

# The Harms of Doomscrolling

A Call to Quit or Switch

# Introduction

In the early 2000s, 20% of cars adopted the Takata Airbag. There was just one problem, it killed people. By 2014, it was recalled across 100M cars after 28 deaths, costing Takata \$24B - **\$857M per life**.

Modern Social Apps (Doomscroll Apps) cause that many youth suicides every 2 days, just in the U.S., thanks to a 70% rise in net new suicides for 10-24 year-olds since social media went mainstream. As Jonathan Haidt and others have documented: this isn't correlation. It's causation. We agree.

So is a life worth what it was in 2014 or not?

If so, that \$857M per life would bankrupt all the main social media apps in a matter of months.

**"There will come a day when social media carries warning labels just like cigarettes."**

- U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy (2024)

## **Doomscroll apps being used for 4.8 hrs/day by Gen-Z are not safe.**

In 2026, a landmark ruling in LA County found **Instagram & YouTube** to be defective & harmful products. TikTok & Snap settled out of court.

The jury explicitly stated in their verdict that **the general public is unaware of the harms of doomscrolling**.

We put together this summary of harms and the solution which is to "quit or switch".

**1. Predator Access**

**2. Lack of Content Standards**

**3. Harmful Design & Algorithms**

## Harm 01

# Predator Access

## 17-Strikes-You're-Out for Sexual Solicitation

Former Head of Safety Vaishnavi Jayakumar testified under oath that Instagram had a "17x" strike policy for accounts "trafficking humans for sex" - what she called "by any measure across the industry, a very, very high strike threshold." This was corroborated by internal Meta docs.

Source: USA Today / Northern District of California court filings, Nov. 2025

## 1-in-5 Teens are Victims of Sextortion in Their Social Media DMs

Thorn's 2025 study of 1,200 young people (ages 13-20) found that 1 in 5 teens has experienced sextortion - someone threatening to expose their sexual images unless they comply with demands. 81% of these threats are from people the minor has never met, often in foreign countries posing with AI as their peers & accessing the youth via their DMs. 1 in 6 victims were age 12 or younger when first sextorted.

Source: Thorn: Sexual Extortion & Young People - Navigating Threats in Digital Environments, June 2025

## Known Groomers Get Recommended Child Accounts

Unsealed FTC documents revealed that in a single three-month period, Instagram's algorithm recommended nearly 2 million minor accounts to accounts already flagged for grooming behavior - at nearly 4x the rate adults were recommended. In 2022 alone, Instagram recommended 1.4 million teens to potential predators in a single day.

Source: FTC antitrust / Social Media Victims Law Center, 2025

## 13% of 13-15 Year Olds Receive Unwanted Sexual Advances on Instagram - Every Week

Meta's own internal research (unsealed in court, 2026) found that 13% of middle schoolers on Instagram (ages 13-15) reported receiving unwanted sexual advances in the past week alone. Teens saw 3x as many nudity posts as adults over 30. Instagram refused to default teen accounts to private - which would have blocked 5.4 million unwanted DMs per day - because executives feared reduced engagement.

Source: Meta internal surveys / Reuters court filings, Feb. 2026

## \$375M New Mexico State Fine for Failing to Protect Children

After a six-week trial, a jury ordered Meta to pay \$375 million - the maximum \$5,000-per-violation penalty under New Mexico's Unfair Practices Act - finding Meta misled consumers about platform safety and enabled child sexual exploitation. The state's undercover investigation showed that a fake 13-year-old girl's account attracted thousands of adult followers and received graphic photos and videos 3-4 times per week through DMs.

Source: State of New Mexico v. Meta Platforms, Inc. / NM Dept. of Justice, March 2026

## Harm 02

# Lack of Content Standards

### 32,000+ Weight-Loss Videos Served to 13-Year-Old Girls in Weeks

The Wall Street Journal and the Center for Countering Digital Hate created fake accounts registered as 13-year-old girls on TikTok. Within just a few weeks, TikTok's algorithm served them more than 32,000 weight-loss videos - many promoting fasting, sub-300 calorie days, water-only diets, the "Corpse Bride" starvation regimen, and purging techniques. Anorexia has the highest death rate of any psychiatric illness

Source: Wall Street Journal / Center for Countering Digital Hate, 2021; AFP/Levin Law, 2025

### 52% of Reels Are Already AI - With No Standards Governing What Gets Served

AI-generated short-form videos now account for 52% of TikToks and Instagram Reels. Under today's doomscroll model, any human or AI can post anytime with a guaranteed "at least one view" - there are no content standards, no curation, and no accountability. Meta's own Q3 2025 earnings call revealed Reels alone reached a \$50 billion annual run rate. The financial incentive to flood feeds with algorithmically-optimized AI content - regardless of its effect on users - has never been greater.

Source: Zebracat AI / Meta Q3 2025 Earnings

### 10% of US Teens Have Engaged in the "Choking Challenge"

Roughly 10% of U.S. teenagers have engaged in the Choking Game - a viral social media challenge in which users strangle themselves to achieve a brief high. Many kids never wake up. Other platform-amplified challenges - the Benadryl Challenge, Skull Breaker Challenge, and Fire Challenge - have each caused hospitalizations and deaths. Doomscroll algorithms amplify this content because it drives engagement.

Source: CDC / CHOP Injury Research Center / Texas A&M University, 2022-2026

### 10.1% of Meta Ads Are Scams

Meta internally projected that 10.1% of its 2024 revenue - roughly \$16 billion - came from running ads for scams and banned goods, including fraudulent e-commerce schemes, illegal online casinos, and banned medical products. Meta's own systems served users an estimated 15 billion "higher-risk" scam ads per day. A small advertiser could get flagged for financial fraud 8 times before Meta blocked them. Large spenders could accrue 500+ strikes. Meta's platforms were involved in approximately one-third of all successful scams in the U.S.

Source: Reuters / leaked internal Meta documents, Nov. 2025

## Harm 03

# Harmful Design & Algorithms

1 of 2,527 Lawsuits.

**Trial finds Instagram & YouTube (TikTok/Snap settled before) liable for negligently designing addictive products that harm children.**

In Mar 2026, an LA jury issued the first U.S. verdict holding social media companies liable for addictive product design harming a child. The plaintiff began using YouTube at 6 and Instagram at 9, later developing compulsive use, anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation. The jury found Meta and Google acted with negligence and malice. Total verdict: \$6M.

Source: K.G.M. v. Meta Platforms & Alphabet, LA Superior Court, March 2026 / MDL-3047, May 2026

## JURY VERDICT QUESTIONS & FINDINGS - K.G.M. v. META & GOOGLE

QUESTION	INSTAGRAM	YOUTUBE
Was the defendant negligent in the design or operation of its platform?	YES	YES
Was defendant's negligence a substantial factor in causing harm to plaintiff?	YES	YES
Did defendant fail to adequately warn users of dangers?	YES	YES
Would a reasonable designer or operator have warned of the danger or instructed on the safe use of the platform?	YES	YES
Did defendant act with malice, oppression, or fraud?	YES	YES
Compensatory damages	\$2.1M (70%)	\$0.9M (30%)
Punitive damages	\$2.1M (70%)	\$0.9M (30%)

Note: TikTok (Jan. 27, 2026) and Snap (Jan. 22, 2026) reached confidential pre-trial settlements. 8 additional bellwether trials are scheduled. Internal Meta documents at trial: "If we wanna win big with teens, we must bring them in as tweens."

# Most Hated Apps of All Time

(by 1-Star Reviews on Google Play Store)

**50M**

Facebook

**34M**

Instagram

**19M**

TikTok

## TIKTOK

"a lot of people post self harm and other inappropriate stuff and I am triggered by it because I am going through a lot of mental health issues and I try reporting them and TikTok won't do anything about it"

## INSTAGRAM

"when I do [scroll] there's so many graphic posts... completely naked women... a guy shooting another guy with a rifle in the head (with NO graphic post warning)... MAKE INSTAGRAM KID FRIENDLY AGAIN!!!"

## Algorithms Know Exactly How Videos Will Make You Feel - Before They Show Them to You

Social media algorithms use biometric and emotional data to predict how content will make you feel [and how your brain will react] - then use that data to maximize how long and fast you scroll.

**"We collect and use biometrics, (emotions) face and voice information... to recommend and moderate content"**

- TikTok Newsroom, 2023

The algorithm knows anger, fear, and anxiety keep you scrolling longer than **love, joy, and calmness**.

### Negative Emotions = More Revenue

Anger

Fear

Anxiety

Contempt

Disgust

Envy

Distress

Sadness

Keep you scrolling longer. Maximized by the algorithm.

### Positive Emotions = Less Engagement

Love

Joy

Calmness

Contentment

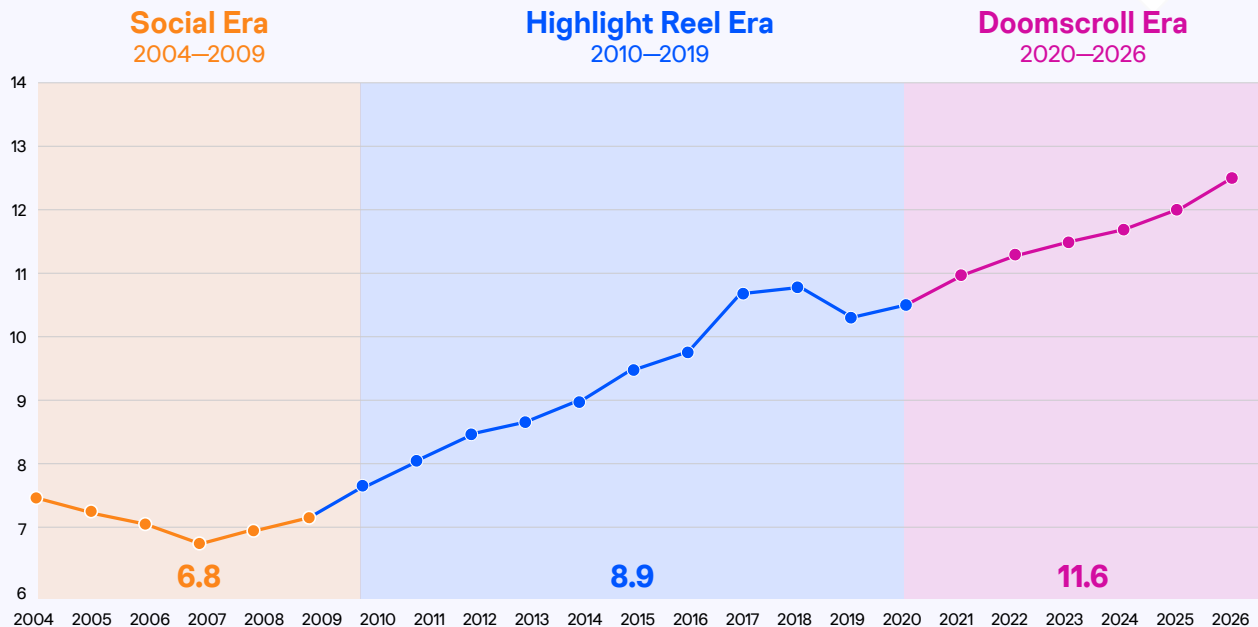
Interest

Satisfaction

Doesn't drive scroll time. Suppressed by profit incentives.

While negative emotions are a winning formula for doomscroll apps, they're a losing formula for mankind.

Youth Suicides (Ages 10-24) Per Social Media Era



Source: CDC/NCHS, National Vital Statistics System (Data Brief 471). 2022-2026 are illustrative estimates, not official forecasts

Adolescent mental health: Social Era (6.8) - Highlight Reel Era (8.9) - Doomscroll Era (11.6). A 70% increase since pre-social media. Source: CDC/NCHS National Vital Statistics System, Data Brief 471. 2022-2026 are illustrative estimates.

# UP's Scroll Happy<sup>®</sup> Solution

Scroll less and better so you can live more.



## No Predators

Vetted creators only. No anonymous actors. DMs off by default. Your kids are safe.

## Content Curated

Every word, scene, and emotion reviewed before it reaches your feed.

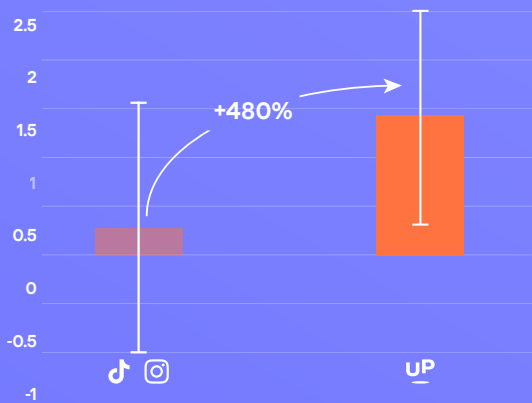
## Algorithm Flipped

Optimized for your mental health and happiness - not your scroll time.

UP is already showing science-backed results as the healthy/uplifting alternative to doomscroll platforms.

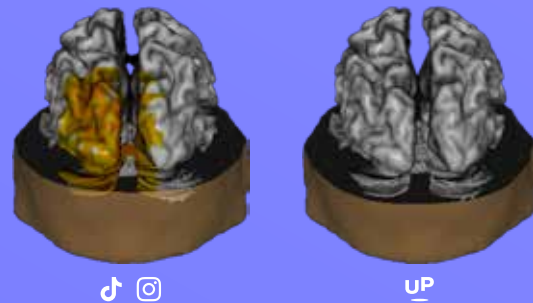
### 5X Mood Improvement

Dr. Philip Nelson, ORU - N=102 • Initial findings



### Brain Activity (qEEG)

Dr. Nate Shanok, FAU — N=11 • Initial findings



TikTok/Instagram: Anxiety • Agitation • Restlessness  
 UP: Attention • Working Memory • Emotional Regulation

# Social with Standards

Don't doomscroll. Quit or Switch to UP

JOIN THE MOVEMENT AT  
**[scrollhappy.com](https://scrollhappy.com)**

This report was prepared by UP, Inc. for informational and advocacy purposes. All statistics sourced from cited public records, court filings, peer-reviewed research, and journalistic investigations. Mood research by Dr. Jonathan Nelson (ORU) and brain scan research by Dr. Nate Shanok (FAU) represent initial studies; larger studies forthcoming. Copyright 2026 UP, Inc.