

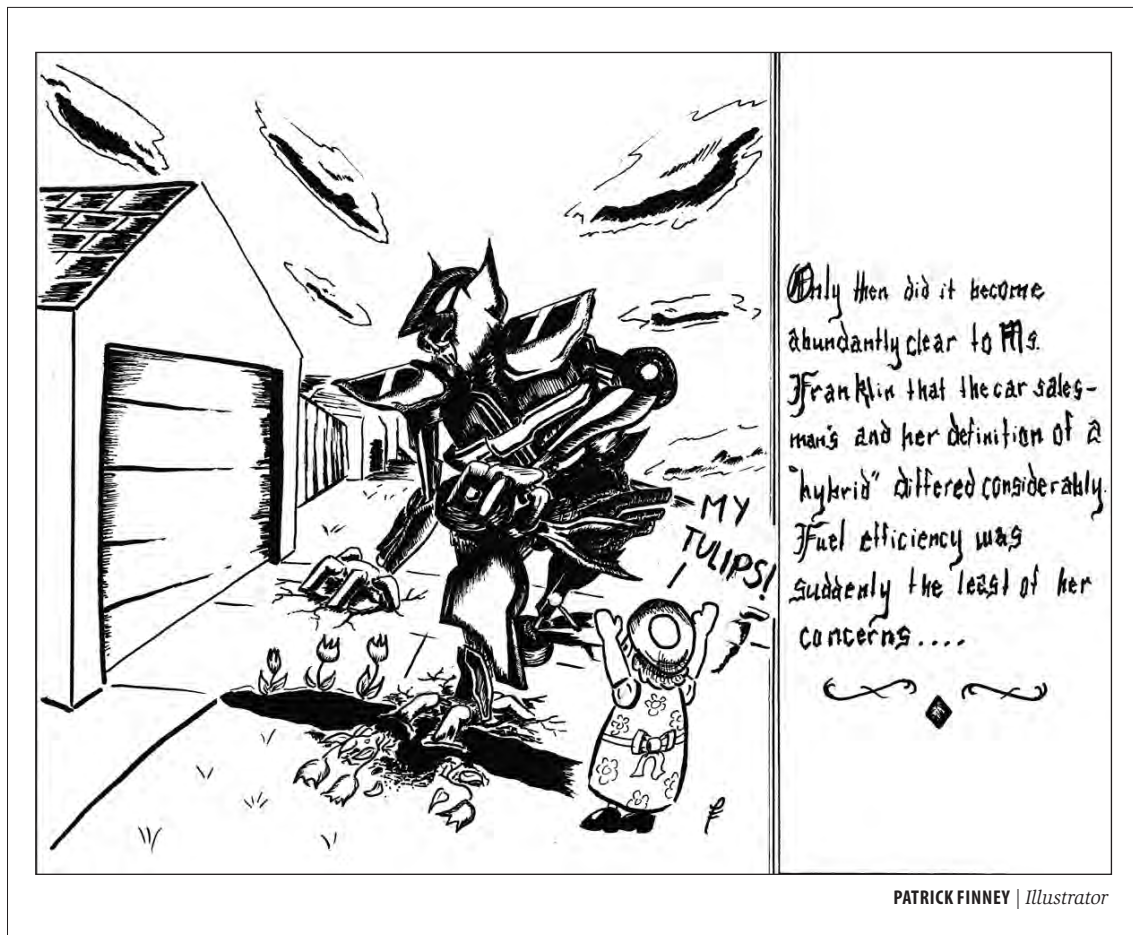
iPhone frenzy just shows modern tech fickleness

The release of the new iPhone has thrown me in the midst of an existential crisis. I thought I would be able to resist the seemingly endless flow of promotional campaigns and rave reviews. It turns out I'm just a powerless consumer, which is why I shamefully admit that my biggest aspiration is now that of owning an iPhone. Forget about doing well in school and getting a decent job. Having an iPhone is all I need to get ahead... or so the ads claim. An iPhone would make me feel relevant again, and I would no longer be out of the loop when it comes to the latest electronics.

Who knew high-tech gadgets could have such a profound effect on our self-image and self-worth? Deep down, we are all aware of the fact that these gadgets are gradually taking control of our everyday lives but we refuse to consciously acknowledge it. Case in point: the highly anticipated Apple iPhone that has techno-lovers all over the world saving up and queuing outside stores for hours on end in order to obtain the latest "IT" device. I don't usually buy into the media hype, but even I have to admit that the all-in-one media convergence marvel that is the iPhone makes a convincing case for throwing all other gadgets out the window (or, at least, disposing of them on the eBay Web site). The problem is, I just recently convinced myself to give into the camera phone craze. But, alas, that investment turned out to be just another outdated device.

The introduction of the iPhone to the consumer market has given all other high-tech gadgets an inferiority complex. Who needs a plain camera phone when you can have an all-in-one mobile communication system in — literally — the palm of your hand? Call me a technophobe, but I find the desire to constantly upgrade our techno-gadgets troublesome. As clichéd as it sounds, material consumption is often an attempt to fill a void in our lives and a means of fulfilling our desire to belong. Upgrading your cell phone to an iPhone might temporarily validate your consumer identity by keeping you up to date with technological progress, but the satisfaction of possession is fleeting because there is always an upgrade to be made, always a more advanced model to be purchased.

Take the iPod for instance. If you were one of those impulse buyers who rushed to get the iPod Shuffle, you



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have probably tried to resell it on eBay by now. I personally held out for a more versatile model like the iPod Nano, but — to my dismay — the Nano was quickly upstaged by the iPod Video. Admittedly, the iPod Video is redundant if you are content with simply listening to music. Nonetheless, as a consumer, I still feel that the value of my little Nano is somewhat undermined by the fact that there are newer iPods out there taunting me for not being on the cutting edge of techno-fashion. Let's not even get into the various "generations" of iPods that Apple keeps coming up with to sustain consumer interest and thus make us feel that our old iPods do not measure up to newer generations.

You will therefore have to excuse my skepticism when it comes to new gadgets. Maybe I'm just bitter because I cannot yet afford the iPhone. Or perhaps I'm secretly holding out for its inevitable upgrade. In any case, the iPhone is the epitome of "cool" at the moment — at least for the myriad consumers who already own one. There are numerous iPhone micro-communities forming as we speak. On the Internet, consumers have started blogging about their iPhone-related experiences and are incessantly exchanging user tips. Even YouTube has been inundated with videos regarding this new technological

invention. Apparently, owning an iPhone automatically makes you a member of an exclusive VIP club.

Cutting-edge gadgets like the iPhone and BlackBerry aim to improve global communication through features such as portable Internet access. Ironically, though, they further isolate us from each other by overwhelming us with individualized features that make us want to spend more time getting to know our gadgets than each other. Alternatively, we get to know each other through these gadgets, as in the case of iPhone blogs and user chat rooms. All around the world, people are constantly encouraged to embrace their consumer identities and to celebrate their ability to purchase. Simply put, consumerism is power... or so we are led to believe.

To what extent do our technological devices define us? Ultimately, the question is not where we would be without our gadgets, but who we would be without them. High-tech manufacturers are making it difficult to feel relevant in today's world without owning the latest gizmo. Soon enough, we will be reminiscing about the days where the primary function of cell phones was to make calls with the same nostalgia old people now reminisce about their Walkmans and VHS tapes.