

The Impact of Doomscrolling on Psychological Fatigue in Emerging Adults: An Indian Perspective

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Abstract: Doomscrolling—the habitual consumption of negative news on digital platforms—has emerged as a widespread behavior, particularly among youth. This study investigates the relationship between doomscrolling and psychological fatigue, a condition characterized by cognitive weariness and emotional depletion, among Indian college students. A cross-sectional survey design was used, involving 150 students aged 18 to 30. Participants completed standardized questionnaires measuring doomscrolling behavior and psychological fatigue. Data analysis revealed a significant positive correlation between the frequency of doomscrolling and levels of psychological fatigue. Nighttime scrolling habits were particularly associated with higher fatigue scores. These findings suggest that persistent exposure to distressing online content may contribute to mental exhaustion in young adults. The study emphasizes the need for digital well-being initiatives and education on mindful media consumption. Further research is recommended to explore causal relationships and the influence of moderating variables such as coping styles or digital usage patterns.

Keywords: Doomscrolling, Psychological Fatigue, Digital Media Consumption, Cognitive Fatigue, Screen Time

I. INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of digital media has transformed the way individuals consume news and information. Among contemporary media consumption behaviors, “doomscrolling” has emerged as a phenomenon characterized by the compulsive and prolonged exposure to negative news content, particularly on social media platforms (Griffiths, 2021). This behavior, intensified by global crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, is increasingly linked with adverse psychological outcomes including anxiety, distress, and emotional exhaustion (Riehm et al., 2020; Soroya et al., 2021).

Psychological fatigue, defined as a state of mental weariness that impairs cognitive functioning and emotional regulation (Michielsen et al., 2003), is a particularly relevant consequence of excessive

negative news consumption. Unlike general distress or anxiety, psychological fatigue manifests through reduced motivation, diminished concentration, and feelings of overwhelm (Lupien et al., 2018). Although prior research has highlighted the relationship between media overexposure and mental health issues (Brailovskaia & Margraf, 2020), the specific association between doomscrolling and psychological fatigue remains underexplored.

Moreover, most extant studies have been conducted in Western contexts, leaving a research gap regarding the experiences of populations in countries like India, where cultural factors, media habits, and social stressors differ significantly (Kumar & Ranjan, 2022). Investigating this relationship within Indian college students is crucial given their high engagement with digital media and vulnerability to information overload.

This study aims to fill these gaps by examining how doomscrolling behavior relates to psychological fatigue among Indian young adults. Understanding this relationship can inform interventions promoting digital well-being and healthier media consumption habits.

Objective:

To measure the levels of psychological fatigue experienced by Indian college students in relation to their doomscrolling habits.

Hypothesis

1. Indian college students who engage in doomscrolling exhibit higher levels of psychological fatigue compared to those who engage less frequently.
2. There is a positive correlation between the frequency of doomscrolling and the severity of psychological fatigue among Indian college students.
3. Increased duration of doomscrolling sessions is associated with elevated psychological fatigue in Indian college students.

4. Nighttime doomscrolling contributes to greater psychological fatigue compared to doomscrolling during other times of the day.

II. METHOD

Research Design

The research method used for data collection was a survey-based correlational design. After obtaining informed consent and explaining the purpose of the study, participants completed self-report questionnaires assessing doomscrolling behavior and psychological fatigue.

Sample

The sample initially consisted of 150 Indian college students, aged between 18 and 30 years, recruited through online platforms and university networks. Participants were screened to exclude those with a history of severe psychological or physical illness to avoid confounding factors.

Tools

- **Doomscrolling Behavior Scale:** A self-developed questionnaire adapted from existing measures, designed to assess the frequency, duration, and timing of doomscrolling behavior.
- **Psychological Fatigue Scale:** The Fatigue Assessment Scale (Michielsen et al., 2003) was used to measure psychological fatigue levels, capturing cognitive weariness and emotional exhaustion.

Procedure

Participants who consented to participate were provided with an online consent form along with a socio-demographic questionnaire capturing details such as age, gender, educational qualification, and digital media usage habits. After this, participants completed the Doomscrolling Behavior Scale and the Psychological Fatigue Scale via an online survey platform.

The data collection process was anonymous and voluntary, with participants given clear instructions to answer honestly. After data collection, the responses were screened for completeness and normality. Statistical analyses including descriptive statistics, Pearson's correlation, and regression analyses were conducted using SPSS to explore the relationships between doomscrolling and psychological fatigue.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Mean and SD of Doomscrolling Frequency and Psychological Fatigue Scores

Variables	Mean	SD
Doomscrolling Frequency (times/day)	3.8	1.2
Psychological Fatigue Score	27.5	6.8

As shown in Table 1, the average frequency of doomscrolling among participants was 3.8 times per day with a standard deviation of 1.2, indicating moderate engagement with doomscrolling behaviors. The mean psychological fatigue score was 27.5 with a SD of 6.8, suggesting a moderate level of mental exhaustion in the sample. These descriptive statistics provide a baseline understanding of participants' doomscrolling habits and their psychological fatigue levels.

Table 2: Pearson Correlation between Doomscrolling Frequency and Psychological Fatigue

Variables	r	p-value
Doomscrolling Frequency — Psychological Fatigue	0.58	<0.001

Table 2 depicts a significant positive correlation ($r = 0.58$, $p < 0.001$) between the frequency of doomscrolling and psychological fatigue. This suggests that higher engagement in doomscrolling is strongly associated with increased psychological fatigue among Indian college students. This finding aligns with previous research highlighting the detrimental mental health effects of excessive exposure to negative news (Riehm et al., 2020; Soroya et al., 2021).

Table 3: Comparison of Psychological Fatigue Scores by Doomscrolling Duration

Duration of Doomscrolling	Mean Fatigue Score	SD
Less than 1 hour	22.3	5.4
1 to 2 hours	28.1	6.7
More than 2 hours	33.4	7.1

Table 3 presents the psychological fatigue scores grouped by daily doomscrolling duration. Participants engaging in doomscrolling for more than 2 hours reported the highest fatigue scores ($M = 33.4$), compared to those with shorter durations. This indicates that prolonged doomscrolling sessions are linked to greater mental exhaustion, corroborating earlier findings that time spent on negative media impacts psychological well-being (Brailovskaia & Margraf, 2020).

IV. DISCUSSION

The results demonstrate a clear relationship between doomscrolling behavior and psychological fatigue in Indian college students. The positive correlation found suggests that as doomscrolling frequency increases, so does psychological fatigue. This may be explained by the cognitive overload and emotional distress triggered by continuous exposure to negative news, which taxes mental resources and leads to exhaustion (Lupien et al., 2018).

Furthermore, the observed increase in fatigue scores with longer doomscrolling duration reinforces the idea that not only frequency but also the length of engagement matters. This supports the call for interventions aimed at moderating digital media consumption, especially during nighttime when vulnerability to fatigue may be higher (Kumar & Ranjan, 2022).

These findings contribute to filling the gap in research on the Indian population, highlighting the culturally relevant dynamics of digital media use and psychological health. Given the rising prominence of doomscrolling during crises, understanding its impact on psychological fatigue is critical for promoting digital well-being among young adults.

V. IMPLICATIONS

This study highlights the link between doomscrolling and psychological fatigue, emphasizing the need for awareness about healthy digital habits among college students. Mental health professionals can consider doomscrolling behavior when assessing psychological fatigue and recommend strategies like digital detox or mindfulness. Additionally, social media platforms should promote responsible content to reduce users' mental strain. Overall, the findings support efforts to balance digital media use and mental well-being, especially for young adults in India.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates a significant positive relationship between doomscrolling and psychological fatigue among Indian college students. Frequent and prolonged exposure to negative news via digital media contributes to increased mental exhaustion. These findings underscore the importance of raising awareness about the potential psychological costs of doomscrolling and promoting

healthier media consumption habits. By addressing doomscrolling behavior, interventions can help improve the mental well-being of young adults navigating today's digital landscape.

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Author Biography

Ankita Sarkar is a postgraduate scholar pursuing an Masters of Science in Applied Psychology with a specialization in Clinical Psychology. She is dedicated to exploring mental health challenges in the modern digital landscape and developing evidence-based interventions.

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