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TIRUVEDAKAM WEST, MADURAI DISTRICT – 625 234, TAMIL NADU

**One Day International Conference on**

## **ORGANISATIONAL ETHICS – VISION OF VIKSIT BHARAT @ 2047**

**07<sup>th</sup> March 2026**

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**POST GRADUATE AND RESEARCH  
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**Editors**

**Dr. K. Karthikeyan**

**Dr. K. Chellapandian**

**Dr. S. Chandrasekaran | Dr. C. Vadivel**

**Dr. S. Vadivel Raja | Dr. M. Mohan**

**Dr. P. Murugan | Dr. B. Marimuthu**

**Book Title:**

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**ORGANISATIONAL ETHICS - VISION OF VIKSIT BHARAT @ 2047**

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**Editors:**

Dr. K. Karthikeyan, Dr. K. Chellapandian,  
Dr. S. Chandrasekaran, Dr. C. Vadivel, Dr. S. Vadivel Raja,  
Dr. M. Mohan, Dr. P. Murugan & Dr. B. Marimuthu

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# THE DOOMSCROLLING RECOVERY GAP: A CONCEPTUAL MODEL OF DIGITAL FATIGUE SPILLOVER AND PRODUCTIVITY LOSS

Research scholar, Dept of Business Administration, School of Management Studies  
Vels Institute of Science, Technology and Advanced Studies (VISTAS), Chennai.  
saranmanoj.25@vistas.ac.in

Mr. Saran Manoj. S

Department of BBA, Vels Institute of Science, Technology and Advanced Studies (VISTAS)  
Pallavaram, Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India  
mba.subburajp@gmail.com

Dr Subburaj. P

## Abstract

The pervasive habit of doomscrolling—compulsive consumption of negative digital news and social media content—has emerged as a significant yet under-theorised threat to employee well-being and workplace productivity. This conceptual paper introduces the Doomscrolling Recovery Gap (DRG) model, which posits that prolonged exposure to distressing digital content generates a state of digital fatigue that spills over into the work domain, impairing cognitive function, emotional regulation, and task engagement. Drawing on the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, Attentional Restoration Theory (ART), and the Effort-Recovery model, this paper systematically examines the antecedents, mechanisms, and organisational outcomes of doomscrolling-induced digital fatigue. Special attention is given to the Indian workplace context, where rapid smartphone penetration, high social media usage, and the post-pandemic blurring of work-life boundaries have created acute conditions for digital fatigue spillover. The paper proposes a structured conceptual model and identifies moderating variables—including psychological capital, organisational support, and recovery activity engagement—that influence the severity of the DRG. Theoretical contributions and practical implications for HR professionals, organisational psychologists, and policymakers are discussed.

**Keywords:** Doomscrolling, digital fatigue, productivity loss, employee well-being, recovery gap, Conservation of Resources theory, workplace mental health, India

## 1. Introduction

The modern employee wakes, reaches for their smartphone, and begins the day immersed in a cascade of distressing headlines, conflict-laden social media threads, and anxiety-inducing notifications—a behavioural pattern now widely termed doomscrolling. Defined as the compulsive and prolonged consumption of negative or distressing digital content, doomscrolling has accelerated sharply in the post-pandemic era, fuelled by algorithmic content curation designed to maximise engagement through emotional arousal (Ytre-Arne & Moe, 2021). For Human Resource practitioners and organisational psychologists, this phenomenon represents an emergent and under-researched threat to employee well-being and organisational productivity.

Despite growing popular awareness, academic inquiry into doomscrolling's occupational consequences remains nascent. Extant literature on technostress, digital fatigue, and problematic social media use has established foundational linkages between excessive digital consumption and diminished cognitive and emotional resources (Tarafdar et al., 2007; Ragu-Nathan et al., 2008). However, the specific mechanism through which doomscrolling—as a qualitatively distinct form of digital consumption characterised by negativity bias and compulsivity—generates a recovery deficit that spills into the work domain has not been conceptually modelled.

This gap represents both a theoretical and practical challenge for HR seeking evidence-based interventions. This paper addresses this gap by introducing the DoomsScrolling Recovery model—a conceptual framework that traces the pathway from doomscrolling behavior to digital fatigue spillover to measurable productivity loss. The Indian workplace context, with its uniquely high social media engagement rates, and the significant post-pandemic shift to hybrid and remote work arrangements that have eroded protective work-life boundaries (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2007).

## 2. Theoretical Foundations

### 2.1 Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory

Hobfoll's (1989) Conservation of Resources theory provides the primary theoretical foundation for the DRG model. COR theory posits that individuals are motivated to acquire, retain, and protect psychological, social, and material resources, and that resource loss—or the threat thereof—is the principal driver of psychological stress. Applied to doomscrolling, exposure to threatening and distressing digital content constitutes a form of vicarious resource depletion. When this depletion extends into working hours, the employee's capacity for effortful performance, emotional self-regulation, and interpersonal engagement is correspondingly diminished (Hobfoll, 2001; ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012).

### 2.2 Attentional Restoration Theory (ART)

Kaplan and Kaplan's (1989) Attentional Restoration Theory offers a complementary lens for explicating the cognitive mechanisms through which doomscrolling undermines attentional capacity. ART distinguishes between directed attention—the effortful cognitive focus required for work tasks—and involuntary attention, which is captured by inherently stimulating stimuli. Doomscrolling continuously engages involuntary attention through emotionally charged content, depleting the directed attention reserves necessary for complex cognitive work. Crucially, ART posits that restoration of directed attention requires disengagement from stimulating environments and exposure to restorative experiences (Kaplan, 1989). Doomscrolling, by colonising recovery time, forecloses this restorative process, creating a recovery gap central to this paper's thesis.

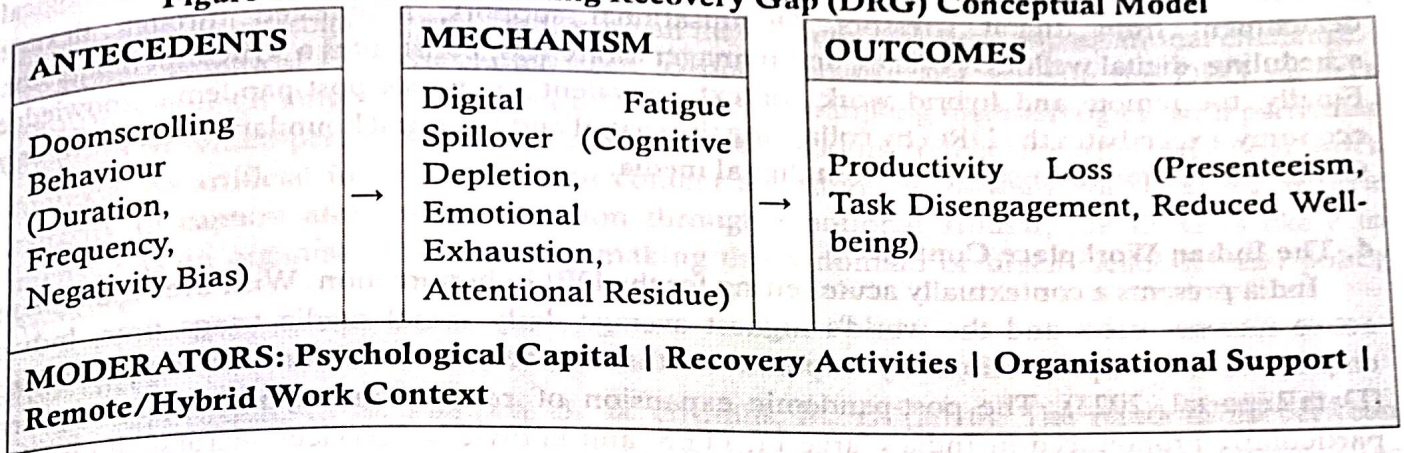
### 2.3 The Effort-Recovery Model

Meijman and Mulder's (1998) Effort-Recovery model stipulates that the cognitive and emotional load costs incurred during effortful activities—including digital media consumption—can only be reversed through adequate recovery periods during which the psychophysiological systems involved are no longer activated. Doomscrolling during ostensible recovery periods—such as evenings, weekends, commutes, and lunch breaks—prevents the functional systems taxed during work from returning to baseline, perpetuating a state of sustained activation. This incomplete recovery constitutes the physiological substrate of the DRG model, manifesting as next-day fatigue, attentional residue, and reduced motivational resources at work (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2007).

### 3. The Doomscrolling Recovery Gap (DRG) Model

The DRG model conceptualises a three-stage process linking doomscrolling antecedents to organisational outcomes, moderated by individual and contextual variables. Figure 1 below presents the proposed model.

Figure 1: The Doomscrolling Recovery Gap (DRG) Conceptual Model



#### 3.1 Antecedents: Doomscrolling Behaviour

The antecedent stage comprises three behavioural dimensions of doomscrolling: duration (total time spent), frequency (number of daily sessions), and negativity bias (the degree to which content consumed is predominantly distressing or threatening). Research indicates that negativity bias is the most psychologically potent dimension, as the human threat-detection system generates disproportionate arousal responses to negative stimuli (Rozin & Royzman, 2001). Doomscrolling is further distinguished from general social media use by its compulsive, loss-of-control quality, linking it theoretically to behavioural addiction frameworks and explaining its resistance to voluntary cessation despite recognised harm (Sharma & Oliver, 2020).

#### 3.2 Mechanism: Digital Fatigue Spillover

The mechanism stage identifies three pathways through which doomscrolling generates work-domain impairment. Cognitive depletion occurs as the effortful processing of complex, emotionally charged information exhausts executive function resources, reducing working memory capacity and decision-making quality. Emotional exhaustion arises from the sustained vicarious distress generated by consumption of threatening content, depleting emotional regulation resources needed for workplace interactions. Attentional residue—the persistence of cognitive activation from off-work stimuli into work contexts—has been identified by Leroy (2009) as a particularly potent productivity disruptor, as partially processed concerns continuously intrude on focal task performance.

#### 3.3 Outcomes: Productivity Loss and Well-being Deficits

The model's outcome stage encompasses both individual and organisational consequences. At the individual level, doomscrolling-induced digital fatigue manifests as presenteeism—physical presence accompanied by significantly impaired cognitive and motivational engagement—alongside elevated anxiety, reduced sleep quality, and diminished subjective well-being (Elhai et al., 2020). At the organisational level, aggregated productivity loss, increased absenteeism risk, higher turnover intention, and degraded team communication quality represent the cumulative costs of unaddressed DRG (Andreassen et al., 2016).

### 3.4 Moderating Variables

The DRG model incorporates four key moderators. Psychological capital (Peterson et al., 2007)—is hypothesised to buffer the fatigue-productivity pathway by enhancing cognitive reappraisal and emotional detachment, can interrupt the spillover mechanism by facilitating genuine recovery activity engagement, including exercise, mindfulness, and scheduling, digital wellness policies, and manager awareness, manifested through organisational support, constitutes a structural moderator. Finally, the remote and hybrid work context, prevalent in India's post-pandemic economy, exacerbates the DRG by collapsing the spatial and temporal boundaries that facilitated natural disengagement from digital media.

## 4. The Indian Workplace Context

India presents a contextually acute setting for the DRG phenomenon. With over 750 million active internet users and the world's highest average daily social media usage time, employees are disproportionately exposed to the antecedent conditions of doomscrolling (DataReportal, 2023). The post-pandemic expansion of remote and hybrid work has particularly pronounced in India's large IT, ITES, and knowledge services sectors, eliminating commute-based disengagement buffers and blurring the psychological boundaries between work and personal digital space.

The socioeconomic context further amplifies DRG vulnerability. High job insecurity, income inequality, and socio-political volatility generate a news environment characterised by threat salience, intensifying the negativity bias dimension of doomscrolling antecedents. Additionally, India's collectivist cultural orientation means that distressing social media content—particularly content involving community or familial threat—generates especially powerful stress arousal responses, accelerating the resource depletion pathway in the DRG model (Hofstede, 2001).

## 5. HR Implications and Proposed Interventions

The DRG model carries several actionable implications for HR practitioners. At the organisational level, organisations should consider institutionalising digital hygiene frameworks—structured guidelines for smartphone use during recovery periods—as part of broader employee well-being programmes. The Right to Disconnect, already legislated in several European jurisdictions and under active discussion in India, represents a structural intervention that directly addresses the recovery foreclosure mechanism of the DRG (Argyrou & Ter Horst, 2020).

At the individual level, HR professionals should integrate doomscrolling awareness and mental health literacy programmes, equipping employees with self-monitoring tools and evidence-based recovery strategies including psychological detachment techniques, mindfulness-based stress reduction, and structured technology-free recovery periods. Building Psychological Capital through targeted developmental programmes represents a moderator-level intervention with broader well-being dividends. Managers, as the proximal organisational interface, require training in recognising digital fatigue symptoms—diminished responsiveness, presenteeism behaviours, and escalating irritability—to enable early identification and supportive interventions.

## 6. Conclusion

This paper has introduced the Doomscrolling Recovery Gap as a theoretically grounded conceptual model that advances understanding of how compulsive negative digital content consumption generates work-domain productivity loss through a digital fatigue spillover mechanism. By integrating COR theory, Attentional Restoration Theory, and the Effort-Recovery model, the DRG framework offers HR scholars and practitioners a coherent architecture for investigating and addressing an increasingly prevalent organisational challenge.

Future empirical research should seek to operationalise and validate the DRG model's constructs through longitudinal survey and experience-sampling methodologies, with particular attention to within-person variation across different doomscrolling intensity levels and work contexts. As artificial intelligence-driven content algorithms grow more sophisticated in their capacity to capture and sustain attention through emotional arousal, the DRG is likely to intensify as an organisational concern, making this a domain of urgent scholarly and policy relevance.

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Department of Commerce

  
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