**INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF
EDUCATION, PSYCHOLOGY
AND COUNSELLING
(IJEPC)**www.ijepec.com**PREDICTORS OF ANXIETY AMONG MALAYSIAN YOUNG
ADULTS WITH DOOMSCROLLING HABIT: ATTRIBUTIONAL
STYLE**Yap Li Ping¹, Foo Fatt Mee^{2*}, Joshua Ng Joo Hou³

¹ Department of Psychology & Counselling, School of Psychology & Social Sciences, IMU University, Malaysia
Email: YapLiPing97@gmail.com

² Department of Psychology & Counselling, School of Psychology & Social Sciences, IMU University, Malaysia
Email: FattMeeFoo@imu.edu.my

³ Department of Psychology & Counselling, School of Psychology & Social Sciences, IMU University, Malaysia
Email: JoshuaNg@imu.edu.my

* Corresponding Author

Article Info:**Article history:**

Received date: 14.03.2025

Revised date: 12.04.2025

Accepted date: 05.06.2025

Published date: 24.06.2025

To cite this document:

Yap, L. P., Foo, F. M., & Ng, J. H. J. (2025). Predictors Of Anxiety Among Malaysian Young Adults With Doomscrolling Habit: Attributional Style. *International Journal of Education, Psychology and Counseling*, 10 (58), 641-654.

DOI: 10.35631/IJEPC.1058042**This work is licensed under** [CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)**Abstract:**

Doomscrolling is motivated by individuals' need to seek out information to prepare themselves for future potential risks. Doomscrolling could affect individuals' psychological well-being by heightening the anxiety symptoms. Literature suggested that individuals' attributional style might moderate the relationship between doomscrolling and anxiety. This study aims to examine the predictability of doomscrolling and the moderation effect of attributional style on anxiety. 105 participants were recruited for the actual study with the 92 final usable responses. Participants filled in the cross-sectional online survey which consisted of demographic questionnaire, Doomscrolling Scale, Attributional Styles Questionnaire, and Anxiety subscales of Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale-21. The regression analysis showed doomscrolling was a significant predictor of anxiety but not moderated by attributional styles. Regardless of how individuals attribute the cause of a negative event, doomscrolling tends to increase their anxiety level. Strategies to alleviate the effect of doomscrolling on individuals' psychological well-being were discussed.

Keywords:

Anxiety, Attributional Style, Doomscrolling, Psychological Well-Being, Young Adults

Introduction

The term “doomscrolling” was popularised alongside the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic when the pandemic struck the globe quickly and ferociously, and individuals are affected by the pandemic news and information (Anand et al., 2021; Buchanan et al., 2021; Price et al., 2022; Sharma et al., 2022; Ytre-Arne & Moe, 2021). The term “doom” refers to a bad situation where avoidance of it is often difficult; “scrolling” refers to moving information on a screen to see more of it. Therefore, “doomscrolling” refers to reading and searching for information about a bad situation in order to see more of it. Doomscrolling is an alarming concern with the high prevalence in the United Kingdom and United States (Aguvaveedi, 2025).

Doomscrolling is motivated by individuals’ need to seek out information to prepare themselves for future potential risks (Sharma et al., 2022; Yang & Kahlor, 2012). Individuals have the need to obtain and process information until they feel confident about the validity of their judgement (Griffin et al., 1999). However, the scrolling may become a repetitive, mindless scanning of newsfeeds without much processing of information (Sharma et al., 2022). Moreover, algorithms of social media are developed to present information that best captures users’ interests and attention. Consequently, individuals may find it difficult to turn away from social media and when they do, they are pulled back by the automated appearance of the negative news, especially for individuals with low self-control (Sharma et al., 2022).

Although doomscrolling behaviour is likely to be motivated by anxiety as well as an attempt to reduce the anxiety (Griffin et al., 1999), by exposing themselves to negative information, individuals may feel more anxious as a result, defeating the original purpose of doomscrolling. With the strong connection to social media addiction and generalised problematic internet use, doomscrolling may be a dysfunctional behaviour that affects individuals’ psychological well-being (Apurva et al., 2021; Satıcı et al., 2022; Sharma et al., 2022).

During the COVID-19 pandemic in Malaysia, variation of movement control order (MCO) was announced progressively starting from 18 March 2020 to contain the virus and curb its spread (BERNAMA, 2021; Bunyan, 2020; Nursyazwani Saiful Sham, 2020). During these periods, individuals had limited social stimulation as they were isolated from social activities with friends, neighbours and families. For more than a year, students were isolated from their peers as schools and entertainment premises ceased operation. Families were separated as they were trapped in different locations. News about the latest, increasing death tolls was blasted by the media.

It was through these restrictions on individuals’ social activities that the phenomenon of doomscrolling came into the public’s view during the pandemic. With the loss of physical interaction with friends and families, individuals utilise technologies to keep in touch. Social media became an important part of individuals’ daily lives as they were the main means of connecting with friends and families. In the meantime, while keeping in touch with their loved ones, they would inevitably be exposed to information and news about the pandemic on social media. Through the algorithm of the social media platforms, contents of similar kinds were more likely to be presented to individuals who browsed them (Balaji et al., 2021; Peterson-Salahuddin & Diakopoulos, 2020), leading to a phenomenon that is called “doomscrolling”.

Literature reported doomscrolling positively correlated with anxiety symptoms among university students sample in Indonesia (Wafa et al., 2024). Doomscrolling was also predicted higher levels of existential anxiety among sample of university students from Iran and the United States (Shabahang, 2024). Taking samples of the adults beyond the university context, the relationship between doomscrolling and trait anxiety was protected by psychological resilience and worsen by intolerance of uncertainty (Türk-Kurtça & Kocatürk, 2025).

The influence of doomscrolling on individuals' mental health is a concern. Studies about doomscrolling peaked during the pandemic to understand how repetitive, intense hunting for information during the pandemic had affected individuals' mental. Nevertheless, despite reaching the endemic of COVID-19 where the situation in Malaysia has become more stable and less stress-inducing, studies about doomscrolling is still limited.

Research shed light on themes of doomscrolling and doomscrolling scale development (Sharma et al., 2022). The in-depth sharing of participant's doomscrolling experience, especially on their feelings of fearful and anxious towards the negative news (Ytre-Arne & Moe, 2021). Doomscrolling was associated with increased depression symptoms and post-traumatic stress disorder, especially for individuals with more severe maltreatment histories (Price et al, 2022). A two-minutes of exposure to negative news about COVID-19 could cause emotional tolls on participants (Buchanan et al, 2021). Interestingly, individuals who engaged in kindness-scrolling (i.e., COVID-related acts of kindness) did not experience less negative affect as compared with those who doomscrolled and those who did not see any COVID-related information.

Strategies to limit doomscrolling were suggested. For example, news avoidance aims to limit information overload or emotional drain from social media (Song et al., 2017; Ytre-Arne & Moe, 2021). However, as individuals had to remove themselves from social media, it may essentially cut down their connection with others, which increase the risk of isolation, anxiety and fear of social interaction (Pennington, 2020; Robb et al., 2020; Williams et al., 2020). Mobile application on meditation, such as "Miracle of Mind" is helpful in breaking the vicious cycle of anxiety-doomscrolling-anxiety (Aguvaveedi, 2025).

Attributional Style As The Moderator

Attributional style refers to the ways individuals explain the cause of events within their lives (Peterson et al., 1982; Peterson & Seligman, 1984; Zeigler-Hill & Shackelford, 2020). When experiencing either positive or negative events, individuals attribute the cause of the events based on locus of control (internal-external) and the impact of duration (stable-unstable) and affected area (global-specific) (Peterson et al., 1982).

Literature also explored the role of individuals' cognitive biases on doomscrolling. Doomscrolling and exposure to pessimistic news would lead individuals to experience feelings of anxiety, apprehension, uncertainty and panic (Abramson et al., 1989). With the increased exposure to pessimistic news, their cognitive biases in turn made them more sensitive to the news, which would further strengthen their feelings of anxiety, apprehension, uncertainty and panic, leading to an unending vicious cycle, hence, emphasises the power of individuals' mind on doomscrolling.

Case study also showcased doomscrolling and maladaptive cognitive style affected a patient's anxiety disorder. Doomscrolling was reported positively related to anxiety (Aknin et al., 2022; Anand et al., 2021; Brooks et al., 2020; Hamilton & Coates, 2020; Wathélet et al., 2020). For individuals with diagnosed anxiety disorder, doomscrolling might further increase their anxiety as the constant flow of news and information from doomscrolling social media – no matter true or false – might contribute to their cognitive distortions and strengthen their already maladaptive cognitive styles (Apurva et al., 2021). As a result, their anxiety symptoms may be further amplified by doomscrolling.

Despite the insinuation of the relationship between doomscrolling, attributional style and anxiety, limited studies explore the role of individuals' cognitive processes in the relationship between doomscrolling and anxiety. This study was to examine the relationship between doomscrolling, attributional style and anxiety, as illustrated in Figure 1. The research hypotheses were:

H1: Doomscrolling is a significant predictor for anxiety.

H2: Internal-external dimension of attributional style is significantly moderate the relationship between doomscrolling and anxiety.

H3: Stable-unstable dimension of attributional style is significantly moderate the relationship between doomscrolling and anxiety.

H4: Global-specific dimension of attributional style is significantly moderate the relationship between doomscrolling and anxiety.

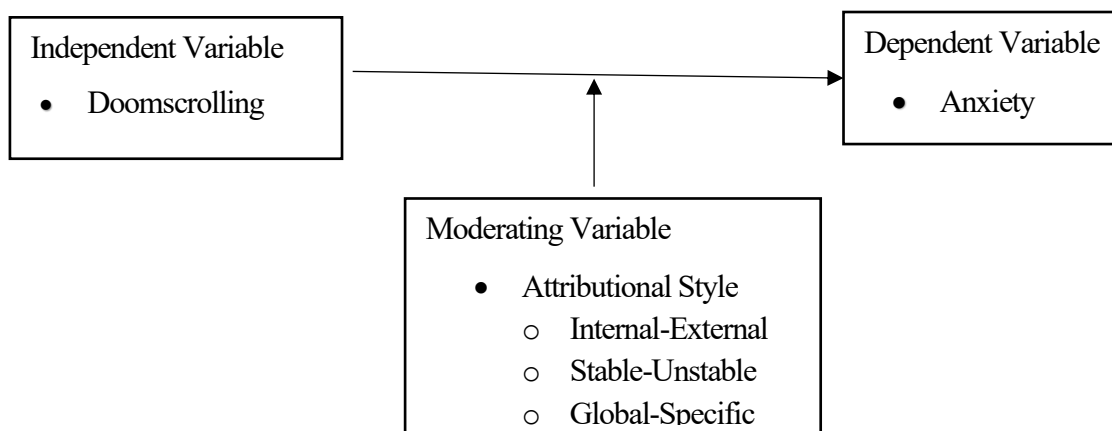


Figure 1: Research Framework

Methods

Participants

The study recruited 105 participants through purposive and snowball sampling, from May to October 2023. The samples are Malaysian who spend at least an hour of daily usage of social media, including, but not limited to, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and TikTok. The final sample size is 92 participants after removal of 13 participants with missing or faulty data. There were 72 females (76%) and 20 males (25%), with the mean age 29.55 years old ($SD = 13.82$).

Measures

The measures used in this study were: a demographic questionnaire, Doomscrolling Scale (Sharma et al., 2022), Attributional Style Questionnaire (Dykema et al., 1996) and Anxiety subscale of the DASS-21 (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995). A pilot test was conducted to examine the reliability of the scales and gathered participants' feedback on the scales such as its readability and clarity. Total of 19 responses (8 males, 11 females, 1 non-binary; $M_{\text{age}} = 28.05$ years old, $SD_{\text{age}} = 10.42$) were collected and all scales achieved internal consistency of .70 and no major feedback was received. Hence, the scales and questionnaires of the study remained unchanged for the actual study, with the internal consistency reliability summarised in Table 1.

Demographic Questionnaire

A demographic questionnaire was developed to measure participants' age, gender, nationality and time spent daily on social media.

Doomscrolling Scale

The Doomscrolling Scale developed by Sharma et al. (2022) was administered to measure participants' doomscrolling behaviour. It consists of 15 items, with a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) and the possible total score ranging from 15 to 105. Some examples of the items are "I feel an urge to seek bad news on social media, more and more often." and "I unconsciously check my newsfeeds for bad news." The higher the total score, the higher the level of the participant's doomscrolling behaviour. The scale reporting high internal consistency ($\alpha = .97$) among participants.

Attributional Style Questionnaire

The Attributional Style Questionnaire (ASQ) developed by Dykema et al (1996) was administered to measure participants' attributional style. It consists of 12 statements, each comes with three questions that measure the three causal dimensions (internal-external, stable-unstable and global-specific) of the statement (Dykema et al., 1996; Peterson & Seligman, 1982).

The internal-external dimension is measured by an open question "What do you feel would be the ONE main cause for the situation if it happened to you?". The short answer provided were then dummy coded as internality (1) or externality (2). The higher the total score, the higher the participants' attribution of the cause of an event as external. The total scores ranging between 12 to 24 (12 to 18 was categorised as internal; 19 to 24 was categorised as external) The initial coding was done by the first author and verified by a research personnel member. The reliability of the internal-external dimension was not specified in the previous literature (Dykema et al., 1996). To measure the reliability of the internal-external dimension for this current study. The codes of both researchers were reported at 57.89% to 94.74% agreement, showing moderate to high reliability.

The stable-unstable dimension was measured by "How likely is it that the cause you gave will continue to affect you?", with a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from -3 (*"will never affect you"*) to +3 (*"will always affect you"*). The total scores ranged from -36 to 36 (-36 to 0 categorised as unstable; 1 to 36 categorised as stable). The item-total correlation for stable-unstable dimension ranged from .27 to .59 (Dykema et al., 1996) and the present study reported very

high reliability coefficient ($\alpha = .93$). The stable-unstable dimension reported high internal consistency among the participants.

The global-specific dimension was measured by “Is the cause you gave something that just affects [this situation], or does it affect other areas of your life?”, with 7-point Likert scale, ranging from -3 (“*just affects [this sort of event]*”) to +3 (“*affects all other areas*”). The total scores ranged from -36 to 36 (-36 to 0 categorised as specific; 1 to 36 categorised as global and affect other areas of lives). The global-specific dimension reported high internal consistency ($\alpha = .92$) among the participants.

Depression, Anxiety, and Stressed Scale-21

The Anxiety subscale of the DASS-21 (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995) was used to measure participants' anxiety level. It consists of seven items, measured in a 4-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*never*) to 4 (*almost always*). Some examples of items are “I was aware of dryness of my mouth.” and “I felt scared without any good reason.” The final total score was multiplied by two so that the scoring is consistent with the scoring of DASS-42 (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995). The higher the total score indicates the participant tends to be more anxious. The Anxiety subscale reported high internal consistency among the participants ($\alpha = .85$).

Table 1: Reliability of All Instruments

Instruments	Reliability		
	Literature	Pilot	Actual
Doomscrolling Scale (Sharma et al., 2022)	^a $\alpha = .96$	$\alpha = .94$	$\alpha = .97$
Attributional Style Questionnaire (Dykema et al., 1996)			
Stable-unstable (12 items)	^b $\alpha = .27$ to $.59$	$\alpha = .88$	$\alpha = .93$
Global-specific (12 items)	^b $\alpha = .08$ to $.48$	$\alpha = .84$	$\alpha = .92$
Anxiety subscale of DASS-21 (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995)	^c $\alpha = .87$	$\alpha = .88$	$\alpha = .85$

Note: a = Sharma et al. (2022); b = Dykema et al. (1996); c = Thiagarajan et al. (2022)

Procedures

This study was approved by IMU Joint Committee on Research and Ethics (Reference No. 4.8/JCM-261/2023). Participants were recruited through social media, such as Facebook and WhatsApp. The recruitment poster incorporated the survey link and QR code for the study, which then directed the participants to the Microsoft online survey form of the study. Pilot study was conducted to check the feasibility of study before the actual data collection.

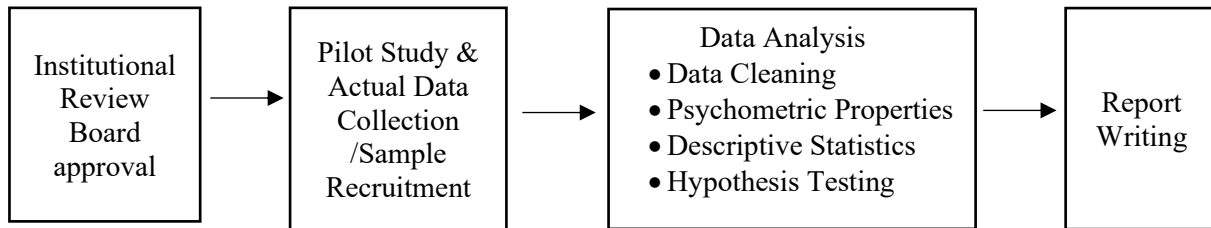


Figure 2: Flow of Research Process

Data Analysis

The data collected was analysis using IBM SPSS 29th edition. The reliability analysis was run to analysis the psychometric properties of the internal consistency of the measurement used. Data was cleaned to remove the outlier (skewness ± 3 & kurtosis ± 7) and missing data. A simple linear regression was conducted to test the relationship between the doomscrolling (predictor) and anxiety (outcome variable). Next, the moderation effect of the attributional style on the relationship between doomscrolling and anxiety was tested using PROCESS macro model 1 for SPSS (Hayes & Rockwood, 2017), the attributional style dimensions were analysed one at a time.

Results

A simple linear regression was conducted to examine the predictive ability of doomscrolling on anxiety. Table 2 showed that doomscrolling predicts anxiety in the positive direction ($R = .44$) and explained 19.7% variance of anxiety ($R^2 = .197$). Overall, the regression model of doomscrolling significantly predicted anxiety, $F(1, 90) = 22.06, p < .001$. Doomscrolling was a significant predictor of anxiety, $t(90) = 4.70, p < .001$.

Table 2: Coefficients & Model Summary of Doomscrolling

Model	Unstandardis		Standar dised Beta	<i>t</i>	Sig.	Model Summary			
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>				<i>R</i>	R^2	Adjuste d R^2	<i>SE</i>
(Constant)	22.41	1.81		12.93	.000	.44	.197	.188	8.82
Doomscrolling	.22	.05	.44	4.70	.000				

Note. Predictor: Doomscrolling. Outcome: Anxiety.

PROCESS macro for SPSS was conducted to examine the moderation effect of the dimensions of the ASQ respectively on the relationship between doomscrolling and anxiety. Table 3 showed that the overall model including doomscrolling, the internal-external dimension and the interaction effect between doomscrolling and the internal-external dimension significantly predicted anxiety, $R^2 = .20, F(3, 88) = 7.48, p < .001$. However, upon inspection of the breakdown of the model, doomscrolling, the internal-external dimension and the interaction effect of doomscrolling and the internal-external dimension respectively did not predict anxiety. Doomscrolling was not a significant predictor of anxiety, $b = 0.12, t(88) = 0.62, p = .536$. The internal-external dimension was not a significant predictor of anxiety, $b = -0.93, t(88) = -0.09, p = .932$. The interaction effect of doomscrolling and the internal-external dimension was not a significant predictor of anxiety, $b = 0.08, t(88) = 0.44, p = .664$. Overall, the internal-

external dimension was not a significant moderator of the relationship between doomscrolling and anxiety.

Table 3: Coefficient & Model Summary of Doomscrolling, Internal-External Dimension and Interaction Effect of Doomscrolling and Internal-External Dimension

Variable	Coefficient	SE	t	p	R	R ²	F	p
(Constant)	24.66	11.29	2.19	.032	.45	.20	7.48	.000
Doomscrolling	0.12	0.20	0.62	.536				
Internal-external dimension	-0.93	10.80	-0.09	.932				
Interaction effect	0.08	0.18	0.44	.664				

Note. Predictor: Doomscrolling. Moderator: Internal-external dimension. Outcome: Anxiety.

Next, Table 4 summarised the overall model including doomscrolling, the stable-unstable dimension and the interaction effect between doomscrolling and the stable-unstable dimension significantly predicted anxiety, $R^2 = .23$, $F(3, 88) = 8.62$, $p < .001$. However, upon inspection of the breakdown of the model, doomscrolling, the stable-unstable dimension and the interaction effect of doomscrolling and the stable-unstable dimension respectively did not predict anxiety. Doomscrolling was not a significant predictor of anxiety, $b = 0.09$, $t(88) = 0.21$, $p = .838$. The stable-unstable dimension was not a significant predictor of anxiety, $b = 3.22$, $t(88) = 0.56$, $p = .575$. The interaction effect of doomscrolling and the stable-unstable dimension was not a significant predictor of anxiety, $b = 0.05$, $t(88) = 0.21$, $p = .835$. Overall, the stable-unstable dimension was not a significant moderator of the relationship between doomscrolling and anxiety.

Table 4: Coefficient & Model Summary of Doomscrolling, Stable-unstable dimension and Interaction Effect of Doomscrolling and Internal-External Dimension

Variable	Coefficient	SE	t	p	R	R ²	F	p
(Constant)	18.79	10.83	1.74	.086	.48	.23	8.62	.000
Doomscrolling	0.09	0.46	0.21	.838				
Stable-unstable dimension	3.22	5.71	0.56	.575				
Interaction effect	0.05	0.23	0.21	.835				

Note. Predictor: Doomscrolling. Moderator: Stable-unstable dimension. Outcome: Anxiety.

Finally, Table 5 presented the overall model including doomscrolling, the global-specific dimension and the interaction effect between doomscrolling and the global-specific dimension significantly predicted anxiety, $R^2 = .28$, $F(3, 88) = 11.27$, $p < .001$. However, upon inspection of the breakdown of the model, doomscrolling, the global-specific dimension and the interaction effect of doomscrolling and the global-specific dimension respectively did not predict anxiety. Doomscrolling was not a significant predictor of anxiety, $b = -0.16$, $t(88) = -0.52$, $p = .601$. The global-specific dimension was not a significant predictor of anxiety, $b = 1.60$, $t(88) = 0.36$, $p = .716$. The interaction effect of doomscrolling and the global specific dimension was not a significant predictor of anxiety, $b = 0.17$, $t(88) = 1.11$, $p = .271$. Overall, the global-specific dimension was not a significant moderator of the relationship between doomscrolling and anxiety.

Table 5: Coefficient & Model Summary of Doomscrolling, Global-Specific Dimension and Interaction Effect of Doomscrolling and Internal-External Dimension

Variable	Coefficient	SE	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> ²	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
(Constant)	23.00	7.94	2.89	.005	.53	.28	11.27	.000
Doomscrolling	-0.16	0.30	-0.52	.601				
Global-Specific Dimension	1.61	4.40	0.36	.716				
Interaction effect	0.17	0.16	1.11	.271				

Note. Predictor: Doomscrolling. Moderator: Global-Specific Dimension. Outcome: Anxiety.

In summary, doomscrolling was found to be a significant predictor of anxiety. However, the results showed no moderation effect of attributional style on the relationship between doomscrolling and anxiety. Therefore, the hypothesis that there is a significant moderation effect of the attributional style on the relationship between doomscrolling and anxiety was rejected.

Discussion

This study focused on examining the relationship between doomscrolling and anxiety, with doomscrolling as the predictor and anxiety as the outcome variable. This model is significant, that more an individual engaged in doomscrolling behaviour, the higher the individual's anxiety level. This significant relationship supported the findings of past literature (Chen et al., 2022; Sharma et al., 2020; Ytre-Arne & Moe, 2021).

When attributional style was added as the moderator, it did not interact with doomscrolling in influencing the anxiety. The results contradicted to past literature that a maladaptive attributional style may further increase the effect of doomscrolling on anxiety (Apurva et al., 2021; Coleman et al., 2022). This result may be due to the unique cultural differences of the participants' collectivistic orientation (Sumari et al., 2020; Tafarodi & Smith, 2001), as compared to past literatures conducted in countries of more individualistic orientation (Coleman et al., 2022; Peterson & Seligman, 1984; Schleider et al., 2014). Individuals with a higher collectivist orientation were more sensitive to social experiences, which may impact on the reading of negative information may be consistent to the participants, regardless of their attributional style (Tafarodi & Smith, 2001).

Implications

This study contributes to an increased understanding on the relationship of doomscrolling on anxiety, specifically in the Malaysia context. The results suggest that regardless of how individuals attribute the cause of a negative event, doomscrolling will lead to an increase in their anxiety level. Hence, to alleviate the effect of doomscrolling on individuals' psychological well-being, the importance of coping strategies to cope with the effects of doomscrolling are highlighted (Buchanan et al., 2021; Price et al., 2022; Ytre-Arne & Moe, 2021).

Practising mindfulness when browsing and reading through information on social media may be one of the ways to counteract the effect of doomscrolling (Baym et al., 2020). By switching from mindless to mindful scrolling, individuals are one step towards behavioural changes. By practising mindfulness, individuals are more aware and conscious of their doomscrolling

behaviour, and its impact on their feelings and emotions. Although a short period of doomscrolling may already have a negative impact on individuals' psychological well-being (Buchanan et al., 2021), having a higher awareness of individuals' own behaviour can help them stop their doomscrolling behaviour before it brings them more harm.

Moreover, avoidance seems to be one of the most widely used strategies to avoid negative thoughts and feelings caused by doomscrolling (Ytre-Arne & Moe, 2021). The avoidance strategies are separated into two categories: time/activity-based avoidance or medium/content-based avoidance. Time/activity-based avoidance refers to restricting individuals' frequency of checking social media, mixed with breaks in between their doomscrolling through engaging in different pleasurable activities such as taking walks, reading, playing computer games and spending more time with family members. Medium/content-based avoidance refers to a deliberate selection of social media platforms or the choice of the information individuals wish to see in their social media platform (Ytre-Arne & Moe, 2021). This can be performed via navigation of platform preferences and consideration of the information that they actively search for. Individuals can achieve this through setting filters in their social media accounts to alter the algorithms.

Furthermore, exposure to positive information is found to be effective in undoing the negative outcome of doomscrolling on individuals' psychological well-being (Buchanan et al., 2021). Buchanan et al. introduced a concept named kindness-scrolling, which reflects that individuals can read about acts of kindness to balance out the consequences of doomscrolling. The results of their study show that individuals who engage in kindness-scrolling have less negative affect than those who have no exposure at all.

Limitations and Recommendations

The ASQ internal-external dimension was captured using open-ended questions enriching the researcher's understanding of the depth of the dimension. However, the interpretation of this dimension was influenced by the researcher's subjectivity, and peer verification was conducted to ensure consistency of the coding. As English is not the national language of Malaysia, the multiple meanings of the word "cause" seemed to pose as a challenge to participants. In future studies, a different choice of word or phrasing, such as, replace the word "cause" to "reason" or change the statement to "What do you feel would be the ONE main reason that the situation happened to you?".

Future studies could explore the role of culture or behaviour on doomscrolling. It is possible that the cultural differences lead to the insignificance of the results of this study compared to past literature. Malaysians, being more collectivistic-oriented than the population of past literature, may be more sensitive to social experiences from doomscrolling (Tafarodi & Smith, 2001). Moreover, behavioural changes may also be able to change the effect of doomscrolling (Buchanan et al., 2021). Kindness-scrolling is found to be one of the effective methods in reversing or reducing the effect of doomscrolling on individuals' psychological well-being. Future studies can also focus on the exploration of coping skills and the effectiveness of different coping skills. Lastly, future studies may also examine the effect of doomscrolling using cross-lagged analysis, that would be able to tease out other covariates and further pinpoint the causal effect between doomscrolling and anxiety.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this research highlights that doomscrolling significantly predict anxiety among Malaysian young adult samples. Upon examining the attributional style as the moderating variable for the relationship between doomscrolling and anxiety, no statistical significance was reported. This suggested that regardless of how individuals attribute the cause of an event, doomscrolling will lead to an increase in their anxiety in similar manner. Therefore, in this digital age while scrolling are likely to be part of human nature, individuals should be more cautious and observant about their scrolling pattern. Strategies such as mindful browsing, time/activity-based and medium/content-based avoidance and balancing the doomscrolling with kindness scrolling are essential to maintain the digital health and psychological well-being.

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to IMU University for funding this research (4.8/JCM-261/2023) and to Amirah Hata for helping with assessing the reliability of the internal-external dimension of the Attributional Style Questionnaire (ASQ) for the pilot test.

References

- Abramson, L. Y., Metalsky, G. I., & Alloy, L. B. (1989). Hopelessness depression: A theory-based subtype of depression. *Psychological Review*, 96(2), 358. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.96.2.358>
- Aknin, L. B., De Neve, J. E., Dunn, E. W., Fancourt, D. E., Goldberg, E., Helliwell, J. F., ... & Ben Amor, Y. (2022). Mental health during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic: A review and recommendations for moving forward. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 17(4), 915-936. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17456916211029964>
- Aguvaveedi, M. (2025). Breaking the doomscrolling cycle: Meditation as a remedy for anxiety in the digital age. <https://ssrn.com/abstract=>
- Anand, N., Sharma, M. K., Thakur, P. C., Mondal, I., Sahu, M., Singh, P., ... & Singh, R. (2022). Doomsurfing and doomscrolling mediate psychological distress in COVID-19 lockdown: Implications for awareness of cognitive biases. *Perspectives in Psychiatric Care*, 58(1), 170-172. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ppc.12803>
- Apurva, Kumar, S., Doshi, K. N., & Bhat, A. (2021). New onset COVID-related delusional disorder in a patient with health anxiety: A case report. *Indian Journal of Psychological Medicine*, 43(4), 363-365. <https://doi.org/10.1177/02537176211016093>
- Balaji, T. K., Annavarapu, C. S. R., & Bablani, A. (2021). Machine learning algorithms for social media analysis: A survey. *Computer Science Review*, 40, 100395. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cosrev.2021.100395>
- Baym, N. K., Wagman, K. B., & Persaud, C. J. (2020). Mindfully scrolling: Rethinking Facebook after time deactivated. *Social Media Society*, 6(2). <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305120919105>
- BERNAMA. (2021, 11 January). Chronology of MCO phases in the country. https://www.bernama.com/en/general/news_covid-19.php?id=1920867#:~:text=The%20six%20states%20under%20MCO%20are%20Penang%2C%20Selangor%2C,Movement%20Control%20Order%20%28RMCO%29%20in%20the%20same%20period
- Brooks, S. K., Webster, R. K., Smith, L. E., Woodland, L., Wessely, S., Greenberg, N., & Rubin, G. J. (2020). The psychological impact of quarantine and how to reduce it: rapid

- review of the evidence. *The Lancet*, 395(10227), 912-920. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(20\)30460-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(20)30460-8)
- Buchanan, K., Aknin, L. B., Lotun, S., & Sandstrom, G. M. (2021). Brief exposure to social media during the COVID-19 pandemic: Doom-scrolling has negative emotional consequences, but kindness-scrolling does not. *PLoS ONE*, 16(10), e0257728. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0257728>
- Bunyan, J. (2020, March 16). PM: Malaysia under movement control order from Wed until March 31, all shops closed except for essential services. *Malay Mail*. <https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2020/03/16/pm-malaysia-in-lockdown-from-wed-until-march-31-all-shops-closed-except-for/1847204>
- Chen, X., Liu, T., Li, P., Wei, W., & Chao, M. (2022). The relationship between media involvement and death anxiety of self-quarantined people in the COVID-19 outbreak in China: The mediating roles of empathy and sympathy. *OMEGA-Journal of Death and Dying*, 85(4), 974-989. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0030222820960283>
- Coleman, E. P., Croft, R. J., & Barkus, E. (2022). The profile of unusual beliefs associated with metacognitive thinking and attributional styles. *PsyCh Journal*, 11(3), 296-309. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pchj.528>
- Daryono, A. M. & Nugroho, K. W. (2020, March 16). BREAKING NEWS: Malaysia Lockdown Mulai 18 Maret. *KumparanNews*. <https://kumparan.com/kumparannews/breaking-news-malaysia-lockdown-mulai-18-maret-1t2QRx3R6UV/full>
- Dykema, J., Bergbower, K., Doctora, J. D., & Peterson, C. (1996). An Attributional Style Questionnaire for general use. *Journal of Psychoeducational Assessment*, 14(2), 100-108. <https://doi.org/10.1177/073428299601400201>
- Faul, F., Erdfelder, E., Lang, A.-G. & Buchner, A. (2007). G*Power 3: A flexible statistical power analysis program for the social, behavioral, and biomedical sciences. *Behavior Research Methods*, 39, 175-191. <https://doi.org/10.3758/BF03193146>
- Fresco, D. M., Alloy, L. B., & Reilly-Harrington, N. (2006). Association of Attributional Style for negative and positive events and the occurrence of life events with depression and anxiety. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 25(10), 1140-1160. <https://doi.org/10.1521/jscp.2006.25.10.1140>
- Griffin, R. J., Dunwoody, S., & Neuwirth, K. (1999). Proposed model of the relationship of risk information seeking and processing to the development of preventive behaviors. *Environmental Research*, 80(2), S230-S245. <https://doi.org/10.1006/enrs.1998.3940>
- Hamilton, M., & Coates, S. (2020). Coronavirus and anxiety, Great Britain: 3 April 2020 to 10 May 2020. Office for National Statistics. <https://backup.ons.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2020/06/Coronavirus-and-anxiety-Great-Britain-3-April-2020-to-10-May-2020.pdf>
- Hayes, A. F., & Rockwood, N. J. (2017). Regression-based statistical mediation and moderation analysis in clinical research: Observations, recommendations, and implementation. *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, 98, 39-57. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.brat.2016.11.001>
- Lovibond, P. F., & Lovibond, S. H. (1995). The structure of negative emotional states: Comparison of the Depression Anxiety Stress Scales (DASS) with the Beck Depression and Anxiety Inventories. *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, 33(3), 335-343. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0005-7967\(94\)00075-U](https://doi.org/10.1016/0005-7967(94)00075-U)
- Markham, A. N. (2021). Pattern Recognition: Using Rocks, Wind, Water, Anxiety, and Doom Scrolling in a Slow Apocalypse (to Learn More About Methods for Changing the

- World). Qualitative Inquiry, 27(7), 914-927.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800420960191>
- Nursyazwani Saiful Sham. (2020, March 26). COVID-19: PKPD dikuatkuasa di dua Kawasan di Simpang Renggam. Astro Awani. <https://www.astroawani.com/berita-malaysia/covid19-pkpd-dikuat-kuasa-di-dua-kawasan-di-simpang-renggam-235454>
- Pennington, N. (2021). Quitting social media: a qualitative exploration of communication outcomes. *Qualitative Research Reports in Communication*, 22(1), 30-38.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/17459435.2020.1817140>
- Peterson, C., & Seligman, M. E. (1984). Causal explanations as a risk factor for depression: Theory and evidence. *Psychological Review*, 91(3), 347. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.91.3.347>
- Peterson, C., Semmel, A., Von Baeyer, C., Abramson, L. Y., Metalsky, G. I., & Seligman, M. E. (1982). The Attributional Style Questionnaire. *Cognitive Therapy and Research*, 6(3), 287-299. <https://doi.org/10.1007/bf01173577>
- Peterson-Salahuddin, C., & Diakopoulos, N. (2020). Negotiated autonomy: The role of social media algorithms in editorial decision making. *Media and Communication*, 8(3), 27-38. <https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v8i3.3001>
- Price, M., Legrand, A. C., Brier, Z. M., van Stolk-Cooke, K., Peck, K., Dodds, P. S., ... & Adams, Z. W. (2022). Doomscrolling During COVID-19: The negative association between daily social and traditional media consumption and mental health symptoms during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy*, 14(8), 1338-1346. <https://doi.org/10.1037/tra0001202>
- Reardon, J. M., & Williams, N. L. (2007). The specificity of cognitive vulnerabilities to emotional disorders: Anxiety sensitivity, looming vulnerability and explanatory style. *Journal of Anxiety Disorders*, 21(5), 625-643.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.janxdis.2006.09.013>
- Robb, C. E., De Jager, C. A., Ahmadi-Abhari, S., Giannakopoulou, P., Udeh-Momoh, C., McKeand, J., ... & Middleton, L. (2020). Associations of social isolation with anxiety and depression during the early COVID-19 pandemic: A survey of older adults in London, UK. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 11. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsy.2020.591120>
- Salisbury, L. (2022). On not being able to read: doomscrolling and anxiety in pandemic times. *Textual Practice*, 37(6), 887-918. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0950236X.2022.2056767>
- Satici, S. A., Gocet Tekin, E., Deniz, M. E., & Satici, B. (2023). Doomscrolling Scale: its association with personality traits, psychological distress, social media use, and wellbeing. *Applied Research in Quality of Life*, 18, 833-847.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11482-022-10110-7>
- Schleider, J. L., Vélez, C. E., Krause, E. D., & Gillham, J. (2014). Perceived psychological control and anxiety in early adolescents: The mediating role of attributional style. *Cognitive Therapy and Research*, 38, 71-81. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10608-013-9573-9>
- Shabahang, R., Hwang, H., Thomas, E. F., Aruguete, M. S., McCutcheon, L. E., Orosz, G., Hossein Khanzadeh, A. A., Mokhtari Chirani, B., & Zsila, Á. (2024). Doomscrolling evokes existential anxiety and fosters pessimism about human nature? Evidence from Iran and the United States. *Computers in Human Behavior Reports*, 15, 100438.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chbr.2024.100438>
- Sharma, B., Lee, S. S., & Johnson, B. K. (2022). The dark at the end of the tunnel: Doomscrolling on social media newsfeeds. *Technology, Mind, and Behavior*, 3(1: Spring 2022). <https://doi.org/10.1037/tmb0000059>

- Sharma, G. D., Ghura, A. S., Mahendru, M., Erkut, B., Kaur, T., & Bedi, D. (2020). Panic during COVID-19 pandemic! A qualitative investigation into the psychosocial experiences of a sample of Indian people. *Personality and Social Psychology*, 11. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.575491>
- Song, H., Jung, J., & Kim, Y. (2017). Perceived news overload and its cognitive and attitudinal consequences for news usage in South Korea. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 94(4), 1172-1190. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077699016679975>
- Sumari, M., Baharudin, D. F., Khalid, N. M., Ibrahim, N. H., & Ahmed Tharbe, I. H. (2020). Family functioning in a collectivist culture of Malaysia: A qualitative study. *The Family Journal*, 28(4), 396-402. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1066480719844334>
- Tafarodi, R. W., & Smith, A. J. (2001). Individualism–collectivism and depressive sensitivity to life events: the case of Malaysian sojourners. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 25(1), 73-88. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0147-1767\(00\)00043-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0147-1767(00)00043-2)
- Thiyagarajan, A., James, T. G., & Marzo, R. R. (2022). Psychometric properties of the 21-item Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale (DASS-21) among Malaysians during COVID-19: a methodological study. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 9, 220. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-022-01229-x>
- Türk-Kurtça, T., & Kocatürk, M. (2025). Beyond the scroll: Exploring how intolerance of uncertainty and psychological resilience explain the association between trait anxiety and Doomscrolling. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 233, 112919. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2024.112919>
- Wafa, M. A., Darungan, T. S., Akbar, S., & Damanik, Z. (2024). The relationship of Doomscrolling with anxiety in students of the faculty of medicine, Islamic University of North Sumatra. *Asian Journal of Healthy and Science*, 3(7), 188-196. <https://doi.org/10.58631/ajhs.v3i7.113>
- Wathelet, M., Duhem, S., Vaiva, G., Baubet, T., Habran, E., Veerapa, E., ... & D'hondt, F. (2020). Factors associated with mental health disorders among university students in France confined during the COVID-19 pandemic. *JAMA Network Open*, 3(10), e2025591. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2020.25591>
- Williams, S. N., Armitage, C. J., Tampe, T., & Dienes, K. (2020). Public perceptions and experiences of social distancing and social isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic: a UK-based focus group study. *BMJ Open*, 10, e039334. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2020-039334>
- Yang, Z. J., & Kahlor, L. (2012). What, me worry? The role of affect in information seeking and avoidance. *Science Communication*, 35(2), 189-212. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1075547012441873>
- Ytre-Arne, B., & Moe, H. (2021). Doomscrolling, monitoring and avoiding: News use in COVID-19 pandemic Lockdown. *Journalism Studies*, 22(13), 1739-1755. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2021.1952475>
- Zeigler-Hill, V., & Shackelford, T. K. (Eds.). (2020). *Encyclopaedia of personality and individual differences*. Cham: Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-24612-3_1779