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Swipe, Scroll, Repeat: The Impact of Emotional Regulation on Doomscrolling in Young Adults

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Abstract: The modern hyper connected society is characterized by young adults spending hours scrolling through the negative news content on their social media feeds, a behavior that is commonly known as doomscrolling. Although this habit might appear as a means of keeping up with the latest or being distracted, it can add to emotional distress and cause dysfunctional habits of digital use. Despite the fact that doomscrolling can be viewed as a way of keeping in touch or getting distracted, nevertheless, such a habit can inflict serious emotional trauma and result in unhealthy habits of consuming digital information on the Internet. The way people manage their emotional state online might be influenced by the consumption of the negative content, especially, techniques, including cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression. Accordingly, the research objective is the investigation of the effect of emotional regulation on doomscrolling in young adults aged 18 to 25 years and who are residents of the Delhi NCR area. A total of 60 participants were involved in the sample, and the doomscrolling Scale that was created by Sharma, Lee, and Johnson (2022) and the Emotional Regulation Questionnaire created by Gross and John (2003) were used to evaluate them. The relationship between the two variables revealed significant positive relationship between expressive suppression and doomscrolling behavior ($p = 0.031$) but not between Cognitive reappraisal and doomscrolling behavior ($p = 0.828$). These results indicate that those who repress their emotional expression can be exposed to doomscrolling as a coping mechanism. The paper emphasizes the importance of attention to healthy emotional processing techniques in online mental health services and the fact that emotional regulation skills should be incorporated into interventions aimed at helping young adults who have to deal with excessive exposure to the Internet.

Keywords- Doomscrolling, Emotional Regulation, Expressive Suppression, Cognitive Reappraisal

Introduction

In some cases where emotional regulation is harder, young adults have been trapped in a negative content consumption loop, also known as doomscrolling. It is a tendency that is frequent on social media platforms and is characterized by extensive and continuous exposure to distressing content of the news, which is associated with anxiety, emotional exhaustion, and poor psychological health (Rodrigues, 2022; Shabahang et al., 2024). Despite the recent years of attention to doomscrolling, especially at the pandemic time, little is known about the psychological underpinnings of this phenomenon. Previous research has already found that people who regularly doomscroll document emotional distress and a lack of cognitive clarity (Shabahang et al., 2024). Likewise, Rodrigues (2022) discovered that young adults who, as a result of doomscrolling, develop high levels of symptoms of anxiety and sleep disturbances. Although these results indicate the emotional impact of doomscrolling, the literature on the psychological aspects that might affect the behavior, especially, emotional regulation, is scarce.

Emotional regulation entails the measure in which individual may control feelings he or she has experienced, as well as the expression of the same (Gross and John, 2003). As postulated in the framework of Gross and John (2003) two major emotional

control strategies are cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression. Cognitive reappraisal is the ability to transform how one thinks about a situation, to change its emotional effect whereas expressive suppression is the propensity to suppress the external expression of feelings that one is already experiencing. Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ) is the tool which is often used to measure these two strategies and to identify personal tendencies in two dimensions. Past studies indicated that reappraisal is generally related to improved emotional results and well-being overall, whereas suppression is connected with the development of negative affect, inauthenticity, and the interpersonal strain (Gross and John, 2003; Verma et al., 2023). The concept of doomscrolling itself can be explained within the context of the model that Sharma, Lee, and Johnson (2022) had introduced, according to which it is a compulsive behaviour, specifically the regular and emotionally charged scrolling through negative news on a social networking platform. Their Doomscrolling Scale measures the severity, frequency and emotional stimuli of such a course of behavior. Although this construct has been examined in the context of distress and media overexposure, there was not much emphasis on how personal differences in the emotional regulation could forecast such online behaviors. Although the role of doomscrolling on mental health

is increasingly discussed, the available empirical evidence of the effects of particular emotional regulation mechanisms on this behavior in young adults is evidently deficient. The consequences of doomscrolling have been primarily studied and little attention has been paid to psychological antecedents of doomscrolling. Furthermore, not much evidence has been examined regarding the importance of emotional regulation strategies as protective or risk variables in the formation of doomscrolling habits.

Purpose of the Present Study

The present research will determine the effects of emotional regulation on the behavior of doomscrolling among young adults. Precisely, it aims at determining whether the cognitive reappraisal or expressive suppression can affect the doomscrolling behavior among the individuals aged 18-25 of the area of Delhi-NCR. The current study fills this research gap and provides an insight with regard to the potential digital-based mental health intervention and how online emotional coping strategies can be promoted to be more healthy.

Method

The Current study was grounded on a quantitative research design to identify how the use of emotional regulation strategies is effective in doomscrolling behavior in young adults. Simple linear regression was used to determine the extent to which variables of emotional regulation (cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression) could result in the levels of doomscrolling among the target population (Scribbr, 2025; University of Southern California Libraries, n.d.).

Participants

The current research involved the sample of 60 people, who are representatives of the age group of 18 to 25 years and who lived in the zones of Delhi-NCR region. The research population was identified via convenience sampling based on the academic circle and online platforms, including the What Sapp groups and student communities of a university. The informed consent and voluntary participation were accorded importance in the present study. The sample consisted of people with different educational backgrounds and sex orientations.

Tools

The study used two standardized self-report questionnaires. The first one was the Doomscrolling Scale created by Sharma, Lee, and Johnson (2022), and which is a scale of measuring the compulsive usage of negative online content, concentrating on frequency, the emotional reactivity, and time. The second one was the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ) by Gross and John (2003) that measures two types of emotion regulation strategies: cognitive reappraisal (the predisposition to reinterpret

situations to minimize the effect they have on the person) and expressive suppression (the predisposition to suppress the expression of emotions after experiencing them). The scales have proved to be reliable to acceptable reliability in past studies involving young adults.

Procedure

Before the study, all the ethical measures were adhered to. The respondents had to fill the questionnaires via a safe internet application. It was asked that the participants complete the Demographic Performa, then Doomscrolling Scale and the Emotional Regulation Questionnaire. The whole procedure lasted between 15 and 20 minutes. The confidentiality and anonymity were kept. Analysis of data was done after it was screened to eliminate the missing values and inconsistencies.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed with the help of SPSS version 29.0. All the variables were performed using descriptive statistics, such as means and standard deviations. The simple linear regression analysis was conducted to determine whether emotional regulation is the predictor of doomscrolling behavior among young adults. Also, the regression models were performed independently to test the predictive value of cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression. The level of significant was determined as p less than .05, and all the results were discussed in compliance with the APA 7 reporting standards (Hamilton College, n.d.; Research.com, 2025).

Results

The analysis of the data was performed using SPSS version 25. Simple linear regression was conducted to examine the impact of emotional regulation on doomscrolling.

Table 1

Regression Coefficients of Cognitive Reappraisal and Emotional Suppression on Doomscrolling

Variable	B	β	SE
Constant	1.35		.54
Cognitive Reappraisal	-.02	-.03	.09
Emotional Suppression	.22*	.30	.03
R ²	.08		

Note. N=60

*p<.05

As shown in Table 1, the overall model was not statistically significant, F (2, 57) = 2.57, p = .09, indicating that the two emotional regulation variables collectively do not explain a significant amount of variance in doomscrolling behavior.

When examined individually, cognitive reappraisal did not significantly predict doomscrolling scores, $B = -0.02$, $p = .83$. On the other hand, expressive suppression significantly predicted doomscrolling, $B = 0.22$, $t = 2.21$, $p = .031$. This suggests that individuals who suppress their emotional expressions are more likely to engage in doomscrolling, while the ability to cognitively reframe emotional experiences does not appear to influence doomscrolling behavior.

Discussion

The aim of the current research was to understand how doomscrolling can be affected by emotional regulation strategies among young adults of the age group 18-25 years in the Delhi NCR region. Although, overarching regression model was not established to be statistically significant, non the less, expressive suppression was observed as a highly important predictor of the doomscrolling behaviour. This observation is consistent with the previous study by Gross and John (2003) who highlighted the idea that expressive suppression in most cases results in heightened psychological distress and coping distortions. It can indicate that those who regularly experience the blocking of their feelings can use compulsive scrolling as a form of coping.

The behavior of doomscrolling was not significantly predicted by cognitive reappraisal. Although reappraisal has been established to be an adaptive behavioral mechanism of emotional control, its success might also be situational and contextual. Recent research published in *Affective Science* (2025) indicates that reappraisal is more effective with acute emotional episodes than with continuous moods, a fact that may help explain the minimal predictive ability of this type of reappraisal in connection with doomscrolling, which can be explained by constant exposure to distressing information.

Findings and conclusions can be compared with the research of Verocchio et al. (2022) who also found that emotional dysregulation and problematic use of social media have a strong connection. A further investigation by Abi Samra et al. (2025) pointed out that an emotional reactivity and incompetence in regulation skills are still considered to be the drivers of compulsive digital behaviors, such as excessive consumption of content.

This fact substantiates the idea that expressive suppression is one of the risk factors of participating in doomscrolling. Conversely, cognitive reappraisal might necessitate more specific interventions in order to be efficient in online behavior control.

Conclusion

The current research problem examined the role of the emotional regulation strategies in the doomscrolling behavior among the young adults in the Delhi-NCR. Even though the general

regression model was not statistically significant ($p = .086$), expressive suppression was identified as a significant predictor of doomscrolling, whereas cognitive reappraisal was not. These results corroborate earlier research that suppression is a more probable contributor to maladaptive results due to its implementation of banning emotional expression devoid of processing the emotion that drives this process (Gross & John, 2003; Cutuli, 2014). Reappraisal on the other hand is likely to be associated with more healthful emotional functioning and possibly needs contextual aid to have protective outcomes (Cutuli, 2014). The importance of expressive suppression as a predictor underscores its possible application in the psychological processes of compulsive consumption of negative online content. Interventions that aim to reduce suppression and enhance adaptive emotional processing may serve to reduce the levels of doomscrolling and increase emotional resiliency among young adults.

Constraints and Future Projections.

A number of limitations were present in the current study and needed to be taken into account.

To begin with, the sample was too small and it comprised of, just 60 respondents operating in one geographical area and this might affect the generalizability of the findings. Therefore, the future research ought to be on the incorporation of a more heterogeneous sample to increase the external validity.

Second, the researchers, cross-sectional self-report technique that could restrict the use of causal reference because the variables were not subject to experimental manipulation.

Third, trade level assessments were used to measure techniques of emotional regulation and this may have failed to capture context specific regulation techniques. Instead, other research designs such as longitudinal and experimental research design would offer greater insight into the actual world settings. (Cutuli, 2014).

Fourth, additional conditions can also lead to do scrolling behavior such as the personality (such as neuroticism), or fear of missing out, anxiety, or sleep quality. It is possible to incorporate such variables in future studies to learn about their potential mediating and moderating effect (Verocchio et al., 2022; Samra, et al., 2025).

The other weakness is that the cultural norms on expressive suppression might not be the same in a collectivistic and an individualistic society, and might also affect doomscrolling behaviour (Markus and Kitayama, 1991; Wikipedia, 2019). Future studies may therefore explore the influence of culture to support the knowledge on how expresses inhibition would affect digital behaviors in various groups.

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