

FEAR OF MISSING OUT



Practical Decision-Making in a
World of Overwhelming Choice

"A must-read for all of us who want to escape the anxiety
of indecision, live with more intention, and thrive."

—ARIANNA HUFFINGTON

PATRICK J. MCGINNIS

Praise for Patrick J. McGinnis and
FEAR OF MISSING OUT

“As the creator of the term FOMO, Patrick J. McGinnis is uniquely positioned to lead the fight against this very modern affliction. In his powerful new book, McGinnis shows us how to take back control of the way we live and work. It is a must-read for all of us who want to escape the anxiety of indecision, live with more intention, and thrive.

— Arianna Huffington, founder and CEO, Thrive Global

“Timely, practical, and insightful... In *Fear of a Missing Out*, McGinnis addresses one of the greatest barriers to happiness...and chronicles how it can hijack both your personal and professional lives. Then he shows you how to live life on your own terms instead of letting life happen to you.”

—Shawn Achor, happiness researcher and *New York Times* bestselling author of *Big Potential* and *The Happiness Advantage*

“Whether it’s life’s trivial details or its major crossroads, decision-making can be stressful and all-consuming. In this timely and essential book, Patrick J. McGinnis shows you why it doesn’t have to be that way.”

—Kerry Kennedy, president of Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights and *New York Times* bestselling author

“Living in an age of unprecedented choice makes the thousands of decisions you face each day more complex than ever. Using the frameworks of FOMO and FOBO, McGinnis gives you a set of user-friendly tools to make smarter, better choices.”

—Nir Eyal, bestselling author of *Hooked* and *Indistractable*

“This book is one you would be right to fear missing out on. A fascinating and fun read.”

—Seth Stephens-Davidowitz, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Everybody Lies*

“Patrick J. McGinnis has written the right book for our fraught moment in time. Smart, careful, and a pleasure to read, *Fear of Missing Out* shows the reader not only what FOMO means and does but how we can learn to escape its clutches and pursue lives of meaning instead.”

—Debora L. Spar, MBA Class of 1952 Professor of Business Administration, Harvard Business School

“In *Fear of Missing Out*, Patrick J. McGinnis shows us why we have FOMO and helps us discover what we actually want. Because if you know what you want, you aren’t really missing out, then, are you?”

—Dr. Will Cole, leading functional medicine expert, IFMCP, DC, author of *The Inflammation Spectrum* and *Ketotarian*, and cohost of the *Goopfellas* podcast

“Patrick is a true innovator when it comes to helping you identify how (shockingly) much FOMO [Fear of a Better Option] messes with your relationships, business, and routine tasks... then he trains your anti-FOMO muscles. FOMO may get all the meme attention, but FOMO is the real enemy of choosing what shirt to wear, developing friendships that have value, or scaling your dream startup to an exit.”

—Jack Kramer and Nick Martell, cohosts of Robinhood’s podcast *Snacks Daily*

“*Fear of Missing Out* is an indispensable handbook for anyone who wants to spend each day actually living their life instead of wasting precious time on indecision. Patrick is both generous and genuine, which is a rare gift in this world.”

—Cathy Heller, creator and host of the podcast *Don’t Keep Your Day Job*

“Whether you’re managing a Fortune 500 company, an entrepreneurial venture, or your day-to-day life, you will need to be resolute if you’re going to succeed. This book provides easy to use yet powerful strategies to push past indecision and focus on what matters.”

—Dorie Clark, executive education faculty, Duke University Fuqua School of Business, and author of *Entrepreneurial You* and *Reinventing You*

“After first coining FOMO, McGinnis invented FOMO (Fear of a Better Option) to describe an even more destructive set of behaviors. Now he’s back with a clear, step-by-step, and powerful approach to help people stop looking over their shoulders and instead embrace the real and exciting possibilities before them.”

—Jamie Metzl, leading futurist and bestselling author of *Hacking Darwin*

“It took me nearly dying five times to learn what Patrick so eloquently shares in this must-read book: we must find the power to choose what we actually want and the courage to miss out on the rest. He provides concrete guidance for how to do this (without needing to have the near-death experiences!). McGinnis carries an urgent message: Don’t live with regret. Step one is to read this book.”

—Dr. David Fajgenbaum, author of *Chasing My Cure* and Assistant Professor of Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania

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World of Overwhelming Choice

PATRICK J. MCGINNIS

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*To all the FOMO sapiens, especially
those who hail from the 02163.*

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Introduction

The evolution of humanity from the dawn of time to the present day is not a subject without dispute. New discoveries upend existing theory and shift the known timeline of the development of our species by a couple of hundred thousand years this way or that. It's an inexact science, one that melds paleontology with genetics. Still, experts generally agree that about two million years ago, our first ancestor, *Homo habilis* (named for its use of stone tools), roamed Africa. Eventually, *Homo habilis* gave way to *Homo erectus*, and later *Homo sapiens*, which has dominated the earth ever since.

I'm here to announce a major new addition to the history of human evolution. While I'm not an archaeologist, I can assure you that there was no need to dig for fossils in rural Ethiopia to make the groundbreaking discovery that I'm about to share with you. There is ample evidence of this new form of human on the streets of New York, on the Tube in London, in the office buildings of Beijing, and at the coffee shops of São Paulo. Just as *Homo sapiens* displaced *Homo erectus*, modern humankind is itself giving way to a new species: *FOMO sapiens*.

You might be asking yourself how I can be so certain of this next stage of evolution. The short answer is that it takes one to know one.

My name is Patrick J. McGinnis, and I am the first known *FOMO sapiens*. I initially arrived at this realization way back in the early 2000s when I was a graduate student. But while I was the first of this new and

curious species, I am certainly not the last. Today there are hundreds of millions, if not billions, of *FOMO sapiens*. Just as you could identify *Homo habilis* by its stone tools, *FOMO sapiens* exhibits a few tell-tale characteristics. In its natural habitat, *FOMO sapiens* can be observed yearning for all of the things, either real or imagined, that could make life *perfect*, if only it could have them or do them at this very moment. It's so distracted that if it had any natural predators, it would make for *shockingly* easy prey.

If you haven't heard of FOMO, let me catch you up. Do you ever get stressed out when you come across those delightful (read: highly selective, filtered, and cropped) photos posted by friends, family, and celebrities to your social media feed? As you scroll, you may notice that a feeling starts to build within you, perhaps best understood as a sense of anxiety. While you're playing with your phone, it occurs to you that all of these people are *living lives* that are far more interesting, exciting, successful, and, frankly, Instagramable than yours. This feeling is called **FOMO**, short for Fear of Missing Out, and its effects are widespread.

Contrary to popular belief, FOMO isn't just confined to what you see on social media. It runs much deeper, with implications that go far beyond shaping the daily lives of digital natives, such as millennials and Gen Z. Those two groups are naturally predisposed to evolve into *FOMO sapiens*, but their parents are clear candidates as well. FOMO hounds the middle-aged executive who is stuck in the office while his younger colleague gets invited to a conference in Vegas. It also pesters the sixty-year-old woman whose friends share so many details about their grandkids that she longs for her children to finally start having babies already. Social media heightens FOMO, but you don't need to be glued to your phone to fall into its trap. All you have to do is spend an inordinate amount of time and energy focused on all of the things that

you *wish* you had rather than appreciating the things that you *do* have yet take for granted. The temptation to do so is increasingly prevalent given that so many people now live in a world that offers overwhelming choice, either real or perceived, for almost anything.

Before I go any further, I should come clean about something: the other reason I know that I was the first *FOMO sapiens* is that I'm the guy who came up with the term FOMO in the first place. In 2004, I introduced the acronym in an article titled "Social Theory at HBS: McGinnis' Two FOs" in *The Harbus*, the student newspaper of Harvard Business School (HBS). Now, over fifteen years later, that four-letter word has become a pretty big deal. It's appeared all over pop culture and it's even been added to a host of authoritative dictionaries, including the *Oxford English Dictionary* and Merriam-Webster. In my own life, the most tangible result of this distinction is that a lot of people want to take selfies with me. Naturally, they post them to social media in order to give all of their friends FOMO...if you think about it for too long, it's all pretty meta.

All selfies aside, I feel a little bit guilty for making FOMO *a thing*. Despite its popularity and extreme hashtagability, it is not a laughing matter. It causes stress, insecurity, jealousy, and even depression. It also imperils your success at work, tempts you to make speculative investments, and compels business leaders, from CEOs to start-up founders, to chase after the wrong strategies and squander precious resources. Put simply, it's a massive distraction and a waste of valuable time and energy.

And that's not the worst of it. I regret to inform you that FOMO isn't the only FO that you have to worry about. If you were paying close attention, you might have noticed that the article I wrote was subtitled "McGinnis' Two FOs." So, what happened to the other FO? While FOMO has gone on to fame and fortune, the other FO, well, at least until very recently, not so much.

FOBO, or Fear of a Better Option, is the anxiety that something better will come along, which makes it undesirable to commit to existing choices when making a decision. It's an affliction of abundance that drives you to keep all of your options open and to hedge your bets. As a result, you live in a world of maybes, stringing yourself and others along. Rather than assessing your options, choosing one, and moving on with your day, you delay the inevitable. It's not unlike hitting the snooze button on your alarm clock only to pull the covers over your head and fall back asleep. As you probably found out the hard way, if you hit snooze enough times, you'll end up being late and racing for the office, your day upended and your mood foul. While pressing snooze felt so good at the moment, it ultimately exacts a price.

FOBO is a serious problem that can inflict far more damage than FOMO. Unlike FOMO, which is largely an internal struggle, the costs of FOBO aren't just borne by you, they are also imposed on those around you. When you treat your life like a Tinder feed, swiping with reckless abandon without ever committing to any of the potential options, you turn everything around you, from opportunities to individuals, into commodities. You also send a clear and unambiguous message to everyone else: *you are the ultimate holdout*. You won't set a clear course or commit to a plan of action. Instead, you will let the possibilities pile up and only make a decision when it suits you, likely at the last minute, if at all. These personal defects can wreak havoc on your career trajectory, and they can translate into broader management challenges that imperil companies large and small by engendering analysis paralysis, stifling innovation, and robbing leaders of their authority.

It's no coincidence that I discovered FOBO at the exact same time as FOMO. If you are the kind of person who is prone to fear missing out, then you are also a likely candidate to compulsively keep your options

open. The common thread between these two concepts—that you have many options and opportunities, either real or imagined—is very much a by-product of our modern tech-enabled age. But while most everyone now knows how to spot FOMO in their personal and professional lives, FOBO gets a free pass. It's hiding in plain sight.

It's time to acknowledge that when you live with the negative effects of FOMO or FOBO or both, you run the risk of blowing up your career, destroying your business, imperiling critical personal and professional relationships, and making yourself miserable in the process. Irrespective of these dire long-term consequences, the FOs can also creep into the mundane details of your daily life and seriously impact your productivity. They will then distract you, rob you of any clarity of purpose, and take you away from the present and into a tangled world of hypotheticals, calculations, and trade-offs. They will also sap you of conviction, consume your energy, and impair your performance. Each on its own is problematic, but taken together, they are catastrophic. When you combine FOMO and FOBO, you end up paralyzed with a critical case of FODA—Fear of Doing Anything.

Have you ever heard of the wounded healer? It's a personality archetype created by the psychologist Carl Jung to explain why some people become psychotherapists. Jung believed that many therapists choose their careers because their experiences as patients have given them a special vocation to help others dealing with the same kinds of issues. They may only be a few steps ahead of their patients on their own road to recovery, but having made those steps, they are uniquely positioned to help. I can relate to that. I like to think of myself as the world's first FOMologist. I've studied its causes, nature, and implications. More importantly, after fifteen years of living with FOMO and FOBO, I finally know how to manage them, although the struggle always continues.

Case in point, the words on this page were written during a sabbatical I took in Mexico City. Why did I set up shop in a different country and choose to work from a place that's more than 2,000 miles from home? As much as I'd like to claim it was for easy access to tacos and tequila, the reason is FOMO. Facing an all-consuming task, I knew that the risk of falling victim to the distractions of FOMO was way too high if I stayed home in New York City. With that decision behind me, I also managed pangs of FOBO when trying to settle on dates, lock down the optimal Airbnb, and find the coolest coffee shop in which to write. I made all of these decisions while fully aware of how FOMO and FOBO were driving my behavior. Then I relied on the strategies that I will show you in this book to overcome them.

My path to (relative) freedom from FOMO and FOBO has not been an easy one. I have spent my entire adult life living in New York City, a place that is home to millions of *FOMO sapiens* who think nothing of lining up for hours to experience the latest restaurant, the most buzzed-about exhibit, or some impossible-to-snap collaboration from the cult fashion-brand Supreme. I have also worked in an industry, venture capital, that is often driven by FOMO and FOBO and have traveled all over the globe, from Silicon Valley to Pakistan and Istanbul to Buenos Aires, in search of the hottest start-ups. Even when I've tracked them down, I've often been paralyzed at the moment when it was time to make those big bets. These bouts of indecision have cost me time, money, and focus, all to the detriment of my wallet and my well-being. It's only when I realized that my FOs were costing me money and peace of mind that I decided it was time to find ways to deal with them. In fact, these lessons from my career as a venture capitalist have informed a number of the decision-making strategies that you will learn in this book.

If you're here right now, I'm going to assume that you too are looking

to conquer FOMO or FOBO. No matter your profession or stage of life, the antidote to these challenges is the same: you must learn to be *decisive*. When you are decisive, you strip away the fear from decision-making, remove the emotion from your deliberations, and take action. In doing so, you recognize that when you miss out on an opportunity, you don't necessarily limit your options. On the contrary, you give yourself freedom. Rather than letting life pass you by while you vacillate, you claim what you truly want out of life. You make things happen instead of letting life happen to you. You replace fear with conviction.

If all of that sounds great, then it's time to get to work. While the solutions to your FOs are within reach, living and working decisively is not something that happens overnight. In the same way that indecision slowly creeps into your subconscious, it will take you some time to deprogram yourself. You will do this by following a process that will be guided by two core principles:

1. **You will learn to choose what you actually want.** Rather than collecting every option and then wasting time and energy weighing all possible choices, you must instead decide: close all other paths, move forward, and don't look back in regret. When you do so, you will find that making decisions is a direct pathway to freedom, even in a world of overwhelming choice.
2. **You will find the courage to miss out on the rest.** If you stop trying to do and be everything, you can actually have it all—by not having it all. Rather than longing for what you're missing, you'll feel a profound sense of relief as soon as you put everything else to the side. You will revel in what you missed and instead re-direct your attention to all of the things that truly matter in life.

The book is organized into four parts. The first two sections will show you what drives FOMO and FOBO and then take you through how they can impact your career, your business, and your life. The third section will prepare you to go out into the real world and fight your FOs by giving you the tools you'll need to prevail. Finally, section four will help you to change the way you think about FOMO and FOBO in order to reframe them and then use them for your benefit. In addition to this book, you can always find additional tools, ideas, and resources at patrickmcginnis.com and on my podcast *FOMO Sapiens*.

As you learn to overcome FOMO and FOBO, you will see that the methodologies you will employ are different from other decision-making strategies you might have encountered in the past. That's because when you're dealing with the FOs, you are not caught between a rock and a hard place. Instead, you are operating from a position of abundance. In a very real sense, this is a good problem to have, even if it doesn't feel like it at the moment. If you can manage to break free from indecision, then you can partake in this abundance and benefit from the fact you do, in fact, have plenty of acceptable options. But to do so, you have to accept that you cannot have it all. Overcoming FOMO will require you to determine whether any of the many opportunities that you feel tempted to explore are actually worth pursuing. On the contrary, when you have FOBO, you already have more viable alternatives than you can handle. Your challenge is to choose just one and then move forward.

Before we begin, it's worth considering, even as you learn to manage them, whether either FOMO or FOBO has any redeeming qualities that are worth preserving. The answer, perhaps surprisingly, is yes. FOMO, when kept in check, can provide the inspiration to branch out, take a risk, or make a change in your life. Say you're working eighty-hour weeks

in the corporate world and you feel pangs of FOMO when your former colleague, now an entrepreneur, raises millions of dollars on Kickstarter for her new venture. What can you learn from those feelings? Perhaps a lot. In that sense, I think of FOMO in the same way I think of drinking wine. When consumed in moderation, it has clear health benefits. Plus, it can help you to loosen your inhibitions a bit (*in vino veritas*) so that you can wander over to the edge of your comfort zone. As long as you don't drink to excess, you'll feel fine in the morning, and you'll be ready for your next adventure. Chapter 13 will show you how to harness FOMO for good in order to broaden your horizons and seek new experiences in a sustainable way.

FOBO, on the other hand, is like smoking cigarettes. It has no redeeming qualities and nothing good can come from it. First, it is highly addictive. Second, even if it feels good at the moment, it will inflict long-term damage to all aspects of your well-being. Worst of all, the secondary effects of FOBO are exactly like those of secondhand smoke. While you're focused on your own selfish needs, your vice hurts everyone around you too. That's why you need to devise strategies to cut it off at the source and act with conviction. You'll learn more about that later on.

OK, it's time. Your journey starts now. Your first step, ironically, is a decision: Are you going to turn the page, both literally and metaphorically, and get started? Turning the page means shutting down your FOMO and continuing forward with this journey (goodbye viral cat videos). It also means ignoring your FOBO (no browsing on Amazon for an even better book to read). For the next two hundred pages, you're going to stay right here, focused on the task at hand. That's how you're going to turn this page, the next one, and so on until you reach the back cover. That's what it means to be decisive.

SECTION I

FEAR AND

INDECISION

IN AN

OVERWHELMING

WORLD

"There is no more miserable human being than one in whom nothing is habitual but indecision."

—WILLIAM JAMES

CHAPTER 1

A Brief History of FOMO

"FOMO (fear of missing out) is the enemy of valuing your own time."

—ANDREW YANG

The year was 2002, and I was a first-year student at Harvard Business School. Looking back, when I arrived in Boston to start classes, I considered myself to be a relatively high-functioning *Homo sapiens*. I had spent the last few years making decisions, important grown-up decisions, of the kind that had never been expected of me back in college. I had moved three times, worked at two companies, and invested in more than ten companies in my role as a venture capitalist. I'd learned to make some consequential decisions, both personally and professionally, and I'd managed to do so with surprisingly little drama. If you'd asked me at the time, I would have told you that I was getting pretty good at the whole *adulting* thing.

Admittedly, that was a simpler time, before anyone had ever heard of things like sexting or selfies. When I started business school, I had no

social media. Nobody did. Social networking was in its infancy, although that was just about to change: little did I know it, but Mark Zuckerberg was working on the first version of Facebook less than a mile from my student apartment. Still, even in the absence of Facebook, Twitter, and all of the social networks that help to power the FOMO phenomenon today, something happened to me the minute I stepped on campus: all of the sudden and without warning, I was consumed by a persistent anxiety that no matter where I was or what I was doing, something better was happening elsewhere. This was a clear product of my new habitat. For the first time in my life, I was immersed in an intensely choice-rich environment where almost anything seemed possible. At the same time, I could never even hope to scratch the surface of what was on offer. All I had to do was compare myself to my peers—most of whom were happy to tell me how much they had on their plates—to know that I could never keep up.

Let me explain. Life at HBS was what I imagine it would be like to live life *inside* of a social network. Every overstuffed day was like a real-world mashup of LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, and Snapchat, even though none of those companies existed at the time. You lived in a self-obsessed bubble where news traveled at the speed of lightning, so your conversations and your brags (humble or otherwise) served as a proxy social network, performing many of the same functions as a news feed, a witty Instagram story, or a snarky tweet. This environment cultivated a pervasive fear of being left out of the action going on around you, especially if it could end up being *bigger, better, and brighter* than what you were doing at the moment. Even if you didn't have a name for such feelings, and my classmates and I didn't yet have one, you constantly struggled with them.

I, perhaps, suffered more than my peers. In retrospect, I was a

natural candidate to become the world's first *FOMO sapiens*. I grew up in a small town in Maine, not unlike the kind of place you would find in a Stephen King novel. If you've never been to Maine, let me tell you a little about what people do there. They eat lobster. They take walks on the beach. They shovel snow. They go to L.L. Bean. It's a great place to grow up and to live, but it's not a particularly choice-rich environment. Life is relatively predictable—even comfortably so—and I was used to selecting from a sensible number of alternatives for most anything I could ever want or need.

All of that changed when I started life as an MBA candidate. Not only was I bombarded with choices, but I also felt quite sincerely that I shouldn't let this once-in-a-lifetime set of experiences pass me by. The way I saw it, if you weren't afraid of missing out, then you probably *were* missing out. To make sure I did not, I tried to do *everything*. On campus, I was ubiquitous. The only thing I didn't have a *fear of missing out* on was sleep. I participated in scores of clubs and attended an unending stream of social events, recruiting presentations, conferences, weekend trips, lectures, and, of course, classes. On weekdays, I dragged myself out of bed before 7:00 a.m. and collapsed well after midnight. Weekends were just as hectic. If you threw a rock at any event on campus, chances are that you would have hit me.

Given my desire to take part in essentially *everything*, my friends started to tease me that I'd probably show up at the opening of an envelope. They were right. I clearly suffered from a persistent anxiety that I would fail to take full advantage of anything happening around me, whether it was social, academic, or otherwise. In response, I told them to look in the mirror—they were no better. We were all so busy making sure that we wouldn't be left behind that we were spending a lot of time and energy on things that didn't actually reflect our true priorities.

Rather than doing things because they were going to make us happier or smarter, we instead did them because everybody else was doing them too. There was very little thought behind this behavior: when you say yes to everything, no deliberation is required.

Although my friends and I joked about it, the fear was very real. It was also so common in my life and in the lives of my peers that I decided to give it a name. As the frequent creator of my own slang and shorthand, I decided that this concept, this fear, deserved an acronym. I shortened “fear of missing out” to FOMO, introduced it into my vocabulary, and worked it into the shared lingo of my friend group. Just before graduation in May 2004, I wrote about my favorite new word in that now-fated article in the school newspaper. In a little over one thousand words, I skewered a campus culture that was permeated by FOMO.

While the piece became a hit on campus, my expectations for the acronym’s long-term prospects were limited. In fact, I had much higher hopes for another word I’d recently created—McGincident—that I wanted to become the default description of anything someone in my family did that was funny, clever, or memorable. Then, slowly and entirely unbeknownst to me, FOMO took on a life of its own. Over the next decade, the story of FOMO and its quest for global domination actually became a full-fledged McGincident!

How FOMO Took over the World

Although I was completely unaware of what was happening at the time, I’ve now been able to piece together FOMO’s trajectory as it spread slowly but steadily beyond the confines of my friends and classmates to all corners of the earth. The term first became popular

with MBAs across the United States, who could easily relate to the concept and quickly adopted it into the common lingo that travels between schools. As *Businessweek* (now *Bloomberg Businessweek*) satirically reported in 2007:

An epidemic has hit America's top MBA programs. At Harvard Business School, it's called FOMO: fear of missing out. Symptoms include a chronic inability to turn down invitations to any party, dinner, or junket attended by anyone who might be a valuable addition to one's network—no matter the cost.¹

The next year, in the *New York Times* bestseller *Ahead of the Curve: Two Years at Harvard Business School*, author Philip Delves Broughton, who graduated two years after me, wrote that:

The trick to HBS, the administration kept telling us, was not succumbing to FOMO. You had to choose exactly what you wanted to do and do it without fretting about what else was going on. I quelled my own FOMO by going to the library each day and reading the newspapers, trying to get my head as far away from the bubble as possible. But FOMO was a persistent stalker on campus, sowing poison in every mind.²

FOMO continued to gain traction on a growing number of campuses, and the newly graduated *FOMO sapiens* who spilled out into the world each May got jobs in industries like technology, consulting, and finance. When they arrived at their offices all over the country and the world, they brought FOMO with them and introduced it to a broader professional audience. At the same time, the proliferation of

social media, mobile internet penetration, and digital marketing helped to introduce FOMO into general popular culture.

But while technological advancements have been indispensable to spreading FOMO far and wide, I'm also reminded of an old saying that's a favorite of finance types: correlation does not imply causation. As you will see in the next chapter, FOMO existed long before smartphones were invented, and it would persist even if you restricted your collection of gadgets to a first-generation PalmPilot. Technology has now weaponized a set of emotions that have been part of humanity since the days of *Homo habilis*. The electronic devices that you carry around with you have added fuel to a fire that has been burning for millennia and then set it ablaze as never before.

In fact, in many ways, FOMO is a postmodern version of a classic idiom that has long been part of American culture. Way back in 1913, the comic strip *Keeping Up with the Joneses* made its debut in the pages of the *New York Globe*. The strip, which ran for decades, satirized the misadventures of a social climber named Aloysius and his family in their struggles to keep pace with the exploits of their neighbors the Joneses. If you read it, you'll find that it's a chronicle of analog FOMO at its finest, with the typical plotline centering on Aloysius's wife's efforts to get him to wear pink socks, a red necktie, and green spats, just like his frenemy Mr. Jones. While I too have been known to sport a red necktie from time to time, there's a far more remarkable coincidence that binds Aloysius and me. His full name was Aloysius P. McGinis. So, while we're separated by one "n," it's clear that Aloysius and I have a lot in common. He was the first McGin(n)is to have FOMO, but he certainly wasn't the last.

FOMO, International Word Celebrity

Today, FOMO has permeated all strata of society. It's no longer a niche problem, but rather a mass-market affliction that can strike anyone. In recognition of this status, it was added to the *Oxford English Dictionary* in 2013 and then included in the *Merriam-Webster Unabridged Dictionary* three years later. As it's gone mass market, it's also gone global. By making headlines all over the world, it's become clear that FOMO is far from an American phenomenon. Over the past few years, Spain's *El País* ran a column chronicling the rise of "Generación 'fomo,'" ³ and *The Times of India* asked, "Is FOMO Making You Paranoid?" ⁴ Meanwhile, France's *Le Figaro* wondered if FOMO might just be the illness of the new century in "Le fomo, nouvelle maladie du siècle?" ⁵ while the Turkish newspaper *Daily Sabah* warned, "Hastalığın adı 'FOMO'! Siz de yakalanmış olabilirsiniz..." or "The name of the disease is 'FOMO'! You might get it..." ⁶ Yikes.

Today, a search for the term on Google yields over ten million results and #FOMO pops up hundreds of thousands of times on sites like Twitter and Instagram. It's also used widely across media, in advertisements, in bitmojis, and in countless daily conversations across the globe.



Barack Obama ✓

@BarackObama

No need for #FOMO. Enter now, for free, to meet the President:

<http://t.co/nTpkrVz1oV>.

Jun 29, 2013 12:53 PM

**Khloé** ✓

@khloekardashian

I'm having major FOMO! My entire family is in NYC but I couldn't go due to shooting Kocktails. I might have to hop on a flight after taping

Feb 11, 2016 3:49 AM

**Backstreet Boys** ✓

@backstreetboys

How many days until we're cruising? #FOMO #BSBCRUISE2016

Oct 8, 2015 5:33 PM

**Trevor Noah** ✓

@Trevornoah

Everyone is saying Fomo. What is Fomo? I need to know so I can join in. Please help me.

Nov 13, 2012 6:05 AM

**Harley-Davidson** ✓

@harleydavidson

#SturgisOrBust! The 78th @SturgisRally has been nothing but rolling thunder in the #BlackHills. If you aren't here, get here. The #FOMO is real. #HarleyDavidson #FindYourFreedom

Aug 5, 2018

**Tyra Banks** ✓

@tyrabanks

Today is the day! Register for #FierceUp now, or forever hold your
#FOMO. @nyledimarco <http://bit.ly/29ZeOKx>

Jul 28, 2016

Simply put, FOMO is now an international word celebrity, used by paupers, presidents, and Kardashians alike. Given its power, it now lies at the center of a global conspiracy to influence your decisions that is driven by influencers, brands, and even your fellow *FOMO sapiens*. Ironically, although the Kardashians of the world are very much part of this machine, they are also beholden to it, just like you and me. As you'll see in the next chapter, almost no one, except for a few resolute and impenetrable souls, can truly escape its grasp.

About the Author



Patrick J. McGinnis is a venture capitalist, writer, and speaker who has invested in leading companies in the United States, Latin America, Europe, and Asia.

He is the creator and host of the hit podcast *FOMO Sapiens*, which is distributed by *Harvard Business Review*. Patrick coined the term “FOMO,” short for “Fear of Missing Out,” which was added to the *Oxford English Dictionary* in 2013. He is also the creator of the term “FOBO” or “Fear of a Better Option” and has been featured as the creator of both terms in media outlets including the *New York Times*, *Politico*, *The Financial Times*, *Boston Globe*, *Guardian*, *Inc. magazine*, *Cosmopolitan*, and MSNBC. His TED Talk “How to Make Faster Decisions” was released in 2019.

Patrick is the author of the international bestseller *The 10% Entrepreneur: Live Your Startup Dream Without Quitting Your Day Job*, a guide to part-time entrepreneurship. Translated into over ten foreign languages, the book has been featured by the BBC, MSNBC, CNN en Español, *Entrepreneur*, *Fast Company*, *Forbes*, *Fortune*, and many other media outlets worldwide.

As a 10% Entrepreneur, Patrick has invested in, advised, or founded more than twenty part-time entrepreneurial ventures

spanning the high-tech, real estate, and entertainment industries. Two of the companies in his investment portfolio have subsequently become unicorns. He is also an investor in the UK theatrical production of *The Last King of Scotland*.

He is a proud founding member of the Leadership Council at Sesame Workshop and is an avid fan of Grover, who is clearly the Muppet with the most FOMO.

A graduate of Georgetown University and Harvard Business School, Patrick has visited more than one hundred countries and is fluent in Spanish, Portuguese, and French. He lives in New York City.

For more information, visit patrickmcginnis.com.

WHAT ARE YOU **REALLY** MISSING OUT ON?

You're home on a Friday night, scrolling through Instagram, ready to go to bed.

Then you see posts on your timeline from a party you were invited to but didn't attend. You were confident when you said no, but now you can't stop thinking about it, and you start feeling anxiety.

You have FOMO, or Fear of Missing Out.

We live in a time of seemingly unlimited options and opportunities—and it's impossible to choose them all. Deciding which are best for us, be it our Friday night plans or our next career move, can be daunting, to say the least. So how can we find the power to choose what we actually want in our lives—whether it's life's major decisions or the minor details—when the options are essentially limitless?

Patrick J. McGinnis has been studying FOMO since he created the term nearly two decades ago, and he has developed a fresh approach to decision-making to beat it. Learning to weigh the costs and benefits of your choices, prioritizing your decisions, and listening to your gut are central to silencing FOMO and its lesser-known cousin, FOBO: Fear of a Better Option. After all, don't you want to feel comfortable and confident in your decisions?