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OVERCOMING FOMO: MY STRUGGLE AND PROGRESS

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Two years ago, I grappled with the phenomenon known as FOMO, or the “fear of missing out”. Fortunately, with the assistance of a psychologist friend, I successfully liberated myself from this pervasive anxiety. FOMO is an acronym encapsulating the apprehension of being excluded from gratifying experiences that others partake in, accompanied by an incessant urge to stay perpetually connected through compulsive monitoring of social media notifications. This condition represents a genuine manifestation of social anxiety,

marked by the fear of missing out on enjoyable events shared online. Implicit in this experience is an ongoing comparison with others, fostering the continual need to stay abreast of the activities of one’s peers.

I used to constantly have my phone in hand, and the mere thought of leaving it at home was unbearable, inducing anxiety. Even in the most inconvenient moments, I found it challenging to resist the temptation of checking notifications or browsing social networks. In essence, I had

unwittingly become enslaved to the smartphone, oblivious to the extent of its influence.

The phone had transformed into a veritable addiction, allowing me no respite, as I could not stay disconnected for more than twenty minutes during the day. At night, I would wake up every sixty minutes, compelled to check notifications or messages. I harbored an obsession with maintaining constant connections with everything and everyone, round the clock. The incessant need to stay updated on others’ lives, coupled with the compulsion to share moments through photos and videos, resulted in a hyper-connected state that detrimentally affected my well-being. This unhealthy attachment threatened to disconnect me from reality and my own life.

I experienced sadness and anxiety in the absence of an internet connection or when I inadvertently left my phone behind. FOMO became the root



Figure 1: Illustration of what FOMO means (Source: Website Geeks for Geeks)

FOMO is closely intertwined with NOMO-PHOBIA, short for “No Mobile Phone Phobia” or “Disconnection Syndrome”, which entails an uncontrollable fear of being without access to the mobile phone network.

cause of my depression and irritability, undeniably casting a negative shadow on both my life and that of my family. Casual chats with my psychologist friend, who recognized my struggle with FOMO, played a crucial role in helping me overcome this condition before it could escalate into more serious issues. Although FOMO is not officially classified as a mental illness, it can undeniably have adverse effects on mental well-being. It is more of a social and psychological phenomenon where people feel uneasy about the prospect of missing out on social events, experiences, or opportunities that others are enjoying. The constant comparison and the pressure to participate in every social activity can lead to stress, anxiety, and a pervasive sense of inadequacy. This, in turn, may fuel a cycle of overcommitting and burnout as individuals try to keep up with an idealized social life. It is crucial to tackle and manage FOMO by fostering a healthy perspective on social activities, setting realistic expectations, and prioritizing self-care. Even though it is not recognized as a mental disease, the impact of unchecked FOMO on mental health is certainly something that warrants attention.

FOMO is closely intertwined with NOMOPHOBIA, short for “No Mobile Phone Phobia” or “Disconnection Syndrome”, which entails an uncontrollable fear of being without access to the mobile phone network. NOMOPHOBIA manifests as anxiety, discomfort,

nervousness, and anguish when out of contact with a mobile phone or computer. This leads to a compulsive need to constantly monitor the phone, resembling a mechanism of addiction akin to substance abuse disorders.

The guidance from my psychologist friend, for which I will be forever grateful, proved incredibly valuable. It enlightened me on the notion that while smartphones are undeniably useful in our daily lives, we should never allow ourselves to become their slaves. It is imperative to be in control of the tool and not let it dictate our actions.

Following his advice, I learned to resist the impulsive urges of FOMO. Now, I check notifications and messages only twice a day, allowing me to use my time more positively. Thanks to my friend’s support, I achieved the following: A) I avoid squandering precious time tethered to the internet on my phone, and 2) I redirect my time towards activities that are undoubtedly more beneficial and healthful, such as taking a leisurely walk, delving into a good book, and engaging in meaningful conversations with friends and family.

This challenging experience imparted to me a crucial lesson: while technology is integral and advantageous in our lives, we must not be overwhelmed by it. Otherwise, we risk compromising our psychological well-being and mental health, both vital for effectively managing our lives.