

# **Planned Obsolescence: Aesthetic over Functional - The Emergence, Effects and Ethics**

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## **Abstract**

Aesthetic Obsolescence is a form of planned obsolescence involving the alteration of superficial characteristics of a product to create a new model, and in turn make the previous undesirable, thus rendering it obsolete despite it still performing its primary function. By continually introducing new designs and discontinuing others, the manufacturer creates a cycle of fashion aided by marketing.

This paper presents a brief overview of the emergence of aesthetic obsolescence in the 1930s, and its initial utilisation in the automotive industry. An attempt is made to provide an explanation for its formidable rise in the marketing strategies of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the effects of this on the consumer, and the resulting over-consumption that created the ‘disposable society’.

A selected case study of the mobile phone is subjectively used to illustrate modern exploitation of the aesthetic obsolescence strategy. The attitudes of major brands are assessed by looking at particular marketing strategies employed.

To conclude, the design issue of sustainability is dealt with in relation to an ethically sound route for the much-criticised concept of aesthetic obsolescence. Issues of sustainability in design continue to come to the forefront of the design press, and obsolescence in products is gaining more exposure. This highlights that the solution is not such a move into a static aesthetic but a transition into attractive sustainable products that accommodate the sustainable materials and processes available to the designer.