Doomscrolling Among Generation Z Social Media Users on Twitter and Instagram in Indonesia
Doomscrolling pada Gen-Z Pengguna Media Sosial Twitter dan Instagram di Indonesia

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Abstract :

Generation Z (1996–2012) as digital natives grew up in an era of technology that plays a major role in their lives. Doomscrolling, the habit of scrolling through social media for negative content, has become a significant phenomenon among Gen Z. This study aims to explore the doomscrolling habit of Instagram and Twitter users in Indonesia, using a qualitative approach with semi-structured interviews with three Gen Z women. The analysis revealed four main themes underlying doomscrolling behavior. Curiosity refers to the desire to continue seeking information, even the negative content. Fear of missing out (FOMO) drives individuals to stay connected and not miss out on something trending. Anxiety emerges as a trigger and consequence of consuming negative content. Finally, stress arises from prolonged exposure to negative news and not having the ability to stop scrolling. These findings highlight the need for greater self-regulation and digital awareness among Generation Z to reduce the psychological impacts of doomscrolling.

## 1.   Introduction

Doomscrolling is defined as the habit of continuously viewing and scrolling through social media and news feeds, where users obsessively seek out negative information such as crises and disasters (Satici et al., 2023). The term "doomscrolling" first emerged in 2020, coinciding with the increased use of digital devices during the Covid-19 pandemic (Barabak, 2020). This behavior arose as a response to the constant exposure to pandemic-related news, prompting many individuals to spend hours scrolling through social media or news portals to keep up with the latest developments in the situation. Amid the global COVID-19 crisis, this behavior has been linked to increased anxiety, depression, and fear among the general public (Gao, et al., 2021). The habit of doomscrolling as explained by George et al. (2024) involves repeated exposure to threat-based content, which over-stimulates the limbic system—particularly the amygdala—triggering prolonged stress responses such as elevated cortisol levels. This not only impairs cognitive functions like reasoning and memory through prefrontal cortex fatigue and hippocampal disruption, but also reinforces compulsive scrolling behaviors via dopamine-driven reward circuits (George et al., 2024). Globally, the phenomenon of doomscrolling has had a serious impact on productivity, psychological well-being, and the quality of social relationships. This is supported by recent studies showing that doomscrolling is significantly associated with higher levels of anxiety, depression, and stress due to excessive consumption of negative information (Gao et al., 2021; George et al., 2024). Similar effects are observed in Indonesia, where this behavior is increasingly prevalent among university students. A study conducted at Universitas Negeri Padang explored the relationship between doomscrolling and the oversharing of information on social media. The study found that students spent approximately 3–5 hours per day on doomscrolling, which negatively impacted their academic concentration and mental health (Faunesya & Ardoni, 2024). These findings indicate that the global impact of doomscrolling is also reflected in
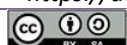
the local context of Indonesia, necessitating serious attention in the form of digital education and relevant psychosocial interventions.

The emergence of doomscrolling cannot be separated from the digital habits of today's youth, especially Generation Z (Gen Z). Gen Z refers to the generation born between 1996 and 2012. As digital natives, they grow and develop amid rapid technological advances, where the internet and social media play a central role in daily life (Sunyoto, 2024). According to a survey by the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII), Gen Z is the largest group of internet users in Indonesia as of early 2024, accounting for 34.4% of the total internet user population (Pebriyani, 2024). Platforms like Instagram are recorded as the most frequently used by Gen Z, with a usage rate of 51.9%, while Twitter usage is only 1.98% (Ahdiat, 2024). However, data from Gadgetiva shows that Gen Z aged 18 to 24 dominate Twitter users in Indonesia at 43% (Aliya, 2022). The high involvement of Gen Z on social media makes them the group most vulnerable to the phenomenon of doomscrolling and its negative impacts. The urge to keep consuming negative information often arises from an individual's desire to understand uncontrollable situations and fill existing information gaps (Ahn et al., 2021). The hope of finding comforting information to relieve anxiety often ends with exposure to even more negative and pessimistic news. As a result, individuals get trapped in a repetitive cycle that worsens anxiety, worry, and emotional distress, thereby increasing stress levels. Despite being aware of the impacts, individuals generally cannot resist the urge to keep seeking information (Robertson et al., 2023). This cycle will continue as long as individuals feel the need to find more information, even though the results worsen their psychological condition.

According to Anand et al. (2022), doomscrolling can trigger various emotional experiences, such as intense anxiety, uncertainty, worry, fear, and psychological stress. This condition has an impact on sleep quality disorders, difficulty in carrying out daily activities, and decreased appetite. Instead of helping to reduce stress, individuals who are trapped in this habit actually spend more time in digital platform with the hope of improving their mood (Liu & Ma, 2019). According to research by (Yasin et al., 2022), excessive use of social media has also been shown to cause mental and physical disorders. Thus, it will be difficult for individuals to get out of the habit doomscrolling. This makes the habit of doomscrolling difficult to stop. In the long term, this behavior can have a significant impact on mental well-being individuals (Buchanan et al., 2021). Through these impacts, Gen Z as active social media users will be more susceptible to this habit. Although the doomscrolling phenomenon is widely discussed globally, very few studies have discussed this behavior with the habits of Gen Z in Indonesia. As a generation with a high level of internet penetration, it is important to understand how these habits affect mental well-being, including in terms of anxiety, stress, and overall quality of life.

This study aims to explore further about doomscrolling on Generation Z in Indonesia, especially on Generation Z users of the Instagram and Twitter platforms. Specifically, the study will explore the motivations and psychological impacts arising from doomscrolling. Through this approach, research is expected to provide deeper insight into the relationship between habits, doomscrolling, and social media consumption patterns of Gen Z in Indonesia. In addition, this study also seeks to identify unique factors that influence this behavior in the context of Indonesia's digital culture, which has its own characteristics. Studies related to doomscrolling in Indonesia are still limited, especially in terms of comprehensive exploration of the psychological factors underlying this behavior and its broader impact on psychosocial well-being. Although doomscrolling has been widely researched in Western countries, in-depth studies of this behavior in the context of Generation Z's digital culture are still very limited, even though they are very active and vulnerable social media users. Therefore, this study aims to address this lack of understanding.

2. Methods

This research uses a qualitative approach involving three Generation Z women born between 1997 and 2012, with the initials A, E, and N. The subjects were selected based on their characteristics as members of Generation Z, who grew up in the digital era and are known for their high level of digital engagement. The inclusion criteria were active university students, aged between 18 and 25 years, and actively using social media. All three are students at various universities in Surabaya, with

digital experiences and habits relevant to the research topic. Data collection was conducted through open and semi-structured interviews. This allows subjects to share experiences freely while still following a guideline of questions designed to support the research objectives. To record data, two mobile phones were used, one to record the interview audio and one for visual documentation, to ensure accurate and comprehensive data.

Interviews were conducted in different locations that were convenient for the subjects, namely Ketintang, Surabaya University, and Sambikerep. The interview process took place on December 11, 13, and 14, 2024 with an average duration ranging from 13 to 25 minutes, depending on the depth of discussion with each subject and comprising approximately 20 to 25 questions. Data were analyzed using the interactive model of qualitative data analysis developed by Miles and Huberman (1994), which consists of four interrelated steps: data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data obtained through interviews were reduced by filtering relevant information and then presented in the form of tables or thematic quotes. Drawing conclusions was done by interpreting the data that has been compiled, followed by verification to ensure the accuracy of the findings. This approach ensures that the research results remain relevant and in-depth. This analysis produced key themes that describe the impact on mental health.
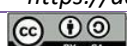
3. Results

The study involved three subjects who had habits of doomscrolling, namely participant 1 (A), participant 2 (E), and participant 3 (N). The three participants are generation Z students in the city of Surabaya who use social media Twitter and Instagram. Based on interviews and observations, this study found four themes that are relevant to motivation and the impact of habits like doomscrolling. The theme encompasses curiosity, fear of missing out (FOMO), anxiety and worry, and stress.

Table 1. Theme Table

Theme	Description
Curiosity	Curiosity is one of the primary drivers of doomscrolling behavior. A high level of curiosity about viral issues on social media compels individuals to continue scrolling in search of the latest developments. This urge is no longer momentary but often evolves into a persistent psychological need that is difficult to control. As more information becomes available, the desire to stay updated intensifies, reinforcing a repetitive cycle of doomscrolling.
Fear of Missing Out (FoMO)	The participants experienced FOMO, or fear of missing out on information. This concern about not being up to date is often accompanied by a desire to remain engaged in social conversations within their environment. The need to stay relevant in everyday discussions serves as a strong motivation to continuously access news, particularly viral content. Although they were aware of the potential negative impacts of this habit, such as mental fatigue and anxiety, the FOMO-driven impulse often proved to be more dominant and difficult to resist.
Anxiety and Worry	Feelings of anxiety and worry serve both as triggers and psychological consequences of doomscrolling. Continuous exposure to negative news—such as violence, disasters, or social conflicts—can lead to heightened anxiety. In such cases, the drive to seek additional information often intensifies the anxiety rather than alleviating it. Even when individuals already feel anxious or emotionally distressed, the compulsion to keep searching for updates persists, reflecting an addictive pattern of information consumption.

| Stress | Stress emerges as a significant consequence of the doomscrolling habit. The constant pressure to stay updated with the latest information imposes a mental and emotional burden, often resulting in sleep disturbances, mood fluctuations, and reduced productivity. In addition to its psychological impact, doomscrolling has also been linked to physiological effects, particularly in the form of disrupted sleep patterns. |

a. Curiosity

Participants felt compelled to continue scrolling through the news because they were curious and had a great sense of curiosity about viral issues, whether they were directly related to their lives or not.

> "*I often check even though I have nothing to do with it, it's just out of curiosity, like what's going on...*"–A

In addition, it is difficult for participants to stop scrolling through the news while they remain curious about news developments.

> "*...sometimes it's like I can't just stop like that. The thing is, yes...it's like I'm curious too, right, I want to know more.*"–N

b. Fear of Missing Out (FOMO)

Fear of Missing Out can arise due to fear of being left behind on information. Participants read the news so as not to be left behind on information and to be able to update information.

> "*It's important, what's more, it's not only discussed among students, even lecturers also feel the need to stay updated about this news.*"–N

> "*It's like I want to know what's viral today. Sometimes it feels like there is a kind of urge to check so as not to miss any information. You could say that's FOMO I think.*"– E

The desire to stay relevant in social circles or current trends are the main reasons why individuals constantly scroll through news, especially viral news. In the interviews, participants indicated that the need to stay relevant in social discussions or understand the context of major issues was the main motivation for the doomscrolling behavior.

> "*Negative news often makes me think about it because I'm afraid of missing out on information or not being able to relate to my friends conversations.*"–N

c. Anxiety and Worry

Anxiety and worry are one of the main psychological impacts that appear in participants as a result of the habit of constantly scrolling through negative news.

> "*I feel anxious when negative news such as murder, disease outbreaks, and rape circulate on social media.*"–A.

Despite knowing the impact of anxiety and worry, participants continued to engage in doomscrolling. This condition is worsened by the tendency to continuously seek information despite being aware of its negative impact.

> "*Even though I feel uncomfortable and scared when reading negative news, I still scroll through it.*"–A

d. Stress

Stress is one of the most obvious impacts of doomscrolling, especially due to the pressure to keep up to date with current issues. The pressure to keep up to date with updates, such as during a pandemic is a form of stress that encourages participants to continue looking for deeper information on social media.

> "*Because this outbreak is a disease that can be said to be global, I became paranoid, afraid of being infected or not knowing the latest developments. From that fear and worry, I started to find out more about COVID through news on Twitter. Every time I open the application, news about daily cases, the number of victims, or new variants always appears, making me more curious and anxious at the same time.*"–E

Doomscrolling also negatively impacted participants' sleep quality. Constant negative information caused difficulty sleeping or waking up feeling anxious.

> *"Sometimes, I have trouble sleeping or wake up feeling anxious because my brain can't stop processing all that information."* –E

Participant N explained that negative news often made him feel that bad things could happen to him unexpectedly.

> *"Sometimes, I feel like bad news on social media can happen to me because of unexpected bad events. It makes me stressed and worried."* –N

A similar thing was also expressed by Participant E, who felt that news such as murders or disease outbreaks often triggered feelings of worry that led to stress.

> *"Negative news like murder, disease outbreak, or rape often makes me worry. Sometimes, it makes me stressed too."* –E

Stress caused by habits like doomscrolling not only affects the physical condition, but also disrupts the overall mood of the participants.

> *"If you read too much negative news, your mood becomes heavy. It's like you're sad, worried, or even thinking about it all the time, making you stressed."* –N

Overall, the stress caused by doomscrolling not only affected mental health, but also disrupted participants' sleep quality and emotional stability. Constant exposure to negative news created a cycle of anxiety and stress that was difficult to escape, with a long-term impact on their mood and psychological well-being.

4. Discussion

This study found that the behavior of doomscrolling in generation Z are influenced by various psychological and social factors, with a significant impact on their mental well-being. Key findings suggest that curiosity, Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), anxiety, and stress are the main drivers and impacts that arise due to habit doomscrolling.

Curiosity and FOMO as the main drivers of doomscrolling often mutually reinforcing. Generation Z feels compelled to continuously seek out information that not only satisfies their curiosity but also ensures that they remain socially relevant. However, this drive often leads them into a cycle that is difficult to break, where they are constantly exposed to negative news. Research by (Sharma et al., 2022a) notes that excessive curiosity about negative information reinforces an individual's engagement in doomscrolling, which ultimately has a negative impact on their well-being.

Curiosity was found to be one of the main drivers of doomscrolling. Participants showed a tendency to keep scrolling through news because they wanted to know more about viral issues, even though they were not directly related to their lives. This can be explained by Berlyne's (1960) theory of epistemic curiosity, which suggests that individuals are motivated to seek understanding when confronted with problems, puzzles, or incongruent information/situations that involve uncertainty or a lack of harmony between pieces of knowledge (Suditu & Safta, 2021). In the digital context, ambiguous or surprising news creates cognitive conflict that triggers the urge to continue searching for information, in order to reduce tension and fulfill the need for understanding. Research (Shabahang et al., 2023) supports this finding, stating that curiosity often triggers compulsive behavior in consuming negative news. Research by (Anand et al., 2022) also noted that curiosity about complex or unexpected situations can strengthen the tendency doomscrolling. In addition, the habit doomscrolling also driven by the need to understand uncontrolled information and the fear of missing important information (Ahn et al., 2021; Sharma et al., 2022a). In this context, curiosity becomes a cognitive element that is often reinforced by social media algorithms, which continue to present related news to maintain user engagement. Various cases suggest that this curiosity is accompanied by the need to understand complex and uncontrollable situations, which is typical of doomscrolling behavior.

Apart from curiosity, fear of missing out (FOMO) can also be an important factor in motivating doomscrolling behavior. Participants feel the need to stay connected with trends or breaking news to stay informed and relevant in their social circles. This can be explained by the self-determination theory, which is the concept of psychological needs, one of which is relatedness. Relatedness refers to the need to feel connected to and accepted by others within a social environment. (Wang et al., 2019). Research by (Satici et al., 2023), shows that FOMO is closely related to social media addiction and doomscrolling which ultimately increases anxiety. In some

cases, participants admitted that the need to always be "updated" increased their anxiety, especially when they felt that not knowing certain news could affect their social relationships or interactions.

On the other hand, the anxiety and stress that arise from doomscrolling create a detrimental chain effect. Individuals who feel anxious or stressed due to exposure to negative news tend to use doomscrolling as a mechanism for seeking a sense of security or certainty. However, instead of reducing anxiety, this behavior actually worsens their emotional condition. Anxiety and worry are the main impacts of this doomscrolling. This phenomenon can be explained through the Cognitive Therapy approach developed by Aaron T. Beck. According to him, an individual's emotional and behavioral responses are strongly influenced by how they interpret an event. Individuals who are continuously exposed to negative news tend to develop automatic negative thoughts (Mustofa & Nurjannah, 2022). Participants report feeling worried due to prolonged exposure to negative news, such as news about disasters, violence, or disease outbreaks. This is consistent with research by (Ytre-Arne & Moe, 2021) which shows that doomscrolling worsens emotional conditions and increases individuals' levels of hypervigilance. These impacts are often exacerbated by cognitive biases, such as focusing on negative information, which makes individuals feel helpless in the face of ongoing global or local situations. In addition, stress is the most significant impact of the habit of doomscrolling. Participants reported that the pressure to stay updated with the latest information, especially during times of crisis such as the pandemic, caused them to feel stressed and have difficulty sleeping. This experience aligns with the concept of digital stress, which refers to the distress caused by the continuous use of digital media, particularly in social and relational contexts. Digital stress encompasses phenomena such as overconnection, and online hypervigilance, all of which are triggered by constant exposure to an overwhelming and often stressful flow of information (Yang & Smith, 2024). The compulsive need to monitor updates, particularly during uncertain events, can drain an individual's cognitive and emotional resources, leading to anxiety, fatigue, and disturbed sleep patterns. This study supports research (Shimoga et al., 2019), which shows that doomscrolling correlated with increased digital stress and sleep disturbances. Participants also revealed that the information their brains were constantly processing triggered mood disturbances like feeling heavy, sadness, and emotional instability. In many cases, this stress creates a vicious cycle, where individuals feel compelled to continue seeking information despite realizing the negative impact on their mental health. This feeling of stress can also affect an individual's motivation to carry out daily activities. Constant exposure to negative news creates feelings of helplessness that hinder their productivity. A study by (Anand et al., 2022), shows that this behavior increases feelings of pessimism about life, which results in decreased motivation to pursue personal or professional goals. As a result, Generation Z, who are trapped in doomscrolling not only face psychological challenges but also lose focus and direction in their lives.

In addition, the social impact of doomscrolling also needs to be considered. Generation Z who are trapped in this behavior often experience disruption in their social interactions. Dependence on social media for up-to-date information reduces their ability to connect directly with others. This is exacerbated by feelings of anxiety and stress, which make them reluctant to interact outside the digital world (Starkman, 2024). These findings underscore the importance of interventions designed to help Generation Z manage their media consumption more healthily. Increasing digital literacy and promoting balance in social media use can be the first step to reducing the negative impacts of doomscrolling. Educational institutions can provide digital literacy programs and awareness campaigns about the negative impact of doomscrolling. Counselors may also offer guidance focused on emotional regulation and stress management to help students develop healthier online habits. By understanding the motivating factors and their impact, efforts to improve the mental health and well-being of Generation Z can be carried out more effectively.

5. Conclusions

Based on the results of the analysis in this study, it aims to further explore doomscrolling in Gen Z in Indonesia, especially in Gen Z users of the Instagram and Twitter platforms. In general, overall, this study provides important insights that doomscrolling is not only an individual issue, but also a social phenomenon that requires more serious attention. Therefore, it is important for every individual, especially Generation Z, to be wiser in managing time and managing social media
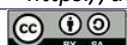
consumption so that the negative impact of doomscrolling on mental and emotional health can be minimized. The suggestions that can be given are to develop a digital literacy program for education on the impact of doomscrolling and the implementation of digital time management, especially for generation Z. In addition, further research is needed to understand the psychological and social factors underlying this behavior in order to design more effective interventions that can be utilized by educational institutions and communities to support healthy digital habits.

6. CRediT Authorship Contribution Statement

Vania Fidella : Conceptualization, Resources, Data Collection–participant E, Qualitative data analysis, Methodology, Validation, Investigation–participant E, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing, and Project administration. **Shafa Adilah Panggabean:** Data collection – participant A, Qualitative data analysis, Methodology Development, Investigation–participant A, Validation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing, Translation, and Project administration. **Shofiyyah Aabidah:** Resources, Data collection – participant N, Qualitative data analysis, Methodology, Investigation – participant N, Validation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing, and Translation. **Meita Santi Budiani:** Validation, Methodology development, Supervision, and Funding acquisition.

7. Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors hereby declare that there is no conflict of interest, either financial or personal, that could affect the objectivity and integrity of this scientific work. All research activities, data analysis, and preparation of the report were carried out independently and responsibly, without any influence from any party.

8. Declaration of Generative AI and Assistive Technologies in the Writing Process

The authors states that AI technology was used in the preparation of the article, where AI Chat GPT technology was used in the preparation and improvement of paragraph text alignment, while the AI DeepL was used to review the editing of paragraph text into English. The authors have reviewed that the entire content of the article produced with the help of AI technology complies with academic ethical standards.

9. Funding

10. Ethical Approval

The authors confirm that the research with the three participants has complied with the Code of Ethics of the Indonesian Psychological Association (HIMPSI) and Law Number 23 of 2022 concerning Psychological Education and Services for research conducted in Indonesia. The authors declare that they will protect the rights of the participants, maintain the integrity of the research, and enhance the credibility of the published findings.

11. Acknowledgments

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