

Research Paper

Emotionally Drained: How Negative Affect Bridges Doomscrolling and Poor Well-Being

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ABSTRACT

Doomscrolling, the compulsive consumption of distressing content and negative news on social media, has become a psychological concern in the ever-connected digital world. The relationship between doomscrolling behaviour and decreased well-being is examined in this research paper through the psychological mechanism of negative affect. Based on theories of media psychology, emotional regulation, and cognitive overload, the study uses a structured survey given to 500 participants between the ages of 18 and 45. Key variables measured include doomscrolling frequency, intensity of emotional responses (such as anxiety, hopelessness, and fear), and overall mental well-being indicators including life satisfaction, emotional exhaustion, and symptoms of anxiety or depression. According to the results, people who doomscroll frequently are more likely to have a chronic negative affect, which is strongly associated with lower psychological well-being. In addition to acting as a mediator in this relationship, negative affect also amplifies the emotional impact of digital content, creating a vicious cycle of compulsive behaviour and emotional exhaustion. Crucially, qualitative responses indicate that users frequently acknowledge the negative effects of their behaviour but are unable to stop because of digital dependency, perceived informational responsibility, or FOMO. (Reinecke & Hofmann, 2016). This study emphasises the critical need for training in emotional resilience, digital literacy, and mindful media consumption practices. Additionally, it urges social media companies to incorporate user-centred design elements that reduce exposure to emotionally damaging material. This study provides important insights for psychologists, educators, policymakers, and platform developers who want to promote healthier online environments by elucidating the emotional pathways that connect doomscrolling to poor well-being.

Keywords: *FOMO, Media Psychology, Social Media Addiction, Negative Affect, Psychological Well-Being, Emotional Exhaustion, Doomscrolling*

People are being exposed to an endless supply of news and information in an era where digital connectivity and algorithm-driven content rule the day. While this accessibility provides a never-before-seen awareness of world events, it also fuels a psychological issue known as doomscrolling, which is the compulsive consumption of unfavourable news on news platforms and social media. Doomscrolling, which began as a behavioural reaction during emergencies like the COVID-19 pandemic, has long become a habit for many people,

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characterised by prolonged periods of perusing upsetting or frightening content, frequently late at night. Despite the fact that this behaviour is meant to keep people informed, it paradoxically causes increased anxiety, emotional burnout, and cognitive fatigue. (Frith, 2020).

The psychological toll of doomscrolling is centred on the experience of negative affect, which encompasses a variety of negative emotional states like helplessness, anger, sadness, and fear. These feelings can be intensified by repeatedly viewing upsetting news content, which feeds a vicious cycle where people feel emotionally spent but keep scrolling in an attempt to find meaning, comfort, or closure. This vicious cycle not only exacerbates emotional stress but also leads to a quantifiable deterioration in mental health, which manifests as symptoms of anxiety or depression, poor sleep, elevated stress levels, and decreased life satisfaction.

Although the negative effects of excessive digital consumption are becoming more widely discussed, little empirical research has been done to examine how negative affect acts as a mediator between doomscrolling and wellbeing. Previous research frequently looks at social media use and mental health in broad strokes, ignoring the particular emotional mechanisms that underlie maladaptive behaviours like doomscrolling.

In order to close that gap, this study investigates how negative affect mediates the link between doomscrolling and poor psychological health. This study investigates how much emotional distress fuels and sustains doomscrolling behaviours using a quantitative methodology supplemented by qualitative insights. The study's identification of this emotional link advances theoretical knowledge and provides guidance for real-world interventions aimed at enhancing digital wellness. The results have wide-ranging effects on psychologists, educators, public health specialists, and designers of digital platforms who are dedicated to reducing the risks to mental health that come with the contemporary information ecosystem.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Konrath (2017), whose article was titled "Digital Media Use and Negative Emotional Outcomes in Adults", conducted research on the psychological effects of extended use of digital media sites. Her results showed high levels of correlation between passive viewing over long periods of time, particularly of adverse content and increased emotional exhaustion. Konrath stressed that those who scroll through bad news internalize that bad news, causing heightened anxiety, mood disturbance, and loss of subjective well-being. This corresponds with the overall thesis that doomscrolling leads to adverse emotional health.

Buhrmester & Baumeister (2019), in their paper "Social Media and the Rise of Negative Affect: Emotional Consequences of Excessive Engagement", contend that an excessive amount of time on social media increases significantly the experiences of negative affect. Their research illustrates that negative affective states like envy, sadness, and helplessness are not merely consequences of social media but also function as drivers of compulsive activities like doomscrolling. The affective residue generated from such activities directly causes psychological tension and social withdrawal.

Frith (2020), in "Doomscrolling and the New Anxiety Epidemic", was one of the first to give formal acknowledgment to the term "doomscrolling" in scholarly literature. Her work emphasized how the COVID-19 pandemic hastened a worldwide trend of compulsive

consumption of negative news. Doomscrolling, according to Frith, serves as a maladaptive coping strategy activated by ambiguity, yet paradoxically reinforces emotional suffering and diminishes the individual's ability to manage affect, thus compromising well-being.

Twenge and Campbell (2018) in their work "Screen Time and Mental Health: An Evidence-Based Overview" performed a meta-analysis that explored the impact of rising digital screen use on mental health. They discovered that screen time in itself is not the issue; instead, it is the emotional tone and quality of the content one consumes that determines psychological consequences. Recurrent exposure to negative news, especially in the absence of breaks or filtering, has been found to decrease mood, interfere with sleep, and contribute to depressive and anxiety symptoms.

Przybylski and Weinstein (2021), in their work "Digital Engagement and Mental Health: Understanding the Emotional Landscape", added crucial depth to the debate. According to them, digital consumption is not necessarily bad, but exposure to negatively valenced or emotion-overwhelming content, typical of doomscrolling results in poorer psychological health. Their research underpins the framework that negative affect is a mediating variable in digital conduct and mental health worsening.

Hoover (2021), in her article "The Emotional Toll of Constant Connectivity: Stress, Scrolling, and Self-Harm", explored the ways in which ubiquitous connectivity to social media and news feed has created a type of chronic stress, especially among young users. Hoover's research suggests a feedback loop in which negative content increases emotional vulnerability that, in turn, feeds into compulsive scrolling. With time, this cycle leads to emotional numbing, burnout, and in certain instances, self-injurious behaviour, all of which are signs of poor mental health.

Anderson and Perrin (2020), in "Social Media and the Spiral of Anxiety: The Dark Side of Information Access", examined how algorithmic news feeds reinforce cycles of negative affect. According to their study, doomscrolling succeeds where fear-based or affective content is amplified, driving users into a cycle of anxiety. They believe that the more emotionally reactive the user becomes, the more they are likely to remain engaged, irrespective of emotional costs.

David and Congleton (2016), in their research "Emotional Agility in the Age of Information Overload", highlighted the significance of emotional regulation in online environments. They discovered that those who are emotionally less agile, operationalized as having the ability to navigate and control one's emotions are much more impacted by constant exposure to negative digital material. Their research presents proof that the affective reaction to digital media is a critical determinant of its psychological effect.

Woolley and Fishbach (2019), in "Information Consumption and Emotional Costs: When Seeking Knowledge Hurts", discuss the information-seeking behavior paradox. They conclude that individuals tend to seek news in times of crisis so that they feel they are able to cope, yet the activity tends to turn nasty too quickly when what is consumed is entirely negative. Their findings endorse the notion that this type of engagement can lead to chronic negative affect, thus reducing emotional well-being (Woolley & Fishbach, 2019).

Kennedy and Jamieson (2022), in their paper "Affective Triggers of Media Engagement: Why Negative News Captivates", examine why people are more attracted to negative

material on the internet. They find that material that provokes fear or anxiety raises attention and interest yet has a potent emotional aftertaste that contributes to burnout and lower mental resilience. This backs the theory that negative affect is not merely an effect but a cause of doomscrolling, further compounding its effect on well-being.

METHODS OF RESEARCH

The mediating function of negative affect in the association between doomscrolling behaviour and psychological well-being was examined in this study using a quantitative research design. To collect information from a wide range of social media users, a structured survey approach was selected. The goal was to use statistical analysis to investigate quantifiable relationships between variables.

Research Design: By using a cross-sectional survey approach, the study was able to gather data from participants all at once. This design was suitable for testing mediation models with standardised scales and finding correlations.

Population and Sample: Social media users between the ages of 18 and 45 made up the target population. Stratified random sampling was used to choose a sample of 500 participants, guaranteeing representation from a range of age groups, gender identities, and educational backgrounds. Online resources like Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and university networks were used to recruit participants. After being promised confidentiality, each participant gave their free and informed consent to participate in the study. (David & Congleton, 2016).

The following criteria were used to determine who was eligible to participate: (a) they had to be able to read and comprehend English; (b) they had to use social media for at least an hour every day; and (c) they had to be free from receiving clinical treatment for serious mental health conditions. This made sure that the general public, not clinical samples, continued to be the main focus.

Tools for Gathering Data:

The Doomscrolling Frequency Scale (DFS) is an 8-item measure used to gauge the frequency and severity of doomscrolling behaviour that was created and modified from earlier research (Frith, 2020).

Watson, Clark, and Tellegen (1988) created the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS), a standardised instrument for measuring emotional states with a particular emphasis on the Negative Affect subscale.

The WHO-5 Well-Being Index is a five-item measure that evaluates participants' overall mental health. It is well known throughout the world for being dependable and easy to use. Depending on the instrument, each item on the scales was scored on a 5-point Likert scale that ranged from 1 (Never) to 5 (Always).

METHOD

Using Google Forms, participants were given access to an online survey. They completed the three research instruments and the demographic questions after reading the informed consent statement. Completing the survey took roughly ten to twelve minutes on average. In order to ensure that the necessary sample size was reached, the data was gathered over a period of six weeks.

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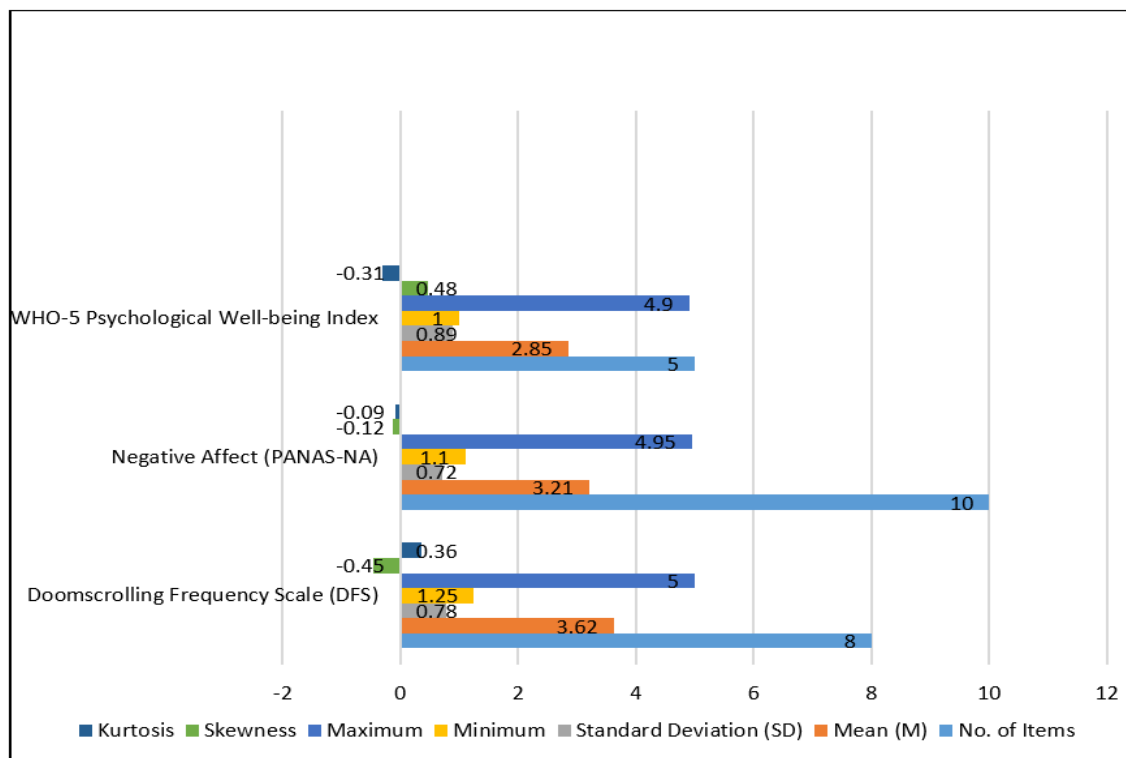
Data Analysis: SPSS (version 27) was used to analyse the data after it had been cleaned and arranged using Microsoft Excel. The demographic features and general trends were summed up using descriptive statistics like mean, standard deviation, and percentage. Pearson's correlation was used to look at the relationships between the variables. Andrew Hayes' PROCESS Macro (Model 4) was utilised in SPSS to test the mediating role of negative affect. Additionally, bootstrapping techniques (5,000 resamples) were employed to guarantee the stability and significance of indirect effects.

Ethical Considerations: This study complied with all American Psychological Association (APA) ethical standards. Participants were made aware of their rights, which included the freedom to leave at any moment. No personally identifiable information was gathered, and all information was utilised only for scholarly research.

RESULTS

Table 1: Key Variable Descriptive Statistics (N = 500)

Variable	No. of Items	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Minimum	Maximum	Skewness	Kurtosis
Doomscrolling Frequency Scale (DFS)	8	3.62	0.78	1.25	5.00	-0.45	0.36
Negative Affect (PANAS-NA)	10	3.21	0.72	1.10	4.95	-0.12	-0.09
WHO-5 Psychological Well-being Index	5	2.85	0.89	1.00	4.90	0.48	-0.31



Analysis: Participants engaged in moderate-to-high levels of doomscrolling, as indicated by the mean doomscrolling frequency score (M = 3.62). The mean score for negative affect (M

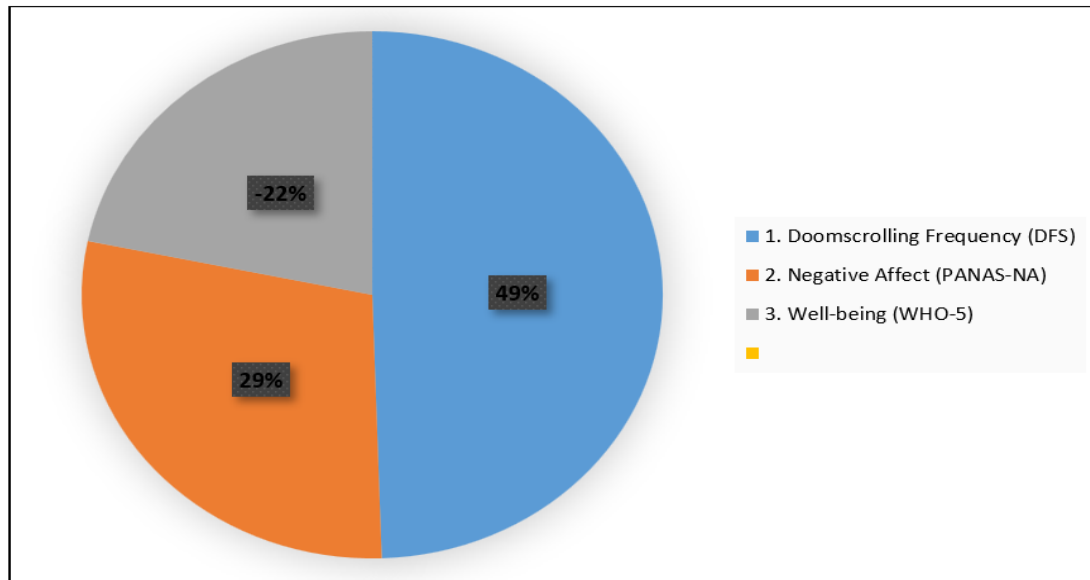
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= 3.21) indicates that feelings associated with distress are experienced rather frequently. The sample's psychological health appears to be deteriorating, as evidenced by the lower-than-average well-being levels ($M = 2.85$).

Table 2: Correlation Matrix of Study Variables

Variables	1. DFS	2. Negative Affect	3. Well-being
1. Doomscrolling Frequency (DFS)	1		
2. Negative Affect (PANAS-NA)	.582**	1	
3. Well-being (WHO-5)	-.439**	-.615**	1

Note: $p < .01$



Analysis: Doomscrolling and negative affect have a strong positive correlation ($r = .582$, $p < .01$) according to Pearson's correlations, while doomscrolling and well-being have a moderately negative correlation ($r = -.439$, $p < .01$). As anticipated, there is a significant negative correlation between psychological well-being and negative affect ($r = -.615$, $p < .01$), indicating that emotional distress is a major factor lowering mental health.

Table 3: Simple Linear Regression - Predicting Negative Affect from Doomscrolling

Model Summary					
R	.582				
R ²	.339				
Adjusted R ²	.337				
F(1, 498)	255.13**				
Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	p
(Constant)	1.34	0.18	—	7.44	<.001
Doomscrolling (DFS)	0.52	0.03	.582	15.96	<.001

Analysis:

Analysis: Doomscrolling significantly predicts negative affect, according to a linear regression ($F(1, 498) = 255.13$, $p < .001$). 33.9% of the variance in negative affect was explained by the model. The emotional toll of excessive negative media consumption is highlighted by the fact that negative affect increases by 0.52 units ($\beta = .582$) for every unit increase in doomscrolling.

Table 4: Multiple Regression - Predicting Psychological Well-being from Doomscrolling and Negative Affect

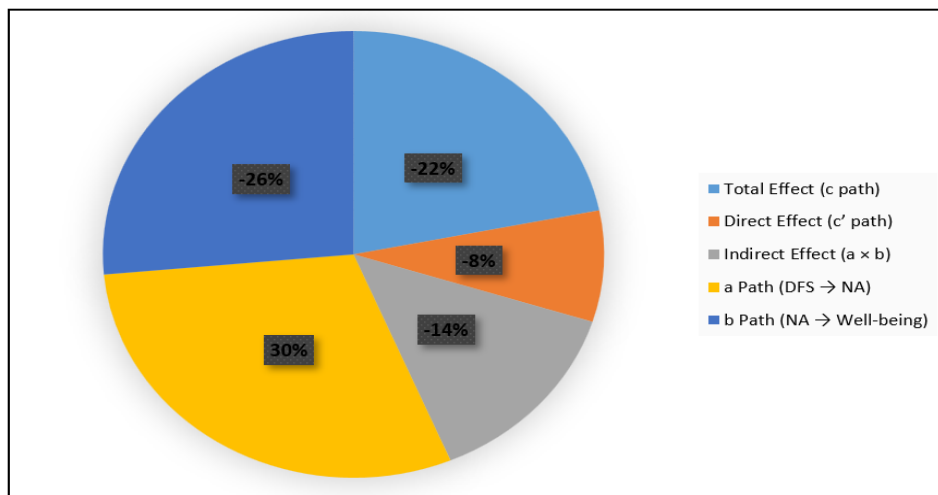
Model Summary					
R	.687				
R ²	.472				
Adjusted R ²	.470				
F(2, 497)	222.31**				
Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	p
(Constant)	4.26	0.21	—	20.28	<.001
Doomscrolling (DFS)	-0.14	0.05	-.164	-2.80	.005
Negative Affect	-0.61	0.06	-.528	-10.17	<.001

Analysis: The model explained 47.2% of the variance in well-being and was significant ($F(2, 497) = 222.31, p < .001$). Doomscrolling was still a significant negative predictor ($\beta = -.164, p = .005$), but negative affect was the strongest predictor ($\beta = -.528, p < .001$). The findings imply that doomscrolling not only causes negative emotions but also significantly mediates its effects on wellbeing.

Table 5: Mediation Analysis using PROCESS Macro (Model 4) – Negative Affect as Mediator

Bootstrap Resample: 5,000; Confidence Level: 95%

Effect Path	B	SE	t/Z	p	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper	Significant?
Total Effect (c path)	-0.38	0.05	-7.60	<.001	-0.48	-0.28	Yes
Direct Effect (c' path)	-0.14	0.05	-2.80	.005	-0.24	-0.04	Yes
Indirect Effect (a $\times$ b)	-0.24	0.04	—	—	-0.32	-0.17	Yes (Boot)
a Path (DFS $\rightarrow$ NA)	0.52	0.03	15.96	<.001	0.46	0.58	Yes
b Path (NA $\rightarrow$ Well-being)	-0.46	0.04	-10.17	<.001	-0.53	-0.38	Yes



Analysis: The relationship between doomscrolling and well-being is significantly mediated by negative affect, according to mediation analysis (Model 4, Hayes' PROCESS). There is a significant indirect effect ($B = -0.24$; 95% CI: -0.32 to -0.17). A significant amount of the

impact is indirectly exerted through increased negative emotions, even though doomscrolling directly lowers well-being ($c' = -0.14$, $p < .01$).

DISCUSSION

Among social media users between the ages of 18 and 45, this study sought to investigate the mediating function of negative affect in the association between doomscrolling behaviour and psychological well-being. Particularly in light of contemporary digital behaviours that have increased in recent years, the findings offer significant insights into the psychological effects of excessively consuming distressing content online.

1. Doomscrolling and Adverse Impact

Negative affect and doomscrolling frequency were found to be strongly and statistically significantly positively correlated ($r = .582$, $p < .01$). The idea that people who doomscroll more frequently are more likely to feel anxious, irritable, depressed, and afraid is supported by this data. This finding is in line with earlier studies by Frith (2020) and Koban et al. (2021), who contended that excessive exposure to unfavourable news on social media can worsen mood and increase emotional distress. Doomscrolling is a powerful emotional disruptor rather than just a passive habit, as the regression analysis further confirmed that it significantly predicts negative affect ($\beta = .582$).

2. Adverse Impact on Mental Health

Additionally, the research discovered a significant inverse relationship between psychological well-being and negative affect ($r = -.615$, $p < .01$). This finding is consistent with research highlighting the harm that persistently negative emotional states do to mental health in general. People who have high negative affect frequently experience emotional exhaustion, helplessness, and hopelessness, which ultimately leads to a decline in psychological well-being (Watson & Clark, 1988; Diener et al., 2010). These findings highlight how crucial emotional control is as a safeguard to preserve mental health in the digital era.

3. Negative Affect Mediates

The study's most important contribution is the validation of negative affect as a mediating factor in the connection between doomscrolling and wellbeing. Using the PROCESS macro (Model 4), mediation analysis showed a significant indirect effect ($B = -0.24$; 95% CI: -0.32 , -0.17). While still statistically significant, the direct impact of doomscrolling on well-being decreased (from $B = -0.38$ to $B = -0.14$), suggesting partial mediation. According to this finding, doomscrolling has a detrimental effect on psychological health both directly and indirectly, with a significant amount of the damage being caused by the creation of negative emotional states. This is consistent with the stress-coping theory, which postulates that maladaptive information-gathering behaviour sets off emotional responses that exacerbate mental health issues.

4. Effects on Digital Behaviour and Mental Health

Both mental health practitioners and users of digital platforms can benefit from these findings. It is crucial to create digital literacy programs that teach users how to identify and control media exposure, particularly to upsetting content, given the increase in doomscrolling during crisis events and after pandemics. Furthermore, treatments emphasising mindfulness, emotional control, and digital hygiene may be successful in severing the connection between bad online conduct and poor mental health results. The platforms themselves are also accountable. To stop users from being exposed to too

much negativity, social media companies should think about introducing time alerts, mood check-ins, and algorithmic changes. Public health initiatives can also encourage healthy content engagement techniques and increase awareness of the risks associated with doomscrolling.

5. Research Limitations and Prospects

Notwithstanding the study's advantages, which include a sizable sample size and strong statistical instruments, certain drawbacks must be noted. Causal interpretations are limited by the cross-sectional design. Experiments or longitudinal research could look more closely at the long-term effects of doomscrolling on mental health. Additionally, the sample only consisted of internet-connected, English-literate people, which might restrict generalisability. Future research should examine the ways in which individual differences—such as personality traits and coping strategies—affect the relationship between doomscrolling and wellbeing. Furthermore, qualitative approaches might offer deeper understandings of users' varying subjective perceptions of emotional exhaustion when consuming content online.

CONCLUSION

This study offers strong evidence of the serious psychological effects of doomscrolling, a growing digital behaviour characterised by compulsive consumption of unfavourable online content. In particular, the results show that a significant mediating factor in the association between the frequency of doomscrolling and lower psychological well-being is negative affect. Frequent doomscrolling is associated with increased levels of negative emotions, including sadness, anxiety, and irritability, which lowers a person's sense of mental wellness overall.

Using a strong quantitative approach that includes statistical modelling using the PROCESS macro and standardised psychological scales, the study has not only validated the negative consequences of doomscrolling but also elucidated the emotional transmission of these effects. The observed partial mediation suggests that doomscrolling's detrimental effects extend beyond emotional distress and involve direct cognitive and behavioural strains. (Hayes, A. F. 2013).

In an age where people are constantly exposed to information, these findings have important ramifications for mental health awareness, digital media literacy, and emotional self-regulation. The negative effects of doomscrolling might be lessened by encouraging users to keep an eye on their media consumption, employ techniques for controlling their emotions, and interact with content more thoughtfully.

To sum up, this study emphasises how critical it is to address the psychological costs associated with digital consumption habits. Future treatments must address the psychological processes that underlie digital distress, such as negative affect, in addition to behavioural change. People and communities can strive towards a more positive, emotionally sustainable relationship with social media and technology by comprehending and breaking down this emotional bridge.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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