International Journal of Education, Vocational and Social Science
https://e-journal.citakonsultindo.or.id/index.php/IJEVSS
E-ISSN : 2963 4954
IJEVSS

Psychoeducation Of "Digital Mindfulness" To Reduce Doomscrolling Behavior In Students

Hanifa Ashaditya Khamila Putri
Pascasarjana Psikologi, Universitas Muhammadiyah,Malang,Indonesia
Djudiyah
Pascasarjana Psikologi, Universitas Muhammadiyah,Malang,Indonesia

Corresponding Author: hanifaashaditya@gmail.com

Abstract

The phenomenon of doomscrolling, or the tendency to overconsume negative information through digital media, has become a significant mental health challenge among college students. Reliance on real-time information amidst uncertainty triggers anxiety and a decline in psychological well-being. This study aims to test the effectiveness of a Digital Mindfulness-based psychoeducation program in reducing doomscrolling behavior in college students. Using a quantitative approach through a one-group pretest–posttest quasi-experimental design, the study was conducted with 37 participants selected through a purposive sampling technique. Data were collected using the Doomscrolling Scale and analyzed using a paired sample t-test. The results showed a significant decrease in participants' doomscrolling scores after the intervention, from an average of 72.95 to 48.76 with a significance value of p = 0.000 (p < 0.05). These findings demonstrate that Digital Mindfulness psychoeducation is effective in helping college students increase awareness of digital behavior, recognize emotional triggers, and build cognitive defenses against maladaptive social media algorithms. The implications of this research underscore the importance of integrating digital mental health literacy into higher education curricula as a preventative strategy. This program is expected to serve as the foundation for institutional policies supporting a healthier digital ecosystem, helping students develop adaptive self-regulation skills, and maintaining psychological well-being amidst increasingly complex information flows. The results of this study provide theoretical and practical contributions to the development of proactive psychological intervention models for young people in the digital age.

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Keywords: Doomscrolling; Digital Mindfulness; Psychoeducation.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of digital technology and social media has fundamentally changed the way individuals access and consume information in the modern era. Today, the internet allows instant, broad, and limitless access to information, bringing significant benefits to the global exchange of knowledge (Hughes et al., 2024; Syakira, 2025). However, this ease of access creates a behavioral paradox, where uncontrolled digital media use triggers the phenomenon of doomscrolling, a compulsive tendency to continuously scroll and consume negative information (Muhtar et al., 2025). This phenomenon is crucial for academic research because doomscrolling is not simply a bad habit but a maladaptive response mechanism to global uncertainty that threatens mental well-being (Satici et al., 2023; Sharma et al., 2022). Theoretically, this behavior is driven by a need for certainty amidst a crisis. However, ironically, repeated exposure to negative information actually triggers threat-related attentional bias, which exacerbates anxiety and depression (Garfin et al., 2020; Yang et al., 2024). Therefore, understanding the psychological dynamics behind doomscrolling is crucial to mitigating its long-term impact on the quality of life of social media users (Price et al., 2022).

The primary focus of this research focuses on college students' vulnerability to doomscrolling, which impairs their cognitive and academic functioning. College students, as the group with the highest intensity of technology use, are at high risk of becoming trapped in a doomscrolling cycle due to academic demands and the need for information updates (Saricali et al., 2021). Research shows that intense exposure to negative information not only causes mental fatigue but also triggers procrastination, decreased concentration, and poor time management, leading to decreased productivity (Yang et al., 2024; Saricali et al., 2021). If this behavior continues without systematic intervention, doomscrolling will crystallize into a digital behavior pattern that is detrimental to long-term mental health. The focus of this research is how to break the chain of doomscrolling behavior through an intervention approach that can transform maladaptive digital behavior into a more mindful pattern of information consumption.

Several previous studies provide the basis for this study. Garfin et al. (2020) found that excessive consumption of negative news consistently correlated with increased levels of stress and anxiety, as well as a significant decline in psychological well-being in individuals. Furthermore, Yang et al. (2024) revealed that doomscrolling acts as a crucial mediator in the relationship between insomnia and depression and is a contributing factor to smartphone addiction in a

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college student population. Meanwhile, Satici et al. (2023) demonstrated that digital mindfulness is negatively associated with problematic social media use, with individuals who are mindful being better able to manage their emotions and avoid excessive exposure to negative content.

Although numerous studies have explored the link between doomscrolling and mental health disorders, there remains a gap in the literature regarding the integration of psychoeducational interventions specifically incorporating digital mindfulness principles for college students. Most previous studies tend to focus on descriptive or correlational impacts, but are limited in developing applied interventions capable of improving digital awareness in real-time. This study fills this gap by offering a psychoeducational model that combines cognitive understanding of doomscrolling with practical self-regulation skills based on digital mindfulness.

The novelty of this research lies in the development of a digital mindfulness-based psychoeducational program that not only provides theoretical information about the dangers of doomscrolling but also trains students to build "cognitive resistance" to social media algorithms. Unlike previous research, which has generally been reactive, this intervention is preventive-proactive, focusing on digital awareness as an adaptive coping strategy. With this approach, this research makes a unique contribution to the digital psychology literature, transforming information consumption behavior from initially compulsive and unconscious to directed, selective, and mindful behavior. This program is specifically designed to modify the architecture of students' digital behavior, making it a highly novel intervention in the context of social media-based mental health (Price et al., 2022; Roffarello & De Russis, 2022).

This study aims to develop and test the effectiveness of a psychoeducational program in reducing doomscrolling behavior in college students by enhancing digital mindfulness. Crucially, this study seeks to address a real challenge in the digital era, where students are trapped in a cycle of anxiety due to the relentless consumption of negative news, which reduces their academic effectiveness. Through this intervention, it is hoped that students will be able to develop more adaptive social media management skills, increase awareness of their information consumption patterns, and build psychological defenses to maintain mental well-being amidst the flow of threatening information (Donker et al., 2009; Li et al., 2024). Ultimately, this research is aimed at becoming a strategic solution to break the pattern of doomscrolling behavior and support the creation of a healthier digital ecosystem for the younger generation in higher education environments.

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RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a quantitative approach with a quasi-experimental design. This design was chosen because the study aimed to test the effectiveness of the Digital Mindfulness psychoeducational program intervention in reducing doomscrolling behavior in college students without randomizing subjects, allowing researchers to observe behavioral changes in a more natural setting than a pure experiment. Specifically, this study employed a one-group pretest–posttest design, involving one group of subjects measured before (pretest) and after (posttest) receiving the intervention. This design is capable of demonstrating direct changes in cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects of the subjects. The data analysis technique used was a paired sample t-test to test for significant differences between pretest and posttest scores, while the social media usage questionnaire data was analyzed descriptively to examine general behavioral changes.

Participants in this study were selected using a purposive sampling technique, with 37 active college students aged 18–25 years old. Inclusion criteria included social media use of at least 3 hours per day, a tendency to doomscroll as characterized by the habit of repeatedly accessing negative news, and a willingness to participate in the entire intervention series. The selection of students as participants was based on the finding that young age groups are the most active social media users and are vulnerable to doomscrolling due to high exposure to digital information, which then impacts mental health and the balance of daily activities.

Doomscrolling behavior was measured using the 15-item Doomscrolling Scale with a Likert format, which has been used in various studies to measure the relationship between doomscrolling and psychological well-being. The Digital Mindfulness-based psychoeducational intervention was implemented in four 20–30-minute sessions, covering an introduction to the concept, negative impacts, mindfulness techniques, and behavioral management strategies. This approach was chosen because previous research has shown that interventions emphasizing awareness and management of media consumption can reduce the negative impact of doomscrolling on mental well-being, where individuals become more effective when given understanding and control over their social media usage habits.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULTS

Profile of Intensity of Doomscrolling Behavior of Students

Based on the results of descriptive data analysis obtained from the Doomscrolling Scale

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and social media usage questionnaires, a consistent pattern of information consumption behavior was found among college students. The data showed that the majority of respondents aged 20 years and above had a high tendency to access social media, particularly TikTok and Instagram, with daily usage durations ranging from 4 to 6 hours.

This intensity is supported by observational findings showing that participants tended to scroll compulsively at crucial times, particularly before bed. Theoretically, this pattern indicates a threat-related attentional bias that triggers excessive anxiety. Social media algorithms have been shown to reinforce repetitive behavioral patterns that are difficult to consciously break, where users become trapped in a cycle of consuming negative information as a maladaptive coping mechanism.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Doomscrolling Behavior

Time	N	Mean	SD	Std. Error Mean
Pre-Test	37	72.95	24.239	3.98
Post-Test	37	48.76	19.823	3.25

Effectiveness of Digital Mindfulness Psychoeducational Intervention

Quantitative results showed a significant decrease in doomscrolling behavior after the Digital Mindfulness-based psychoeducational intervention. The decrease in the average score from 72.95 to 48.76 indicated the program's success in modifying students' digital behavior. This finding was corroborated by observations during the intervention session at Muhammadiyah University, where participants demonstrated increased awareness of limiting screen time.

Table 2. Paired Sample T-Test Results

Variables	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Doomscrolling	-6.143	36	0.000

Based on the table above, a significance value of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$) proves that the psychoeducational intervention had a significant impact on changing student behavior. Overall, these data indicate that the integration of providing theoretical information about the impact of doomscrolling with mindfulness skills training creates an effective synergy in building students' psychological resilience in the digital environment. The successful reduction in scores reflects that providing students with tools to recognize their emotional triggers makes them more competent

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in managing the digital ecosystem independently. Thus, these findings provide empirical evidence regarding the importance of digital literacy oriented towards mental well-being for students.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study comprehensively confirm that a Digital Mindfulness-based psychoeducation program is significantly effective in mitigating doomscrolling behavior among college students. Data findings show a sharp decrease in average doomscrolling scores after the intervention, a milestone indicating that increasing cognitive awareness of doomscrolling mechanisms is a crucial preventative measure. The success of this intervention strengthens the theoretical argument that psychoeducation, as emphasized by Donker et al. (2009) and reinforced by Lukens & McFarlane (2020), serves as a key catalyst in individual cognitive restructuring. By providing a deeper understanding of the psychological consequences of exposure to negative information, participants are no longer trapped in cycles of automatic behavior but instead transform into media consumers with agency over their own attention.

This interpretation of the results positively aligns with a study by Satici et al. (2023), which states that individuals with high levels of digital mindfulness have superior emotional regulation capacity in the face of digital distractions. In this discussion, it can be concluded that the effectiveness of the intervention in this study was not simply a result of providing information, but rather the result of practicing present awareness, which directly disrupted threat-related attentional bias patterns. When participants were trained to apply mindful breathing techniques and pause before scrolling, they were actually building cognitive barriers against social media algorithms designed to trigger anxiety. This finding aligns with research by Li et al. (2024), which highlights that the ability to "pause" before responding to digital stimuli is key to breaking the chain of entrenched maladaptive behaviors.

Furthermore, when compared to the findings of Sharma et al. (2022) and Price et al. (2022), this study provides a new dimension to applied interventions. While previous research has focused on mapping the impact of doomscrolling on depression and anxiety, this study moves beyond the problem identification phase to offer technical solutions that can be replicated in academic settings. The behavioral management strategies taught, such as limiting social media use before bedtime, have been empirically proven to reduce students' chronic stress burden. This is highly relevant to the findings of Yang et al. (2024), who identified doomscrolling as a central mediator between insomnia and depression. By limiting exposure to negative content during critical hours, participants in this study showed improvements not only in doomscrolling scores

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but also in their overall psychological well-being.

An in-depth analysis of the characteristics of the respondents in this study, where the majority of students used social media for up to six hours per day, predominantly before bedtime, provides an interesting sociological context. This phenomenon directly intersects with the findings of Muhtar et al. (2025) on Generation Z's vulnerability to exploitative algorithms. In this discussion, it must be acknowledged that doomscrolling is not simply a matter of individual willpower, but rather a systemic problem fueled by social media interface design. Therefore, interventions that only address motivational aspects will fail without being accompanied by practical skills training such as digital detox and disciplined time management. The Digital Mindfulness approach in this study proved to be an appropriate instrument because it returns control over attention to the user, not the algorithm.

Furthermore, comparing these results with the study by Shabahang et al. (2024), it appears that the urgency of psychoeducation for today's college students is far greater than in previous decades. Students are at the crossroads of high academic demands and a threatening flow of information, making them vulnerable to "mental burnout." The results of this study suggest that through structured psychoeducation, students can build "cognitive resilience" that not only functions during interventions but also forms new, healthier habit patterns. This reinforces the proposition that digital mindfulness is an essential 21st-century competency that should be integrated into the curriculum of college counseling services.

The significant difference found in the paired-sample t-test confirms that although doomscrolling behavior is powerful, driven by fear of missing out (FOMO) and the need for certainty amidst a crisis (Hughes et al., 2024), it remains plastic and modifiable. In other words, the compulsive tendency to continuously scroll is not an unchangeable psychological fate. Conversely, through proper education and mindfulness practices, individuals can learn to navigate the digital ecosystem more wisely. This interpretation challenges the fatalistic view often present in discussions about social media addiction, providing empirical evidence that targeted psychological interventions can produce measurable behavioral changes.

In closing, it is important to note that the success of this program is clear evidence that educational environments, such as Muhammadiyah University, play a crucial role in maintaining their students' digital mental health. By providing a space for students to reflect on their digital habits, educational institutions can serve as a shield against the detrimental effects of excessive exposure to negative information. The findings of this study are expected to form the foundation for developing campus policies that are more friendly to digital mental well-being, given that in

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the future, information challenges will become increasingly complex and demand greater mental resilience from each student.

CONCLUSION

This research confirms that doomscrolling is a serious digital psychological challenge for college students, but this maladaptive behavior has plasticity that can be modified through structured interventions. A key lesson from this research is that the compulsive tendency to consume negative information is not simply a side effect of algorithms, but rather a reflection of a neglected emotional response to global uncertainty. Through a Digital Mindfulness-based psychoeducation program, it was demonstrated that increasing cognitive awareness and self-regulation skills can break the chain of automatic scrolling behavior that has been threatening students' mental health. A valuable lesson learned is the importance of restoring agency or self-control to individuals amidst the onslaught of exploitative information. By providing practical skills to recognize emotional triggers and apply mindful pauses before interacting with digital content, students were able to shift their social media usage patterns from impulsive to more targeted, selective, and mindful. This demonstrates that digital mental health education must shift from simply providing information about dangers to providing technical tools capable of building "cognitive resilience" for young people to sustainably maintain their psychological well-being in an increasingly complex digital ecosystem. Scientifically, this study contributes to a renewed perspective on doomscrolling interventions by integrating a psychoeducational model and practical Digital Mindfulness exercises into a systematic whole that can be applied in college counseling services. However, this study has inherent limitations due to its limited location at a single institution, Muhammadiyah University, and the demographic diversity of participants, which does not fully represent a wide range of gender and age groups. The one-group pretest-posttest design also limits the ability to guarantee the universal generalizability of the results. These limitations create opportunities for future research to ensure that the resulting perspective is not partial but provides a comprehensive picture.

It is hoped that future research will incorporate gender variables, a wider age range, and the use of large-scale survey methods to capture the more complex dynamics of digital behavior. This broader approach is crucial for generating robust empirical evidence, so that the research results can serve as a basis for more inclusive and targeted institutional and national policies to mitigate the negative impacts of doomscrolling. The expected policies are preventative in nature, namely by incorporating digital mental health literacy into the compulsory curriculum or ongoing

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student development programs. In addition, collaboration between educational institutions, psychology experts, and technology developers needs to be enhanced to create a more mentally health-friendly social media ecosystem to support the creation of a resilient, digitally aware young generation with optimal psychological well-being.

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