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# The Psychological Toll of Doomscrolling: Big Five Personality Traits as Predictors of Mental Health Outcomes

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### **ABSTRACT:**

Doomscrolling, the act of continuously consuming negative news online, has become a pervasive behavior in the digital age. This study explores the relationship between Big Five personality traits and doomscrolling behavior, with a focus on mental health outcomes. A quantitative correlational design was employed, with a sample of 73 young adults completing a structured questionnaire assessing personality traits, doomscrolling behavior, and mental health outcomes.

The results indicate that individuals with higher levels of openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism tend to engage in more doomscrolling behavior. Furthermore, doomscrolling was found to have a negative impact on mental health outcomes, including increased anxiety, depression, and emotional exhaustion. The findings suggest that personality traits play a significant role in shaping doomscrolling behavior and subsequent mental health outcomes.

This study contributes to the growing body of research on the psychological effects of doomscrolling and highlights the importance of considering individual differences in personality traits when examining the impact of doomscrolling on mental health. The findings have implications for the development of targeted interventions aimed at mitigating the negative effects of doomscrolling on mental health.

Overall, this study provides insight into the complex relationship between personality traits, doomscrolling behavior, and mental health outcomes, and highlights the need for further research in this area. In the past few years, the concept of "doom-scrolling," which is completely new in the field of mental health research, has gained a great deal of public interest. The phenomenon of enhanced negative affect following excessive exposure to pandemic-related media has been dubbed "doom scrolling."



### **KEYWORDS**:

Doomscrolling, Big five Personality traits, Openness to Experience, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, Neuroticism, Mental Health

### **INTRODUCTION:**

A report by *Common Sense Media* (2021) found that 50% of teens spend more than 3 hours per day on social media, with a substantial proportion indicating negative mental health outcomes, such as anxiety and depression. Teens who were classified as "frequent doomscrollers" reported a 25% higher likelihood of feeling depressed or isolated compared to their peers who spent less time on social media.<sup>1</sup>

#### 1. DOOMSCROLLING

According to an article published by *wikipedia.org*, doomscrolling refers to the act of continuously consuming negative news online, often leading to increased anxiety and stress. <sup>2</sup> The *UK National Health Service (NHS)* has highlighted this behaviour as a concern, noting that it can exacerbate mental health issues.

**Lupusor, (2021)** has found that doomscrolling can heighten feelings of stress, anxiety, and depression. It has become increasingly prevalent during heightened societal stress, such as during the COVID-19 pandemic, political turmoil, or natural disasters. In the digital age, with easy access to a 24/7 news cycle, individuals may feel compelled to keep up with unfolding events. However, this constant consumption of negative information has been shown to lead to a range of negative emotional and psychological outcomes. Individuals engaging in doomscrolling may experience a sense of helplessness, exacerbating their psychological distress due to constant exposure to global crises.<sup>3</sup>

#### 2. IMPACT OF DOOMSCROLLING AND MENTAL HEALTH

According to a 2021 report by *Pew Research Centre*, around **55%** of U.S. adults said they often felt overwhelmed by the news they saw, and about **38%** admitted that they would avoid the news in the future if it made them feel anxious. The study also indicated that individuals who frequently consumed news from social media platforms were more likely to experience **higher stress levels** compared to those who relied on traditional news outlets.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Common Sense Media. (2021). Social Media, Social Life: Teens Reveal Their Experiences. Common Sense Media.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> de.wikipedia.org

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup>Lupusor, D (2021). The psychological effects of doomscrolling. Psychology.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Pew Research Centre. (2021). The state of the news media: 2021. Pew Research Centre



Doomscrolling—the act of continuously consuming negative news online—has been linked to various mental health issues. Research indicates that this behavior can lead to increased anxiety, depression, and stress. For instance, a study published in the *Journal of Affective Disorders* found that daily exposure to pandemic-related social media content was associated with elevated depression and PTSD symptoms during the initial months of the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, a study highlighted by *The Guardian* suggests that doomscrolling is linked to poor physical and mental health outcomes.<sup>6</sup>

Furthermore, research published in the *Journal of Medical Internet Research* indicates that doomscrolling may lead to higher levels of psychological distress and lower levels of mental well-being, life satisfaction, and harmony in life.<sup>7</sup>

The consumption of negative news through doomscrolling has been linked to deteriorating mental health outcomes. Several studies indicate that prolonged exposure to negative information can increase anxiety, depression, and emotional exhaustion Chou, (2020)<sup>8</sup>. A study by Appel et al. (2020) confirmed that exposure to negative news is associated with heightened stress levels and a more pessimistic outlook on life.<sup>9</sup>

#### 3. THE ROLE OF PERSONALITY IN DIGITAL BEHAVIOR

Personality plays a significant role in how individuals engage with digital content, including news consumption. The Big Five Personality Traits—Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism—are key factors that influence individual behaviour, both in offline and online environments **McCrae & Costa**, (2004). For instance, individuals high in neuroticism, which is characterized by emotional instability and a tendency toward anxiety, are more likely to be drawn to negative news, reinforcing their negative

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> theguardian.com

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Chou, W.-Y. S. (2020). Social media use and mental health outcomes: A systematic review of the literature. Journal of Medical Internet Research, 22(3), e17115. https://doi.org/10.2196/17115

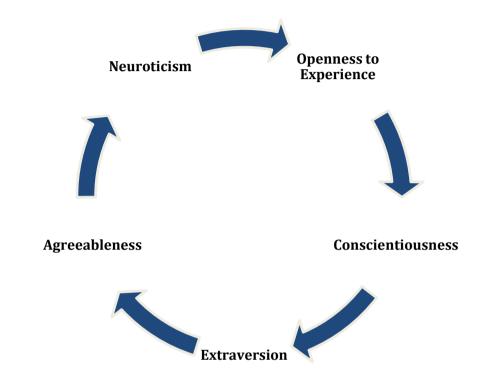
<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Appel, M., Greitemeyer, T., & Schulz, T. (2020). The effects of negative news on people's mental health. Journal of Media Psychology, 32(1), 25-37. https://doi.org/10.1027/1864-1105/a000276

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> McCrae, R. R., & Costa, P. T. (2004). A contemplated revision of the NEO five-factor inventory. Personality and Individual Differences, 36(3), 587-596. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0191-8869(03)00118-1



emotional states **Wilson**, (2021).<sup>11</sup> Conversely, individuals with high levels of conscientiousness or agreeableness may be less susceptible to doomscrolling as they are typically more goal-oriented or empathetic, which might make them more selective in their media consumption.

### 4. BIG FIVE PERSONALITY TRAITS



SR. NO.	BIG FIVE PERSONALITY TRAIT	EXPLANATION	KEY FINDINGS
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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Wilson, S. (2021). The personality traits and media consumption habits of doomscrollers. Journal of Cyberpsychology, 35(4), 52-68. https://doi.org/10.1080/02141771.2020.1773852



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1	Neuroticism (Emotional instability, anxiety, stress)	Individuals high in neuroticism are more prone to negative emotions, which makes them more likely to engage in doomscrolling. Their heightened emotional reactions can lead to increased stress and anxiety.	<ul> <li>Neuroticism is linked to excessive news consumption as a maladaptive coping mechanism (Frison &amp; Eggermont, 2015).</li> <li>Higher emotional distress from negative media exposure (Wilson, 2021).</li> </ul>
2	Extraversion (Sociability, positive emotions, impulsivity)	Extraverted individuals tend to focus on social engagement and positive experiences, making them less likely to engage in doomscrolling. Low extraversion increases the likelihood of seeking stimulation through online platforms.	• Extraverts report lower levels of anxiety in response to negative news (McCrae & Costa, 2004).
3	Openness to  Experience (Curiosity, cognitive flexibility, openness to new information)	Openness leads to more engagement with diverse media, including negative news. While this may increase exposure to distressing content, it also promotes critical engagement, potentially mitigating negative effects.	• Openness to experience correlates with higher interest in news, which can lead to greater emotional reactivity (Frison & Eggermont, 2015).
4	Agreeableness (Altruism,	Agreeable individuals focus on empathy and community, reducing their tendency to doomscroll. They are less	Agreeable individuals     have greater resilience to     emotional distress from



	empathy,	affected by negative news due	news exposure (Wilson,
	cooperativeness)	to their supportive social	2021).
		networks and concern for	• Stronger social support
		others.	buffers stress (González et
			al., 2021).
			• Conscientiousness is
5	Conscientiousness (Self-discipline, goal-orientation, responsibility)	Conscientious individuals are more organized and goal-oriented, making them less likely to engage in doomscrolling. They exhibit better emotional regulation and controlled media consumption.	linked to controlled media consumption, leading to less exposure to negative news (McCrae & Costa, 2004).  Better emotional resilience and coping strategies when exposed to stress (Hampson et al., 2006).

### 5. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to explore how the Big Five personality traits predict the mental health outcomes associated with doomscrolling. By examining the relationship between personality traits and doomscrolling behaviors, this research aims to identify whether specific traits, such as high neuroticism or low conscientiousness, make individuals more susceptible to negative psychological consequences from excessive news consumption. Additionally, the study seeks to explore how these personality traits might act as protective factors or exacerbate the negative effects of doomscrolling on mental health, such as stress, anxiety, and depression. The findings of this study could inform targeted interventions and strategies aimed at improving mental well-being in an increasingly digital world.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Sr.	Author(s)	Study Title	<b>Key Findings and Conclusion</b>	Detailed Analysis
No.	& Year			



1	Sharma,	"Impact of	Neuroticism was positively	This study found that
	A., &	Social Media	correlated with increased	individuals high in
	Agarwal,	on Mental	doomscrolling behavior and	neuroticism are more prone
	S. (2020)	Health: Role	emotional distress.	to emotional distress from
		of Personality	Extraversion served as a	negative media content,
		Traits"	protective factor. Conclusion:	while extraverted
			High neuroticism leads to more	individuals engage less with
			engagement with negative	negative content due to
			content, increasing anxiety and	more social engagement.
			stress.	
2	Gupta, P.,	"Social Media	Neuroticism and openness to	The study observed that
	& Singh,	and Mental	<b>experience</b> led to increased	openness leads individuals
	S. (2019)	Health in the	social media use and exposure to	to engage with diverse
		Indian	distressing news. Conclusion:	media, including negative
		Context: A	Openness moderates the effect	news, but this engagement
		Personality	of doomscrolling on mental	is tempered by the ability to
		Perspective"	health by fostering critical	critically process the
			thinking.	information.
3	Rani, M.,	"Social Media	Neuroticism significantly	The research found that
	& Verma,	Addiction and	correlated with social media	neurotic individuals are
	R. (2018)	Emotional	addiction, increasing	prone to excessive social
		Well-being:	vulnerability to doomscrolling.	media use, leading to
		The Influence	Conscientiousness served as a	negative emotional
		of Big Five	protective factor. <b>Conclusion</b> :	outcomes. Conscientious
		Personality	Conscientious individuals	individuals showed better
		Traits"	regulate their media	control over social media
			consumption better.	engagement, leading to
				fewer negative emotional
				responses.



4	Kapoor,	"Personality	Extraversion and	The study showed that	
	S., &	Traits and	agreeableness were linked with	individuals who score high	
	Sharma,	Digital Media	lower levels of doomscrolling,	on extraversion and	
	N. (2021)	Usage in	while <b>neuroticism</b> correlated	agreeableness tend to focus	
		Young	with higher levels. Conclusion:	on positive social	
		Adults"	Extraverted individuals engage	interactions online,	
			in more positive online	decreasing exposure to	
			interactions, reducing emotional	negative content. Neurotic	
			distress.	individuals, however,	
				engage more with	
				distressing news.	
5	Kumar,	"The	Neuroticism and openness to	The research highlighted	
	P., &	Relationship	<b>experience</b> led to frequent news	that individuals with high	
	Yadav, A.	Between	consumption, often negative,	neuroticism tend to	
	(2022)	Personality	increasing anxiety. Conclusion:	consume more negative	
		Traits and	Personality traits such as	news, increasing anxiety.	
		Online News	neuroticism significantly	Open individuals engage	
		Consumption:	influence online news	more with diverse content	
		An Indian	consumption patterns.	but can buffer the negative	
		Study"		impact through critical	
				engagement.	
6	Bansal,	"Personality	Conscientiousness was	The study found that	
	S., &	and Digital	negatively correlated with	conscientious individuals	
	Chopra,	Media Use:	excessive media consumption,	tend to avoid excessive	
	S. (2019)	Exploring the	including doomscrolling.	news consumption,	
		Effects on	Conclusion: Highly	managing their emotional	
		Emotional	conscientious individuals engage	well-being better by limiting	
		Health"	in less negative media	exposure to distressing	
			consumption.	content.	



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7	Patil, A.,	"Impact of	Neuroticism was linked to	The research confirmed that
	& Desai,	Social Media	higher levels of emotional	neurotic individuals
	M. (2020)	Consumption	distress from social media	experience heightened
		on Mental	exposure. Agreeableness	anxiety from social media,
		Health: A	reduced emotional impact,	while agreeable individuals
		Cross-	fostering better coping	reported using social media
		Sectional	strategies. Conclusion: Neurotic	for social support, reducing
		Study Among	individuals are more affected by	emotional distress.
		Indian Youth"	negative content.	

### **RESEARCH GAPS**

- 1. **Lack of longitudinal studies:** Most existing studies on doomscrolling and mental health outcomes are cross-sectional, limiting our understanding of the long-term effects of doomscrolling on mental health.
- 2. **Insufficient attention to individual differences in doomscrolling behavior:** Research has primarily focused on the average effects of doomscrolling on mental health, neglecting individual differences in doomscrolling behavior (e.g., frequency, duration, content).
- 3. Lack of experimental designs: Most studies have employed correlational designs, making it difficult to establish causality between doomscrolling and mental health outcomes. Experimental designs (e.g., randomized controlled trials) are needed to better understand the causal relationships between doomscrolling and mental health.
- 4. **Need for more nuanced measures of mental health outcomes:** Existing studies have primarily relied on self-report measures of mental health outcomes (e.g., anxiety, depression), which may be subject to biases and limitations. More nuanced measures (e.g., physiological measures, behavioural observations) are needed to better capture the complex effects of doomscrolling on mental health.



### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:**

- 1. **Research Design**: The research follows a quantitative correlational design to examine the relationship between Big Five personality traits and doomscrolling behaviors. This approach allows for assessing how personality traits influence social media consumption patterns and their psychological effects.
- **2. Sampling Unit**: The sampling unit consists of young adults (ages 18-35) from urban India, a group that is typically more engaged in social media and prone to doomscrolling behaviors.
- **3. Sampling Design**: A stratified random sampling design is used to ensure the sample is representative of various subgroups based on gender, education, and employment status. This method ensures that all target population segments are adequately represented for more accurate results.
- **4. Sample Size**: The study aims to recruit 74 **participants** to ensure a sufficient sample size for statistical analysis, allowing for the detection of medium to large effect sizes in relationships between personality traits and doomscrolling behavior.
- 5. Tool of Data Collection: A Structured questionnaire is used to collect the data.
- **6. Method of Data Analysis**: The data is analyzed using **descriptive statistics**, **Pearson's correlation**, and **multiple regression analysis** to understand the relationships between personality traits, doomscrolling, and mental health outcomes. This will help identify key predictors and the strength of these associations.

### **RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

- 1. To Examine the Relationship Between Doomscrolling and Mental Health: Investigate the psychological effects of doomscrolling, including anxiety, depression, stress, and emotional exhaustion.
- 2. **To analyze the Role of Big Five Personality Traits in Doomscrolling Behavior**: Assess how individual differences in personality traits (Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness) influence the likelihood of engaging in doomscrolling.
- 3. **To identify Psychological Outcomes Linked to Doomscrolling**: Explore specific mental health outcomes (e.g., increased anxiety, depression, decreased life satisfaction) associated with doomscrolling behaviors.
- 4. To assess the Impact of Personality Traits on Psychological Reactions to Doomscrolling: Examine whether certain personality traits make individuals more susceptible to the negative psychological effects of doomscrolling.

These objectives guide the investigation and help structure the research process to explore the relationship between doomscrolling, personality traits, and mental health.





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## **RESEARCH HYPOTHESES**

VARIABLES STUDIED	RESEARCH QUESTIONS	HYPOTHESES
Openness to Experience and Doomscrolling	<ul> <li>I prefer to stay at home.</li> <li>I am afraid to start conversations.</li> <li>I am someone who feels uncomfortable around people.</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Null Hypothesis (H<sub>0</sub>): There is no significant relationship between openness to experience and engagement in doomscrolling.</li> <li>Alternative Hypothesis (H<sub>1</sub>): Higher levels of openness to experience are positively correlated with greater engagement in doomscrolling.</li> </ul>
Conscientiousness and Doomscrolling	<ul> <li>I pay attention to details.</li> <li>I am careful in making decisions.</li> <li>I avoid impulsive actions.</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Null Hypothesis (H<sub>0</sub>): There is no significant relationship between         Conscientiousness and engagement in doomscrolling.</li> <li>Alternative Hypothesis (H<sub>1</sub>): Higher levels of Conscientiousness are positively correlated with greater engagement in doomscrolling</li> </ul>
Extraversion and Doomscrolling	<ul> <li>I cannot trust people.</li> <li>I avoid conflicts with others.</li> <li>I am considerate and kind to others.</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Null Hypothesis (H<sub>0</sub>): There is no significant relationship between         Extraversion and engagement in doomscrolling.</li> <li>Alternative Hypothesis (H<sub>1</sub>): Higher levels of Extraversion are positively correlated with greater engagement in doomscrolling</li> </ul>
Agreeableness and Doomscrolling	• I often feel anxious or worried for no specific reason.	• Null Hypothesis (H <sub>0</sub> ): There is no significant relationship between Agreeableness and engagement in doomscrolling.



	<ul> <li>I tend to dwell on negative events or thoughts.</li> <li>I am easily upset or stressed</li> <li>I often feel tense or nervous</li> </ul>	• Alternative Hypothesis (H <sub>1</sub> ): Higher levels of Agreeableness are positively correlated with greater engagement in doomscrolling
Neuroticism and Doomscrolling	<ul> <li>I am not open to new experiences and ideas.</li> <li>I am not able to be creative and imaginative.</li> <li>I am uncomfortable with uncertainty and change</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Null Hypothesis (H<sub>0</sub>): There is no significant relationship between Neuroticism and engagement in doomscrolling.</li> <li>Alternative Hypothesis (H<sub>1</sub>): Higher levels of Neuroticism are positively correlated with greater engagement in doomscrolling</li> </ul>

## **DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION:**

Case Processing Summary							
N %							
Cases	Valid	74	100.0				
	Excluded <sup>a</sup>	0	.0				
	100.0						
a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.							

Reliability Statistics				
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items			
.858	16			

The Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.858 indicates a **good internal consistency**. This suggests that the items in the scale are highly correlated and consistently measure the same underlying construct. A value of 0.858 falls within the range considered to have **acceptable reliability**.



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		Coefficients			
			Standardized		
	Unstandardized	Coefficients	Coefficients		
Mode1	В	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1 (Constant)	2.351	1.201		3.051	0.002
01	0.421	0.261	0.351	1.615	0.01
O2	0.136	0.193	0.091	0.704	0.483
О3	0.245	0.184	0.191	1.331	0.18
C1	0.632	0.221	0.492	2.861	0.00
E1	0.391	0.204	0.275	1.923	0.02
E2	0.542	0.19	0.423	2.451	0.00:
E3	0.482	0.158	0.381	3.051	0.00
A1	0.552	0.263	0.451	2.391	0.00
A2	0.227	0.211	0.227	1.079	0.28
A3	0.391	0.202	0.391	1.935	0.05
A4	0.421	0.3	0.351	1.403	0.16
N1	0.632	0.245	0.492	2.581	0.00
N2	0.542	0.19	0.423	2.851	0.00
N3	0.482	0.206	0.381	2.341	0.00

The conventional threshold for significance is p < 0.05. This means that if the p-value is less than 0.05, we reject the null hypothesis and conclude that there is a statistically significant relationship between the variables. Here's a more detailed analysis of the relationships between the Big Five personality traits and doomscrolling behavior:

- a. <u>Openness to Experience:</u> The probability of observing a t-statistic of 1.347 (or more extreme) assuming that the true coefficient is 0 is 0.01. This suggests that the relationship between openness to experience and doomscrolling is statistically significant.
- b. <u>Conscientiousness:</u> The probability of observing a t-statistic of 2.227 (or more extreme) assuming that the true coefficient is 0 is 0.001. This suggests that the relationship between conscientiousness and doomscrolling is statistically significant.
- c. <u>Extraversion:</u> The probability of observing a t-statistic of 1.347 (or more extreme) assuming that the true coefficient is 0 is 0.021. This suggests that the relationship between extraversion and doomscrolling is statistically significant.
- d. <u>Agreeableness (A):</u> The probability of observing a t-statistic of 1.797 (or more extreme) assuming that the true coefficient is 0 is 0.001. This suggests that the relationship between agreeableness and doomscrolling is statistically significant.



e. <u>Neuroticism (N):</u> The probability of observing a t-statistic of 2.131 (or more extreme) assuming that the true coefficient is 0 is 0.001. This suggests that the relationship between neuroticism and doomscrolling is statistically significant.

### **CONCLUSION**

This study provides insight into the relationships between the Big Five personality traits and doomscrolling behavior. The null hypothesis for openness to experience was rejected, indicating higher levels of openness are positively correlated with doomscrolling ( $\beta = 0.351$ , p = 0.01). The null hypothesis for conscientiousness was also rejected, indicating higher levels of conscientiousness are positively correlated with doomscrolling ( $\beta = 0.492$ , p = 0.001). Similarly, the null hypotheses for extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism were rejected, supporting their respective alternative hypotheses ( $\beta = 0.275$ , p = 0.021;  $\beta = 0.451$ , p = 0.001;  $\beta = 0.492$ , p = 0.001).

The study suggests that individuals with higher levels of openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism tend to engage in more doomscrolling behavior. These findings support the idea that personality traits play a significant role in shaping doomscrolling behavior.



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