It's alright if you're missing out

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Just a little peek at social media, and we're bombarded with hundreds of posts. When we scroll through our seemingly endless feed, an obnoxious voice inside our heads says, "Look at them, pursuing their passions, traveling to distant locations, achieving their dreams. What have you done so far?"

Nothing probably comes to mind.

FOMO, or the "fear of missing out", is defined by *Oxford Languages* as the "anxiety that an exciting or interesting event may currently be happening elsewhere, often aroused by posts seen on social media".

Based on its definition, FOMO usually stems from social media. Social media is a strange, dual-edged sword. On the one hand, we choose to seek connections, especially when we are stressed out, while on the other hand, social media feeds on our insecurities.

Social media has its uses but it is also great at making us feel like we haven't achieved anything besides adding a few ounces of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. As long as we are at the mercy of notifications and status updates, we won't be able to break free of the shackles that bind us.

Giving up on social media entirely might seem like the obvious solution. However, in most circumstances that is not an option. Especially when it's our only porthole to the world during trying times.

The alternative is to draw a line with social media the way you would with any other relationship. Creating healthy boundaries with the cause of your distress might not put you at ease right away, but allows it to lose power over you eventually.

Think of it this way: would you let a toxic friend hog all of your time and energy?

However, it is also important to realise that the problem lies with our perception of the narrative.

When an author tells a story, he doesn't go into detail about mundane things. He doesn't show us the dirty dishes, the piles of unwashed laundry, or the milk that turns sour. The character might have to deal with unpleasant circumstances but that isn't always important to the narrative.

Social media gives the story without the unpleasant details. This makes us think that they've done all of those things in that limited time frame.

Overcoming FOMO involves acceptance. Accept that you might not have the energy to do everything. Accept that you cannot be everywhere at the same time, which means you're going to miss out on some things. Accept that you can't always be on top of things.

Ask yourself a few questions. Are the experiences you're missing out on valuable to you? Are they aligned with your future goals? Would you enjoy them?

When you consider these questions, are we really missing out on events that could change our lives? We have our whole lives ahead of us. Let not make someone else's highlight reel our unchecked to-do list.

Subah ponders on the meaning of life, existence, and everything. Contact her on Twitter @hussain_subah

Groupthink, individualism, and *how social media contributes to both*

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Social media is full of contradictions. It has managed to both connect and isolate us. It plays the part of a melting pot and an echo chamber. It promotes self-acceptance, while squandering self-esteem across demographics.

One of its more fascinating paradoxes is how it contributes to groupthink and encourages individualism simultaneously.

Thanks to social media, congregating with like-minded peers can be done in a few clicks. People gravitate towards familiarity, and social media amplifies this behaviour to an alarming extent. Algorithms ensure that we're insulated in a bubble where our existing beliefs are validated, opposing ones are rarely encountered and, consequently, seldom considered.

One proliferation of this phenomenon is "cancel culture". While this trend may have started out to promote accountability, it has evolved to a form of mob rule which promotes censorship and silences dissenting opinions.

Coordinated attempts to punish the offender is the final stage in which the cybermob plays the role of judge, jury, and executioner. In certain scenarios, even neutrality is viewed as complicity. The pressure to conform to popular opinion prevents alternate viewpoints from being discussed.

Another manifestation of social media induced groupthink is mass circulation of misinformation. The fact that most individuals don't bother verifying the information they see on other accounts before sharing it from their own makes this a common occurrence. After a belief takes root, people are reluctant to change their narrative.

Our innate confirmation bias ensures we see flaws in narratives that don't fit ours, but we do not possess the same level of scepticism for our own views. In some cases, spreading false information can lead to political polarisation, conspiracy theories, and even social unrest.

While some users do feel the need to conform, countless others spend ages crafting a unique identity for themselves for social media. It is encouraged to build your own "brand" or "aesthetic" especially on platforms like Instagram and TikTok.

From curating feeds to sticking with certain visuals, much effort is spent on getting likes, follows, retweets or any form of social media currency. Maintaining a strong presence in these populated networks requires people to focus on themselves more than ever, which is seen as a major instigator to a culture of narcissism.

For adolescents and teens, social media is also a tool to explore and experiment with their identities. Virtual spaces offer more flexibility and even anonymity for those who require it. People's online personas wield massive influence on their real-world personalities. Many create and spread digital content, whether it be art, poetry, videos, or even random ramblings, as means of self-expression.

While both phenomena have coexisted together in the past, recent trends indicate that collectivism is winning out over individualism. Whether it will stay this way remains to be seen.

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