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Relationship between
Nomophobia, Doom Scrolling,
Psychological Distress and
Emotion Dysregulation among
Young Adults

by

Laiba Rasheed

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment for the
degree of Master of Science

in the

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Abstract

The increasing use of smartphones and digital technologies has made young adults more vulnerable to psychological and emotional challenges, particularly in the form of nomophobia and doomscrolling behaviors. These digital behaviors have been increasingly associated with emotional regulation difficulties and psychological distress, making it important to understand their interrelationships. Therefore, the present study aimed to examine the relationship between nomophobia, doomscrolling, psychological distress, and emotional dysregulation among young adults. A correlational research design was employed, and data were collected from university students of Rawalpindi and Islamabad, aged 18 to 25 years, using a convenience sampling technique. The total sample consisted of $N = 300$ participants. Standardized instruments were used, including the Nomophobia Questionnaire (NMP-Q), Doomscrolling Scale, Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10), and the Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS). Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS version 27 to assess the direction and strength of relationships among variables. The findings revealed a strong positive relationship between nomophobia and doomscrolling ($r = .74, p < .001$), indicating that individuals with higher levels of nomophobia were more likely to engage in repetitive consumption of negative online content. Nomophobia also showed a small but significant positive relationship with difficulties in emotion regulation ($r = .20, p < .01$), while doomscrolling similarly demonstrated a significant positive relationship with difficulties in emotion regulation ($r = .24, p < .01$). However, no significant relationship was found between nomophobia and psychological distress, nor between doomscrolling and psychological distress. Overall, these findings suggest that nomophobia and doomscrolling are more strongly associated with emotional regulation difficulties than with psychological distress among young adults. Practically, the study emphasizes the need for awareness programs and interventions aimed at improving healthy smartphone use and enhancing emotion regulation skills among young adults.

Keywords: Nomophobia, Doom scrolling, Psychological Distress, Emotional Dysregulation.

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Abbreviations

DS	Doom scrolling
DERS	Difficulty in emotion regulation scale
KPD	Kessler Psychological Distress
NMP	Nomophobia

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

The rapid advancement of technology and the increasing popularity of smartphones have significantly reformed the way individuals communicate with one another, interact with their environment, and acquire information ([Sa'idah and Aryani, 2025](#)). Smartphones are once considered a luxury, have now become an important part of daily life. Globally, it is expected that mobile phone users will increase up to 7.7 billion by 2027 ([Safaria et al., 2024](#)), highlighting the widespread dependency on digital devices. In Pakistan, the number of mobile phone consumers has also tremendously increased to 164.9 million in January, 2020 ([Saleem et al., 2022](#)), indicating a rapid increase in digital connectivity. Pakistan ranks 11th on the list of emerging countries that experienced a significant increase in mobile phone use ([Farooq et al., 2022](#)).

Modern smartphones are widely used for social networking, education, entertainment, and news consumption, particularly among young individuals, mainly due to their accessibility and rich content availability ([Eichenberg et al., 2024](#)). Research showed that when it comes to getting their first mobile phone, the average age is 12, with a significant proportion, approximately 54.3% of participants, spending 3–5 hours and 22.5% of participants spending 5–10 hours a day on screen, and on average, 44 times a day they check notifications ([Santl et al., 2022](#)). These

patterns suggested increasing behavioral dependency on digital technology among young individuals. (Gnardellis et al., 2023). Even though mobile phones have facilitated our lives a lot, research on excessive device usage also showed negative consequences on individual life that can be psychological, physical, behavioral, social or affective in nature (Farooq et al., 2022).

In particular, excessive dependence and spending significant long periods on digital media have been responsible for numerous psychosocial and behavioral problems like nomophobia and doomscrolling (Sa'idah and Aryani, 2025). Also, there is increasing evidence that identifies problematic use of mobiles is linked with severity of anxiety and depressive symptoms, low self-esteem, irritability and emotional dysregulation (Rao et al., 2023).

In this context, nomophobia surfaced recently as the fear or anxiety of being without one's mobile phone or being unable to access its functions (Alhusseini et al., 2025). Rather than being a entirely new phenomenon, nomophobia has gained increasing empirical attention in past few years and considered as a modern expression of smartphone dependency (Gnardellis et al., 2023; Thompson and Saleem, 2025). Over reliance on smart phones creates tension and extreme worry (Khan et al., 2024). People with nomophobia can be identified with particular symptoms like they never turning off their phones, constantly checking for texts or call notifications, taking their mobile phones everywhere, using phones when not appropriate, and deliberately missing real-world interactions (Afreen, 2024; Shabahang et al., 2024).

In severe cases, people with nomophobia can experience the physical symptoms of anxiety and worry when the phone is out of reach, like shortness of breath, panic attacks, sweating and shivering, neck pain, headache (Afreen, 2024). Symptoms of nomophobia share characteristics with anxiety disorders, particularly anticipatory anxiety or panic when a person is separated from their mobile phone (Huang et al., 2026). People having nomophobia feel better and validated when they receive positive feedback on social media, while people who are more adaptable and

have more emotional control are less likely to display nomophobia ([Qutishat et al., 2020](#)). Alongside nomophobia, doomscrolling refers to the behavior of continuously consuming distressing or negative news on digital platforms, often leading to emotional distress and anxiety. People engage in doom scrolling even when the news provokes emotional discomfort or irrational worry([Munir, 2024](#)). People engage in doom scrolling to search information to have a sense of control and to prepare themselves to navigate crisis situations ([Scammon, 2025](#)).

These negative behaviors (nomophobia and doomscrolling) are interlinked as both increase digital dependency, psychological distress and emotional dysregulation. Psychological distress refers to the emotional suffering that an individual experiences, typically associated with feelings of anxiety, depression, and general emotional discomfort. It can result from exposure to stressful life events, lack of control and can have negative effects on mental health ([Kessler et al., 2002](#)). Psychological distress, including anxiety, stress and depression symptoms, is also common among young adults ([Gebremariam et al., 2023](#)) for which technological factors are recognized as one of the major contributors ([Abbasi et al., 2025](#)).

Emotion dysregulation refers to difficulties in managing and responding to emotional experiences in an adaptive way. It involves challenges in regulating emotional responses, especially when those emotions become overwhelming or when individuals cannot manage emotional experiences effectively ([Gratz and Roemer, 2004](#)). While healthy emotions regulation involves processes like assessing emotions based on one's environment and managing them for having favorable outcomes eventually behavior is regulated that is an emotional response ([Sequeira et al., 2026](#)).

Emotional regulation is essential for behavioral management as well as mental and physical health ([Cui et al., 2024](#)). Symptoms of emotional dysregulation include lack of awareness and clarity about one's and others' emotions, impulsive behavior rather than goal directed behavior, maladaptive coping strategies and avoidance of emotions ([Squires et al., 2021](#)). In Pakistani culture, healthy emotional expression

is usually limited by social norms which makes interlink between digital dependency and emotional dysregulation more complex (Batool et al., 2025). Thus, examining emotional dysregulation in relation with doomscrolling and nomophobia specific to Pakistani culture is essential to understand the difference in experiences as well as to develop culturally appropriate interventions. In the West, the excessive use of smartphones and exposure to unpleasant content on the internet can affect emotional regulation, resulting in increased emotional instability (Safaria et al., 2024).

Emotional dysregulation impacts the healthy expression of emotions thus, impacting social communication. Ultimately, physical communication is avoided and online communication is preferred which exacerbates digital consumption (Naz et al., 2025). In this context, maladaptive emotion regulation strategies play an essential role in shaping digital behaviours patterns. Expressive suppression is a form of maladaptive emotional coping which aggravates nomophobia (Cui et al., 2024).

In collectivistic cultures like Pakistan, people use maladaptive emotional regulation like expressive suppression because it plays a positive role for their culture. In collectivistic culture the goal is shared harmony and to avoid conflict and this emotional regulation promotes it so, Asians are more likely to use expressive suppression (Batool et al., 2025; Cui et al., 2024). This emotions suppression creates emotional instability, increases digital engagement, lowers in-person communication and increases nomophobia and doomscrolling (Zhang et al., 2021).

In Western culture, people believe in emotional expression, which promotes resilience and social connection and is negatively related to adverse digital behaviors (Cui et al., 2024). Therefore, cultural differences should be considered in future research regarding the relationship between emotional dysregulation and psychological health. Evidence from Pakistan also suggested excessive mobile use and doomscrolling can lead to chronic emotional dysregulation, higher psychological distress and reduced mental well-being (Batool et al., 2025). Conversely, people having low emotional stability are at higher risk of doomscrolling and nomophobia

(Naz et al., 2025). As, people having problems in coping with adverse emotional states often use the Internet and social media to relax, which can likely lead to addictive behaviors and result in increased levels of nomophobia (Santl et al., 2022). Inability in regulating emotions reinforces maladaptive coping mechanisms, creating a constant cycle between digital use and psychological deterioration (Hameed, 2025). This interdependence highlights the need to investigate these factors collectively.

In Pakistan, young adults make up a significant portion of the population and they have highest fear of missing out (FOMO) and social desirability making them more susceptible to doomscrolling and nomophobia (Anchan et al., 2025), thus, examining the interlink between these factors is essential. The increased use of mobile phones and doomscrolling, combined with mental health stigma and low socio-emotional education in Pakistan, increases the risk of maladaptive coping strategies (Iqbal, 2023).

Past studies in Pakistan highlighted that digital over consumption is correlated with loneliness, emotional dysregulation, low mental wellbeing (Ayaz et al., 2025). Another study in Pakistan, also found that young adults reported higher levels of doomscrolling, social media addiction which caused higher levels of anxiety, depression, lower self-esteem (Hawwa, 2025; Rahman et al., 2025).

Thus, examining the association between nomophobia, doomscrolling, emotional dysregulation and psychological distress among young adults is essential for understanding psychological cost of digital lifestyle.

Thus, this research is significant to fill literature gaps by examining these variables in Pakistani culture which is more collectivistic and has limited mental health resources while most studies conducted earlier were from Western individualistic cultures, with more accessibility to psychological assistance (Nguyen et al., 2022). Understanding these relationships can inform culturally appropriate interventions based on emotional regulation, psychoeducation to promote healthy technology use among young adults thus, improving youth wellbeing.

1.2 Gap Analysis

Although nomophobia, doomscrolling, psychological distress, and emotional dysregulation have already been the focus of many previous studies as separate factors, there is still a lack of such single study that explores the synergetic effect of all these elements within a unified framework, especially in the context of young adults in Pakistan ([Safaria et al., 2024](#); [Anand et al., 2022](#)).

There is limited empirical evidence on the association between nomophobia and doomscrolling, while it is plausible that people who have higher scores on nomophobia have higher anxiety and stress so they may engage in excessive doomscrolling as a coping mechanism and to seek reassurance ([Antonyamy and Parameswari, 2026](#)). Similarly, continuous exposure to negative news further intensify anxiety and psychological stress which in turn increases nomophobia, a fear of missing out any important information. They both then impact psychological well-being negatively ([Anchan et al., 2025](#)).

The existing literature has largely focused on adolescents, medical students or even the general population, thus failing to address the psychological vulnerabilities of university student age 18 to 25, who represent one of the most digitally immersed and psychologically sensitive age groups ([Desouza et al., 2024](#)).

A recent study examined that up to 90% of the undergraduate students have moderate to severe symptoms of nomophobia, with 42.66 percent experiencing depressed mood and psychological distress ([Santl et al., 2022](#)). However, the combined psychological effects of nomophobia and doomscrolling remain understudied, particularly in the context of the South Asian communities ([Antonyamy and Parameswari, 2026](#)).

Most of the studies focusing on problematic digital use particularly doomscrolling, were conducted during the time of COVID-19 pandemic and only news related to it ([Akat, 2025](#)). But based on the available literature, young adults still have high

mobile phones usage for their different activities, news consumption and have low mental health ([Anchan et al., 2025](#)). Doomscrolling behavior is still present after pandemic due to persistent fear of any similar uncertain situation that can occur and to prepare themselves to navigate that through early information they get through media ([George et al., 2024](#)).

So, current study examines the relationships between doomscrolling, nomophobia, emotional dysregulation and psychological distress outside the context of pandemic. So, digital consumption behaviors can also be understood in absence of a global pandemic. Another important research gap is that doomscrolling and nomophobia are relatively a new terms, most of the past research, that involved scrolling through negative news or fear of being without phones, used terms like problematic media use, digital dependency or media exposure to negative news which were more umbrella terms ([Sharpe et al., 2026](#)). While other researches on doomscrolling and nomophobia are in exploratory phase and as the terms are generally new most people are unaware that they have these behaviors and their consequences on their wellbeing ([Gnardellis et al., 2023](#); [Antonysamy and Parameswari, 2026](#)). Therefore, a greater empirical evidence is needed to explore, examine, and understand the most determining and correlating factors that impact these contemporary pathology.

Moreover, most existing studies are conducted in Western regions, whose media influence, and online behavior differ significantly from those of Pakistani youth ([Safaria et al., 2024](#)). All these limitations regarding population focus, digital behaviors, psychological challenges, contextual relevance and variables integration highlight a significant gap in the available literature.

Therefore, research is needed to examine the interrelated impacts of nomophobia and doomscrolling to psychological distress and emotional dysregulation, particularly among the population of Pakistani university students. Empirical evidence should be collected from Pakistan, which has a collectivistic culture, high societal expectations and involvement. While such digital habits became incongruent with

Pakistan's culture of social connectedness by increasing loneliness, hours spend online, emotional dysregulation and psychological distress (Nguyen et al., 2022). Such research is essential for developing culturally competent mental health and digital behavioral interventions (Shiraly et al., 2024)

1.3 Problem Statement

Nowadays, it's quite common to see people using mobile applications in public and private spaces, given the popularity and accessibility of smartphones (Notara et al., 2023). This excessive consumption is particularly more prevalent among young adults because they use it for studies, entertainment, and to get updates, also (Scammon, 2025). Although smartphones provide significant advantages, excessive and uncontrollable use has been associated with negative consequences for mental health and behavioral functioning (Farooq et al., 2022).

In this context, excessive digital engagement has contributed to the development of psychological constructs "Nomophobia" which is the fear of staying without mobile phones, (Alhusseini et al., 2025) and "Doomscrolling" which is the consumption of stressful news compulsively (Ayaz et al., 2025). These constructs are significantly linked with emotional dysregulation and psychological distress according to past evidence (Naeem et al., 2023).

Pakistan estimated population is approximately 241 million, with more than 36 million individuals currently enrolled in colleges and universities (Mashood, 2025). Research conducted in Pakistan examined that nearly 89 percent of university students have severe symptoms of nomophobia, highlighting a high level of dependency and anxiety related to digital disconnection (Gnardellis et al., 2023) & (Ayaz et al., 2025). Additionally, a higher percentage of students engaged in doomscrolling, which is a behavioral tendency marked by compulsively consuming negative or distressing news content (Batool et al., 2025).

This behavior became especially prevalent during the COVID-19 pandemic, as continuous exposure health issues, increasing death rates, rising mortality rates,

and lockdown-related uncertainties contributed to heightened depression, anxiety, emotional instability (Price et al., 2022). The interlink between these digital behaviors and maladaptive emotional coping techniques further increases psychological distress levels (Abdoli et al., 2023). While Doomscrolling and nomophobia are emerging as a national phenomenon with increased digital devices penetration among young adults (Antonysamy and Parameswari, 2026).

However, despite increasing recognition of such behaviors, limited research has examined their combined influence within a single integrated model, particularly in Pakistan. (Usman et al., 2025). However it is well-documented that the act is pervasive among youth who use the internet, and has been highly correlated to psychological difficulties such as increased stress, anxiety, and cognitive fatigue (Zhang et al., 2021). This increasing reliance on smart phones and digital media is causing various psychological and social problems among students (Sheikh et al., 2024).

In current era, higher dependency on mobile phones is one of the most significant non drug dependencies as particularly young adults spend more than 9 hours on screens (Schwaiger, 2020). During this era, where there are more frequent calamities as compared to past, people are more likely to spend more time online to seek information during negative events (Kartol et al., 2023).

Due to these behaviors and increasing crisis, wars depression, anxiety and stress continue to increase which need more work and interventions (Kartol et al., 2023). When compared to drug dependencies, compulsive digital behaviors also cause physiological and psychological effects like strong negative emotions, a sense of loss, irritability, and physical expression of anger and sadness (Gnardellis et al., 2023). Constant exposure to harmful online content materials and the fear of being digitally disconnected are leading to emotional instability, sleep disturbance, and declining academic performance (Taskin et al., 2024).

A study in Pakistan also showed that constant exposure to online overwhelming content creates feelings of uncertainty, which leads to higher levels of worry

and tension. Accordingly, nomophobia and doomscrolling are associated with increased anxiety and stress, instead of being interpreted as direct causal predictors (Hawwa, 2025). Understanding this link is critical as these digital behaviors are also weakening the student abilities, impairing their capacity to maintain healthy real-life social relationships, reducing emotional resilience, increasing social anxiety, isolation (Barends et al., 2023). As digital dependency constantly increases, nomophobia is not only destroying individual mental health but also pose severe risks to educational and social development of young adults in Pakistan (Safaria et al., 2024).

Therefore, current study aims to examine the link between nomophobia, doomscrolling, psychological distress and emotional dysregulation among young adults in Pakistan, addressing a critical research gap of understanding emerging digital behaviors and mental wellbeing in South Asian culture.

1.4 Research Objectives for this Study

Objectives of the study are as follows:

- i. To examine the relationship between nomophobia, doom scrolling, psychological distress, and emotional dysregulation among young adults.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Nomophobia and doom scrolling are problematic digital consumption behaviors among young adults have gained increasing attention in research, particularly after COVID-19 ([Strasser et al., 2022](#)). In this area, many studies have explored the relationship of these variables with mental health and how they are impacting youth. Nomophobia is viewed as a behavioral addiction to online social network, thus these devices become a source of relaxation for people ([Abdoli et al., 2023](#)). Thus, nomophobic people view online interactions more comfortable as compared to face-to-face communication which further withdraw them from the physical world ([Squires et al., 2021](#)). Digital media not only sets trends but it also creates a negative side that it creates a digital dependency reinforced by the social platform's algorithms. A study by [Celik et al. \(2023\)](#) also showed that participants having nomophobia displayed disengagement, denial, self-blame, low mood, self-distraction, venting when face any stressor.

2.0.1 Nomophobia as a Problematic Digital Consumption Behavior

Nomophobia has not been formally recognized as phobia in the DSM-V or ICD-11 but gained increasing attention of researchers as past evidence through 43 studies and 18 countries indicated that nomophobia is widespread as 26% people reported

mild nomophobia symptoms, 51% reported moderate while 21% had severe nomophobia according to their self-reported distress ([Al-Mamun et al., 2025](#)). Data from the neighboring country India which has cultural similarities with Pakistan also showed that 72% of the medical students and almost 100% of the college students had nomophobia ([Srivastava et al., 2025](#)) Even people who are not currently experiencing symptoms of nomophobia, a high population is at risk of developing nomophobia ([Santl et al., 2022](#)) thus, emphasizing the need for accurate definition, clinical diagnosis and further exploration of correlating factors ([Al-Mamun et al., 2025](#)). From recent data it is evident that the use of smart phones has been increased largely with approximately 5.28 billion smart phone users globally in 2025 ([Czekalska, 2025](#)). Smart phones use is found highest among young adults of age 18-29 and most of them are students ([Amez, 2020](#)). This widespread use of the digital technology in everyday life has dramatically shaped the psychological well-being of young adults all over the world. As nomophobic people find it difficult to switch off their phones, they keep phones close even while sleeping, in severe cases, people carry extra batteries, chargers or even more than one mobile phones. They experience feelings of stress, discomfort, or panic when separated from their phones or are unable to use those ([Afreen, 2024](#)).

According to [Dolapoğlu et al. \(2025\)](#), there are multiple factors contributing to the development of nomophobia including the ring anxiety which is a need to constantly check phones for messages and calls; overexpenditure on mobile phones; disturbed sleep due to uncontrollable mobile usage and uneasiness in turning mobile phones off. Time spend on mobile phones per day is seen to be positively correlated with nomophobia ([Kukreti et al., 2021](#)).

Sometimes loneliness and stress also contribute in nomophobia as people do excessive use of mobile phones to distract themselves or find alternative gratification ([Counts et al., 2023](#)). Persistent need for connection results in compulsive mobile checking that increases emotional dysregulation, irritability and psychological distress ([Safaria and Suyono, 2026](#)). As past evidence found that people who have more followers and friends online have more nomophobia symptoms than those

having more in-person social connections (Vagka et al., 2024). People experience nomophobia due to lack of self-control and discipline or when they have no adaptive resources for healing, relaxation or entertainment (Srivastava et al., 2025).

Continuous accessibility to the online platforms further increases emotional dependency that intensify the risk of stress and mental health problems (Batool et al., 2025). Constraining social media apps use to 30 minutes can increase the psychological wellbeing and reduce symptoms of nomophobia (Vagka et al., 2024).

Higher scores on the nomophobia scale are linked with higher self-blame, denial, strong negative emotions, avoidance, psychological distress and negative coping strategies (Guillari et al., 2026). Nomophobia is associated with higher emotional disturbances like ruminating over past, withdrawal and aggressive behavior (Abdoli et al., 2023). Using a smartphone excessively is a growing issue associated to more psychological problems in the general population. In a recent study conducted in Saudi Arabia, 66.6% of participants had moderate nomophobia and 48.7% displayed some signs of psychological distress (Alhusseini et al., 2025). Among Indian young adults also, nomophobia is seen to be linked with higher scores on anxiety and depression scales (Srivastava et al., 2025).

Using mobile devices till late night keeps brain cells active and prevents mind from fully resting phase. This increases next day stress and exaggerated levels of anxiousness also physiological effects including neck and shoulder pain, headache (George et al., 2024). A study conducted by Notara et al. (2023) also showed that severe levels of nomophobia is linked with muscles pain, hearing and vision issues and psychosomatic symptoms.

Another study conducted in Pakistan shows that most Pakistani undergraduate students do not hesitate to call themselves nomophobic, with about 90% identified as having moderate to severe symptoms (Farooq et al., 2022). Because of nomophobia, an increasing number of young adults are experiencing anxiety, depression and stress (Gnardellis et al., 2023). As, individual with excessive smartphones

addiction finds it difficult to regulate their emotions effectively which can make them act without thinking first and also lead to a lot of stress ([Shahid et al., 2022](#)).

Young people are most prone to nomophobia as they are more familiar with these devices and technology than people of other age groups and have a constant need to fit in ([Notara et al., 2023](#)). Young adults are in phase of exploring their identity and have more intense social comparison, thus nomophobia can have more behavioral consequences at this age ([Antonyamy and Parameswari, 2026](#)). In Pakistan, nomophobia the fear of not having a mobile phone has been found to be quite prevalent among university students. A study conducted in Pakistan by [Shiraly et al. \(2024\)](#) found that all the participants showed some degree of nomophobia, with 59.4% showing moderate severity and 26.1% showing severe severity. Likewise, 48.57% of undergraduate students had moderate nomophobia, and 40.88% had severe levels in Pakistan.

These results highlight the prevalence of nomophobia among Pakistani youth ([Singh and Narula, 2024](#)) Based on study findings, 90% of students have moderate nomophobia and 42.66% have severe symptoms. Among university students, 52.1% in Malaysia, while 37% in Indonesia, have nomophobia. This situation may cause people to use their phones excessively for emotional relief ([Santl et al., 2022](#)). Difficulty with emotional regulation may cause people to become more susceptible to nomophobia ([Safaria et al., 2024](#)) because it is so widespread; researchers must focus on the psychological consequences of this maladaptive behavior.

A study was conducted on the relationship between nomophobia and psychological distress among Saudi Arabian young adults. The level of nomophobia was found to be moderate, and psychological distress was mild among young adults. A higher percentage of Saudi nationals, males, and people from the Eastern region scored high. The study found that excessive smartphone use can increase mental health risks ([Santl et al., 2022](#)). Research examined the relationship between nomophobia, depression, and insomnia among the general public in Saudi Arabia. The finding of this study is that 97% of people suffer from nomophobia,

47.3% suffer from depression, and 37.1% of people suffer from insomnia. This study found that excessive mobile phone and social media usage was associated with a greater risk of nomophobia. However, the primary study focuses on depression, nomophobia, and insomnia, leaving a gap in understanding the relationship between nomophobia and other digital behaviors ([Sheikh et al., 2024](#)). As the prevalence of nomophobia remained under explored among Bangladeshi young adults, ([Al-Mamun et al., 2023](#)) investigated nomophobia prevalence and inter-related factors to it. A cross-sectional study design was used to study the link between nomophobia, insomnia, depression, smartphone addiction and Facebook addiction. Quantitative surveys were used to collect data from university students.

Findings showed 39.5% students had severe nomophobia, whereas 56.1% had moderate nomophobia and 9.1% had mild nomophobia. First year students showed higher levels of nomophobia than those in other years. Time spent per hour on phones showed as a first-year significant predictor of nomophobia. While depression, insomnia, Facebook and mobile addiction were positively correlated with nomophobia. The study recommended the management of smartphone usage may reduce nomophobia symptoms over time. Further study provided a foundation for future research on nomophobia and other psychological impacts it can have, and also its prevalence in other Asian countries ([Laçin and Kiye, 2025](#)).

[Desouza et al. \(2024\)](#) examined the increasing prevalence of nomophobia, which is becoming more common among medical students due to their excessive use of mobile devices in education and communication. The finding of this study revealed that 90% of medical students aged between 18 to 30 were struggling with nomophobia, which negatively impacted their communication skills and education. The gap found in this study does not discuss mental health challenges due to restricted digital behaviors in medical students.

[Santl et al. \(2022\)](#), examined the relationship between nomophobia and emotional dysregulation in Croatian university students. The study found that nomophobia is closely related to anxiety, stress, loneliness, and emotional dysregulation.

The finding indicated that 80% of nomophobia caused the psychological symptoms such as anxiety, emotional dysregulation, and stress. However, the study did not explore the negative consequences that caused these symptoms. In past research evidence, nomophobia the term first introduced in 2008 in UK, was not just as behavioral habit but as a psychological control reducing overall well-being by maximizing symptoms like anxiety, depression, stress and social withdrawal. With increasing prevalence of smartphone use, nomophobia received increasing research attention with almost 21% young adults having severe level of nomophobia. Many studies have focused on causes and psychological impacts of nomophobia but very few had focused on its link with psychological distress ([Eichenberg et al., 2024](#)).

This research conducted a meta-analysis of past studies on nomophobia. Nomophobia was seen as highly prevalent among young adults, particularly students. Almost 99.3% students reported them as nomophobic, while 23.6% had severe nomophobia. Significantly higher nomophobia was seen among adolescents and those in the young adulthood stage. Among all past studies, there was a significant link between nomophobia and anxiety, stress, and depression. ([Handa, 2025](#)). [Celik et al. \(2023\)](#) further examined the prevalence of nomophobia, anxiety and burnout among young adults' medical students. As, medical students had very stressful routine and long lectures, which can make them feel anxious. Preparation and first-year medical students were selected from university in Syria.

Participants completed surveys on nomophobia, anxiety and burnout. Results indicated that the majority of the students 82.9% had nomophobia and felt uncomfortable when they were unable to use their phones. 79.4% reported having anxiety. Most of the students reported less attention on lectures and assignments due to intrusive thoughts and constant urge to use mobile phones. While 88.3% also felt emotionally exhausted due to nomophobia, anxiety and lessons.

Most of the students in Syria experienced nomophobia, anxiety and burnout due to their stressful living conditions, findings may differ in other cultural contexts and better living conditions. The war situation in Syria had negatively affected

young adults' mental health. Study emphasized on development of better educational curriculum for students and better policy making to reduce stressors and nomophobia behavior ([Abu-Elenin et al., 2025](#)).

2.0.2 Doomscrolling as a Problematic Digital Consumption Behavior

According to the American Psychological Association (2022) 56% of young adults experience increased stress due to information overload, mainly due to news and social media. This emphasizes how the doomscrolling behavior exacerbates mental health problems among young adults due to an overstimulated digital environment. Doomscrolling is defined as when many people are unaware that they are engaging in doomscrolling while having many symptoms of it ([Shabahang et al., 2024](#)). Thus, further research is needed to understand the prevalence of doomscrolling behavior in developing country like Pakistan.

Social media apps like Instagram, YouTube, TikTok provide entertainment to their audience but now have become a source of news consumption especially for young adults. As they provide real life updates but persistent viewing negative content causes cognitive distress and overload ([Scammon, 2025](#)). Likewise, these psychological association with doomscrolling also influence physiological health. Continuous exposure to negative content heightens the sympathetic nervous system contributing to mental strain ([Abbasi et al., 2025](#)). As a result, psychological stress response remains active which increases cortisol and adrenaline levels in body which causes anxiety, emotional dysregulation and distress ([George et al., 2024](#)).

Doomscrolling also has an adverse relationship on sleep, concentration, and interpersonal relationships ([Scammon, 2025](#)). Doomscrolling causes a person to see the future pessimistically ([Kartol et al., 2023](#)). The compulsive nature of doomscrolling traps the user in a cycle of negative information, which makes recovery difficult and increases anxiety. When anxiety is increased they again engage in

doomscrolling to relieve it ([Abdoli et al., 2023](#)). Doomscrolling creates a brain rot which means the psychological and emotional challenges it's creates ([Hawwa, 2025](#)). Cognitive biases are also involved in doomscrolling, as people tend to focus on negative information only as it can help them in survival while filtering out positive ones, also over consumption of news can cause cognitive overload which can lead to more stress and anxiety ([Anchan et al., 2025](#)).

Digital media algorithms are also a major cause of increased doomscrolling. Gadgets, mobile phones and news feed are designed in a way to make user engagement more prolonged by using their interests ([Ang, 2025](#)). Algorithms are designed on the bases of user engagement, when people engage with negative content the algorithm redirect similar content in their feed based on their interest. Thus, creating a cycle of compulsive engagement with the negative news ([Batool et al., 2025](#)).

Doomscrolling is usually framed as individual driven behavior but it is the system and algorithmic determinism also that increases the engagement with negative content without considering hyper consumption and negative effects ([Hawwa, 2025](#)). Another study showed that negative emotional language in content was more likely to be clicked ([Abdoli et al., 2023](#)). This indicates that negative news thumbnails tend to attract the individual attention more, thus leading into the never-ending cycle of doomscrolling. Moreover, people displaying higher scores on depressive symptoms tend to engage in negative content and doomscrolling more often on online platforms ([Gnardellis et al., 2023](#)).

Also, most of the times news on social sites is negatively communicated and often risk is exaggerated than actual which creates more worry among viewers ([Scammon, 2025](#)). Online news is difficult to distinguish as correct or incorrect, misleading news creates more confusion fear and anxiety ([Kartol et al., 2023](#)). This uncertainty of news accuracy, enables people to read more about it and look for clarification content. So, they keep scrolling and reading articles one by one to seek more information and minimize fear of missing out ([Batool et al., 2025](#)). This makes a person to compulsively view negative feed which can add up to their

anxiety. Presence of offline social network also contributes to doomscrolling behavior. As, people having strong offline social network and support are more likely to use adaptive coping strategies rather than doomscrolling in times of crisis ([Antonyamy and Parameswari, 2026](#)).

Nomophobia can also be a cause of problematic social media use through doomscrolling. As, there is significant positive correlation exists between nomophobia and problematic social media use. The continuous use of mobile phones cause cognitive overload, emotional dysregulation, and reward-based dependency on these digital apps which lead to compulsive behaviors like doomscrolling ([Li, 2023](#)).

This construct gained attention during the time of COVID-19 as compulsive news exposure increased to stay informed about the pandemic ([Akram et al., 2025](#)). According to American Psychological Association survey (2022) 36% people reported they persistently view pandemic related news on social media. This study suggests that those doomscrolling behaviors can be still present nowadays ([George et al., 2024](#)). American psychiatric association survey (2022) reported that 72% participants had increased anxiety and hopelessness directly linked to COVID-19 news consumed on hourly basis.

[Elhabashy et al. \(2025\)](#) examined the psychological influence on Egyptian teenagers resulting from media exposure to the Gaza Strip conflict. This research employed a cross-sectional study design. The results showed that 61.5% of the teenagers experienced depression, 57% dealt with anxiety, and 30% faced stress. The research indicated that ongoing exposure to news and media related to war results in heightened mental health issues. These findings reveal adolescents' susceptibility to emotional turmoil triggered by media exposure. The study did not investigate the coping strategies and long-term mental health issues faced by those exposed to conflict. Past evidence also indicated that doom scrolling is more related to anticipatory anxiety than general anxiety ([Shiraly et al., 2024](#)). Other studies define doomscrolling as passive social media use, described as engaging, leading to lengthy browsing and scrolling sessions without the realization of time and creates

loss of concentration and persistence in other tasks (Nguyen et al., 2022). While self-description by people says that it is a compulsive information seeking that is timely but also negative (Singh and Narula, 2024). Thus, due to nature of news-feed there is no terminal stage of doomscrolling (Scammon, 2025).

In Pakistan increased geopolitical tensions have contributed in panic attacks and anxiety disorders among those repeatedly exposed to traumatic online content (Iqbal, 2023). For example, increased exposure to global conflicts, like Palestine-Israel, is increased through digital media which induces vicarious trauma identifying key factors of helplessness, sadness and guilt, highlighting the adverse effects of digital media viewing on psychological well-being (Farooq et al., 2022). Also, during recent tensions between Pakistan and India, public interest in national security increased doomscrolling which resulted in socio-emotional crisis in non-combatants (Hameed, 2025).

Another study in Turkey found that after earthquakes in 2023, people are accompanied with fear of future earthquakes and automatic thoughts related to it which increased doomscrolling to stay informed, also PTSD, stress and anxiety were further increased (Kartol et al., 2023). Mostly in past research doomscrolling has been examined during crisis like COVID-19 or wars because naturally during crisis people want to be stay informed but also feel guilty for continuously feeding minds with negative information. But they are put in a compulsive cycle of searching this content which reinforces anxiety and stress (Hawwa, 2025).

Recent evidence from Karachi showed that media students who frequently engage in doomscrolling have higher rates of emotional exhaustion, psychological distress and hopelessness, thus showing a negative association between over consumption of digital content and mental wellbeing (Usman et al., 2025). Among Turkish adults, excessive doomscrolling was associated with less mindfulness and greater stress as a result of exposure to traumatic news (Taskin et al., 2024). Similarly, during COVID-19 pandemic doomscrolling and doomsurfing in Pakistan increased among active Internet users (Shabahang et al., 2024). Reports suggest that online

news exposure increased to 50% during lockdowns, ([Anand et al., 2022](#)).

Such behaviors, influenced by cognitive bias exacerbate emotional risk, anxiety and irregular sleep patterns. Continuous exposure to frequent news related to climate crisis also increased doomscrolling among youth that further increases mental health risks ([Dominguez et al., 2025](#)). When Australian students are exposed to online negative content, they reported higher levels of anxiety, depression, stress and PTSD ([Elhabashy et al., 2025](#)). Therefore, especially in politically unstable and frequently conflicted regions like South Asia, digital behaviors and how they influence mental health must be examined for targeted awareness and prevention.

However, earlier doomscrolling was seen as a short-term behavior occurring at times of crisis but now recent studies have found that it can be formed into a regular habit ([Anchan et al., 2025](#)). This transformation of doomscrolling from a purposeful behavior to a compulsive habit has negative effects on psychological and physiological health ([Antonysamy and Parameswari, 2026](#)). But no doubt social changes like economic uncertainty, large-scale wars, political instability, etc., result in an increase of negative content on media and user engagement with them ([Akat, 2025](#)).

Transformation of doomscrolling into a long-term habit includes various psychological processes like negative or catastrophizing bias, as people tend to focus more on negative news or exaggerate the threats ([Shahid et al., 2022](#)). Social media presents emotional charged or threatening content to use this natural instinct for increasing user engagement. Fear of missing out (FOMO) often intensifies during crisis situations as people worry about overlooking critical information or news; this ongoing sense of worry gradually turns into doomscrolling. ([Batool et al., 2025](#)).

Social media provides news updates and likes as rewards for doomscrolling behavior which further increases the behavior. A reinforcement loop is created as anxiety leads a person to check for updates which further exacerbate anxiousness, creating a cycle of undesirable behavior ([Nguyen et al., 2022](#)).

Doomscrolling is becoming a major concern in Generation Z causing heightened anxiety, depression and stress (Chand, 2025). Recent study estimates that 80% of young adults frequently visualize disturbing content online (George et al., 2024). Young population is generally hyper connected as well as more inclined towards social crisis, they escape to digital platforms to disassociate from stressful social realities but algorithmic newsfeed and stressful content increases distress instead of minimizing it (Lim, 2024).

Young adults are at a transitional period in career, studies also life style and face most societal pressures which drive them to doomscrolling leading to higher stress and anxiety (Afreem, 2024). Half of individuals having age 18-29 usually get news from Instagram, TikTok or other social media platforms including podcasts as they seem to have less trust on national broadcast channels (Scammon, 2025). Thus, the growing prevalence of this behavior has increased concern among researchers to examine factors related to it and effects on mental health (Anand et al., 2022).

2.0.3 Doom Scrolling and Psychological distress

Counts et al. (2023) examined how distressing climate-related news affects mental well-being. This study employed a correlation research design. The finding shows that doomscrolling was linked to heightened emotional sensitivity and reduced resilience. The research did not investigate wider aspects of psychological distress or emotional instability linked to exposure to distressing news. This research develops a standardized questionnaire to assess doomscrolling. This finding requires further investigate the relationship between psychological and emotional challenges that arise from receiving negative information.

Price et al. (2022) explored the relationship between doomscrolling, insomnia, and PTSD among young adults in COVID-19 pandemic. The finding of this study highlights that 95% of individual who involve in doomscrolling experience insomnia and PTSD. A significant gap in the study is that it primarily focused on

individuals with past trauma and did not examine the emotional dysregulation or psychological distress in the general population. Future studies should investigate broader psychological impacts of negative news exposure across diverse population.

[Munir \(2024\)](#) examined the relationship between doomscrolling and spirituality among Muslim students in Surabaya, Indonesia. This study used a qualitative research design and data were collected through intake interviews and questionnaires. The finding revealed that individuals with higher spirituality were less affected by negative news on their well-being. However, the study did not examine the psychological distress or emotional dysregulation linked to excessive negative news exposure, which limits a comprehensive understanding of doom scrolling broader impact on mental health.

[Gebremariam et al. \(2023\)](#) examined the relationship between emotion dysregulation, psychological distress, emotional eating among Italian young adults. This study used a quantitative research design, and data were collected through questionnaire. The finding highlights that emotion dysregulation is positively correlated with psychological distress and emotional eating playing mediator role in this correlation.

However, the study did not identify the other potential behavior and psychological disorders. Similarly, to examine the association between nomophobia and psychological distress among young adults, a quantitative correlational study was conducted. Participants filled demographic questionnaire and Nomophobia scale and Anxiety, depression, stress scale. Nearly complete sample showed symptoms of nomophobia. Out of which 59.3% had moderate while 24.2% had severe nomophobia. There was a significant positive correlation between nomophobia and anxiety, stress, depression.

Females showed higher rate of nomophobia than males while a significant negative relationship existed between age and nomophobia. The study had limitations in understanding other etiological factors in development of nomophobia, also study

didn't include emotional impacts of nomophobia ([Pramudiani et al., 2025](#)).

[Anchan et al. \(2025\)](#) examined the effects of doomscrolling on emotional well-being, Anxiety and sleep disturbances among young adults and adults. Cross-sectional study design was used to find psychological and emotional impacts of doomscrolling. Selfreported questionnaires were used. Results indicated that there is significant positive correlation between doomscrolling and emotional distress.

[Munir \(2024\)](#) studied the association between doomscrolling and anxiety among young adults, in Indonesia. Using a cross-sectional study design and stratified sampling, data was collected from university students. Results indicated that almost 44% of participants were at risk of doomscrolling while 60% females reported doomscrolling behavior. Also, a significant positive association between doomscrolling and anxiety was found. Higher scores on anxiety scales were related to higher scores on doomscrolling also. The study only focused on anxiety symptoms while emotional correlates to doomscrolling remained unexplored which needs further research.

[Scammon \(2025\)](#) conducted a cross-sectional study to investigate relationship between doomscrolling and anxiety, depression and coping ability among young adults. Self-report quantitative measures were used to collect data. Results indicated positive correlation between doomscrolling and anxiety, depression. While perceived coping ability has little to no effect on this association. Study provided no evidence related to nomophobia or emotional outcomes of problematic digital use.

[Pramudiani et al. \(2025\)](#) examined the relationship between doomscrolling and anxiety with the role of emotional regulation, through correlatioal study. Findings showed that higher scores on doomscrolling were significantly linked with increased anxiety symptoms among participants. As, persistent engagement with distressing content increases worry and emotional exhaustion. However, the study also showed that higher emotional intelligence and regulation and its association between doomscrolling and anxiety. Overall, the research highlighted emotional

regulation as a protective factor, suggesting that enhancing emotional regulation may help to reduce the adverse psychological consequences of compulsive negative news consumption in youth.

Past research indicated that people who engage in prolonged doomscrolling have more chances to experience psychological distress because they internalize negative emotions linked to consumed content ([Abbasi et al., 2025](#)). A recent study in Karachi, Pakistan, also examined the relationship between doomscrolling and mental health among youth. It was a cross-sectional study design. Data was collected from media students. Findings showed a strong correlation between doomscrolling and mental health problems like anxiety, depression, emotional dysregulation, and poor sleep. Interview analysis also indicated the same findings ([Usman et al., 2025](#)).

2.0.4 Nomophobia and Psychological Distress

In Lahore, Pakistan, [Saleem et al. \(2022\)](#) conducted a cross-sectional study to find out the prevalence of nomophobia and its link with demographic variables among young adults' medical students. Data was collected using a nomophobia questionnaire. 51.5% of students reported having moderate nomophobia. While 38.2% of them had severe nomophobia. The number of hours of mobile use was also seen as positively related to nomophobia. Higher nomophobia was linked with lower academic performance and higher disturbance in students' routines. The study was conducted in Lahore; thus, the results were not generalizable to other socio-demographic cultures. So, further research can be done in other Pakistani cities to confirm these statistics.

For Nomophobia, [Afreen \(2024\)](#) conducted a correlational study to investigate relationship of nomophobia with anxiety and emotional regulation among young adults and adolescents. Results showed significant positive association between nomophobia and anxiety. A significant positive association was found between emotional dysregulation and nomophobia. Results also indicated young adults

have more anxiety due to nomophobia as compared to adolescents. The study had limitations in data collection as done through Google forms that were too long, which can lead to participant fatigue.

To understand and deal with psychological impacts of nomophobia ([Abdoli et al., 2023](#)) also examined Nomophobia and psychological issues among young adults. Study investigated the link between nomophobia and mental health conditions like anxiety, stress, depression, insomnia and obsessive-compulsive disorder. Data was collected through self-reported questionnaires and demographic sheets. Findings showed that scores on nomophobia were linked with higher scores on depression, anxiety and stress. While nomophobia was found unrelated to insomnia and obsessive-compulsive disorder.

[Schwaiger \(2020\)](#) investigated nomophobia and its predictors in young adults, undergraduate students of Lahore, Pakistan. Through cross-sectional study design participants completed quantitative surveys. All participants reported having certain level of nomophobia while most reported was moderate levels of nomophobia. Women reported higher level of nomophobia as compared to men. Mobile use per day significantly predicted nomophobia. The study emphasized as mobile use is increasing in Pakistan, monitoring nomophobia and its correlates is greatly important, and has implications at the societal and student making levels. Anxiety, depression and stress are related psychological issues that impact emotional, cognitive as well as physical health ([Wang et al., 2025](#)).

Depressive symptoms include melancholy or loss of interest while anxious individuals have tension feelings and fear of unseen and lastly stress is an experience of mental strain arising from challenging situations ([Gnardellis et al., 2023](#)). Persistent emotional strain triggers depression, external pressure increases stress while perceived danger causes anxiety ([Gebremariam et al., 2023](#)). Adverse digital habits like doomscrolling and nomophobia function as stressors which deteriorate mental health gradually ([Safaria et al., 2024](#)).

[Kumar et al. \(2021\)](#) examined relationship between nomophobia and psychological

distress among young adults. Cross sectional study design was used. Quantitative surveys were distributed among participants selected through convenience sampling. Findings showed that nomophobia has significant association with all distress factors including depression, anxiety and stress. Thus, suggested that over consumption of mobile phones is linked with higher psychological distress and low academic performance.

[Kukreti et al. \(2021\)](#) assessed the prevalence of nomophobia in young adults working in tertiary care medical college. Relationship of nomophobia with stress, anxiety and depression was also analyzed. Participants were included through random sampling. Data was collected through quantitative surveys for psychological distress and nomophobia along with socio demographic information. Results indicated majority of participants used their phones on average of 3 to 6 hours per day. All students showed having some level of nomophobia. Level of stress, anxiety and depression were seen as highly correlated with nomophobia. Study suggested that future researches on other related factors may aid in development of better coping strategies for this overlooked mental health risks.

A systematic review and meta-analysis identified that nearly 42.66% of Pakistani university students show depressive symptoms. Such high prevalence points towards a severe mental health issue in this group ([Shahid et al., 2022](#)). Also, a study on Generation Z in America found that 38% of those below 27 years old feel tremendous stress due to financial insecurity and career uncertainty ([Counts et al., 2023](#)).

[Tsevreni et al. \(2023\)](#) reported similar results that young adults are most likely to suffer from psychological distress as compared to middle adults or older people, anxiety and depression rate was seen higher among young adults as compared to people having age above 30. These figures lead to the worldwide prevalence of psychological distress and emotional dysregulation in young adults. Psychological distress is a complex phenomenon that involves emotional suffering precipitated by strains that are internal or external to the person. A common expression of

this disorder is the occurrence of symptoms such as anxiety, depression, irritability, fatigue, and emotional dysregulation ([Elhabashy et al., 2025](#)).

Nomophobia and doomscrolling both together contribute in lowering psychological well-being by lowering real world communication and increasing psychological distress ([Antonysamy and Parameswari, 2026](#)). People having distress due to mobile phones separation or over exposure to stressful news lack adaptive regulatory mechanisms thus have higher scores on psychological distress scales like depression, anxiety and stress ([Ahmed et al., 2025](#)).

[Gebremariam et al. \(2023\)](#) investigated mental wellbeing in sample of young adults, results indicated feelings of loneliness, depression and anxiety have increased while level of social connectedness has minimized after pandemic and over consumption of it's news. In this study almost half participants reported sense of loneliness while 80% have depressive symptoms and 62% reported moderate to severe anxiety symptoms. Likewise, constant app notifications and over reliance on seeking social validation through social media also contribute to psychological distress ([Kumar et al., 2021](#)). Continuous engagement with mobile phones increases sense of helplessness, information fatigue that increases exhaustion and psychological strain ([Hameed, 2025](#)).

While another study found that individuals who had higher levels of anxiety were more likely to consume online forms of communication to minimize their own anxiety symptoms ([Santl et al., 2022](#)). A recent study found that 73% participants usually use more than 5 apps per day. Most frequently used apps were Facebook, Instagram, Viber, YouTube and Pinterest. People who have higher psychological distress are more likely to consume digital apps for longer hours ([Vagka et al., 2024](#)).

The results were same for all three conditions depression, stress, anxiety. In short, there are both possibilities that the fear of inability to use mobile phones or doomscrolling aggravate the symptoms of stress, anxiety, and depression, secondly it is

also possible that people with the previous history of anxiety or depressive symptoms are more susceptible to developing nomophobia ([Abdoli et al., 2023](#)).

2.0.5 Emotional Dysregulation

Emotional dysregulation is an increasing issue among young adults and is linked with adverse mental health outcomes ([Paulus et al., 2021](#)). Although there is limited prevalence in Pakistan, the presence of high psychological distress and nomophobia indicates that there could be a correlation with difficulties in emotional regulation ([Alhusseini et al., 2025](#)).

In the present study, emotional dysregulation is considered as a dependent variable influenced by problematic digital behaviours. Both nomophobia and doomscrolling increase anxiousness and fear which cause inability to effectively recognize and manage emotions. Compulsive mobile phone use causes difficulty in regulating emotions and emotional dysregulation associate with problematic mobile and internet use ([Cui et al., 2024](#)).

Research indicates that lower emotional regulation is related to various addictive behaviors, mainly problematic mobile phone usage, and online game addiction. Neuropsychology explains that doomscrolling increases activity of amygdala that is important in fear and emotional responses. When it is activated continuously it causes prolonged stress, raised cortisol and emotional exhaustion ([Anchan et al., 2025](#)). Over exposure to stressful content or excessive worry due to nomophobia impacts cognitive emotional control system leading to higher impulsivity, instability in mood and being stuck in negative emotional cycles ([Naeem et al., 2023](#)).

According to emotions contagion theory, emotions are transferred from person to person through automatic mimicry, thus it can occur online without direct social contact ([Zhang et al., 2021](#)). Therefore, continuous exposure to negative posts triggers negative emotions constantly, which further aggravates psychological distress. [Laçin and Kiye \(2025\)](#) investigated psychological well-being and emotional

regulation are associated with doomscrolling behavior. Participants were aged 18-50. Standardized questionnaires were administered for data collection. Results showed that age has an effect on doomscrolling and young adults had highest levels of doomscrolling. Psychological well-being negatively correlate with doomscrolling, while emotional regulation positively correlate with it.

To investigate the relationship of nomophobia with emotional regulation and sleep quality, and conducted a correlational study ([Nayana, 2025](#)). Data was collected from young adults through standardized questionnaires. Findings suggested significant positive association of nomophobia with poor sleep quality and emotional dysregulation. Participants having higher scores on nomophobia have difficulties in emotional clarity and regulation strategies. The study highlighted the use of mindful digital practices and future research using a broader framework to study other factors related to nomophobia.

Similarly, another cross-sectional study was conducted to find out link between nomophobia and negative emotional states like depression, anxiety and stress among young adults in Greece. Questionnaires and demographic sheets were distributed for data collection. Results indicated that nomophobia is linked with higher scores on negative emotional states. Participants having higher scores on depression and anxiety were more likely to check their phones often ([Gnardellis et al., 2023](#)).

[Dolapoğlu et al. \(2025\)](#) studied the relationship between nomophobia, social media addiction and emotional dysregulation among university students. Quantitative correlational study was conducted using standardized questionnaires. Results indicated a significant positive correlation between nomophobia, emotional dysregulation and social media addiction.

[Antonysamy and Parameswari \(2026\)](#) examined the link between nomophobia and psychological well-being with the role of doomscrolling and social media sites addiction. A cross-sectional study design was used. College students of ages 18-24 were included from Tamil Nadu, India. Results of the study revealed that there

exists a positive correlation between doomscrolling, nomophobia, and social media site addiction. But these variables are negatively correlated with psychological well-being. The study suggested the investigation of other variables like emotional regulation, psychological distress, or social support to better understand psychological outcomes of digital behaviors. [Srivastava et al. \(2025\)](#) studied nomophobia and related psychopathologies including somatic problems, depression, anxiety and related disorder among Indian young adults. 200 Participants were recruited through convenient sampling from universities and colleges. Quantitative correlational study design was employed to collect data. Results from SPSS analysis indicated that 67% participants had moderate, 19% had severe level of nomophobia while, 12.8% of part had mild nomophobia. Nomophobia had significant positive correlation with anxiety, depression, and somatic complaints.

Another correlational study studied the relationship between doomscrolling, psychological distress and personality types. Study examines how compulsive exposure to negative content known as doomscrolling is linked to individual personality characteristics and psychological outcomes. After data collection through quantitative surveys data was analyzed using SPSS. Results showed that young adults with higher levels of neuroticism and introversion are more likely to engage frequently in doomscrolling. Higher level of doomscrolling was seen linked with higher symptoms of anxiety, stress, and depression. The study further emphasized that students who showed lower emotional stability and higher sensitivity to negative content are especially more vulnerable to psychological distress when persistently consuming negative news ([Singh and Narula, 2024](#)).

[Kartol et al. \(2023\)](#) also investigated the relationship between doomscrolling, psychological distress and future anxiety among young adults, in Turkey after 2023 earthquakes. Through cross-sectional study design data was collected online and also face to face through quantitative questionnaires. Data analysis showed higher future anxiety among participants and moderate levels of doomscrolling. There was significant positive association between doomscrolling and psychological distress. As, doomscrolling increased level also increased psychological distress.

Higher levels of depression, anxiety and stress lead to excessive exposure to negative content. Also, higher levels of future anxiety also increases the doomscrolling behavior.

Recently, [Kıvanç et al. \(2025\)](#) in Turkey also conducted a quantitative study to examine link between nomophobia and anxiety experience among young adults. The study analyzed how nomophobia which is the fear of being without mobile phone is linked with anxiety symptoms among young adults, especially university students. The study involved 383 undergraduate students from a Turkish university.

Data was collected using quantitative questionnaires that included a demographic Data Form, the Üsküdar Nomophobia Scale, and an Anxiety Rating Scale. Statistical analyses was performed using SPSS 24, with correlation and regression analysis applied to determine links between psychological constructs. The results indicated a significant positive link between nomophobia and anxiety symptoms. Almost half (46%) of the participants recognized themselves as somewhat addicted to mobile phones (having nomophobia), while 42.6% reported feeling excessive worry when their mobile battery was low, and 39.9% reported procrastinating necessary activities like eating or sleeping due to smartphone usage.

Moreover, 50.9% believed that their smartphone use had physical, psychological. The study also found that higher nomophobia scores are linked with higher general anxiety symptoms and sub-domains like overconsumption, impaired functionality, and communication anxiety. These findings emphasized that excessive smartphone use is significantly linked to emotional dysregulation and anxiety, reflecting the psychological strain of digital dependency among young adults. In interpreting these findings, the researchers emphasized that mobile phones can become source of psychological distress when overconsumed.

The study supported the increasing evidence on recognizing nomophobia as a modern form of anxiety disorder, confirming findings from ([Counts et al., 2023](#)),

who explained nomophobia as fear of being disconnected from mobile phones and from Gezgin et al. (2018) who also confirmed similar findings among Turkish university students.

Other evidence, like those by [Khan et al. \(2024\)](#); [Shahzadi et al. \(2024\)](#), found that smartphone overconsumption is linked with stress, low academic performance, and social withdrawal symptoms, further validating the Turkish research conclusions. Although the findings are confirmed, [Kıvanç et al. \(2025\)](#) acknowledged limitations like the reliance on self-reported information, which may cause biasness.

Additionally, the study's participants were confined to one department, limiting the generalizability of findings. The study offered important insights for universities and policymakers by emphasizing the need for preventive techniques, including digital wellbeing psychoeducation and mental health support programs. In essence, the study highlighted that rising smartphone dependency not only disturbs behavioral patterns but also increases anxiety levels among young adults, making it a significant public health concern in the digital era.

[Maghaireh et al. \(2025\)](#) conducted a comprehensive study on nomophobia and its psychological correlated constructs. This research examined the immediate and underlying psychological outcomes of nomophobia defined as the distress and excessive worry resulting from being unable to use one's smartphone. Identifying the growing prevalence of over digital dependence among youth, the study tried to examine how nomophobia interlinks with broader mental health constructs like stress, loneliness, and depression. Initially, quantitative questionnaires were administered to sample recruited from several schools.

This phase utilized standardized instruments, including the Nomophobia Questionnaire (NMP-Q), Perceived Stress Scale (PSS), UCLA Loneliness Scale, and the Beck Depression Inventory-II (BDI-II). The results of this part of study indicated that acute nomophobia was significantly and positively linked with perceived stress, sense of loneliness, and depressive symptoms ($p < 0.01$). Participants with

higher scores of nomophobia reported higher difficulty concentrating, sleep problems, and heightened worry when separated from their mobile phones, showing a psychological dependency like behavioral addictions.

The results offering rich understanding into how emotional regulation and social connections are increasingly mediated through digital usage. The researchers concluded that nomophobia performs as a multidimensional psychological construct, significantly linked to young adults' mental health. It not only represented worry about disconnection but also reflected on deeper insecurities about social desirability and personal identity in the digital era. These findings aligned with previous studies who recognized nomophobia as a type of situational phobia, and ([Abu-Elenin et al., 2025](#)), who conceptualized it as a complex psychological construct involving behavioral, cognitive, and emotional outcomes.

Similarly, ([Schwaiger, 2020](#)) found that increased smartphone dependency links with academic stress and low emotional well-being trends reflected in ([Maghaireh et al., 2025](#)) study sample. The study also had limitations, including dependency on self-reports and participants self-perception of digital use.

Nonetheless, the paper contributed critical empirical and interpretive findings in nomophobia, a state marked by increased worry and emotional distress upon disconnection. The findings emphasized the need for treatment programs in educational institutes to promote digital mindfulness and balanced mobile phones use, helping students to develop healthier coping techniques and social links beyond digital environments.

Likewise, [Daraj et al. \(2023\)](#) conducted a comprehensive systematic review and Meta-Analysis of studies on correlation between Nomophobia and Anxiety, mobile phones Addiction, and Insomnia Symptoms. This research represented one of the most rigorous quantitative data of empirical research on nomophobia and its psychological correlates, aimed to quantify the strength of link between nomophobia and other major psychological variables like anxiety, mobile phones addiction,

and insomnia symptoms. The researchers identified that while various studies have examined these links, results have varied among studies due to variability in psychometric scales, cultural contexts, and sample properties. Thus, their systematic review aimed to confirm and statistically examine the global evidence. The meta-analytic findings showed statistically significant positive links between nomophobia and all three psychological constructs. Specifically, the link between nomophobia and anxiety indicates a moderate link. The link between nomophobia and mobile phone addiction was somewhat stronger, indicating that increased nomophobia is closely associated with and indicates behavioral dependence on mobile phones (Al-Mamun et al., 2025). The strongest relationship observed was between nomophobia and insomnia, showing that over-dependency on mobile phones may significantly lead to problematic sleep quality.

These findings collectively suggested a multi-dimensional framework of nomophobia, where emotional, behavioral, and physiological domains interact to impact psychological well-being. The researchers interpreted these links as empirical evidence that nomophobia impacts beyond mere discomfort when disconnected from phones; it represents a broader psychological impact, potentially leading to chronic anxiety and sleep issues.

The study emphasized that mobile phone dependency may increase anxiety through continuous digital usage, while late-night screen exposure and anticipatory anxiety related to phone disconnection can lead to insomnia symptoms. Furthermore, the review showed how adolescents and young adults are especially vulnerable, as they increasingly rely on smartphones for social validation and academic tasks.

A significant strength of this review lies in its methodological design by using random-effects models, sensitivity analyses, and heterogeneity tests; the researchers accounted for cross-study variability and ensured increased generalizability. There were limitations like potential publication bias and the predominance of cross-sectional research, which limited causal inference. In conclusion, Daraj et al. (2023) gave critical quantitative evidence that nomophobia is significantly linked

with anxiety, mobile phones addiction, and insomnia severity, promoting its relevance as an emerging psychosocial health problems. The work highlighted the need for preventive strategies, like digital wellness education, sleep hygiene awareness, and cognitive-behavioral techniques to manage technology-related anxiety. This meta-analysis served as a vital reference base for future researchers exploring the psychological and physiological dimensions of digital dependency.

[Kivrak \(2021\)](#) conducted a correlational study to examine nomophobia, Stress, and anger expression styles. The study aimed to understand how nomophobia a term explaining the fear or anxiety of being without one's mobile phone links to the psychological pathways of stress coping and anger expression among young adults' university students. This research was based within the increasing literature that frames nomophobia as both a technological and emotional dependency problem, with implications for young adults' psychological health and social functioning. The study used a quantitative, cross-sectional design with a sample including undergraduate students from various departments. Data was collected using the quantitative questionnaires. The statistical analyses, conducted through SPSS 22, involved correlation and regression analysis to recognize links among the variables. The results indicated a significant positive link between nomophobia and maladaptive stress coping techniques, such as avoidance and emotional venting ([Iqbal, 2023](#)).

Participants who scored higher on nomophobia were more likely to rely less on problem-solving coping mechanisms and more on passive or emotion-driven techniques, indicating a difficulty in regulating stress without technological usage. In addition, the findings showed that anger expression styles were strongly impacted by nomophobia severity. Particularly, participants with higher nomophobia were more likely to show anger-in and anger-out behaviors either suppressing anger internally or expressing it in externalized, impulsive ways. In contrast, those with lower nomophobia levels showed better angercontrol skills ([Paulus et al., 2021](#)). This pattern supported the evidence that over smartphone reliance might impair emotional regulation, causing maladaptive responses when people are deprived of

connectivity or digital usage.

[Kivrak \(2021\)](#) interpreted these results as indicative of a psychosocial feedback loop which means that excessive mobile phone dependence increases stress and impairs coping strategies, which in turn increases anger mismanagement and emotional dysregulation. The research associated this dynamic with the cognitive-behavioral framework of addiction, suggesting that mobile phones can serve as both coping tools and stressors, temporarily relieving stress while deepening psychological dependency. The study's results were consistent with previous evidence, such as ([Celik, 2024](#)), who defined nomophobia as a modern anxiety disorder; [Hawwa \(2025\)](#), who associated smartphone addiction with poor stress coping; and who described behavioral outcomes similar to withdrawal symptoms. Encouraging students to develop non-digital coping techniques like mindfulness, physical exercise, and face-to-face interaction that could help reduce the emotional volatility linked with smartphone overreliance.

Similarly, the repetitive consumption of negative content through social media creates heightened emotional strain but its association with psychological outcomes like emotional dysregulation and psychological distress remains less understood. This study examined the underlying role of psychological distress and belief in just world in relationship between doomscrolling and secondary traumatic stress symptoms that occur due to viewing negative social media content.

A cross-sectional study design was used with 235 participants from Singapore. Participants completed self-reported measures to evaluate doomscrolling, psychological distress, general belief in just world and secondary traumatic stress. Analysis of the collected data revealed that psychological distress was linked with relationship between doomscrolling and secondary traumatic stress and also with the subdomains of depression, anxiety and stress. General belief in just world was not observed as a mediating in this relationship. Findings indicated that due heightened strain people experience psychological distress as an emotional response while belief in just world acts as resource. Study emphasized on emotional and cognitive

pathways by which doomscrolling was linked with secondary traumatic stress. The study highlighted the need for future studies on problematic digital usage and to inform interventions for better psychological health in digital contexts ([Ang, 2025](#)).

[Montazeri et al. \(2023\)](#) examined doomscrolling specifically of COVID-19 news, psychological distress and behavioral affect among young adults of Iran. Correlational study design was used. Self-designed surveys were administered. Results showed almost 55% have anxiety, fear of COVID-19 was among 54.1%. 88% have changed behavior. COVID-19 news was associated with higher anxiety, fear and more preventive behaviors.

In Germany, [Bendau et al. \(2021\)](#) also studied the link between doomscrolling specific to COVID-19 news consumption, anxiety, depression and fear. Results showed that higher levels of negative news consumption mainly through social media and constant news updates were significantly related to higher levels of anxiety, depression, and pandemic-linked fear. The study emphasized that individuals who were exposed to COVID-19 news excessively were more likely to have emotional distress. Thus, the study suggested that both the quantity and the type of news exposure played an important role in shaping psychological well-being. Highlighted the need for balanced and accurate media viewing to reduce the mental health challenges during crises.

Also, [Strasser et al. \(2022\)](#) conducted a meta-analysis of past evidence on doomscrolling specifically related to COVID-19 negative news consumption and psychological distress among young adults. 13 cross-sectional studies were reviewed. Past evidence also indicated a strong positive correlation between negative news consumption related to COVID-19 and psychological distress among youth. Results were more accurate and reliable for information seek through social media and mobile phones rather than traditional media sources. This meta-analysis study was only specific to the COVID-19 pandemic, but the relationship was not examined outside this context. [Zhang et al. \(2021\)](#) also examined social media exposure to COVID-19 news, emotional regulation, psychological distress and depression

in china. Participants completed quantitative questionnaires online. Findings indicated higher level of psychological distress in people having higher exposure to stressful COVID-19 news, depressive symptoms were also seen higher. Emotional dysregulation and use of maladaptive regulation techniques like emotional suppression further increaseThe study psychological distress and depression. The study highlighted the need for mental health assistance for people suffering from negative media consumption. Study only focused specifically on negative news exposure that also only related to COVID-19, while other negative posts and digital factors that can affect were overlooked.

[Samuel \(2025\)](#) also conducted a meta-analysis of recent literature from (2019-2024). The review was done to examine doomscrolling pathways, its influence on psychological health and coping techniques to overcome adverse news consumption on mobile devices. Researchers concluded that doomscrolling is a prevalent compulsive behavior among young adults after the pandemic. Repetitive negative news exposure is found to be strongly positively correlated with higher scores on psychological distress, anxiety, and depression. The paper also emphasized the use of digital hygiene awareness and CBT to overcome the negative effects of doomscrolling.

Similarly, [Squires et al. \(2021\)](#) investigated the link between psychological distress, emotional dysregulation, coping behavior and problematic smartphone use. Undergraduate students (young adults) were recruited online. Participants completed the quantitative scales for variables. Correlational analysis revealed that there exists a positive correlation between psychological distress, emotional dysregulation and problematic smartphone consumption.. As, nomophobia and doomscrolling are relatively new terms, this study was done on problematic mobile use, while current study examines the new constructs specifically.

[Zhang et al. \(2025\)](#) conducted a study to examine the relationship between nomophobia and depression, anxiety, stress and mobile phone-related behaviors. During an 8-week period data were collected from 41 participants who were diagnosis with

major depressive disorder. Data was gathered using mobile sensors like location (as stays at particular locations provide information into routines and lifestyle patterns), apps time usage and psychometric scales.

Findings revealed that higher scores on nomophobia questionnaire were linked with higher scores on depression, anxiety, stress and lower location movement. Participants who spent more time at one place had higher rates of nomophobia. While time spent on different apps and messages sent were negatively related with nomophobia which needs further exploration in future studies.

[Cui et al. \(2024\)](#) investigated the relationship of emotional regulation strategies on nomophobia among young adults in China. The study also investigated the role of resilience. Findings of the study suggested that 85.6% of participants had certain level of nomophobia. Emotional dysregulation through expressive suppression is positively related to nomophobia while negatively linked to resilience as positive emotional regulation strategy. Cognitive reappraisal is also positively related to nomophobia. Resilience had significant positive link with use of cognitive reappraisal. The study only focused on emotional impacts of nomophobia, while other psychological impacts were overlooked, which should be focused in future research.

[Safaria et al. \(2024\)](#) conducted a cross-cultural study to understand the cultural differences in experience of nomophobia. The study examined the relationship between nomophobia, emotional dysregulation, self-control and smartphone use among young adults from two different countries, including Yogyakarta, Indonesia and Pahang, Malaysia. The study used a cross-sectional study design. Pahang students showed higher levels of nomophobia and smartphone use as compared to Yogyakarta students. Emotional dysregulation and smartphone use were positively related with nomophobia in both countries. While self-control had no significant influence on nomophobia.

The above-mentioned research studies highlight the prevalent and detrimental impact of nomophobia and doomscrolling on mental health and overall well-being. The gap in existing literature reveals significantly limited research exploring the

combined impact of nomophobia and doomscrolling on psychological distress and emotional dysregulation, particularly among young adults in Pakistan ([Ahmed et al., 2025](#)). While several international studies have examined doomscrolling in the context of media exposure, and anxiety, limited attention has been given to the interaction between this behavior and digital dependencies such as nomophobia influences on their emotional and psychological well-being. Moreover, most prior research has focused on digital behavior in the Western context, leaving a contextual gap in South Asian, especially Pakistani, youth ([Farooq et al., 2022](#)). Identifying this gap, the current study aims to investigate the relationship between nomophobia, doomscrolling, psychological distress, and emotional dysregulation among young adults in Pakistan.

2.1 Rationale

The present study examines the relationships between nomophobia, doomscrolling, psychological distress, and emotional dysregulation among Pakistani young adults. Pakistan is among the countries that have observed a significant increase in smartphone and internet users ([Hickman et al., 2021](#); [Ogunbode et al., 2022](#)). Excessive dependency on smartphones has caused psychological issues such as depression, anxiety, stress ([Ejaz et al., 2023](#)). Nomophobia and doomscrolling behaviors are even more prevalent and alarming among Pakistani students than other young adults because demanding nature of their education system and simultaneously the necessity of technology in their educational and professional development ([Desouza et al., 2024](#)). Pakistani students suffer from mild to severe ranges of nomophobia ([Farooq et al., 2022](#)). These constructs are widely identified in global mental health literature ([Antonyamy and Parameswari, 2026](#); [Cui et al., 2024](#)), but remained under explored in the Pakistani cultural context ([Hawwa, 2025](#)). As mobile phone dependency increases and normalizes, studying these constructs' psychological implications is critical for evaluating young adults' mental health ([Zhang et al., 2025](#)). So, the current study emphasizes the negative impacts of nomophobia and doomscrolling, with a focus on promoting responsible mobile phone use.

As, the terms "nomophobia" and "doomscrolling," most of the past research on digital behaviors conducted in Pakistan was on internet addiction, problematic digital use, and digital dependency which were either different or broader terms (Zhang et al., 2021). While other research on nomophobia and doomscrolling were exploratory in nature while other correlating factors like psychological distress and emotional dysregulation need to be further examined (Guerrini-Usubini et al., 2023).

Even though there is empirical evidence which shows that digital addiction is associated with mental well-being and emotional dysregulation, as individuals find it difficult to manage their emotions without being connected to digital networks (Kumar et al., 2021). Nomophobia is currently not a part of DSM despite negative effects on psychological health (Ayaz et al., 2025). Wider research on this phenomenon can provide empirical base for its clinical significance, conceptualization, formal diagnosis criteria and understanding of correlating factors (Desouza et al., 2024; Al Wafa et al., 2024).

Existing literature on these digital behaviors is limited in scope as most past researches were done during COVID-19 and specifically focused on pandemic related anxiety and news (Strasser et al., 2022). As, Pakistan has moved beyond the COVID-19, examining how social media consumption patterns have changed over time is crucial. There is a literature gap in post pandemic studies and prevalence after changing features in mobile like artificial intelligence algorithms that personalize social platforms feeds and significantly increase doomscrolling and nomophobia (Samuel, 2025; Akbar and Begum, 2025).

This technological advancement necessitates up-to-date research to capture the prevalence of these variables with the changing dynamics of technology. Doomscrolling is still widespread nowadays after pandemic among young adults in the digital era due to increasing calamities (Kartol et al., 2023). Doomscrolling refers to the compulsive habit of reading negative or disturbing news, which eventually has an unhealthy effect on psychological health (Li, 2023).

Constant exposure to bad news through smartphones is not only increasing stress but also leads to emotional dysregulation, where individuals struggle to understand and manage their emotional responses. For minimizing these negative impacts and developing interventions it is necessary to understand the underlying factors ([Kartol et al., 2023](#)). In a country like Pakistan, where political instability, economic instability, and global crises such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and climate change crisis frequently make headline news in the media, the psychological impact of nomophobia and doomscrolling is likely to be even greater. Repeated exposure to disturbing content, coupled with dependency on mobile phones may undermine young adults' emotional resilience ([Venegas-Vera et al., 2020](#)).

Media exposure of Palestine emphasize human tragedy, violence, and displacement, which contribute significantly to having a deep emotional impact on young adults, especially those who sympathize with the victims of the conflict. Constantly exposed to such traumatic content can give rise to emotional dysregulation, and individuals may find it difficult to control their emotional response to the content consumed. The visual images from Gaza which were not seen before on social media, continuous exposure to those violent and shocking pictures impacted mental health and leading to stress, anxiety, depression, even post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) through vicarious trauma ([Al Wafa et al., 2024](#)).

Likewise, climate change, which has become a persistent global issue, has been associated with eco-anxiety among youth ([Tsevreini et al., 2023](#)). Exposure to the destructive impacts of climate change through constant media coverage, including wildfires, floods, and severe weather conditions, can result in increased distress and anxiety, as young adults feel helpless to mitigate the crisis ([Reyes et al., 2023](#)).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, a study indicated that doomscrolling were strong indicators of psychological distress and emotional dysregulation ([Price et al., 2022](#)). The pandemic increased social isolation, lockdowns, healthrelated worries, rising mortality rates, and financial instability, leading to a rise in the consumption of negative media content, which, in turn, worsened emotional dysregulation and

psychological distress.

In this era where there are frequently occurring calamities, economical issues and wars, people are more likely to engage in doomscrolling which intensifies stress, anxiety and depression (Kartol et al., 2023). These traumatic events increase future anxiety which ultimately increase digital engagement. So, it's essential to do a timely research on these digital behaviors to minimize negative impacts. Even worse is that in a developing country like Pakistan smartphone excessive consumption is not identified as problematic because it is considered so prevalent and normalized especially among young adults in all areas of their lives (Gnardellis et al., 2023).

So, raising awareness on these issue is essential. The primary aim of the current research is to examine the separate and combined impacts of nomophobia and doomscrolling, emotional dysregulation and psychological distress among young adults. The study seeks to explore how excessive mobile phone usage and constant exposure to distressing news contribute to emotional and psychological health problems. A review of the existing literature shows a limited but growing research focus on nomophobia, doomscrolling, psychological distress, and emotional regulation. Although various studies have observed these variables separately, in-depth research on their interrelationship remains sparse.

Additionally, most research has been undertaken in Western setting, with little research done in young adult in Pakistan. Pakistan is a collectivistic culture which differs in emotional expression, mental health stigma and limited mental health resources than western cultures (Cui et al., 2024). With insufficient mental health resources turn to digital platforms for relaxation and coping from stress, loneliness and uncertainty but this platforms backfire leading to further increase in psychological distress and emotional dysregulation (Counts et al., 2023). Therefore, generalizing western findings and interventions to nomophobia, doomscrolling, emotional dysregulation and psychological distress in Pakistan without its cultural validation may result in inappropriate interpretations (Hawwa, 2025).

This justifies the vital need to study culture specific patterns of digital behaviors and emotionally responses.

The potential implications of this study are diverse. It can provide culture-specific empirical evidence to understand how nomophobia and doomscrolling interrelate with emotional dysregulation and psychological distress in Pakistan. It may help policymakers, mental health practitioners, and educators establish prevention and intervention strategies to mitigate the psychological impact of nomophobia and doomscrolling. The results may guide media outlets and application developers in understanding the necessity of creating features that encourage healthier media use. Educating people about healthy online engagement and teaching strategies to critically evaluate information can minimize the harmful impacts of doomscrolling (Samuel, 2025). Promoting access to motivational stories or redirecting attention towards positive content can assist to create a balanced digital environment (Cui et al., 2024).

2.2 Theoretical Framework

Cognitive behavioral theory (CBT) was developed by Beck (1970) as a theoretical framework that clarifies how an individual's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are connected and influence each other. CBT proposes that cognitive processes such as automatic thoughts, fundamental beliefs, and cognitive distortions play a crucial role in shaping the emotional experiences and behavioral reactions (Beck and Fleming, 2021). These cognitive processes, both consciously and unconsciously, shape how individuals understand their surroundings and the internal states.

When these cognitive patterns become maladaptive or distorted, they can lead to negative emotional states and behaviors that perpetuate mental health problems (Kornacka, 2023). CBT suggests that emotional distress and unproductive behavior are connected and result from impaired cognitive processing and distortions. Doomscrolling and nomophobia are recognized as behavioral responses associated with maladaptive cognitive schemas and disordered cognitive patterns. According

to CBT, schemas are deeply rooted cognitive structures that shape an individual's perception, emotional reactions, and behaviors. In the context of nomophobia, these maladaptive schemas are related to fear of disconnection, social exclusion, and missing important information.

Cognitive behavioral theory posits that nomophobia, the intense fear of being without a mobile phone, is a behavior sustained by cognitive frameworks linked to safety, authority, and social engagement ([Antonyamy and Parameswari, 2026](#); [Pramudiani et al., 2025](#)). These schemas encompass core beliefs that losing control, facing societal exclusion, or missing important information are likely consequences of being separated from or unable to access a smartphone. ([Notara et al., 2023](#)). Such a belief may contribute to nomophobia by increasing fear of disconnection and may contribute to doomscrolling via compulsive checking of online updates to reduce uncertainty and emotional discomfort.

When these schemas are activated, automatic negative thoughts emerge, such as worries about missing important information or fears of isolation. These thoughts generate anxiety and distress, which drive compulsive behaviors to reduce discomfort, such as frequent checking or continuous use of the mobile device ([Gnardellis et al., 2023](#); [Vagka et al., 2024](#)). Negative thoughts also create depressive feelings characterized as low self-worth, lack of interest, and the need for others approval, which leads to more frequent online engagement and internet use ([Santl et al., 2022](#)). However, these behaviors inadvertently reinforce the cognitive schemas, cognitive overload, and the associated negative emotions, thereby maintaining a cyclical pattern of distress and maladaptive behavior ([Maghaireh et al., 2025](#); [Scammon, 2025](#)). These cycles ultimately contribute to the emergence of psychological distress and emotional dysregulation, which are conceptualized as dependent variables in this study.

Similarly, doomscrolling refers to the repetitive and prolonged consumption of negative or distressing online content and is conceptualized within CBT as a behavior driven by cognitive distortions such as overestimating the likelihood and severity

of negative events, and expecting catastrophic outcomes ([Anchan et al., 2025](#)). Individuals engaging in doomscrolling often hold beliefs about the uncontrollability and unpredictability of the world, which fuel feelings of uncertainty and threat ([Dominguez et al., 2025](#)).

The behavior of constantly seeking out negative information serves as an attempt to gain a sense of control, relieve anxiety, or prepare for potential dangers ([George et al., 2024](#)). Yet, this recurrent behavior intensifies negative thinking and emotional arousal, leading to increased psychological distress and difficulty managing emotions. This difficulty in regulating emotional responses reflects emotional dysregulation, which functions as a dependent variable in this study. ([Akat, 2025](#)).

CBT also explains how these behaviors became a habit instead of a purposeful behavior of information seeking. When a person has disturbed cognitive ability of self-monitoring and judgement then cannot understand their actions according to standards, leading to a lack of control and regulatory mechanisms for behavior ([LaRose et al., 2003](#)). When a person is deficient in self-regulation or self control, it allows habits to develop. Thus, digital media consumption becomes automatic. Then, Negative feelings further reinforce such behavior when person uses media to gain relief from depressive emotions but consumption of negative content intensify such feelings ([LaRose et al., 2003](#)). This creates a link between negative mental states and digital usage. Usually because of cognitive bias, people act out of emotions rather than conscious, accurate judgment, creating a cycle of emotional dysregulation and psychological distress due to problematic behavior ([Kornacka et al., 2023](#)).

In this study, nomophobia and doomscrolling are conceptualized as independent variables, while emotional dysregulation and psychological distress are conceptualized as dependent variables, in line with this theoretical framework. According to past researches, doomscrolling has been seen as an outcome of anxious feelings and anticipatory fear, consequently person views more news to minimize those negative emotions which are intensified instead ([LaRose et al., 2003](#)) creating cycle of nomophobia and doomscrolling behavior. CBT explains that psychological

distress and emotional dysregulation are outcomes of the reciprocal relationship between cognition, emotion, and behavior. Distorted thinking patterns increase emotional reactivity, which in turn triggers maladaptive behaviors such as nomophobia and doomscrolling. These behaviors temporarily reduce distress but ultimately reinforce negative cognitive patterns, sustaining emotional difficulties and psychological strain (Santl et al., 2022).

Through this perspective, nomophobia, doomscrolling, psychological distress, and emotional dysregulation are interrelated components of a self-perpetuating sequence rooted in dysfunctional cognition and behavior. CBT's theoretical framework emphasizes that modifying maladaptive thoughts and behaviors is essential for breaking this sequence and improving psychological wellbeing (Barends et al., 2023).

By using cognitive behavioral theory as a framework, CBT techniques can be used in intervention planning also to address underlying psychological factors that contribute to doomscrolling (Anchan et al., 2025), such as anxiety and FOMO, automatic thoughts, and maladaptive schemas and restructuring them into positive thoughts which can ultimately reduce nomophobia and doomscrolling (Nguyen et al., 2022).



FIGURE 2.1: Conceptual framework

2.3 Proposed Hypotheses of the Study

H1: There will be a significant positive relationship between Nomophobia and Doomscrolling.

H2: Doom scrolling will have a significant positive relationship with emotional dysregulation among young adults.

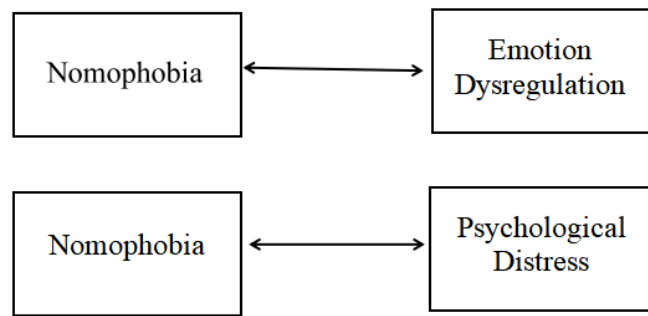


FIGURE 2.2: Conceptual framework

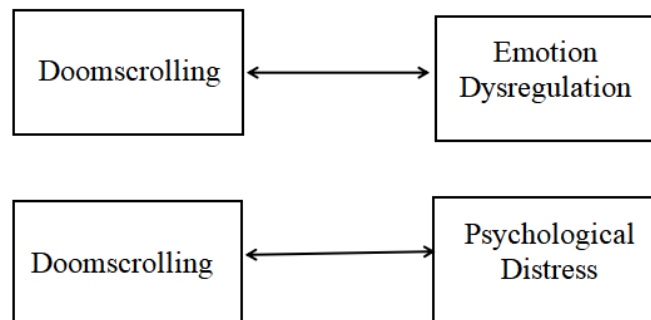


FIGURE 2.3: Conceptual framework

H3: Doom scrolling will have a significant positive relationship with psychological distress among young adults.

H4: Nomophobia will have a significant positive relationship with emotional dysregulation among young adults.

H5: Nomophobia will have a significant positive relationship with psychological distress among young adults.

Chapter 3

Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional design to examine the relationship between nomophobia, doom-scrolling, emotion dysregulation and psychological distress.

3.2 Population and Sample

The population of the current study was university students, including both males and females, within the age range of 18 to 25 years. A total sample size of 300 participants from Rawalpindi and Islamabad.

3.2.1 Inclusion Criteria

Participants must meet the following criteria to be included in the study:

- i. Educated individuals between the ages of 18 to 25 will be part of this study.
- ii. Individuals who will spend time scrolling on social media platforms (5-7 hours)

3.2.2 Exclusion Criteria

The following individuals were excluded from the study:

- i. Individuals with a diagnosed severe psychiatric disorders or neurological conditions that hindered their ability to participate in this study.

3.3 Sampling Technique

Participants were recruited using a convenience sampling technique through educational institutes.

3.4 Measures

3.4.1 Nomophobia Questionnaire

Nomophobia questionnaire was developed by [Yildirim \(2015\)](#). It has 20 items. The NMP-Q uses a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Somewhat disagree, 4 = Neutral, 5 = Somewhat agree, 6 = Agree, 7 = Strongly agree) to measure the severity of nomophobia symptoms. Score is obtained by summing all items together. Higher scores indicate higher nomophobia severity. Cut off scores are also provided which means 20 score indicates absence of nomophobia, 21-59 means mild nomophobia, 50-99 indicates moderate level and equal to or above 100 shows severe level of nomophobia (Yildirim & Correia, 2015). The NMP-Q has been found to have excellent internal consistency with Cronbach's alpha around .94. The NMP-Q is suitable for individuals aged 15 years and above.

3.4.2 Doom Scrolling Scale

This scale developed by [Sharma et al. \(2022\)](#). The Doomscrolling Scale uses a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Never, 2 = Rarely, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Often, 5 = Always) to assess the frequency and emotional impact of engaging doomscrolling behavior. The Cronbach's alpha for this scale typically ranges from .87 to .90, indicating strong reliability. Targets adult populations. The scale consists of 11 items, the total score is obtained by summing all item responses. A greater response indicated higher doom scrolling behavior.

3.4.3 Kessler Psychological Distress Scale

Psychological distress scale was developed by Kessler, having 10 items (Kessler et al., 2002). The K10 uses a 5-point Likert scale (1 = None of the time, 2 = A little of the time, 3 = Some of the time, 4 = Most of the time, 5 = All of the time) to assess psychological distress. Scoring can be done by summing up all items that will yield a minimum score of 10 and maximum 50. Lower scores show low level of psychological distress while higher scores indicate higher psychological distress. The scale has demonstrated excellent reliability with a Cronbach's alpha ranging from .88 to .92, indicating high internal consistency.

3.4.4 Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale

The scale was developed by Gratz and Roemer (2004). The DERS-36 utilizes a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Almost never, 2 = Sometimes, 3 = About half the time, 4 = Most of the time, 5 = Almost always) to measure the frequency of difficulties in emotion regulation. It comprises of six subscales: Non-acceptance, Goals, Awareness, Strategies, and Clarity. This scale has shown high internal reliability, with Cronbach's alpha ranging from .92 to .94. The DERS-36 is validated for individuals aged 16 years and older. The total score range from 36 to 180.

3.5 Procedure

In this study, permission was obtained from university authorities to recruit participants from universities in twin cities. Participants were informed about the study purpose. They were assured that their data would be used solely for research purpose and kept confidential. A sample of 300 individuals were invited to participate in this study. Informed consent was collected from each participant, highlighted their rights to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences. Participants completed a survey that included the Nomophobia Questionnaire (NMP-Q), Doomscrolling Scale, Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale, and Kessler Psychological Distress Scale. The data was anonymized and

participants were assured of the confidentiality of their responses. The data was analyzed by using IBM SPSS-27 to assess the relationship between variables.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Approval for conducting the study was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Management and Social Sciences prior to data collection. APA guidelines were strictly followed in this study. Before collecting data, participants were informed about the purpose of the study, how data was stored and used through informed consent. Participants were assured that their responses will remain confidential and anonymous and their data will not be shared. Participants had the right to withdraw at any point of study without any negative consequences. Participants didn't suffer any physical, psychological, or emotional harm. All psychometric scales were culturally and age appropriate. This study securely stored all data and used it for academic and research purposes only.

3.7 Data Analyses

The data collected and were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27. Descriptive statistics such as means, standard deviations, and frequencies were calculated to describe participants' demographic characteristics and the distribution of scores across study variables. Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to determine the relationship between nomophobia, doomscrolling, psychological distress, and emotional dysregulation. The distribution of the data was assessed to determine whether it met the assumptions of normality or non-normality, after which appropriate statistical analyses were carried out accordingly.

Chapter 4

Results

This chapter presents the results of the present study, including demographic statistics for the demographic variables, descriptive, psychometric properties of the scales in terms of Cronbach's alpha reliabilities, and inferential statistics in terms of Pearson Correlation.

4.1 Frequencies and Percentages of Demographic Variables

Table 4.1 explains the frequencies and percentages of the demographic characteristics of the 300 participants. The sample consisted of 170 males (56.7 %) and 130 females (43.3%). In terms of age distribution, the majority of the participants fell within the 18-21 age range (56.0%), whereas participants ages 22-25 showed 44.0% of the sample. Most of the participants in the sample were enrolled in undergraduate programs (81.3%), postgraduates were (15.3%), and a small portion of participants were intermediate (3.3%). Regarding the socioeconomic status, the data showed that the majority of the participants belonged to the middle class (87.7%), while fewer participants came from the upper class (11.7%), and only a negligible percentage fell into lower class (0.7%). This distribution indicated that mainly most of the participants have sufficient resources and have greater access to educational and informational resources.

TABLE 4.1: Frequencies and Percentages of Demographic Variables

Variables	Categories	n	%
Gender	Male	170	56.7
	Female	130	43.3
Age	18–21	168	56.0
	22–25	132	44.0
Education	Intermediate	10	3.3
	Undergraduate	244	81.3
	Postgraduate	46	15.3
Socioeconomic Status	Lower class	2	0.7
	Middle class	263	87.7
	Upper class	35	11.7
Smartphone Usage	Yes	300	100.0
Average Daily Smartphone Usage	Less than 2 hours	11	3.7
	2–4 hours	68	22.7
	5–7 hours	149	49.7
	More than 7 hours	72	24.0
Primary Purpose of Smartphone Usage	Social media	161	53.7
	Online news/information	46	15.3
	Messaging/calls	53	17.7
	Entertainment	32	10.7
	Educational/Academics	8	2.7
Frequency of Checking Phone	Rarely	7	2.3
	Occasionally	72	24.0
	Frequently	170	56.7
	Very frequently	51	17.0
Frequency of Scrolling Negative/Distressing Content	Rarely	48	15.0
	Sometimes	153	51.0
	Often	98	32.7
	Almost always	1	0.3

Note. n = frequencies, % = percentages. N = 300.

All participants reported owning and using smart phone. 149 participants reported their average daily usage of smartphones is 5-7 hours per day, followed by those using their phones for more than seven hours a day, only 3.7% reported usage of 2-4 hours. When asked about the primary purpose of smartphone use large portion of the participants reported that they spend most of their time on social media, followed by messaging or calls (17.7%), and get into online news information (15.3%). whereas educational and academic purposes less often reported (2.7%). Majority of the participants indicated that they checked their phones frequently (56.7%). Lastly, the frequency of exposure to negative or distressing content showed that

over half of the participants come across such content sometimes (51.0%).

4.2 Descriptives and Reliability analysis

TABLE 4.2: Reliability of Scales

Scales	Items	M	SD	α	Range		Skewness	Kurtosis	KS	p
					Potential	Actual				
NMP	20	49.9	11.1	.85	20–140	20–80	-0.01	-0.02	.05	.03
DERS	36	100.3	17.5	.84	36–180	36–176	-0.20	1.45	.07	.00
KPD	10	27.0	6.13	.83	10–50	10–45	-0.26	0.11	.09	.00
DS	11	26.5	5.99	.77	11–55	11–44	0.07	0.10	.06	.00

Note. NMP = Nomophobia; DS = Doom scrolling; KPD = Kessler Psychological Distress; DERS = Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale; α = Cronbach's alpha; KS = Kolmogorov–Smirnov test for normality. $N = 300$.

Table 4.2. presents the descriptive statistics, reliabilities, and normality test for the study variables: Nomophobia (NMP), Doom scrolling (DS), Psychological distress (KPD), and Difficulty in emotion dysregulation (DERS). The Nomophobia scale (NMP) demonstrated the mean score of 49.9 (SD=11.1) and the Cronbach alpha reliability was found 0.85, indicating a high acceptable internal consistency. The skewness (-.01) and kurtosis (-.02) values lie under the range of normal distribution but KS value (0.5, $p=.03$) is significant and indicated non normal distribution of the data. This might be due to the large sample size ($N=300$).

For the Difficulty in emotion regulation scale (DERS), the mean score was (100.3) and the standard deviation was (17.5). The DERS scale presented the good Cronbach's alpha reliability 0.84 indicating a high internal consistency. The actual range of the scale was (26-176) and the maximum potential range was (36-180). Most of the participant's scores are within the moderate range. The distribution of the data was slight negatively skewed (-.20) and leptokurtic (1.45). The KS value was again significant and less than 0.05 indicated the non-normal distribution of the data.

The Psychological distress scale (KPD) presented the strong reliability (0.83), showed the greater internal consistency. The mean score of psychological distress scale was (27.0) and the standard deviation (6.13). The actual range of the scale was within the expected limits, which is (10-45). The skewness value (-.26) indicated the slightly negative skewed and the kurtosis value was (.11) directed relatively symmetric and the mesokurtic the KS value (.09) of this scale was significant, less than 0.05 explained the data distribution was non-normal.

The Doom scrolling scale demonstrated the mean score of (26.5) and the standard deviation of (5.99). The Cronbach's alpha reliability of the scale was (0.77), represented the acceptable internal consistency. The actual score range (11-44) was exceed than the potential theoretical maximum range (11-50). The skewness value (0.07) suggests an almost symmetrical distribution of scale and the kurtosis value was (0.10), both suggested the normal distribution of the data. Again, the KS value (.06) of this scale indicated the non-normal distribution of the data.

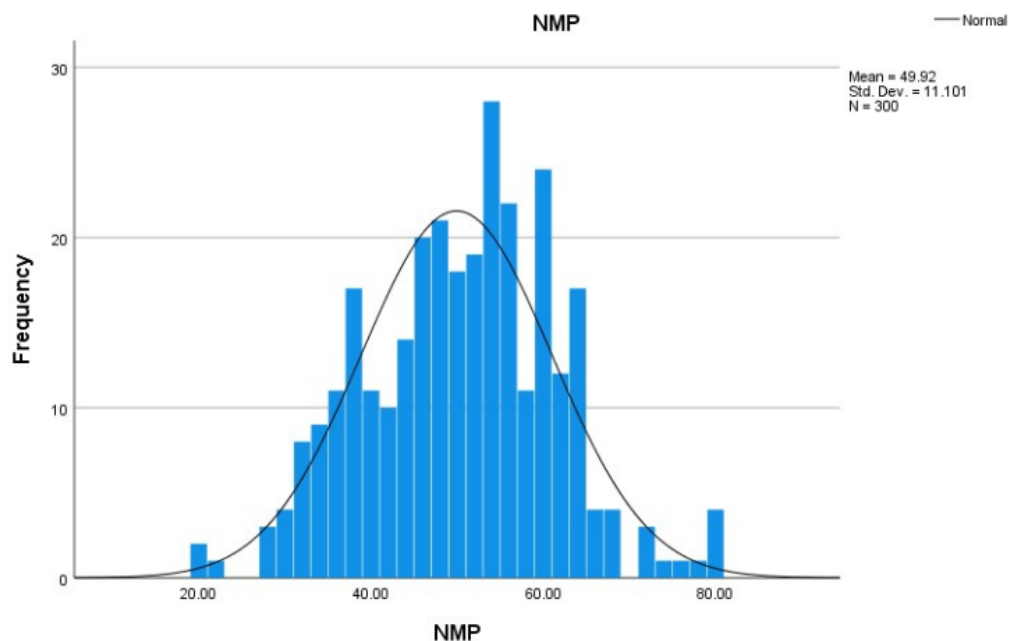


FIGURE 4.1: NMP

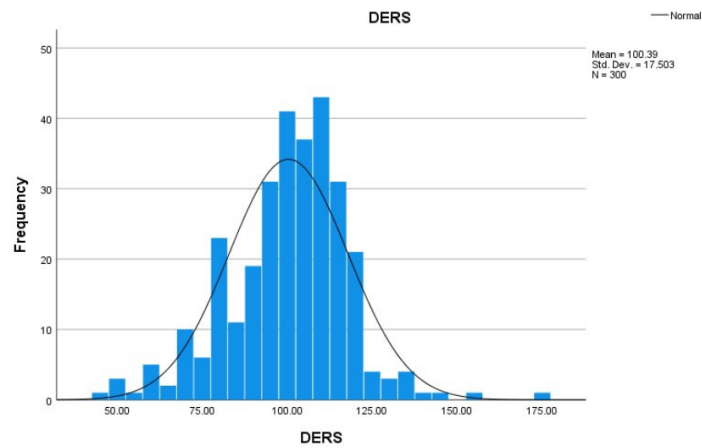


FIGURE 4.2: DERS

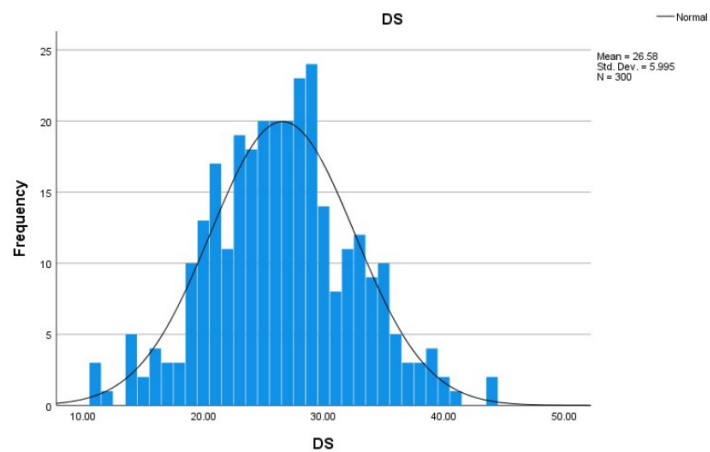


FIGURE 4.3: DS

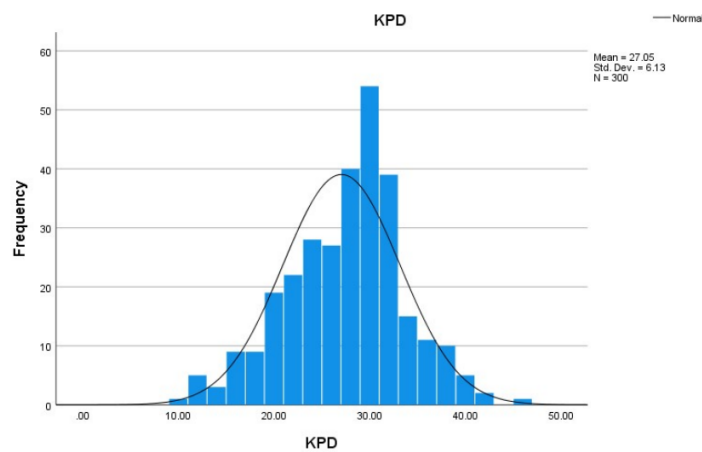


FIGURE 4.4: KPD

As indicated by the histograms of NMP, DS, KPD, and DERS, the variables seems to have a normal distribution of the data. Each distribution is symmetrically distributed, showing no evidence of significant positive or negative skew, as the data points are balanced evenly on both sides of the central peak. Overall, the bell curve shows the normal distribution of the data. In terms of kurtosis, the NMP, DS, and DERS distributions are classified as mesokurtic, indicating a standard peak. Conversely, KPD distribution in Figure 03 exhibited a leptokurtic tendency. Overall, the lack of significant outliers suggests that these variables are suitable for parametric statistical procedure.

4.3 Pearson's Correlation analysis

TABLE 4.3: Pearson Correlations among NMP, DS, KPD, and DERS ($N = 300$)

Variables	1	2	3
1. Nomophobia (NMP)	—		
2. Doomscrolling (DS)	.74**	—	
3. Psychological Distress (KPD)	-.01	.08	—
4. Difficulty in Emotion Regulation (DERS)	.20**	.24**	.06

Note. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$; NMP = Nomophobia, DS = Doomscrolling, KPD = Psychological Distress, DERS = Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale.

Table 4.3. explains the Pearson's correlation analysis conducted to examine the relationship between Nomophobia (NMP), Doom scrolling (DS), Psychological distress and Difficulty in emotion regulation. The results indicated the strong and positive relationship between nomophobia and doom scrolling ($r = .74, p < .001$), showed that participants with higher level of nomophobia were more likely to engage in doom scrolling. Nomophobia also showed a small but significant positive relationship with difficulty in emotion regulation DERS ($r = .20, p < .01$), indicating that individual with high dependence on phones experience difficulty in regulating their emotions. However, nomophobia was not significantly related to

psychological distress.

Doom scrolling showed a significant positive relationship with difficulty in emotion regulation. DERS ($r = .24, p < .01$) indicated that higher engagement in repetitive consumption of negative online content was related with emotion dysregulation. When observing the relationship of doom scrolling with psychological distress the results showed that they are not significantly correlated. Overall, these results showed that Nomophobia and Doom scrolling are more related with emotional regulation difficulties than to direct experience of psychological distress.

Chapter 5

Discussion and Conclusion

This research sought to investigate the relationship between nomophobia, doom scrolling, difficulty in emotion dysregulation, and psychological distress in Pakistani young adults, who are increasingly engaged with digital technologies. Increased smartphone and internet consumption among young adults in Pakistan has created a concern about the possible psychological impact of overuse of digital technology, especially when it comes to social media use and exposure to negative or upsetting news online ([Hickman et al., 2021](#); [Ogunbode et al., 2022](#)). Although past studies have explored digital addiction in general, but there is a lack of research on particular variables (nomophobia and doom scrolling) in the Pakistani population ([Hawwa, 2025](#)).

5.0.1 Sample Characteristics and Demographics

The current study is connected to the accumulating body of research by examining how these behaviors are associated with emotion dysregulation and psychological distress, presenting an insight into the psychological consequences of modern digital behaviors. This study employed a sample of 300 university students from Rawalpindi and Islamabad, consisting 170 males (56.7%) and 130 females (43.3%), with the majority aged 18-21 years (56.0%). Participants were primarily enrolled in undergraduate programs (81.3%), while postgraduate were 15.3%, and a small portion were at intermediate level. The socioeconomic status of participants was predominantly middle class (87.7%). The demographic composition of the sample

was selected to reflect the population most actively engaged with smartphones and online content. Young adults studied in universities and colleges are particularly vulnerable to behaviors such as excessive mobile phone use doom scrolling due to academic, social and digital pressures.

Furthermore, the age range of 18 to 25 was selected as adults are highly engaged with digital technologies and are in developmental phase where they explore their identity and the establishment of social and emotional regulation (Gnardellis et al., 2023). These demographics were selected to ensure that the study could meaningfully investigate the psychological correlates of nomophobia and doom scrolling in a population with relevant exposure and susceptibility.

5.0.2 Psychometric Properties of the Measures

All participants in the study reported ownership and regular use of smartphones, which made them an appropriate sample for examining patterns of digital behaviors, including nomophobia and doom scrolling. The common use of smartphones within this sample ensured that the participants could reliably provide responses regarding their engagement with digital technologies, as well as their emotional and psychological experiences associated with such use.

The reliability of the scales used in this study was assessed via Cronbach's alpha coefficients, which indicated higher internal consistency of the scales. The Nomophobia Questionnaire demonstrated high internal consistency .85, indicating that the items consistently measured the construct of fear of being without one's smartphone.

Similarly, the Difficulty in emotion regulation scale (DERS) showed high reliability .84, confirming that the scale reliably assessed participants' ability to manage and regulate emotional responses. The Kessler Psychological Distress scale also demonstrated strong internal consistency .83, suggesting that scale reliably measured the symptoms of psychological distress in this sample. The Doom scrolling

scale exhibits acceptable reliability which is .77, indicating a consistent measurement of participants' engagement with compulsive or excessive consumption of negative online content. These findings confirm the appropriateness of the instruments for measuring the intended constructs in this population and support the validity of the subsequent correlation analyses.

5.0.3 Relationship between Study Variables

Correlation analyses were conducted to explore the relationships between the study variables. Nomophobia demonstrated a strong and significant positive association with doomscrolling, suggesting that individuals with high dependence on smartphones are more likely to engage in repetitive consumption of negative online content. These findings support Hypothesis 1 (H1), which predicted a positive relationship among nomophobia and doomscrolling. Nomophobia also showed a small but significant positive relationship with emotion dysregulation, whereas its correlation with psychological distress was not significant. Similarly, Doomscrolling showed a significant positive correlation with emotion dysregulation but not significantly related to psychological distress. These results highlight that while both nomophobia and doom scrolling are associated with emotion dysregulation, their direct relationship with psychological distress was non-significant. These findings partially support H1, H2, and H4 hypotheses, particularly emotion dysregulation outcomes. Whereas H3 and H5 were not supported.

5.0.4 Nomophobia and Doomscrolling

The first hypothesis of the study stated that nomophobia would be positively correlated with doom scrolling, emotion dysregulation, and psychological distress. This hypothesis was partially supported by the results (H1).

In particular, nomophobia showed a significant and positive correlation with doom scrolling, which indicated that people who fear being without their phones are significantly more likely to develop obsessive doom scrolling behaviors. This finding is consistent with the prior studies that suggest the concept of nomophobia as a

type of smartphone addiction is strongly linked to compulsive digital behaviors and serves as a coping mechanism in situations where individuals feel threatened and anxious about their social connectedness ([Argumosa-Villar et al., 2017](#); [George et al., 2024](#)). Individuals experiencing nomophobia may feel a persistent need to stay connected to social networks, not just to sustain social connections but also to consume content that might reduce uncertainty or fear of missing out. As a result, they may repeatedly check news or social media platforms, which can increase engagement in doomscrolling ([Antonyamy and Parameswari, 2026](#)).

Additionally, the significant relationship between nomophobia and doom scrolling can also be explained using the cognitive behavioral theory, which suggests that maladaptive cognitive schemas and automatic thoughts contribute to the coping behaviors aimed to reducing distress ([Beck and Fleming, 2021](#)). With nomophobia, the presence of beliefs connecting safety, social acceptance, and the information accessibility may trigger anxiety whenever individuals are out of their phone, motivating them to compensate by engaging in activities like doom scrolling. Engaging in such behaviors may alleviate the anxiety on short term but heightened emotional difficulties, creating a self-perpetuating cycle of dependence and compulsive behaviors ([Gnardellis et al., 2023](#); [Vagka et al., 2024](#)).

5.0.5 Doomscrolling, Emotion Dysregulation and Psychological Distress

The second and third hypotheses proposed that doom scrolling would have a positively related to psychological distress and emotional dysregulation. These hypotheses were partially supported by the findings. Regarding H2, doomscrolling showed a significant positive relationship with difficulty in emotion regulation ($r=.24$, $p<.01$), indicating that frequent exposure to disturbing, negative on-line content or information is directly linked to difficulty in emotion regulation. Therefore, H2 was supported. The findings are alligned with existing literature that explained that negative and distressing content cause or trigger emotional arousal which may impact individuals' regulatory abilities ([Anchan et al., 2025](#);

[Desouza et al., 2024](#)). Constant exposure to distressing and negative content such as social, political issues or ecological crisis can trigger anxiety and increases the emotional responses such as fear, sadness, frustration, and anger.

When such responses not treated on time they may worsen the emotional functioning. Through Cognitive behavior theory lens, doomscrolling can cause maladaptive thinking patterns, such as catastrophic thinking, threat overestimation, anticipatory anxiety, which cause emotion dysregulation ([George et al., 2024](#)). The findings showed that doom scrolling had no significant correlation with psychological distress which suggests that even though doom scrolling affects the emotional regulation, it might not necessarily correlate with anxiety, stress, and depression in current sample.

This non-significant relationship can be explained in several ways, one of them is that there protective or buffering factors that mitigate the impact of negative digital engagement on psychological distress. For instance, cultural coping strategies including family support, collective problem-solving, or religious/spiritual practices may help to reduce the distress caused by exposure to negative content, also the normalization of technology use in university students ([Cui et al., 2024](#); [Farooq et al., 2022](#)). This highlights the importance of exploring culturally specific patterns of digital engagement and emotional responses when interpreting the psychological outcomes of nomophobia and doom scrolling ([Yasmin et al., 2022](#)).

5.0.6 Nomophobia, Emotion Dysregulation and Psychological Distress

H4 proposed that nomophobia would have a significant positive relationship with emotional dysregulation among young adults. The hypothesis was supported by the study findings. Nomophobia showed a small but significant positive relationship with difficulty in emotion regulation (DERS). This implies that people with a higher level of smartphone dependence may experience emotion dysregulation, which can manifest as increased irritability, mood fluctuations, and heightened sensitivity to stressors, particularly when access to smartphone is limited. Previous

literature has highlighted the importance of allowing people to develop adaptive coping mechanisms instead on relying on external sources of emotional support or stress relief, since individuals become habituated to externally sourced comfort instead of learning to control them internally (Kumar et al., 2021; Santl et al., 2022). These findings were further supported by recent researches showing that excessive and problematic use of smartphones is associated with impulsivity, poor emotional clarity, and maladaptive coping strategies (Cui et al., 2024; Rao et al., 2023; Alhusseini et al., 2025).

Individuals may engage in constantly checking online news and information through scrolling as an attempt to regain their sense of control or prepare themselves for any kind of potential danger, yet this behaviors paradoxically reinforces anxiety and emotional instability by continued preoccupation with negative stimuli.

These patterns give rise to a vicious cycle where the exposure to distressing material increases emotional reactivity, which causes subsequent compulsive consumption of negative news and it becomes difficult to control the affective responses ((LaRose et al., 2003; Akat, 2025).

H5 proposed that nomophobia would be significantly positively correlated with psychological distress among young adults. However, this hypothesis was not supported, as nomophobia was not significantly correlated with psychological distress. This non-significant relationship may reflect many contextual factors.

First, most of the sample consisted of university students belongs to the middle or upper class, who might have sufficient resources and a support system that reduced the direct influence of nomophobia on psychological distress. Secondly, the Pakistani culture is collectivist and family-oriented with communal coping that can help to mitigate the psychological burden (Hawwa, 2025; McLaughlin et al., 2024; Yasmin et al., 2022).

Third, nomophobia may cause emotional dysregulation such as mood fluctuation, irritability, discomfort rather than direct cause of psychological distress (Celik

[et al., 2023](#)).

5.0.7 Cognitive Behavioral Perspective on Maladaptive Digital Behaviors

The findings of this study also support the cognitive behavioral conceptualization of maladaptive digital behaviors. Nomophobia seems to function according to the automatic negative thought patterns associated with social exclusion, loss of information, and the fear of missing out, which provokes compulsive smartphone checking and connection with digital content

([Santl et al., 2022](#)). Likewise, doom scrolling is also an indication of cognitive bias towards catastrophic thinking, threat exaggeration, and a need to anticipate negative events, which leads to prolonged exposure to emotionally distressing information ([Desouza et al., 2024](#)). These actions are short-term measures to reduce discomfort or gain perceived control, but ultimately reinforce maladaptive cognitive distortions, leading to the emotion dysregulation and compulsive digital use ([Barends et al., 2023](#); [Kornacka et al., 2023](#)).

The current findings have significant repercussions on mental health intervention and educational strategies in Pakistan. First, since these digital behaviors are closely associated with emotion dysregulation, the effect of nomophobia and doom scrolling could be alleviated with the assistance of emotion regulation skill-enhancing intervention. Particularly, cognitive behavioral interventions, including cognitive restructuring, mindfulness, and behavioral activation, can be effective in addressing maladaptive thoughts, as well as breaking the cycle among cognition, behaviors, and emotions ([Nguyen et al., 2022](#)).

Second awareness programs create awareness regarding balanced use of smartphone and engagement with online information. Such programs help young individuals to set boundaries and inform them about the danger of excessive use of

digital technologies. Lastly, media literacy training and exposure to an encouraging or positive content can mitigate the emotional influence of distressing content, especially in societies or communities that are frequently exposed to political, social, and ecological crisis. Moreover, the research highlights the importance and need of culturally sensitive research and intervention strategies. Although most of the previous researches on digital behaviors were conducted on western countries, Pakistani young adults are exposed to specific sociocultural contexts, including collectivistic norms, family-centered coping, and the normalization of technology use (Cui et al., 2024).

5.1 Implications

The following are the implications of the study:

- i. This study provided significant information regarding the psychological impact of doom scrolling and nomophobia on young adults, especially university students.
- ii. The findings highlighted important implications for professionals in the mental health industry, teachers, and lawmakers.
- iii. Through the acquisition of an understanding of the significant correlations between extreme usage of digital media and psychological distress, it becomes possible to set up preventative strategies, digital wellness programs, and targeted interventions that are designed to encourage healthy digital behaviors.
- iv. The study would benefit educational institutions to improve the quality of support services and awareness programs focused on the management of emotions and mental health affected by online behaviors.
- v. Current study provided basis for future research that can include diverse age groups that can provide insight how doom scrolling and nomophobia have varying psychological impacts on various age groups. Studies should focus on research beyond students' population particularly among working adults and participants

exposed to heightened trauma.

vi. Future researches can focus on influence of AI algorithms that sustain doom scrolling behavior and if AI based preventions can minimize the issue or not.

vii. Future researchers can imply longitudinal or experimental research designs to better understand the causal mechanisms.

5.2 Research Limitations

Following are the limitations of the study:

i. The study utilized a self-report measures for data collection which increases the risk social desirability bias in responses. This factor may potentially affect the reliability of data.

ii. Confounding variables could be present that are not controlled like sleep quality, academic stress etc. which can contribute to psychological distress and emotional dysregulation scores.

iii. As a quantitative study, the research focused on standardized and objective analysis of responses, limiting the ability to capture in-depth and subjective experience. Data was gathered from Rawalpindi and Islamabad only, which made the generalizability limited as other cities or regions may differ in culture and context.

iv. The correlational design of the study which limits the ability to conclude about direct of cause and effect relationship.

5.3 Conclusion

The present study examined the relationship between nomophobia, doomscrolling, difficulty in emotion regulation, and psychological distress among young adults

in Pakistan. The findings demonstrated the strong positive correlation between nomophobia, doomscrolling, and difficulty in emotion regulation, but showed no significant correlation with psychological distress. These results indicate the importance of addressing maladaptive digital behaviors in the context of the CBT, emphasizing the interplay of cognitive distortions, compulsions, and emotion regulation problems. Overall, the key findings of the study are that problematic digital behaviours were more strongly related to emotional dysregulation than to psychological distress, suggesting that these behaviours primarily affect emotional dysregulation instead of directly causing psychological distress symptoms. These findings suggest that interventions should focus more on improving emotional regulation instead of only addressing psychological distress. Educational institutes can use psychoeducation and conduct awareness seminars and programs to highlight the issues of problematic digital behaviors on emotions.

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Appendix

Informed Consent

I, Laiba Rasheed, a student of MS Clinical Psychology at Capital University of Science and Technology, invite you to participate in my research study. The title of my research is: **"The Relationship Between Nomophobia, Doomscrolling, Psychological Distress, and Emotion Dysregulation Among Young Adults."**

To participate in this research, you will be asked to complete a self-report questionnaire related to nomophobia, doomscrolling, psychological distress, and emotional regulation. The estimated time to complete the questionnaire is 15–20 minutes. Your responses will be kept confidential, and your identity will not be disclosed in any reports or publications.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and you have the right to withdraw at any time without any consequences. If you withdraw before submitting the questionnaire, your responses will not be recorded. If you withdraw your submission after it has been received, your data will be discarded by the researcher and will not be included in the final analysis.

All responses will be used solely for academic research purposes. Data will be securely stored and accessed only by the researcher and supervisor. It will be retained for 3 years after the study's completion and then permanently destroyed to ensure confidentiality.

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, you may contact me at: **rasheedlaiba7@gmail.com**

By signing below, you confirm that you have read and understood the study details and voluntarily agree to participate.

Participant's Signature: _____

Date: _____

FIGURE 1: Informed Consent

Please provide the following information. Your responses will be kept confidential and used only for research purposes.

1. Personal Information

- Age: _____
- Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female
- Education Level
 - ☐ Intermediate
 - ☐ Undergraduate
 - ☐ Postgraduate
- Socioeconomic Status
 - ☐ Lower Class
 - ☐ Middle Class
 - ☐ Upper Class

2. Mobile Phone & Internet Usage

- Do you use a smartphone?
☐ Yes ☐ No
- Average daily mobile phone usage:
 - ☐ Less than 2 hours
 - ☐ 2–4 hours
 - ☐ 5–7 hours
 - ☐ More than 7 hours
- Primary purpose of smartphone use:
 - ☐ Social Media (Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, etc.)

FIGURE 2: Demographic Information form

- ☐ Messaging/Calls (WhatsApp, SMS, etc.)
- ☐ Online News/Information
- ☐ Entertainment (YouTube, Streaming, Gaming)
- ☐ Educational/Academic
- ☐ Other: _____

3. Social Media & News Consumption

- How often do you check your phone for notifications or updates?
 - ☐ Rarely (a few times a day)
 - ☐ Occasionally (every 1–2 hours)
 - ☐ Frequently (every 30 minutes)
 - ☐ Very Frequently (almost constantly)
- Do you find yourself scrolling through negative or distressing news/content online?
 - ☐ Rarely
 - ☐ Sometimes
 - ☐ Often
 - ☐ Almost Always

FIGURE 3: Demographic Information form

Nomophobia Questionnaire (NMP-Q)

Instructions:

Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement using the scale below:

1 = Strongly Disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Somewhat Disagree 4 = Neutral 5 =
Somewhat Agree 6 = Agree 7 = Strongly Agree

Items

1. I would feel uncomfortable without constant access to information through my smartphone.
2. I would be annoyed if I could not look up information on my smartphone when I wanted to do so.
3. Being unable to get the news (e.g., happenings, weather, etc.) on my smartphone would make me nervous.
4. I would be annoyed if I could not use my smartphone and/or its capabilities when I wanted to do so.
5. Running out of battery in my smartphone would scare me.
6. If I were to run out of credits or hit my monthly data limit, I would panic.
7. If I did not have a data signal or could not connect to Wi-Fi, I would constantly check to see if I had a signal or could find a Wi-Fi network.
8. If I could not use my smartphone, I would be afraid of getting stranded somewhere.
9. If I could not check my smartphone for a while, I would feel a desire to check it.
10. I would feel anxious because I could not instantly communicate with my family and/or friends.
11. I would be worried because my family and/or friends could not reach me.
12. I would feel nervous because I would not be able to receive text messages and calls.
13. I would be anxious because I could not keep in touch with my family and/or friends.
14. I would be nervous because I could not know if someone had tried to get a hold of me.
15. I would feel anxious because my constant connection to my family and friends would be broken.
16. I would be nervous because I would be disconnected from my online identity. .

FIGURE 4: Nomophobia Questionnaire

17. I would be uncomfortable because I could not stay up-to-date with social media and online networks.
18. I would feel awkward because I could not check my notifications for updates from my connections and online networks.
19. I would feel anxious because I could not check my email messages.
20. I would feel weird because I would not know what to do.

FIGURE 5: Nomophobia Questionnaire

Instructions:

Please press the response that is most true for you.

		Almost Never	Sometimes	About half the time	Most of the time	Almost always
1	I am clear about my feeling	5	4	3	2	1
2	I pay attention to how I feel	5	4	3	2	1
3	I experience my emotions as overwhelming and out of control	1	2	3	4	5
4	I have no idea how I am feeling	1	2	3	4	5
5	I have difficulty making sense out of my feelings	1	2	3	4	5
6	I am attentive to my feelings	5	4	3	2	1
7	I know exactly how I am feeling	5	4	3	2	1
8	I care about what I am feeling	5	4	3	2	1
9	I am confused about how I feel	1	2	3	4	5
10	When I'm upset, I acknowledge my emotions	5	4	3	2	1
11	When I'm upset, I become angry with myself for feeling that way	1	2	3	4	5
12	When I'm upset, I become embarrassed for feeling that way	1	2	3	4	5
13	When I'm upset, I have difficulty getting work done	1	2	3	4	5
14	When I'm upset, I become out of control	1	2	3	4	5
15	When I'm upset, I believe that I will remain that way for a long time	1	2	3	4	5
16	When I'm upset, I believe that I'll end up feeling very depressed	1	2	3	4	5
17	When I'm upset, I believe that my feelings are valid and important	5	4	3	2	1

FIGURE 6: Difficulty in Emotion Regulation Scale

		Almost Never	Sometimes	About half the time	Most of the time	Almost always
18	When I'm upset, I have difficulty focusing on other things	1	2	3	4	5
19	When I'm upset, I feel out of control	1	2	3	4	5
20	When I'm upset, I can still get things done	5	4	3	2	1
21	When I'm upset, I feel ashamed with myself for feeling that way	1	2	3	4	5
22	When I'm upset, I know that I can find a way to eventually feel better	5	4	3	2	1
23	When I'm upset, I feel like I am weak	1	2	3	4	5
24	When I'm upset, I feel like I can remain in control of my behaviours	5	4	3	2	1
25	When I'm upset, I feel guilty for feeling that way	1	2	3	4	5
26	When I'm upset, I have difficulty concentrating	1	2	3	4	5
27	When I'm upset, I have difficulty controlling my behaviours	1	2	3	4	5
28	When I'm upset, I believe that there is nothing I can do to make myself feel better	1	2	3	4	5
29	When I'm upset, I become irritated with myself for feeling that way	1	2	3	4	5
30	When I'm upset, I start to feel very bad about myself	1	2	3	4	5
31	When I'm upset, I believe that wallowing in it is all I can do	1	2	3	4	5
32	When I'm upset, I lose control over my behaviours	1	2	3	4	5
33	When I'm upset, I have difficulty thinking about anything else	1	2	3	4	5
34	When I'm upset I take time to figure out what I'm really feeling.	5	4	3	2	1
35	When I'm upset, it takes me a long time to feel better	1	2	3	4	5
36	When I'm upset, my emotions feel overwhelming	1	2	3	4	5

FIGURE 7: Difficulty in Emotion Regulation Scale

Please tick the answer that is correct for you:	All of the time (score 5)	Most of the time (score 4)	Some of the time (score 3)	A little of the time (score 2)	None of the time (score 1)
1. In the past 4 weeks, about how often did you feel tired out for no good reason?					
2. In the past 4 weeks, about how often did you feel nervous?					
3. In the past 4 weeks, about how often did you feel so nervous that nothing could calm you down?					
4. In the past 4 weeks, about how often did you feel hopeless?					
5. In the past 4 weeks, about how often did you feel restless or fidgety?					
6. In the past 4 weeks, about how often did you feel so restless you could not sit still?					
7. In the past 4 weeks, about how often did you feel depressed?					
8. In the past 4 weeks, about how often did you feel that everything was an effort?					
9. In the past 4 weeks, about how often did you feel so sad that nothing could cheer you up?					
10. In the past 4 weeks, about how often did you feel worthless?					

FIGURE 8: Psychological Distress Scale

Item	Never (1)	Sometimes (2)	Often (3)	Routinely (4)	Always (5)
1. I have subscriptions to online news sites and news alerts that I check several times a day.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2. When I watch the news on the Internet, I do not realize how quickly time passes.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3. I watch the news, trying to find answers to questions that interest me (e.g., solving a problem, helping loved ones).	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4. It has become a habit for me to start the morning and end the night by watching negative news online.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5. I am horrified by what I see on social media, but I cannot switch to anything else.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6. I feel uncertain and tense after following negative news, as if something bad is about to happen.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
7. I try to follow negative events on social media to find out if they really happened.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
8. When I wake up at night, I check the news on the Internet to see if anything bad has happened.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
9. I find it hard to stop watching negative news, reading comments, and discussing them on social media.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

FIGURE 9: Doom scrolling Scale

Item	Never (1)	Sometimes (2)	Often (3)	Routinely (4)	Always (5)
10. Recent negative news causes me anxiety, fear, irritability, or eating problems.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
11. I pay close attention to negative predictions and analysis on social media, believing real information is hidden from me.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

FIGURE 10: Doom scrolling Scale



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Ref. CUST/IBD/PSY/Thesis-1674
September 09, 2025

SUBJECT: REQUEST FOR DATA COLLECTION

Capital University of Science and Technology (CUST) is a federally chartered university. The university is authorized by the Federal Government to award degrees at Bachelor's, Master's and Doctorate level for a wide variety of programs.

Ms. Laiba Rasheed registration number **MSP233031** is a bona fide student in MS Psychology program at this University from Fall-2023 till date. In partial fulfillment of the degree, she is conducting research on "Relationship between Nomophobia, Doomscrolling, Psychological distress and Emotion dysregulation among Young Adults". In this continuation, the student is required to collect data from your institute.

Considering the forgoing, kindly allow the student to collect the requisite data from your institute. Your cooperation in this regard will be highly appreciated.

Please feel free to contact undersigned if you have any query in this regard.

Best Wishes,



Dr. Sabahat Haqqani
Head, Department of Psychology
Ph No. 111-555-666 Ext: 178
sabahat.haqqani@cust.edu.pk

FIGURE 11: Data Collection Form



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September 09, 2025

RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE CERTIFICATE OF REVIEW AND SUPPORT

This is to certify that Project titled: **"Relationship between Nomophobia, Doomscrolling, Psychological Distress and Emotion Dysregulation among Young Adults."** submitted by Scholar: **Laiba Rasheed MSP233031** and supervised by: **Dr. Uzma Rani** reviewed by the Research Ethics Committee of Faculty of Management and Social Science, meets the requirements of the American Psychological Association's Ethical guidelines for Human Research and is **REVIEWED** and **APPROVED** by Research Ethics Committee of Faculty of Management and Social Sciences.

It is the Scholar's responsibility to ensure that all researchers associated with this project are aware of the conditions of approval and which documents have been approved.

The Scholar is required to notify the Research Ethics Committee in case of any amendment in the project, specifically:

- Any significant change to the project and the reason for that change, including an indication of ethical implications (if any)
- Serious adverse effects on participants and the actions taken to address those effects
- Any other unforeseen events or unexpected developments that merit notification
- The inability of the Principal Investigator to continue in that role, or any other change in research personnel involved in the project
- A delay of more than 12 months in the commencement of the project; and,
- Termination or closure of the project.



Dr. Sabahat Haqqani
Convener, Research Ethics Committee
Faculty of Management and Social Sciences
Capital University of Science and Technology
Islamabad

FIGURE 12: Research Ethics Committee Certificate of Review and Support