International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research (IJFMR)
E-ISSN: 2582-2160 ● Website: www.ijfmr.com ● Email: editor@ijfmr.com

Investigating Doomscrolling and Emotion Regualtion Among Adults

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Abstract
In recent years, social media has had a huge impact on human contact and communication. As digital exposure develops into a more integral component among children, constant usage of social media platforms can lead to feelings of exclusion and comparison. Doomscrolling, also known as doom-surfing, is the behaviour of excessively consuming short-form material or significant amounts of user-generated content or news, particularly unfavourable news, on the internet and social media. This behavior often leads to increased anxiety, stress, and a sense of helplessness. Emotion Regulation is the ability to recognize and manage emotional events is essential for adaptive psychological functioning and respond to external stressors. This study investigates the relationship between doomscrolling and emotion regulation tendencies among adults. A cross-sectional survey approach has been used, comprising of 150 adults aged 18 to 30 years. A validated self-report questionnaire such as the Doomscrolling Scale (Sharma et al. 2022) and Emotion Regulation (Gross, J.J., & John, O.P. 2003) has been used to collect the data from the participants. Data analysis revealed a significant positive correlation emerged between doomscrolling and emotional suppression. Doomscrolling shared a significant negative relationship with cognitive reappraisal. These findings indicate that prolonged exposure to distressing internet content may contribute to mental fatigue in young adults. The report emphasises the need of digital wellbeing efforts as well as education on responsible media usage. More study is needed to investigate causal linkages and the role of moderating factors like personality traits or internet usage habits.

Keywords: doomscrolling, emotion regulation, social media, adults

INTRODUCTION

As technology has evolved, we are increasingly exposed to both information and emotional content, which influences how we perceive and respond to the outside world. The phrase "doomscrolling" has emerged to characterise the excessive intake of negative content due to its dissemination, particularly on social media platforms (Katariya 2020).

Doomscrolling has become a recent topic of conversation, being a unique media use behavior where people are prone to consuming negative news content repetitively and excessively, especially on social media (Griffiths, 2021). This trend of behavior has been exaggerated in the context of large-scale global crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic, and has been correlated with negative psychological effects more and more. Studies show that repeated exposure to distressing news material is associated with an increase in the levels of anxiety, psychological distress, and emotional fatigue in people (Riehm et al., 2020; Soraya et al., 2021). Anxiety, overload, and emotional exhaustion may result from this ongoing

exposure to upsetting material. At the same time, students differ in how effectively they manage their emotions using various emotion regulation strategies (e.g., cognitive reappraisal, expressive suppression). People are drawn to disturbing information by nature, and negativity bias only makes this problem worse (Rozin & Royzman, 2001). According to neuroscientific research, doomscrolling stimulates dopaminergic pathways, which reinforce compulsive conduct in spite of negative psychological effects (Canli et al., 2005). Similar to actual traumatic events, excessive exposure to stressful media might result in vicarious trauma (Garfin et al., 2020). According to the information overload theory, consuming too much bad news strains cognitive abilities. Furthermore, the compulsive nature of dread scrolling is further supported by the Fear Of Missing Out (FOMO), which creates a sense of urgency and anxiety among people through 24-hour news cycles.

Emotion regulation is critical in adolescent development and has been related to various psychological outcomes, including anxiety, depression, and social media addiction (Hatzenbuehler et al., 2008; Wartberg et al., 2021; Giordano et al., 2022). According to (Schreiber et al., 2012) past research has linked both emotion regulation and impulsivity with the development and maintenance of addictions. However, no research has investigated the relationship between emotion regulation and impulsivity within young adults. The study, investigated 194 young adults (27.8% female; 21.3 ± 3.32 years old; 91.8% single; 85.1% Caucasian) and classified them as low, average, or high emotionally dysregulated. It also compared self-reported impulsivity, impulsive behaviours (such as alcohol, substance use, and gambling), and cognitive impulsiveness. According to (Sarkar, & Ankita., 2025) assess the impact of doomscrolling on psychological fatigue in emerging adults in India was examined. A cross-sectional survey approach was utilised, with 150 students aged 18 to 30. Participants filled with standardised questionnaires that assessed doomscrolling behaviour and psychological fatigue. The data analysis demonstrated a substantial positive relationship between the frequency of doomscrolling and levels of psychological tiredness. Nighttime scrolling habits were particularly associated with higher fatigue scores.

According to (Doğan Laçin & Kiye, 2025) in A research investigated psychological well-being and emotion regulation as predictors of doomscrolling. Data were obtained from 348 people aged 18 to 50. Data were collected using the Doomscrolling Scale, the Psychological Well-Being Scale, and the Emotion Regulation Scale. Suppression, a sub-dimension of emotional regulation, positively predicts doomscrolling conduct, whereas reappraisal does not. All of these variables account for 11% of the doomscrolling.

According to (Aguvaveedi, 2025) in a study Breaking the Doomscrolling Cycle: Meditation as a Remedy for Anxiety in the Digital Age explores the topic of "doomscrolling"--the obsessive reading of unpleasant news online--and its harmful repercussions on mental health in the United Kingdom, the European Union, and the United States. Digital technology has facilitated unprecedented access to information, but this constant connectivity has led to maladaptive consumption patterns that significantly impact psychological well-being. This research explores how the design of digital platforms, human psychological tendencies, and the pervasiveness of negative content create a cycle that fuels anxiety. The paper presents meditation, particularly through accessible digital solutions like mobile applications, as an effective intervention for managing doomscrolling-related anxiety.

According to (Öksüz et al., 2023) in a study Psychological Adjustment and Wellbeing after an Earthquake: The Serial Mediating Role of Doomscrolling and Emotional Regulation Difficulty, examined the effect of psychological adjustment on mental well-being and to investigate the mediating role of doomscrolling and emotion dysregulation. A total of 407 Turkish adults (264 women, 143 men) participated in the

study. Analysis was conducted using structural equation modeling (SEM). Doomscrolling and emotion dysregulation were investigated as mediating factors in the link between psychological adjustment and mental well-being. Doomscrolling and emotion dysregulation completely influenced psychological adjustment and mental health.Based on the review of literature, the following objectives and hypothesis were framed.

OBJECTIVE

To examine the relationship between doomscrolling behaviour and emotion regulation among adult male and female.

HYPOTHESIS

H_1: There will be a significant relationship between doomscrolling and emotion regulation among adults.
H_2: There will be a significant difference in doomscrolling and emotion regulation between male and female participants among adults.

METHOD

Sample:

The sample initially comprised of 150 Indian college participants, aged between 18 and 30 years, recruited through online platforms and university networks. To prevent confounding variables, participants were screened to remove those with a history of serious physical or psychological disease.

Inclusion Criteria-

- Young Adults between the age range of 18 to 30 years old.
- The study included male and female participants.

Exclusion Criteria-

- The participants' religious beliefs were excluded.
- Socioeconomic status was not taken into consideration.

Measures:

1. Doomscrolling Scale:

Doomscrolling behavior was assessed using the Doomscrolling Scale developed by Sharma et al. (2023). This scale is a 15-item self-report questionnaire that captures the habitual tendency to excessively consume negative news content on social media platforms. The scale measures multiple dimensions including emotional immersion, compulsive scanning for negative updates, and difficulty disengaging from distressing content. Items were rated on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 7 (Strongly agree). Total scores were calculated by summing responses across all items, with higher scores indicating a greater tendency toward doomscrolling. The scale has demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency and construct validity in prior research involving social media users. Cronbach's alpha coefficient for this scale was 0.922.

2. Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ):

Emotion Regulation was measured by the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ) developed by Gross, J.J., & John, O.P. (2003). This scale is a 10-item designed to measure respondent's tendency to regulate their emotions in two ways: 1) Cognitive Reappraisal and (2) Expressive Suppression. Respondents answer each item on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 7 (Strongly agree). The questions involve two distinct aspects of your emotional life. One is your emotional experience, or what

you feel like inside. The other is your emotional expression, or how you show your emotions in the way you talk, gesture, or behave. The Cronbach alpha coefficient was calculated as .78 in one of the subdimensions (reappraisal) and .73 in the other (suppression).

Procedure

The study was conducted using a cross-sectional, survey- based design. Data collection was carried out online using a structured questionnaire created through Google Forms. A convenience sampling strategy was employed, and participants were recruited through WhatsApp groups, personal contacts, and referrals. Before beginning the survey, all participants were provided with an informed consent form outlining the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and their rights, including the right to withdraw at any time without penalty.

To ensure ethical compliance, participants were informed about the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses, and no personally identifying information was collected. The survey took approximately 10 to 15 minutes to complete. The questionnaire was structured into multiple sections and the order of the scale was fixed for all the participants.

Data Analysis

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 24, was used to analyse the data in order to draw relevant inferences. The means of two groups (adult male and female) were compared using the independent samples t-test, and the Pearson Product Moment of connection was used to determine the relation between the variables.

RESULTS

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of Doomscrolling and Emotional Regulation among adults Descriptive statistics presented in table 1, indicates that on doomscrolling the mean and SD scores of young adults were 37.14 and 19.82 respectively. On Cognitive Reappraisal the mean, SD scores of adolescents were 31.39 and 6.37. Additionally, table 1 showed that the SD and mean values for emotional suppression were 5.96 and 17.88, respectively.

Variables	N	Mean	SD
Doomscrolling	150	37.14	19.82
Cognitive Reappraisal	150	31.39	6.37
Emotional Suppression	150	17.88	5.96

Table 2: Mean, SD, and t-Value of male and female young adults with regard to Doomscrolling and Emotional Regulation

Variable		**Gender**	**N**	**Mean**	**SD**	***t***	**df**	***p***
Doomscrolling		Male	75	40.08	23.54	1.83	148	.069
		Female	75	34.20	14.81			
Emotion Regulation	**Cognitive Reappraisal**	Male	75	30.21	6.69	-2.28	148	.024
		Female	75	32.56	5.85			

	Emotional Suppression	Male	75	19.80	6.17	4.15	148	.000
		Female	75	15.96	5.09			

A t-test for independent samples was used to find gender differences in doomscrolling, cognitive reappraisal and emotional suppression of young adults. As we can see in the table 2, for doomscrolling, male (M=40.08, SD=23.54) reported higher mean scores than female (M=34.20, SD= 14.81). However, this difference was not statistically significant, $t(148)=1.83$, $p= .069$, indicating that doomscrolling behavior did not differ significantly between males and females.

In the context of cognitive reappraisal, a significant gender difference was observed. Female students (M = 32.56, SD = 5.85) scored significantly higher than male students (M = 30.21, SD = 6.69), $t(148) = -2.28$, $p = .024$. This implies that women are more likely than men to utilise adaptive emotion management techniques like cognitive reappraisal.

For emotional suppression, male students (M = 19.80, SD = 6.17) reported significantly higher levels than female students (M = 15.96, SD = 5.09), $t(148) = 4.15$, $p < .001$. This indicates that males tend to rely more on expressive suppression as an emotion regulation strategy.

Table 3: Showing the correlation coefficient between Doomscrolling and Emotional Regulation among adolescents.

Note.**p < .01

		Doomscrolling	**Emotion Regulation**	
			Cognitive Reappraisal	**Emotional Suppression**
Doomscrolling		1	-.29**	.41**
Emotion Regulation	**Cognitive Reappraisal**		1	.04
	Emotional Suppression			1

An analysis using Pearson's product moment correlation revealed significant associations between doomscrolling and emotion regulation tendencies in young adults. Specifically, doomscrolling shared a significant negative relationship with cognitive reappraisal ($r = -.29$, $p < .01$), suggesting that increased scrolling behavior is linked to a decreased use of adaptive regulation. Conversely, a significant positive correlation emerged between doomscrolling and emotional suppression ($r = .41$, $p < .01$), indicating that higher engagement with negative digital content is associated with more frequent use of maladaptive strategies. Notably, no significant link was found between the two regulation strategies themselves ($r = .04$, $p > .05$).

DISCUSSION

The present study exhibits a clear relationship between doomscrolling and emotion regulation tendencies. The high level of negative correlation between doomscrolling and cognitive reappraisal indicates that students who make frequent use of doomscrolling are not inclined to adaptive emotion regulation strategies. Cognitive reappraisal is the re-evaluation of any emotional experiences in a manner that

minimizes emotional suffering (Gross and John, 2003). Past studies have indicated that high levels of negative or threatening information may overwhelm cognitive resources and hence disabling the ability of the individuals to undergo adaptive emotional processing (Garfin, Silver, and Holman, 2020). Research on recurrent exposure to negative news has also discovered the same finding that sustained use of distressing material is linked to the increased emotional responsiveness and decreased application of effective coping methods, such as reappraisal (Holman, Garfin, and Silver, 2014). The current results build on this body of literature by showing that the phenomenon of doomscrolling as a particular negative media consumption is linked to missing adaptive emotion regulation in young adults.

Conversely, the positive relation between doomscrolling and emotional suppression is significant and shows that the higher the doomscrolling levels the more the maladaptive strategies of emotion regulation are relied on. Emotional suppression is suppressing emotional expression instead of processing emotional experiences and has been identified to have caused more psychological distress and worse emotional results (Gross and John, 2003). The result is in line with previous research findings indicating that people who are exposed to a prolonged negative media content tend to have more chances to employ avoidant and suppressive coping styles (Marroquin, Vine, and Morgan, 2020). Problematic social media use research has also identified that maladaptive emotion regulation, including suppression, is positively related to compulsive online activities and the emotional distress (Elhai, Yang, and Montak, 2020). Therefore, the current results explain that doomscrolling can strengthen emotional suppression, which might actually make emotional problems more severe instead of making them less challenging.

CONCLUSION

The results of the current research are coherent with the previous studies that have pointed to the adverse psychological effects of overconsumption of digital media. Previous research has indicated that a long-term exposure to negative news content has been linked to stress, anxiety and emotional exhaustion. Similarly, studies on maladaptive social media habits have found that there is an interrelation between excessive internet use and the lack of emotion control, which results in the present discovery. To summarize, this current research underscores doomscrolling as an important digital habit related to issues of emotion management among college students. Addressing maladaptive online behaviours like doomscrolling is crucial for fostering psychological resilience and emotional well-being among young adults, as digital media continues to play a significant part in their lives.

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