generate such a buzz, but keep in mind this was an event aimed at hardcore gadget enthusiasts and mobile aficionados. The question I want to get back to and ponder myself is if these phones will truly make a splash on the market and revolutionize the way we use just smartphones and apps or simply just another trend in the ever changing mobile tech market that will die out over time.

The biggest take away I get from these design aesthetics is that idea or the camera being needed for both inward and outward use. This I can see being huge factor in people picking a foldable design who do a lot of video conferencing and photography because they want to use that superior camera for these tasks. This is the one area I see these phones having staying power over time if price follows and a reason to own one over both a separate tablet and a smartphone. In its current design, however, Samsung's offering will have as many as three different camera set ups depending on how you hold the phone including a rear-facing set-up of three cameras. Despite not much of a need, Huawei's offering does feature multiple camera set-ups as well (front and rear facing).

When the price falls over time and designs become standardized to what users prefer and how apps can be made to use most efficiently,

I can see these phones making some splash on the market. For now, though, this is just an experiment in engineering and visual design that is cool to look at and see in action, but not so practical for the average user. On the other hand, other new technologies these phones also come with — like wireless charging of peripherals (Galaxy Fold) and especially 5G network coverage (Mate X and Galaxy Fold optionally) —will impact users in a bigger way.

Note that the Galaxy Fold's form factor will be 4.6" unfolded and 7.3" folded (via [Samsung's website](#)) while the Mate X will be 6.35" folded and 8" unfolded (via [Consumer.Huawei](#)).