

Doom Scrolling: How it impacts us and what you can do about it

The Individual Impact of Doomscrolling

Impact on College Students

College life is a critical period marked by our academic growth, social development, and the forging of our future career paths. However, the pervasive nature of digital distractions—particularly doomscrolling—poses significant challenges to student productivity and overall well-being.

One college student encapsulated the struggle with this behavior, stating:

"I feel as though it is taking away from me actually living life and like actually using my brain it has also definitely lowered my productivity because i will just sit and doomscroll instead of actually doing my fucking homework because it gives me instant gratification. It's really dangerous for me because I have a hard time limiting myself when I start going. I actually just took Instagram and TikTok from my phone."

This candid reflection underscores the reality that doomscrolling can disrupt our essential academic tasks. The instant gratification derived from endless scrolling often overshadows the long-term rewards of studying and completing assignments. Consequently, students may find themselves trapped in a cycle where negative digital habits lead to procrastination, cognitive overload, and reduced academic performance.

The Societal Impact of Doomscrolling

Erosion of Trust in Media and Institutions

Another significant societal impact of doomscrolling is erosion of public trust. When negative, sensationalized content dominates the information landscape, it becomes increasingly difficult for citizens to differentiate between factual reporting and opinionated commentary. This blurring of lines can lead to widespread skepticism towards traditional media and governmental

institutions. As highlighted by Smith (2020), the psychological strain we experience from all this continuous negative exposure contributes to a collective sense of mistrust and cynicism.

Profit-Driven Platforms Versus User Well-Being

At the heart of doomscrolling is a business model that prioritizes profit over the well-being of users. Social media companies thrive on user engagement, which is monetized through advertising. The algorithms are fine-tuned to increase the time spent on the platform, often at the cost of mental health. This pursuit of profit creates a system where our wellbeing is entirely overlooked, in favor of maximizing ad revenue (Carr, 2021). The result is an online environment where negative content is not just prevalent, it's by design.

A philosophical Perspective on Doomscrolling

Dr. Brandon Boesch, a philosophy professor at Morningside University offers a critical lens on how social media platforms shape our digital experiences and ultimately, our society. His insights revealed that these platforms, while seemingly designed to foster connection, are fundamentally structured around raising profits.

According to Dr. Boesch, social media companies aim to maximize engagement through features like push notifications and infinite scrolling. This engagement, driven by algorithms that amplify emotional reactions, creates a cycle of doomscrolling that is detrimental to our personal goals and mental health. “Instagram, X, TikTok do not exist to make us happy or serve our needs, they exist to make a profit. And it oftentimes turns out that making a profit is a task they achieve in opposition to our greater desires and wants.”

Dr. Boesch further explains that the addictive nature of these platforms distracts us from meaningful activities. When users find themselves trapped in a cycle of negative content, they often lose sight of their personal ambitions and responsibilities. This not only impacts individual well-being but also contributes to a fragmented public discourse, where echo chambers and heightened polarization undermine constructive political engagement. Boesch notes “the political critiques apply equally to any political party. I think that this vice is not limited to any political ideology.”

Strategies to Combat Doomscrolling

Cultivating Self-Awareness and Mindfulness

One of the first steps to mitigating the effects of doomscrolling is fostering self-awareness. Recognizing the triggers that lead to compulsive scrolling is essential. Mindfulness practices—such as meditation, journaling, or simply taking periodic breaks from digital devices—can help

restore balance and reduce the emotional toll of constant negative input. By understanding one's habits and their impacts, it becomes possible to interrupt the cycle of doomscrolling.

Implementing Digital Detoxes and Time Management

Setting boundaries is crucial. Consider scheduling regular 'digital detoxes' where you intentionally disconnect from social media. Setting screen-time limits, disabling non-essential notifications, and designating 'offline hours' can help reduce the urge to engage in endless scrolling. These strategies allow for more focused time on personal goals, relationships, and offline activities that foster overall well-being. Which I think we all could use.

Seeking Out Positive and Constructive Content

Counteracting the negative effects of doomscrolling also involves consciously curating your digital environment. Actively seeking out positive, educational, or inspiring content can create a more balanced information diet. Whether it's following channels that emphasize uplifting stories or engaging with content that encourages critical thinking and meaningful dialogue, diversifying your online experiences can help restore a more optimistic and informed perspective.

Engaging in Constructive Community Dialogue

But we can go beyond individual measures, community engagement plays a vital role in overcoming the societal impacts of doomscrolling. Engaging in thoughtful and respectful discussions with people from diverse backgrounds can break down echo chambers and foster a more inclusive dialogue. Such exchanges not only enhance personal growth but also contribute to building a more connected and resilient community.

Doomscrolling is a phenomenon with significant implications for both our individual mental health and the fabric of society. The interplay between algorithm-driven platforms, profit motives, and the human need for connection has given rise to a digital environment that can be as damaging as it is engaging. The constant exposure to negative content leads to cognitive overload, distorts our perception of reality, and creates divisive echo chambers that erode public trust.

As we navigate this digital age, it's crucial for us to reclaim our agency. By cultivating self-awareness, establishing digital boundaries, and seeking out balanced content, we can equip ourselves to mitigate the adverse effects of doomscrolling. Moreover, making space for constructive dialogue within our communities can help us to bridge divides created by the media platforms which we ironically refer to as social.

References

Carr, N. (2021, February 5). *Doomscrolling: How endless scrolling through negative news is damaging mental health*. The Guardian. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com>

Smith, J. (2020, November 15). *The psychological effects of doomscrolling in the age of COVID-19*. BBC News. Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news>