

The Impact of Doomscrolling on the Mental Health of Social Media Users: A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract

The rapid growth of social media has significantly increased access to information while simultaneously intensifying exposure to negative content, thereby contributing to the emergence of doomscrolling behavior. This phenomenon has attracted increasing attention in media psychology due to its potential role in deteriorating users' mental health. The present study aims to analyze the influence of doomscrolling on mental health and to identify the psychological mechanisms underlying this relationship among adult social media users. The study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach following the PRISMA guidelines. Literature searches were conducted in the Scopus database using Publish or Perish, while article screening and duplicate removal were performed using Rayyan. Of the 59 records initially identified, 14 international studies published between 2022 and 2025 met the inclusion criteria and were analyzed through thematic synthesis. The findings indicate that doomscrolling is a maladaptive digital behavior shaped by the interaction of the need for certainty, threat-related attentional bias, and social media algorithmic reinforcement. Doomscrolling was consistently associated with increased anxiety, depression, psychological distress, sleep disturbances, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), reduced mental well-being, and existential anxiety. This study proposes a conceptual model explaining the psychological pathway linking doomscrolling to declining mental health and contributes to the advancement of digital media psychology literature. The findings have practical implications for the development of digital literacy programs, emotional regulation skills, and preventive mental health interventions in the digital era.

Keywords: Doomscrolling, Mental Health, Media Psychology

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INTRODUCTION

Digital transformation has fundamentally reshaped the way individuals access, produce, and consume information. Social media has evolved beyond a communication platform into a primary source of real-time information about global events. Although rapid access to information enhances public literacy and supports informed decision-making, the continuous algorithm-driven flow of content has also exposed users to an unprecedented volume of negative information. News concerning geopolitical conflicts, natural disasters, pandemics, economic crises, and criminal incidents continuously appears on users' timelines, creating a digital environment characterized by persistent exposure to threatening information. This issue has become increasingly significant given that more than one billion people worldwide are living with mental health disorders, while the digital environment has

emerged as an important external determinant of psychological well-being (World Health Organization, 2025).

This phenomenon has given rise to *doomscrolling*, defined as the compulsive tendency to continuously consume negative news on digital platforms despite experiencing emotional discomfort (Satici et al., 2023). From the perspective of Uncertainty Reduction Theory, individuals naturally seek information when confronted with uncertainty. However, within the contemporary social media ecosystem, algorithmic personalization transforms this adaptive behavior into a maladaptive cycle by continuously recommending similar negative content. Consequently, information seeking intended to reduce uncertainty instead reinforces repeated exposure to distressing information, making doomscrolling more than merely excessive social media use; it represents a pattern of digital behavior shaped by both psychological mechanisms and platform algorithms.

Scholarly interest in doomscrolling increased substantially during the COVID-19 pandemic, when social media became the primary source of information regarding infection rates, government policies, and vaccine developments. Although digital platforms fulfilled urgent informational needs, prolonged exposure to crisis-related news has consistently been associated with increased anxiety, depression, stress, and psychological distress (Price et al., 2022; Sharma et al., 2022). These findings suggest that mental health outcomes are influenced not only by the amount of social media use but also by the characteristics of the content consumed and the repetitive patterns of information exposure.

The relationship between doomscrolling and mental health can be explained through cognitive-behavioral theory. Repeated exposure to negative information reinforces negative automatic thoughts, catastrophic thinking, and attentional bias toward threats. Individuals continue seeking additional information under the belief that doing so will reduce uncertainty; however, this behavior instead intensifies anxiety. Social media algorithms further amplify this cycle by persistently presenting content aligned with users' previous interactions, thereby creating a self-reinforcing loop of negative information exposure. Consequently, doomscrolling should be understood as a compulsive digital behavior with psychological consequences that extend far beyond information fatigue.

Growing empirical evidence has demonstrated the detrimental effects of doomscrolling on mental health. Yang et al. (2024) identified significant associations between doomscrolling, depression, anxiety, smartphone addiction, and insomnia, with doomscrolling acting as a mediator between insomnia and depression among university students (Yang et al., 2024). Similarly, Taskin et al. (2024) reported that doomscrolling reduced mental well-being through increased secondary traumatic stress and decreased mindfulness (Taskin et al., 2024). Satici et al. (2023) further demonstrated positive associations with psychological distress alongside lower life harmony and reduced psychological well-being (Satici et al., 2023). Collectively, these studies establish doomscrolling as a significant psychological determinant within contemporary digital media environments.

Despite these advances, the existing literature remains fragmented. Most studies have focused on isolated psychological outcomes, such as depression, anxiety, or stress, and have been conducted within specific populations, including university students and adult social media users. Consequently, the literature lacks a comprehensive synthesis capable of explaining how doomscrolling affects multiple dimensions of mental health across diverse contexts. Furthermore, as doomscrolling has evolved beyond a pandemic-related phenomenon into a persistent feature of contemporary digital life, there is an increasing need to integrate empirical findings into a coherent conceptual framework (Kartol et al., 2023; Shabahang et al., 2024).

Recent scholarship has substantially expanded knowledge regarding doomscrolling. Sharma et al. (2022) introduced the Doomscrolling Scale, distinguishing doomscrolling from ordinary news consumption by emphasizing compulsive behavior, loss of self-control, and emotional disturbance driven by threat-related attentional bias and information-seeking tendencies. Satici et al. (2023) subsequently provided psychometric validation of the scale and demonstrated positive associations with psychological distress, fear of missing out (FoMO), social media addiction, and excessive social media use, alongside negative associations with psychological well-being. Taskin et al. (2024) extended this work by employing structural equation modeling to demonstrate that mindfulness and secondary traumatic stress fully mediated the relationship between doomscrolling and mental well-being. Yang et al. (2024) further identified doomscrolling as a mediator linking insomnia and depression, while more recent studies have associated doomscrolling with future anxiety, death distress, reduced resilience, and diminished quality of life during large-scale crises (Soraci et al., 2025; Dominguez-Rodriguez et al., 2025).

Nevertheless, three major research gaps remain. First, existing studies have predominantly relied on quantitative designs conducted within specific populations, thereby limiting the generalizability of their findings. Second, previous research has typically examined only one or two mental health outcomes without integrating multiple psychological indicators into a unified conceptual framework. Third, most investigations have emphasized statistical associations rather than providing a comprehensive synthesis of the underlying psychological mechanisms, the consistency of empirical evidence, and the overall trajectory of research development.

To address these gaps, the present study offers a novel contribution through a systematic literature review that synthesizes empirical evidence regarding the psychological consequences of doomscrolling among social media users. Rather than examining a single mental health outcome, this review integrates findings concerning depression, anxiety, stress, psychological distress, mental well-being, quality of life, secondary traumatic stress, and the underlying psychological mediating mechanisms into a coherent conceptual model. This integrative approach contributes to the advancement of digital behavior theory, media psychology, and mental health research while providing an evidence-based foundation for digital literacy initiatives, mental health promotion, and preventive strategies aimed at addressing problematic social media use. Furthermore, the synthesized conceptual framework is expected to guide future research by identifying the psychological variables most consistently influenced by doomscrolling. This study aims to systematically examine the influence of doomscrolling on the mental health of social media users through a synthesis of international empirical studies. Specifically, the study seeks to identify the dominant psychological consequences of doomscrolling, analyze the psychological mechanisms underlying these relationships, and develop a comprehensive conceptual model explaining how compulsive exposure to negative online information affects multiple dimensions of mental health in the era of digital transformation.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) using a qualitative-descriptive approach to synthesize empirical evidence regarding the influence of doomscrolling on the mental health of adult social media users. The systematic literature review approach was selected because it enables researchers to identify, evaluate, and integrate findings from previous studies in a systematic, transparent, and reproducible manner, thereby producing more comprehensive conclusions than those generated through conventional narrative reviews. The review process consisted of three major stages: planning, conducting the review, and reporting. During the planning stage, the research questions were

formulated using the SPIDER framework (Sample, Phenomenon of Interest, Design, Evaluation, and Research Type), which served as the foundation for defining the scope of the review. Based on this framework, the study focused on identifying how doomscrolling influences the mental health of adult populations. Subsequently, a comprehensive literature search strategy was developed by identifying relevant keywords, including doomscrolling, doom scrolling, doomsurfing, mental health, mental well-being, psychological health, and adulthood. These search terms were designed to maximize the retrieval of scientific publications relevant to the objectives of the study.

Data collection was conducted through a systematic search of the Scopus database using Publish or Perish as the literature retrieval tool. All identified records were subsequently imported into Rayyan software to facilitate duplicate detection and removal prior to the screening process. Study selection was carried out in multiple stages, beginning with title and abstract screening, followed by a full-text review to determine each article's eligibility and relevance to the research objectives. A total of 59 records were initially identified, of which 14 studies satisfied all inclusion criteria and were included in the final synthesis. The inclusion criteria comprised: (1) studies examining doomscrolling as the primary independent variable and mental health as the outcome variable; (2) participants consisting of adult individuals; (3) studies employing either quantitative or qualitative research designs; (4) articles published in English; and (5) publications released between 2022 and 2025. Conversely, studies were excluded if they were not published in English, were review articles, books, reports, blogs, or news articles, or failed to provide a clear and systematic description of their research procedures. The overall process of study identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion is illustrated in Figure 1 according to the PRISMA study selection framework.

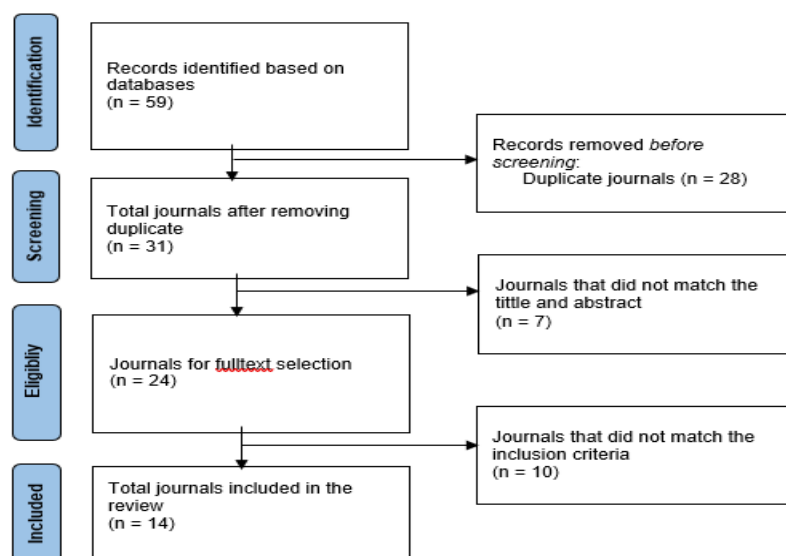


Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram of the Study Selection Process

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Cognitive–Affective and Compulsive Behavioral Dimensions of Doomscrolling

The synthesis of fourteen international empirical studies indicates that doomscrolling is a maladaptive digital behavior characterized by the interaction of cognitive, affective, and compulsive behavioral processes. Across all reviewed studies, a consistent pattern emerged in which individuals were motivated to continuously seek negative information regarding pandemics, armed conflicts, natural disasters, economic crises, and other global events in response to situations perceived as uncertain. Rather than reducing uncertainty, repeated

exposure to such information heightened perceptions of threat and reinforced the tendency to consume additional negative content. Consequently, doomscrolling extends beyond excessive social media use and reflects a psychological process that perpetuates repeated exposure to distressing information.

The synthesized evidence suggests that doomscrolling can be conceptualized through two interrelated dimensions: the **cognitive–affective dimension** and the **compulsive behavioral dimension**. The cognitive–affective dimension reflects individuals' tendency to seek information as a means of reducing uncertainty when confronted with perceived threats. In contrast, the compulsive behavioral dimension represents repetitive scrolling behavior accompanied by diminished self-regulation. Although the reviewed studies employed different conceptualizations and measurement instruments, all fourteen consistently identified these two dimensions as co-occurring characteristics of doomscrolling.

Table 1. Synthesis of the Psychological Dimensions of Doomscrolling

Dimension	Characteristics	Psychological Mechanisms	Initial Consequences
Cognitive-affective	Seeking negative information to reduce uncertainty	Intolerance of uncertainty; need for control	Increased threat perception and anxiety
Compulsive behavioral	Repetitive scrolling with diminished self-control	Reinforcement through social media algorithms; poor self-regulation	Intensified exposure to negative content

The reviewed evidence further indicates that the cognitive–affective dimension represents the initial stage in the development of doomscrolling. Individuals facing uncertain situations tend to increase information seeking in an attempt to understand unfolding events. However, social media platforms provide an unlimited flow of emotionally salient content, preventing individuals from achieving a stable sense of certainty. Instead, each newly encountered piece of information further amplifies perceived threats and motivates additional information seeking. As a result, information seeking gradually shifts from an adaptive coping strategy to a repetitive behavioral pattern.

The synthesis also demonstrates that affective responses consistently accompany this cognitive process. Continuous exposure to news concerning global threats evokes fear, worry, and anticipation of adverse future events. These emotional responses encourage individuals to seek further information in the hope of gaining reassurance, yet repeated exposure instead increases contact with similarly distressing content. Consequently, anxiety appears not only as an outcome of doomscrolling but also as a recurring element within the behavioral cycle.

Across the reviewed studies, the structural characteristics of social media platforms also emerged as an important component of doomscrolling. Features such as infinite scrolling, real-time news updates, and personalized recommendation systems continuously expose users to similar categories of negative information. Consequently, repeated exposure becomes progressively more intensive, reinforcing habitual scrolling behavior and making disengagement increasingly difficult.

Overall, the synthesized findings indicate that doomscrolling develops through the interaction of information-seeking behavior, emotional responses to perceived threats, diminished self-regulation, and repeated exposure facilitated by algorithm-driven social media environments. Together, these elements form a persistent behavioral cycle that characterizes doomscrolling across diverse populations and research contexts.

Clinical Manifestations and Existential Impacts on Mental Health

The synthesis of the fourteen reviewed studies demonstrates that doomscrolling is consistently associated with multiple indicators of deteriorating mental health. Although the

included studies employed different research designs, measurement instruments, and participant characteristics, the overall pattern of findings indicates that repeated exposure to negative information contributes to increased anxiety, depression, psychological distress, stress, sleep disturbances, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), loneliness, emotional exhaustion, and declines in mental well-being and quality of life. These findings consistently identify doomscrolling as an important psychological risk factor among adult social media users.

Table 2. Synthesis of Mental Health Indicators Associated with Doomscrolling

Authors	Participants	Participant Criteria	Mental Health Indicators	Main Findings
Dominguez-Rodriguez et al. (2025)	365 participants	Adults aged >18 years	Anxiety, depression	Doomscrolling was associated with anxiety and depression; the association with depression differed by gender.
Laçin & Kiye (2025)	348 participants	Adults aged 18–50 years	Poor mental health, emotion dysregulation	Doomscrolling was positively associated with poorer mental health and emotion dysregulation.
Yang et al. (2024)	2,885 participants	Chinese university students	Psychological distress, anxiety, stress	Doomscrolling was associated with problematic social media use and poorer psychological well-being.
Yap et al. (2025)	92 participants	Adult social media users	Anxiety	Doomscrolling significantly predicted anxiety and poorer mental well-being.
Soraci et al. (2025)	300 participants	Adult social media users	Stress, anxiety, depression	Doomscrolling was associated with psychological symptoms and problematic social media use.
Shabahang et al. (2024)	800 participants	University students	Existential anxiety, pessimism	Doomscrolling reinforced existential anxiety and pessimistic worldviews.
Niehoff et al. (2024)	797 participants	Adults aged 18–78 years	Psychological distress, emotional exhaustion	Continuous exposure to negative COVID-19 news increased emotional distress and exhaustion.
Woodward et al. (2025)	575 participants	Young adults	Depression, anxiety, PTSD, loneliness	Greater doomscrolling behavior was associated with poorer mental health outcomes.
Musiał (2025)	150 participants	University students	Anxiety, depression, stress, sleep disturbance	Negative news consumption was associated with poorer well-being and digital addiction tendencies.
Kütük et al. (2025)	406 participants	University students	Psychological maladjustment, hopelessness	Higher doomscrolling predicted poorer psychological adjustment.
Kartol et al. (2023)	402 participants	Earthquake survivors	Anxiety, psychological distress, depression	Doomscrolling was associated with poorer post-disaster mental health.
Satici et al. (2023)	797 participants	Adult social media users	Psychological distress, anxiety, low well-being	Doomscrolling was positively associated with distress and negatively associated with psychological well-being.
Kaya et al. (2025)	415 participants	Earthquake survivors	Psychological distress, anxiety, depression	Repeated disaster-related news exposure intensified psychological symptoms.

Canoğulları (2025)	460 participants	University students	Psychological distress, stress	Doomscrolling functioned as a maladaptive coping strategy that exacerbated psychological distress.
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Among the identified psychological outcomes, **anxiety** emerged as the most consistently reported clinical manifestation. Nearly all reviewed studies found that individuals who engaged more frequently in doomscrolling exhibited significantly higher anxiety levels than those with lower exposure to negative information. This pattern was observed across different countries, participant groups, and crisis contexts, indicating that anxiety represents one of the most robust psychological correlates of doomscrolling.

Depression was the second most frequently identified mental health outcome. Several studies consistently reported that repeated exposure to distressing online information was associated with feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, diminished motivation, and worsening depressive symptoms. Participants often acknowledged that negative news consumption negatively affected their emotional state but nevertheless experienced difficulty disengaging from doomscrolling behavior.

Another recurring finding concerned **psychological distress**, which appeared consistently across studies involving university students, community samples, and populations affected by disasters. The reviewed evidence indicates that psychological distress increased following prolonged exposure to negative information during situations characterized by uncertainty and crisis, including the COVID-19 pandemic and natural disasters.

Beyond anxiety, depression, and psychological distress, several studies identified additional psychological outcomes associated with doomscrolling. These included **post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), loneliness, emotional exhaustion, sleep disturbances, hopelessness, psychological maladjustment, sadness, helplessness, reduced psychological well-being, and lower quality of life**. Although these outcomes were not reported uniformly across all studies, their repeated occurrence demonstrates that the consequences of doomscrolling extend across multiple domains of psychological functioning.

The synthesis further indicates that doomscrolling is associated not only with conventional indicators of mental health but also with broader existential outcomes. Shabahang et al. (2024) identified significant associations between doomscrolling, existential anxiety, and pessimistic views of human nature. These findings suggest that prolonged exposure to negative digital information influences not only emotional well-being but also individuals' broader perceptions of safety, trust, and the future.

Collectively, the reviewed evidence demonstrates that doomscrolling is associated with a broad spectrum of psychological outcomes ranging from emotional symptoms to more complex clinical and existential manifestations. Across diverse research contexts, anxiety, depression, and psychological distress consistently emerged as the dominant indicators, while sleep disturbances, PTSD, loneliness, emotional exhaustion, hopelessness, and existential anxiety appeared as additional consequences reported in specific populations. These findings indicate that the psychological impact of doomscrolling extends beyond temporary emotional discomfort and encompasses multiple dimensions of mental health.

Discussion

The findings of this review support the proposition of Sharma et al. (2022) that doomscrolling originates from individuals' attempts to regain control under conditions of uncertainty. However, the present synthesis extends this explanation by demonstrating that once doomscrolling is established, the behavior is no longer driven solely by information seeking. Instead, it evolves into a habitual digital practice reinforced by the interaction

between psychological vulnerability and algorithmic features embedded within social media platforms. This progression suggests that doomscrolling should be conceptualized not merely as excessive media consumption but as a maladaptive behavioral pattern maintained through reciprocal interactions between users and digital environments.

The review further supports the **threat-related attentional bias** framework proposed by Price et al. (2022). Repeated exposure to negative information progressively directs individuals' attention toward threatening stimuli while simultaneously reducing sensitivity to neutral or positive information. Such attentional bias narrows cognitive appraisal processes and promotes increasingly negative interpretations of surrounding events. The consistency of this finding across studies conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, natural disasters, and sociopolitical crises suggests that the psychological consequences of doomscrolling are influenced more strongly by the characteristics of consumed information than by the duration of social media use alone.

Another important contribution of the present synthesis concerns the role of affective processes in maintaining doomscrolling behavior. Rather than functioning solely as an emotional consequence, anxiety appears to become an active mechanism that perpetuates repetitive information seeking. Individuals repeatedly search for additional information in an attempt to reduce uncertainty; paradoxically, this behavior exposes them to increasingly distressing content, thereby intensifying anxiety and encouraging further information seeking. This self-reinforcing process illustrates how cognitive and affective mechanisms interact to sustain doomscrolling over time.

Furthermore, the present review highlights the importance of considering technological characteristics alongside individual psychological factors. Infinite scrolling interfaces, algorithm-driven recommendations, and continuous real-time updates are specifically designed to maximize user engagement. These platform features repeatedly expose users to similar categories of emotionally salient information, thereby reinforcing compulsive behavioral tendencies. This observation extends previous literature by demonstrating that doomscrolling should not be attributed exclusively to individual psychological vulnerability but should also be understood as a consequence of interactions between users and digitally engineered information environments.

Taken together, these findings support the conceptualization of doomscrolling as a multidimensional psychological phenomenon involving cognitive, affective, behavioral, and technological processes. This integrative perspective provides a more comprehensive explanation of why individuals continue engaging in doomscrolling despite recognizing its detrimental emotional consequences. It also establishes an important theoretical foundation for understanding how this behavioral cycle subsequently contributes to broader mental health outcomes, including anxiety, depression, psychological distress, and diminished psychological well-being, which are discussed in the following section.

The findings of this systematic review demonstrate that doomscrolling is consistently associated with a wide range of adverse mental health outcomes, highlighting its role as an emerging psychological risk factor within contemporary digital environments. Across the reviewed studies, anxiety, depression, psychological distress, stress, sleep disturbances, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), loneliness, emotional exhaustion, diminished mental well-being, and existential anxiety repeatedly emerged as consequences of prolonged exposure to negative online information. The consistency of these findings across different populations and crisis contexts suggests that the psychological consequences of doomscrolling are not limited to specific demographic groups or isolated global events but instead represent a broader phenomenon associated with digital information consumption.

Among all identified outcomes, anxiety appears to constitute the earliest and most prominent psychological response to doomscrolling. This finding is consistent with the

threat-related attentional bias framework proposed by Price et al. (2022), which argues that repeated exposure to threatening information selectively directs cognitive attention toward perceived risks while reducing sensitivity to neutral or positive stimuli. As attentional resources become increasingly devoted to threat monitoring, individuals experience sustained psychological vigilance that maintains heightened levels of anxiety even in the absence of immediate danger. The present synthesis extends this theoretical explanation by demonstrating that anxiety functions not merely as an emotional consequence but also as a mechanism that perpetuates doomscrolling itself. Individuals repeatedly return to social media in an attempt to resolve uncertainty, yet the algorithmic presentation of similar negative content reinforces anxiety and encourages further information seeking. Consequently, anxiety should be understood as both an outcome and a reinforcing component of the doomscrolling cycle.

The review also demonstrates that depression frequently develops alongside prolonged doomscrolling behavior. Unlike anxiety, which primarily reflects heightened anticipation of future threats, depressive symptoms are characterized by hopelessness, helplessness, emotional withdrawal, and diminished motivation. The reviewed studies consistently indicate that individuals recognize the detrimental emotional consequences of continuously consuming negative information but nevertheless experience considerable difficulty disengaging from this behavior. This reciprocal relationship suggests that negative affective states increase susceptibility to doomscrolling, while repeated exposure to distressing information further intensifies depressive symptoms. Such findings reinforce cognitive theories of depression, which emphasize the role of persistent negative cognitive schemas and maladaptive information processing in maintaining depressive symptomatology.

Psychological distress emerged as another consistently reported outcome across the reviewed literature. Unlike anxiety and depression, psychological distress represents a broader construct encompassing accumulated emotional strain resulting from individuals' reduced capacity to cope effectively with persistent psychological demands. The findings reported by Kartol et al. (2023), Kaya et al. (2025), and Canoğulları (2025) suggest that this condition becomes particularly pronounced during periods of collective crisis, including pandemics and natural disasters. In such circumstances, digital media function not only as channels for obtaining information but also as mechanisms that continuously reactivate stressful experiences through repetitive exposure to crisis-related content. These findings indicate that doomscrolling may prolong rather than alleviate psychological stress by preventing emotional recovery following exposure to threatening events.

Beyond conventional indicators of mental health, the present synthesis reveals that doomscrolling is associated with broader clinical manifestations, including PTSD symptoms, sleep disturbances, loneliness, emotional exhaustion, hopelessness, and reduced psychological well-being. Although these outcomes were not uniformly reported across all studies, their repeated identification demonstrates that the psychological consequences of doomscrolling extend beyond transient emotional discomfort. Sleep disturbances, for example, may impair cognitive functioning and emotional regulation, thereby increasing vulnerability to anxiety and depressive symptoms on subsequent days. Similarly, emotional exhaustion limits individuals' capacity to engage adaptively with their social environment, contributing to interpersonal difficulties and diminished overall well-being. Collectively, these findings suggest that doomscrolling produces multidimensional psychological consequences that interact and reinforce one another over time.

An important contribution of this review concerns the identification of existential consequences associated with doomscrolling. While previous research has primarily emphasized emotional symptoms, the present synthesis demonstrates that prolonged exposure to negative information also influences how individuals perceive the world, evaluate future

possibilities, and construct social meaning. Shabahang et al. (2024) reported significant associations between doomscrolling, existential anxiety, and social pessimism, indicating that repeated exposure to threatening information gradually reshapes individuals' beliefs regarding safety, trust, and the fundamental nature of society. Rather than representing isolated emotional reactions, these existential changes reflect broader transformations in individuals' cognitive frameworks through which reality is interpreted.

The reviewed evidence further suggests that existential consequences develop progressively through interconnected psychological mechanisms. Individuals initially engage in information seeking to reduce uncertainty during periods of perceived threat. However, repeated exposure to algorithmically curated negative content strengthens threat-related attentional bias and reinforces perceptions of environmental danger. Over time, persistent anxiety develops into psychological distress, followed by declining psychological well-being and increasingly pessimistic beliefs regarding personal security, social relationships, and future outcomes. This progression illustrates that doomscrolling should be understood as a dynamic psychological process rather than a behavior associated with isolated emotional symptoms.

The present findings also extend the work of Soraci et al. (2025), who conceptualized doomscrolling as a maladaptive digital behavior with significant implications for mental health. The current synthesis demonstrates that its consequences are shaped not only by individual psychological vulnerability but also by technological characteristics of digital platforms. Algorithm-driven recommendation systems, personalized content delivery, infinite scrolling interfaces, and continuous real-time updates collectively increase repeated exposure to emotionally salient information. Consequently, psychological risks emerge through the interaction between individual cognitive vulnerabilities and platform architectures specifically designed to maximize user engagement. This perspective broadens previous literature by integrating technological determinants into explanations of doomscrolling, thereby moving beyond predominantly individual-centered interpretations.

From a theoretical standpoint, these findings support the conceptualization of doomscrolling as a multidimensional construct situated at the intersection of media psychology, cognitive psychology, behavioral science, and digital communication research. The behavior cannot be adequately explained solely through models of problematic social media use or behavioral addiction. Instead, doomscrolling reflects a complex interaction among the need for certainty, threat-related attentional bias, maladaptive emotional regulation, compulsive information seeking, and algorithmic reinforcement. This integrative framework provides a more comprehensive explanation of why individuals persist in consuming negative information despite recognizing its harmful psychological consequences.

The practical implications are equally important. The findings indicate that interventions focusing exclusively on reducing screen time or limiting social media use may be insufficient to mitigate the psychological effects of doomscrolling. More comprehensive preventive strategies should incorporate digital literacy education, emotional regulation training, critical evaluation of online information, and increased public awareness of algorithmic content recommendation systems. Helping individuals recognize how digital platforms selectively amplify emotionally salient information may reduce compulsive engagement with negative news while fostering healthier patterns of information consumption. At the societal level, these findings also encourage policymakers, educators, mental health professionals, and technology companies to collaborate in designing digital environments that better support psychological well-being without compromising access to essential information.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this systematic literature review, synthesizing evidence from fourteen international empirical studies, demonstrate that doomscrolling is a maladaptive digital behavior consistently associated with deteriorating mental health among adult social media users. The review indicates that doomscrolling develops through the interaction of the need for certainty, threat-related attentional bias, and the algorithmic characteristics of social media platforms that repeatedly deliver negative content. This process contributes to a broad spectrum of psychological outcomes, including anxiety, depression, psychological distress, sleep disturbances, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), diminished mental well-being, and, ultimately, the emergence of existential anxiety and reduced quality of life. These findings highlight an important implication: the impact of social media on mental health is determined not merely by the amount of time spent online but, more importantly, by the quality of information consumed, users' patterns of engagement with digital content, and their capacity for emotional regulation and adaptive management of negative information exposure.

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