

The Relationship of Doomscrolling with Anxiety in Students of the Faculty of Medicine, Islamic University of North Sumatra

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Abstract

Doomscrolling is a new term which is commonly used as a tendency to keep scrolling on the bad news, even though the news is miserable, hurtful, and scary. This new term affects society at various ages, gender, caste, class, religion, and national boundaries. Doomscrolling comes up as a vicious cycle, which is when users stick to a pattern to search for negative information, no matter how bad the news is. It is hard to distinguish which is the trusted news on social media. This spread of misleading propaganda creates fear, anxiety, and confusion. This research design is observational analytics with cross-sectional design. The sample of this study was 216 respondents, which was included in the inclusion and exclusion criteria at the Faculty of Medicine, Universitas Islam Sumatera Utara. The data was taken in February 2024 using stratified random sampling. Data collection was carried out using the HAM-A and Doomscrolling scale questionnaires. In this study, found that the value of $p=0.000$ ($p<0.05$) which shows that there is a significant relationship between *Doomscrolling* and Anxiety which has a value of $r=0.303$ where the strength of this relationship is weak ($p=0.2-0.4$) and the direction of the correlation is positive (+) means there is a unidirectional relationship at the Faculty of Medicine, Islamic University of North Sumatra. There is a relationship between *Doomscrolling* and Anxiety in Students at the Faculty of Medicine, Islamic University of North Sumatra.

Keywords: Doomscrolling, Anxiety

INTRODUCTION

Background

Technology is the easiest and most important means of communication in this day and age, especially related to the use of social media. Social media is closely related to people's daily lives. Based on a research conducted by DataReportal, it shows that social media users in Indonesia have reached 191.4 million users in January 2022. This figure can be said to be equivalent to 68.9 percent of Indonesia's total population, which now stands at 277.7 million as of January 2022 (Kemp S, 2022).

Users access social media content, messaging communications, *games* and online shopping more often. The area with the highest rate of internet users is still on the island of Java, which is 56.4%, Sumatra 22.1%, Sulawesi 7%, Kalimantan 6.3%, Bali-Nusa Tenggara 5.2% and Maluku-Papua 3%. Active internet users in North Sumatra also increased from 10.9 million in 2018 to 11.7 million in 2019.(APJII, 2020)

The use of the internet and mobile phones makes it very easy to access various information anywhere and anytime, both through *websites* and various applications provided, resulting in many people, especially teenagers, lingering on accessing the internet, thus causing internet harassment, especially the use of social media. (Tomczyk & Selmanagic-Lizde, 2018)

In 2021 (Covid-19), there has been a 35% increase in news consumption through digital platforms, and a 47% increase in social media use. Despite the enormous positive effects, the overuse and dependence on online platforms has caused people to become addicted to online use, and in some cases has led to an increase in phenomena such as "doom surfing" and "doom scrolling" (M. K. Sharma et al., 2022).

Istilah *doomscrolling* emerged in early 2020 to become common, describing digital media practices that took a bigger life during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and *social distancing* (Barabak, 2020). Created in 2018, and later popularized by journalist Karen Ho (Garcia-Navarro, 2020). *Doomscrolling* are new words that are commonly used to describe the tendency to keep surfing or browsing bad news, even if the news is sad, hurtful, and scary. This new term affects all of us regardless of age, gender, caste, class, religion, and national boundaries. Consciously or unconsciously *doomscrolling* has entered our lives. It can affect and is easily seen (Rodrigues, 2022).

Doomscrolling emerged as a vicious circle where users were trapped in a pattern of searching for negative information no matter how bad the news was. In addition, since online platforms are well aware of what is most searched for using algorithmic systems, they deliver content that will grab the attention of social media users based on what they searched for before on the internet (Nguyen, 2020).

Individuals who perform *doomscrolling* often become aware of their behavior and make some efforts to reduce it. Individuals also consider negative news to be uncomfortable to read, and want to reduce their habit of reading such negative news (Valerie, 2023).

The urge to get all the facts to protect oneself from danger makes a person keep scrolling through his gadgets for hours to get information and news, which is especially negative news. Constant exposure to negative news on social media can take the form of "*doomscrolling*" which is generally defined as the habit of browsing social media where users obsessively search for sad and negative information (B. Sharma et al., 2022).

Distinguishing accurate and inaccurate information spread through social media can be difficult. This spread of misleading propaganda causes fear, anxiety, and confusion (Rosenberg et al., 2020). The uncertainty of information, makes people tend to read the news and look for clarification articles and answers to their questions incessantly. They keep browsing and reading articles one by one to gather more information. This makes a person unable to look away from their device screen which can add to their anxiety (Rodrigues, 2022).

According to the Indonesian Association of Psychiatric Specialists (PDSKJI), which examined 14,988 people from 2020-2022, it was found that the results of an increase in psychological problems that continue to increase every year, namely 70.7% had psychological problems in 2020, 80.4% had psychological problems in 2021 and 82.5% had psychological problems in 2022. For anxiety problems, there were 68.8% had anxiety problems in 2020, 76.1% had anxiety problems in 2021 and 75.8% had anxiety problems in 2022. The most age range is 20-30 years old, followed by ages less than 20 years and 31-40 years where this age range is still included in the productive age (Evan Wijaya et al., 2023).

Previous research has revealed a link between social media use and increased feelings of depression and anxiety (Vannucci et al., 2017). At the beginning of the study, individuals who reported spending more time during the COVID-19 pandemic were found to

experience higher levels of anxiety, anxiety, stress, and depression (D'Hondt et al., 2020). According to Sharma, *doomscrolling* have a moderate positive correlation with anxiety (B. Sharma et al., 2022).

Problem Formulation

The formulation of the problem in this study is to find out the relationship between *doomscrolling* and anxiety of students of the Faculty of Medicine, Islamic University of North Sumatra.

Research Objectives

General Purpose

Knowing how *doomscrolling* is related to anxiety in students of the Faculty of Medicine, Islamic University of North Sumatra

Special Purpose

1. Knowing the frequency distribution of *doomscrolling events*
2. Knowing the frequency distribution of anxiety levels
3. Knowing the frequency distribution of the sexes with *doomscrolling*
4. Knowing the frequency distribution of the duration of device use with *doomscrolling*
5. Knowing the frequency distribution of doomscrolling with Anxiety level

Research Benefits

Benefits for Researchers

1. To increase insight and knowledge about the influence of *doomscrolling* on students
2. To increase insight and knowledge about its impact on student anxiety

Benefits for the Institution

1. As one of the references for agencies, especially in the health sector, in making movements to minimize this phenomenon.

Benefits for Other Researchers

1. As one of the sources of reference for other researchers in researching the same or related variables in this study

Benefits for the Community

1. To provide information about the impact of *doomscrolling* on anxiety
2. To raise public awareness about the effects of *doomscrolling*

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Description of the Research Location

This research was conducted at the Faculty of Medicine, Islamic University of North Sumatra (FK UISU). UISU Faculty of Medicine is one of the Private Medical Faculties established in 1965. FK UISU is located at JL. STM NO. 77 Suka Maju, Medan Johor, Medan City, North Sumatra.

Characteristics Responden

The type of research conducted uses an observational analytical study with a *cross sectional* design, which aims to determine the relationship *between Doomscrolling* and anxiety in students of the Faculty of Medicine, Islamic University of North Sumatra. The respondents in this study are students of the Faculty of Medicine, Islamic University of North Sumatra. The number of respondents in this study was 216 students.

Data Analysis Results

Univariate Analysis

Table 4. 1 Frequency Distribution of Anxiety Levels

Feature Responden (N=216)	Frequency	Percentage
Anxiety Level		
Usual	145	67,1%
Light	21	9,7%
Keep	31	14,4%
Heavy	12	5,6%
It's very heavy	7	3,2%
Total	216	100%

Based on the table above, of the 216 respondents showed the distribution of anxiety frequency ($M = 1.68$, $SD = 1.11$). The majority of respondents, 145 (67.1%) respondents, did not experience anxiety problems. A total of 21 (9.7%) respondents experienced mild anxiety. A total of 31 (14.4%) respondents experienced moderate level of anxiety. A total of 12 (5.6%) respondents experienced severe level of anxiety. Meanwhile, 7 (3.2%) respondents experienced anxiety at a very severe level.

Table 4. 2 Distribution of Doomscrolling Event Frequencies

Feature Responden (N=216)	Frequency	Percentage
Risk of Doomscrolling		
Ya	95	44%
No	121	56%

Based on the table above, the majority of respondents as many as 121 (56%) did not have a *doomscrolling problem*. Meanwhile, as many as 95 (44%) respondents experienced *doomscrolling*.

Table 4. 3 Distribution of genders with *Doomscrolling*

Gender (N=95)	Frequency	Percentage
Law Law	38	40%
Woman	57	60%

Based on the table above, the majority of respondents who experienced *doomscrolling* were women, as many as 57 (60%) respondents.

Table 4. 4 Distribution of Duration of Gadget Use with *Doomscrolling*

Duration of device use (N=95)	Frequency	Percentage
1-2 Jam	12	12,6%
2-5 hours	26	27,4%

> 5 jams	57	60%
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Based on the table above, the majority of respondents who experience *doomscrolling* are those who use gadgets for more than 5 hours per day 57 (60%).

Table 4.5 Frequency Distribution of Anxiety Levels of *Doomscrolling* Respondents

Anxiety Level (N=95)	Frequency	Percentage
Usual	52	54,7%
Light	10	10,5%
Keep	19	20%
Heavy	9	9,5%
It's very heavy	5	5,3%

Based on the table above, the anxiety level of respondents who experienced *doomscrolling* was mostly not anxiety, which was 52 (54.7%) of respondents.

Bivariate Analysis

The spearman correlation test aims to see if there is a linear correlation between the two variables that we want to investigate (Akoglu, 2018). The following are the results obtained from the Spearman test

Table 4. 6 Relationship *between Doomscrolling and Anxiety*

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis	Spearman Correlation	Significance
<i>Doomscrolling</i>	36,6	18,9	1,272	2,000	0,303	0,000
Anxiety	11,3	11,07	1,154	1,393	0,303	0,000

Based on table 4.6 above, the results of the statistical test using the Spearman correlation test with a significance value of $p=0.000$ ($p<0.05$) which means that there is a significant relationship between *Doomscrolling* and anxiety. Based on these results, H1 was accepted. The correlation strength between variables is $r=0.303$ which means that the strength of the *Doomscrolling* is weak ($r=0.21-0.40$) with a positive (+) or unidirectional correlation direction, the higher the level of *Doomscrolling*, the higher the anxiety experienced and vice versa.

Discussion

In this study, the gender of female respondents was 157 (72.7%) more than male 59 (27.3%). When the researcher distributed the questionnaire, female respondents were more engaged and willing to take the time to fill out the questionnaire. Number of respondents at risk *doomscrolling* is 95 (44%). The majority of respondents who experienced this *doomscrolling* were women (60%). This is in line with the article (Evan Starkman, 2022) which states that women do more often *doomscrolling* compared to men.

Table 4.3 shows many gadget users with a fairly high duration of use. From the number of respondents at risk *doomscrolling*, 57 (60%) of which the duration of daily gadget use is >5 hours. Research (Price et al., 2022) found that higher smartphone use was associated with increased anxiety, depression, and lower life satisfaction. In China, the average duration of device use is 17.2 hours/week. Meanwhile, gadget users in Indonesia experienced an increase in Internet duration during the COVID-19 pandemic and both women and men experienced an average increase of 3.43 hours per day compared to usage before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the midst of the pandemic, 25.4% of respondents used the Internet for 0–5 hours per day, 34.2% for 6–10 hours daily, and 40.3% for ≥ 11 hours (Siste et al., 2020).

In this study, a significant relationship between *Doomscrolling* with anxiety. This is in line with research similar to this finding, research conducted by (Satici et al., 2022) which indicates a positive relationship between psychological distress and *Doomscrolling*. The first study of the concept *doomscrolling* which entered our lives with the pandemic, was carried out during the COVID-19 period. Therefore, there are studies investigating the relationship of this concept with other mental health variables during the COVID-19 process (Merriam-Webster, 2020a). In another research study by (Karakose et al., 2022) found a positive association between psychological distress and social media addiction in their research conducted during the COVID-19 process. The level of psychological pressure has increased along with the increase in Internet-related behavior during the COVID-19 process (Chen et al., 2020).

In the study (Shabahang et al., 2023) found that future anxiety increases as rates increase *doomscrolling* and emphasized that *doomscrolling* is a risky activity that has the potential to increase worrying thoughts about the future and despair. Exposure to negative news streams can increase anxiety levels by causing individuals to negatively interpret their perspective on life, career, studies and the world of the future. Therefore, increased levels of anxiety negatively impact the psychological well-being of individuals. In this case, studies of interventions that can be undertaken in an effort to reduce anxiety in the future may have a reducing effect on an individual's commitment to *doomscrolling* behaviors in which they are constantly dragged into the search for information.

Doomscrolling can interfere with learning by reducing focus, wasting time potentially used for studying, and increasing students' stress and anxiety levels (Hunt et al., 2018). *Doomscrolling* can have several negative impacts on learning, especially in the context of education:

1. Distractions in Focus and Attention: When a person engages in *doomscrolling*, their focus and attention can be distracted from academic tasks and study materials. They may become less productive and efficient in learning because they are distracted by negative content they read on social media or online news.
2. Increased Anxiety and Stress: Often negative and anxiety-inducing content in *doomscrolling* can lead to increased levels of anxiety and stress. High anxiety can interfere with their ability to concentrate, study, and remember information well.
3. Sleep and Mental Health Disorders: *Doomscrolling* can affect a person's sleep quality because they may tend to check their phones late at night or even in the middle of the night. Sleep deprivation can lead to decreased academic performance and poor mental well-being.
4. Decreased Motivation and Academic Engagement: A person who is overly involved in *doomscrolling* may lose interest and motivation in learning because they focus more on negative online content than on actual learning. This can result in decreased classroom engagement and decreased academic achievement.

In adverse life events (natural disasters, epidemics, and so on), and situations that affect society in general (e.g. elections), a person will feel the need to obtain more information and they may get stuck when they encounter negative news from digital media. This vicious cycle of negative news triggers negative emotions in the individual and causes him to experience a negative emotional state. In other words, individuals with psychological distress experience bad luck more often and are more anxious about the future. Many studies conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic revealed that media exposure is closely related to depression and anxiety (Gao et al., 2020) (Wang et al., 2020). Therefore, good digital literacy is needed as a person's preventive intervention to avoid negative news will lead to a reduction in psychological stress and an increase in well-being (Kartol et al., 2023).

Gadgets, social media, and news feeds, are indeed designed to encourage frequent or prolonged interactions. This further increases the need to perform *doomscrolling* to get information and facilitate browsing more than usual negative news (B. Sharma et al., 2022). Exposure to negative news streams can cause individuals to not be able to see the future clearly and always experience negative future anxiety. This anxiety process continues as the flow continues and depressive symptoms develop by increasing in severity. As a result of this study, behavior *doomscrolling*, which is a new phenomenon, turns out to be harmful to mental health.

This study, like other studies, has limitations. First, *doomscrolling* may be caused by specific social situations, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, social restrictions, elections, and other situations. So that it affects the results of the study which causes the correlation strength to be weak. Because in this study, specific situations that have an impact on respondents are not included. Second, filling out questionnaires that are online, and not conducting interviews in person, so that the answers that have been given by the respondents are not very accurate in fact, which can affect the results of the relationship between the two variables. Third, this phenomenon is relatively new, thus causing the limitation of literature as a reference. Fourth, the results of this study only describe the conditions that exist in the Faculty of Medicine, Islamic University of North Sumatra. So that it cannot be translated to be applied to other places.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results obtained from this study, it can be concluded that the majority of FK UISU 145 students (67.1%) do not experience anxiety or are in a normal state, and the majority of FK UISU 121 students (56%) do not experience doomscrolling. Most of the FK UISU students who experience doomscrolling are women (60%) and use gadgets for more than 5 hours per day (60%). Although the majority of those who experience doomscrolling do not experience anxiety (54.7%), there is a significant positive relationship between doomscrolling and anxiety with values of $r= 0.303$ and $p= 0.000$, indicating a weak relationship. Based on this research, it is suggested that further research should conduct different statistical tests and consider different socio-demographic conditions since this phenomenon is still relatively new. The results of this study are also expected to be a consideration and source of information for the Islamic University of North Sumatra regarding the relationship between doomscrolling and anxiety. Additionally, it is recommended that further research be conducted on more specific conditions or at certain moments, and readers are encouraged to increase digital literacy as a preventive measure to avoid doomscrolling.

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