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Doomscrolling, Existential Anxiety and Psychological Capital among Youth

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Abstract : *The youth of today's society live in a fast-changing world with growing amounts of negative online information. One of the major consequences is that, young people are developing a pattern of compulsively watching a big amount of distressing news and social media updates, which is known as "Doomscrolling". This compulsive behaviour, typically creates a heightened experience of fear, emotional fatigue and anxiety. This may have an adverse impact on person's psychological stability and increase the likelihood that they may experience more severe anxiety. A feeling of confusion and disorientation towards life and own existence is called as Existential Anxiety and it is one example of an anxiety that today's youth are suffering from.The Psychological Capital is the positive energy an individual will poses in their day to day life activities along with four areas or components, resilience, optimism, self-efficacy and hope. Therefore, young adults who possess a high level of Psychological Capital have a greater ability to deal with negative emotional situations and to recover from those situations than do their peers with a low level of PsyCap. This shows that Psychological Capital may buffer or reduce the effects of Doomscrolling and which reduce the severity of Existential Anxiety. The aim of this study is to find out the associations among these three variables. Data was collected from 150 youth population aged between 15 and 24 years in both offline and online mode by using Doomscrolling Questionnaire, Existential Anxiety Questionnaire and Psychological Capital Questionnaire.The findings revealed that Doomscrolling had no significant correlation with Existential Anxiety and Psychological Capital while Existential Anxiety and Psychological Capital were negatively correlated.Gender difference was found in Psychological Capital only and not in other variables.*

Keywords: *Doomscrolling, Existential Anxiety, Psychological Capital (PsyCap), Hope, Optimism, Resilience, Self-efficacy, Youth,Mental Well-being*

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Introduction:

The intrusion of digital platforms in our lives has changed a lot in the present society. Social media is influencing people as a mentor. According to a United Nations report, in India students and others in the age of youth have easily available internet and online resources so as in the whole world (Boampong, M., 2013). Everyone, including young people, is now able to receive tremendous amounts of information online, but much of it is either distressing, sensationalized or evokes outrage. A more specific behavioural pattern emerged in the digital era is doomscrolling, which can be described as continuous and excessive consumption of distressing or negative news (Akat & Hamarta, 2025;

Sumbal & Faran, 2025; Bendau et al., 2022). Those who are involved in doomscrolling are at very high risk of developing anxiety, sleep problems, reduced well-being, emotional exhaustion and disengagement from school and/or work.

Unfortunately, in India, where young people are constantly subjected to additional psychosocial pressures such as extremely competitive academic environments, uncertainty around future careers, identity exploration and economic disparity, the impact of 24-hour exposure to digital negativity on young people will only continue to be more significant than in other countries (MacMillan, 2019). Young people are also often online for extended periods creating an additional risk of compulsively consuming distressing news, plus compounded emotional stressors to how they process crises and social tensions (Roy et al., 2020; Savci & Aysan, 2017). Young people turned to doomscrolling often during the COVID-19 pandemic, political unrest and economic instability, even though it had a significant negative psychological impact on their lives (Satici et al., 2021).

There is a large amount of research between how being constantly exposed to a negative perspective about the world or about news can create existential (a deeper level of) anxiety. This type of anxiety is related to life's purpose, death, uncertainty, and feelings of isolation (Yalom, 2020; Weems, et al., 2004). When people see catastrophic stories, crisis and other human vulnerability stories on a more regular basis, it will then lead to something called “existential anxiety.” Thus it creates a connection that, constant exposure to negative online news can leads to fears such as fear regarding future, safety, and the meaning and purpose of life. Youth who are trying to develop an understanding of their identity and worldview are at more risk (Pandya, & Lodha, 2021; Boelen & Reijntjes, 2009).

From a developmental perspective, adolescents and young adults will be at increased risk for these outcomes due to their current stage of development, which is characterized by identity development, emotional sensitivity and increased self-awareness (Arnett, 2014). The added exposure of negative online narratives during this time will also lead to confusion, worry about the future and hopelessness.

In addition, the interaction of digital media with this developmental process will further complicate this process by creating a lack of clear boundaries between searching for information online and compulsively using media to help manage their emotions. Given that social media is immersive, the ability to have continuas updates regarding news, and the ability of algorithms to determine the most emotional based reactions, media users engage in behaviours known as “doomscrolling” which is associated with cycles of rumination, fear, and existential uncertainty.

In light of the psychological dangers presented, a perspective from Positive Psychology to explain Youth Resilience comes from the concept of Psychological Capital or PsyCap (Luthans, Youssef, & Avolio, 2007). PsyCap is comprised of four essential components; Hope, Self-Efficacy, Resilience, and Optimism. These components combined to develop the internal strengths that help individuals to cope and adjust with difficult situations effectively. Hence it can be said that, PsyCap serves as a prominent buffer against stressors, anxiety, and depressive symptoms (Avey et al., 2009). Those who have a high level of PsyCap tend to have superior emotional regulation, utilize adaptive coping mechanisms, have persistence and view negative events on social media in a more positive manner (Gautam, Ningthoujam, & Singh, 2019; Newman et al., 2014).

Hope, resilience, self-efficacy and optimism combined to reduce the negative psychological effect of online negative news consumption. Some of the studies have found that a high level of PsyCap predicts lower levels of anxiety from social media, less vulnerability to negative online content, and greater overall digital well-being (Goyal, Chauhan & Bajaj, 2025; Mansukhani& Hasan, 2024). Based on the researches it has been seen that the psychological capital of individuals become a protective factor which prevents from developing anxiety and other negative psychological impact including online social media uses and will help in better adjustment to their daily life.

Due to the increasing amounts of doomscrolling among the youth of India, combined with the known effects that doomscrolling has on levels of anxiety, it is important to look at these variables together. This would

help in better understanding the relationship between doomscrolling (both in terms of vulnerability from existential anxiety, and resilience via psycap) and how they may be used to shape mental health intervention techniques, college/university counselling programs, digital wellness programs, and policy initiatives geared towards youth protection. Additionally, exploring the degree to which psycap acts as either a mediator or moderator between doomscrolling and existential anxiety could provide insight into how psychological capital (strengths) may help reduce distress associated with today's digital age.

In the today's digital world it is most important to understand the impact on mental health, both the ways positive and negative. Therefore this study aimed to examine the relationship between Doomscrolling, Existaential Anxiety and Psychological Captital among Youth. Also it explored the significance of gender among these three variables. Further the ways to enhance our life-style and use the psychological resources can be conveyed in a clear manner. Enhancing healthy digital habits and management of own emotions.

Objectives:

Aims of the present study are:

1. To find out relationship between Doomscrolling and Existential Anxiety among youth.
2. To find out the relationship between Existential Anxiety and Psychological Capital among youth.
3. To find out the relationship between Doomscrolling and Psychological Capital among youth.
4. To find out the gender difference between Doomscrolling, Existential Anxiety, and Psychological Capital among youth.

Hypothesis:

On the basis of objectives following hypothesis have been made:

- There would be significant correlation between Doomscrolling and Existential Anxiety among youth.
- There would be significant correlation between Existential Anxiety and Psychological Capital among youth.
- There would be significant correlation between Doomscrolling and Psychological Capital among youth.
- There would be significant gender differences in Doomscrolling among youth.
- There would be significant gender differences in Existential Anxiety among youth.
- There would be significant gender differences in Psychological Capital among youth.

Methodology:

Sample: Participants taken were 150 out of which 75 males and 75 were females with the age range between 15 and 24 years. Participants were selected from different institutions of Bihar through online and offline method with convenience sampling method.

Tools:

1. Doomscrolling Questionnaire: Melnyky and Standnik in 2024 developed this questionnaire. The Doomscrolling Questionnaire considers how often a person doomscrolls, how emotionally attached or involved they are while doing so; how difficult it is for them to stop doomscrolling, and the psychological damage they experience after seeing distressing material). The higher the score (on a 1-5 scale) on the Doomscrolling Questionnaire, the higher the likelihood that the individual displays doomscrolling behaviours. With the significance levels below 0.01, the Doomscrolling Questionnaire has high reliability and validity.
2. Existential Anxiety Questionnaire: It was developed by Weems in 2004, the existential anxiety questionnaire, assesses the levels of existential anxiety an individual has about their existence using five areas of concern (i.e., meaninglessness; uncertainty; isolation; death realization; and vulnerability on a personal level) through existential anxiety questionnaire items. Higher scores on the existential anxiety (EAQ) questionnaire means the greater level of existential anxiety in an individual. The areas of assessment are about death, isolation, uncertainty, and the sense of purpose. The

reliability analysis of the EAQ indicates that the measure has acceptable internal consistency (Alpha = 0.71) and test-retest reliability over two weeks (r =0.72). The EAQ has good reliability and validity with significance levels below 0.01.

3. Psychological Capital Questionnaire (PCQ-24): This scale was developed by Luthans in 2007 and it has been used to assess psychological capital. Hope, self-efficacy, resilience, and optimism combines to form, "Psychological capital" which means the ability to protect oneself from disturbances. It is helpful in enhancing the life quality. A higher score on this questionnaire, shows that the individual has better psychological resources and thus have a greater positive mental state. Using a significance level of 0.01, the reliability of the PCQ was established through test/retest (0.342 correlation coefficient) and split-half reliability (0.643 correlation coefficient). The PCQ was also determined to be a valid measure at the 0.01 level.

Statistical Analysis: Means, standard deviations, t-ratios, and coefficients of correlation were used to analyze the results statistically.

Procedure: The tests followed an appropriate process that was both systematic and ethical. The data was collected through both online and offline mode. They were explained about the purpose of this research. After getting informed-consent from the participants, the researcher gave three different psychological tests to the participants, Doomscrolling Questionnaire (Melnyky & Standnik, 2024), Existential Anxiety Questionnaire (EAQ - Weems, 2004), and Psychological Capital Questionnaire (PCQ - Luthans, 2007). Each of these three psychological tests had clear instructions on it about how to complete each item using the Likert-type scale. It was told to the participants that answers will be kept confidential so to answer each of the questions honestly and were instructed to ask if they have any query. After completing the questionnaires, the researcher did scoring and analyzed by SPSS.

Design: The present study used a quantitative, cross-sectional, and correlational design. It examined the relationships between doomscrolling, existential anxiety, and psychological capital among youth, and compared male and female participants on these variables.

Results and Discussion:

This research is seeking to better understand how Doomscrolling, Existential Anxiety, and Psychological Capital relate to each other for young adults. This study also wanted to assess whether there are differences between male and female participants on these three variables. A literature review and some theoretical frameworks supported the creation of six hypotheses. A total of 150 participants (75 males and 75 females) were taken, using convenience sampling method and they completed standardized measures including the Doomscrolling Questionnaire, the Existential Anxiety Questionnaire (EAQ), and the Psychological Capital Questionnaire (PCQ-24). After the data collection, scoring was done and statistical analysis was calculated by SPSS. Once analyzed, the results were explained by using tables for clarity.

Hypothesis 1. "There would be significance correlation between Doomscrolling and Existential Anxiety among youth."

Table 1. Coefficient of Correlation between Doomscrolling and Existential Anxiety among youth

Variables	*r*	Level of significance
Doomscrolling	–0.108	p>0.05
Existential Anxiety		

N = 150, df = 148

The correlation between doom scrolling and existential anxiety for young adults is provided in the table above. A Pearson correlation coefficient of r = –0.108 indicates a very weak negative correlation between the two constructs, indicating little to no relationship. The p-value of 0.187 is higher than the conventional alpha level of 0.05, which means that the variables are not significantly correlated and if increases or decreases in doomscrolling behaviour corresponding increases or decreases in the level of

existential anxiety experienced by the participants.

Thus the first hypothesis that "There would be significance correlation between Doomscrolling and Existential Anxiety among youth" have been rejected. Since this study found an extremely weak correlation; and since the p-value did not indicate significance, the Null hypothesis that there is no statistically significant relationship between doomscrolling and existential anxiety is retained as true, and the alternate hypothesis is rejected. There was no statistically significant effect of doomscrolling on the level of existential anxiety for this particular sample.

In contrast with the above finding, Shabahang et al., (2024) found that there is a significant positive association between doomscrolling and anxiety. This research said more association than what was found in this study, it can be concluded that the variables may exhibit different relationships in various populations or settings.

Hypothesis 2. "There would be significant correlation between Existential Anxiety and Psychological Capital among youth."

Table 2. Coefficient of correlation between Existential Anxiety and Psychological Capital among youth

Variables	*r*	Level of significance
Existential Anxiety	–0.368	p<0.01
Psychological Capital		

N=150, df= 148

The above table explains correlation coefficient, which indicated that a moderate negative correlation of the two variables found. The Pearson correlation coefficient is r= -0.368 which indicates that as existential anxiety increases psychological capital is negatively affected. The correlation was statistically significant with a p-value of 0.000 which falls far below the conventional thresholds of 0.01. Because the correlation is negative correlation this means that as existential anxiety increases the level of psychological capital (hope, resilience, optimism, and self-efficacy) will decrease.

Thus the second hypothesis, that "There would be significant correlation between Existential Anxiety and Psychological Capital among youth" was accepted. Which means that existential anxiety and psychological capital are significantly associated but the direction is opposite. It was found consistent with the theory that increased existential anxiety negatively impacts individual inner strength and coping capacity.

This result supports the finding in LeSueur's (2019) study that they also had a statistically significant relationship in youth between existential anxiety and psychological capital. With the support of these studies the conclusion can be drawn that the existential anxiety and youth psychological capital constructs have a meaningful relationship.

Hypothesis 3. "There would be significant correlation between Doomscrolling and Psychological Capital among youth."

Table 3. Coefficient of correlation between Doom scrolling and Psychological Capital among

Variables	*r*	Level of significance
Doomscrolling	0.074	p>0.05
Psychological Capital		

N = 150 ,df = 148

In the above table, the correlation results indicate that a weak and negligible (r = 0.074) relationship exists between youth doomscrolling behaviours and their psychological capital. This represents a very low degree of correlation suggesting that there is no meaningful linear association between these two variables for this population (i.e. the correlation between the two constructs). The significance value is p = 0.368, which is greater than 0.05, which further explains that this association is not significant and the correlation is may be due to random chance and not a true effect.

Thus the third hypothesis that "There would be significant correlation between Doomscrolling and Psychological Capital among youth" have been rejected. There was little correlation (practically zero) with respect to how young people employ doomscrolling as a means of developing mental resiliency (i.e., psychological capital).

This result was supported by a research done by Korolainen (2024), his study showed the lack of correlation between doomscrolling and psychological capital among youth. This adds further evidence that doomscrolling as an activity has little relationship to psychological capital development among similar cohorts.

Hypothesis 4. "There would be significant gender difference in Doomscrolling among youth."

Table 4. Mean, Standard deviation and t value of Doomscrolling among Male and Female youth

Gender	Mean	N	SD	t-ratio	Level of significance
Male	32.21	75	14.18	–0.251	p>0.05
Female	32.87	75	17.57		

N = 150 ,df = 148

An independent samples t-test was used to examine the differences between doomscrolling behaviour between genders of youth. The value of t = -0.251 based on data and the corresponding significance value was p = 0.803, which is much higher than the conventional alpha level of 0.05, indicating the mean differences in doomscrolling scores of males and females are not statistically significant.

Thus the fourth hypothesis that "There would be a significant gender difference in Doomscrolling among youth" was rejected. Because the p-value did not reach the level of significance and the t-ratio showed a very small difference between groups, there was not sufficient support for any considerable gendered variations in doomscrolling behaviours.

In support with the above study, Scammon's (2025) investigation of youth doom scrolling found no gender differences. There is similarity between the results of this study and previous research findings, suggesting that there are no substantial differences in the tendency of young people to doomscroll across gender.

Hypothesis 5. "There would be significant gender difference in Existential Anxiety among youth."

Table 5. Mean, Standard Deviation and t value of Existential Anxiety among male and female youth

Gender	Mean	N	SD	t-ratio	Level of significance
Male	8.03	75	2.254	1.814	p>0.05
Female	7.27	75	2.844		

N= 150 ,df = 148

In table 5 it was shown that an independent samples t-test conducted to find out gender differences in existential anxiety among youth. A t-ratio of t=1.814 with a p-value of 0.072 was found in the result. There was little mean difference, still it was seen that there is no statistically significant difference between male and female (i.e., p > 0.05) found.Thus the difference may reflect random sample variability rather than an actual effect.

The fifth hypothesis that "There would be significant gender difference in Existential Anxiety among youth"have been rejected. Therefore male and female difference does not affects levels of existential anxiety among youth. It means that the mean score variability is most likely due to random variability.

In support with the above finding, in 2016 a study conducted by Weems et al. portrayed no statistically significant variation in existential anxiety across both the gender. The finding of this study support this conclusion and add further weight to the belief that there are no differences in existential anxiety levels between gender.

Hypothesis 6. "There would be significant gender difference in Psychological Capital among youth."

Table 6. Mean, Standard Deviation and t value of Psychological Capital among male and female youth

Gender	Mean	N	SD	t-ratio	Level of significance
Male	121.41	75	10.112	3.542	p<0.01
Female	116.57	75	6.145		

N= 150 ,df = 148

Psychological capital differences between genders were analyzed through the independent samples t-test as shown in the table. A t-value of t = 3.542 with a p-level of p < .01 indicates that the differences in scores for males and females are statistically significant & therefore gender type significantly impacts levels of

psychological capital within this group. Females tend to score high as compared to males.

Thus the sixth hypothesis that "There would be significant gender difference in Psychological Capital among youth" have been accepted. Since a highly statistically significant (p-value) supports that there are substantial gender-based difference in psychological capital (hope, resilience, optimism, and self-efficacy) between males and females.

In support with the above result a study conducted by Dogra & Kang (2022), showed that there was a significant gender difference in psychological capital. So there may be variation in gender in psychological capital depending on the past experiences and societal context.

Conclusion:

In the present study, the associations between Doomscrolling, Existential Anxiety and Psychological Capital among young individuals were explored. Also it was examined that whether there are any differences between gender in the three variables. Results indicated that there was no significant correlation of doomscrolling with psychological capital and existential anxiety among youth. One of the significant cause of this could be a small sample size and also these results could stem from differences in the cultural context in which this data was collected means a society characterized by strong familial and community ties may act as a buffer for young people against the potentially deleterious effects of consuming excessive amounts of negative news. Doomscrolling thus can be understood actually as a part of habit in individuals rather than causing distress. This result indicates that other psychosocial and contextual factors can affect how digital behaviours can affect mental health.

The another result shown is that, when a person have high psychological capital or levels of hope, resilience, self-efficacy, and optimism they can be less affected by existential anxiety than others who do not have these qualities. Because young adults who have very high levels of all of those psychological capital (hope, resilience, etc.) will have a lot of ways to cope with all types of stressors (including negative things found online), so building and developing their level of psychological capital can be an effective strategy for improving the mental wellness and emotional stability of youth.

Interestingly, male and female participants in this study did not differ significantly with respect to doomscrolling. The implication of this is that excessive negativity (i.e., anxiety) associated with digital media is becoming prevalent among both young men and women, indicating that the act of doomscrolling may be more subject to influence from contextual, technological variables, rather than demographic characteristics. The result of existential anxiety found to be as no significant gender difference among youth. Besides slight variations in mean scores, they were not strong enough to be considered as significant difference. This describes that existential worry such as uncertainties about future, purpose, identity and worth are shared experiences among youth across genders. Thus the finding explains that existential anxiety is triggered more by psychosocial and environmental challenges than by gender.

However, psychological capital had a very large gender difference, meaning that male and female scores were significantly different overall for hope, self-efficacy, resilience, and optimism. Thus it can be said that male and female gender develop the psychological ability in different ways. The significant difference indicates that there is need for focused interventions to enhance psychological capital, particularly among group who score lower in these areas which is male gender group.

This research gives a relevant information about the relationships among digital behaviours, existential experiences, and positive psychological qualities for young people. There are limitations in this study as it used a small sample size, convenience sampling technique and online and offline mode of data collection. In addition, because of the study's variable results, more research needs to take place as well as more programs focused on education, emotional and digital well-being to help young people create positive coping strategies, lower distress, and build greater levels of psychological resources for young people. Some of the preventive measures are following:

- Fostering psychological capital by setting realistic goals, which will improve hope and motivation and lessen existential anxiety.

- Learning problem-solving abilities and resilience for better adjustment to the environment.
- For better understanding the differences in individuals regarding their behaviourto doomscrolling, additional factors such as personality traits, coping styles, digital awareness, family environments and academic pressures should also be examined that how much contribution they have in doomscrolling.
- Larger samples sizes, more than just one method of data collection e.g., interviews, observational studies and/or follow-up studies will give researchers more detailed and informative data than what can be gathered from a set of questionnaires.

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