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Caught in a Flood of Negative Information: Doomscrolling and Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) as Predictors of Negative Affect in Generation Z

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Abstract

Generation Z's heavy use of social media increases their exposure to negative information, which can lead to psychological effects such as negative affect, unpleasant emotional experiences like anger, fear, anxiety, and low self-esteem. This condition is linked to the phenomenon of doomscrolling, the habit of continuously scrolling through negative content, as well as Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), the feeling of anxiety about being left out of others' information or social experiences. This research aims to analyze the extent to which doomscrolling and FoMO predict negative affect among Generation Z social media users. This research employs a quantitative approach using purposive sampling on 150 Generation Z individuals who are active social media users. The instruments used include the Doomscrolling Scale, the Online Fear of Missing Out (ON-FoMO) Scale, and the Negative Affect Scale. Data were analyzed using multiple linear regression. The results indicate that doomscrolling and FoMO are simultaneously positive and significant predictors of negative affect, with an effective contribution of 19.5%. These findings suggest that repetitive negative information and digital social anxiety can increase negative affect among Generation Z.

Keywords: Doomscrolling, fear of missing out, generation Z, negative affect

Abstrak

Penggunaan media sosial yang tinggi pada Generasi Z meningkatkan paparan terhadap informasi negatif yang berpotensi menimbulkan dampak psikologis berupa negative affect, yaitu pengalaman emosional yang tidak menyenangkan seperti marah, takut, cemas, dan rendah diri. Kondisi ini berkaitan dengan fenomena doomscrolling, yakni kebiasaan menggulir konten negatif secara terus-menerus, serta Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), yaitu perasaan cemas dan takut tertinggal informasi atau pengalaman sosial orang lain. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis sejauh mana doomscrolling dan FoMO memprediksi negative affect pada pengguna media sosial Generasi Z. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif dengan teknik purposive sampling pada 150 individu Generasi Z pengguna aktif media sosial. Instrumen yang digunakan meliputi Skala Doomscrolling, Online Fear of Missing Out (ON-FoMO), dan Skala Negative Affect. Data dianalisis menggunakan regresi linier berganda. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa doomscrolling dan FoMO secara simultan merupakan prediktor positif dan signifikan terhadap negative affect, dengan kontribusi efektif sebesar 19,5%. Temuan ini mengindikasikan bahwa informasi negatif yang berulang serta kecemasan sosial digital dapat meningkatkan afeksi negatif pada Generasi Z.

***Kata kunci**: Afek negatif, doomscrolling, fear of missing out, generasi z*

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1. Introduction

Life in the digital age is inseparable from social media, which we use constantly. Over the past two decades, information and communication technology has undergone a remarkable transformation; the emergence of social media has brought ethical, social, environmental, and political issues to the attention of people across all segments of society (Rajeshwari & Meenakshi, 2023). With the rapid development of social media, users are exposed not only to information but also to emotionally charged content. This content influences users' perceptions and reactions regarding their personal lives (Kaydırması et al., 2024).

Unpleasant events can trigger a cascade of negative news stories that are widely consumed and shared across digital platforms (Mandliya et al., 2024). The spread of such information elicits a variety of responses from many social media users. Various user reactions will cause the information to spread further, leading to network interactions around it. This network interaction refers to social media users being indirectly exposed to information that is currently trending. Users will receive content containing the same information as before. The content that appears afterward is a result of the information search algorithms used by users (Price et al., 2022).

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In this context, Przybylski et al. (2013) noted that social media offers an increasingly diverse and easily accessible range of information. Digital platforms offer real-time access to activities, events, and conversations taking place across various social networks. However, not all news or events on social media have a positive impact on individuals. The abundance of bad news, grief, and sad events can leave individuals feeling down.

The sheer volume of negative posts and content on social media can lead to ongoing emotional distress, foster harmful assumptions (Sharifian & Zahodne, 2021), and increase stress, anxiety, depression, sleep disturbances, and a decline in both psychological well-being and quality of life (Soraci et al., 2025). This phenomenon is supported by a 2024 report from GoodStats.id, which indicates that prolonged social media use among Generation Z is associated with increased social comparison and a decline in self-confidence, thereby triggering emotional distress and negative affect (Trihandani, 2024). This situation has the potential to give rise to negative affect, which refers to unpleasant emotional experiences such as anxiety, sadness, anger, or fear (Watson et al., 1988).

Exposure to negative information affects an individual's emotional state because affect underpins emotional responses. According to Tomkins, affect is triggered by changes in neural activity—whether an increase, decrease, or sustained intensity—in response to internal or external stimuli (Ott, 2017). Affect is understood as an emotional phenomenon that can be explained through a discrete emotions approach, which emphasizes emotional categories such as fear, anger, and distress (Ekman, 1992). Negative affect is an emotional dimension that describes unpleasant subjective experiences, including feelings of anger, disgust, guilt, fear, nervousness, and low self-esteem (Watson et al., 1988). In the context of negative affect, factors such as worry, anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, and ruminative thinking serve as primary triggers (Magno, 2010). Additionally, negative affect is associated with cognitive evaluation processes that trigger rumination, as reflected in emotions such as anger, anxiety, and worry (Smith & Kirby, 2001; Kelly & Barsade, 2001). Fear of negative evaluation is also included in negative affect because individuals with social anxiety tend to interpret social information negatively (Ledley & Heimberc, 2006).

When individuals are exposed to a constant stream of negative information, their emotional systems become easily triggered, leading to a decline in psychological well-being. This results in negative affect, as stated by De Hoog and Verboon (2020) who note that individuals exposed to negative information experience direct negative effects and few positive effects. Individuals with high levels of negative affect tend to experience greater emotional distress, whereas those with low negative affect exhibit a calmer emotional state (Watson et al., 1988). Individuals who have many pleasant experiences and a predominance of positive emotions exhibit healthier psychological conditions (Bukhori, 2023); thus, repeated exposure to negative information via social media has the potential to impair an individual's psychological well-being (Sagioglou & Greitemeyer, 2014).

Previous studies have indicated that excessive use of social media can exacerbate negative affect and reduce emotional well-being. Social media use has been linked to the emergence of technostress, increased feelings of sadness and guilt (Bennett et al., 2020), and a worse mood after browsing social media compared to general internet browsing (Sagioglou & Greitemeyer, 2014). When exposure to negative information occurs continuously, these negative affective states tend to intensify. Individuals become more prone to anxiety, depression, and a loss of control over their emotional reactions. This pattern explains how excessive, uncontrolled social media use can diminish psychological well-being and lead to emotional fatigue.

This habit has come to be known as doomscrolling, the behavior of continuously scrolling through social media to consume negative or alarming news and information, to the point of becoming impulsively drawn to bad, sad, or otherwise negative content (Sharma et al., 2022). Essentially, doomscrolling demonstrates how human attention is directed and exploited by digital systems operating within a data-driven, algorithm-based capitalist framework (Salisbury, 2023). The concern that social media algorithms control how users search for and view information is not unfounded. Although often viewed as a bad habit because it leads people to keep viewing negative content, doomscrolling can also be understood as a new way for individuals to interact with information. When scrolling through content, individuals are actually trying to understand,

interpret, and make sense of what they see, rather than simply looking for news (Salisbury, 2023).

According to research by Sa'i et al. (2025), approximately 70% of students spend more than three hours a day on social media, generally to communicate, seek entertainment, and obtain information. If social media use is not managed properly, it can lead to addiction and doomscrolling behavior—the habit of constantly scrolling through negative content that impacts adolescents' mental health. In this context, social media is no longer merely a communication tool but has become a primary source of emotional fatigue and reduced mental well-being among users (Sharma et al., 2022). Research by Akbar et al. (2018) indicates that doomscrolling behavior among adolescents may reduce life satisfaction and foster low self-esteem. Tsawiyah (2022) also notes that individuals with a doomscrolling habit tend to become trapped in negative thought patterns and experience feelings of isolation from real-world social life.

Another phenomenon associated with excessive social media use and heightened negative emotions is Fear of Missing Out (FoMO). FoMO is defined as a feeling of anxiety, worry, or fear of missing out on enjoyable experiences that others are having, particularly those seen on social media (Przybylski et al., 2013). This condition is also characterized by the emergence of social anxiety when individuals feel left out of important moments or information (Bahrudin & Azzam, 2026). To address this, individuals tend to follow social media trends to maintain a sense of connection with others or their peer group (Muharam et al., 2023). Individuals with high levels of FoMO tend to have a strong need to remain connected to their online social environment, leading them to check notifications more frequently, scroll through their feeds, and follow others' activities. This behavior can increase emotional tension and reinforce feelings of dissatisfaction with oneself (Masyitah & Annatagia, 2022). FoMO and doomscrolling are two interrelated phenomena in social media use; both are driven by the need to constantly obtain the latest information and the fear of being left behind by the digital social current. Both factors contribute to increased negative affect among users.

FoMO is significantly associated with increased negative affect and reduced emotional well-being. Research by Sa'i et al. (2025) indicates that adolescent girls use social media more frequently for affective purposes, such as sharing feelings, building emotional connections, and seeking social support. When they feel left out of digital conversations or current trends, they are more likely to experience social anxiety related to FoMO. Meanwhile, adolescent boys tend to use social media for informational or entertainment purposes; thus, although they are also exposed to FoMO, its impact tends to be lower in the emotional dimension. Savitri (2019) found that the higher the FoMO, the lower the level of psychological well-being among social media users in emerging adulthood. Excessive social media use, accompanied by FoMO, can lead to problems with social media use. In other words, the higher a person's FoMO, the greater the likelihood of negative emotions arising from social media dependency. Additionally, Akbar et al (2018) explain that FoMO contributes to low life satisfaction and increased feelings of worthlessness, particularly among active adolescent social media users.

This phenomenon becomes even more complex when linked to the habits of doomscrolling and Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), which are prevalent among younger generations, particularly Generation Z. Both behaviors reinforce individuals' tendency to continuously consume negative information and maintain their presence on social media. In the long term, these habits can exacerbate negative affect, as individuals are not only exposed to negative content but also trapped in a psychological drive to keep up with the flow of information.

This phenomenon is particularly evident among Generation Z, a group of active social media users. Generation Z is often exposed to large amounts of information, which risks disrupting their emotional and cognitive balance. Generation Z is the generation most likely to report that social media use has a negative impact on mental health, at 27%. Research by Hansya and Ardi (2024) reveals that the more users engage in doomscrolling, the higher their levels of psychological distress, which in turn leads to a decline in Generation Z's mental well-being.

This research focuses on the habit of doomscrolling, the excessive scrolling and consumption of negative content on social media. The tendency to constantly seek out or read negative information on digital platforms is often accompanied by feelings of anxiety and the fear of missing out (FoMO). Both behaviors can affect an individual's emotional state, particularly as negative affect, such as sadness, anxiety, anger, or frustration (Elhai & Casale, 2026; Satici et al., 2022).

Previous research has shown that doomscrolling is associated with increased psychological distress and decreased mental well-being among social media users (Hansya & Ardi, 2024). Additionally, Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) has also been linked to the emergence of negative emotions such as anxiety and emotional distress (Elhai & Casale, 2026). In the context of social media use, doomscrolling and FoMO tend to co-occur, with the urge to stay connected and not miss out on information increasing an individual's tendency to excessively consume negative content (Elhai, Yang, & Montag, 2021; Shabahang et al., 2023). However, research examining both variables simultaneously as predictors of negative affect among Generation Z social media users remains limited. Therefore, this research aims to analyze the extent to which doomscrolling and fear of missing out (FoMO) predict negative affect. The hypothesis proposed in this research is that doomscrolling and Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) are simultaneous predictors of negative affect.

2. Method

This research employs a quantitative survey approach. The research aims to analyze the extent to which doomscrolling and fear of missing out (FoMO) predict negative affect among Generation Z social media users. The population of this research consists of females and males classified as Generation Z in 2025. The sample was selected using purposive sampling. The inclusion criteria for this research are as follows: 1) individuals (male or female) classified as Generation Z (born between 1997 and 2012); 2) active social media users in the past year, with daily usage and a minimum duration of 30 minutes per day; 3) using at least one major social media platform such as Instagram, TikTok, or X; and 4) willing to voluntarily complete a questionnaire via Google Forms. Social media usage activities include active activities such as posting content, sending messages, commenting, and liking content, as well as passive activities such as scrolling or viewing content without making any posts.

Data collection for the research took place over a 25-day period from 6 November to 30, 2025. The research sample consisted of 150 participants spread across several provinces in Indonesia. The majority of respondents were female, totaling 130 people (86.7%), while 20 respondents (13.3%) were male. Most respondents were university students, totaling 137 people (91.3%). In addition, the majority of respondents—82 people (54.7%)—used social media for more than 4 hours per day.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Category	n	%
Gender		
Male	20	13.3
Female	130	86.7
Status		
University Students	137	91.3
Workers	10	6.7
Students	3	2.0
Province of origin		
Central Java	66	44.0
West Java	41	27.3
East Java	9	6.0
Jakarta	7	4.7
Other provinces	27	18.0
Daily social media usage		
30 minutes – 1 hour	12	8.0
2 – 4 hours	56	37.3
> 4 hours	82	54.7

Data collection was conducted online by distributing a questionnaire via social media platforms, aiming to efficiently reach respondents from across Indonesia. Given the large and diverse population of Generation Z, the number of respondents in this research was targeted at 100–200 people to ensure the validity of the statistical results and the representativeness of the sample. This number was deemed sufficient to represent the target population and minimize the risk of sampling error that might occur if the sample size were too small.

This research instrument uses three psychological scales: first, the Doomscrolling Scale (Sharma et al., 2022), translated by Rahmayanti and Ambarini (2025). This scale consists of 15 items with a Content Validity Index (CVI) for all items > 0.79 and a Cronbach's Alpha reliability of $\alpha = 0.93$. It also uses an adaptation of the Online Fear of Missing Out (ON-FoMO) scale (Sette et al., 2019) by Kurniawan and Utami (2022), consisting of 10 items. The results of the construct validity test showed correlations between dimensions ranging from $r = 0.21 – 0.41$, with a reliability coefficient of $\alpha = 0.89$. Finally, the Negative Affect scale (Watson et al., 1988) was used, translated by Akhtar (2019). This scale consists of 10 items measuring negative affect, with item-total correlations ranging from $r = 0.41$ to 0.69 and a Cronbach's Alpha reliability of $\alpha = 0.85$. Data were analyzed using multiple linear regression in Jamovi 2.4.14.

3. Results

Once the data has been collected, the researcher must first conduct assumption tests to verify that the necessary conditions have been met. The assumption tests conducted by the researcher include tests for autocorrelation, normality, multicollinearity, and homoscedasticity.

The first assumption test was met, with an autocorrelation p-value of 0.472 ($p > 0.05$). The second assumption test—the normality test—was not met, with a p-value of 0.036 ($p < 0.05$), indicating that the residuals are not normally distributed. However, based on the visual Q–Q plot of the residuals, the points are scattered around the diagonal and follow its pattern. This indicates that the residual distribution is close to normal. Furthermore, with a large sample size ($n = 150 > 30$), the multiple linear regression analysis can still proceed, as in large samples, a violation of the normality assumption does not significantly affect the analysis results (Field, 2018).

Table 2. Results of the Classical Assumptions Test

Assumption Test	Variable	Score	Criteria	Note
Autocorrelation	Doomscrolling*FoMO* Negative Affect	$p = 0.472$	$p > 0.05$	Met
Normality	Doomscrolling*FoMO* Negative Affect	$p = 0.036$	$p > 0.05$	Not met
Multicollinearity	Doomscrolling*Negative Affect	VIF = 1.38	VIF < 10	Met
	FoMO*Negative Affect	VIF = 1.38	VIF < 10	Met
Homoscedasticity	Doomscrolling*Negative Affect	$p = 0.476$	$p > 0.05$	Met
	FoMO*Negative Affect	$p = 0.286$	$p > 0.05$	Met

The third assumption test was met, with the multicollinearity results indicating no correlation between the two independent variables. This was confirmed by the VIF values for both variables, which were 1.38 (VIF < 10); therefore, there was no multicollinearity. Additionally, the fourth assumption test was met: the homoscedasticity test showed no evidence of heteroscedasticity, with p-values of 0.476 for Doomscrolling and 0.286 for FoMO. Although the normality test was not statistically significant, based on the visual Q–Q plot and an adequate sample size, the regression model was deemed suitable to proceed with multiple linear regression analysis.

The results of the multiple linear regression analysis conducted on three variables in the hypothesis test (F-test) showed a significance level of < 0.001, indicating that doomscrolling and FoMO are simultaneously significant predictors of negative affect. Additionally, the constant (α) was found to be 14.548; B1X1 was 0.095; and B2X2 was 0.199, so the resulting regression equation is expressed as $Y = 14.548 + 0.095X1 + 0.199X2 + e$. Furthermore, the adjusted R-squared value was 0.195, indicating that doomscrolling and FoMO together explain 19.5% of the variance in negative affect. This means that 19.5% of the variation in the negative affect variable is explained by the doomscrolling and FoMO variables. The analysis results indicate that doomscrolling and FoMO are positive and significant predictors of negative affect.

The regression model is considered suitable for use because most classical assumption tests were met, and it has an $R^2 = 0.206$, indicating that the model explains 20.6% of the variation in negative affect.

Table 3. Results of the Multiple Linear Regression Test

Variable	B	SE	β	t	p	95% CI
Doomscrolling*Negative Affect	0.095	0.039	0.208	2.40	0.017	[0.017, 0.172]
FoMO*Negative Affect	0.199	0.055	0.308	3.56	< 0.001	[0.089, 0.309]

Based on Table 3, the results of the multiple linear regression analysis indicate that doomscrolling and Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) are positive and significant predictors of negative affect. The FoMO variable has a greater predictive contribution than doomscrolling, as indicated by the standardized beta coefficients. The figure shows that the doomscrolling variable has a p-value of 0.017 and a calculated t-value of 2.40, indicating that doomscrolling is a significant predictor of negative affect. Furthermore, the FoMO variable has a p-value < 0.001 with a t-value of 3.56, indicating that FoMO is a significant predictor of negative affect. These results suggest that the higher the tendency toward doomscrolling and FoMO, the higher the level of negative affect experienced by the individual.

4. Discussion

Based on the analysis, doomscrolling and Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) are both positive and significant predictors of negative affect. The higher the levels of doomscrolling and FoMO experienced by an individual, the higher the level of negative affect felt. The results of the research indicate that the first hypothesis (H1) is accepted: doomscrolling and Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) jointly contribute to negative affect. Additionally, the regression coefficients show that doomscrolling and Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) each provide a positive and significant contribution to negative affect in the multiple regression model. The main hypothesis of this research—that doomscrolling and Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) significantly predict negative affect—was confirmed by the effective contribution of both independent variables to the dependent variable, accounting for 19.5%.

Based on the results of this research, when individuals engage in continuous doomscrolling—the act of scrolling through negative news or information—coupled with feelings of anxiety or fear of missing out on others' experiences (FoMO), it leads to negative affect. This finding aligns with research by Sa'i et al. (2025), which found that doomscrolling and FoMO have negative impacts on the mental health of junior high school students in Surabaya. Although the dependent variable of that research was mental health, negative affect can act as one of the factors that exacerbate that mental health condition (Sa'i et al., 2025). Positive and negative affect are aspects of affect within subjective well-being (Akhtar, 2019), in which individuals cognitively and affectively evaluate their life experiences from a positive or negative perspective.

In the second hypothesis, doomscrolling influences negative affect. Excessive and uncontrolled social media use, such as doomscrolling, can worsen psychological well-being and increase negative affect, including feelings of anxiety, depression, and emotional exhaustion. Through the Digital Well-being Theory (Büchi, 2024), the findings of this research are particularly relevant regarding doomscrolling behavior. This theory emphasizes that digital well-being heavily depends on an individual's ability to maintain a balance in technology use (Sa'i et al., 2025). Furthermore, research by Shabahang et al (2023) states that doomscrolling is closely associated with depression, increased future anxiety, and lower psychological well-being. This is also consistent with the research's findings that negative affect—such as irritation, hostility, restlessness, and worry—arises when individuals engage in doomscrolling.

The results of the third hypothesis indicate that Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) contributes to the emergence of negative emotions. This aligns with the findings of Sa'i et al (2025) which show that the majority of students experience FoMO, driving them to constantly monitor social media so as not to miss out on information, trends, or the social activities of their peers. Individuals with high levels of FoMO tend to experience social anxiety and pressure to stay constantly connected online, which can ultimately trigger the emergence of negative emotions. Unmanaged FoMO can lead to various psychological impacts, such as depression, emotional exhaustion, stress, and sleep disorders like insomnia. This condition ultimately reduces an individual's quality of life due to feelings of dissatisfaction and the belief that current achievements or possessions remain insufficient (Tsawiyah, 2022).

Doomscrolling and Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), when experienced simultaneously, can trigger negative affect and potentially worsen mental health. The findings of this research align with those of Ytre-Arne & Moe (2021), who found that, through doomscrolling, individuals are driven to continually follow the flow of information to understand and cope with a world full of uncertainty. However, this behavior is often difficult to stop, even though individuals realize that continuous exposure to negative information actually worsens their emotional state. This research provides a theoretical contribution by demonstrating that doomscrolling and FoMO predict negative affect in the context of digital media use.

Although this research provides significant empirical findings, several limitations should be noted. First, the sampling technique used was purposive sampling, which enabled the researcher to recruit participants who met the research criteria; however, this may limit the generalizability of the results to the entire Generation Z population. The sample obtained represents the characteristics of active social media users but may not fully reflect the full range of psychological conditions among Generation Z in Indonesia. Second is a limitation regarding the results of the normality assumption test. The normality test of the residuals showed a p-

value < 0.05, indicating that the distribution is not fully normal. However, based on a visual inspection of the Q-Q plot, the residuals appear to follow a diagonal line and the pattern approaches a normal distribution. Furthermore, the sample size is relatively large, so multiple linear regression analysis was still conducted. Additionally, although the regression model indicates an effective contribution of 19.5%, this suggests that other variables beyond doomscrolling and FoMO may influence negative affect but have not been examined in this research.

The researcher advises Generation Z to be more mindful in managing their social media use, particularly by limiting doomscrolling behavior and managing feelings of FoMO through increased self-awareness, setting usage limits, filtering content, and taking breaks from exposure to negative information in order to minimize negative emotions and maintain mental health. For future researchers, it is recommended to examine the role of doomscrolling as a mediating variable in the relationship between Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) and negative affect, as well as to consider other variables, longitudinal or experimental designs, and alternative analytical techniques to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the psychological factors involved in social media use. Thus, the research findings are expected to make a broader contribution, both theoretically and practically, to efforts to improve the mental health of social media users in the digital age.

5. Conclusion

Based on the findings of this research, doomscrolling and Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) contribute to the emergence of negative affect among Generation Z social media users. Individuals who are frequently exposed to and consume excessive amounts of negative content, as well as those driven to stay constantly connected online to avoid missing out on others' information or experiences, are likely to experience negative emotions such as anxiety, sadness, anger, and depression. These findings expand the psychological literature on digital behavior by demonstrating that uncontrolled social media use is associated with poorer psychological well-being and poorer emotion regulation among Generation Z in the digital age.

Ethical Statement: This research was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles governing research involving human subjects. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained prior to the completion of the questionnaire. The researchers guaranteed the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants' data and ensured that participants could withdraw at any time without penalty.

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