

Doomscrolling Behavior among Indonesian Adolescents: Psychological Correlates and Digital Media Usage Patterns

Ishlakhatu Sa'idah^{1*}, Amaliah Aryani²

¹Universitas Islam Negeri Madura

² Universitas Islam Negeri Madura

*Corresponding author email: ishlakhatu@iainmadura.ac.id

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received

Revised

Accepted

Keywords:

Doomscrolling

Social Media

Teenagers

Mental Health

ABSTRACT

The phenomenon of doomscrolling—the habit of compulsively scrolling through negative content on social media—has become an increasingly common behaviour among adolescents, especially in the post-pandemic era. This behaviour is characterized by the continuous consumption of information that is frightening, disappointing, or anxiety-inducing, which has an impact on adolescents' mental health and daily life balance. This study used a mixed-methods approach by distributing a quantitative survey to 600 adolescent respondents aged 15–18 years in three major cities in Indonesia (Jakarta, Yogyakarta, and Surabaya) and conducting in-depth interviews with 24 adolescents selected based on their level of doomscrolling intensity. The results showed that 82.3% of respondents doomscrolled at least 4 times a week, with an average duration of 45 minutes per session. Statistical analysis showed a significant positive correlation between doomscrolling frequency and anxiety levels ($r = 0.62$, $p < 0.001$), sleep disturbance ($\beta = 0.47$, $p < 0.01$), and decreased concentration in learning ($\beta = 0.29$, $p < 0.05$). Qualitative findings showed that doomscrolling was triggered by curiosity, FOMO (fear of missing out), and the desire to stay 'connected' to the latest social dynamics, even though the content consumed was negative. This behaviour tends to be unconscious and occurs automatically, especially at night before going to bed. This study suggests the need for holistic school- and family-based interventions that include digital literacy, stress management, and time management of social media use to reduce the negative impacts of doomscrolling on Indonesian adolescents.

Copyright ©Journal of Counseling & Psychotherapy Research (JCPR) is licensed under CC BY-NC 4.0

Introduction

Social media has become an integral part of Indonesian teenagers' lives in the past two decades. With increasing internet penetration, teenagers' digital behavior has also undergone significant transformation. Based on the latest report from the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII, 2024), 89% of teenagers aged 15–18 years in Indonesia actively use the internet. The majority of them access social media for more than four hours every day.

One of the new forms of behavior that has emerged as a consequence of intense exposure to social media is doomscrolling. This behavior refers to the tendency to continuously scroll and consume negative content such as bad news, disasters, or political conflicts. This term first became popular during the COVID-19 pandemic. At that time, many internet users experienced an increase in negative news consumption which had a negative impact on their mental health (Mannell & Meese, 2022).

Doomscrolling is not just a passive habit, but reflects a compulsive pattern that is often not realized by the perpetrator (Sharma, et al., 2022). In the context of adolescents, this behavior becomes even more complex because they are in a vulnerable phase of emotional development. Adolescence is characterized by the search for identity and high sensitivity to the influence of the social environment. This makes them more susceptible to negative information that is widely spread on social media.

According to a study by Cahyaningtyas & Sekti (2024), adolescents have a higher risk of experiencing anxiety and depression disorders due to excessive consumption of negative content. This is reinforced by data showing a relationship between the intensity of social media use and increased psychological disorders. Doomscrolling, as part of excessive digital habits, worsens the mental condition of adolescents. This relationship needs to be studied specifically in the local context of Indonesia.

The FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) phenomenon also strengthens the practice of doomscrolling in teenagers. FOMO is anxiety that arises from feeling left behind by information or other people's activities. In the digital era, the pressure to always keep up with the latest developments is very strong. As a result, teenagers feel compelled to continue opening social media even when the content is negative.

Social media platforms operate on algorithms that prioritize content that grabs users' attention. Negative content often gets more engagement, and therefore appears more frequently in timelines. This creates a feedback loop where users are exposed to similar content over and over again. As a result, doomscrolling becomes a habit formed by a mixture of psychology and technology.

This condition is exacerbated by the lack of digital literacy among teenagers. Many teenagers do not have the critical ability to filter and evaluate the information they receive. As a result, they are more easily swept up in the flow of repetitive negative content. Low digital literacy also makes teenagers vulnerable to disinformation and emotional manipulation from social media.

Research on doomscrolling in Indonesia is still very limited. Most previous studies only discuss social media addiction in general. Not many studies have focused on doomscrolling behavior and its impact on adolescents. In fact, a deep understanding of this behavior is important for designing appropriate interventions.

Mental health of adolescents in Indonesia has shown a worrying trend in recent years. Riskesdas data (2023) noted that around 13.2% of adolescents experience emotional disorders. One of the contributing factors is digital stress due to exposure to excessive information. Doomscrolling, as a new form of digital stress, needs special attention.

In addition to mental health, doomscrolling also affects the quality of sleep for teenagers (Rodriguest, 2022). Many teenagers doomscrolling at night before going to bed. This disrupts the sleep cycle and causes fatigue during the day. Lack of sleep negatively affects their physical health, emotions, and academic performance.

A study by Woran et al. (2021) showed a correlation between social media use at night and sleep disturbances. Doomscrolling before bed is an additional risk factor. Teenagers who sleep late due to social media have lower concentration levels in school. This is a challenge for educators in improving student learning achievement.

The impact of doomscrolling also includes decreased motivation and enthusiasm for learning. Continuous consumption of negative content causes emotional exhaustion. This interferes with adolescents' cognitive abilities and mental resilience in facing learning challenges (Satici, et al., 2023). Teachers and parents are starting to worry about decreased learning performance as a result of social media.

Social media content filled with conflict, bad news, and pessimistic narratives adds to the emotional burden of teenagers. Issues such as climate change, geopolitical conflicts, and economic crises often appear in their social media feeds. Teenagers who are not emotionally mature have difficulty distinguishing between sensational information and opinions. This adds to the level of anxiety and despair.

From a guidance and counseling perspective, doomscrolling behavior requires attention as a maladaptive form in responding to information pressure and digital social dynamics. Adolescents need support to develop emotional regulation skills, digital self-awareness, and the ability to make wise decisions in accessing media. Therefore, this study aims to analyze doomscrolling behavior in depth, including triggers, behavioral patterns, and its impact on mental health and academic achievement of adolescents. The results of this study are expected to be the basis for developing guidance and counseling services that are responsive to today's digital challenges, as well as encouraging the formation of healthy media habits among Indonesian adolescents.

Method

This study uses a mixed methods approach with a sequential explanatory design. This approach was chosen to gain a comprehensive understanding of doomscrolling behavior in adolescents, by combining generalizable quantitative data and in-depth and contextual qualitative data. This strategy allows researchers to identify general trends through quantitative surveys, then explore subjective experiences and meanings more deeply through qualitative interviews. This method is very suitable for studying complex and relatively new phenomena such as doomscrolling, especially in the context of adolescent psychosocial development in Indonesia.

The population in this study were teenagers aged 15 to 18 years who were in high school and equivalent and lived in three major cities in Indonesia: Jakarta, Yogyakarta, and Surabaya. These three cities were chosen because they have high internet penetration rates, cultural diversity, and wide access to digital media. Using stratified random sampling techniques, 600 respondents were recruited to take part in the quantitative survey. Meanwhile, 24 interview participants were selected purposively based on high doomscrolling intensity, as identified in the initial survey results.

The main instrument in the quantitative stage is an online questionnaire developed based on adaptations of the Social Media Use Integration Scale (SMUIS) and Generalized Anxiety Disorder-7 (GAD-7), supplemented with specific items measuring the frequency, duration, time of use, and impact of doomscrolling on sleep and concentration. Content validity was tested by three psychology and counseling experts with a validity index result of 0.85. Reliability testing using Cronbach's Alpha showed a value of 0.87, indicating a high level of internal consistency of the instrument. For the qualitative stage, a semi-structured interview guideline was used that was compiled based on quantitative findings. Interview questions covered perceptions of doomscrolling, emotional experiences, behavioral triggers, and self-control strategies.

Quantitative data collection was conducted in February to March 2025 by distributing questionnaires through the Google Forms platform. The questionnaires were distributed through school networks, guidance and counseling teacher forums, and social media. All respondents were asked to provide voluntary consent to participate. Meanwhile, qualitative data were obtained through online interviews using the Zoom application in April 2025. Each interview session lasted between 30 and 45 minutes and was recorded with the permission of the participants. The entire process was carried out by observing the principles of research ethics, including confidentiality and protection of respondents' identities.

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS version 26 software. Descriptive analysis was used to describe the frequency and duration of doomscrolling, while Pearson correlation analysis and linear regression were used to test the relationship between doomscrolling and anxiety, sleep disturbance, and decreased learning concentration. The level of statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$. Meanwhile, qualitative data were analyzed using the thematic analysis approach developed by Braun and Clarke. The analysis process began by reading the transcripts thoroughly, conducting open coding, then grouping the codes into main themes. To increase the validity of the results, two researchers conducted cross-validation independently and held discussions until reaching a mutual agreement.

Result

The quantitative results of this study show that out of 600 respondents aged 15–18 years in Jakarta, Yogyakarta and Surabaya, 494 people (82.3%) admitted to doomscrolling at least four times a week. The average time spent doomscrolling in one session was 45 minutes, with the most frequent time occurring at night between 9:00 p.m. and 1:00 a.m. As many as 65.8% of respondents said that they were not aware that the activity was classified as unhealthy behavior until they experienced impacts such as sleep disturbances or decreased concentration in learning.

Pearson correlation analysis showed that there was a significant positive relationship between doomscrolling frequency and anxiety levels based on GAD-7 scores ($r = 0.62$, $p < 0.001$). In addition, linear regression analysis showed that doomscrolling predicted sleep disturbance ($\beta = 0.47$, $p < 0.01$) and decreased learning concentration ($\beta = 0.29$, $p < 0.05$). These results indicate that the higher the frequency of doomscrolling, the higher the tendency for adolescents to experience psychological problems.

In the qualitative aspect, in-depth interviews were conducted with 24 participants selected based on the criteria of high doomscrolling frequency (more than five times per week). From these interviews, four main themes emerged. First, many teenagers admitted to feeling compelled to continue scrolling through content despite feeling anxious or uncomfortable, due to high curiosity. Second, FOMO or the fear of being left behind from social information was their main motivation to stay connected. Third, some respondents revealed that they used doomscrolling as an escape mechanism from academic pressure and family problems. Fourth, almost all participants mentioned the lack of learning or guidance on how to use social media healthily from the school or family environment.

One participant stated, “Initially I only watched the news for a short time, but eventually it could last for an hour because the news kept popping up that made me worry.” This finding indicates that doomscrolling in adolescents is not just a passive habit, but is closely related to their emotional and social conditions. Qualitative data also supports the quantitative results that this behavior has a direct impact on psychological well-being. The following table summarizes the results of the related statistical analysis:

Variable	Correlation (r/β)	Significance(p)
Anxiety (GAD-7)	$r = 0,62$	$p < 0,001$
Sleep Disturbance	$\beta = 0,47$	$p < 0,01$
Study Concentration	$\beta = 0,29$	$p < 0,05$

Quantitative and qualitative results support each other in showing that doomscrolling is a digital behavior that needs to be watched out for because it has the potential to cause serious impacts on the mental health and quality of life of adolescents.

Discussion

The doomscrolling phenomenon in adolescents found in this study showed a very high prevalence, namely 82.3%, which is in line with previous findings by Shabahang et al. (2023) in the United States which noted that more than 70% of adolescents spend time scrolling through negative content every week. This percentage shows that doomscrolling is not an incidental behavior, but has become a pattern of digital consumption that is fixed in the daily lives of adolescents.

The positive correlation between doomscrolling and anxiety ($r = 0.62$) indicates that the more often a teenager is exposed to negative information, the higher the level of anxiety he or she feels. This supports Beck's (1991) cognitive theory which states that repeated exposure to negative stimuli can strengthen pessimistic cognitive schemas that trigger anxiety responses. In the context of doomscrolling, these stimuli come in the form of crisis news, social conflicts, or global issues that make teenagers feel that the world around them is unsafe.

Sleep disturbances were also found to be a significant result of doomscrolling, reinforcing the opinion of Suhartati, et al. (2021) who showed that the use of social media at night is associated with disturbed sleep patterns and an increased risk of insomnia. The average duration of doomscrolling of 45 minutes per session before bedtime reflects a pattern of nighttime behavior that disrupts the circadian rhythm.

The consequence of sleep disturbance is decreased cognitive function during the day, including the ability to concentrate in class, as evidenced by the β value = 0.29 in this study. This confirms the initial hypothesis that doomscrolling has an impact on decreasing adolescents' learning concentration, which can then affect overall academic achievement.

Interview data also reinforces that adolescents are not fully aware of the consequences of doomscrolling. Most of them feel that the act is just part of a digital routine to 'check information'. This indicates a lack of metacognitive awareness and low emotional digital literacy among adolescents. In the context of education, this opens up important space for school counselors to provide preventive interventions through media literacy and stress management programs.

The doomscrolling motivation related to FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) illustrates the social needs of adolescents to remain part of the flow of information occurring in their community. This concept has long been explained by Azmi (2019) who stated that FOMO is a manifestation of the basic psychological need for connectedness and competence. When these needs are not met positively, adolescents seek alternatives through the consumption of digital information, even when the information is disturbing.

Psychosocial factors such as academic pressure and family conflict revealed in interviews show that doomscrolling also functions as a coping mechanism. However, this coping strategy is considered maladaptive because it actually worsens the user's psychological condition. Lazarus & Folkman (1984) call this strategy 'escape-avoidance coping', where individuals try to escape from pressure with activities that do not solve problems, but instead create new problems.

The algorithmic aspect of social media also exacerbates doomscrolling behavior. Platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and Twitter have content curation systems that are based on engagement, not informational value. Content that evokes intense emotions (both negative and positive) tends to appear more frequently on timelines, causing users to be constantly exposed to emotionally draining content.

Low digital literacy is also an important finding that needs to be considered in the context of Indonesian education. Many teenagers have not been taught how to filter information, manage digital time, or recognize the psychological impacts of excessive content consumption. In this regard, guidance and counseling programs in schools must take a central role by including media literacy materials in non-academic curricula.

The need for school-based interventions is reinforced by the fact that families are often unaware or even unaware of doomscrolling behavior. This lack of understanding leads to minimal supervision and guidance in the use of social media. BK teachers and homeroom teachers need to build collaboration with parents to detect and address early symptoms of doomscrolling experienced by students.

Doomscrolling is also closely related to adolescent neuropsychological development. During this period, the limbic system that regulates emotions develops faster than the prefrontal cortex that regulates logic and impulse control. As a result, adolescents are more easily attracted to emotional content and are less able to control the duration of consumption (Sa'idah & Nisrina, 2024). This knowledge is important for designing intervention strategies that are appropriate to the developmental stage.

Suggested forms of intervention include digital mindfulness training, monitoring of device usage, and providing reflective assignments on social media use. In addition to individual strategies,

regulations at the school policy level are also needed, such as implementing device-free hours in the school environment, regular counseling, and training of guidance and counseling teachers on digital mental health issues. These strategies can be part of a comprehensive approach to character education that emphasizes not only cognition but also emotional and technological management.

Theoretically, doomscrolling behavior can be analyzed through behavioral psychology and cognitive psychology approaches. In behavioral psychology, doomscrolling behavior can be seen as a result of positive reinforcement from social media algorithms that provide a sense of momentary satisfaction. Meanwhile, the cognitive approach explains that the way individuals process negative information greatly influences their perceptions and emotions. Data from this study also showed that doomscrolling is often done automatically without conscious intention, reflecting the presence of impulse-based habits. This emphasizes the importance of strengthening self-control and understanding automatic thoughts in cognitive behavioral counseling (CBT) sessions in schools.

Finally, the findings of this study emphasize the importance of a multidimensional approach in understanding and addressing doomscrolling behavior in adolescents. This approach includes psychological, social, educational, and technological aspects. For this, cross-sector collaboration involving psychologists, school counselors, teachers, parents, and even technology developers is needed. By understanding the root causes, patterns, and impacts of doomscrolling in more depth, we can design more appropriate interventions. This research provides an important contribution to shaping educational policies and counseling services that are more adaptive to today's digital challenges, especially in maintaining the psychological well-being of Indonesian adolescents.

Conclusion

This study concludes that doomscrolling behavior is a significant phenomenon among Indonesian adolescents, with high prevalence and significant impacts on psychological and academic aspects. The frequency of doomscrolling has been shown to be positively correlated with anxiety levels, sleep disturbances, and decreased concentration in learning. Qualitatively, in-depth interviews revealed that this behavior is influenced by emotional and social motivations, such as FOMO, the need to feel connected, and the inability to control exposure to negative content. The role of social media algorithms in strengthening doomscrolling patterns also contributes to the worsening situation.

From a guidance and counseling perspective, these findings suggest the urgency of developing intervention programs that target digital literacy, stress management, and self-regulation skills. School counselors need to play an active role in providing preventive services through classical guidance that discusses healthy digital media consumption patterns. In addition, individual and group counseling services can focus on increasing adolescents' self-awareness of doomscrolling behavior and its impact on their psychological well-being. School-based interventions also need to involve teachers and parents as partners in creating an environment that supports digital balance. This study is expected to be a starting point for further research and the development of evidence-based education and counseling policies to face today's digital challenges.

References

- APJJI (2020). Penetrasi & Perilaku Pengguna Internet Indonesia Survey 2019-2020. <https://apjii.or.id/survei2020>
- Azmi, N. (2019). Hubungan antara Fear of Missing out (FoMO) dengan kecanduan media sosial pada mahasiswa. *Skripsi. Fakultas Psikologi Universitas Islam Negeri Sultan Syarif Kasim Riau*.
- Cahyaningtyas, P. A., & Sekti, B. A. (2024). Jejak Digital dan Jiwa Remaja: Pengaruh Media Sosial terhadap Kesehatan Mental. *Prosiding SISFOTEK*, 8(1), 224-229.
- Jenkins-Guarnieri, M. A., Wright, S. L., & Johnson, B. (2013). Development and validation of a social media use integration scale. *Psychology of popular media culture*, 2(1), 38.

- Lazarus, R. S., & Folkman, S. (1984). *Stress, appraisal, and coping*. Springer publishing company.
- Mannell, K., & Meese, J. (2022). From doom-scrolling to news avoidance: limiting news as a wellbeing strategy during COVID lockdown. *Journalism Studies*, 23(3), 302-319.
- Rodrigues, E. V. (2022). Doomscrolling threat to mental health and well-being: a review. *International Journal of Nursing Research*, 127-130.
- Saidah, I., & Nisrina, R. A. (2024). Perilaku Narsis di Instagram: Studi Kasus pada Remaja Perempuan di Pamekasan. *DA'WA: Jurnal Bimbingan Penyuluhan & Konseling Islam*, 4(1).
- Satici, S. A., Gocet Tekin, E., Deniz, M. E., & Satici, B. (2023). Doomscrolling scale: Its association with personality traits, psychological distress, social media use, and wellbeing. *Applied Research in Quality of Life*, 18(2), 833-847.
- Shabahang, R., Kim, S., Hosseinkhanzadeh, A. A., Aruguete, M. S., & Kakabaraee, K. (2023). "Give your thumb a break" from surfing tragic posts: Potential corrosive consequences of social media users' doomscrolling. *Media Psychology*, 26(4), 460-479.
- Sharma, B., Lee, S. S., & Johnson, B. K. (2022). The dark at the end of the tunnel: Doomscrolling on social media newsfeeds.
- Suhartati, B. L., Dewi, A. A. N. T. N., Wibawa, A., & Winaya, I. M. N. (2021). Hubungan Lama Durasi Penggunaan Media Sosial Dengan Kualitas Tidur Pada Usia 19-22 Tahun. *Majalah Ilmiah Fisioterapi Indonesia*, 9(1), 28.
- Woran, K., Kundre, R. M., & Pondaag, F. A. (2021). Analisis hubungan penggunaan media sosial dengan kualitas tidur pada remaja. *Jurnal Keperawatan*, 8(2), 1-10.