



ILLUSTRATION: SALMAN SAKIB SHAHRYAR

■ YOUTH ANXIETIES ■

The distressing psychology of screen time

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Since getting my first phone in the ninth grade, I have found it excruciatingly difficult to keep it away from me. I always feel the typical fear of missing out. Until 12th grade, my screen time was loosely monitored by my strict, working mother. Having grown up in a household where both my parents were employed, it was easy enough for me to sneak back onto my phone, though. This act was an appropriate reflection of my lack of self-control, masked in the bravado of teenage rebellion.

Naturally, doomscrolling became my way of seeking out connection in the world and escaping my reality. Paradoxically, it also acted as a source of stress due to constantly being inundated with content. From my observation, my experience is not isolated. Rather, it is a microcosm of the collective experience of our generation.

Abdullah-Aat-Tahmidus Siddiquee, a recent graduate from the Institute of Business Administration (IBA), Dhaka University (DU), says he slips into doomscrolling when he feels stressed, anxious, or even bored, using it as a coping mechanism. He says, "Obviously, I find myself online on social media when I am stressed or anxious, because I feel it helps me stay informed. I specifically find myself on TikTok, given its algorithm is more curated and cleaner."

Maintaining a similar tone regarding distraction from stress, Raisa Nuzhat, a lecturer at Green University, says, "When I feel stressed or anxious, I sometimes go online and watch something funny to distract myself or lighten my mood. It helps for a while and gives me a short break from my thoughts. But in the end, my stressful thoughts really do not go away."

Needless to say, our generation has adopted doomscrolling as a counterproductive coping habit, effectively keeping us insulated and creating an illusion

of relief through temporary distractions. However, relying on social media to momentarily divert our attention could potentially backfire as well. This is especially the case in this day and age of curated algorithms and constant connections, where users are bombarded with content. Given just how digestible online consumption has become, it is unlikely that users are able to spare a thought, let alone process, what's been presented to them. This can lead them to giving in to their compulsions, the consequences of which can range from unhealthy comparisons between peers to slipping down the pipeline of dangerous ideologies.

Shumia Islam, a final-year undergraduate student from East West University, says that sometimes she finds herself comparing her life to her acquaintances' online. She states, "While scrolling on social media, sometimes I find myself wondering if my life would turn out to be as successful as some of my relatives. Will I be able to measure up to the expectations of society, or will I miserably fail? Sometimes these thoughts can be stressful."

Meshkat E Rabbani, an assistant case manager at Raju Law, articulates that while scrolling, he often encounters intolerant ideology that makes him anxious. "Oftentimes, screen time stresses me out because I end up seeing things that I find intolerant and distasteful. Sometimes, there is a lot of bad news to consume in a single day. These things do work as a negative trigger to my psychology," he explains.

Sumaya Afrin Misty, co-founder and lead psychologist of BloomAid Online Mental Health, emphasises the need for young people to invest themselves in mindful activities. She says, "Recent research suggests that while doomscrolling provides temporary relief and distraction from ongoing life stressors, this ultimately is a maladaptive coping

strategy which can result in anxiety, feelings of helplessness, and sleep disturbances."

"It is important for young adults to be mindful, which is often overtaken by the distractions of doomscrolling. Rather than thinking about a problem and seeking solutions and resolutions, young people often use doomscrolling as a maladaptive coping strategy. Journaling, expressive art, or face-to-face meetings with loved ones can often give new perspectives on any problems. Seeking active solutions often helps young people build resilience and better anxiety management," she adds.

Although doomscrolling has become a common way for young people to cope with stress, it often exacerbates feelings of anxiety rather than easing them. The situation has devolved into a vicious cycle for many young people. For this demographic to escape the rut, methods – such as those discussed by Sumaya Afrin – can be adopted. What is also worth exploring are the limits of temporary digital escapes. Feelings of distress are obviously uncomfortable, and the need to find ways to distance oneself from them is natural. However, the notion that the solution rests on a system that deepens the pit of content warrants scrutiny. Perhaps then we can take the first step towards reclaiming focus, resilience, and psychological well-being.

Reference:

International Journal of Interdisciplinary Approaches in Psychology (December, 2024) *A Study on Doom Scrolling Behavior and Its Correlation with Personality types and Psychological Distress GenZ College Students.*

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