



A Study on Doom Scrolling Behavior and Its Correlation with Personality types and Psychological Distress GenZ College Students

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Abstract

Doomscrolling is the compulsive act of endlessly scrolling through negative or distressing news on social media, often leading to heightened anxiety or stress. The current research investigates the relationship between internet Doom scrolling habits, personality types, and psychological Distress. A correlational study was conducted using a sample of 30 participants to examine the connections between variables. However, the findings reveal a negative correlation between doom scrolling and psychological distress. Neuroticism was positively correlated with psychological distress ($r = 0.302$), further supporting its role as a personality trait associated with psychological distress. In addition to these primary variables, exploratory analyses examined correlations

between doom scrolling and other personality dimensions, including agreeableness, extraversion, conscientiousness, and openness to experience. Notably, agreeableness was positively associated with doom scrolling ($r = 0.32$). These findings demonstrate the interconnectedness of personality, behavior, and mental health. While doom scrolling appears to be a risk factor for psychological distress, its interaction with neuroticism may vary, necessitating further research to understand underlying mechanisms. This study highlights the importance of promoting healthy digital habits and developing interventions to mitigate the negative psychological impacts of excessive news consumption in the digital age.

Keywords: *Doom Scrolling, Personality Types, Psychological Distress, GenZ*

Introduction

The rise of the digital age and the pervasiveness of social media have profoundly reshaped the way our youth interact with information. While these platforms do offer a lot of opportunities for networking, learning and entertainment, they also give rise to behaviors that are negatively impacting one's mental health. One such behavior is “*doom scrolling*” a term used to describe the compulsive consumption of negative news and distressing content on digital media. The phenomenon has become especially prominent in recent years, fueled by the Global Crisis, Economic uncertainties, due to the increase of household technology and thanks, to affordable internet plans.

“Doom scrolling” involves an endless cycle of consuming distressing news that leads to an increase in levels of anxiety, stress, and emotional exhaustion. College students, who all are navigating academic, developmental and social challenges, the compulsive tendency of doom scrolling provokes psychological distress and interferes with mental and physical well-being.

College students represent a unique demographic due to their high engagement with digital media and are at a stage of identity formation and emotional development. Academic stress, pressure of social belongingness, career preparation all combined with excessive use of smartphones creates an environment of unhealthy social comparison, identity crisis and promotes self-esteem issues.

Understanding doom scrolling within this demographic is of crucial importance, as it may have long-term implications on mental health and unhealthy coping mechanisms. Evidence suggests that excessive engagement with distressing content can perpetuate feelings of helplessness and aggravate psychological vulnerabilities. The habit of doom scrolling often coincides with disrupted sleep patterns, reduced physical activities, and poor academic performance further compounds to its negative effects.

The study explores the doom scrolling tendencies of college going students and examines their relationship with psychological distress and personality traits. For this assessment three established scales were utilized.

- 1) The Doom scrolling scale
- 2) Kessler's Psychological distress scale
- 3) Big five personality inventory

The (DSS) provides the measure of the frequency and intensity of doom scrolling behaviors while the K10 evaluates the level of psychological distress experienced by individuals. The BFI offers insights into the personality dimensions that include Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, Openness to Experience which may predispose individuals to specific patterns of behavior. The integration of these three scales allows for a comprehensive understanding of the interplay between doom scrolling, personality types and psychological distress.

Doom Scrolling

Doom Scrolling refers to "the tendency to continue to consume negative news or information online, even when it causes distress or anxiety" (Sweeney, 2020). Doomscrolling, also known as "doom surfing", refers to the act of spending excessive time-consuming negative news online, particularly on social media platforms. This behavior often leads to increased anxiety, stress, and a sense of helplessness.

According to the authors 'Doom Scrolling' is described as a unique media habit where the users persistently attend to the negative information in their newsfeeds, social media pages and other online forums. As per the research the potential of this practice is directly related to the chronic relevance for user experiences, increase in negative viewpoints, altered political perceptions, and affecting overall mental well-being. The study was conducted as a self-report measure to study doom Scrolling tendencies (Sharma, 2020).

The term gained prominence around 2020s, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, as individuals increasingly engaged in prolonged exposure to distressing news. Health professionals have noted that excessive doom scrolling can negatively impact mental health, exacerbating issues such as anxiety and depression (Stevens, 2023).

According to Leloudas and Wit (2023), research was conducted on investigating the impact of doom scrolling on social media and examining the potential effects of age and gender with the help of exposure to dramatic and non-dramatic news which was displayed on a Facebook page. Results from repeated measures indicates quite a significant impact on online risk behavior and effect on self-esteem and Pessimism. The study faced some limitations due to small sample size and has the potential to offer deeper insights into long term psychological impacts of doom scrolling.

Personality Types

Neuroticism

A basic personality characteristic known as neuroticism is the propensity to feel negative emotions like anger, sadness, and worry. People who are highly neurotic often see things as dangerous and may have trouble controlling their emotions. Common mental illnesses, such as mood and anxiety disorders, are significantly predicted by this attribute.

Although the term "Neuroticism" has its roots in Freudian theory, Hans Eysenck and others established the modern conceptualization of the term using a variety of personality psychology techniques, such as lexical and psychophysiological research (Ormel et al., 2013).

As per the study, Neuroticism is essential to be assessed since it affects how people view and respond to stressors, which in turn affects their overall quality of life. To improve emotional control in professional and personal settings, it can be crucial to identify and treat excessive levels of neuroticism.

Conscientiousness

Conscientiousness is a fundamental personality construct that plays a critical role in determining health outcomes, fostering positive aging, and building human capital. It reflects an individual's tendency to be organized, responsible, goal-oriented, and self-disciplined. This trait influences behaviors and attitudes that contribute to long-term success, well-being, and societal contributions. As a multidimensional construct, conscientiousness encompasses facets such as industriousness, orderliness, dependability, and self-control, making it a key driver of adaptive functioning and resilience across the lifespan (Roberts et al., 2014).

Conscientiousness reflects the tendency to maintain motivational stability within the individual, to make plans, and carry them out in an organized and well-planned manner. It

encompasses both proactive and inhibitive aspects, such as desire to achieve, competitiveness, deliberation, order, dutifulness, and self-discipline" (Cerreia et al., 2011).

Corker et al. (2011) conducted research that investigates the correlation between conscientiousness and academic performance. The general notion states that conscientiousness influences task performance in a positive manner. A study on 347 college students assessed Personality, Short term goals and effortful strategies over a whole semester. The findings of the study shows that effortful strategies demonstrate a positive relationship between conscientiousness and academic performance.

Extraversion

Extraversion is a personality trait that represents individual variances in the propensity to feel and display positive emotions, act assertively, think decisively, and crave attention from others. According to the Five Factor Model (FFM) of personality, extraversion is one of five fundamental inclinations (Wilt et al., 2016).

The authors describe the personality traits that are included in the FFM's model of personality which are biologically based, hierarchically organized, evolve over time in accordance with internal maturation framework show up as characteristic adaptations, that impacts an individual's objective viewpoint, and are the reflection of their self-concept, and have both adaptive and maladaptive variations. The authors describe extraversion spectrum as a correlated variation of psychological and behavioral facets where the high end of spectrum is defined by gregariousness, boldness, assertiveness, positive emotionality and status motivation (Lucas et al., 2000).

Pavot et al., (1990) conducted a study on extraversion and happiness to examine 2 key aspects of the relationship: 1) is the relationship substantive or a byproduct of social desirability.

2) what are the underlying mechanisms. The result of the research concludes that there is a substantive relationship between extraversion and happiness and further suggest that situational and personality factors both combine to produce the positive correlation between Extraversion and Subjective well-being.

Agreeableness

An agreeable personality is characterized by the ongoing display of conforming states, attitudes, and actions consistently over time and in various contexts. The measurement and studies regarding Agreeableness are across three contextual areas: intrapersonal, interpersonal, and international. I

Intrapersonal agreeableness is described in various ways: (1) as adopting nonviolent and accepting attitudes towards oneself, (2) as a harmonious state among different aspects of self, and (3) as an inclination toward emotional states like serenity and fulfillment linked to experiencing inner harmony. Interpersonal Agreeableness encompasses actions and mindsets that are nonviolent and foster the creation and maintenance of harmonious relationships with others. International agreeableness is characterized by positive attitudes towards nonviolent and collaborative interactions with other countries (Linden et al., 2013).

Agreeableness is a conceptual, overarching summary term that outlines personal variations in being agreeable, friendly, and harmonious in interactions with others. Studies indicate that individuals labeled by others as "kind" are likewise characterized as "considerate" and "warm," suggesting an overarching quality that remains constant over time and is associated with various thoughts, emotions, and social actions. Agreeableness is one of the five primary dimensions of personality in the Big Five Personality Inventory, focusing on how individuals vary in their approaches to interpersonal relationships (Graziano et al., 2009).

As per the largest quantitative review conducted so far, the compilation of findings from 142 meta-analyses that detail effects for 275 variables, encompassing over 1.9 million participants from more than 3,900 studies. By organizing variables based on their content and type, the structure of 16 conceptual categories was employed that provides a comprehensive overview of Agreeableness' external relationships. In general, this characteristic positively influences 93% of variables (Wilmot et al., 2022).

Open to experience

Open to experience is predominantly an attitude that recognizes one's own limitations as a believer. According to the authors, it consists of being consciously aware of the possibility that no matter what one believes in, it may be firmly held and well supported but there's always a margin of error. This emphasizes a person's humility and willingness to engage in alternate perspectives, evidence and or arguments. Open-mindedness is less about doubting specific beliefs and more about where the person stands in terms of intellectual humility towards one's own capacity of error (Wriggs, 2010).

According to Kruglanski et al. (2012), open-mindedness is not a fixed or permanent characteristic but rather a flexible attitude that varies based on the situation and is shaped by an individual's objectives, like their desire for closure. It pertains to the readiness to entertain information or viewpoints that might contradict previous convictions. Nonetheless, this transparency can differ depending on individual motivations and circumstances. For example, people with greater political knowledge may first show open-mindedness to gain that understanding but eventually may turn closed-minded due to the reinforcement of their convictions.

According to YingWu et al., (2022) study trips abroad assist healthcare students in cultivating their intercultural communication skills by immersing them in different cultures, thereby improving their capacity to assist individuals from various backgrounds. This research investigated the influence of open-mindedness, a characteristic of personality, in this process employing a mixed-method strategy. A total of thirty-two Australian undergraduate healthcare students took part, filling out questionnaires prior to and following their trip, along with interviews (n=16). The findings indicated that open-mindedness had a positive relationship with cultural skills, which is a part of intercultural communication competence, yet it did not correlate with other components. Qualitative results uncovered three main themes: open-mindedness promoting cultural engagement, active involvement in regional traditions, gaining insights from peers, and welcoming new challenges.

Psychological Distress

According to Lazarus et al., (1984), psychological distress is explained as the emotional condition a person feels when coping with situations that are unsettling, frustrating or perceived as harmful or threatening. Psychological distress has also been defined as prevalence of emotional states such as lack of enthusiasm, sleep disturbances, feelings of blue, hopeless about the future, emotional vulnerability, extensive boredom and thoughts of suicide.

Mirowsky et al., (2002), described psychological distress “as a state of emotional suffering which is characterized by symptoms of depression which are prolonged sadness, hopelessness and loss of interest.” These psychological symptoms may also be tied with physiological symptoms such as insomnia, headaches and lack of energy, however they are likely to vary across cultures.

Research was conducted on future health outcomes and the evaluation to measure distress in prospective studies were evaluated through 10 different distress assessment instruments in the

analysis of 19 papers from four interdisciplinary databases. Regardless of the measurement method used, the results consistently showed that psychological distress negatively impacts health outcomes for a variety of populations. A pooled hazard ratio of 1.29 (95% CI: 1.15–1.46) indicated a substantial correlation between elevated mortality risk and high levels of distress, according to a meta-analysis of the data. The strong correlation between distress and unfavorable health outcomes is highlighted in this study, underscoring the significance of precise distress evaluation in both clinical and research settings (Barry et al., 2019).

Purpose

The purpose is to study doom scrolling behavior relationship with psychological distress and personality types among college students.

Hypothesis

H1: There is a significant positive correlation between Doom scrolling and Psychological Distress.

H2: Psychological Distress is negatively correlated with Agreeableness and conscientiousness and has a positive correlation with Neuroticism.

Method

Sample

A total sample of 30 College students with an age range of 18-23 from Mohali, Punjab.

Measures

Doom Scrolling Scale, given by Sharma et al. (2020), with 15 points on the scale. The rating of the scale ranges from 1-5, where 1 represents “Strongly Disagree” and 5 “Strongly Agree” respectively.

Kessler Psychological Distress Scale, given by Kessler, developed in 1992, with 10 points on the scale. The rating of the scale ranges from 1-5: 1= None of the time, 2= A little of the time, 3= Some of the time, 4= Most of the time, 5= All of the time

Big Five Personality Inventory, given by Costa et al., (2007), with 10 points on the scale. The rating of the scale ranges from 1-7, the scoring is reverse item scoring Where 1=>5 and 5=>1 Representing, >1R,6= Extraversion, >2, 7R= Agreeableness, >3R,8= Conscientiousness, >4R,9= Neuroticism, >5R,10= Openness to experience

Procedure

The present study was conducted to examine the relationship between Doom Scrolling, Psychological Distress and Personality traits among college students. A sample of 30 undergraduate students comprising both males and females was recruited from Amity University, Mohali campus. Participants were selected using a random sampling method. Before the data collection participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the nature of the scales that were used and ensuring the data confidentiality of their responses. The written informed consent and the responses were all collected through Google Forms.

Analysis of Data

Results

Table 1. *N, Mean and Standard Deviation*

	DOOM SCROLLING	PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS	EXTRAVERSION	AGREEABLENESS	CONSCIENTIOUSNESS	NEUROTICISM	OPENNESS TO EXPERIENCE
N	30	30	30	30	30	30	30
Mean	64.0	20.4	3.05	3.88	3.43	2.65	3.38
Median	67.5	19.5	3.00	4.00	3.50	3.00	3.00
Standard deviation	11.3	6.18	0.781	0.838	0.935	0.872	0.997

Table 2. *Correlation between doom scrolling, psychological distress and Personality types*

	DOOM SCROLLING	PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS	EXTRAVERSION	AGREEABLENESS	CONSCIENTIOUSNESS	NEUROTICISM	OPENNESS TO EXPERIENCE
DOOM SCROLLING	—						
PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS	-0.344	—					
EXTRAVERSION	0.067	-0.143	—				
AGREEABLENESS	0.328	-0.329	-0.060	—			
CONSCIENTIOUSNESS	0.034	-0.078	-0.145	0.040	—		
NEUROTICISM	-0.119	0.302	-0.019	-0.209	-0.559**	—	
OPENNESS TO EXPERIENCE	0.208	-0.020	-0.237	0.299	0.193	-0.129	—

Note. * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

Discussion of Results

Doom Scrolling and Psychological distress: The correlation between Doom Scrolling and Psychological distress is (-0.344) that indicates a negative relationship. That explains that subjects

who engage in more doom scrolling behavior have a slightly lower psychological distress which is contrary to the general expectation. The results could be due to various reasons, one reason could be that GenZ though are highly digital savvy generation might have developed a level of desensitization or emotional numbing to negative news. Other reason may involve them using memes or humor as coping mechanism.

Doom Scrolling and Personality Traits

Extraversion: The correlation between doom scrolling and extraversion is positive (0.067) which is very weak suggesting there is no meaningful relationship with Doom Scrolling.

Agreeableness: Doom scrolling is positively correlated with agreeableness with a score of (0.328) that implies that subjects higher in Agreeableness engage in more doom scrolling behavior.

Conscientiousness: A non-significant positive relation with a score of (0.034) indicating that there is no meaningful relationship between Doom Scrolling and Conscientiousness.

Neuroticism: There is a minimal association between Doom scrolling and Neuroticism and suggested by a low score of (-0.119)

Openness to Experience: Doom scrolling and Openness to experience are positively correlated with a score of (0.208), indicating that open minded individuals are more likely to indulge in doom scrolling activities.

Psychological Distress and personality Traits

Neuroticism: Represents the strongest positive correlation with a high score of (0.302) that suggests that individuals with higher neuroticism are more likely to experience Psychological distress.

Extraversion: shows a comparatively weaker correlation with a score of (-0.143) that may indicate that higher extraversion is associated with lower psychological distress.

Agreeableness: A moderate negative correlation (-0.329) indicates that Agreeableness is inversely related to psychological distress

Conscientiousness: The correlation is weak and negative (-0.078) with minimal significance.

Openness to experience: Shows a negligible correlation (-0.020) between psychological distress and openness to experience.

Findings

Doomscrolling exhibited notable associations with psychological distress and certain personality characteristics, such as agreeableness and openness. These associations suggest that individual differences and emotional reactions may influence doom scrolling behaviors. Neuroticism emerged as the personality trait most closely linked to psychological distress, aligning with earlier studies that connect neuroticism to fluctuations in emotional stability. The pronounced negative correlation between neuroticism and conscientiousness may indicate that individuals with emotional instability are less inclined to participate in structured and goal-directed activities.

Conclusion

The study has demonstrated the relationship between doom scrolling, psychological distress and personality traits among college students. Contrary to the hypothesis, a negative correlation between doom scrolling and psychological distress was observed that indicates the individuals that engage in frequent doom scrolling may experience slightly lower psychological distress. The findings of this research deviates from general expectations , suggesting that Doom scrolling and its psychological impact may not always align with conventional assumptions. The research confirmed the significant correlation between Psychological Distress and Personality

traits, notably Neuroticism that shows a significant positive correlation which proves to be a key predictor of emotional instability.

The research findings also indicate that empathetic individuals may be more inclined to consuming emotionally charged content. The above insights show the multifaceted nature of Doom Scrolling and its interplay with different personality types. It provides valuable contributions in understanding these dynamics that necessitate further research especially in the exploration of the counterintuitive results regarding Psychological Distress and Doom Scrolling. To mitigate the adverse psychological impacts of excessive negative news consumption there is a need for interventions that are aimed at promoting Healthier digital habits. There is a huge scope of new information with this research considering a more diverse sample size and a broad dimensional design of the assessment that will offer a deeper understanding of the long-term consequences of doom scrolling and its psychological implication on a diverse population.

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