

# IMPACT OF DOOMSCROLLING ON EMOTIONAL REGULATION IN WORKING EMPLOYEES: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS

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## Abstract

The increasing dependence on digital media has intensified individuals' exposure to emotionally disturbing online content, leading to a behavioural pattern commonly referred to as doomscrolling. Doomscrolling involves repeated engagement with negative news and social media information, which can adversely affect emotional and psychological functioning. The present study investigates the effect of doomscrolling on emotional regulation among working employees, with psychological distress acting as a mediating variable. A quantitative correlational design was employed, and data were collected using standardized instruments assessing doomscrolling behaviour, psychological distress, and emotional regulation. Statistical analyses including correlation and mediation testing were performed. The findings indicated that higher levels of doomscrolling were significantly associated with increased psychological distress and reduced emotional regulation. Furthermore, psychological distress partially mediated the relationship between doomscrolling and emotional regulation. The study highlights the psychological risks of maladaptive digital consumption and emphasizes the need for workplace interventions that encourage healthy media habits and emotional resilience among employees.

## Keywords:

Doomscrolling, Emotional Regulation, Psychological Distress, Working Employees

## 1. Introduction

The widespread availability of digital platforms has significantly altered the way individuals consume information in everyday life. While online media enables rapid access to global events, it also exposes users to a continuous flow of negative and emotionally disturbing content. One behavioural outcome of this exposure is doomscrolling, a pattern in which individuals repeatedly engage with distressing online information despite its adverse emotional impact. Although doomscrolling is often driven by curiosity and the desire to remain

informed, prolonged involvement in such content may gradually undermine psychological well-being. Research indicates that persistent exposure to negative information contributes to emotional exhaustion, heightened anxiety, and reduced emotional balance. Working employees are particularly vulnerable, as occupational responsibilities combined with digital overload may intensify emotional strain. Emotional regulation refers to the ability to monitor, evaluate, and modify emotional responses in adaptive ways. Effective emotional regulation supports

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mental stability, social functioning, and workplace performance. However, continuous engagement with distressing online material may weaken these regulatory capacities, leading to increased emotional vulnerability.

Psychological distress represents a state of emotional discomfort characterized by symptoms such as anxiety, tension, and low mood. According to stress and coping frameworks, persistent distress consumes coping resources and interferes with emotional control. Therefore, psychological distress may serve as a critical pathway through which doomscrolling affects emotional regulation.

Although previous studies have explored doomscrolling in relation to anxiety and depression, limited research has examined its influence on emotional regulation among working employees using a mediational approach. To address this gap, the present study examines the impact of doomscrolling on emotional regulation, with psychological distress as a mediating variable. The findings are expected to contribute to digital well-being research and provide practical implications for occupational mental health interventions.

## 2. Statement of the Problem

The increasing use of digital media has led working employees to spend more time-consuming online news and social media content, often exposing them to negative and distressing information. Repeated engagement with such content, commonly referred to as doomscrolling, has become a frequent behavior that may adversely affect emotional well-being. Emotional regulation, which involves the ability to manage and control emotional responses, is essential for psychological health and effective workplace functioning. However, continuous exposure to negative digital content may weaken emotional regulation and increase psychological distress, such as anxiety and emotional discomfort. Although previous studies

have linked doomscrolling to mental health problems, limited research has examined how psychological distress explains the relationship between doomscrolling and emotional regulation, particularly among working employees. Therefore, the present study seeks to examine the impact of doomscrolling on emotional regulation and to analyze the mediating role of psychological distress in this relationship.

## 3. Research gap

Despite the growing body of literature on doomscrolling and digital well-being, several important research gaps remain. Existing studies have largely focused on students and general adult populations, with limited research specifically targeting working employees. Furthermore, most studies have examined doomscrolling in relation to anxiety, depression, or stress independently, rather than exploring emotional regulation as a key psychological outcome.

In addition, there is a scarcity of studies employing mediation models to explain how psychological distress functions as an underlying mechanism linking doomscrolling and emotional regulation. Very few studies have used structured quantitative designs to simultaneously examine doomscrolling, psychological distress, and emotional regulation within a single framework.

Moreover, limited research has been conducted in Indian occupational settings, restricting the cultural applicability of existing findings. Therefore, the present study seeks to address these gaps by empirically examining the impact of doomscrolling on emotional regulation among working employees, with psychological distress as a mediating variable.

## 4. Objectives

The present study has the following objectives:

1. To examine the relationship between doomscrolling, psychological distress and

emotional regulation among working employees.

2. To analyze the mediating role of psychological distress in the relationship between doomscrolling and emotional regulation.

## 5. Hypotheses

The study is guided by the following hypotheses:

H1: There will be a significant relationship between doomscrolling, psychological distress and Emotional regulations

H2: Psychological distress will significantly mediate the relationship between doomscrolling and emotional regulation.

## 6. Research Methodology

### 6.1 Research Design

The present investigation employed a quantitative correlational research design to examine the relationship between doomscrolling behaviour, psychological distress, and emotional regulation among working employees. This design was selected as it allows for the systematic assessment of associations among variables and supports the examination of mediating effects within a non-experimental framework.

### 6.2 Participants and Sampling

The study sample consisted of 200 working employees employed at Lenovo India Pvt. Ltd., Puducherry. Participants were selected using a simple random sampling technique to ensure equal representation across different departments. Employees from Information Technology, Production, Human Resources, Sales, and Administration departments were included in the study.

The age of the participants ranged from 22 to 45 years, and both male and female employees participated. With regard to income, most respondents belonged to the middle-income group. The majority of

participants reported spending between three to four hours per day on social media and four to six hours on total screen exposure, reflecting moderate to high levels of digital engagement.

## 6.3 Variables of the Study

The study included the following variables:

- Independent Variable: Doomscrolling behaviour
- Mediating Variable: Psychological distress
- Dependent Variable: Emotional regulation

## 6.4 Instruments Used

### 6.4.1 Doomscrolling Questionnaire (DQ-12)

Doomscrolling behaviour was assessed using the Doomscrolling Questionnaire developed by Kushlev et al. (2022). The scale contains twelve statements rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Higher scores indicate greater involvement in compulsive consumption of negative digital content.

### 6.4.2 Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10)

Psychological distress was measured using the Kessler Psychological Distress Scale developed by Kessler et al. (2003). This instrument includes ten items that assess symptoms of anxiety and depression experienced over the previous four weeks. Higher total scores reflect greater levels of psychological distress.

### 6.4.3 Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ)

Emotional regulation was measured using the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire developed by Gross and John (2003). The scale consists of ten items that assess two dimensions: cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression. Higher reappraisal scores indicate healthier emotional regulation strategies, while higher suppression scores indicate less adaptive regulation.

## 6.5 Reliability of the Instruments

The internal consistency of the instruments was

reassessed for the present study. Cronbach's alpha coefficients obtained were as follows:

- Doomscrolling Questionnaire:  $\alpha = 0.88$
- Kessler Psychological Distress Scale:  $\alpha = 0.91$
- Emotion Regulation Questionnaire:  $\alpha = 0.84$

These values indicate that all instruments demonstrated satisfactory reliability and were suitable for research purposes.

## 6.6 Procedure for Data Collection

After obtaining formal permission from the organization, participants were briefed about the objectives of the study. They were assured that their responses would remain confidential and used solely for research purposes. Informed consent was obtained prior to data collection.

Questionnaires were administered during work breaks to avoid interference with official duties. Participants were instructed to respond honestly and independently. The completed questionnaires were checked for completeness, coded, and entered into SPSS for statistical analysis.

## 6.7 Conceptual Model

The study followed a mediation model in which doomscrolling behaviour was treated as the predictor variable, psychological distress as the mediator, and emotional regulation as the outcome variable.

Doomscrolling → Psychological Distress → Emotional Regulation

This model assumes that doomscrolling influences emotional regulation both directly and indirectly through psychological distress.

## 8. Data Analysis and Interpretation

## 7. Review of Literature

Recent research highlights the negative psychological consequences of excessive exposure to distressing digital content, commonly referred to as doomscrolling. Doomscrolling has been consistently associated with increased anxiety, depressive symptoms, emotional fatigue, and cognitive strain. Elhai et al. (2020) found that prolonged engagement with negative online information significantly predicted depression and rumination, while Brailovskaia et al. (2021) reported reduced subjective well-being due to continuous crisis-related news consumption. Similarly, Kartol and Yildirim (2023) observed heightened psychological distress among individuals repeatedly exposed to disaster-related news.

Emotional regulation is essential for maintaining psychological stability under stress. Difficulties in emotion regulation have been linked to increased stress responses and poorer psychological adjustment (Gross & John, 2003). Psychological distress, characterized by symptoms of anxiety and depression that impair daily functioning (Kessler et al., 2003), has been shown to intensify with persistent exposure to emotionally charged digital content. Yuen et al. (2023) demonstrated that doomscrolling significantly predicted psychological distress, which in turn contributed to emotional exhaustion and instability.

In occupational contexts, digital information overload has been associated with emotional fatigue, reduced concentration, and decreased job satisfaction (Meier et al., 2023; Arnold et al., 2023). Despite growing evidence of the harmful effects of doomscrolling, limited research has examined emotional regulation as a primary outcome or explored psychological distress as a mediating mechanism. Therefore, the present study addresses this gap by examining psychological distress as a mediator between doomscrolling and emotional regulation among working employees.

**Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Doomscrolling, Psychological Distress, and Emotional Regulation**

Variable	Levels	N	%
<b>Doomscrolling</b>	Mild	6	3.0
	Moderate	52	26.0
	Moderately Severe	89	44.5
	Severe	53	26.5
<b>Psychological Distress</b>	Low	24	12.0
	Moderate	75	37.5
	High	64	32.0
	Severe	37	18.5
<b>Emotional Regulation</b>	Low	37	18.5
	Average	79	39.5
	Good	47	23.5
	Excellent	37	18.5

Source: Primary Data

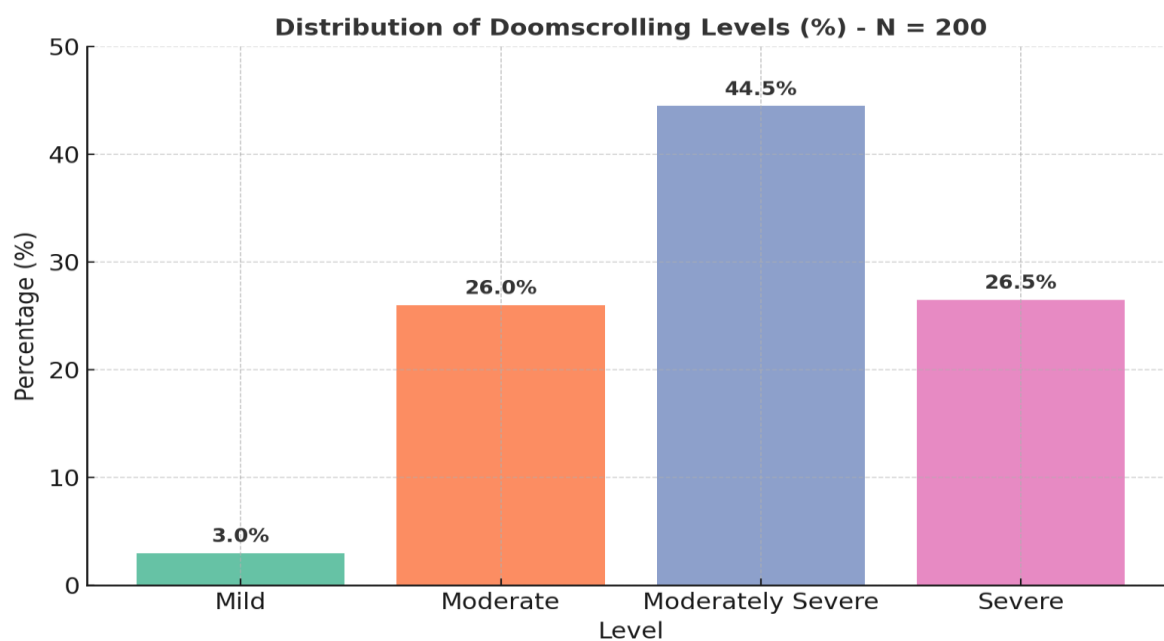
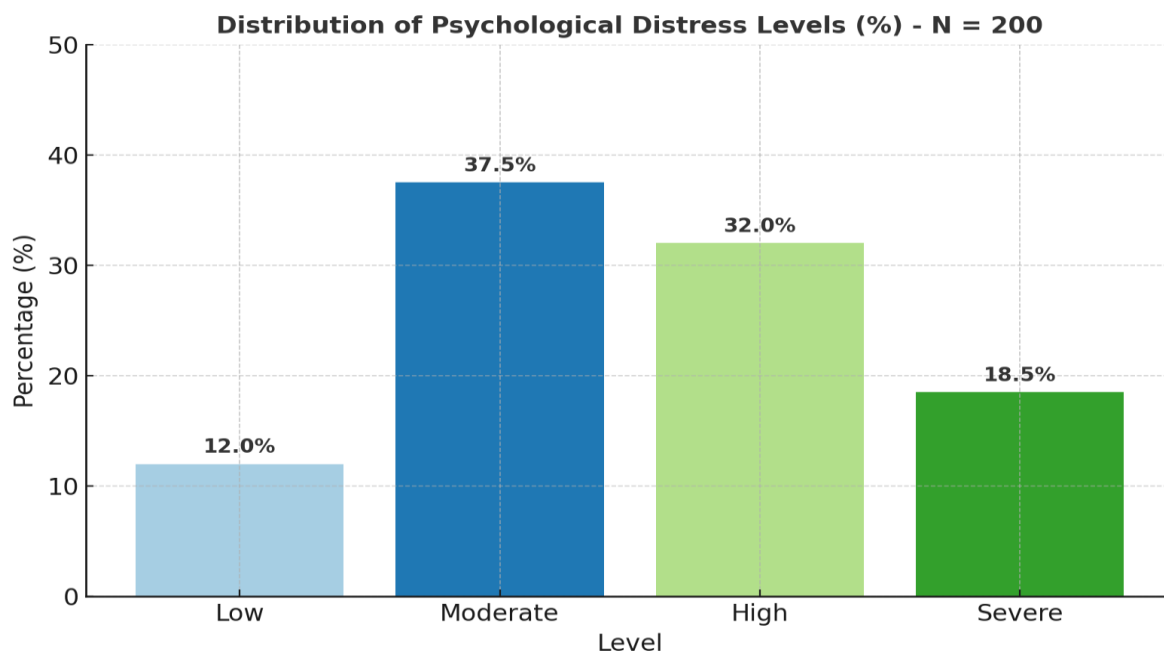
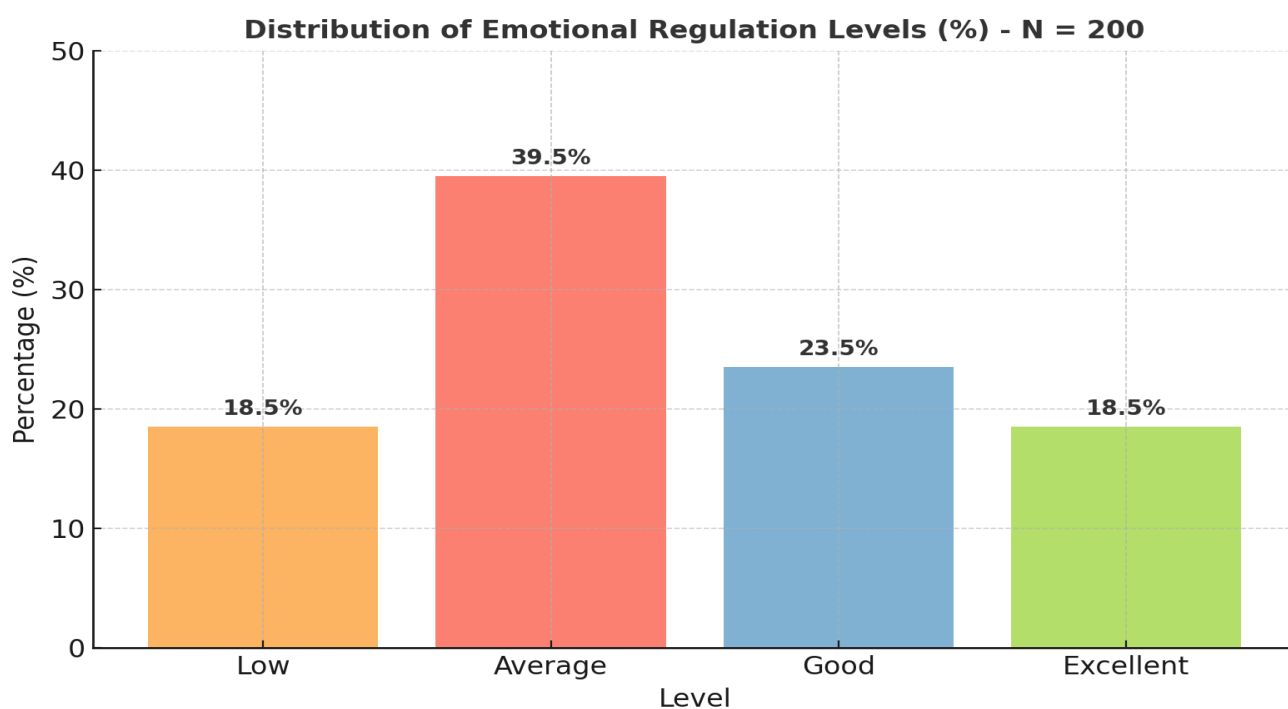


Fig 4.1: Showing percentage distribution of Doomscrolling



*Fig 2: Showing percentage distribution of Psychological Distress*



*Fig 3: Showing percentage distribution of Emotional Regulation*

The descriptive statistics revealed that a substantial proportion of working employees demonstrated elevated levels of doomscrolling behaviour. Nearly

half of the participants (44.5%) fell under the moderately severe category, while 26.5% were classified under the severe category. This indicates that

frequent engagement with negative online content is highly prevalent among working professionals. With respect to psychological distress, the findings showed that 37.5% of the employees reported moderate distress, 32% reported high distress, and 18.5% experienced severe distress. These results reflect a considerable level of emotional strain among employees, suggesting that digital exposure combined with occupational demands contributes to increased psychological vulnerability. Regarding emotional regulation, most participants were classified under the average (39.5%) and good (23.5%) categories.

However, only 18.5% demonstrated excellent emotional regulation. This suggests that although many employees possess moderate emotional coping abilities, a notable proportion continue to experience difficulty in managing their emotional responses effectively.

Overall, the descriptive results indicate that higher levels of doomscrolling are accompanied by increased psychological distress and comparatively reduced emotional regulation among working employees.

**Table 2. Pearson Correlation between Doomscrolling, Psychological Distress, and Emotional Regulation**

Variables	Doomscrolling	Psychological Distress	Emotional Regulation
<b>Doomscrolling</b>	—	0.68*	-0.54*
<b>Psychological Distress</b>	0.68*	—	-0.61*
<b>Emotional Regulation</b>	-0.54*	-0.61*	—

\*Significant at 0.05 level

Pearson correlation analysis revealed a significant positive relationship between doomscrolling and psychological distress ( $r = 0.68$ ,  $p < .05$ ), indicating that employees who engage more frequently in doomscrolling experience higher levels of emotional distress.

A significant negative relationship was observed between doomscrolling and emotional regulation ( $r = -0.54$ ,  $p < .05$ ), demonstrating that increased exposure to negative digital content is associated with

poorer emotional regulation abilities.

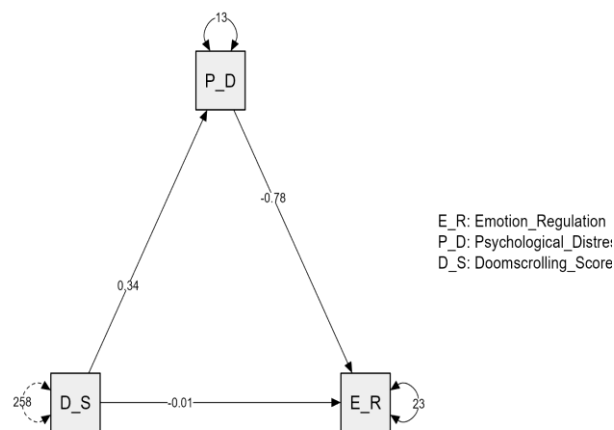
Furthermore, psychological distress showed a strong negative correlation with emotional regulation ( $r = -0.61$ ,  $p < .05$ ), confirming that higher levels of distress are linked with reduced capacity to regulate emotions effectively.

These findings support Hypothesis H4 and clearly indicate that doomscrolling contributes to emotional dysregulation primarily through increased psychological distress.

**Table 3. Mediation Analysis**

Path	$\beta$	SE	t	p	Result
<b>Doomscrolling → Distress (a)</b>	0.52	0.07	7.43	.001	Significant
<b>Distress → Emotional Regulation (b)</b>	-0.63	0.09	-6.89	.001	Significant
<b>Doomscrolling → Emotional Regulation (c')</b>	-0.22	0.08	-2.75	.006	Significant
<b>Total Effect (c)</b>	-0.55	0.08	-6.81	.001	Significant

*Indirect Effect ( $a \times b$ ) = -0.33; 95% CI [-0.45, -0.22] (Significant)*



The mediation analysis demonstrated that doomscrolling significantly predicted psychological distress ( $\beta = 0.52, p < .001$ ). Psychological distress, in turn, significantly predicted emotional regulation in a negative direction ( $\beta = -0.63, p < .001$ ). When psychological distress was included in the model, the presence of partial mediation. This indicates that doomscrolling affects emotional regulation both directly and indirectly by increasing psychological distress. Therefore, Hypothesis H5 is accepted, as

## 9. Interpretation of Findings

The findings clearly demonstrate that doomscrolling is a significant psychological risk behaviour among working employees. Continuous exposure to negative online content intensifies emotional strain, which weakens individuals' ability to regulate their emotions effectively. Psychological distress emerges as a critical mechanism through which doomscrolling disrupts emotional balance. These results highlight the importance of addressing maladaptive digital consumption patterns in workplace mental health programs and emphasize the need for interventions that strengthen emotional regulation and reduce psychological distress among employees.

the direct effect of doomscrolling on emotional regulation remained significant but was reduced in magnitude ( $\beta = -0.22, p < .01$ ).

The indirect effect of doomscrolling on emotional regulation through psychological distress was found to be statistically significant, confirming psychological distress significantly mediates the relationship between doomscrolling and emotional regulation among working employees.

## 10. Conclusion

The present study examined the relationship between doomscrolling, psychological distress, and emotional regulation among working employees using a mediation framework. The findings revealed that doomscrolling significantly increased psychological distress and reduced emotional regulation, with psychological distress acting as a partial mediator.

The positive association between doomscrolling and psychological distress is consistent with previous findings indicating that repeated exposure to negative online information intensifies emotional strain and rumination (Elhai et al., 2020; Brailovskaia et al., 2021). Doomscrolling sustains individuals in a state of emotional vigilance, thereby increasing cognitive and emotional overload. In occupational contexts, this effect may be

further amplified due to work-related stressors.

The negative relationship between doomscrolling and emotional regulation supports the theoretical framework proposed by Gross and John (2003), which suggests that persistent emotional stimulation weakens regulatory capacity. Similar observations were reported by Rozgonjuk et al. (2020), who noted that excessive digital engagement impaired adaptive emotional control strategies.

Psychological distress emerged as a significant mediating mechanism. This finding aligns with stress and coping theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), which explains that prolonged distress consumes coping resources and disrupts emotional balance. The mediating role of distress also supports the findings of Yuen et al. (2023), who identified emotional distress as a pathway linking doomscrolling to mental health outcomes.

The partial mediation observed indicates that doomscrolling affects emotional regulation both directly and indirectly through distress. Employees experiencing higher distress may rely more on maladaptive strategies such as emotional suppression rather than adaptive reappraisal. From an organizational perspective, these findings highlight the importance of addressing maladaptive digital behaviours within workplace mental health initiatives. As suggested by Meier et al. (2023) and Arnold et al. (2023), digital overload contributes to emotional burnout, and the present study extends this understanding by identifying emotional regulation as a key psychological outcome.

Overall, the study contributes to digital well-being literature by clarifying the emotional processes through which doomscrolling influences employees' psychological functioning

## 11. Limitations and Recommendations

Despite its contributions, the present study has

certain limitations. First, the sample was drawn from a single organization, which limits the generalizability of the findings to other occupational settings. Second, the cross-sectional design restricts causal interpretation of the observed relationships. Third, the reliance on self-report measures may have introduced response bias. Additionally, the study did not examine specific categories of digital content involved in doomscrolling behaviour.

Future research should include larger and more diverse samples across different industries to enhance external validity. Longitudinal and experimental designs are recommended to establish causal relationships. Future studies may also investigate moderating variables such as resilience, emotional intelligence, mindfulness, and coping styles. Qualitative approaches can provide deeper insight into employees' subjective experiences of doomscrolling. Furthermore, intervention-based research can help evaluate strategies aimed at reducing maladaptive digital behaviour and improving emotional regulation

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