Indian Journal of Health and Well-being 2024, 15(4), 611-613
Peer-reviewed and Indexed Journal
https://iahrw.org/our-services/journals/indian-journal-of-health-wellbeing/
© 2024 Indian Association of Health, Research and Welfare
ISSN-p-2229-5356,e-2321-3698

Doomscrolling and its impact on Mental Health

Amreen Sekhon
Department of Psychology, Panjab University, Chandigarh

Doomscrolling, the compulsive consumption of negative news online has emerged as a significant challenge in the digital age. The present paper examines the psychological and emotional impacts of doomscrolling, particularly its association with overall mental health. Drawing on recent studies, it explores the behavioural and cognitive mechanisms underlying doomscrolling, including negativity bias, fear of missing out (FOMO) and information overload. The review highlights research findings on its prevalence during global crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic and discusses interventions, including mindfulness practices and digital literacy campaigns that can mitigate its adverse effects. The present paper emphasizes the importance of addressing doomscrolling to improve individual well-being and promote healthier digital habits in a hyperconnected world.

Keywords: doomscrolling, mental health, social media

The advent of smartphones and the proliferation of social media platforms have revolutionized how people consume information. While these technologies provide instant access to news and updates, they also introduce behaviours that can adversely affect mental health. One of the most concerning behaviours to emerge in recent years is “doomscrolling," a compulsive habit of consuming negative or distressing news for prolonged periods (Ytre-Arne & Moe, 2021). Doomscrolling can also be described as a combination of monitorial news use patterns centered on the smartphone, the dark content of “unsettling news”, and attention towards economy news channels which result in emotional drain through a flow users find hard to get out of (Ytre-Arne & Moe, 2021). Doomscrolling often arises during times of uncertainty, such as global crises or pandemics when individuals feel an urgent need to stay informed (Luqman et al., 2022).

This behaviour is driven by a combination of psychological factors, including negativity bias-the tendency to focus more on negative information than positive-and fear of missing out (FOMO) (Nguyen et al., 2021). While it may provide a temporary sense of control, doomscrolling has been linked to increased levels of anxiety, depression, and stress. Various studies suggest that excessive exposure to negative content not only heightens emotional distress but also disrupts sleep patterns and diminishes overall well-being (Dhir et al., 2021). Given its widespread prevalence and impact, understanding doomscrolling and developing strategies to mitigate its effects is crucial in promoting mental health.

Historical Perspective

The habit of doomscrolling can be likened to an earlier concept from the 1970s known as the "mean world syndrome." This term refers to the perception that the world is far more dangerous than it truly is, caused by prolonged exposure to violent content on television. Research indicates that encountering distressing news compels individuals to search for additional information on the subject, thereby creating a continuous and self-reinforcing cycle.

The term "doomscrolling" emerged in early 2020, gaining widespread usage during the COVID-19 pandemic and the period of social distancing (Barabak, 2020). Although first coined in 2018, it was later popularized by journalist Karen Ho (Garcia-Navarro, 2020). Doomscrolling refers to the compulsive habit of continuously browsing or scrolling through negative news, even when the content is distressing, frightening, or upsetting. This phenomenon transcends barriers of age, gender, caste, class, religion and nationality, impacting people from all walks of life. Whether consciously or unconsciously, doomscrolling has become a part of modern digital habits and is increasingly noticeable in daily life (Rodrigues, 2022).

Review of Literature

Doomscrolling has been a topic of growing academic interest with numerous studies exploring its psychological and emotional implications.

Bontcheva and colleagues (2021) examined the spread of misinformation during crises and its link to doomscrolling. They argued that the combination of distressing news and misinformation intensifies feelings of uncertainty and fear, further driving compulsive information consumption.

Brailovskaia and colleagues (2021) identified a strong association between excessive social media use and mental health issues such as anxiety and depression. The study included 221 participants from Spain. The results of the study highlighted how doomscrolling fosters a sense of helplessness, as individuals are overwhelmed by the volume of negative information they encounter.

Nguyen et al. (2021) explored the role of individual differences in doomscrolling behaviour. They found that individuals with higher levels of neuroticism are more likely to engage in doomscrolling and experience its negative effects on mental health. The research highlights the importance of considering personality traits when developing interventions for this behaviour.

Ytre-Arne and Moe (2021) examined the digital news

Author Note

Dr. Amreen Sekhon, Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology Panjab University, Chandigarh
I have no known conflict of interest to disclose.
Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to
Dr. Amreen Sekhon, Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology Panjab University, Chandigarh
E-mail: dr.amreensekhon@gmail.com

consumption patterns during the COVID-19 pandemic and found that doomscrolling contributes significantly to emotional exhaustion and pandemic fatigue. They emphasized that continuous exposure to distressing news creates a feedback loop of negativity, reinforcing anxiety and stress.

The American Psychological Association (2022) reported that 56% of adults experience stress due to information overload, particularly from news and social media. This finding underscores the extent to which doomscrolling exacerbates mental health challenges in an already overstimulated digital environment.

Harper et al. (2022) explored the impact of doomscrolling on sleep quality and emotional well-being. The study revealed that individuals who engage in doomscrolling before bedtime are more likely to experience disrupted sleep which in turn exacerbates symptoms of anxiety and depression.

Luqman et al. (2022) conducted a study on the psychological impact of information overload and technostress caused by doomscrolling. They found that individuals who frequently consume distressing news online are more likely to experience emotional dysregulation and feelings of burnout. These findings support the argument that doomscrolling is a maladaptive coping mechanism that worsens mental health outcomes.

Sharma and colleagues (2022) found that doomscrolling is strongly linked to online vigilance, problematic internet and social media use and fear of missing out (FOMO). Moderate associations were observed with passive and habitual use as well as news surveillance. It showed a moderate positive correlation with anxiety and smaller positive correlations with traits like political interest, neuroticism, cynicism, sensation-seeking, and negativity bias. Additionally, men and younger adults were more likely to engage in doomscrolling than women and older adults.

Kim et al. (2023) studied the role of mindfulness interventions in reducing the adverse effects of doomscrolling. Their findings demonstrated that mindfulness-based strategies significantly decrease the frequency of doomscrolling and improve mental health outcomes by fostering a sense of emotional regulation.

Wafa and colleagues (2024) conducted a study in order to understand the impact of doomscrolling on mental health of students. The results of the study found a significant relationship of doomscrolling with anxiety. The study also revealed that the majority of the students who experienced doomscrolling were women.

The above studies highlight the pervasive and detrimental impact of doomscrolling on mental health and overall well-being. Additionally, researchers have also found that doomscrolling leads to increased anxiety, depression, emotional exhaustion and a sense of helplessness. It is driven by a compulsive consumption of distressing information often exacerbated by misinformation and overwhelming digital environments. The research also suggests interventions such as mindfulness which can effectively reduce the frequency of doomscrolling and promote emotional regulation.

Interventions

The following interventions are helpful in mitigating the adverse effects of doomscrolling which can be aversive to overall mental health:

Mindfulness Practices

Mindfulness techniques such as meditation, deep breathing exercises, and awareness training can help individuals regulate their emotional responses and reduce compulsive doomscrolling. Kim and colleagues (2023) demonstrated that mindfulness-based interventions significantly decrease the frequency of doomscrolling, enhancing emotional well-being and fostering a sense of control over digital consumption.

Digital Literacy Campaigns

Educating individuals about healthy online behaviours and teaching strategies to critically evaluate information can reduce the harmful effects of doomscrolling. Bontcheva et al. (2021) highlighted the importance of equipping users with skills to identify misinformation and manage their exposure to distressing news content.

Setting a Time Limit

Encouraging users to set boundaries on their screen time, particularly for news and social media consumption can minimize the negative mental health impacts. Apps that track screen usage and provide reminders for breaks can help enforce these limits (Harper et al., 2022).

Emphasis on Positive Content

Redirecting users' attention to uplifting or neutral content can counteract the negativity bias associated with doomscrolling. Promoting access to inspiring stories or engaging in hobbies online can help create a balanced digital environment (Luqman et al., 2022).

Therapeutic Interventions

Cognitive-behavioural approaches and counselling can address underlying psychological factors that contribute to doomscrolling, such as anxiety and FOMO (Nguyen et al., 2021).

Conclusion

Doomscrolling represents a significant challenge to mental health in the digital age. While it may provide temporary reassurance during times of uncertainty, the habit often results in heightened anxiety, depression, and stress. The existing body of research underscores the pervasive impact of doomscrolling on emotional well-being, sleep quality, and overall mental health. Addressing this issue requires a multifaceted approach, including public awareness campaigns, mindfulness interventions, and strategies to promote healthier digital consumption habits. As the digital landscape continues to evolve, prioritizing mental health in the face of doomscrolling is a crucial step toward fostering a more balanced and resilient society.

References

American Psychological Association (2022). *Stress in America 2022: A National Mental Health Crisis*. American Psychological Association.

Barabak, M. Z. (2020, April 11). *"Quarantini."* "Doomscrolling." Here's how the coronavirus is changing the way we talk. Los Angeles Times.

Bontcheva, K., Gorrell, G., & Wessels, B. (2021). Social media and misinformation during crises: Effects on doomscrolling behaviour. *Journal of Digital Media Studies, 12*(3), 256-274.

Brailovskaia, J., Truskauskaite-Kunevičienė, I., Margraf, J., & Kazlauskas, E. (2021). The relationship between social media use, anxiety, and depression. *Current Psychology, 40*(10), 5610-5616.

Dhir, A., Yossatorn, Y., Kaur, P., & Chen, S. (2021). Online social media fatigue and psychological well-being: A study of doomscrolling during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of Consumer Behavior, 20*(6), 1345-1360.

Garcia-Navarro, L. (2020, July 19). *Your "doomscrolling" breeds anxiety. Here's how to stop the cycle.* National Public Radio.

Harper, R., Ortiz, J., & Lee, C. (2022). The relationship between doomscrolling, sleep quality, and emotional well-being. *Journal of Behavioral Science, 42*(4), 345-360. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbs.2022.05.012

Kim, H., Park, J., & Choi, S. (2023). Mindfulness interventions to combat doomscrolling: An experimental study. *Mindfulness and Behavior, 18*(2), 112-129.

Luqman, A., Masood, A., & Shahbaz, M. (2022). Technostress and information overload in the age of doomscrolling. *Psychological Studies, 67*(3), 123-141.

Nguyen, T. T., Vuong, Q. H., & Ho, T. M. (2021). Personality traits and doomscrolling: The role of neuroticism. *Social Media Research Journal, 15*(5), 421-437.

Rodrigues, E. V. (2022). Doomscrolling threat to mental health and well-being: A review. *International Journal of Nursing Research, 08*(04), 127-130.

Sharma, M. (2022). *Doomscrolling: Eye pupillometry with smartphone camera and an eye tracker* (Master's thesis). Bauhaus-Universität Weimar, Weimar.

Wafa, M. A., Darungan, T. S., Akbar, S., & Damanik, Z. (2024). The relationship of doomscrolling with anxiety in students of the faculty of medicine, Islamic university of North Sumatra. *Asian Journal of Healthy and Science*, *3*(7), 188-196.

Ytre-Arne, B., & Moe, H. (2021). Doomscrolling, news overload and pandemic fatigue: The digital news habits of the COVID-19 lockdowns. *Digital Journalism, 9*(9), 1109-1128.

Received November 18, 2024
Revision received December 3, 2024
Accepted December 7, 2024