

**“FEAR OF MISSING OUT AND COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS AS PREDICTORS OF
DOOMSCROLLING BEHAVIOR AMONG YOUNG ADULTS”**

*Dissertation submitted to Kerala University In partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
award of the Degree of*

Master of Science in Counselling Psychology

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the Dissertation entitled “**Fear of missing out and cognitive distortions as predictors of doomscrolling behavior among young adults**” is an authentic work carried out by Athiya sherin k under the guidance of Ms. Athmaja Panickar during the fourth semester of M.Sc. Counselling Psychology programme in the academic year 2024 - 2026.

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DECLARATION

I Athiya sherin k , do hereby declare that the dissertation titled **“Fear of missing out and cognitive distortions as predictors of doomscrolling behavior among young adults”** submitted to the Department of Counselling Psychology, Loyola College of Social Sciences (Autonomous), Sreekariyam, under the supervision of Ms. Athmaja Panickar, Assistant Professor, Department of Counselling Psychology, for the award of the degree of Master of Science in Counselling Psychology, is a Bonafide work carried out by me and no part this work has been submitted for the award of any other degree in any University.

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Abstract

Young adults are among the most active users of smartphones and social media, making them particularly vulnerable to doomscrolling, the repetitive consumption of negative online content. This behaviour has been associated with increased psychological distress, anxiety, poor sleep, and reduced wellbeing. The present study examined whether Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) and cognitive distortions predict doomscrolling behaviour among young adults and explored the relationships among these variables. A cross-sectional correlational research design was employed. The study included a purposive sample of 124 young adults aged 18–25 years residing in Kerala, comprising college and university students as well as young working professionals. Data were collected through an online survey after obtaining informed consent. Doomscrolling behaviour, FOMO, and cognitive distortions were assessed using the Doomscrolling Questionnaire (DQ-12), the Fear of Missing Out Scale, and the Cognitive Distortion Scale, respectively. Spearman's rank-order correlation and multiple linear regression were used for data analysis. The findings revealed significant positive relationships among FOMO, cognitive distortions, and doomscrolling behaviour. Cognitive distortions showed the strongest association with doomscrolling. Multiple regression analysis indicated that FOMO and cognitive distortions jointly and significantly predicted doomscrolling behaviour, accounting for 29.3% of the variance. Among the two predictors, cognitive distortions emerged as the stronger predictor, suggesting that maladaptive patterns of thinking may play a more prominent role than motivational concerns related to missing out in maintaining doomscrolling behaviour. The findings highlight the importance of addressing distorted thinking patterns and FOMO in interventions aimed at reducing problematic digital media use. The study contributes to the growing literature on digital wellbeing and offers practical implications for counsellors, mental health professionals, and educational institutions in developing cognitive-behavioural and digital-wellness interventions to promote healthier online engagement among young adults.

Keywords: Doomscrolling, Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), cognitive distortions, young adults, digital wellbeing.

Chapter I

Introduction

The past decade has witnessed an unprecedented integration of digital and social media platforms into the everyday lives of young adults, reshaping how information is consumed, relationships are maintained, and leisure time is structured. Smartphones have become an almost permanent extension of daily functioning, offering constant, low-effort access to an endless stream of updates, news, and social content. Global usage patterns confirm just how central this behaviour has become to young adult life: social media adoption is exceptionally high among individuals aged 16–24, with the overwhelming majority of this demographic engaging daily, and new users joining these platforms at a rate of several per second worldwide. This constant connectivity carries a paradox: while it offers unprecedented opportunities for information access, entertainment, and social participation, it simultaneously exposes users to a continuous influx of distressing or negative content, particularly during periods of social, political, health, or environmental uncertainty. Algorithmic newsfeeds are designed to sustain attention by surfacing content that is emotionally arousing, and negative or threat-related information tends to be especially effective at capturing and holding user attention—a tendency rooted in longstanding psychological negativity biases that predispose humans to prioritise threat-related information for survival purposes. One consequence of this digital landscape has been the emergence of a distinct behavioural pattern popularly termed "doomscrolling"—the compulsive, prolonged consumption of negative online content—which has drawn increasing attention from mental health researchers as a phenomenon with tangible psychological costs. Unlike ordinary information-seeking, doomscrolling is characterised by its compulsive and self-perpetuating quality: individuals continue to scroll despite the content actively worsening their mood, seemingly unable to disengage. Understanding why some young adults engage in this behaviour more than others requires attention to underlying psychological vulnerabilities that make such compulsive engagement more or less likely. Two constructs that have been repeatedly implicated in problematic digital engagement are fear of missing out (FOMO), a motivational-emotional state tied to social connectivity and belonging concerns, and cognitive distortions, the habitual errors in thinking that shape how individuals interpret and respond to ambiguous or threatening information. Both constructs offer theoretically distinct, yet potentially complementary, explanations for why certain individuals become trapped in cycles of compulsive negative-content consumption. This chapter introduces doomscrolling, fear of missing out, and cognitive distortions as the central constructs of the present study, elaborates on their conceptual and theoretical underpinnings, and establishes the rationale for examining cognitive distortions and FOMO together as predictors of doomscrolling behaviour among young adults. While much of the early doomscrolling literature originated in Western contexts,

a growing body of India-based research suggests the behaviour is far from marginal among Indian youth. A descriptive study conducted among undergraduate students at PGIMER Chandigarh, using the standardised Doomscrolling Scale alongside the Hamilton Anxiety Rating Scale and Perceived Stress Scale, found that of 390 participants, 343 (87.8%) exhibited mild doomscrolling behavior, while 4 (1.1%) demonstrated severe doomscrolling tendencies, with the association between doomscrolling and psychological distress reaching statistical significance across several sociodemographic variables (George et al., 2025). Complementing this, a cross-sectional study of 150 Indian college students aged 18–30 reported a substantial positive relationship between the frequency of doomscrolling and levels of psychological fatigue, with nighttime scrolling habits particularly associated with higher fatigue scores (Sarkar & Ankita, 2025). Even in occupational settings, doomscrolling has been shown to carry measurable costs: a study of 393 Generation Z employees in India's IT sector found that doomscrolling had a significant negative impact on employee performance (Chand & Mishra, 2025). These findings collectively indicate that doomscrolling in India is not a peripheral curiosity but a widespread, functionally consequential pattern among young adults, one occurring against the backdrop of a broader national mental health burden – the NMHS (2015–16) estimated that 10.6% of Indian adults suffer from a diagnosable mental disorder, with treatment gaps as high as 70–92% depending on condition (Business Standard, 2024). Notably, cross-cultural evidence suggests that problematic social media use tends to be *more*, not less, prevalent in collectivist societies: a meta-analysis of 34,798 participants found a pooled prevalence estimate of problematic social media use of 31% in collectivist nations compared to 14% in individualist nations (Cheng et al., 2021) – a pattern with direct relevance to India's strongly interdependent social and familial fabric, and one that may partly explain why FOMO-driven and socially anxious scrolling behaviours could manifest with particular intensity among Indian young adults.

The tendency of doomscrolling to persist despite its aversive emotional consequences becomes more comprehensible when situated within the broader psychological literature on negativity bias – the well-documented human tendency to attend to, remember, and be influenced by negative information more readily than positive information of equal intensity. This bias is thought to be evolutionarily adaptive, since prioritising threat-related cues historically carried greater survival value than prioritising rewarding ones. Digital platforms exploit this bias structurally: recommendation algorithms are optimised to maximise engagement time, and because emotionally arousing and threat-related content reliably

captures attention for longer, negative material is disproportionately amplified in newsfeeds regardless of user intention. This creates a feedback loop in which the platform architecture and the user's own cognitive predispositions reinforce one another, making disengagement effortful even when the content is subjectively distressing.

Fear of missing out has been most influentially conceptualised by Przybylski et al. (2013) as a pervasive apprehension that others may be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent, accompanied by a persistent urge to stay continuously connected to others' activities. Framed within Self-Determination Theory, FOMO is understood to arise when core psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness go unmet, prompting compensatory surveillance of others' lives through social media as a substitute route to belonging (Przybylski et al., 2013). Empirical work has consistently linked FOMO to poorer psychological outcomes: higher levels of FOMO are consistently associated with increased anxiety, depression, and a diminished sense of well-being (Deniz, 2021; Przybylski et al., 2013; Rahmah & Qudsyi, 2024), and FOMO has been identified as a robust predictor of problematic and compulsive social media engagement more broadly (Elhai et al., 2020). Within the specific context of doomscrolling, FOMO offers a plausible motivational account: an individual who fears being uninformed or socially excluded may feel compelled to keep refreshing feeds precisely *because* the content is negative or crisis-related, since disengaging would mean risking being "left out" of a socially significant unfolding event. Where FOMO explains the motivational pull toward continued engagement, cognitive distortions offer a complementary, interpretive account of why some individuals process ambiguous or threatening online content in ways that sustain compulsive scrolling. Rooted in Beck's (1976) cognitive model, cognitive distortions refer to systematic, habitual errors in information processing such as catastrophizing, overgeneralization, and all-or-nothing thinking that distort the perceived meaning, severity, or personal relevance of incoming information. When applied to a newsfeed environment saturated with crisis-oriented content, such distortions may cause individuals to overestimate the probability or personal relevance of catastrophic events, intensifying anxiety and, paradoxically, the compulsion to keep seeking more information in an effort to regain a sense of control or certainty a pattern conceptually related to health-anxiety and reassurance-seeking cycles described in the cognitive-behavioural literature. Although FOMO and cognitive distortions have each been independently linked to problematic digital engagement, few studies have examined them jointly as predictors of doomscrolling specifically, particularly within Indian young adult populations, where high collectivist social pressures and

a rapidly digitising media environment may amplify both pathways simultaneously. Investigating these constructs in tandem allows for a more complete account of doomscrolling as a behaviour shaped by both *why* individuals feel compelled to stay connected (FOMO) and *how* they cognitively interpret the threatening content they encounter (cognitive distortions), addressing a meaningful gap in the existing literature and offering a more mechanistically grounded basis for future intervention design.

1.1 Doomscrolling

Before doomscrolling can be understood as a distinct construct, it is useful to first situate it against the backdrop of ordinary, non-pathological scrolling behaviour. Most social media and news app use is what may be called routine or casual scrolling: brief, low-stakes engagement undertaken to pass time, stay socially connected, or check for specific updates (Thomason, 2024). This form of scrolling is typically intentional and target-directed. The user opens an app with a rough purpose in mind, such as checking messages, viewing a friend's post, or confirming a piece of news, and disengages once that purpose has been satisfied. Even when the content encountered is mildly negative, the emotional reaction is proportionate and short-lived, since ordinary scrolling does not involve a compulsive loop of re-engagement (Thomason, 2024). A related but distinct pattern is what some clinicians describe as “dread scrolling” or checking behaviour, in which a person repeatedly returns to a specific app or conversation seeking a particular piece of information, such as a reply or a result. Crucially, this pattern has a natural endpoint: once the awaited information appears, or its absence is confirmed, the associated anxiety tends to subside and the scrolling stops. Ordinary and checking-type scrolling therefore share a key feature that differentiates them from doomscrolling, namely the presence of a foreseeable resolution that allows the user to disengage.

The term “doomscrolling” entered popular usage during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, when large numbers of people, confined to their homes and anxious about an unfolding global crisis, found themselves repeatedly checking news feeds and social media for updates. During that period, digital news consumption rose sharply and social media use increased markedly, as people sought orientation and control amid uncertainty. What began as a colloquial, journalistic term describing an intuitively recognisable habit has since been taken up by researchers and refined into a more precise psychological construct. Doomscrolling has been defined as a habitual, immersive scanning for timely negative information on social media

newsfeeds, a formulation that captures both the repetitive, almost ritualistic quality of the behaviour and its specific orientation toward negatively valenced content. It has also been described more clinically as the compulsive, iterative engagement with negative or distressing online content beyond intended consumption thresholds, a definition that emphasises the loss-of-control dimension: individuals typically report having intended to scroll only briefly before finding themselves unable to stop. Many people scroll to feel more in control, but it usually backfires; endless negative news only increases anxiety and keeps you stuck in a worry cycle (Kaya & Griffiths, 2024; Türk-Kurtça & Kocatürk, 2025). A further and particularly useful conceptualisation frames doomscrolling as a negative feedback loop of maladaptive engagement, in which exposure to distressing content triggers a negative psychological reaction, which in turn compels the individual to keep scrolling whether in search of resolution, additional information, or simply because the negative arousal itself has become difficult to disengage from. This cyclical quality distinguishes doomscrolling from ordinary news consumption or social browsing: rather than being satisfied by information and disengaging, the doomscroller becomes locked into escalating engagement with content that offers diminishing psychological returns. Some researchers have further proposed that this urge reflects an evolved drive to gather threat-relevant information in order to feel a sense of control or preparedness, even though the actual effect of continued exposure is typically the opposite heightened anxiety and a subjective loss of control.

Taken together, the literature suggests that normal scrolling and doomscrolling differ along at least four dimensions. First, intentionality and structure: normal scrolling is target-directed and ends once its purpose is met, whereas doomscrolling is algorithmically driven, open-ended, and lacks a clear destination (Anand et al., as cited in Satıcı et al., 2022). Second, content valence: while ordinary scrolling exposes users to a mixed stream of neutral, positive, and negative material, doomscrolling involves a selective, repeated pull toward distressing or threat-related content, consistent with negativity bias (Sekhon, 2024). Third, resolution and disengagement: routine and checking-type scrolling permit a natural stopping point once the sought information is found, whereas doomscrolling offers no equivalent closure, since the feed is continuous and the anxiety it generates is rarely settled by further scrolling. Fourth, affective and physiological consequence: normal scrolling is typically affect-neutral or mildly rewarding, whereas doomscrolling is associated with heightened anxiety, sleep disruption, rumination, and a distorted, exaggerated sense of danger in the world, sometimes termed “scary world syndrome” (Türk-Kurtça & Kocatürk, 2025). It is this combination of compulsive

repetition, negative content selection, absent resolution, and adverse affective outcome that marks the conceptual boundary between an everyday digital habit and doomscrolling as a maladaptive pattern of engagement. The starting point is negativity bias the well-documented tendency for the brain to allocate more attention and processing weight to potentially threatening information than to neutral or positive information (Sekhon, 2024). This isn't a flaw so much as an old survival mechanism: organisms that noticed danger fast outlived ones that didn't. What actually implements this in the brain is the salience network a system anchored in the amygdala, anterior insula, and anterior cingulate cortex whose job is to flag which incoming stimuli deserve attention and to redirect cognitive resources toward them (a 2023 ScienceDirect overview of the salience network). Under acute stress, this network shifts into a more hypervigilant mode that actively promotes threat detection, essentially lowering the bar for what counts as "worth noticing" (van Marle et al., as cited in the same source). So, an alarming headline doesn't just get read it gets flagged by this system as urgent, even when there's no action the reader can actually take in response. Once the salience network flags something as threatening, it activates the sympathetic nervous system via connections to the hypothalamus and brainstem, triggering release of stress hormones like cortisol and adrenaline, which raise heart rate, blood pressure, and respiration (a neuroscience explainer on the salience network, 2026). This is a normal, adaptive response to a single real threat. The problem with doomscrolling is repetition without recovery: instead of one stress spike followed by a return to baseline, the person is exposed to a rapid sequence of small, discrete stress triggers, one headline after another, with no interval for the nervous system to downregulate in between. There's also a feedback-loop element worth citing: chronic stress can impair the prefrontal cortex's ability to exert top-down control over the salience network, meaning the more regulatory, rational parts of the brain become progressively less able to dampen the alarm response so the amygdala and insula end up driving the reaction more or less unchecked (the same salience-network source). This produces a self-reinforcing cycle: more perceived threat → less regulatory control → more perceived threat. This is where it connects back to your dissertation constructs. The compulsive, repeated-checking quality of doomscrolling has been explained through variable/intermittent reinforcement the same reward structure that makes slot machines compelling because the person never knows in advance whether the next scroll will surface something urgent, so each swipe carries the possibility of a payoff (Sharma et al., 2022, describe this dynamic in terms of poor affect-regulation and compulsive engagement, though the "variable reward" framing itself is more commonly used in behavioral-addiction literature than formal doomscrolling studies worth flagging as a popular-science extrapolation

if you cite it academically). Layered on top of that is the cognitive-behavioral explanation you're already using: people who habitually process information through threat-oriented or catastrophizing lenses show heightened physiological arousal specifically in situations involving uncertainty, which is a near word-for-word restatement of Beck's cognitive model as applied to digital contexts (Clark & Beck, 2010, as cited in Camadan & Uzunoğlu, 2025).

1.2 Fear of Missing Out (FOMO)

Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) has emerged as one of the most widely studied psychological phenomena in the digital age, particularly in relation to social media engagement and problematic online behaviours. Although individuals have always experienced concerns about exclusion or being left out of rewarding social experiences, the rapid expansion of smartphones, social networking platforms, and continuous internet connectivity has transformed these concerns into a persistent psychological state. Today's digital environment allows individuals to observe, compare, and monitor the activities of others in real time, making opportunities for social comparison almost constant. Consequently, many individuals experience anxiety not only about missing social events but also about missing important information, emerging trends, breaking news, or opportunities that others may already be aware of. This persistent apprehension has become increasingly relevant among young adults, who represent the most active users of digital technologies and social networking platforms.

The term Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) was formally conceptualised by Andrew K. Przybylski, Kou Murayama, Cody R. DeHaan, and Valerie Gladwell (2013), who defined FOMO as *"a pervasive apprehension that others might be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent."* They further explained that individuals experiencing FOMO possess a strong desire to remain continuously connected with what others are doing, resulting in frequent monitoring of social interactions through digital technologies. Their landmark study positioned FOMO within the framework of Self-Determination Theory (SDT), arguing that FOMO is fundamentally a motivational phenomenon arising from the frustration of three universal psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Rather than being caused solely by social media use, FOMO develops when these basic psychological needs remain inadequately satisfied in everyday life, making individuals increasingly dependent on digital interactions to fulfil emotional and social needs. According to Self-Determination Theory proposed by Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan (2000), autonomy refers to experiencing a sense of personal choice and control over one's actions, competence involves

feeling effective and capable in achieving desired outcomes, and relatedness reflects the need to establish meaningful interpersonal relationships. When these needs are inadequately fulfilled, individuals may seek alternative means of satisfying them through online engagement. Social networking sites provide immediate opportunities for social validation, belongingness, and comparison, temporarily reducing feelings of psychological deprivation. Consequently, individuals with lower satisfaction of these needs tend to report significantly higher levels of FOMO, greater social media engagement, and poorer psychological well-being (Przybylski et al., 2013). This theoretical perspective is particularly valuable because it conceptualises FOMO as an underlying psychological vulnerability rather than merely a consequence of technology use. Such an understanding is highly relevant to the present study, as it suggests that FOMO may independently predict doomscrolling behaviour by motivating continuous monitoring of digital content regardless of specific platform characteristics. Although FOMO was originally conceptualised in relation to social experiences, subsequent research has demonstrated that the construct is considerably broader. Qualitative investigations have revealed that young adults experience FOMO across several interconnected domains, including maintaining social relationships, remaining informed about current affairs, keeping pace with cultural trends, meeting perceived social expectations, obtaining recognition and approval from peers, and avoiding feelings of exclusion. These findings indicate that FOMO extends beyond concerns about missing enjoyable social gatherings to include fears of being uninformed, outdated, or disconnected from rapidly evolving information environments. In the contemporary digital landscape, individuals increasingly fear missing breaking news, health updates, political developments, entertainment releases, educational opportunities, and viral online discussions. This informational dimension of FOMO provides an important theoretical bridge to doomscrolling, as individuals may continue consuming distressing news content because disengaging creates anxiety about becoming uninformed or missing important developments. The American Psychological Association (APA) describes FOMO as "anxiety that an exciting or interesting event may currently be happening elsewhere, often aroused by posts seen on social media." This definition highlights the emotional component of FOMO by emphasising the anxiety generated through perceived exclusion from rewarding experiences. Unlike transient curiosity, FOMO represents a persistent cognitive-emotional state characterised by vigilance, anticipation, and concern regarding what others might be experiencing. Within psychological literature, FOMO is increasingly recognised as involving both emotional distress and maladaptive behavioural responses, including compulsive checking of smartphones, excessive social media use, repeated refreshing of news feeds, and

difficulty disengaging from online environments. Although the APA acknowledges the role of social media in intensifying FOMO, contemporary research suggests that digital technologies primarily magnify pre-existing psychological vulnerabilities rather than create them independently. From a cognitive perspective, FOMO develops through several interconnected psychological mechanisms. One of the primary processes underlying FOMO is social comparison, described by Leon Festinger (1954), who proposed that individuals naturally evaluate themselves by comparing their lives, achievements, and experiences with those of others. Social media platforms intensify this tendency because users are predominantly exposed to carefully curated and positively biased portrayals of others' lives. Continuous exposure to idealised content increases perceptions that others are happier, more successful, more socially connected, or leading more fulfilling lives. These upward social comparisons often generate dissatisfaction, envy, reduced self-esteem, and increased anxiety, all of which reinforce FOMO. The individual consequently develops a stronger motivation to remain continuously connected in order to minimise uncertainty and restore feelings of inclusion.

Another important psychological mechanism involves intolerance of uncertainty, whereby individuals experience discomfort when they perceive gaps in their knowledge about ongoing events or social interactions. Research suggests that individuals with high FOMO find uncertainty particularly distressing and therefore engage in repetitive checking behaviours to reduce anxiety temporarily. Unfortunately, each episode of checking provides only short-term reassurance before new uncertainties emerge, creating a repetitive cycle of compulsive digital engagement. This behavioural reinforcement closely resembles negative reinforcement processes described in behavioural psychology, whereby checking behaviours persist because they temporarily relieve psychological discomfort rather than produce lasting satisfaction.

The physiological and neuropsychological mechanisms underlying FOMO have also received increasing attention. Neuroscientific research suggests that FOMO is associated with activation of the brain's reward system, particularly pathways involving the neurotransmitter dopamine. Notifications, likes, comments, messages, and novel online information function as intermittent rewards that stimulate dopaminergic activity within regions such as the ventral striatum and nucleus accumbens, structures critically involved in reward anticipation and motivational behaviour. Because these rewards occur unpredictably, they operate according to principles of variable-ratio reinforcement, the same behavioural mechanism that contributes to persistent gambling behaviour. This unpredictable reward schedule encourages frequent checking of smartphones and social media platforms because individuals remain uncertain

about when rewarding information or social validation will appear. In addition to reward-related processes, FOMO has been associated with increased activation of brain regions involved in emotional regulation and threat detection. Functional neuroimaging studies suggest that anticipated social exclusion and perceived interpersonal rejection activate the anterior cingulate cortex (ACC) and anterior insula, regions implicated in processing both physical and social pain. These findings support the view that social exclusion represents a psychologically significant threat capable of eliciting neural responses similar to those observed during experiences of physical discomfort. Simultaneously, repeated digital engagement may reduce opportunities for reflective self-regulation by increasing reliance on rapid, emotionally driven decision-making processes. Consequently, individuals experiencing elevated FOMO may find it increasingly difficult to disengage from digital platforms despite recognising that continued engagement contributes to emotional exhaustion and psychological distress. FOMO has consistently been associated with numerous adverse psychological outcomes. Research demonstrates significant relationships between FOMO and problematic social media use, smartphone addiction, internet addiction, anxiety, depression, loneliness, perceived stress, sleep disturbances, emotional dysregulation, and reduced life satisfaction. Individuals with elevated FOMO frequently report checking their smartphones immediately upon waking, during academic activities, while driving, before sleeping, and even during face-to-face conversations. Such behavioural patterns contribute to impaired concentration, reduced productivity, poorer academic performance, interpersonal difficulties, and diminished psychological well-being. Importantly, many of these outcomes appear to be maintained through reciprocal relationships in which psychological distress increases FOMO, while FOMO simultaneously reinforces excessive digital engagement and emotional distress. The relationship between FOMO and doomscrolling has become increasingly important in recent psychological research. While FOMO traditionally emphasised missing rewarding social experiences, contemporary digital environments have expanded its scope to include fears of missing important information regarding crises, political events, public health emergencies, economic instability, and global conflicts. Individuals high in informational FOMO may perceive disengagement from online news as irresponsible or risky, believing that remaining continuously informed enhances preparedness and personal control. Ironically, this motivation often results in prolonged exposure to predominantly negative information, reinforcing anxiety and encouraging further information seeking. Thus, FOMO may function as an important psychological mechanism sustaining doomscrolling behaviour, wherein individuals repeatedly consume distressing news despite experiencing increasing emotional discomfort. This

conceptual relationship provides a strong theoretical rationale for examining FOMO as a significant predictor of doomscrolling behaviour among young adults.

1.3 Cognitive Distortions

Cognitive distortions are systematic errors in thinking that lead individuals to interpret situations in an irrational, inaccurate, or negatively biased manner. These distorted patterns of thought influence how people perceive themselves, others, and the world around them, often resulting in emotional distress and maladaptive behavioural responses. First introduced by Aaron Beck (1967) as part of Cognitive Therapy, cognitive distortions are considered a core feature in the development and maintenance of various psychological disorders, particularly depression and anxiety (Beck, 1976). According to cognitive theory, individuals do not respond directly to events but rather to the meanings they assign to those events. When these interpretations are consistently distorted, they can contribute to persistent negative emotions, ineffective coping strategies, and psychological dysfunction. Such distorted thinking often creates a self-perpetuating cycle in which negative thoughts intensify emotional distress, and heightened emotional distress further reinforces distorted patterns of thinking (Joormann & Vanderlind, 2014). Several forms of cognitive distortions have been identified in psychological literature. Common examples include catastrophizing, in which individuals anticipate the worst possible outcome; overgeneralization, where broad negative conclusions are drawn from isolated experiences; personalization, which involves taking excessive responsibility for external events; and black-and-white thinking, characterized by viewing situations in absolute, all-or-nothing terms without recognizing intermediate possibilities. These thinking errors can impair judgment, reduce psychological flexibility, and negatively influence decision-making and interpersonal relationships.

David Burns (1980), building upon Beck's original work, described ten common cognitive distortions that are frequently observed in individuals experiencing psychological distress. These distortions continue to be widely recognised within CBT literature.

All-or-Nothing Thinking (Black-and-White Thinking)

Individuals perceive situations in absolute categories without acknowledging intermediate possibilities. Events are viewed as complete successes or total failures.

Example: "If I do not score the highest marks, I am a complete failure."

Overgeneralization

A single negative experience is interpreted as representing an endless pattern of failure.

Example: After one unsuccessful job interview, an individual concludes, "I will never get employed."

Mental Filter

Individuals focus exclusively on negative aspects of an experience while ignoring positive information.

Example: Receiving nine compliments and one criticism but thinking only about the criticism.

Discounting the Positive

Positive experiences are dismissed as insignificant, accidental, or undeserved.

Example: "I only passed because the examination was easy."

Jumping to Conclusions

Individuals reach negative conclusions without sufficient evidence. This distortion includes:

- Mind Reading: assuming others hold negative opinions.
- Fortune Telling: predicting negative future outcomes.

Magnification (Catastrophizing) and Minimization

Negative events are exaggerated, whereas positive qualities or achievements are minimized.

Example: Believing a minor mistake will permanently damage one's future career.

Emotional Reasoning

Feelings are interpreted as objective facts.

Example: "I feel anxious, therefore something terrible must happen."

Should Statements

Rigid internal rules create unrealistic expectations for oneself and others.

Example: "I should never make mistakes."

Labeling and Mislabeled

Rather than describing behaviour, individuals assign global negative labels to themselves or others.

Example: Instead of saying "I made a mistake," one says, "I am an idiot."

Personalization and Blame

Individuals assume excessive responsibility for events beyond their control or unfairly attribute blame to others.

Example: A student believes that a friend's bad mood must have been caused by something they said.

Although cognitive distortions were originally studied and validated primarily in the context of clinical depression and anxiety, the underlying mechanism they describe – systematic, biased misinterpretation of incoming information – is directly transferable to the context of digital media consumption. When a young adult encounters an item of distressing or ambiguous news while scrolling, the interpretation they form of that information is shaped by their habitual cognitive style rather than by the objective content alone. A person prone to catastrophising or magnification may interpret an isolated negative event as evidence of pervasive, escalating danger, generating heightened anxiety that paradoxically compels further scrolling in search of reassurance or additional information. Similarly, an individual prone to emotional reasoning – the tendency to treat one's emotional state as direct evidence of objective reality – may interpret the anxiety generated by continued scrolling as confirmation that continued vigilance and monitoring are genuinely necessary, thereby reinforcing rather than interrupting the scrolling behaviour. Overgeneralisation may lead an individual to extrapolate a single negative news item into a broader, unwarranted narrative of universal decline or threat, sustaining prolonged engagement with confirmatory content. In this way, cognitive distortions may function as a proximal cognitive mechanism that translates general digital exposure into the specific compulsive, self-perpetuating pattern that characterises doomscrolling. According to cognitive theory, cognitive distortions develop gradually through repeated learning experiences and interactions with significant others during childhood and adolescence. Negative life experiences such as criticism, rejection, failure, trauma, or inconsistent caregiving contribute to the formation of maladaptive schemas regarding the self, others, and the world. Once established, these schemas influence future information processing by selectively attending to

schema-consistent information while ignoring contradictory evidence. When stressful situations activate these schemas, automatic thoughts arise almost instantaneously. Because these thoughts occur rapidly and effortlessly, individuals often accept them as factual rather than recognizing them as interpretations. Consequently, distorted thinking becomes habitual, creating a vicious cycle in which negative interpretations strengthen dysfunctional beliefs, leading to increased emotional distress and further reinforcing the same cognitive biases. This recursive process explains why cognitive distortions remain persistent even when objective evidence contradicts them (Beck, 1976; Beck & Haigh, 2014). Although cognitive distortions were originally conceptualized to explain emotional disorders, recent theoretical perspectives suggest that these distorted thinking patterns also influence digital media engagement. Online environments expose individuals to an overwhelming stream of emotionally salient information, particularly sensationalized news, social comparisons, and threatening content. Rather than processing this information objectively, users interpret it through pre-existing cognitive schemas and habitual thinking patterns. For example, individuals prone to catastrophizing may interpret isolated negative news stories as evidence of widespread societal collapse, increasing anxiety and encouraging continued searching for additional information. Mental filtering may lead users to selectively attend to distressing headlines while ignoring neutral or positive content, thereby reinforcing a perception that the world is overwhelmingly dangerous. Emotional reasoning may cause individuals to interpret feelings of fear generated during scrolling as confirmation that further monitoring is necessary. Likewise, overgeneralization may transform isolated incidents into generalized beliefs that disasters are inevitable or constantly increasing.

These distortions create a self-reinforcing cognitive cycle. Exposure to distressing content activates distorted automatic thoughts, which heighten emotional distress. The resulting anxiety motivates further scrolling in an attempt to obtain reassurance or certainty. However, continued exposure introduces additional threatening information, further strengthening distorted cognitions and maintaining compulsive doomscrolling behaviour. Thus, cognitive distortions may represent an important cognitive mechanism linking ordinary social media exposure with the repetitive, anxiety-driven pattern of excessive negative news consumption characteristic of doomscrolling. This conceptualization aligns with contemporary cognitive models emphasizing that maladaptive interpretations, rather than objective digital content alone, determine emotional and behavioural responses.

1.4 Need for the Study

India possesses one of the largest populations of young social media users in the world, with young adults constituting the demographic most heavily engaged with digital platforms on a daily basis. Kerala, in particular, reports near-universal smartphone penetration and digital literacy, placing its young adult population at the centre of the very digital ecosystem within which doomscrolling behaviour develops and is sustained. While the psychological correlates of doomscrolling including anxiety, depression, sleep disturbance, and reduced well-being have been documented with increasing consistency, and while fear of missing out and cognitive distortions have each been independently linked to compulsive digital engagement and maladaptive thought patterns respectively, there remains a conspicuous absence of integrated research examining FOMO and cognitive distortions together as joint predictors of doomscrolling, particularly within the Indian and Kerala context. Existing literature has largely treated these constructs in isolation or has focused on doomscrolling's consequences rather than its psychological antecedents, leaving a meaningful gap in understanding which individual-difference factors render certain young adults more vulnerable to this compulsive pattern of engagement.

This study carries direct implications for counselling and intervention practice. Identifying FOMO and cognitive distortions as significant predictors of doomscrolling would provide an empirical basis for designing psychoeducational programmes aimed at young adults, targeting both the motivational-emotional drivers of compulsive social media use and the cognitive restructuring techniques that could interrupt distorted appraisals of online content. Such findings could also inform digital-wellness interventions within college counselling centres and guide the development of evidence-based, cognitively-oriented support services tailored to a population whose relationship with digital media is now central to their psychological functioning. The study is further significant in that it extends the professional responsibility of counselling psychology beyond traditional developmental and clinical concerns to the emerging domain of digital and cyberpsychological well-being, an area of increasing relevance as young adults' mental health becomes progressively intertwined with their online environments.

1.5 Statement of the Problem

Doomscrolling has emerged as a growing concern among young adults due to increased social media use. Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) and cognitive distortions may contribute to this behaviour by promoting compulsive engagement with negative online content. However, limited research has examined their combined role in predicting doomscrolling, particularly among Indian young adults. Therefore, The study entitled as **"Fear of Missing Out and Cognitive Distortions as Predictors of Doomscrolling Behaviour Among Young Adults."**

1.6 Delimitations of the Study

The study is confined to young adults aged 18 to 25 years residing in Kerala, drawn from college and university student populations as well as young working professionals. Participants currently receiving treatment for a diagnosed psychiatric disorder, and those without regular access to a smartphone or active social media accounts, are excluded from the sample. The study adopts a cross-sectional design and relies exclusively on standardised, validated self-report instruments for measuring fear of missing out, cognitive distortions, and doomscrolling behaviour; consequently, the findings are subject to the inherent limitations of self-report methodology and do not permit causal inference regarding the relationships among the study variables.

Chapter II

Review of Literature

This chapter presents a comprehensive review of the literature relevant to fear of missing out (FOMO), cognitive distortions, and doomscrolling behaviour among young adults. The chapter is organised into three major sections. The first section, the theoretical review, elaborates the conceptual and theoretical frameworks that underpin each construct, namely Self-Determination Theory, Beck's Cognitive Theory, the Uses and Gratifications Theory, and the Interaction of Person-Affect-Cognition-Execution (I-PACE) model. The second section, the empirical review, synthesises quantitative studies examining doomscrolling, FOMO, and cognitive distortions independently as well as in combination, drawing predominantly on peer-reviewed research published within the last decade, supplemented by foundational studies that established each construct. The chapter concludes with a clearly articulated research gap and a statement of the relevance of the present study to the existing body of literature.

2.1 Theoretical Review

This section outlines the major theoretical frameworks that inform the conceptualisation of fear of missing out, cognitive distortions, and doomscrolling behaviour. These frameworks provide the conceptual scaffolding against which the empirical literature reviewed in the subsequent section can be meaningfully interpreted, and together they suggest plausible mechanisms by which motivational deficits and habitual cognitive errors might combine to sustain compulsive engagement with distressing online content.

Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

Self-Determination Theory, developed by Deci and Ryan, proposes that human motivation, psychological growth, and wellbeing depend fundamentally on the satisfaction of three basic psychological needs: autonomy (the need to feel volitional and self-governing in one's actions), competence (the need to feel effective and capable), and relatedness (the need to feel connected to and cared for by others). The theory further proposes that when these needs are chronically unmet in an individual's daily life, the resulting motivational deficit generates compensatory psychological states and behaviours, which the individual pursues, often unconsciously, in an attempt to restore need satisfaction. Przybylski, Murayama, DeHaan, and Gladwell (2013), in

their foundational work formally conceptualising and operationalising fear of missing out, situated the construct squarely within this framework. Across two empirical studies, they demonstrated that individuals reporting lower satisfaction of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in their offline lives reported significantly higher levels of trait FoMO, and that elevated FoMO, in turn, predicted increased social media engagement, more frequent checking behaviour, and diminished mood and life satisfaction. This theoretical positioning carries an important implication for the present study: it frames FoMO not merely as a technologically induced phenomenon confined to social media platforms, but as a manifestation of a more fundamental, need-based motivational vulnerability, one that may plausibly extend beyond purely social contexts to encompass an anxious preoccupation with being informed about unfolding events, including distressing news.

Beck's Cognitive Theory and the Taxonomy of Cognitive Distortions

Aaron Beck's cognitive theory, developed through his clinical work with depressed patients during the 1960s and 1970s, proposes that psychological distress arises not directly from external events but from the meaning and interpretation an individual assigns to those events. Beck observed that his patients experienced a continuous stream of spontaneous, habitual thoughts, termed automatic thoughts, which arose without deliberate reasoning and which, in psychologically vulnerable individuals, tended to be persistently negative and difficult to consciously interrupt. He proposed that these automatic thoughts are shaped by predictable, recurring errors in logical reasoning, termed cognitive distortions, and that such distortions, along with underlying negative self-schemas, combine to form what he termed the cognitive triad: a simultaneously negative view of the self, the world, and the future. Beck's student, David Burns, later expanded and substantially popularised this framework in accessible clinical language, articulating a taxonomy that has since become the standard reference point in both clinical and research contexts: all-or-nothing thinking, overgeneralisation, mental filtering,

disqualifying the positive, jumping to conclusions, magnification and minimisation, emotional reasoning, should statements, labelling, and personalisation. Although this framework was developed and validated primarily within the context of clinical depression and anxiety, the underlying mechanism it describes, namely the systematic, biased misinterpretation of ambiguous or emotionally salient information, is directly transferable to digital media contexts, where individuals routinely encounter ambiguous and distressing content that must be cognitively appraised. A young adult prone to catastrophising, for instance, may interpret a single distressing news item as evidence of pervasive, escalating danger, while one prone to emotional reasoning may treat the anxiety generated by continued scrolling as confirmation that continued vigilance is genuinely warranted, thereby sustaining rather than interrupting the compulsive behaviour.

Uses and Gratifications Theory

The Uses and Gratifications Theory offers a media-specific framework for understanding why individuals actively select and engage with particular forms of content. Rather than viewing media audiences as passive recipients of content, UGT conceptualises users as active, goal-directed agents who deliberately choose media in order to satisfy specific underlying psychological and social needs, commonly categorised as cognitive needs (acquiring information and knowledge), affective needs (emotional experience and mood management), social-integrative needs (strengthening social connections and status), and escapist or tension-release needs (temporary relief from everyday stressors). Viewed through this lens, doomscrolling can be understood as a maladaptive form of gratification-seeking: a young adult may turn to distressing news content in pursuit of a sense of informational control, social belonging, or emotional processing of an unfolding crisis, yet the gratification obtained proves illusory, generating heightened distress that paradoxically compels further engagement rather than satisfaction and disengagement. This theoretical lens is particularly useful for integrating

FOMO and cognitive distortions within a single explanatory framework, since FoMO can be understood as reflecting the specific unmet need-state (informational and social) that motivates the gratification-seeking behaviour, while cognitive distortions shape how the content encountered during this process is subsequently appraised and interpreted.

The Interaction of Person-Affect-Cognition-Execution (I-PACE) Model

The I-PACE model, proposed by Brand and colleagues to explain the development and maintenance of problematic technology use, offers an integrative process framework relevant to the present study. The model proposes that problematic digital behaviours arise from a dynamic interaction between predisposing personal characteristics (such as trait FOMO or a tendency toward specific cognitive distortions), situational affective and cognitive responses that are triggered by specific cues (such as the appearance of a distressing headline), and the resulting maladaptive execution of behaviour (such as compulsive scrolling), which subsequently reinforces the underlying vulnerability through a feedback loop. Several recent meta-analytic and empirical studies reviewed in the following section explicitly invoke the I-PACE model to explain the robust association between FOMO and compulsive technology use, lending further theoretical support to the integration of FOMO and cognitive distortions as joint, interacting predictors of doomscrolling in the present study.

2.2 Empirical Review

This section reviews quantitative empirical studies examining doomscrolling, fear of missing out, and cognitive distortions, independently and in combination. The review is organised into four subsections: studies on doomscrolling, studies on fear of missing out, studies on cognitive distortions, and studies that have examined these constructs jointly. Studies have been drawn predominantly from peer-reviewed journals published within the last decade, with particular attention paid to research conducted in Indian and other Eastern cultural contexts where available, given the present study's specific focus on young adults in Kerala, India.

Doomscrolling

Sharma, Lee, and Johnson (2022): developed and validated the Doomscrolling Scale (DSS), the first standardised self-report instrument specifically designed to measure the construct. The scale was developed through participant focus groups and expert panel review, and subsequently tested across two survey studies (N = 401 and N = 502) drawn from an OECD sample. The resulting 15-item unidimensional scale demonstrated strong reliability and construct validity, and the authors additionally validated a brief four-item short form. Doomscrolling was found to be closely related to online vigilance, problematic internet and social media use, and fear of missing out, and was further associated with passive social media use, habitual media use, anxiety, and poor self-control. Demographically, men, younger adults, and politically engaged individuals were found to be more likely to engage in the behaviour. This study is foundational to the present research both theoretically, in establishing doomscrolling as a distinct and measurable construct, and methodologically, as the DSS is among the most widely adopted instruments for its assessment.

Satici, Gocet-Tekin, Deniz, and Satici (2023): adapted the Doomscrolling Scale into Turkish, confirming the one-dimensional 15-item structure of the original instrument and additionally validating the four-item short form within a non-English-speaking cultural context. Beyond psychometric validation, the study examined doomscrolling's associations with the Big Five personality traits, social media addiction, FoMO, psychological distress, and overall wellbeing, finding significant relationships across all of these variables. This cross-cultural replication strengthens confidence that the doomscrolling construct, and its documented association with FoMO in particular, generalises beyond the originally studied Western sample, lending support to its applicability within the Indian context examined in the present study.

Anand, Sharma, Thakur, Mondal, Sahu, Singh, and Singh (2022): conducted a study at the National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences (NIMHANS), Bengaluru, examining doomsurfing and doomscrolling as mediators of psychological distress during the COVID-19 lockdown in India. This study is of particular significance to the present research as it explicitly identified specific cognitive biases, namely confirmation bias and anchoring bias, as mechanisms that enhance the tendency to engage in doomscrolling. The authors observed that individuals prioritised information that aligned with their pre-existing fears while disregarding contradictory evidence, a pattern that worsened psychological distress over the course of the lockdown. As one of the few Indian studies to explicitly connect cognitive biases to doomscrolling, this work provides direct empirical precedent for the present study's investigation of cognitive distortions as a predictor of doomscrolling among Indian young adults.

Shabahang, Aruguete, and Shim (2021): examined online news addiction among a sample of adult internet users, finding that future anxiety, a specific form of FoMO oriented toward news and current events rather than social experiences, and interpersonal trust each independently contributed to excessive online news consumption. This study is notable for empirically demonstrating that FoMO need not be confined to social contexts, as originally conceptualised by Przybylski et al. (2013), but can extend to an anxious preoccupation with staying informed about world events, a finding directly relevant to conceptualising FoMO as a predictor of doomscrolling specifically.

Shabahang, Kim, Hosseinkhanzadeh, Aruguete, and Kakabaraee (2023): investigated the potentially corrosive psychological consequences of habitual engagement with tragic and distressing social media content among a sample of active social media users. Their findings reinforced the classification of doomscrolling as a behaviourally and psychologically harmful pattern rather than a benign or adaptive information-seeking

strategy, noting that users who habitually engaged with tragic content reported measurable declines in mood and increased psychological strain over time.

A study examining doomscrolling and emotion regulation strategies among young adults: found a significant negative relationship between doomscrolling and cognitive reappraisal, an adaptive emotion regulation strategy involving the reframing of distressing situations, and a significant positive relationship between doomscrolling and emotional suppression, a maladaptive strategy involving the inhibition of emotional expression. This suggests that young adults who habitually rely on maladaptive rather than adaptive regulation strategies may be particularly susceptible to becoming caught in doomscrolling cycles. Sarkar: conducted a cross-sectional study among 150 Indian emerging adults aged 18 to 30, examining the relationship between doomscrolling and psychological fatigue using standardised questionnaires. The study found a substantial positive relationship between the frequency of doomscrolling and levels of psychological fatigue, with nighttime scrolling habits particularly associated with elevated fatigue scores, suggesting a temporal dimension to the behaviour's psychological cost that may be especially relevant to a student and young professional population with variable sleep schedules.

Doğan Laçın and Kiye (2025): investigated psychological wellbeing and emotion regulation as predictors of doomscrolling among a sample of 348 individuals aged 18 to 50. Both psychological wellbeing and emotion regulation capacity emerged as significant predictors, with lower wellbeing and poorer regulation associated with greater doomscrolling engagement, findings broadly consistent with the emotion-regulation-based studies described above.

A study examining personality traits, FoMO, and doomscrolling within an Eastern cultural context, including India, examined the joint associations among the Big Five personality

traits, fear of missing out, and doomscrolling. Correlation analyses indicated that neuroticism, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and FoMO were each significantly associated with doomscrolling, while multiple regression analysis revealed that FoMO had the largest standardised association with doomscrolling among all variables tested, exceeding the contribution of any single personality trait. The authors explicitly noted that while such associations had been explored in other Eastern contexts such as Turkey and Iran, very little was known about their applicability within the Indian setting specifically, a gap the present study directly addresses. The study's authors further acknowledged its cross-sectional design as a limitation, noting that longitudinal designs are needed to clarify the direction of these relationships over time.

A study examining the roles of FoMO and nomophobia in the relationship between doomscrolling and sleep quality recruited 663 adults aged 18 to 77 and employed a descriptive-correlational design with multiple mediation analysis (PROCESS Macro, Model 6). Doomscrolling was found to be positively associated with poor sleep quality, and further significantly predicted both FoMO and nomophobia (the fear of being without one's mobile phone). Nomophobia, but not FoMO alone, significantly mediated the relationship between doomscrolling and poor sleep quality, while FoMO and nomophobia together demonstrated a significant combined mediating effect. This study is notable for empirically establishing doomscrolling as a predictor of FoMO, suggesting a potentially bidirectional or cyclical relationship between the two constructs that merits further investigation in a predictive framework such as that adopted by the present study.

A study on doomscrolling and emotional desensitisation among Generation Z, including Indian university students, employed a mixed-methods approach combining survey data with physiological measurement. The study found that FoMO and negativity bias functioned as primary drivers of compulsive checking behaviour among participants, who

reported compulsively checking their feeds in order to stay updated even as algorithmically amplified negative content reinforced cycles of overexposure and emotional fatigue. Notably, the study found that Indian students exhibited a behavioural transition over repeated exposure, moving from initial compassionate responses to distressing content toward humour and emotional dullness, with frequent doomscrollers exhibiting measurably reduced autonomic physiological responses to distressing stimuli, indicative of embodied emotional desensitisation.

Türk-Kurtça and Kocatürk (2024) examined how intolerance of uncertainty and psychological resilience explain the relationship between trait anxiety and doomscrolling among 443 participants (79.9% female, mean age 23.49 years), using structural equation modelling. Trait anxiety significantly predicted intolerance of uncertainty ($\beta = .50, p < .001$) and was negatively associated with psychological resilience ($\beta = -.19, p < .001$). Intolerance of uncertainty, in turn, was negatively correlated with resilience ($\beta = -.42, p < .001$) and positively associated with doomscrolling ($\beta = .29, p < .001$), while resilience was negatively associated with doomscrolling ($\beta = -.12, p < .05$), functioning as a protective factor. Critically, both intolerance of uncertainty and psychological resilience were found to explain the relationship between trait anxiety and doomscrolling ($\beta = .193, p < .05$). This study is significant for the present research in demonstrating that a dispositional, anxiety-linked cognitive vulnerability (intolerance of uncertainty) meaningfully predicts doomscrolling, lending further support to the plausibility of cognitive-processing variables such as cognitive distortions, which share conceptual overlap with intolerance of uncertainty, as predictors of the same behaviour.

Kaya and Griffiths (2024) investigated the associations between intolerance of uncertainty and mental wellbeing, examining the mediating and moderating role of doomscrolling among 432 participants aged 18 to 55, using the Intolerance of Uncertainty Scale, the

Doomscrolling Scale, and the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Short Form. The study found significant direct effects of intolerance of uncertainty on both doomscrolling and mental wellbeing, as well as a significant direct effect of doomscrolling on mental wellbeing, with mediation analysis confirming a significant indirect effect of doomscrolling on the relationship between intolerance of uncertainty and mental wellbeing. Moderation analysis further revealed that intolerance of uncertainty exerted an inverse impact on mental wellbeing specifically at low and medium levels of doomscrolling. These findings position doomscrolling as both an outcome of an anxiety-related cognitive vulnerability and an active mechanism through which that vulnerability translates into poorer wellbeing, reinforcing the present study's rationale for examining cognitive-level predictors of the behaviour.

Uygun Karakuş and Türk (2026) examined the serial mediating roles of rumination and hope in the relationship between doomscrolling and subjective vitality among 324 adults ($M = 35.24$, $SD = 10.44$) from Türkiye, using structural equation modelling. The study found that doomscrolling indirectly decreased subjective vitality through a sequential pathway of increased rumination followed by reduced hope; that is, higher levels of doomscrolling were associated with greater rumination, which subsequently diminished both hope and subjective vitality. The authors proposed digital self-regulation strategies, including limiting news exposure, taking social media breaks, and practising digital detox, as protective interventions. This study is notable for identifying rumination, a repetitive and difficult-to-disengage-from pattern of negative thinking that shares conceptual overlap with several cognitive distortions such as catastrophising and overgeneralisation, as a key cognitive mechanism linking doomscrolling to poorer psychological outcomes, further reinforcing the relevance of cognitive-level constructs to understanding the behaviour.

Fear of Missing Out (FOMO)

A large-scale meta-analysis synthesising 85 independent studies (90 effect sizes) conducted between 2016 and 2023 estimated the pooled strength of the association between fear of missing out and mobile phone addiction using a random-effects model. The analysis, which drew on studies indexed across major international and Chinese-language databases, found a strong positive pooled correlation ($r = .47$, 95% CI [.44, .50]) between the two constructs. Notably, the strength of this association did not significantly vary as a function of age, gender, publication year, or cultural background, suggesting that the FoMO-addiction relationship is robust across diverse populations, including non-Western contexts such as India. The authors interpreted their findings through the I-PACE model and called for psychological and mental health services specifically targeting the reduction of FoMO as a strategy for addressing problematic device dependence.

Akbari, Seydavi, Palmieri, Mansueto, Caselli, and Spada (2021) conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis, following PRISMA guidelines, of the association between trait FoMO and internet use, synthesising 86 effect sizes representative of 55,134 participants (mean age = 22.07, 58.37% female) drawn from Scopus, Web of Science, PubMed, and PsycINFO. The analysis found that the strength of the FoMO-internet use association varied considerably across studies, ranging from $r = .11$ to $r = .63$, and that this variability was not explained by a simple linear or curvilinear pattern, nor by the severity of internet use. Notably, and somewhat counter to assumptions in some of the literature, the FoMO-internet use association did not appear to be significantly associated with depressive, anxiety, or stress symptoms, or with life satisfaction, in this meta-analytic sample. The COVID-19 pandemic emerged as the only significant moderator, substantially strengthening the FoMO-internet use relationship during that period. The authors interpreted FoMO through the I-PACE model as a predisposing cognitive-personality

variable, and explicitly called for further research clarifying which additional factors account for the considerable heterogeneity observed across populations, a call the present study addresses in part by examining FoMO's association with doomscrolling specifically within an Indian population not represented in the reviewed literature.

Tandon, Dhir, Almugren, AlNemer, and Mäntymäki (2021) conducted a systematic literature review synthesising 58 empirical studies on FoMO drawn from four major academic databases: Scopus, Web of Science, PubMed, and PsycINFO. The review organised existing FoMO research into four broad thematic clusters and identified significant limitations in how the construct has been conceptualised and operationalised across studies, alongside a narrow geographic, methodological, and contextual focus in the existing literature, with research disproportionately concentrated in Western populations. The authors proposed a comprehensive framework and specific gap-oriented directions to guide future FoMO research, explicitly calling for studies employing novel theoretical lenses and examining FoMO's effects across diverse cultural contexts and social media user populations. This systematic review lends direct support to the present study's rationale, as it explicitly identifies the geographic and cultural narrowness of existing FoMO scholarship as a limitation that research on Indian young adults, such as the present study, is well positioned to address.

A study examining interpretation bias among individuals with high versus low trait FoMO used both behavioural response measures and event-related potential (ERP) recordings to examine how FoMO shapes the interpretation of ambiguous social situations. Results showed that, compared to a low-FoMO group, individuals with high FoMO were significantly less likely to endorse positive interpretations of ambiguous scenarios, and responded more quickly when endorsing negative interpretations and rejecting positive ones. This pattern is consistent with established cognitive models of anxiety, in which

interpretation bias plays a central role in the development and maintenance of anxious states, and directly parallels the interpretive mechanisms proposed for cognitive distortions in the present study's conceptual framework.

A related ERP study examining FoMO and inhibitory control in a social media context found a significant correlation between participants' FoMO scores and the amplitude of specific neural response components (N2 and P3) when viewing social media-related images, but not neutral images. As FoMO scores increased, N2 amplitude increased and P3 amplitude decreased specifically for high-social-media-relevance images, indicating that individuals high in FoMO must allocate greater cognitive resources toward inhibiting automatic responses to socially relevant digital stimuli. This neurocognitive evidence lends biological plausibility to the behavioural link between FoMO and compulsive digital engagement patterns such as doomscrolling.

A study exploring FoMO's impact on social media use, psychological wellbeing, and academic performance among university students employed a quantitative, correlational design with a sample of 521 university students. The study found that FoMO negatively predicted both life satisfaction and academic performance, and was positively associated with anxiety and depression, with the authors proposing that persistent social comparison and chronically unmet social needs underlie this pattern. The study further noted inconsistencies across the literature regarding FoMO's association with academic outcomes specifically, suggesting that individual differences in coping strategies may moderate FoMO's downstream effects, a consideration relevant to the present study's inclusion of cognitive distortions as a potential co-predictor.

A study exploring the role of FoMO in coping and risk-taking among individuals with alcohol use disorder and a general young adult population found that FoMO was a significant positive predictor of health risk-taking behaviour across both samples. The study proposed that individuals with pronounced FoMO experience a range of adverse emotional states, including depressive symptoms and anxiety, and that in an effort to manage these states, they frequently resort to maladaptive coping mechanisms, with the study specifically emphasising increased reliance on alcohol as a coping strategy. This finding underscores FoMO's broader association with maladaptive coping and compulsive behaviour patterns beyond social media use specifically, supporting its conceptualisation as a general vulnerability factor relevant to doomscrolling as well.

A cross-sectional and quasi-experimental study examining FoMO and social media addiction among students combined a correlational design, which found a significant positive association between FoMO and social media addiction, with a quasi-experimental evaluation of a guidance and counselling intervention programme. The experimental component demonstrated statistically significant reductions in both FoMO and social media addiction scores among students who received the intervention, compared to no significant change in a control group. This study carries direct practical relevance for the present research, providing preliminary evidence that structured counselling interventions can effectively target FoMO as a modifiable psychological vulnerability underlying problematic digital behaviour.

Cognitive Distortions

Agnihotri and Datti (2023) examined the association between cognitive distortions and generalized problematic internet use (PIU) among university students during the COVID-19 pandemic, a period marked by a sharp rise in internet dependency due to lockdowns and the shift to remote learning. Their findings revealed a positive correlation

between cognitive distortions and PIU, with problematic use being more pronounced among students from larger families and among graduate-level students, and with cognitive preoccupation emerging as a particularly salient dimension. Notably, internet use exceeding six hours daily substantially increased the risk of problematic use, with mood regulation identified as a predominant underlying motive. This study is significant for the present research in that it situates cognitive distortions as antecedents of maladaptive online engagement during a period of heightened digital reliance, a pattern conceptually mirrored in the compulsive, mood-driven nature of doomscrolling.

Extending this line of enquiry to adolescent populations, Özparlak and Karakaya (2022) investigated the associations between cognitive distortions and internet addiction across different online activities in a sample of 638 adolescents. Their results indicated an internet addiction prevalence of 16.9%, with elevated addiction scores among adolescents engaged in online gaming, pornographic content consumption, social media use, and aimless browsing. Regression analyses showed that catastrophizing, personalization, and selective abstraction collectively accounted for approximately 17.5% of the variance in internet addiction scores, with selective abstraction specifically predicting online gaming and aimless browsing, personalization predicting exposure to pornographic content, and catastrophizing predicting internet-based academic activity. This granular, activity-specific mapping of distortion types onto distinct online behaviours underscores that cognitive distortions do not operate uniformly but instead interact with the nature of the online content being consumed—a consideration directly relevant to doomscrolling, which is itself defined by a specific and negatively valenced content type.

Kuzucu, Sarıot Ertürk, Şimşek, and Gökdaş examined interpersonal cognitive distortions in relation to problematic internet use (PIU) while accounting for the intervening roles of loneliness and social anxiety, controlling for social desirability bias. Using structural

equation modelling with a sample of 260 university students, they found that loneliness but not social anxiety significantly mediated the relationship between interpersonal cognitive distortions and PIU. This finding is instructive in highlighting that the pathway from cognitive distortion to problematic online behaviour is not always direct, but may instead operate through intervening socio-emotional states, a methodological consideration that supports the use of serial or multiple mediation designs, such as the one adopted in the present study.

Sireli, Dayi, and Colak (2023) investigated the mediating role of cognitive distortions in the relationship between problematic social media use and self-esteem among 239 university students. Their results demonstrated that problematic social media use directly and negatively predicted self-esteem, and that it also negatively predicted cognitive distortions as a mediating variable. When cognitive distortions were introduced into the model, they were found to partially mediate the relationship for the sub-dimensions of self-perception, self-blame, hopelessness, and perceiving life as dangerous, while fully mediating the relationship for helplessness and the total distortion score. These findings offer robust evidence that cognitive distortions are not merely correlates but active mechanisms through which problematic digital engagement erodes psychological well-being, lending empirical support to models such as the one guiding the present dissertation that position cognitive distortions as a mediating or predictive mechanism between online behaviour patterns and adverse psychological outcomes.

More directly relevant to the present study is recent work linking cognitive distortions to FoMO and doomscrolling specifically. Taneri and Akın-Sarı (2026) proposed a cognitive-behavioural model, inspired by conceptualisations of obsessive-compulsive disorder, in which FoMO was likened to the anxiety accompanying obsessions and problematic smartphone use (PSU) to the compulsive behaviours performed to alleviate that anxiety. In a sample of 386 individuals aged 18 to 36, they found that cognitive distortions and metacognitive beliefs partially mediated the relationship between FOMO and PSU, with the hopelessness sub-

dimension of cognitive distortions and the cognitive confidence sub-dimension of metacognitions emerging as particularly influential partial mediators. This study offers direct theoretical scaffolding for the present dissertation by empirically demonstrating that cognitive distortions sit causally between FOMO and compulsive technology-use outcomes, reinforcing the plausibility of a similar predictive pathway for doomscrolling behaviour.

A related qualitative strand of evidence comes from a mixed-methods study of FoMO-driven compulsive buying among Romanian university students, in which open-ended responses were coded using the Beck–Burns taxonomy of cognitive distortions. The analysis identified recurring patterns of catastrophizing, emotional reasoning, and dichotomous thinking that amplified the psychological salience of digitally generated triggers such as push notifications and time-limited offers, even among participants who consciously believed themselves unaffected by such cues. This finding is notable for illustrating that cognitive distortions linked to FOMO can operate below the threshold of conscious awareness, a pattern with clear implications for how doomscrolling another FOMO-adjacent, notification- and algorithm-driven behaviour may similarly be sustained by distortions that individuals do not readily recognise in themselves.

Most directly, an emerging body of work has begun to examine doomscrolling through an explicitly cognitive lens. A 2026 study investigated the mediating role of doomscrolling in the relationship between perceptual–concentration errors—a category of cognitive failure closely aligned with cognitive distortion constructs—and anxiety in a sample of 400 Turkish adults. The authors proposed that excessive social media exposure heightens attentional narrowing toward threatening content, reinforcing threat-oriented perceptual biases, and that doomscrolling itself functions as a behavioural mechanism through which such cognitive vulnerabilities translate into elevated anxiety. In a closely related and directly pertinent study, Uygun Karakuş and Türk (2026) tested a serial mediation model in which doomscrolling

predicted reduced subjective vitality through the sequential pathway of increased rumination and diminished hope, in a sample of 324 Turkish adults. Their structural equation modelling confirmed that doomscrolling was associated with heightened rumination—a repetitive, passive, and negatively toned cognitive process conceptually and empirically related to cognitive distortion which in turn reduced hope and, subsequently, subjective vitality. Together, these two studies represent some of the first empirical demonstrations that doomscrolling is embedded within a broader network of maladaptive cognitive processes, including rumination and perceptual bias, that erode psychological resources over time.

2.3 Research Gap

The literature reviewed demonstrates consistent empirical support for the relationships among the three major constructs examined in the present study Doomscrolling Behaviour, Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), and Cognitive Distortions. Research on doomscrolling has consistently shown that excessive engagement with negative online content is associated with heightened psychological distress, anxiety, sleep disturbances, reduced well-being, and maladaptive emotion regulation. Several studies have identified intolerance of uncertainty, rumination, and diminished psychological resilience as important psychological correlates of doomscrolling. Although research on this behaviour has expanded considerably in recent years, the majority of studies have focused primarily on its psychological consequences rather than the cognitive and motivational factors that contribute to its development. Similarly, an extensive body of literature has established Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) as a significant psychological predictor of problematic digital behaviours. Previous studies have consistently demonstrated positive associations between FOMO and problematic smartphone use, excessive social media engagement, internet addiction, and compulsive online behaviour. Emerging evidence further indicates that individuals with higher levels of FOMO are more likely to engage in doomscrolling as they continuously seek updates, social information, and reassurance through digital platforms. Importantly, studies conducted within Indian and other Eastern populations have also identified FOMO as one of the strongest psychological predictors of doomscrolling behaviour, highlighting its relevance within culturally diverse contexts. The literature on Cognitive Distortions similarly provides substantial evidence supporting their role in

maladaptive online behaviours. Distorted patterns of thinking, including catastrophising, selective abstraction, overgeneralisation, and confirmation bias, have been linked to problematic internet use, excessive social media engagement, internet addiction, and reduced psychological well-being. During the COVID-19 pandemic, research conducted at the National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (NIMHANS), India, further highlighted the role of cognitive biases, particularly confirmation bias and anchoring bias, in maintaining doomscrolling behaviour. These findings suggest that maladaptive cognitive processes may influence the tendency to selectively attend to threatening or distressing online information, thereby reinforcing repetitive patterns of doomscrolling. More recent investigations have begun to integrate these constructs within broader theoretical frameworks. For instance, Taneri and Akın-Sarı (2026) demonstrated that cognitive distortions partially mediate the relationship between Fear of Missing Out and problematic smartphone use, suggesting that distorted cognitive processing may function as an important mechanism through which motivational vulnerabilities translate into problematic digital behaviours. Likewise, studies examining rumination, attentional biases, and perceptual concentration errors have increasingly conceptualised doomscrolling as a behaviour influenced by maladaptive cognitive processes. These findings provide preliminary support for considering both motivational and cognitive vulnerabilities simultaneously when examining excessive digital engagement. Despite these important advances, a significant gap remains within the existing literature. To date, no identified study has simultaneously examined Fear of Missing Out and Cognitive Distortions as joint predictors of Doomscrolling Behaviour. Existing studies have generally focused on one predictor in isolation or have investigated these constructs in relation to broader outcomes such as problematic smartphone use, problematic internet use, or social media addiction. Studies examining doomscrolling have predominantly explored its psychological consequences, whereas investigations focusing on cognitive distortions have typically examined related cognitive constructs, including rumination and attentional biases, rather than cognitive distortions as conceptualised within Beck's cognitive theory. Consequently, the combined influence of motivational and cognitive vulnerabilities on doomscrolling behaviour remains insufficiently understood. This gap is particularly evident within the Indian context. Systematic reviews have highlighted the limited geographical diversity of FOMO research, with the majority of studies conducted in Western, Turkish, and Iranian populations. Likewise, although Indian research has begun exploring doomscrolling, the available evidence remains relatively limited and has primarily focused on the adverse

psychological outcomes of the behaviour rather than its underlying cognitive and motivational determinants. Given the widespread use of smartphones and social media among young adults in Kerala, understanding the psychological factors that contribute to doomscrolling behaviour has considerable theoretical as well as practical significance. Accordingly, the present study seeks to address these gaps by examining Fear of Missing Out and Cognitive Distortions simultaneously as predictors of Doomscrolling Behaviour among young adults in Kerala. Unlike previous studies that have investigated these constructs independently or in relation to broader forms of problematic technology use, the present study integrates a motivational vulnerability (Fear of Missing Out) and a cognitive vulnerability (Cognitive Distortions) within a single predictive model specifically focused on doomscrolling behaviour. Furthermore, by conducting this investigation among young adults in Kerala, the study contributes context-specific evidence to the relatively limited Indian literature and extends current understanding of the psychological mechanisms underlying doomscrolling behaviour.

2.4 Relevance of the Study

Theoretical Relevance

The present study carries meaningful theoretical relevance by integrating two conceptually distinct psychological vulnerabilities, a motivational-emotional construct (FOMO) and a cognitive-processing construct (cognitive distortions), within a single predictive framework applied specifically to doomscrolling behaviour. While FOMO and cognitive distortions have each been extensively studied in relation to broader forms of problematic digital engagement, such as internet addiction, problematic smartphone use, and social media addiction, their joint examination as predictors of doomscrolling specifically remains largely unexplored. By situating the study within Self-Determination Theory, Beck's Cognitive Theory, the Uses and Gratifications Theory, and the I-PACE model, the present research offers an integrative theoretical account of doomscrolling as a behaviour shaped simultaneously by unmet motivational needs and habitual, biased patterns of information processing, rather than by either mechanism in isolation. This contributes to a more mechanistically complete understanding of doomscrolling as a distinct construct, one that extends beyond the general problematic-internet-use literature within which cognitive distortions have predominantly been studied, and beyond the general FOMO-addiction literature within which cognitive processes

have received comparatively less direct attention. Furthermore, by identifying which of the two constructs, FOMO or cognitive distortions, carries greater predictive weight, the study offers a theoretically informative comparison that has not been directly tested in prior joint studies, thereby refining existing understanding of the relative contribution of motivational versus cognitive vulnerabilities to compulsive digital engagement. The study additionally extends the geographic and cultural reach of both the FOMO and cognitive distortion literatures, which have been repeatedly flagged in systematic reviews as disproportionately concentrated in Western, Turkish, and Iranian populations, by generating empirical data from an Indian, Kerala-based young adult sample.

Practical Relevance

Beyond its theoretical contribution, the present study carries direct practical relevance for counselling psychology, digital-wellness programming, and mental health service design. By empirically identifying FOMO and cognitive distortions as significant predictors of doomscrolling, and by clarifying that cognitive distortions exert a comparatively stronger influence, the study provides an evidence-based rationale for the specific design of psychological interventions aimed at reducing doomscrolling among young adults. Findings of this nature can inform the development of cognitively-oriented psychoeducational programmes, such as those incorporating cognitive-restructuring techniques drawn from cognitive-behavioural therapy, that directly target the catastrophising, overgeneralisation, and emotional reasoning patterns shown in the literature to sustain compulsive engagement with distressing online content, while complementary strategies addressing FOMO-driven social and informational anxiety, such as mindfulness-based approaches, can be incorporated to address the motivational dimension of the behaviour. This has particular relevance for college and university counselling centres in Kerala, a region marked by near-universal smartphone and social media penetration among young adults, where such findings can directly inform screening protocols and the design of campus-based digital-wellness initiatives. More broadly, given the well-documented consequences of doomscrolling, including anxiety, sleep disturbance, and reduced psychological wellbeing, and given India's substantial existing mental health treatment gap, the present study's findings offer a timely and locally grounded contribution toward the development of accessible, preventive, and culturally relevant digital mental health interventions. In doing so, the study extends the professional scope of counselling psychology into the increasingly urgent domain of cyberpsychology, positioning the discipline

to respond proactively to a behavioural pattern that is likely to remain a significant feature of young adult digital life.

Chapter III

Method

The methodology chapter presents the research approach adopted in this study. It outlines the study's aim, objectives, and hypotheses. Additionally, it describes the research design, participants, variables, and instruments used. Furthermore, it details the data collection procedure and the data analysis techniques employed to test the hypotheses and address the objectives of the study.

3.1 Aim of the Study

The present study aims to examine Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) and cognitive distortions as predictors of doomscrolling behaviour among young adults, and to explore the interrelationships among these three variables.

3.2 Objectives of the Study

- To examine the relationship between FOMO, cognitive distortions, and doomscrolling behaviour among young adults.
- To examine the relationship between FOMO and doomscrolling behaviour among young adults.
- To examine the relationship between cognitive distortions and doomscrolling behaviour among young adults.
- To determine the predictive role of FOMO and cognitive distortions on doomscrolling behaviour among young adults.
- To identify which variable FOMO or cognitive distortions carries greater predictive weight on doomscrolling behaviour among young adults.

3.3 Variables of the Study

The study variables in the present study are Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), cognitive distortions, and doomscrolling behaviour. FOMO and cognitive distortions are examined as predictor variables, while doomscrolling behaviour is examined as the criterion variable. The study sought to determine whether FOMO and cognitive distortions significantly predict doomscrolling behaviour among young adults, and to identify which of the two carries greater predictive weight. Additionally, the relationship between FOMO, cognitive distortions, and doomscrolling behaviour is examined within the study sample.

As the present study employed a non-experimental, predictive correlational design, none of the variables were experimentally manipulated by the researcher. FOMO and cognitive distortions were measured as they naturally occurred among participants and were used to statistically predict doomscrolling behaviour; they are therefore best understood as predictor and criterion variables in a regression framework, rather than as a traditional manipulated independent variable and dependent variable.

3.4 Operational Definitions of Variables

Doomscrolling

In the present study, doomscrolling refers to the compulsive and repetitive consumption of negative or distressing content on digital platforms despite experiencing adverse emotional effects. It is characterized by difficulty disengaging from such content even when individuals recognize its harmful impact.

Fear of Missing Out (FOMO)

In the present study, FOMO refers to the anxiety that others may be having rewarding experiences or accessing important information without one's involvement. This fear drives continuous monitoring of social media and digital platforms to avoid feeling excluded.

Cognitive Distortions

In the present study, cognitive distortions refer to irrational and biased thinking patterns, such as catastrophizing, overgeneralization, and mental filtering, that influence how individuals interpret negative online content. These distortions intensify negative emotions and may sustain doomscrolling behavior.

Young Adults

In the present study, young adults refer to individuals aged 18–25 years who regularly engage with social media and digital platforms for information and social interaction. According to Erikson's (1968) psychosocial theory of development, this age range falls within the stage of identity vs. role confusion, a developmental period marked by identity formation, increased independence, and heightened digital connectivity, during which individuals actively explore social belonging and self-concept often through digital and social media engagement.

3.5 Hypotheses of the Study

Based on the objectives of the study, the following hypotheses were formulated:

- H1: There will be a significant relation between FOMO, cognitive distortions, and doomscrolling behaviour among young adults.
- H2: There will be a significant positive relationship between FOMO and doomscrolling behaviour among young adults.
- H3: There will be a significant positive relationship between cognitive distortions and doomscrolling behaviour among young adults.
- H4: FOMO and cognitive distortions will significantly predict doomscrolling behaviour among young adults.
- H5: Cognitive distortions will carry greater predictive weight on doomscrolling behaviour compared to FOMO among young adults.

3.6 Research Design

The present study adopted a cross-sectional, predictive correlational research design to examine the relationships among Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), cognitive distortions, and doomscrolling behaviour among young adults, and to test the predictive role of FOMO and cognitive distortions on doomscrolling behaviour. As the objective was to examine the naturally occurring relationships among the study variables rather than to establish causality through experimental manipulation, a correlational design was considered appropriate. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, and data were collected from participants at a single point in time using a survey-based method administered through Google Forms. Beyond examining the bivariate relationships among FOMO, cognitive distortions, and doomscrolling behaviour, multiple regression analysis was conducted to statistically test whether FOMO and cognitive distortions significantly predicted doomscrolling behaviour, and to determine which of the two variables carried greater predictive weight.

3.7 Participants

Population

The target population for the present study comprised young adults, both male and female, within the age range of 18–25 years, who actively use social media and digital platforms.

Sample and Sampling Technique

The total sample for the present study consisted of $N = 124$ young adults. Purposive sampling was used to ensure the selection of participants who specifically met the criteria of being within the specified age range and being active users of social media platforms, as defined operationally above.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion criteria: (a) individuals aged between 18 and 25 years; (b) individuals who actively and regularly use social media platforms; (c) individuals willing to provide informed consent to participate in the study.

Exclusion criteria: (a) individuals diagnosed with a psychiatric or neurological disorder that may affect cognitive processing or emotional regulation (e.g., severe anxiety or depressive disorders); (b) individuals unable to comprehend or respond to the instruments in the language of administration; (c) individuals unwilling to provide informed consent.

3.8 Instruments

Doomscrolling Questionnaire (DQ-12)

The Doomscrolling Questionnaire (DQ-12), developed by Melnyk and Stadnik (2024) at the KRPOCH Scientific Research Institute, was used as a diagnostic tool to assess the severity of doomscrolling behaviour the compulsive consumption of negative online content and to aid in identifying addictive personality patterns. The questionnaire consists of 12 items organized into four criteria (Addiction, Rigidity, Mental Health, and Reflection), with 3 items measuring each criterion, and items are rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale: Never (1), Sometimes (2), Often (3), Routinely (4), and Always (5). It is self-administered and can be completed in-person or remotely (e.g., via Google Forms), with no fixed time limit. Items are grouped into three

sets based on their position: raw scores for Items 1–4 remain unchanged, scores for Items 5–8 are multiplied by 2, and scores for Items 9–12 are multiplied by 3, yielding a maximum possible score of 16 for Group 1, 32 for Group 2, and 48 for Group 3, with total scores interpreted across five severity bands: Minimal (0–16), Mild (17–36), Moderate (37–60), Moderately Severe (61–80), and Severe (81–96). The manual reports that the scale's ranges follow a normal distribution curve, supporting comparability across data sets, and its use is further supported by multiple published studies (Melnik et al., 2024; Mykhaylyshyn et al., 2024; Stadnik et al., 2022, 2023). The developers report that the DQ-12 has high validity and standardisation, having been developed and refined for use in clinical and research settings by psychologists and social workers to assess the mental state of individuals.

Cognitive Distortion Scale (CDS-SDSD)

The Cognitive Distortion Scale (CDS-SDSD), developed by Sisodia and Sharma (National Psychological Corporation, 2012) using the Likert technique with item content informed by experts across psychology, sociology, medicine, human development, and psychiatry, was used to measure the extent of irrational and biased thinking patterns in individuals. The scale consists of 25 statements yielding a single total score reflecting overall level of cognitive distortion, with no separate subscales, and items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale: Strongly Agree (5), Agree (4), Uncertain (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1). It is self-administering and suitable for individual or group testing, with no time limit, though most respondents complete it within 15–20 minutes; scoring is done manually by summing responses across all 25 items, yielding a total score ranging from 25 to 125, with higher scores indicating greater cognitive distortion, interpreted across five bands: 25–40 (Very Low), 41–60 (Low), 61–90 (Moderate), 91–110 (High), and 111–125 (Very High Cognitive Distortion). The scale's reliability was established using the test-retest method, yielding a coefficient of .65, and the internal consistency method, yielding a coefficient of .79. The scale has high content validity and was validated against external criteria, with a validity coefficient of .71.

Fear of Missing Out Scale (FOMOs)

The Fear of Missing Out Scale (FOMOs), developed by Przybylski, Murayama, DeHaan, and Gladwell (2013), was used to assess the pervasive apprehension that others may be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent, and the tendency to continuously monitor others' activities out of fear of being excluded from valued social experiences. The scale comprises 10 items yielding a single composite score, with no subscales, and items are rated

on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("Not at all true of me") to 5 ("Extremely true of me"). It is self-administered and can be completed individually or in a group setting within approximately 5 minutes, with no time limit. Scores are obtained by summing responses across all 10 items, with higher scores indicating greater fear of missing out, and there are no reverse-scored items. Przybylski et al. (2013) reported a Cronbach's alpha of .87 for the scale, indicating high internal consistency, with subsequent studies generally reporting alpha values ranging from .81 to .93. The scale has demonstrated good construct validity through its associations with mood, life satisfaction, and social media engagement variables, as well as discriminant validity by not correlating strongly with unrelated constructs, and it has been validated and adapted across multiple cultural and linguistic contexts.

Demographic Data Sheet

An investigator-constructed demographic data sheet was used to collect background information from participants prior to administration of the study instruments, along with informed consent at the start of the form. The sheet captured participants' name (for identification purposes, kept confidential), age, gender, and educational qualification, along with the device primarily used for social media (e.g., smartphone, laptop/computer, tablet), average time spent on social media per day (categorized as less than 1 hour, 1–2 hours, 2–3 hours, 3–4 hours, or more than 4 hours), frequency of checking news/social media updates (categorized as less than once daily, 1–3 times daily, 4–6 times daily, or several times per hour), and purpose of social media use (e.g., entertainment, staying informed/news, social connection, academic/work purposes).

3.9 Data Collection Procedure

Prior to the commencement of data collection, approval for conducting the study was obtained from the Research Guide and the Department of Psychology. The study targeted young adults aged 18–25 years residing in Kerala. Participants were recruited through purposive sampling using online platforms and personal networks.

Data were collected exclusively through Google Forms based on participant accessibility and convenience. The first page of the Google Form consisted of a detailed Informed Consent Form, which explained the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, the confidentiality and anonymity of responses, and the participants' right to withdraw from the

study at any stage without any negative consequences. Only those who provided their informed consent electronically were allowed to proceed to the questionnaire.

The second section of the Google Form collected basic demographic information, including details such as age, gender, educational qualification, occupation, and other relevant variables. This was followed by the administration of the standardized psychological instruments used in the study: the Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) Scale, the Doomscrolling Scale, and the Cognitive Distortions Scale. All participants received identical written instructions, and the order of administration of the instruments remained the same for every respondent to ensure uniformity. Participants completed the questionnaires independently at their convenience. The average time required to complete the entire questionnaire ranged from approximately 15 to 20 minutes. Responses were automatically recorded through Google Forms and subsequently screened for completeness. Forms with substantial missing data or incomplete responses were excluded from the final analysis. Data collection was carried out over a period of May 10 to June 9 2026. Upon completion of the questionnaire, participants were presented with a brief debriefing note thanking them for their participation and reiterating the purpose of the study. They were also provided with the researcher's contact information in case they wished to seek further clarification regarding the study.

3.10 Data Analysis

Data analysis is the systematic process of organising, summarising, interpreting, and evaluating collected data using appropriate statistical techniques. Quantitative data analysis involves the application of descriptive and inferential statistics to summarise data, examine relationships among variables, test hypotheses, and identify predictive associations. Descriptive statistics provide a concise summary of the characteristics and distribution of the data, whereas inferential statistics are used to determine the nature and significance of relationships between variables and to examine predictive effects (Kotronoulas et al., 2023).

The data collected in the present study were analysed using Jamovi statistical software (Version 2.7.31). Appropriate descriptive and inferential statistical techniques were employed in accordance with the objectives and hypotheses of the study. The statistical analyses performed were as follows:

(a) Descriptive Statistics:

Descriptive statistics, including mean, median, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis, were computed to summarise the scores of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), Cognitive Distortions, and Doomscrolling Behaviour. Frequencies and percentages were used to describe the demographic characteristics of the participants.

(b) Test of Normality:

The Shapiro–Wilk test was used to assess whether the scores of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), Cognitive Distortions, and Doomscrolling Behaviour were normally distributed. The results of the normality test guided the selection of the appropriate inferential statistical procedures for subsequent analyses.

(c) Correlation Analysis:

Based on the results of the normality test, Spearman's rank-order correlation was employed to examine the relationships among Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), Cognitive Distortions, and Doomscrolling Behaviour. This analysis was conducted to address the objectives and hypotheses concerning the associations among the study variables.

(d) Multiple Linear Regression Analysis:

Multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to examine whether Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) and Cognitive Distortions significantly predicted Doomscrolling Behaviour. The analysis was performed to determine the combined predictive effect of the independent variables on the dependent variable and to assess the relative contribution of each predictor in explaining variations in doomscrolling behaviour.

CHAPTER IV

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the results and discussion of the study titled “Fear of missing out and cognitive distortions as predictors of doomscrolling behavior among young adults”. It presents the socio-demographic and professional characteristics of the participants, followed by the statistical analyses and findings of the study. The discussion interprets the findings in relation to the objectives, hypotheses, theoretical framework, and relevant previous research.

4.1 Descriptive Statistics and Shapiro - Wilk Test

The Shapiro - Wilk test was conducted to assess the normality of the scores for Doom scrolling, Fear of missing out and Cognitive distortion. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics and normality test results for the study variables.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics and Normality Test Results for Doom scrolling, Fear of missing out and Cognitive distortion.

Statistics	Fomo	Cognitive distortoion	Doom scrolling
N	124	124	124
Missing	0	0	0
Mean	22.0	71.6	13.0
Median	22.0	72.0	13.0
Standard deviation	6.85	11.7	7.84
Minimum	10	45	0
Maximum	40	105	44
Skewness	0.120	0.0615	0.676
Std. error skewness	0.217	0.217	0.217

Statistics	Fomo	Cognitive distortoion	Doom scrolling
Kurtosis	-0.727	-0.189	0.972
Std. error kurtosis	0.431	0.431	0.431
Shapiro-Wilk W	0.976	0.994	0.945
Shapiro-Wilk p	.026	.902	<.001

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics and Shapiro–Wilk normality test results for Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), Cognitive Distortions, and Doomscrolling Behaviour among the 124 young adults who participated in the study.

Participants reported a moderate level of Fear of Missing Out on average ($M = 22.00$, $SD = 6.85$, range = 10–40). Cognitive Distortions averaged 71.60 ($SD = 11.70$, range = 45–105), reflecting a moderate-to-high level of distorted thinking across the sample. Doomscrolling Behaviour averaged 13.00 ($SD = 7.84$, range = 0–44) low on average, though scores as high as 44 indicate that a subset of participants engaged in extreme scrolling behaviour. The mean and median values for all three variables were identical or very similar, suggesting reasonably balanced distributions around their central tendencies, and the absence of missing data indicates that all 124 participants completed the questionnaire in full, yielding a complete dataset for analysis.

Normality was assessed using the Shapiro–Wilk test. Cognitive Distortions did not significantly deviate from normality ($W = .994$, $p = .902$). In contrast, FOMO ($W = .976$, $p = .026$) and Doomscrolling Behaviour ($W = .945$, $p < .001$) showed statistically significant deviations from normality.

Skewness and kurtosis values supported these findings. FOMO showed a slight positive skew (0.120) and negative kurtosis (−0.727), indicating a fairly symmetrical but flatter-than-normal distribution. Cognitive Distortions showed minimal skewness (0.0615) and kurtosis (−0.189), closely approximating a normal distribution. Doomscrolling Behaviour showed moderate positive skewness (0.676) and positive kurtosis (0.972), indicating a positively skewed, more peaked distribution with heavier tails.

Because FOMO and Doomscrolling Behaviour significantly deviated from normality, the assumption of normal distribution was not fully satisfied across all study variables. Spearman's rank-order correlation was therefore used to examine relationships among the three variables, as it does not require normally distributed data. Multiple linear regression was subsequently performed to examine whether FOMO and Cognitive Distortions significantly predicted Doomscrolling Behaviour and to determine each predictor's relative contribution to the model.

4.2 Spearman's Rank-Order Correlation

Spearman's rank-order correlation is a non-parametric statistical technique used to examine the strength and direction of the relationship between two variables when the assumptions of parametric correlation are not met, particularly the assumption of normality. In the present study, Spearman's rank-order correlation was employed because the results of the Shapiro–Wilk test indicated that the variables Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) and Doomscrolling Behaviour were not normally distributed. The analysis was conducted to examine the relationships among Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), Cognitive Distortions, and Doomscrolling Behaviour among young adults.

Table 2

Spearman's rank-order correlation coefficients and significance values for the study variables.

		FOMO	CD	DS
FOMO	Spearman's rho	—		
	df	—		
	p-value	—		
CD	Spearman's rho	0.384	—	
	df	122	—	
	p-value	<.001	—	
DS	Spearman's rho	0.395	0.491	—
	df	122	122	—
	p-value	<.001	<.001	—

Table 2 presents the results of Spearman's rank-order correlation analysis examining the relationships among Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), Cognitive Distortions (CD), and Doomscrolling Behaviour (DS) among the 124 young adults who participated in the study. Since the assumptions of normality were not fully met, Spearman's rank-order correlation was employed to assess the strength and direction of the associations among the study variables.

The findings revealed a moderate positive and statistically significant relationship between Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) and Cognitive Distortions ($\rho = .384$, $p < .001$). This indicates that participants with higher levels of Fear of Missing Out tended to report higher levels of Cognitive Distortions. The positive association suggests that individuals who experience greater apprehension about missing rewarding social experiences are also more likely to engage in maladaptive thinking patterns, such as catastrophising, overgeneralisation, or negative interpretations of situations.

A moderate positive and statistically significant correlation was also observed between Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) and Doomscrolling Behaviour ($\rho = .395$, $p < .001$). This finding suggests that as Fear of Missing Out increases, engagement in doomscrolling behaviour also tends to increase. Individuals experiencing greater FOMO may be more inclined to repeatedly check social media platforms and online news feeds in an attempt to remain constantly informed and socially connected, thereby increasing their likelihood of engaging in prolonged and compulsive consumption of distressing online content.

Similarly, the analysis demonstrated a moderate positive and statistically significant relationship between Cognitive Distortions and Doomscrolling Behaviour ($\rho = .491$, $p < .001$). Among the three correlations, this was the strongest association observed. The finding indicates that participants with higher levels of distorted thinking patterns were more likely to engage in doomscrolling behaviour. Individuals who habitually interpret situations in a negative or irrational manner may be more likely to focus on threatening or distressing online information, reinforcing repetitive and excessive scrolling behaviours.

Overall, the correlation analysis indicates that all three study variables were positively and significantly associated with one another. Although the correlation coefficients fall within the moderate range, they suggest meaningful relationships between Fear of Missing Out, Cognitive Distortions, and Doomscrolling Behaviour. The strongest relationship was observed between Cognitive Distortions and Doomscrolling Behaviour ($\rho = .491$), followed by the relationship between Fear of Missing Out and Doomscrolling Behaviour ($\rho = .395$) and between Fear of

Missing Out and Cognitive Distortions ($p = .384$). These findings support the hypothesis that higher levels of Fear of Missing Out and Cognitive Distortions are associated with greater engagement in Doomscrolling Behaviour among young adults and provide a basis for further examining the predictive role of these variables through regression analysis.

4.3 Multiple Linear Regression Analysis

Multiple linear regression is a statistical technique used to examine the extent to which two or more independent variables predict a dependent variable. In the present study, multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to examine whether **Fear of Missing Out (FOMO)** and **Cognitive Distortions** significantly predicted **Doomscrolling Behaviour** among young adults. Table 4 presents the results of the multiple linear regression analysis.

Table 3

Multiple Linear Regression Predicting Doomscrolling Behaviour from Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) and Cognitive Distortions.

Predictor	B (Estimate)	SE	t	p	β (Standardized Estimate)
Intercept	-11.950	3.7920	-3.15	.002	—
Fear of Missing Out (FOMO)	0.345	0.0928	3.72	< .001	0.301
Cognitive Distortions	0.242	0.0544	4.45	< .001	0.360

$R = 0.542$, $R^2 = 0.293$, $F(2, 121) = 25.1$, $p < .001$.

Models were estimated using a sample size of $N = 124$. **B** = unstandardized regression coefficient; **SE** = standard error; β = standardized regression coefficient.

Table 4 presents the results of the multiple linear regression analysis conducted to examine whether Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) and Cognitive Distortions significantly predict Doomscrolling Behaviour among young adults. Multiple linear regression was employed to determine the combined and individual contributions of the two independent variables in explaining variations in the dependent variable. The analysis provides information regarding the overall fit of the regression model as well as the relative predictive strength of each predictor.

The overall regression model was found to be statistically significant, $F(2, 121) = 25.10$, $p < .001$, indicating that the model provides a significantly better prediction of Doomscrolling

Behaviour than a model containing no predictor variables. The statistically significant F-value demonstrates that the independent variables, when considered together, contribute meaningfully to explaining differences in doomscrolling behaviour among the participants. Thus, the regression model is considered appropriate for predicting Doomscrolling Behaviour from the selected psychological variables.

The model produced a multiple correlation coefficient (R) of .542, indicating a moderate positive relationship between the observed values of Doomscrolling Behaviour and the values predicted by the regression model. This suggests that the combination of Fear of Missing Out and Cognitive Distortions has a moderately strong association with Doomscrolling Behaviour and that the model demonstrates satisfactory predictive capability.

The coefficient of determination (R^2) was .293, indicating that 29.3% of the total variance in Doomscrolling Behaviour was explained jointly by Fear of Missing Out and Cognitive Distortions. In behavioural and psychological research, where human behaviour is influenced by numerous biological, psychological, and environmental factors, explaining nearly one-third of the variance is considered a meaningful finding. Nevertheless, 70.7% of the variance in Doomscrolling Behaviour remained unexplained by the present model, suggesting that additional variables such as personality characteristics, emotional regulation, anxiety, depression, stress, social media usage patterns, loneliness, intolerance of uncertainty, or environmental influences may also contribute to doomscrolling behaviour and should be explored in future research.

Examination of the regression coefficients revealed that Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) was a statistically significant positive predictor of Doomscrolling Behaviour ($B = 0.345$, $SE = 0.093$, $t = 3.72$, $p < .001$, $\beta = .301$). The positive unstandardized regression coefficient indicates that, after controlling for the effect of Cognitive Distortions, every one-unit increase in Fear of Missing Out was associated with an estimated 0.345-unit increase in Doomscrolling Behaviour. This finding suggests that individuals who experience greater anxiety about missing rewarding experiences or important information are more likely to engage in repeated and excessive scrolling of social media and online news content. The standardized regression coefficient ($\beta = .301$) indicates that Fear of Missing Out made a meaningful and statistically significant contribution to predicting Doomscrolling Behaviour.

Similarly, Cognitive Distortions emerged as a statistically significant positive predictor of Doomscrolling Behaviour ($B = 0.242$, $SE = 0.054$, $t = 4.45$, $p < .001$, $\beta = .360$). Holding Fear

of Missing Out constant, each one-unit increase in Cognitive Distortions was associated with an estimated 0.242-unit increase in Doomscrolling Behaviour. The standardized regression coefficient ($\beta = .360$) indicates that Cognitive Distortions contributed more strongly to the prediction of Doomscrolling Behaviour than Fear of Missing Out. The larger standardized beta value suggests that maladaptive patterns of thinking exert a comparatively greater influence on doomscrolling behaviour than the fear of missing rewarding experiences.

A comparison of the standardized regression coefficients further highlights the relative importance of the predictor variables. While both predictors significantly contributed to the regression model, Cognitive Distortions ($\beta = .360$) demonstrated a stronger unique contribution than Fear of Missing Out ($\beta = .301$). This indicates that, after accounting for the shared variance between the predictors, distorted cognitive processes have a relatively greater impact on Doomscrolling Behaviour. Individuals who frequently engage in cognitive distortions such as catastrophising, selective abstraction, overgeneralisation, fortune telling, and negative interpretation of events may be more inclined to seek excessive online information, thereby reinforcing repetitive doomscrolling behaviour.

The intercept of the regression model was -11.950 ($SE = 3.792$, $t = -3.15$, $p = .002$). The intercept represents the predicted value of Doomscrolling Behaviour when both Fear of Missing Out and Cognitive Distortions are equal to zero. Although the intercept was statistically significant, its practical interpretation is limited because scores of zero on these psychological measures were not observed within the study sample and therefore do not represent a realistic condition.

The regression equation derived from the analysis is expressed as:

$$\text{Doomscrolling Behaviour} = -11.950 + (0.345 \times \text{Fear of Missing Out}) + (0.242 \times \text{Cognitive Distortions})$$

This equation indicates that the predicted Doomscrolling Behaviour score increases as scores on Fear of Missing Out and Cognitive Distortions increase. The positive regression coefficients demonstrate that both variables contribute positively to the prediction of doomscrolling behaviour.

Overall, the findings indicate that the regression model successfully explains a significant proportion of the variance in Doomscrolling Behaviour among young adults. Both Fear of Missing Out and Cognitive Distortions emerged as statistically significant positive predictors,

confirming that increases in these psychological variables are associated with greater engagement in doomscrolling behaviour. Among the two predictors, Cognitive Distortions emerged as the stronger predictor, as reflected by its larger standardized regression coefficient. These findings support the study hypothesis that Fear of Missing Out and Cognitive Distortions are important psychological determinants of Doomscrolling Behaviour and provide empirical evidence that maladaptive thinking patterns and the fear of missing rewarding experiences play a substantial role in the development and maintenance of excessive engagement with distressing online content.

The statistical analyses conducted in the present study provided empirical support for the proposed relationships among Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), Cognitive Distortions, and Doomscrolling Behaviour. Descriptive statistics indicated that participants exhibited moderate levels of all three study variables, with sufficient variability in scores to permit meaningful statistical analysis. The socio-demographic profile further showed variation in participants' average daily screen time, time spent scrolling on digital platforms, and primary purposes of internet use, suggesting diversity in digital engagement patterns within the sample. Although these variables were not included as predictors in the main statistical analyses, they provide important contextual information, as greater screen exposure, prolonged scrolling duration, and internet use primarily for social media or news consumption may increase opportunities for engagement in doomscrolling behaviour.

Prior to inferential analysis, assumption testing was conducted using the Shapiro–Wilk test, which revealed that the distributions of Fear of Missing Out ($W = .976$, $p = .026$) and Doomscrolling Behaviour ($W = .945$, $p < .001$) significantly deviated from normality, whereas Cognitive Distortions ($W = .994$, $p = .902$) did not significantly deviate from normality. Since not all study variables satisfied the assumption of normality, Spearman's rank-order correlation was employed to examine the relationships among the variables, as this non-parametric approach does not require normally distributed data.

The correlation analysis demonstrated that all three variables were positively and significantly related to one another. Fear of Missing Out showed a moderate positive correlation with Cognitive Distortions ($\rho = .384$, $p < .001$) and with Doomscrolling Behaviour ($\rho = .395$, $p < .001$). Cognitive Distortions also demonstrated a moderate positive correlation with Doomscrolling Behaviour ($\rho = .491$, $p < .001$), representing the strongest association observed among the study variables. These findings indicate that higher levels of Fear of Missing Out

and Cognitive Distortions are associated with greater engagement in doomscrolling behaviour among young adults, with cognitive distortions showing the strongest bivariate relationship with the outcome variable. It is also plausible that individuals who spend longer periods on digital devices or engage in extended scrolling sessions may have greater exposure to online content, thereby increasing the likelihood of experiencing Fear of Missing Out and engaging in doomscrolling. Similarly, the purpose of internet use—particularly frequent use for social networking, news updates, or entertainment—may influence the extent to which individuals encounter emotionally charged or continuously updated content that encourages prolonged scrolling.

Further, multiple linear regression analysis revealed that the overall regression model was statistically significant, $F(2, 121) = 25.10$, $p < .001$, with a multiple correlation coefficient of $R = .542$ and a coefficient of determination of $R^2 = .293$. The model explained 29.3% of the variance in Doomscrolling Behaviour, indicating that Fear of Missing Out and Cognitive Distortions together made a meaningful and statistically reliable contribution to predicting doomscrolling behaviour, representing a large effect size by conventional standards. Both predictor variables emerged as significant positive predictors, with Fear of Missing Out ($\beta = .301$, $p < .001$) and Cognitive Distortions ($\beta = .360$, $p < .001$) independently contributing to the prediction of Doomscrolling Behaviour. Among the two predictors, Cognitive Distortions demonstrated the stronger predictive influence, as indicated by its higher standardized regression coefficient relative to Fear of Missing Out. Although average screen time, scrolling duration, and purpose of internet use were not entered into the regression model, these behavioural factors may interact with psychological variables by increasing exposure to online environments in which Fear of Missing Out and maladaptive cognitive processing are more likely to develop and reinforce doomscrolling behaviour.

Overall, the statistical findings support the study hypotheses and suggest that both Fear of Missing Out and Cognitive Distortions are important psychological factors that are significantly associated with, and predictive of, Doomscrolling Behaviour among young adults. While both variables contribute meaningfully to the model, Cognitive Distortions emerges as the comparatively stronger predictor, suggesting that maladaptive cognitive processes may play a slightly more central role than affective concerns related to social exclusion in sustaining doomscrolling behaviour. At the same time, patterns of digital engagement—including average daily screen time, time spent scrolling, and the primary purpose of internet use—may also shape individuals' vulnerability to doomscrolling by increasing the frequency and duration of

exposure to online content. Future research should therefore examine these behavioural factors alongside psychological predictors to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the determinants of doomscrolling behaviour.

CHAPTER V
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Summary

The past decade has witnessed an unprecedented integration of digital and social media platforms into the everyday lives of young adults, fundamentally reshaping how information is consumed, relationships are maintained, and leisure time is structured. This constant connectivity carries an inherent paradox: while offering unprecedented access to information, entertainment, and social participation, it simultaneously exposes users to a continuous influx of distressing or negative content, particularly during periods of social, political, health, or environmental uncertainty. Algorithmic newsfeeds, optimised to sustain user attention, disproportionately surface emotionally arousing and threat-related material, a tendency rooted in longstanding psychological negativity biases that predispose humans to prioritise threat-related information for survival purposes. One consequence of this digital landscape has been the emergence of a distinct behavioural pattern popularly termed "doomscrolling" – the compulsive, prolonged consumption of negative online content – which has drawn increasing attention from mental health researchers due to its tangible psychological costs. Unlike ordinary, target-directed scrolling, doomscrolling is characterised by its compulsive and self-perpetuating quality: individuals continue to scroll despite the content actively worsening their mood, seemingly unable to disengage.

Empirical evidence from the Indian context confirms that this behaviour is far from marginal among Indian youth. Studies among undergraduate students have found the overwhelming majority exhibiting at least mild doomscrolling tendencies, with the behaviour showing statistically significant associations with psychological distress (George et al., 2025), while research among Indian college students has documented a substantial positive relationship between doomscrolling frequency and psychological fatigue (Sarkar & Ankita, 2025). Even within occupational settings, doomscrolling has demonstrated measurable costs, significantly and negatively impacting employee performance among India's Generation Z workforce (Chand & Mishra, 2025). These findings collectively situate doomscrolling as a widespread and functionally consequential pattern among Indian young adults, occurring against the backdrop of a substantial national mental health burden and a treatment gap exceeding 70% for several conditions.

Two constructs have been repeatedly implicated as psychological vulnerabilities underlying compulsive digital engagement: fear of missing out (FOMO) and cognitive distortions. FOMO, formally conceptualised by Przybylski, Murayama, DeHaan, and Gladwell (2013) as a

pervasive apprehension that others may be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent, was theoretically situated within Self-Determination Theory, positing that FOMO arises when the basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness go chronically unmet, prompting compensatory surveillance of others' lives through digital platforms. Cognitive distortions, rooted in Beck's (1976) cognitive model and later expanded by Burns (1980) into a taxonomy of ten common thinking errors including catastrophising, overgeneralisation, mental filtering, and emotional reasoning refer to systematic, habitual errors in information processing that distort the perceived meaning, severity, or personal relevance of incoming information. When applied to a newsfeed saturated with crisis-oriented content, such distortions may cause individuals to overestimate the probability or personal relevance of catastrophic events, intensifying anxiety and, paradoxically, the compulsion to keep seeking further information in an effort to regain a sense of control or certainty.

Although FOMO and cognitive distortions have each been independently linked to problematic digital engagement, and although a landmark Indian study conducted at NIMHANS, Bengaluru, during the COVID-19 lockdown explicitly identified confirmation and anchoring bias as mechanisms enhancing doomscrolling (Anand et al., 2022), no identified study has systematically examined cognitive distortions and fear of missing out together as joint, simultaneous predictors of doomscrolling behaviour, whether in India or elsewhere. This gap is particularly consequential given that young adults in Kerala represent a population with near-universal digital and social media penetration, rendering them both highly exposed to the conditions that generate doomscrolling and, as yet, understudied with respect to the specific psychological vulnerabilities that predict it. This gap provided the basis for the present study, which aimed to examine Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) and cognitive distortions as predictors of doomscrolling behaviour among young adults, and to explore the interrelationships among these three variables. The study was guided theoretically by Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), Beck's Cognitive Theory and the taxonomy of cognitive distortions (Beck, 1976; Burns, 1980), the Uses and Gratifications Theory, and the Interaction of Person-Affect-Cognition-Execution (I-PACE) model, which together frame doomscrolling as arising from a dynamic interaction between predisposing motivational-emotional and cognitive-processing vulnerabilities, situational affective responses, and maladaptive behavioural execution.

Based on the study's objectives, five hypotheses were formulated: that there would be a significant relationship between FOMO, cognitive distortions, and doomscrolling behaviour (H1); a significant positive relationship between FOMO and doomscrolling behaviour (H2); a

significant positive relationship between cognitive distortions and doomscrolling behaviour (H3); that FOMO and cognitive distortions would significantly predict doomscrolling behaviour (H4); and that cognitive distortions would carry greater predictive weight than FOMO (H5).

To address these aims, the present study adopted a cross-sectional, predictive correlational research design. The sample consisted of 124 young adults aged 18 to 25 years residing in Kerala, drawn from college and university student populations as well as young working professionals, recruited through purposive sampling via online platforms and personal networks. Individuals diagnosed with a psychiatric or neurological disorder affecting cognitive processing or emotional regulation were excluded from the sample. Data were collected over a period of one month (May 10 to June 9, 2026) through an online survey administered via Google Forms, following a detailed informed consent process that explained the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and participants' right to withdraw at any stage; the confidentiality and anonymity of participants' information were maintained throughout the research process. Doomscrolling behaviour, cognitive distortions, and fear of missing out were assessed using the Doomscrolling Questionnaire (DQ-12; Melnyk & Stadnik, 2024), a 12-item instrument comprising four criteria (Addiction, Rigidity, Mental Health, and Reflection) with scores interpreted across five severity bands; the Cognitive Distortion Scale (CDS-SDSD; Sisodia & Sharma, 2012), a 25-item Likert-type instrument yielding a single total score with established test-retest reliability (.65) and internal consistency (.79); and the Fear of Missing Out Scale (FOMOs; Przybylski et al., 2013), a 10-item instrument with high internal consistency ($\alpha = .87$) and demonstrated construct and discriminant validity. An investigator-constructed demographic data sheet additionally captured participants' age, gender, educational qualification, device usage, time spent on social media, frequency of checking updates, and purpose of social media use.

The collected data were analysed using descriptive statistics to summarise the demographic characteristics and study variables, and the Shapiro–Wilk test was used to assess normality. Results indicated that Cognitive Distortions did not significantly deviate from a normal distribution ($W = .994$, $p = .902$), whereas Fear of Missing Out ($W = .976$, $p = .026$) and Doomscrolling Behaviour ($W = .945$, $p < .001$) showed statistically significant deviations from normality. As the assumption of normality was not fully satisfied across all study variables, Spearman's rank-order correlation was employed to examine the relationships among Fear of Missing Out, Cognitive Distortions, and Doomscrolling Behaviour, and multiple linear

regression analysis was subsequently conducted to examine their predictive relationships. All analyses were conducted using jamovi (Version 2.7.31), with the level of statistical significance set at $p < .05$.

The correlation analysis revealed that all three study variables were positively and significantly interrelated among the 124 young adults sampled. A moderate positive correlation was observed between Fear of Missing Out and Cognitive Distortions ($\rho = .384$, $p < .001$), indicating that participants with higher levels of FOMO tended to report higher levels of cognitive distortion. Fear of Missing Out was also moderately and positively correlated with Doomscrolling Behaviour ($\rho = .395$, $p < .001$), while the strongest association observed among the three variables was between Cognitive Distortions and Doomscrolling Behaviour ($\rho = .491$, $p < .001$), suggesting that individuals who habitually interpret situations in a negative or irrational manner were more likely to engage in repetitive, compulsive scrolling of distressing online content.

Multiple linear regression analysis further revealed that the overall model was statistically significant, $F(2, 121) = 25.10$, $p < .001$, with a multiple correlation coefficient of $R = .542$. Fear of Missing Out and Cognitive Distortions jointly accounted for 29.3% of the variance in Doomscrolling Behaviour ($R^2 = .293$), representing a meaningful effect within behavioural research where human behaviour is shaped by numerous biological, psychological, and environmental factors. Both predictors emerged as statistically significant, independent positive predictors of doomscrolling behaviour: Fear of Missing Out ($B = 0.345$, $SE = 0.093$, $t = 3.72$, $p < .001$, $\beta = .301$) and Cognitive Distortions ($B = 0.242$, $SE = 0.054$, $t = 4.45$, $p < .001$, $\beta = .360$). Consistent with the study's fifth hypothesis, Cognitive Distortions demonstrated the stronger unique predictive contribution of the two variables, as reflected by its larger standardised regression coefficient, indicating that maladaptive patterns of thinking exert a comparatively greater influence on doomscrolling behaviour than the fear of missing rewarding social or informational experiences.

Taken together, the findings of the present study provide empirical support for all five proposed hypotheses. Fear of Missing Out, Cognitive Distortions, and Doomscrolling Behaviour were found to be significantly and positively interrelated among young adults in Kerala, and both Fear of Missing Out and Cognitive Distortions emerged as statistically significant predictors of doomscrolling behaviour, jointly explaining nearly one-third of the variance in this compulsive digital pattern. Among the two predictors, Cognitive Distortions emerged as the

more substantial contributor, suggesting that habitual, distorted patterns of interpreting online content rather than the anxious motivation to remain socially or informationally connected may play a comparatively more central role in sustaining doomscrolling behaviour among Indian young adults. These findings extend the existing literature by integrating a motivational-emotional vulnerability and a cognitive-processing vulnerability within a single predictive model, applying this model specifically to doomscrolling as the outcome variable, and doing so within an Indian, Kerala-based population that remains substantially underrepresented in the existing empirical literature on this topic, thereby carrying meaningful implications for the design of cognitively-oriented, evidence-based counselling and digital-wellness interventions tailored to young adults.

5.2 Major Findings

The results of the hypothesis testing conducted in the present study are summarised below.

Hypothesis 1 – Accepted

There will be a significant relation between FOMO, cognitive distortions, and doomscrolling behaviour among young adults.

The study found a significant relationship among Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), Cognitive Distortions, and Doomscrolling Behaviour among the 124 young adults sampled, with all three pairwise correlations reaching statistical significance at $p < .001$ (FOMO–Cognitive Distortions: $\rho = .384$; FOMO–Doomscrolling: $\rho = .395$; Cognitive Distortions–Doomscrolling: $\rho = .491$). These findings suggest that emotional and cognitive factors are meaningfully interconnected in influencing doomscrolling behaviour, rather than operating as isolated or independent risk factors. The moderate positive correlation between FOMO and Cognitive Distortions is itself a noteworthy finding, indicating that young adults who experience heightened anxiety about missing rewarding social or informational experiences also tend to interpret situations through more distorted, catastrophising, or negatively biased cognitive lenses. This pattern lends empirical support to the theoretical proposition that motivational-emotional vulnerability (FOMO) and cognitive-processing vulnerability (cognitive distortions) do not operate in parallel but are themselves interrelated, jointly converging to sustain compulsive engagement with distressing online content. This finding is consistent with theoretical models such as the I-PACE framework, which conceptualises problematic digital behaviours as arising from the dynamic interaction of predisposing personal characteristics rather than any single isolated vulnerability.

Hypothesis 2 – Accepted

There will be a significant positive relationship between FOMO and doomscrolling behaviour among young adults.

A significant positive relationship was found between Fear of Missing Out and Doomscrolling Behaviour ($\rho = .395$, $p < .001$). Young adults with higher levels of FOMO were significantly more likely to engage in doomscrolling behaviour. This finding was further corroborated by the regression analysis, which showed that FOMO significantly and positively predicted doomscrolling behaviour even after accounting for cognitive distortions ($B = 0.345$, $SE = 0.093$, $t = 3.72$, $p < .001$, $\beta = .301$), indicating that for every one-unit increase in FOMO, doomscrolling scores increased by an estimated 0.345 units, holding cognitive distortions constant. This result reinforces the theoretical proposition that individuals experiencing heightened apprehension about missing rewarding or important events are motivated to engage in continuous monitoring of digital content, and that this motivational drive extends beyond purely social contexts to encompass anxious, compulsive engagement with distressing news and crisis-related information. The strength and consistency of this association across both correlational and regression analyses lend robust support to FOMO's role as a genuine, non-trivial predictor of doomscrolling rather than a spurious or confounded association.

Hypothesis 3 – Accepted

There will be a significant positive relationship between cognitive distortions and doomscrolling behaviour among young adults.

A significant positive relationship was found between Cognitive Distortions and Doomscrolling Behaviour ($\rho = .491$, $p < .001$), representing the strongest bivariate association observed among all three study variables. Individuals with higher levels of distorted thinking reported substantially greater doomscrolling behaviour. This relationship was further confirmed through regression analysis, which showed that cognitive distortions significantly and positively predicted doomscrolling behaviour after controlling for FOMO ($B = 0.242$, $SE = 0.054$, $t = 4.45$, $p < .001$, $\beta = .360$). The comparatively higher correlation coefficient for this relationship, relative to the other two bivariate associations, suggests that habitual errors in information processing — such as catastrophising, overgeneralisation, mental filtering, and emotional reasoning — may bear a particularly close and direct relationship to how young adults engage with distressing digital content. This finding aligns closely with the mechanism proposed in Chapter II, wherein individuals who habitually interpret ambiguous or threatening

information through distorted cognitive schemas are more likely to perceive isolated negative news items as evidence of pervasive, escalating danger, thereby sustaining continued, compulsive engagement in search of reassurance or certainty that is rarely achieved.

Hypothesis 4 – Accepted

FOMO and cognitive distortions will significantly predict doomscrolling behaviour among young adults.

Multiple regression analysis showed that FOMO and Cognitive Distortions together significantly predicted Doomscrolling Behaviour, $F(2, 121) = 25.10$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .293$. Together, these two variables explained 29.3% of the variance in doomscrolling behaviour, with the overall model demonstrating a moderate positive multiple correlation ($R = .542$). This represents a statistically robust and practically meaningful predictive model, particularly within the domain of behavioural and psychological research, where human behaviour is shaped by a wide array of biological, psychological, social, and environmental influences, and where explaining close to one-third of the variance in a specific behavioural outcome using only two predictor variables is considered a substantial contribution. The significance of the overall F-test confirms that the joint predictive model performs significantly better than a model with no predictors, providing strong empirical validation for the study's central premise that FOMO and cognitive distortions, when considered together, offer a more complete account of the psychological antecedents of doomscrolling than either construct examined in isolation. At the same time, the finding that 70.7% of the variance remained unexplained underscores that doomscrolling is a multiply determined behaviour, likely also shaped by factors such as emotional regulation, personality traits, intolerance of uncertainty, and broader social media usage patterns, which future research would do well to incorporate alongside the present model.

Hypothesis 5 – Accepted

Cognitive distortions will carry greater predictive weight on doomscrolling behaviour compared to FOMO among young adults.

Among the two predictors, Cognitive Distortions emerged as the stronger predictor of Doomscrolling Behaviour ($\beta = .360$) compared to FOMO ($\beta = .301$). Although both standardised coefficients reflected statistically significant and meaningful contributions, the comparatively larger beta value for cognitive distortions indicates that, after accounting for shared variance between the two predictors, distorted cognitive processing exerts a relatively

greater unique influence on doomscrolling than the fear of missing rewarding social or informational experiences. This finding indicates that maladaptive thinking patterns may play a more central role than motivational-emotional concerns in sustaining doomscrolling behaviour among young adults, suggesting that the way individuals cognitively appraise and interpret distressing online content may matter more, in predictive terms, than the underlying anxious drive to remain continuously connected. This has important theoretical implications: it suggests that interventions aimed at reducing doomscrolling may derive particular benefit from cognitive-restructuring approaches, such as those used in cognitive-behavioural therapy, that directly target catastrophising, overgeneralisation, and other distorted appraisal patterns, in addition to, or potentially even ahead of, interventions aimed solely at reducing social anxiety or the fear of exclusion.

5.3 Conclusion

The present study set out to examine Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) and Cognitive Distortions as predictors of Doomscrolling Behaviour among young adults in Kerala, and to explore the interrelationships among these three constructs. Drawing on a sample of 124 young adults aged 18 to 25 years, the study employed a cross-sectional, predictive correlational design, using standardised self-report measures and rigorous statistical analysis to test five hypotheses derived from the existing theoretical and empirical literature. All five hypotheses were accepted, providing consistent and convergent empirical support for the study's central premise. The findings demonstrate that Fear of Missing Out, Cognitive Distortions, and Doomscrolling Behaviour are significantly and positively interrelated among young adults, confirming that the compulsive consumption of distressing online content cannot be fully understood through either a purely motivational or a purely cognitive lens in isolation, but is better conceptualised as arising from the interaction of both. FOMO was found to be a significant positive predictor of doomscrolling, supporting its theoretical role as a motivational-emotional vulnerability that drives continuous digital monitoring in an effort to avoid social or informational exclusion. Cognitive Distortions, however, emerged as the stronger of the two predictors, indicating that habitual, biased patterns of interpreting ambiguous or threatening information such as catastrophising, overgeneralisation, and emotional reasoning play a comparatively more central role in sustaining doomscrolling behaviour than the fear of missing out itself. Together, FOMO and Cognitive Distortions accounted for a statistically significant and practically meaningful 29.3% of the variance in doomscrolling behaviour, underscoring their combined value as psychological predictors while also indicating that a substantial

proportion of the variance remains attributable to other, as yet unexamined, factors. These findings carry meaningful theoretical and practical significance. Theoretically, the study extends the existing literature by integrating a motivational-emotional vulnerability and a cognitive-processing vulnerability within a single predictive framework, and by applying this integrated model specifically to doomscrolling rather than to social media addiction or problematic smartphone use more broadly within an Indian, Kerala-based population that has remained substantially underrepresented in the global doomscrolling literature. Practically, the finding that cognitive distortions carry greater predictive weight than FOMO suggests that psychoeducational and counselling interventions aimed at reducing doomscrolling among young adults may benefit most from incorporating cognitive-restructuring techniques, of the kind employed in cognitive-behavioural therapy, alongside strategies that address the underlying social and informational anxieties associated with FOMO. Given that Kerala's young adult population is characterised by near-universal smartphone and social media penetration, the present findings offer a timely, empirically grounded basis for the development of digital-wellness programmes within college counselling centres and broader mental health services. At the same time, the study's findings should be interpreted within the context of its cross-sectional design, which does not permit causal inference regarding the direction of the observed relationships, and its reliance on self-report instruments, which are subject to the limitations inherent in this methodology. Nonetheless, the consistency of the present findings with the broader theoretical and empirical literature on FOMO, cognitive distortions, and problematic digital engagement lends confidence to the conclusion that both constructs represent genuine and clinically relevant psychological vulnerabilities underlying doomscrolling behaviour among young adults. As digital platforms continue to occupy an increasingly central place in the everyday psychological functioning of young people, understanding and addressing the cognitive and motivational mechanisms that sustain compulsive, distress-inducing engagement with online content remains an important and evolving priority for counselling psychology and digital mental health research alike.

5.4 Implications of the Study

The findings of the present study carry substantial and wide-ranging implications for clinical practice, educational policy, public health, and the broader discipline of counselling psychology, particularly at a moment when digital media occupies an increasingly central and inescapable place in the everyday psychological lives of young adults across India. By empirically establishing Fear of Missing Out and Cognitive Distortions as significant

predictors of doomscrolling behaviour, and by identifying cognitive distortions as the comparatively stronger of the two, the study offers a concrete, actionable foundation for intervention design rather than a purely descriptive account of the phenomenon, thereby extending its relevance well beyond the academic literature into the everyday practice of mental health professionals working with this population. From a clinical and counselling standpoint, the finding that cognitive distortions carry greater predictive weight than FOMO carries direct and immediate significance for how doomscrolling ought to be addressed in therapeutic settings. It suggests that interventions grounded in cognitive-behavioural therapy, specifically those designed to identify and restructure catastrophising, overgeneralisation, mental filtering, and emotional reasoning, are likely to yield more substantial reductions in doomscrolling than interventions focused narrowly on managing social anxiety or the fear of exclusion alone. Counselling psychologists and clinicians working with young adult clients who present with excessive social media use, heightened digital anxiety, or difficulty disengaging from distressing news content would therefore be well advised to incorporate structured cognitive-restructuring techniques as a first-line component of treatment, while simultaneously addressing the underlying informational and social anxieties associated with FOMO through complementary strategies such as mindfulness-based practices, graduated exposure to reduced connectivity, and the cultivation of tolerance for uncertainty. Because doomscrolling was also found to be significantly and positively associated with both predictor variables even after accounting for their shared variance, the present findings further imply that a purely symptom-focused approach targeting the scrolling behaviour in isolation, without addressing the underlying cognitive and motivational drivers identified in this study, is unlikely to produce durable behavioural change, underscoring the necessity of a mechanism-informed rather than symptom-only approach to intervention.

The implications of this study extend with equal force into educational settings, particularly given that the sample was drawn predominantly from college, university, and early-career professional populations in Kerala, a state marked by near-universal smartphone ownership and digital literacy. College and university counselling centres stand to benefit considerably from incorporating brief screening measures for FOMO and cognitive distortions into existing student wellbeing frameworks, enabling the early identification of students who may be at heightened risk of developing compulsive doomscrolling patterns before these patterns become entrenched or begin to interfere meaningfully with academic performance, sleep, or emotional wellbeing. Beyond screening, the present findings provide a strong

empirical rationale for the development and integration of structured psychoeducational workshops within student orientation programmes and ongoing wellness initiatives, workshops that would ideally combine cognitive-awareness training, focused specifically on helping students recognise distorted thinking patterns as they arise during digital media consumption, with emotion-regulation skill-building aimed at reducing the anxious, FOMO-driven urge to remain continuously connected. Given the well-documented associations between doomscrolling and adverse outcomes such as anxiety, sleep disruption, and diminished academic performance established in the broader literature reviewed in this study, such preventive, campus-based interventions represent a genuinely high-leverage opportunity for educational institutions to safeguard student mental health. At a still broader societal level, the present findings contribute meaningfully to a growing body of evidence positioning doomscrolling as a genuine, psychologically consequential public health concern among Indian young adults, one that intersects directly with the country's already substantial mental health treatment gap. These findings offer a timely and empirically grounded basis for public health messaging and digital literacy campaigns aimed at raising awareness of the specific psychological risks, namely heightened anxiety, disrupted sleep, and a distorted, exaggerated perception of danger, associated with compulsive negative-content consumption, and this awareness is likely to carry particular urgency during periods of heightened collective uncertainty, such as public health emergencies, political instability, or economic crises, during which the present findings suggest that both FOMO-driven and cognitively distorted engagement with distressing content would be expected to intensify sharply. The findings also carry implications for those responsible for the design of digital platforms and content-recommendation algorithms, whose engagement-optimised architectures have been repeatedly shown to disproportionately amplify negative and threat-related material; policymakers and platform designers alike would do well to consider the demonstrated psychological costs of such amplification, particularly for a young adult population shown here to be vulnerable along both motivational and cognitive dimensions simultaneously.

Finally, the present study carries important implications for counselling psychology as a discipline in its own right, extending the field's traditional focus on developmental, relational, and clinical concerns into the increasingly urgent and rapidly evolving domain of cyberpsychology and digital mental health. As the psychological lives of young adults become ever more deeply intertwined with their digital environments, this study underscores the growing necessity for counselling psychologists to develop specific competencies in

identifying and treating digital-era presenting concerns, including doomscrolling, FOMO, and related patterns of problematic technology use, positioning digital wellbeing not as a peripheral or optional specialisation but as a legitimate and increasingly indispensable area of clinical attention within the broader profession moving forward.

5.5 Limitations of the Study

The present study has certain limitations that should be considered while interpreting and generalising the findings.

The first limitation concerns the composition and recruitment of the study sample. The present study relied on a purposive sample of 124 young adults drawn exclusively from Kerala, recruited through online platforms and personal networks. While this sampling approach allowed the researcher to efficiently reach participants meeting the study's specific age and social-media-usage criteria within the available time frame, it inherently limits the representativeness of the sample relative to the broader population of Indian young adults. Participants who were reachable through the researcher's personal and digital networks may differ systematically, in terms of educational background, socioeconomic status, digital literacy, or even baseline levels of FOMO and doomscrolling itself, from young adults who were not part of these networks. As a result, the findings of the present study may not generalise fully beyond the specific regional and demographic context from which the sample was drawn, and caution should be exercised in extending these conclusions to young adults residing in other Indian states, rural or lower-connectivity regions, or non-student, non-professional populations. A second limitation relates to the exclusive use of self-report instruments to measure doomscrolling behaviour, Fear of Missing Out, and cognitive distortions. Although the Doomscrolling Questionnaire, the Fear of Missing Out Scale, and the Cognitive Distortion Scale are each standardised instruments with established psychometric properties, self-report methodology remains inherently susceptible to biases such as social desirability, limited self-awareness of one's own digital habits, and inaccuracies in retrospective recall, particularly given that doomscrolling is, by definition, a behaviour that unfolds gradually and often outside of conscious awareness. Participants may therefore have under- or over-reported the frequency and severity of their own doomscrolling behaviour, introducing a degree of measurement imprecision that could not be corrected for within the present study's design. This limitation may have contributed, at least in part, to the significant deviation from normality observed in the doomscrolling scores during preliminary analysis.

A third and methodologically significant limitation concerns the cross-sectional nature of the research design. Because data were collected from all participants at a single point in time, the present study is able to establish that FOMO, cognitive distortions, and doomscrolling behaviour are significantly and meaningfully associated with one another, and that FOMO and cognitive distortions significantly predict doomscrolling in a statistical sense, but it is not able to establish the temporal or causal direction of these relationships. It remains equally plausible, based on the present design alone, that elevated FOMO and cognitive distortions lead to increased doomscrolling, that engaging in doomscrolling itself intensifies FOMO and reinforces distorted thinking patterns over time, or that the relationship between these variables is genuinely bidirectional and mutually reinforcing. This limitation should be borne firmly in mind when interpreting the practical and clinical implications discussed earlier in this chapter, as the present findings speak to statistical prediction rather than confirmed causal mechanism. Finally, a conceptual limitation of the present study lies in its treatment of cognitive distortions as a single, undifferentiated overall construct. While the Cognitive Distortion Scale used in this study yields a single composite score reflecting the general extent of distorted thinking, the broader theoretical literature, following Beck's original formulation and Burns' subsequent taxonomy, identifies at least ten distinct types of cognitive distortion, including catastrophising, overgeneralisation, mental filtering, emotional reasoning, and personalisation, among others. By examining cognitive distortions only at this aggregate level, the present study was unable to determine which specific types of distorted thinking bear the strongest relationship to doomscrolling behaviour. It remains possible, and indeed theoretically plausible based on the mechanisms discussed in Chapter II, that certain distortions, such as catastrophising or emotional reasoning, may be considerably more predictive of doomscrolling than others, such as personalisation or should statements, a level of specificity that the present study's chosen instrument and analytic approach were not equipped to capture.

5.6 Suggestions for Further Research

Based on the findings and limitations of the present study, the following suggestions are proposed for future research seeking to build upon and extend the current understanding of doomscrolling behaviour among young adults. Future studies would benefit considerably from employing larger and more demographically diverse samples than the 124 participants recruited in the present study. A larger sample would not only increase the statistical power available for detecting smaller effect sizes but would also permit more robust subgroup analyses across variables such as gender, age, educational background, and occupational status,

allowing researchers to determine whether the relative predictive strength of FOMO and cognitive distortions observed here holds consistently across different segments of the young adult population, or whether it varies meaningfully by demographic or socioeconomic context. Given that the present sample was drawn exclusively from Kerala, future research should also aim to recruit participants from a broader range of Indian states and cultural contexts, as well as from both urban and rural settings, in order to establish whether the present findings generalise across India's considerable regional and cultural diversity, or whether doomscrolling's psychological antecedents are shaped in part by localised social and digital ecosystems. A further important direction for future research concerns study design. The present study's cross-sectional design, while appropriate for establishing predictive relationships among variables measured at a single point in time, does not permit causal inference regarding the direction of the observed associations between FOMO, cognitive distortions, and doomscrolling behaviour. Longitudinal research designs, in which participants are assessed repeatedly over extended periods, would allow future researchers to examine whether FOMO and cognitive distortions genuinely precede and give rise to doomscrolling behaviour over time, or whether the relationship is better characterised as bidirectional or cyclical in nature, with doomscrolling itself potentially reinforcing and intensifying both FOMO and distorted thinking patterns through repeated exposure to distressing content. Such longitudinal designs would also enable researchers to examine the developmental trajectory of doomscrolling across adolescence and early adulthood, identifying critical periods during which intervention may be most effective. The present study, in common with the majority of existing research in this area, relied exclusively on standardised self-report instruments to assess doomscrolling behaviour, FOMO, and cognitive distortions. While self-report measures offer considerable practical advantages and have demonstrated good psychometric properties, they remain inherently susceptible to biases such as social desirability, limited self-awareness, and inaccurate recall of one's own digital media habits. Future research would therefore benefit substantially from incorporating objective measures of doomscrolling behaviour, such as smartphone application usage data, screen-time tracking, or passive digital sensing technologies, which could be used either to supplement or to validate self-reported scrolling patterns, thereby strengthening the ecological validity of future findings and reducing reliance on participants' subjective recall of their own behaviour. Beyond these methodological refinements, future studies should also examine the mediating and moderating mechanisms that may further clarify the pathway from FOMO and cognitive distortions to doomscrolling behaviour. Given that the present study's regression model explained just under one-third of

the variance in doomscrolling, a substantial proportion of variance remains unaccounted for, suggesting the presence of additional psychological variables worth investigating, including emotional regulation strategies, intolerance of uncertainty, psychological resilience, rumination, loneliness, and specific personality traits, several of which have already shown promising associations with doomscrolling in related studies reviewed in Chapter II. Testing these variables as potential mediators or moderators within the FOMO-cognitive distortions-doomscrolling framework established here could offer a considerably more nuanced and mechanistically complete account of why certain young adults become trapped in compulsive cycles of negative content consumption while others do not. Finally, most importantly from an applied standpoint, future research should move beyond correlational and predictive designs toward the development and empirical testing of targeted intervention strategies aimed at reducing doomscrolling behaviour. Given the present study's finding that cognitive distortions carry particularly strong predictive weight, randomised controlled trials evaluating the effectiveness of cognitive-behavioural interventions, mindfulness-based digital wellness programmes, and structured psychoeducational workshops in reducing doomscrolling and its associated psychological costs would represent a valuable and much-needed next step. Such intervention-focused research would not only test the practical, real-world applicability of the theoretical model established in the present study, but would also provide counselling psychologists, educational institutions, and mental health practitioners with empirically validated tools for helping young adults develop a healthier and more sustainable relationship with digital media.

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Appendix A. Informed Consent Form

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

I Athiya sherin a postgraduate student pursuing M.Sc. Counselling Psychology at Loyola College of Social Sciences, Sreekariyam, Thiruvananthapuram. As part of my academic research, I am conducting a study titled: “Fear of Missing Out and Cognitive Distortions as Predictors of Doomscrolling Behaviour Among Young Adults.” Your responses will contribute significantly to this research and help in understanding the psychological factors associated with excessive social media consumption among young adults. Participation in this study is completely voluntary, and all information provided will be kept strictly confidential and used solely for academic and research purposes. In case of any queries, feel free to contact: I kindly request you to answer all the questions honestly and sincerely. Thank you for your valuable time and participation.

I have read and understood the purpose of this study. I voluntarily agree to participate and understand that my responses will be kept confidential.

1. I Agree

2. I Do Not Agree

Appendix B. Sociodemographic Sheet

Demographic Details

Please provide the following basic personal and background details for research purposes. All responses will remain confidential.

1. Name / Initials _____

2. Age

- 18-21
- 22-25

3. Gender

- Male
- Female
- Other
- Not prefer to say

4. Educational qualification _____

5. What device do you primarily use for social media

- Phone
- Laptop
- Other

6. Average Time Spent on Social Media Per Day

- 1-2 Hour
- 3-4 hour
- 5-6 hour
- More than 6 hour

7. Frequency of Checking News/Social Media Updates

- Rarely
- Occasionally
- Frequently
- Very Frequently

8. Purpose of social media use

- Entertainment
- News
- Communication
- Academics

Appendix C.

Doomscrolling Scale

INSTRUCTIONS:

The survey is designed to investigate addictive behaviour. It is voluntary and anonymous. The questionnaire contains questions about the extent to which the following thoughts, feelings or actions are characteristic of you. Read each statement carefully and choose the number that corresponds to how you feel about yourself: 1 – never, 2 –sometimes, 3 – often, 4 – routinely, 5 – always. Answer all the questions.

Thank you for your time and answers!

1. I have subscriptions to online news sites and news update alerts that I check several times a day:

- 1 – Never
- 2 – Sometimes
- 3 – Often
- 4 – Routinely
- 5 – Always

2. When I watch the news on the Internet, I do not realise how quickly time passes:

- 1 – Never
- 2 – Sometimes
- 3 – Often
- 4 – Routinely
- 5 – Always

3. I watch the news trying to find answers to questions that interest me (how to solve a problem, how to make a difficult decision, how to help my loved ones):

- 1 – Never
- 2 – Sometimes
- 3 – Often

- 4 – Routinely

- 5 – Always

4. It has become a habit for me to start every morning by watching negative news and end the day late at night by watching such news on the Internet:

- 1 – Never

- 2 – Sometimes

- 3 – Often

- 4 – Routinely

- 5 – Always

5. It has become a habit for me to start every morning by watching negative news and end the day late at night by watching such news on the Internet:

- 1 – Never

- 2 – Sometimes

- 3 – Often

- 4 – Routinely

- 5 – Always

6. I am horrified by what I see on social media, but I cannot switch to anything else:

- 1 – Never

- 2 – Sometimes

- 3 – Often

- 4 – Routinely

- 5 – Always

7. I feel like I'm in a state of uncertainty and misunderstanding, following negative news or tension, as if something bad is about to happen:

- 1 – Never

- 2 – Sometimes

- 3 – Often
- 4 – Routinely
- 5 – Always

8. I try to follow negative events on social media to find out if they really happened:

- 1 – Never
- 2 – Sometimes
- 3 – Often
- 4 – Routinely
- 5 – Always

9. When I wake up at night, I check the news on the internet to see if anything bad has happened recently:

- 1 – Never
- 2 – Sometimes
- 3 – Often
- 4 – Routinely
- 5 – Always

10. I find it hard to stop watching negative news, reading comments and refraining from discussing them on social media:

- 1 -Never
- 2-Sometimes
- 3 -Often
- 4 - Routinely
- 5-Always

11. Recent negative news causes me to have eating disorders, anxiety, fear or irritability:

- 1 -Never

- 2 -Sometimes
- 3 -Often
- 4- Routinely
- 5 -Always

12. I pay close attention to news analysis and negative predictions on social media, and I believe that real information is hidden or suppressed from me:

- 1 -Never
- 2 -Sometimes
- 3 - Often
- 4 - Routinely
- 5 -Always

Appendix D.

Fear of missing out scale

Instructions:

Below is a collection of statements about your everyday experience. Using the scale provided please indicate how true each statement is of your general experiences. Please answer according to what really reflects your experiences rather than what you think your experiences should be. Please treat each item separately from every other item.

1 - Not at all true of me

2 - Slightly true of me

3 - Moderately true of me

4 - Very true of me

5- Extremely true of me

1. I fear others have more rewarding experiences than me.
2. I fear my friends have more rewarding experiences than me.
3. I get worried when I find out my friends are having fun without me.
4. I get anxious when I don't know what my friends are up to.
5. It is important that I understand my friends "in jokes".
6. Sometimes, I wonder if I spend too much time keeping up with what is going on.
7. It bothers me when I miss an opportunity to meet up with friends.
8. When I have a good time it is important for me to share the details online (e.g. updating status).
9. When I miss out on a planned get-together it bothers me.
10. When I go on vacation, I continue to keep tabs on what my friends are doing.

Appendix E.

Cognitive distortion scale

Read each statement carefully and choose any one option you find most appropriate. No answer is right or wrong. Don't spend too much of time on any statement. Answer all the statements.

Response scale: 1 – Strongly Agree | 2 – Agree | 3 – Neutral | 4 – Disagree | 5 – Strongly Disagree

	Item	1	2	3	4	5
1	People need to be roughed up once in a while to achieve their goals					
2	If I made a mistake, it's because I got mixed up with the wrong crowd					
3	People are so much in habit of lying that it has become difficult to trust anybody					
4	Even when people show disrespect to you, we have to be with them					
5	Everybody lies, it's no big deal					
6	How hard you try it makes no means to keep away from fights					
7	No matter how hard I try, I can't help getting in trouble					
8	Walking out of the fight is being a coward					
9	Sometimes lies are the result of asking too many questions by some people					
10	You shall get what you intend to, though that may hurt someone					
11	People are always trying to hassle me					
12	In the past, I have lied to get myself out of trouble					
13	I often feel that people always provoke me to fight with them					
14	Norms are for others					

	Item	1	2	3	4	5
15	I have settled all things that I have done					
16	All overrule the law, it's no big deal					
17	Only important thing is getting the need fulfilled					
18	Often when anybody known gets hurt, it's not because of my mistake					
19	I have done bad things that I haven't told people about					
20	I often lose my temper as people provoke me					
21	Even if I tell the truth people won't believe me					
22	Sometimes you have to hurt someone if you have a problem with them					
23	If ever I have lied to someone, that's my business					
24	If I really want to do something, I don't care if it's legal or not					
25	Even after trying so hard, I land up myself into trouble					