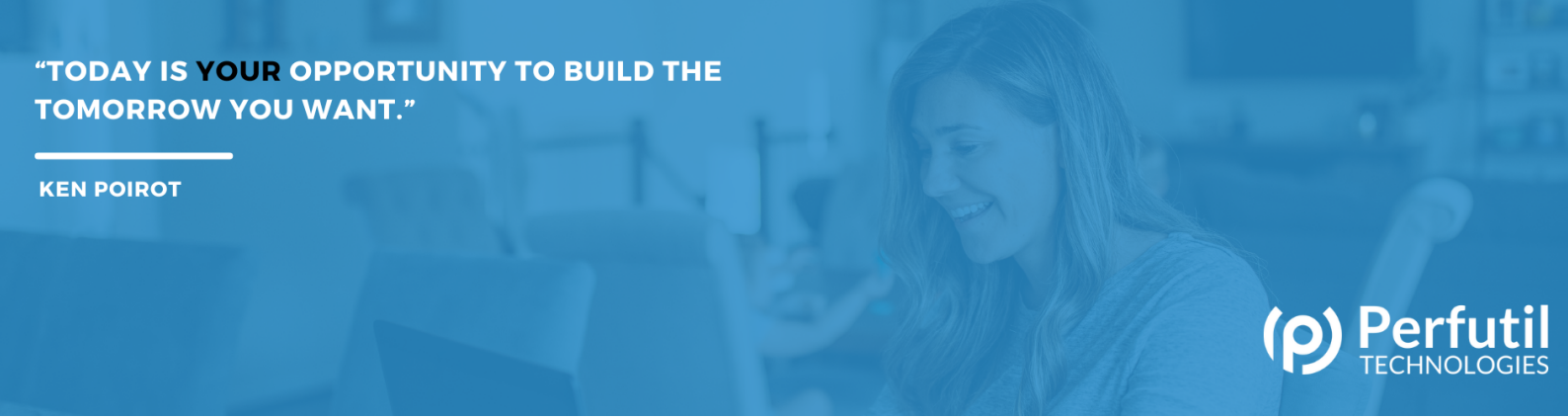


# Introduction

Doomscrolling – sometimes called *doomsurfing* – refers to the compulsive consumption of endless bad news on digital platforms techtarget.com. The term gained notoriety during the COVID-19 pandemic and was even listed as one of Oxford’s “Words of the Year” in 2020 techtarget.com. It describes a habit of continually scrolling through social media feeds or news sites for distressing headlines, well past the point of it being informative. This behavior taps into our **negativity bias** and survival instincts: when the world feels dangerous or uncertain, we instinctively “scan for threats” by seeking more information, even if it’s grim health.harvard.eduwired.com. Unfortunately, this coping mechanism often backfires – trapping users in a spiral of anxiety, sadness, and information overload. In this paper, we delve into the psychological and neurological effects of doomscrolling on mental health, examine how it manifests on popular platforms like X (formerly Twitter) and Instagram, compare it with other digital activities, and explore both personal and systemic strategies to break the cycle.

## Psychological Impact Across Age Groups and Vulnerable Users

**Teens and Young Adults:** Adolescents may be especially vulnerable to doomscrolling’s harms. Emerging research has linked excessive passive scrolling in teens to dramatic increases in anxiety and depression. In one nine-month study of 580 adolescents (age 12–17) with no prior mental diagnoses, those who spent **over 2 hours per day** on screens doubled their risk of clinically elevated anxiety and were **four times more likely** to show signs of depression . By the end of the study, 45% of these teens exhibited psychiatric symptoms significant enough to warrant medical evaluation . Neuroscientists note that adolescence is a critical period of brain development (especially for emotional regulation and impulse control), and endless scrolling can “quietly reshape” the developing brain in negative ways . In plain terms, doomscrolling is fueling a mental health crisis among youth during a phase when resilience is still forming. Teens themselves report spending astonishing amounts of time glued to their screens (some up to 15 hours a day), often starting upon waking and continuing all day . This leaves little room for restorative activities like in-person socializing, exercise, or sleep – compounding stress and isolation.

**Adults and Older Users:** No age group is completely immune to doomscrolling. Harvard experts emphasize that *anyone* with a device can fall prey to the cycle of endlessly refreshing bad news . That said, certain adult demographics appear more susceptible. For instance, women may be hit particularly hard; psychiatrists observe that much violent or disturbing news disproportionately involves harm to women or children, which can heighten fear and vigilance in female readers . People with a history of trauma are also at risk – survivors of violence or disaster often doomscroll in an anxious attempt to foresee threats and "get a handle on what's going on," yet ironically the constant exposure can *trigger* their past trauma and aggravate anxiety . Even older adults who use social media as a news source can experience the same anxiety loops and pessimism if they become fixated on negative headlines. In short, while doomscrolling behaviors may peak among younger, tech-savvy users, the psychological toll spans across generations whenever individuals lack healthy limits on their media diet.

**Pre-Existing Mental Health Conditions:** Individuals who already struggle with mental health issues (such as anxiety, depression, or PTSD) are particularly prone to doomscrolling and may suffer outsized consequences. Clinical psychologists note that the habit tends to be more prevalent among patients with diagnosed **anxiety or depression** weforum.orgweforum.org. The reasons vary: People with anxiety might doomscroll in a misguided effort to regain control – compulsively checking for the latest updates on scary events, hoping that knowledge will ease their worry . Those with depression or pessimistic worldviews may subconsciously seek out news that validates their negative beliefs (a form of confirmation bias) . Unfortunately, this only reinforces hopelessness. Indeed, therapists report that for patients with co-occurring conditions (like depression plus PTSD or substance use), doomscrolling can **exacerbate symptoms quickly**, even triggering panic attacks in some cases . The behavior feeds a vicious cycle: an already-anxious or depressed person is drawn to negative content, which then amplifies their distress and makes recovery harder . In summary, those with underlying mental health vulnerabilities must exercise extreme caution – what begins as a search for understanding or connection online can easily spiral into harmful overconsumption of bad news.

## Doomscrolling, Anxiety, Depression, and Cognitive Fatigue – What Research Shows

An expanding body of research confirms that habitual doomscrolling is linked to poorer mental well-being. Multiple studies from the COVID era onward have found correlations about.

From a neurological and cognitive perspective, doomscrolling overloads the brain's stress circuits. Harvard Medical School experts explain that our brains are wired to handle **short bursts** of stress or threat, but the never-ending stream of crises on a newsfeed keeps us in prolonged fight-or-flight. The amygdala (the brain's fear center) stays activated, pumping out stress signals and keeping us hyper-vigilant for the next danger . People describe feeling on edge or unable to "turn off" their worry after a doomscrolling session. This chronic hyperarousal contributes to what one physician calls *"popcorn brain"* – a state of

overstimulation where "you feel your brain is popping" from the constant dopamine hits and stress surges of online content . Over time, this can lead to **cognitive fatigue** and difficulty engaging with offline life, which inevitably moves at a slower pace than the frenetic online world . Indeed, neuroscientists worry that heavy internet multi-tasking and information bombardment can physically change the brain: high levels of screen-based media consumption have been tied to decreased grey matter in prefrontal regions (the areas responsible for focus and impulse control) theguardian.com. One commentary noted that researchers have likened infinite scrolling feeds to a "bottomless soup bowl" – if content keeps refilling, users keep consuming mindlessly, driven by dopamine-fueled reward. This design hack exploits our brain's seeking circuits and can become truly.

The mental health fallout from doomscrolling extends beyond mood and into behavior and physical well-being. Chronic stress from negative news can manifest in **physical symptoms** like headaches, muscle tension, upset stomach, and. One Harvard report observed that intense doomscrolling sessions often leave people sedentary for hours, compounding issues like poor sleep and body pain . There are also functional impacts: an April 2024 study in *Computers in Human Behavior* found that employees who doomscroll during work become significantly **less engaged and productive** in their tasks. It appears that absorbing distressing news not only saps emotional energy but also impairs concentration and motivation in other areas of life. Furthermore, the mood distortion from constant negativity can linger; people may ruminate on what they read long after putting the phone down, leading to distraction and worry throughout the day therapist.com. In summary, a robust collection of academic and clinical evidence now links doomscrolling to a range of adverse outcomes: higher anxiety and depression levels, greater stress and physiological arousal, "brain fog" and attention deficits, pessimistic worldviews, and even reduced work performance . While causation is complex (and some studies note it's unclear whether doomscrolling causes anxiety or anxious individuals doomscroll ), the associations are strong enough to raise alarms about this digital habit's toll on mental health.

## Platform Design and Algorithmic Tendencies on X vs. Instagram

Doomscrolling behaviors can be amplified or alleviated depending on platform design. **X (formerly Twitter)** and **Instagram** – two immensely popular but very different social networks – illustrate how features and algorithms influence user scrolling patterns. X is largely text-driven and news-centric; its core experience involves an infinite feed of tweets, many discussing current events, opinions, and breaking news. This real-time, news-focused design means that X often confronts users with a barrage of sociopolitical content and world crises in quick succession grapevine.in. The platform's algorithms (especially the "For You" personalized feed and trending topics list) tend to amplify the most sensational and engaging content – which is often negative or outrage-inducing, since such posts get more reactions. In fact, an analysis of ~30 million Twitter posts found that **highly negative, emotionally charged news** stories were the most likely to go viral, particularly when coming from partisan or biased sources . Over time, even mainstream

news outlets on X felt pressured to adopt more negatively framed and arousing posts "to chase eyeballs" and match the engagement of more extreme content hai.stanford.edu. This creates a feedback loop where a user's feed gets progressively saturated with anger- or fear-provoking headlines. The structure of X thus readily lends itself to doomscrolling: infinite scroll + viral negativity = a user checking one alarming tweet after another, indefinitely. As one technologist put it, modern social platforms have created a "race to the bottom of the brainstem" – algorithms hack our base emotions (fear, outrage) to maximize attention, linking platform profit to how long they can keep us engaged in a cycle of emotional reactivity .

Instagram, on the other hand, was originally built around visual content and personal sharing – a digital scrapbook of photos and videos from friends, influencers, and brands. At first glance, Instagram might not seem as obviously tied to "doomscrolling," since many users go there for entertainment or social connection rather than hard news. However, Instagram's design has evolved to also encourage endless browsing, and it can facilitate its own form of negative scrolling. The **infinite feed and Explore page** on Instagram use powerful recommendation algorithms to serve up a never-ending flow of posts tailored to your interests – which can include news or crisis content if you've shown a tendency to engage with it. Moreover, even aside from news, Instagram's algorithm aggressively pushes engaging content like Reels (short videos), often prioritizing sensational, provocative, or aspirational posts to keep users hooked . Users have noticed that *even if they try to curate or hide unwanted content*, Instagram "still [ends] up showing" them trending reels and influencer posts, reflecting the platform's determination to maximize viewership at all costs . This can lead to a different flavor of doomscrolling: one might start by casually browsing light content, only to be swept into hours of swiping through algorithm-recommended videos that range from frivolous to disturbing. Unlike Twitter's overt news bombshells, Instagram's negativity often comes more subtly – through *social comparison and FOMO*. The platform's emphasis on polished images of others' lives can trigger feelings of inadequacy, envy, and loneliness in viewers. Studies have shown that heavy Instagram use, especially passive viewing of others' highlight reels, is associated with increases in depressive symptoms and body image concerns in teens and young adults . In this sense, scrolling Instagram may not always fill one with dread about world events, but it can erode self-esteem and mood via constant comparisons. It's telling that Facebook's own internal research (revealed in 2021) found Instagram could worsen mental health for a sizable percentage of teen girls – a more insidious consequence than traditional doomscrolling, but a serious harm nonetheless.

Despite their content differences, **both X and Instagram share design features that encourage compulsive overuse**. The endless scrolling interface (no natural stopping cues), algorithmic feeds that prioritize engagement, and autoplaying or automatically refreshing content streams all serve to prolong sessions. These platforms lack built-in "stopping points" – you can scroll indefinitely on Instagram's feed or X's timeline without hitting a logical end, which exploits our tendency to lose track of time online theguardian.com. Notifications and real-time indicators (likes, comments, new posts) also play on our reward system to pull us back in frequently. The result is that someone

seeking a quick update can easily end up spending an hour immersed. As Tristan Harris (a former design ethicist) warned, billions of users are now getting their information from systems that are *engineered* to maximize attention – even if that means "hacking lower into our lizard brains" by stoking fear and outrage . Instagram's tactics might be more about eye-catching entertainment and aspirational envy, whereas X's are about argumentative news and outrage, but the underlying algorithmic goal is the same: capture eyeballs and keep them scrolling. For users, this means extra vigilance is needed on both platforms to avoid falling into a doomscroll hole. Ultimately, whether one is repeatedly refreshing X for the latest crisis or swiping through Instagram's endless carousel of content, the combination of unlimited feed + engagement-driven algorithms can foster unhealthy usage patterns and related mental health strains.

## Doomscrolling vs. Other Digital Behaviors: A Comparison

Not all online activities affect mental health in the same way. It's useful to compare doomscrolling with other common digital behaviors – such as video gaming or passive content consumption (like binge-watching shows or scrolling through light-hearted content) – to understand their relative impacts.

**Doomscrolling vs. Gaming:** On the surface, doomscrolling and playing video games are very different behaviors: one involves passively ingesting real-world bad news, while the other is an interactive form of entertainment or challenge. Their mental health effects can thus diverge significantly. Doomscrolling tends to leave users feeling helpless, anxious, and drained – it provides information (often of upsetting events) but little sense of agency or resolution. Gaming, by contrast, often provides goals, feedback, and a sense of *control or achievement* that doomscrolling lacks. Many gamers report that playing games is a stress-reliever or mood-booster, offering a form of escape that is actually **engaging** rather than numbing. In fact, an emerging consensus – supported by some studies – is that moderate gaming can have positive effects on mental health, such as improving mood, social connection (in multiplayer games), and cognitive skills wired.com. A feature in *Wired* described how one doomscroller swapped her morning phone habit for handheld gaming and saw a remarkable lift in her mental state . She found gaming "scratched the itch" for stimulation while avoiding the trauma and cynicism that came with doomscrolling – instead of starting the day with videos that made her cry, she was solving puzzles or embarking on adventures in a game world, which left her feeling far more refreshed . That said, gaming is not a panacea. Excessive or disordered gaming can carry its own risks – addiction, social withdrawal, or heightened anxiety in some cases . But on the whole, **the emotional profile of gaming is often more positive**: where doomscrolling "numbs" the mind with worry and despair, gaming (when done in healthy balance) can engage the mind and even produce joy or relaxation. One observer put it succinctly: gaming can "sharpen the mind while doom-scrolling numbs it". Thus, as a coping mechanism or leisure activity, gaming appears far more likely to improve mental well-being (or at least not severely harm it) compared to doomscrolling, which consistently erodes mental health in studies.

**Doomscrolling vs. Passive Media Consumption:** Another contrast can be made with passive digital content consumption that isn't focused on negative news – for example, binge-watching TV shows/movies or endlessly scrolling through humorous videos, memes, or neutral content. Binge-watching has become a common pastime in the streaming era, and while it might seem harmless (or even pleasantly immersive), research indicates it too can have negative effects on mental health. Prolonged binge-watching sessions have been linked to higher levels of depression, anxiety, and loneliness, as well as insomnia and poor sleep quality . Similar to doomscrolling, marathon viewing keeps one sedentary and over-stimulated at odd hours, potentially disrupting normal routines and social activities. However, the *nature* of the psychological impact may differ. The stress from binge-watching tends to come from **overuse** (e.g. guilt from procrastination, physical fatigue, social isolation) rather than from the *content* itself causing distress. In other words, someone might feel sad or empty after finishing a 6-hour series binge, but that's often due to the crash after a long escapist high or the realization of time wasted, rather than the content having terrified or angered them. Doomscrolling, conversely, often provokes immediate anxiety and sadness because the content is directly negative (e.g. reading about tragedies, disasters, conflict). Passive scrolling of light content (like funny videos or lifestyle posts) usually doesn't instill fear; people might emerge from a YouTube or TikTok rabbit hole feeling more numb or mentally foggy, but not existentially afraid. In fact, some use light content scrolling as a form of **emotion-numbing or distraction** – a coping strategy to escape their real worries. While this can provide temporary relief, it can also feed procrastination and avoidant behavior, and if it becomes excessive, it might contribute to depressive feelings (due to lack of purposeful activity) over time nm.org.

In summary, doomscrolling is uniquely pernicious in how it combines *passivity* with *negative emotional input*. Other passive digital behaviors (like watching Netflix or scrolling Instagram for fashion inspiration) might not spike anxiety as sharply, but they carry their own downsides if done compulsively – often impacting mood through isolation, FOMO, or sleep loss rather than through direct fear. Interactive digital activities like gaming, creative hobbies, or online learning tend to be healthier for the mind because they provide a sense of engagement or accomplishment. It's notable that mental health experts often suggest **active coping over passive consumption**: for instance, journaling or playing a game when stressed instead of scrolling news feeds. Active behaviors at least put one in the driver's seat, whereas doomscrolling makes the user a receptacle for whatever horrors the algorithm serves up. Ultimately, compared to other digital behaviors, doomscrolling stands out as offering virtually *no real reward* – it neither truly informs (beyond a point) nor entertains nor relaxes. Instead, it reinforces negative thoughts and leaves the user emotionally spent. As one Psychology Today piece bluntly noted, doomscrolling "reinforces negative thoughts and feelings and can worsen pre-existing depression and anxiety"psychologytoday.com, whereas many other digital activities have at least some positive or enjoyable component. This contrast is a reminder that not all screen time is equal – **content and intent matter greatly** for mental health outcomes.

# Breaking the Doomscrolling Cycle: Interventions and Digital Wellness Strategies

Recognizing the harmful impact of doomscrolling is the first step, but equally important is figuring out how to stop doing it. Fortunately, psychologists, tech experts, and even social media companies have proposed a variety of strategies to help individuals reclaim their time and mental well-being. These interventions range from personal habit changes and mindfulness techniques to app-based tools and potential platform/policy reforms.

**Personal Practices – Setting Boundaries:** Mental health professionals emphasize creating **"digital boundaries"** to disrupt the automatic reflex to scroll health.harvard.edu. A highly recommended tactic is to **bookend your day** with screen-free time. For example, avoid checking your phone first thing in the morning – those initial minutes upon waking can set the tone for your stress response all day. One Harvard doctor suggests keeping your phone *off the nightstand*, maybe across the room, so you're not tempted to grab it upon waking. Instead, take care of a simple morning routine (light, stretching, breakfast) before engaging with news. Similarly, **no phones in bed at night** can protect your sleep; doomscrolling at midnight, when you're tired and susceptible, not only steals sleep time but also fills your head with anxious thoughts that may keep you up . Beyond mornings and nights, try to **identify trigger times** – perhaps you tend to scroll during lunch or right after work – and have alternative activities ready (take a walk, call a friend, play a game) to fill that slot instead. Building new routines takes conscious effort, but even small changes help break the habit loop.

Another simple but powerful tip is to **remove frictionless access** to doomscrolling. This might mean *turning off non-essential news notifications*, so your phone isn't constantly luring you with sensational alerts. It could also involve moving social media apps off your home screen or logging out after each session, requiring an extra step to log in (which makes mindless checking less likely) employmenthero.com. Some people choose to uninstall particularly addictive apps or use their web browser (which is less optimized for infinite scroll) to check social media sparingly. Practicing **mindfulness and emotional awareness** while online is another tool: notice when a piece of news elevates your heart rate or makes you upset, and use that as a cue to step away or take deep breaths rather than diving deeper. Mindfulness essentially trains you to *recognize the urge* to doomscroll as it bubbles up, giving you a chance to pause and choose a different action before the urge takes over.

**Digital Wellness Tools and Apps:** Given that our devices themselves contribute to the problem, it's fitting to enlist technology to fight technology. A number of **anti-doomscrolling apps** and built-in phone features can assist in limiting usage. For instance, screen-time trackers and limiters (like Apple Screen Time or Android's Digital Wellbeing) allow users to set daily time limits on specific apps and receive reminders when time is up. Instagram has a "Take a Break" feature that, when enabled, will nudge users to close the app if they've been scrolling for a set period. There are also third-party apps like *Freedom*, *Opal*, *Forest*, and *RescueTime* that can block or lock you out of social media

during certain hours or after a quota is reached tech.co. For example, Freedom lets you create custom blocklists and schedules to enforce focus periods away from distracting sites. Such tools effectively serve as training wheels – they help you build discipline by creating a buffer between you and the endless feed. Over time, users often find the structure helps reduce compulsive checking and makes them more mindful when they do go online. It's worth noting that *31% of U.S. adults* in one survey admitted to regular doomscrolling, and the rate was even higher for Gen Z users . These numbers underscore that digital wellness is a need for many, and accordingly, an "army of apps" has arisen to meet the demand tech.co. Even simple features like turning your phone display to grayscale (which makes the screen less visually enticing) have shown some promise in curbing mindless scrolling.

**Positive Content and Mindset Shifts:** Another strategy is deliberately reshaping your content diet to include more positive and constructive media. Instead of gorging on doom-and-gloom, seek out sources of hope and solutions. Psychiatrists advise **focusing on community-level news** or niche interests that bring joy, on the theory that local or personalized content is often less doom-filled than global. More concretely, there are now apps and websites dedicated to *uplifting news*. Platforms like the **Good News Network**, **Positive News**, **The Optimist Daily**, or **Goodable** curate stories of kindness, progress, and solutions, providing a counterbalance to mainstream media's negativity bias groovnow.com. Consuming such content can remind us that it's not "all bad" out there – which is important for maintaining perspective. In one experiment, people who read constructive news (e.g. about peace talks or problem-solving) reported significantly **higher mood and lower anxiety** than those who read standard conflict-focused news, even though both stories were factual goodable.co. This suggests that substituting some doomscrolling time with "joyscrolling" (for lack of a better term) can measurably improve emotional state. It's even been shown that *sharing* positive news with others boosts happiness and life satisfaction – a stark contrast to the loneliness and pessimism that sharing negative news can breed. Thus, one habit to cultivate is: for every dark article you read, challenge yourself to find an inspiring or heartwarming one as well, and perhaps discuss that with friends. This doesn't mean ignoring problems in the world, but ensuring you also feed your psyche with evidence of hope and goodwill. (The section below will further explore the idea of positive-content platforms as an antidote.)

**Professional Help and Cognitive Techniques:** For some, doomscrolling may be tied to deeper issues like clinical anxiety or obsessive-compulsive tendencies, and stopping isn't just a matter of willpower. If someone finds they *cannot* cut back despite negative impacts (or they experience intense distress when trying to stop), it's advisable to seek help from a mental health professional. Therapy can provide tools to manage the underlying anxiety that drives doomscrolling. Techniques from cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), for instance, can help individuals challenge catastrophic thinking and develop healthier information-consumption habits. A therapist might work with a client to schedule limited "worry time" for news and practice thought-stopping or grounding exercises when they feel the urge to incessantly check feeds. In severe cases, where doomscrolling is a part of broader compulsive or depressive pathology, a doctor might even consider medication to help alleviate the obsessive anxiety fueling it. The key message: if self-help strategies

aren't enough and the behavior is harming your daily functioning, **do not hesitate to talk to a healthcare provider**. As Dr. Mollica of Harvard said, some problems are very hard to overcome alone – and continually doomscrolling despite extreme upset could be a sign of a deeper issue that merits professional intervention

**Platform and Policy-Level Ideas:** Finally, there is growing recognition that the onus can't be entirely on users to police their behavior – platforms themselves and perhaps regulators have roles to play in mitigating the harms of doomscrolling. Social media companies, under public pressure, have started to introduce wellness features (like the aforementioned break reminders and time limits). However, critics say these measures are small fixes on systems that remain fundamentally attention-driven. Advocates are calling for platforms to "step up and play their part" in addressing doomscrolling and related mental health harms. This could include *reforming algorithms* to not solely optimize for engagement at any cost. For example, a platform might down-rank excessively negative or outrage-fueled content, or diversify feeds to show more positive stories and factual context instead of just what's most clickable. Another idea is greater user control: allowing individuals to easily tune their feed content mix (e.g. a slider for news vs. uplifting content) and giving them a "say in what content is served up" to them. On the policy side, discussions have begun around treating extreme social media use as a public health issue. Some jurisdictions are exploring regulations like requiring social media to *warn users* after extended use, mandating transparency in how algorithms promote content, or even instituting nighttime shutdowns for young users. While sweeping policy moves are still in infancy, the conversation reflects a realization that digital environments should be designed with mental health in mind, not solely optimized for advertising clicks. In the meantime, individual users can take advantage of what controls do exist – muting toxic accounts, unfollowing sources that consistently distress them, and using "mute" or "hide" functions to temporarily cleanse their feed during particularly overwhelming news cycles therapist.com. It's also wise to stick to **reputable news outlets** rather than social media rumors, to avoid the anxiety of misinformation and constant outrage traps. By combining personal discipline with smarter design from the platforms, the goal is to create an online experience that keeps people informed *without* incessantly provoking their worst anxieties.

## Positive Content Platforms: Can Good News Make a Difference?

In response to the barrage of negative news, a niche but growing movement has emerged around **positive content platforms** – apps, websites, and social channels devoted to sharing "good news" stories. The premise is simple: the world is not only full of problems, but also plenty of uplifting events, acts of kindness, progress in science and society, etc., which traditional media often under-report. By curating these positive stories, such platforms aim to boost readers' mood and mental health, counteracting the depressive effects of typical doomscrolling. But is substituting one's daily dose of Twitter or Instagram with a scroll through good news feeds a viable strategy for improving well-

being? The evidence, both anecdotal and scientific, is promising, though with some caveats.

**Examples of Positive Platforms:** A variety of outlets now brand themselves as purveyors of positivity. The **Good News Network (GNN)**, founded in 1997, is a pioneer in this space, boasting over 21,000 positive stories in its archive and a popular app and newsletter delivering daily upbeat news . Similarly, **Positive News** (a UK-based magazine and site) and **Optimist Daily** focus on solutions-oriented journalism, highlighting how challenges are being addressed rather than just the challenges themselves. *Good Good Good* is a media company that produces the *Goodnewspaper* (a print paper of good news) and podcasts to help audiences "feel more hopeful and do more good" groovnow.com. Even mainstream outlets have carved out "good news" sections – for instance, HuffPost has a Good News section that aggregates uplifting articles (from heroic pet rescues to heartwarming community projects) in one place. On social media, accounts like **@TanksGoodNews** on Instagram or subreddits like **r/UpliftingNews** on Reddit have gained millions of followers by exclusively posting encouraging news bits and happy outcomes. There are also apps like **Goodable**, which was explicitly designed with input from psychologists to present a feed of inspiring, hope-filled news as a way to *"improve your mental health"* while staying informed. Goodable's approach is to show that for every problem story (say, a natural disaster), there are related positive stories (people helping each other, recovery efforts) that put things in perspective.

**Mental Health Benefits of Good News:** Consuming positive content can indeed have measurable psychological benefits. Research has found that reading or watching stories of kindness, hope, and progress can elicit emotions like joy, gratitude, and inspiration, which in turn can improve one's overall mood and stress levels. A **University of Southampton study** (noted in a positive news context) showed that when people read stories emphasizing human progress, it lifted their mood and lowered anxiety compared to reading conflict-focused stories about the same issues goodable.co. Another *landmark study* by a Brigham Young University team demonstrated that people who **shared** positive experiences or news with others a couple of times a week became significantly happier and more satisfied with life than those who just kept a private journal of positives. This underscores an important point: good news can be contagious in a beneficial way, strengthening social bonds and optimism when it's passed along. On a biological level, positive news is thought to engage the brain's reward pathways – uplifting stories may trigger the release of dopamine and serotonin (neurochemicals associated with pleasure and calm), essentially acting as a stress antidote. Some proponents even argue that regular exposure to positive news can "retrain" a chronically negative outlook, helping people develop a more balanced and hopeful schema of the world goodable.co. Over time, this could build resilience: if you regularly see evidence that problems can be solved and people can be good, you might be less shaken when facing bad news, because you retain an underlying sense that not everything is awful. In fact, one concept in positive psychology is that cultivating positive emotions and experiences helps **"broaden and build"** our coping resources, making us better equipped to handle adversity when it arises. Reading good news isn't about denial of bad news; it's about giving your psyche nourishment to balance the toxins.

**Viability of Replacing X/Instagram with Good News Apps:** So, could an avid doomscroller simply switch to reading Good News Network articles or scrolling an upbeat Instagram feed and see their mental health improve? To an extent, yes – reducing one's exposure to negative content *and* increasing exposure to positive content is a two-pronged recipe for a brighter mindset. If the choice is between spending an hour on Twitter arguing about the latest political outrage or spending that hour reading stories of humanitarian innovations or watching wholesome videos, the latter is almost certainly going to leave one feeling better. Some users who have made this switch report noticeable reductions in anxiety and cynicism. For example, in response to constant pandemic doomscrolling, there were trends of "news fasting" or curating feeds to show only positive news, which many people found refreshing and calming. Social media consultant Gina Bianchini quipped, *"I replaced doomscrolling with hopefulscrolling and it changed my life,"* highlighting how seeking out hopeful content allowed her to stay informed without feeling hopeless. Empirically, if positive news consumption boosts mood and hope while negative news consumption diminishes it, adjusting that ratio in one's media diet should improve overall mental well-being goodable.co.

However, a few caveats temper this rosy picture. First, completely **isolating oneself from all negative news is neither practical nor necessarily wise**. We do need to remain informed about serious issues to be functional citizens and to respond to real risks in our lives. Thus, a balance is important – one can follow important news, but perhaps limit how much and also consciously include sources of optimism. Secondly, positive news platforms, while beneficial, might not satisfy the same psychological itch that doomscrolling does for some people. Remember that doomscrolling is partly driven by anxiety and hypervigilance – an anxious mind might perceive positive news as "fluff" and still crave information on threats. In other words, someone in a state of worry may not **trust** good news ("it's too good to be true" or "ignoring the real problems"), and thus may not immediately feel relief from it. This suggests a transitional approach: one might need to gradually shift content balance and also work on the underlying anxiety (through mindfulness or therapy) so that the mind can accept stepping away from constant vigilance. Another consideration is engagement – unfortunately, positive news historically doesn't go as viral as negative news, because of that human negativity bias and the fact that outrage/fear produce stronger immediate engagement. So replacing an Instagram or X habit with a Goodable or GNN habit might require conscious effort initially, because the big platforms are literally engineered to be more addictive. It's somewhat akin to changing one's diet: healthy food can absolutely make you feel better than junk food, but junk food has addictive qualities that may make the switch challenging. In time, though, your tastes and cravings adjust.

From a viability standpoint, one promising approach is **substitution and supplementation** rather than total replacement. For example, if you typically spend an hour at night doomscrolling through Twitter, try spending the first 30 minutes reading a positive news roundup or watching feel-good content, and then (if you must) allow 10-15 minutes to skim any critical news updates. Many people find that after uplifting content, their urge to seek out negative news diminishes anyway. Another tactic is to diversify your social media follows to include positivity-focused accounts, so that even within a platform

like Instagram, your feed isn't purely people complaining or showing off, but also accounts sharing daily good news, cute animal stories, and so on. This way, you don't necessarily have to abandon mainstream platforms entirely; you *tune* them to serve you better. The question of viability also ties to the question of impact: will reading good news actually improve mental health in a lasting way? While more research is needed, early indications are encouraging. One study mentioned by Goodable found that even when participants were exposed to negative news, those who also viewed a constructive or positive story afterwards did not experience as severe a drop in mood – essentially, the positive piece buffered the negative effects. Over the long term, building a habit of noticing positive developments can train your brain to be more optimistic and solution-focused, potentially reducing baseline anxiety and depression levels. In sum, integrating positive content platforms into one's media routine is a viable and likely effective strategy to improve mental well-being, *provided* it's done in tandem with wise limitation of negative media and recognition of why one was doomscrolling in the first place. Substituting doomscrolling with "hope-scrolling" is not about sticking one's head in the sand; it's about restoring emotional equilibrium and reminding ourselves that alongside the worst of humanity, the best of humanity is still out there – something that relentless bad news consumption can make us forget.

## Conclusion

Doomscrolling has earned its ominous name for good reason: this habitual trawling through bad news can cast a long shadow over our mental health. As we've explored, its effects range from acute anxiety, stress, and depressed mood to longer-term cynicism, cognitive fatigue, and even physical tension. The psychological impact is particularly concerning for those most vulnerable – teens, whose developing minds are being shaped by an unprecedented onslaught of online negativity, and individuals already dealing with mental health conditions, for whom doomscrolling can be like throwing fuel on the fire of their anxiety or depression. The design of our favorite platforms, like X and Instagram, often exacerbates the issue, with algorithms finely tuned to hook our attention by tapping into fear, outrage, or envy. In contrast to other digital activities that might offer enjoyment or at least neutral diversion, doomscrolling stands out as a maladaptive behavior that offers virtually no benefits to offset its harms.

Yet, the outlook isn't entirely…doomed. Through conscious effort and the help of technology, we can break the cycle. Setting firmer tech-life boundaries – whether it's no-phone zones and times, or using apps to limit our scroll – gives our brains a chance to recover and refocus. Incorporating more positive and solution-focused media into our diet can reframe our perspective, reducing the sense of helplessness that constant bad news can induce. And crucially, as individuals we can push for change on a broader scale: letting social media companies know that we *value our mental health* and want tools (and algorithms) that respect that. As one mental health advocate noted, people increasingly "don't like getting caught up doomscrolling and they want a say in what content is served up to them"[theguardian.com](theguardian.com) – a clear message to platforms that user well-being should trump maximal engagement. In the end, overcoming doomscrolling might require a

combination of personal resolve, community support, and smarter tech design. By recognizing the pattern in ourselves and others, sharing coping strategies, and demanding healthier online environments, we can hope to transform our relationship with digital media from one that breeds despair to one that empowers and informs without overwhelming us. The world will always have challenges and bad news, but how we engage with those realities is within our control. With mindful consumption and balanced habits, we can stay informed **and** stay sane – scrolling for hope and solutions instead of doom.

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