

Psychological Consequences of Crisis-Driven Media Environments: A Conceptual Framework

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Abstract: The omnipresence of digital media in the face of social crises has created a complex and multifaceted phenomenon in terms of the psychological impact of media consumption. This conceptual paper aims to bring together the existing theoretical and empirical studies to develop a comprehensive understanding of the ways in which the media environment in the face of crises affects the cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and social well-being of media consumers. This paper draws from a range of theoretical perspectives including negativity bias, Conservation of Resources (COR), Cultivation Theory, Shattered Assumption Theory, and psychophysical numbing to identify and examine seven interrelated aspects of the psychological impact of media consumption in the face of crises. These seven aspects include compulsive media consumption and doomscrolling, information overload and emotional resource depletion, secondary trauma and vicarious exposure to crises, psychic numbing and emotional desensitization, cognitive distortion and social disengagement, behavioral withdrawal and news avoidance, and coping and psychological resilience.

Keywords: *crisis media, doomscrolling, information overload, secondary trauma, psychic numbing, news avoidance, media psychology, digital well-being*

1. INTRODUCTION

The current media landscape, characterized by the constant and relentless diffusion of digital information across media platforms that are interconnected by the Internet, has significantly altered the manner in which people experience and make sense of crises. Natural disasters, wars, and pandemics, among other catastrophic events, can now be accessed and processed by the public in real time and in a relentless manner, beyond the scheduled programming of traditional media. This fundamental transformation in the manner in which crises are communicated to the public has tremendous implications for psychological health, which have not been explored in current literature.

While a number of recent studies have begun to investigate specific components of the phenomenon of psychological distress associated with the media, including the role of anxiety in processing pandemic-related news, the role of emotion in processing graphic images, and the behavioral phenomenon of doomscrolling, the majority of this work has done so in a relatively piecemeal and disciplinary-specific manner. What is currently absent from the literature, then, is a unifying conceptual framework that seeks to outline the entire sequential process by which a crisis-oriented media environment can lead to a compounding array of psychological and behavioral effects. The current paper seeks to help fill this gap by theoretically integrating the existing literature into a multi-dimensional framework.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The contemporary literature on psychological effects in the context of media induced by a crisis can be classified into the following three groups. First, there is literature connected with doomscrolling and avoidance of news consumption. Second, there is literature on platform design and the mechanisms of amplification of particular information on such platforms. Third, there is literature on mental health and trauma. Even though all these categories provide useful insights, they are usually not integrated together into a certain theory. The present literature review is based on the modern scientific and scholarly literature, namely the works of Shabahang et al. (2024), Kınık & Küçükali (2025), Samet (2025), Fitzpatrick (2022), Schumann (2022), Gurr & Metag (2023), Tian et al. (2025), Slovic (2007), Meek (2016), Abu-Elenin et al. (2025), Thatavarthi & Chandran (2025). All these sources will allow investigating all three groups of literature in question.

2.1 Empirical Research on Doomscrolling and News Avoidance

The empirical study of compulsive news consumption in crisis situations has witnessed significant progress in recent times, primarily driven by the COVID-19 pandemic, which offered a unique natural experiment to study mass media behaviours in the face of sustained social uncertainty. In a recent study, Singh and Narula (2024) identified "doomscrolling" as a new form of compulsive behaviour characterized by repeated exposure to disturbing digital information and showed that this form of compulsive information-seeking is linked to increased levels of anxiety, emotional exhaustion, and poor mental well-being even after controlling for pre-existing mental health conditions. More importantly, the study showed that compulsive information-seeking in crisis situations is linked to increased levels of anxiety and vice versa, thereby creating a self-sustaining feedback loop that is not amenable to self-control. In a more recent extension of the research, Shabahang et al. (2024) examined the cognitive underpinnings of compulsive crisis media use, revealing the role of negativity bias as a core psychological construct underlying the tendency for people to preferentially attend to negative information in their information environment. The research by Shabahang et al. (2024) reveals that, as the level of negativity bias increases, the frequency of doomscrolling behaviour during crisis periods increases, and this relationship is mediated by threat appraisal processes. This suggests that the compulsive nature of crisis-related media use is not merely a product of habit but is cognitively maintained by threat-related processes. Fitzpatrick (2022) undertook an in-depth empirical analysis of news avoidance trends in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The study found that there was an inherent trend of news avoidance characterized by an initial peak in engagement with news of the crisis, followed by disengagement as emotional resources were depleted. The study's findings provide insight into the fact that news avoidance is not an entity that exists in isolation but is rather a complex phenomenon that is dynamic in nature and varies in form and motivation. Some of the participants in the study indicated that they avoided news of particularly disturbing topics, while others indicated comprehensive avoidance of news consumption of all forms.

2.2 Digital Platform Design and Algorithmic Enhancement

The second significant line of literature examines the structural and technological properties of digital media platforms that inform and enhance the psychological processes of media consumption in crises. Aguvaveedi (2025) delivers a comprehensive examination of the ways in which the underlying architectures of content recommendation algorithms for social media platforms, news aggregators, and video streaming services are designed to maximize user engagement by favoring the promotion of emotionally stimulating, sensational, and conflict-based content. In crises, the implications of this are significant in that the more vulnerable to emotions users become in crises, the more the algorithms ensure that the dominant form of media consumption is that of crises-related stories and events in the digitally constructed space of negativity from which disengagement is structurally impossible. The psychological effects of such architectural predisposition are compounded by the notification systems built into most digital mediums. Kamal et al. (2020) studied the concept of notification fatigue, described as the experience of hyperarousal and attentional disruption due to the constant barrage of push notifications, which is characteristic of modern digital connectivity. The research suggests that notification fatigue operates as a separate stressor, which contributes to techno-stress and emotional exhaustion independently of the information being communicated. The suggestion, therefore, is that the structural condition of constant digital connectivity during crises has a psychological cost, which is separate from the cognitive demands of the information being communicated. In this regard, Wu and Zheng (2023) have further explored the social aspects of platform-mediated overload and have conceptualized communication overload as the experience of receiving and being overwhelmed with messages and information beyond what can be adequately processed, and social overload as the experience of exposure to and being overwhelmed with social information, social comparison, and social responsiveness beyond what one's relational resources can sustain. Both types of overload independently predicted emotional exhaustion in social media users, with the mediating role of loss of control over the informational environment. This highlights the role of perceived control as a psychological resource in the context of the crisis media environment.

2.3 Mental Health and Trauma Literature

The literature concerned with mental health and trauma provide a third perspective in terms of the potential psychological impact of exposure to crisis media. Kınık and Küçükali (2025) have produced a comprehensive review and synthesis of the secondary trauma literatures in terms of media exposure contexts, highlighting that vicarious traumatization in terms of exposure to digital media can produce symptomatology that is

substantially similar to that associated with post-traumatic stress disorder. This includes intrusive recollections and emotional dysregulation in terms of exposure to media that does not necessarily require the individual to be directly involved in the traumatic events that are being represented. Their review also highlights that those who are exposed to large volumes of crisis media have a heightened risk of being adversely affected and that the graphic nature of much of the contemporary audiovisual media contributes to this in a way that distinguishes it from its broadcast media equivalent. The literature on psychic numbing, as synthesized most exhaustively by Slovic et al. (2011), offers a complementary perspective that helps explain the apparent paradox and empirical reality of the gradual diminution rather than intensification of emotional reactions following exposure to prolonged trauma. The body of work by Slovic and colleagues on the phenomenon of psychophysical numbing, which refers to the observation that the sensitivity of human emotions to the suffering of others diminishes in direct proportion to the scale of the suffering, and the parallel phenomenon of the diminution of compassion effects, has direct implications for understanding the role of habitual exposure to crisis-related media in contributing to the gradual erosion of the empathic and compassionate orientations that are the foundation of the collective response to crises of this scale, thereby yielding a population of emotionally drained and compassion-fatigued media consumers. Taken collectively, these three bodies of literature share a series of commonalities: crisis-saturated media environments, in their current states of configuration, place significant and underappreciated psychological pressures on media consumers; such pressures operate through a series of complex interrelated processes that span cognitive, emotional, behavioural, and social levels of analysis; and although existing theoretical models are individually informative, they have failed to be adequately integrated to address the full scope and nature of such consequences. The conceptual framework developed in the present article seeks to redress this inter-theoretical integration problem.

3. COMPULSIVE MEDIA CONSUMPTION AND DOOMSCROLLING PHENOMENON

One of the most striking and well-researched psychological effects of crisis media environments is that of compulsive media consumption, which is popularly known as the process of doomscrolling. Compulsive media consumption is characterized by the "repetitive and often extended consumption of disturbing crisis-related digital content, less for information-seeking purposes and more for an anxious compulsion to stay continuously informed about unfolding events" (Singh & Narula, 2024). Rather than having the intended psychological benefit of reducing anxiety that prompted the behaviour in the first place, this process of compulsive consumption is typically associated with heightened levels of emotional distress.

The underlying psychological drivers for compulsive media consumption in crises can be largely understood in terms of the concept of negativity bias. This is a widely recognized cognitive bias that has been consistently demonstrated to exist across the population. Negativity bias refers to the tendency for humans to favor and be drawn to harmful and/or negative information and stimuli in comparison to neutral and/or positive ones (Shabahang et al., 2024). From an evolutionary perspective, negativity bias can be understood as a form of adaptive behaviour that helped ancestral humans to effectively respond to threats in their environment. However, in the current digital media environment, this bias can be seen to have a counterproductive effect. Compounding these cognitive predispositions are the structural characteristics of digital media platforms themselves. Algorithmic content recommendation systems are structurally configured to optimize user engagement. They achieve this by systematically presenting emotionally intense, sensational, or threatening content that captures and maintains user attention (Aguvaveedi, 2025). Consequently, individuals using these platforms during times of crisis are exposed to a disproportionate amount of disturbing content that far exceeds what they might encounter in non-algorithmic information environments. The compound effect of both cognitive and structural factors thereby converts what might be a limited information-seeking behaviour into a self-sustaining compulsion. Ultimately, this may have important implications for the user's psychological self-regulation and disengagement capabilities.

4. INFORMATION OVERLOAD AND THE DEPLETION OF EMOTIONAL RESOURCES

Closely associated with but conceptually different from compulsive consumption is the concept of information overload. This refers to a state that emerges when the quantity and/or velocity of processed information systematically exceed the individual's cognitive ability to process that information. In the current media landscape characterized by crisis communication, media users are constantly bombarded by updates and new pieces of news, opinion pieces, and social media communications. This leads to a state of chronic cognitive saturation (Kamal et al., 2020).

Information overload is not just a product of the quantity of processed information. Rather, it is also affected by the emotional weight of the processed information in crisis communication, which has its own limits. Information overload in the digital world takes the form of several interconnected sub-phenomena, such as communication overload, notification fatigue, and social overload, all of which, on their own, contribute to the experience of psychological distress, culminating in the experience of deep emotional exhaustion on the part of the media users (Wu & Zheng, 2023). The constant connectivity facilitated through the use of mobile devices and the constant online presence create an experience of constant urgency and obligation, which effectively prevents the individual from psychologically detaching from the experience of the crises, even during periods of nominal detachment or 'rest.' The experience has also been conceptualized through the idea of techno-stress, which refers to the experience of occupational and social stress as a result of constant and intensive engagement with the digital world (Kamal et al., 2020).

The process by which information overload can lead to psychological exhaustion can be better understood by referring to the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, which states that human beings are inherently motivated to acquire, conserve, and preserve their limited cognitive, emotional, and social resources (Wu & Zheng, 2023). In the context of the crisis media environment, the persistent experience of information overload can be seen as a continuous drain on the resources of the individual, thereby leading to a continuous depletion of the individual's capacity to cope with information overload. The COR theory is also notable for its formulation of emotional exhaustion as a mediating factor between information overload and the final outcome of disengagement from the media and society at large.

5. SECONDARY TRAUMA AND INDIRECT EXPOSURE TO CRISIS

In terms of cognitive aspects, the experience of overload, as has been described, encompasses the aforementioned cognitive aspects. However, the experience of engaging with the media coverage of crises also leads to the experience of psychological injury, which has been termed secondary trauma, also referred to as vicarious traumatization or compassion fatigue in the adjacent fields of research. Secondary trauma has been defined as the experience of psychological injury for individuals exposed to trauma indirectly, through narratives, images, audio, or video, as opposed to being directly engaged in the situation or event (Kınık & Küçükali, 2025). The digital media environment has vastly increased the circumstances under which secondary trauma can be experienced, given the real-time, immersive, and repeated experience of scenes of violence, disaster, or human suffering for the viewer in the remote location.

For example, modern-day media consumers may, in near real time, observe the development of armed conflicts, natural disasters, or mass casualty events through the constant flow of information on the news or social media, even if they do not have any personal connection to the affected populations or areas. Research has found that such experiences may elicit various psychological responses that are functionally equivalent to those experienced by individuals exposed to primary trauma, such as increased anxiety, hypervigilance, intrusive ideation, emotional dysregulation, and sleep disturbances (Kınık & Küçükali, 2025). The psychological boundaries between direct and indirect trauma exposure may not be as rigid as was previously assumed.

Neurological evidence further supports the contention that exposure to vicarious trauma shares neural substrates with other forms of trauma. Neuroimaging studies have found that exposure to distressing and emotionally potent media has been associated with activation of brain regions that are involved in fear processing and consolidation of emotional memories. Specifically, brain regions that are associated with emotionally potent and distressing memories include the amygdala and hippocampus. This suggests that there is some level of brain processing that is similar to that of directly experiencing trauma. The cumulative effects of this activation of brain regions through crisis media consumption can be associated with psychological exhaustion and clinical manifestations of stress.

6. PSYCHIC NUMBING AND EROSION OF EMOTIONAL ENGAGEMENT

One of the counterintuitive yet well-supported psychological effects of being exposed to crisis media coverage is the development of what has been termed as the attenuation of emotional responses, or what has also been referred to as the concept of 'psychic numbing.' Instead of being exposed to increased emotional responses to repeated portrayals of violence, human suffering, and global crises, being exposed to such repeated portrayals may actually lead individuals to develop emotional numbing, or the diminishment of emotional responses, and may eventually lead individuals towards an emotional detachment or insulation, or the reduction of empathetic responses to the repeated portrayals of global crises (Slovic et al., 2011).

The theoretical basis of the architectural structure of psychic numbing is largely supported by the body of knowledge on the study of psychophysical numbing, which has clearly established that human sensitivity of emotions does not linearly scale with the enormity of human suffering. Instead, the relationship between the scale of the humanitarian disaster and the level of human emotional sensitivity is characterized by the law of rapidly saturating returns, with human beings characteristically demonstrating strong emotional engagement with the identified level of human suffering in one single human being but revealing drastically diminished sensitivity of emotions with the increasing scale of human victims (Slovic et al., 2011). This is largely due to the fundamental limitation in the architectural structure of human affective cognition, in the form of the 'intuitive emotional system' that is evolutionarily adapted to respond to the proximate and interpersonally relevant cues of human suffering.

Closely associated with the concept of psychic numbing is the concept of the collapse of compassion, which refers to the propensity for emotional engagement to decrease even when the number of victims increases only marginally, for instance, from one to two or three (Slovic et al., 2011). The implications for the communicational approach taken in the coverage of crises are considerable, with the commonly taken approach in the reporting of crises, focusing on the statistics of casualties and the overall mortality rate, potentially serving to limit, rather than encourage, the level of empathetic engagement with the events being presented. Furthermore, the repeated exposure to the emotive content of the reporting may serve to encourage the development of a level of emotional desensitization, whereby an individual develops a level of functional desensitization to the stimuli, which, although serving to protect the individual on a psychological level, may also serve to limit the level of empathetic and moral understanding of the events being presented (Singh & Narula, 2024).

7. COGNITIVE DISTORTION AND SOCIAL DISENGAGEMENT

The psychological effects of the exposure to crisis-related information in the media are not only limited to the emotional domain but also spill over into the realm of cognition, including the accuracy and stability of the mental representations of the social world by the individual. By drawing on the available theoretical tools of Cultivation Theory, researchers have argued that the cumulative effects of the exposure to crisis-related information in the media shape the audience's perception of the world in a manner that overestimates the presence of threats, conflicts, and malevolence (Shabahang et al., 2024). The cumulative effects of the distorted perception of the world lead to a state of feeling threatened that is independent of the actual state of the environment.

The social implications of these cognitive changes are considerable. Studies of doomsurfing behaviour and its effects reveal that regular consumption of crisis-oriented media content is correlated with the emergence of increasingly pessimistic and misanthropic dispositions towards human nature and human societies as a whole (Shabahang et al., 2024). These effects of crisis media consumption also have implications that transcend individual psychological levels. The loss of interpersonal trust and social capital potentially contributes to the disintegration of civic communities, collective efficacy, and even social solidarity that is required in order to effectively respond to crises. These psychological effects of crisis media consumption must therefore be considered in conjunction with other sociological and political factors in order to fully understand their implications.

8. BEHAVIOURAL WITHDRAWAL AND THE DYNAMICS OF NEWS AVOIDANCE

As the aggregate psychological impact of compulsive consumption, emotional exhaustion, secondary trauma, and cognitive distortions builds up, many people develop behavioural coping strategies that are focused on managing the associated psychological strain of being immersed in perpetual crisis media. The most extensively studied coping behaviour is that of news avoidance. This is defined as a behavioural pattern in which people engage in the reduction, limitation, and/or cessation of engagement with news media. Rather than being indicative of a lack of civic engagement and interest, news avoidance should be viewed more as a coping behaviour in which people exercise control over their media environment to ensure their psychological well-being. The empirical data pertaining to the pandemic period provides a paradigmatic example of the common course that characterizes the phenomenon of news avoidance. Research into media consumption patterns during the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated that a significant proportion of media consumers increased their media consumption substantially in the early stages of the pandemic due to a genuine interest in being informed about the rapidly developing public health issue (Fitzpatrick, 2022). However, as the pandemic continued and emotional exhaustion became more prevalent, the same proportion of media

consumers also reduced their media consumption substantially. This sequence of events demonstrates the resource depletion processes that are theorized in COR theory and highlights the time dimension of the psychological impact of crisis media. The phenomenon of news avoidance behaviour can be located along a continuum that spans from selective and issue-based news avoidance, in which individuals avoid being exposed to highly distressing and disturbing news topics and stories, such as those pertaining to the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change discourses, to comprehensive and pervasive news avoidance in which individuals avoid being exposed to news across all media platforms and channels. The former has the potential to be a coping strategy that is adaptive and manageable for the individual, while the latter has the potential to result in significant knowledge and public awareness deficits. This dichotomy between the individual's need to protect their well-being and the need for informed and engaged citizens in the public sphere is arguably one of the biggest challenges that is posed by the media environment in the context of crises.

9. COPING MECHANISMS, RESILIENCE AND PATHWAYS TO RECOVERY

Despite the extensive and diverse array of psychological challenges identified in the above sections, the literature also points to several factors that could potentially ameliorate the adverse effects of the crisis media environment and facilitate the maintenance of positive psychological well-being. In this context, mindfulness-based interventions and meditative practices have also been identified as promising avenues, with empirical evidence indicating the positive effects of mindfulness on anxiety reduction, emotional regulation, and the reduction of the compulsive nature of media engagement in individuals with high media use habits (Aguvaveedi, 2025). Meta-awareness of one's own media engagement and the development of a present-centered attentional style could interrupt the automaticity of the compulsive behaviour of doomscrolling.

A second type of coping response is related to the active management of digital media consumption through the creation of purposeful boundaries in relation to information access. This type of coping has been associated with reductions in cognitive overload, emotional exhaustion, and anxiety in clinical and community samples. The process of implementing this type of coping involves some degree of metacognitive awareness and ability that can be developed through educational interventions.

It can be argued that media literacy represents the third and equally important form of protective factor. This is due to the fact that individuals who are able to demonstrate a high level of sophistication in relation to the manner in which algorithmic design prioritizes the inclusion of emotionally evocative content, the manner in which the conventions of sensationalist framing can be employed in order to create distortions in the salience and representativeness of crisis events, and the manner in which compulsion-based consumption patterns are architected and sustained are clearly more likely to be able to navigate the digital information environment in a manner that is psychologically adaptive (Kınık & Küçükali, 2025). The promotion of what might be referred to as critical digital hygiene, thereby seeking to integrate both the analytical and self-regulatory aspects of media literacy, can be seen to represent a promising avenue in the promotion of the capacities of individuals to navigate the crisis-based media environment without sustaining any level of psychological harm. The promotion of this type of competence within the formal educational sphere can be seen to represent a target with high levels of public health relevance.

10. INTEGRATED CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The body of conceptual analysis proposed throughout the preceding sections culminates into a coherent and sequential model of the psychological outcomes of crisis-driven media environments. The proposed integrated framework proposes a multi-stage trajectory from crisis media exposure to a cascade of interacting psychological and behavioural outcomes, and finally to behavioural withdrawal from information engagement. Each stage in this proposed trajectory is theoretically informed, empirically substantiated according to existing scholarship, and linked to preceding and subsequent stages via specifiable mechanisms. The framework may be summarized as follows. The negativity bias and compulsive media consumption behaviours following crisis media exposure (Stage 1, Section 3) lead to information and communication overload, which exceeds cognitive capacity and emotional resources (Stage 2, Section 4). The depletion of resources makes individuals susceptible to secondary trauma from repeated exposure to crisis images and stories (Stage 3, Section 5), while at the same time initiating processes of emotional desensitization and psychic numbing (Stage 4, Section 6). The combined effects of these cognitive and emotional changes result in systematic world perception distortions, breakdowns in assumptive worlds, and social disengagement (Stage 5, Section 7). However, as these effects become psychologically unmanageable, individuals respond with behavioural strategies for coping with crisis, including comprehensive news avoidance (Stage 6, Section

8). At all stages in this process, mindfulness practice, digital consumption regulation, and media literacy may interrupt this process and restore psychological equilibrium (Stage 7, Section 9).

It must, of course, be noted that this sequential model is necessarily an idealization, and the stages are likely to function with considerable individual variation, temporal overlap, and feedback effects between stages, as opposed to a strictly linear progression from one to the next. Furthermore, a number of important moderating factors, including pre-existing psychological vulnerabilities, the availability of social support, socioeconomic status, cultural factors in the use of the media, and the nature of the crisis being mediated, are all expected to play a role in the rate and degree of progression through the stages identified in the framework. However, the framework offers a theoretically consistent and practically useful guide to the psychological terrain of crisis media exposure, which can inform both research and intervention development efforts.

11. IMPLICATIONS

The conceptual framework that has been developed in this paper has significant implications for several domains of theory, research, and practice. At the theoretical level, this paper contributes to the synthesis of media psychology, trauma studies, cognitive psychology, and sociological studies in ways that enrich each field's understanding of the multi-dimensional consequences of crisis media exposure. This paper improves existing theoretical models by providing a sequential understanding of the processes by which individual-level cognitive vulnerabilities intersect with the structural characteristics of digital media platforms to produce a cascade of psychological consequences. In the research practice, the framework offers a substantial research agenda in the form of research questions about the relative magnitude of each of the proposed mechanisms, the specification of critical moderating factors, and the viability of the proposed intervention strategies. Longitudinal methodological approaches will be critical in the study of the temporal dynamics of the proposed trajectory, whereas cross-cultural comparative research will be critical in the evaluation of the generalizability of the framework across diverse socio-cultural contexts.

In the realm of practical application, the framework has implications for the governance of digital platforms, the delivery of clinical mental health services, the design of media literacy education, and the design of crisis communications strategies. The framework can be used by digital platform regulators and designers to think about the psychological implications of the optimization of engagement via algorithms during crisis periods, as well as to think about alternative structural design solutions to compulsive engagement, which might reduce the negative implications of compulsive engagement without limiting access to information. The framework can be used by mental health professionals to better understand and respond to the presentation of psychological distress related to the media in clinical practice.

LIMITATIONS

The present study has some limitations. For one, this is a conceptual paper; therefore, the proposed framework is based on a synthesis of existing literature rather than primary research. It is therefore understood that the relationships established in this research are not necessarily causal relationships. Further research is needed to validate these relationships. Secondly, this research is heavily influenced by contextual factors. A considerable part of the literature that this research is based on is contextual, particularly crisis contexts like the COVID-19 pandemic. It is therefore understood that the applicability of this model to different crisis contexts may be limited. Different crisis factors may influence psychological well-being in a manner that is not fully captured by this research. This research also does not fully capture cross-cultural factors that may influence media and psychological well-being. It is understood that a considerable part of this research is conducted in a particular context; therefore, its applicability to different populations is not fully established. Fourthly, though the involvement of digital platforms and amplification is recognized, this is not differentiated in any more detail. It is possible that different platforms have different architectures that influence user engagement and psychological outcomes in different ways. This is an area that requires more research.

Lastly, though a linear format is adopted for ease of analysis in this proposed framework, it is recognized that media engagement is a non-linear and recursive process. In addition, though coping and resiliency mechanisms are recognized, this is not tested in this research. In summary, these are all areas that require more research and testing to further develop and validate this proposed framework.

CONCLUSION

The psychological implications of a crisis media environment have become some of the major public health concerns of the contemporary era. This paper has established how the impact of crisis media goes beyond

temporary distress to follow an evolving process in terms of its effects on various psychological states of the person exposed to such content. Starting from the addictive behaviour associated with doomscrolling owing to the negativity bias, followed by empathic detachment due to psychic numbing, and finally ending with withdrawal in response to the increasing distress, an individual moves through a series of processes that have a profound psychological impact.

What makes this issue especially critical at this moment in time? The answer lies in the nature of the technologies themselves, which have been built in such a way that their use is encouraged, not discouraged. Solving this issue would require a cross-disciplinary effort with components including platform governance, mental health techniques, media literacy training, and crisis communication strategy formulation. Although it is certainly true that people should not be considered helpless in dealing with such a crisis, there are several methods available for regaining control once one finds himself or herself ensnared in such an ordeal.

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