



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

Doomscrolling and anxiety: *Two sides of the same coin*

EAHSAN ABEDIN

Picture this. Someone picks up their phone for the last scroll on Facebook before falling asleep. What was meant to be a five-minute scroll turns into hours and before they realise it, the clock strikes four in the morning. Not only have they wasted their time, they missed out on sleep, leaving them drained for the next day.

Unfortunately, this person is me and the ordeal I went through is called doomscrolling.

Although the term “doomscrolling” seems unfamiliar, it originated in 2018 on Twitter. In 2020, it was named Oxford Dictionary’s most trendy word for the year. While Covid-19 spread outside our homes, phones gave us doomscrolling inside our very rooms.

But, what is doomscrolling?

Human brains are hardwired to enjoy consuming information. It makes us feel safer and informed, giving us the feeling that we are always in control. Subconsciously wanting more of it, it tells us to continue facilitating news and information to the brain, necessary or not. This is exactly what happened during the pandemic. People felt that scrolling social media was keeping them updated. But the problems began to sprout when people could not stop, and continued scrolling until they eventually became addicted.

Studies have found that people struggling with anxiety-related disorders (panic disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder, post traumatic stress disorder, generalised anxiety disorder, and social anxiety disorder) are more susceptible to doomscrolling. What happens is that your desperation to consume more information and your anxiety become one. Ultimately, your anxiety and social media feed off of each other, making you the victim. It gets you obsessed, intensifying fear and anxiety even more, further aggravating mental disorders. As you scroll more to escape this problem, it triggers fatigue, further exacerbating your existing mental health issues and turning this into a vicious cycle.

Eventually, doomscrolling can become so addictive that even if you are faced with a minor hurdle on your day or have a deadline in 30 minutes, your anxiety does not let you do your job. It leads you to open your phone and start scrolling, almost like second nature. The worst part is that social media algorithms adapt with that and show you content recognising your scrolling behaviour.

Like other phenomena, the solution to the problem is inside its very definition. Our “awareness” of our habit is the first step to quitting it. If you are self-aware and are able to recognise this behaviour, a positive intent may be one of the most helpful ways to snap out of it. Simple tasks such as limiting social media consumption or even seeking positivity through reading books, going on walks, and spending time with family go a long way. Ultimately, newer habits, such as not picking up that phone before you go to sleep, journaling, or even watching a TV show may help. If things get too difficult, seeking out professional help is always an option, and often a good one.

Eahsan is unsure if his experiences generated his personality or is it the other way around. Send him help at eahsanabedin@gmail.com

We are overly reliant on social media, but does social media care?

AAQIB HASIB

Over the last decade, more people have started to depend on the internet for information, their social lives and even for their livelihoods. However, the internet is somewhat of a double-edged sword in this respect, as our reliance on it can work against us.

I remember a friend of mine was recently locked out of their Google account for over 12 hours. Those were some of the most stressful 12 hours of his life, which makes sense when you realise that everything from your bank account to your personal documents might be linked to your Google account.

THE ALGORITHM ISN'T YOUR FRIEND

Social media sites such as Facebook and Instagram run on algorithms that determine the kind of content which is pushed to its users. And this algorithm is constantly being tweaked to make the sites even more engaging for users, leading to a lot of volatility for content creators and businesses.

One minor change in the algorithm might result in many small businesses losing visibility amongst their customer base and as a result, losing a big chunk of their revenue. These social media platforms refrain from disclosing guidelines on how to adapt to the changing algorithm, leaving users in the dark.

If we look at YouTube’s algorithm change around 2018, we can see just how many creators lost their audiences because they could not adapt to the changes.

DATA LEAKS

For many of us, our lives now live on the cloud. Google has so much of our data, that if one were to lose their account, they would be in quite the bind.

On top of this, data leaks have recently started springing up more and more, with Facebook and Google having massive data leaks and breaches in the past five years. These companies failed to take adequate measures to protect it, in the process losing the data of millions of users, between Facebook and Google alone. These leaks can result in users losing their accounts, which can prove catastrophic for those who use their accounts

for business, work, or something equally important to their lives.

YOUR NEWS FEED ISN'T FOR THE NEWS

“Just because it’s on the internet, doesn’t mean that it’s true” – Abraham Lincoln

I am sure we’ve all seen this meme at some point, but misinformation on the internet has continued to grow exponentially. Or have you forgotten parents discovering Whatsapp groups during the peak of the 2020 pandemic?

The consequences of fake news can be devastating, ranging from people using horse deworming medicine to literal genocide. There are people whose internet usage consists of only social media, who rely on it as their primary source of information. Getting them to be more sceptical about news on social media is already an uphill task, and it’ll only get harder in the future. When social media companies fail to filter out fake news, especially for non-English posts, this reliance becomes a dangerous thing.

I suggest we acknowledge our dependence on such platforms. And in doing so, start to branch out to other platforms, digital or physical, to get our news, run our businesses and share our art.

Aaqib Hasib will someday finish writing his book. But not today. Write to him at aaqib.hasib@thedailystar.net

