

Impact of Doomscrolling on Wellbeing

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ABSTRACT

The term doomscrolling is a new concept. It has attracted the attention of the mental health researchers globally during covid-19. Due to technology and social media platform, doomscrolling behaviour exhibited by the individual has been increased to a great extent. Doomscrolling refers to compulsive navigation and scrolling of toxic or negative information through internet or social media platform. During the time of war, economic crisis, terror attack, natural calamities, and epidemic people are indulged themselves in doomscrolling behaviour. The personality traits and mental health of the individual also affect the doomscrolling behaviour. The present paper examines the impact of doomscrolling on the physical and mental health of the individual and suggestions for the coping strategies to manage it.

Keywords: *Doomscrolling, Individual, Technology, Physical, and Mental Health*

The technological innovations not only expose the people to the information but also affect the emotional reaction and perception of the individual to a great extent. The term doomscrolling has been used during COVID-19. The widespread of unpleasant and negative information in the social media lead to the consumption of such content by the people (Katariya, 2020) has resulted the emergence of a new concept “Doomscrolling”.

According to Oxford Languages (2020) doomscrolling refers to going through the bad or negative news in the social media by looking at the mobile or computer. In other words, it refers to when one is searching and habituated in consuming negative news on social media. According to Rodrigues (2020) people cannot refrain themselves in consuming this information. According to Sharma et al., (2022) it is more prevalent in disease, violent, natural disaster and epidemic. Individual experience adverse effects of the negative news on their mental health.

Doomscrolling: Meaning

The term doom according to dictionary refers to fate or destiny. The fate is understood in the context of adverse fate and ill fortune which is unavoidable (www.dictionary.com). It also refers to darkness or evil in the context of one’s fate. Scrolling refers to sliding of text or images etc. The term surfing refers to browsing the internet.

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Doomscrolling is also known as doom surfing. The term doomscrolling has been coined in the year 2018 by Karen K. Ho in a social media posts (twitter). Ho, a journalist and, Global Finance and Economics reporter for Quartz has popularised the term. In the year 2020, Merriam Webster Dictionary used the term “Doomscrolling” in the list of words. During the time of COVID-19 pandemic, the term gained popularity. Doomscrolling refers to compulsive scrolling of the unpleasant and sad news online, even though it is disheartening (Merriam Webster Dictionary, 2020).

Doomscrolling refers to obsessive consumption of toxic information or news. It is characterised by browsing negative news feeds in computer or internet. It is also called “Negative Newsfeed Binging”. During corona virus 2019 (Covid-19) people are engaged themselves in reading bad news. The term doomscrolling was searched globally by people (Google trends Newsletter Company 2021). People are interested towards news and articles seeking clarification and answers to their incessant queries. Overfeeding of the disheartening or sad news such as Covid -19 increase the level of anxiety among people.

According to Kemp (2020), during pandemic and lockdown the surge of the global news consumption through digital media and social media was 355 and 455 respectively. People used to spend most of time in listening, watching and reading to covid -19 news in online due to fear and uncertainty. Doomscrolling emphasises upon the relationship between negative information, fearful and threatening situation with anxiety feeling, coping mechanism for anxiety and effort to control it (Satici et al., 2022).

Doomscrolling: Measurement

Sharma et al., (2022) developed doomscrolling scale (one dimension having 15 number of items). The short form scale (four items) is also available. According to Sharma et al., (2022) doomscrolling is related with online alertness and use of social media platform. The personality traits of the individual such as anxiety and self-control also play a significant role in influencing doomscrolling behaviour.

The doomscrolling behaviour of the individual is related with big five personality dimensions, personal addiction towards social media, life satisfaction, mental wellbeing, harm in life, and psychological distress. Anh (2023) conducted Turkish adaptation of the scale in which 15 items (one dimensional structure) was confirmed. The goodness-of-fit of short form of the doomscrolling scale (consisting of four items) is found to be inadequate.

Doomscrolling: Contributing Factors

According to Anand et al., (2022) individuals engage themselves in order to comprehend the uncontrollable situations and fill the information gap. During pandemic (Covid -19), people in order to cope with negative emotions, they are accessing information with the hope of promising insights on the pandemic. These information act as coping strategies to manage their existing negative situation (GrootKormelink et al., 2021). People used to search for positive and optimistic news during Covid -19 pandemic even in the prevailing negative situation increase their feelings of a anxiety and uncertainty. In other words, the effort of the people to access positive information during stressful situations may resulted a feeling of anxiety as they are being exposed to more toxic news and information.

The personality trait also acts as contributing factor for doomscrolling. Few traits of the individual such as cynicism, neuroticism, and negativity bias increases the occurrence of doomscrolling behaviour where as conscientiousness, self-control, high self esteem/positive

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affect decreases it (Sharma et al., 2020). Satici et al., (2022) stated that the big-five personality dimensions are associated with doomscrolling. The traits such as conscientiousness, extraversion and agreeableness have negative correlation whereas neuroticism has positive correlation with doomscrolling. The research findings of Satici et al., (2022) and Sharma et al., (2022) also confirm the influence of demographic variables (especially age and socioeconomic status) on doomscrolling behaviour. The doomscrolling behaviour is being exhibited more by the younger individuals as well as individuals with lower socio-economic status group. According to Sharma et al., (2022) found that men are exhibiting higher propensity towards doomscrolling.

The adverse psychological effects on individual are also observed during earthquake in Turkey on 6th February 2023 (Biren et al., 2024). There is a positive relation between the adverse psychological distress (anxiety, stress and depression) and doomscrolling (Kartol et al., 2023). The individual those who experience the psychological distress worry more about the future, exhibiting more doomscrolling behaviour.

According to Pas (2023) there is a relationship between doomscrolling and depression. Individuals suffering in depression experience a feeling of worthlessness, affecting their self-evaluation and also lead them to negative beliefs about their future (Eysenck & Fajkowska, 2018). According to Satici et al., (2022) the individual experiencing depression engages themselves more in doomscrolling behaviour. There is a positive correlation between doomscrolling and negativity bias (Eysenck and Fajkowska, 2018)

Due to negativity bias, the negative information is given more importance by the human brain than the positive information (Soroka et al., 2019). The news headlines containing negative information is more clicked (Robertson et al., 2023). According to Pas (2023) individuals experiencing depressive symptoms navigate for negative contents and make themselves available for doomscrolling in social media platform.

There is a positive correlation between social media use and doomscrolling behaviour. According to Satici et al., (2022) and Sharma et al., (2021) in their study found that doomscrolling has positive correlation with:

- One is spending time on social media as well as addiction to social media, and Fear of Missing Out (FOMO).
- Future anxiety leads to online compulsive behaviour (Shabahang et al., 2021).

Individuals engage in doomscrolling behaviour cannot refrain themselves from the use of social media addiction and internet. The social media and doomscrolling is related with news consumption habits. In 2023, the research conducted by the Reuter Institute and Oxford University on digital news report reveals that -

- For accessing the news people use of social media - 30%
- Usage rate of websites and news application - 22%

According to Newsman (2023), individual within the age group of 18-24 use -

- News website application directly
- Social media and its tools

For doomscrolling there is an end point for use of social media (Nguyen, 2020). On the basis of customer's previous scrolling, news feeds are customised (Thorson et al., 2021).

Doomscrolling: Impact on the Individual Health

a. Mental Health:

The doomscrolling has negative impact on the mental wellbeing of the individual overtime. A study has been conducted to study on the impact of the T.V. on the individuals mood and their anxiety. The participants were divided into three groups such as positive, negative and neutral on the basis of news headlines. It was found that individuals those who have watched negative news experience anxiety as well as sadness more compared to their counterparts. Their personal anxiety converted into disaster (Johnston & Davey, 1997).

Sazo & Hopkinson (2007) conducted a study on impact of T. V news on the under-graduated individuals reveal that students anxiety level and mood disorder has been increased after watching 15 minutes of T.V. programs. The news and negative emotions are interrelated (Park, 2015).

Exposure to doomscrolling is associated with depression and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (Price et al., 2013). The terrorist attack on September 11 increases the PTSD (Silver et al., 2013). According to Hau (2023) people experience high level of anxiety when the doomscrolling behaviour is related to climate change. Individuals watching Tiktok video related to climate change experience sadness compared to those who watch content of appreciation.

Doomscrolling affect the emotional state of the social media user. According to Newsman (2023) individuals interest towards consumption of the negative news has been changed recently from 63 % in 2017 to 48% in the year 2023. 23 % prefer towards online news where as 33% make themselves distance from toxic content. The exact reason for this change is not being known till date.

According to Kin Yeager, a psychiatrist of Wexner Medical Centre, research studies reveal that, people think they have control over bad news, even though the people react differently to the negative news, but it makes the people depressed, anxiety and isolated.

b. Physical Health:

According to Dr. Carla Marie, a clinical psychologist doomscrolling can be affective and people want safe during unpredictable time. It may disrupt sleep pattern, less attentive, and cause to overeating.

According to Sharon and Goldman (2020) doomscrolling sleeplessness (insomnia) resulted heart attack and depression. It also increases the stress hormones such as cortisol and adrenaline which resulted health related issues such as heart disease, diabetes, and obesity etc.

A study conducted by Cassidy Caitlin (2022) negative consumption of the news leads to stress, anxiety, and poor health. A survey conducted in Chennai by Wakefit company found that the use of electronic devices and stressful work environment has negative impact on sleeplessness. It was found that even though 60% of the Indians go to bed at 11pm, but late-night browsing of mobile make them sleeplessness (One out of four Indian suffer from insomnia). Late night browsing of the internet has increased significantly compared to pre-pandemic years.

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Doomscrolling has negative impact on mental health as well as neurological health which resulted depression, stress and anxiety due to continuous browsing. According to Dr. Fabian Almada, Psychiatrists of Fortis hospital, doomscrolling affect the physical health such as cervical spondylosis, joint arthritis, Neck flexicon position, posture related issues, Carpal Tunnel syndrome, vision issues and obesity. The radio frequency wave increases the risk of brain tumour.

Doomscrolling is not only unhealthy but also lead to missing deadlines, task cannot be completed, and valuable time cannot be spent with one's friends and relatives. The habits also not easy to break when one is consuming time by going through appropriate websites.

Doomscrolling: Coping Strategies

Various strategies suggested for coping with doomscrolling are as follows:

- **Reduce the use of technology:**

Reduce the individual use of social media platforms. According to Sharma et al., (2020) the negative news feeds can be reduced by managing the time of smart phone use, keeping the digital devices out of bed room by using alarm clock, using smart phone, avoiding the smartphone by 2 hours before going to bedroom. Individual can develop digital hygiene by focusing on healthy technology use. As a result of which individuals will be very conscious about news consumption. The acquisition of digital hygiene enable the individual to engage themselves in offline activities (sports, indoor-games, spending time with family, relatives and friends etc).

- **Limit News Consumption:**

According to Mannel and Meese (2022) the various methods adopted by the individual to mitigate doomscrolling include :

- a. Hiding and deleting news from social media platforms.
- b. Turnoff notifications from smart phones
- c. Abstaining from news
- d. Restrict one self from time spent for the use of news, website and application.

- **Balancing negative information with positive Ones:**

Individuals consume positive news instead of negative by creating websites and applications (Happy Newspaper, Good news Movement, Upworthy, Goodnews Network). In order to counteract doomscrolling Ireland Tourism Board has created websites called Jog scroll. The basic aim of these site is to create positive emotions by offering natural landscapes and sounds instead of bad news. (Das,2022).

- **Adapting Coping Strategies:**

Individuals can enhance their wellbeing by engaging themselves in active coping. Research studies by Lades et al., (2020) found that during Covid -19, instead of using social media with negative emotions, people prefer to engage themselves in various outdoor activities such as spending their time with family & children, physical exercises, walking, and gardening in order to increase their wellbeing. According to Verma et al., (2023), during Covid-19, people engage in a prosocial behaviour such as helping others and collaborate work with others which increase their positive emotions.

- **Implementation of the News Organisations by the Social Media Platform:**

Media organisation emphasising upon reporting one news story with positive outcomes in every three stories with negative outcomes (Vanderweele & Brooka, 2020). The regulation

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of social media platform has been studied by the researcher. It was found that there is a positive relation between doomscrolling behaviour and algorithm structure of social media platforms as well as smartphones. Doomscrolling behaviour on various platforms can be verified as strategies and intervention program may be adopted accordingly.

According to Ananda et al., (2022), education on healthy technology use empowers various aspects such as:

- Management of the digital information/news feeding
- Minimise the time one is spending on smart phones
- Reducing social media platforms.

The coping strategies for doomscrolling includes –

- Conscious use of technology
- Positive coping strategies for managing negative news/ information.
- Limited the consumption of negative news.

The above discussed strategies may help the individual to strengthen their mental wellbeing through positive activity and connect themselves with digital world. The individual may evaluate the effectiveness of implementation of the above strategies and implement the effective strategies for themselves.

CONCLUSION

The doomscrolling behaviour has been increased due to social media platform, as internet has reached in every nook and corner of the world. The mental health and wellbeing is affected by the excessive consumption of the negative news. Consumption of negative news on war, climate change, earthquake, economic crisis, terror attack, epidemic not only affect depressive individuals (feeling worthlessness) but also leads to anxiety, stress, depression, PTSD. It also decreases the level of wellbeing. The personality traits such as neuroticism, and negativity bias also increase the doomscrolling behaviour. It can be concluded that doomscrolling behaviour has negative impact on mental health and wellbeing of the individual. The various coping strategies such as limiting negative news consumption, healthy technology use, and balancing negative information with positive ones can be implemented to overcome doomscrolling behaviour which may contribute to the overall psychological health of the society.

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Acknowledgment

The author(s) appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

How to cite this article: Panda, S. (2025). Impact of Doomscrolling on Wellbeing. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 13(4), 2994-3000. DIP:18.01.272.20251304, DOI:10.25215/1304.272