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Doomscrolling, Span of Attention and Sleep Quality among Youth

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Abstract: *This study examined the cognitive effects of doomscrolling among youth, with a focus on two critical dimensions of mental well-being: Span of Attention and Sleep Quality. Six hypotheses were formulated: 1) There would be negative correlation between Doomscrolling tendency and Span of Attention among Youth. 2) There would be negative correlation between Doomscrolling tendency and Sleep Quality. 3) There would be positive correlation between Span of Attention and Sleep Quality among Youth. 4) Male and Female respondents would differ significantly in terms of Doomscrolling tendency. 5) Male and Female respondents would differ significantly in terms of Span of Attention. 6) Male and Female respondents would differ significantly in terms of Sleep Quality. A sample of 75 male and 75 female students were selected from Patna. Doomscrolling Questionnaire, DQ-12 (2024), The Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (2003) and The Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index (1989) were taken as research tools. Correlation analyses and independent samples t-tests were chosen as statistical tools. The findings highlight doomscrolling as a general cognitive risk factor rather than a gender-specific phenomenon. The relationship between Doomscrolling tendency and Span of Attention came as negative which means that over consumption of negative online news and information impacts individual's ability of sustained focus. A negative correlation among Doomscrolling and Sleep Quality among Youth implies that with the increase in the negative news and information consumption the sleep hygiene of the individual is adversely impacted. The gender differences in the study are not significant which means that even though gender impacts the effect of these variables but other factors like pattern of digital content consumption, personality factors, lifestyle habits also need to be considered.*

Keywords: *Doomscrolling, Span of Attention, Sleep Quality, Gender Differences, Youth Wellbeing.*

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Introduction:

Smartphones have woven themselves into the fabric of daily life, from the morning alarm that wakes us to the midnight scroll that keeps us awake. What began as a tool of convenience has gradually turned into a compulsion. The line between staying connected and becoming dependent is increasingly blurred, with constant notifications splintering attention and disrupting focus. As these digital habits intensify, the cost is often paid in lost sleep and diminished offline presence. Many young people find themselves caught in a cycle of endless scrolling, a behavior now widely recognized as doomscrolling (Harvard Health Publishing, 2022).

Nomophobia — short for "No Mobile Phone Phobia" — adds another layer to this issue. Coined in 2008, it describes the anxiety of being without one's

phone. In today's world, where smartphones serve as portals to social life, education, and work, many feel restless when their device is out of reach. This constant checking and inability to disconnect make individuals more vulnerable to doomscrolling.

The psychological weight of doomscrolling is profound. Cross-cultural research shows that frequent exposure to streams of negative information is closely tied to existential anxiety. For instance, (Shabahang and others, 2024) found that doomscrolling was strongly linked to heightened anxiety in both Iran and the United States, suggesting that its emotional toll is universal, even if its intensity varies across cultures. Doomscrolling, therefore, is not a trivial digital routine but a phenomenon that reshapes perception, fosters pessimism, and erodes trust in humanity.

The consequences are far-reaching. Doomscrolling erodes Span of Attention by conditioning the brain to expect constant stimulation and quick rewards. Activities requiring patience and sustained effort — such as reading, studying, or problem-solving — become taxing. Late-night scrolling further impairs focus by delaying sleep, reducing its quality, and leaving the brain fatigued the next day. Over time, this creates a vicious cycle: reduced attention leads to more mindless scrolling, which in turn worsens sleep and focus.

This study seeks to address a critical gap by examining the effects of doomscrolling on two pillars of mental health: Span of Attention and Sleep Quality. Scholars have observed that prolonged doomscrolling tends to overwhelm mental resources, diminishing one's ability to sustain attention (Maletis, 2025). It has also been linked to poor sleep patterns and heightened emotional fatigue (Singh & Verma, 2025).These outcomes are particularly concerning for young people, who already face academic pressures while navigating an increasingly digital, information-saturated environment.

Doomscrolling often begins with good intentions, where we want to learn about a new topic so that we can prepare ourselves for potential threats. However, the continuous flow of news that is available readily draws us to read negative story after story, even us being quite unaware of it (Mental Health Foundation, 2023). Doomscrolling is an act of endless scrolling of negative news; this exposure to a constant stream of information conditions the brain to seek quick rewards, which in turn affects the brain's capacity to have sustained focus on long-form information. This constant exposure not only affects memory but also causes mental fatigue, which in turn affects attention.

Span of attention is also associated with self-regulation and impulse control. Individuals with weak attentional control usually demonstrate impulsivity, difficulty delaying satisfaction, and a limited tolerance for boredom. From a developmental standpoint, a decreasing span of attention can impede the normal development of executive functions such as planning, problem solving, and decision-making. When people do not engage in persistent mental effort, the brain circuits responsible for persistence and cognitive endurance become undertrained. Span of attention is also strongly linked to mental health. Chronic attentional fragmentation is linked to higher stress, anxiety, irritation, and emotional weariness. When the brain is constantly stimulated and attentive, true psychological rest is impossible to accomplish. The inability to disconnect from digital stimuli can cause sleep difficulties, restlessness, and cognitive tiredness, all of which diminish span of attention in a self-reinforcing cycle.

Sleep delay is a slow and everyday struggle; it slowly erodes well-being both emotionally and physically. These digital tools have become a major source of dependency; the necessity of sleep is overlooked, and students often get caught in the vicious cycle of compromised mental health, functionality, and disrupted sleep. This widespread access not only facilitates constant urges to check phones but also increases the likelihood of late-night screen exposure, including behaviours like doomscrolling. Given the developmental sensitivity of youth, such digital habits pose significant risks to sleep hygiene and span of attention. Habit formation with dependency on technology can become a major consequence. In an age of endless scrolling, young adults are frequently trapped in a cycle of late-night doomscrolling, consuming content long after the world has quieted. Staying informed can gradually erode the body's natural rhythm. Sleep gets lighter, shorter, and less restorative. Over time, this digital habit chips away at emotional and cognitive well-being.

Objectives:

The primary objectives of study are as follows:

1. To examine the relationship between Doomscrolling and Span of Attention among Youth.
2. To investigate the association between Doomscrolling and overall Sleep Quality.

3. To find relationship between Span of Attention and Sleep Quality.
4. To examine gender differences in the frequency and tendency of Doomscrolling among Youth.
5. To examine gender differences in the level of Span of Attention among Youth.
6. To examine gender differences in the Sleep Quality among Youth.

Hypotheses:

The following hypotheses were formulated:

H1: There would be negative correlation between Doomscrolling tendency and Span of Attention among Youth.

H2: There would be negative correlation between Doomscrolling tendency and Sleep Quality.

H3: There would be positive correlation between Span of Attention and Sleep Quality among Youth.

H4: Male and Female respondents would differ significantly in terms of Doomscrolling tendency.

H5: Male and Female respondents would differ significantly in terms of Span of Attention.

H6: Male and Female respondents would differ significantly in terms of Sleep Quality.

Methodology:

Sample: Sample consisted of 150 youth out of which 75 were male and 75 were female from Patna town. The age range of the sample was 19-25 years. Participants were selected through incidental cum purposive sampling.

Design: This is a non-experimental psychological study. No specific design has been used.

Research Tools:

To meet the requirements of the study following scales were used-

Personal Data Sheet- To obtain relevant information about the participants, a personal data sheet was prepared. This consisted of information like name, age, gender, educational level, address, contact details, and living arrangement. Questions like do they own a smartphone and the duration for which they used the smartphone were also included in the sheet.

Doomscrolling Questionnaire (DQ-12) - The Doomscrolling Questionnaire was developed by Melnyk and Stadnik in 2024. It is a diagnostic tool that facilitates the diagnosis of addictive personality disorder in the context of doomscrolling. The questionnaire consisted of 12 items which were scored on a Likert scale as 'Never', 'Sometimes', 'Often', 'Routinely' and 'Always', where points assigned were 0,1,2,3 and 4. The questionnaire has 4 criteria Addiction, Rigidity, Mental health and Reflection where each criterion has three questions. In terms of reliability, the scale has a strong internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values exceeding the commonly accepted threshold of 0.80, and the questionnaire also exhibits content validity.

The Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) - The Mindful Attention Awareness Scale was developed by Brown and Ryan in 2003. It is a self-report questionnaire. There are 15 items on the scale. It contains mindfulness as the frequency of a receptive state of attention and awareness to current events and experiences. The responses are given on a 6-point Likert scale which ranges from 1 (Almost always) to (Almost never). The items are reverse coded, which means items reflect mindlessness, so a higher score means greater mindfulness. This scale shows an excellent Internal Consistency, with Cronbach's alpha (α) as >=0.80 (often between 0.82 and 0.93) for the total scale. It shows a strong validity where Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) consistently supports a single factor structure.

The Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index (PSQI) - The Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index was developed by Buysse and his colleagues at the University of Pittsburgh in 1989. It is a self-report questionnaire. It measures sleep quality and disturbances over a one-month period. Total number of items on the scale is 19, with 5 items rated by a bed partner which are not scored. The 19 items are grouped into seven component scores. Internal consistency is very good for the scale, where Cronbach's alpha (α) for the global score is typically around 0.83 (ranging from 0.70 to 0.85). The test-retest reliability for the scale is high; correlation coefficients for the global score are reported around 0.85 in various studies. The scale shows an excellent criterion validity.

Statistical tools: The statistical tools used for the study were mean, standard deviation, t-ratio, and Pearson's co-efficient of correlation.

Procedure of Test Administration: The data was collected from the adults in both online and offline mode. For online mode, Google Forms were prepared

which were circulated for the concerned participant through e-mail and WhatsApp. For offline mode, colleges in Patna were approached and after taking permission from the concerned authority, the test was conducted. Data were collected from 150 participants out of which 77 were collected in offline mode, and 73 in online mode. The participants were told about the purpose of the study at the beginning of the test. Proper consent was also taken from the participants, and they were assured regarding the confidentiality of their data. All three tests along with the Personal Sheet were given together, and instructions were given before each scale.

Results and Discussions:

The mean, standard deviation, t-ratio and coefficient of correlation were computed for quantitative analysis of data. The obtained data is presented in a tabular form.

H1: There would be Negative correlation between Doomscrolling tendency and Span of attention among youth.

Table 1. Coefficient of Correlation between Doomscrolling and Span of Attention

Variables	*r*	Level of Significance	
Doomscrolling	–0.311	p < 0.01	Significant at 0.01 Level
Span of Attention			

To test the hypothesis, Pearson's coefficient of correlation was calculated by using the scores of doomscrolling quotient and span of attention. In Table 1, the value of Pearson's coefficient of correlation (*r*) is –0.311, which is significant at 0.01 level. The *r* value shows negative correlation which means that the higher the level of doomscrolling tendency lower will be the level of span of attention. Since the obtained result is significant, this supports the first hypothesis that there will be a negative correlation between doomscrolling tendency and span of attention among youth.

The studies demonstrate that doomscrolling has a negative effect on attention control. (Singh and Narula, 2024) discovered that compulsive doomscrolling among Gen Z college students was strongly linked with psychological distress and compulsive behavior of checking their mobile phones, both of which have been established to affect sustained attention. Likewise, (Sa'idah and Aryani, 2025) investigated the topic of doomscrolling in a mixed-method study with Indonesian adolescents. They were statistically significant correlations between the frequency of doomscrolling and the anxiety ($r = 0.62$, $p < 0.001$), sleep disturbance (0.47, $p < 0.01$) and low learning concentration (0.29, $p < 0.05$). The qualitative findings indicated that curiosity, fear of missing out (FOMO) and the necessity to stay connected were often the causes of the desire to doomscroll.

H2: There would be a negative correlation between doomscrolling tendency and sleep quality among youth.

Table 2. Coefficient of Corelation between Doomscrolling and sleep quality among youth

Variables	*r*	Level of Significance	
Doomscrolling	.171	p<0.05	Significant at 0.05 Level
Sleep Quality			

From Table 2, it can be seen that the value of Pearson's coefficient of correlation (*r*) is 0.171, which is significant at 0.05 level. The value of r shows a positive correlation which means that with an increase in scores on doomscrolling quotient, the scores of sleep quality will also increase. According to the scoring system of Pittsburgh sleep quality index, high scores show poor sleep quality. With a positive correlation between doomscrolling tendency and sleep quality, the second hypothesis has been accepted. So even though statistically there is a positive correlation between the two variables; doomscrolling and sleep quality when compared with Pittsburgh sleep quality index scoring system, it practically means a negative correlation. Thus, the second hypothesis that there wouldbe a negative correlation between doomscrolling tendency and sleep quality among youth has been accepted.

The finding that doomscrolling is associated with poorer sleep quality is consistent with prior research on digital habits and sleep health. (Patel and Verma, 2020) demonstrated that high emotional arousal from interactive social media content, particularly news and peer interactions, was linked to delayed sleep onset and reduced satisfaction with rest. Complementing this, (Das and Roy, 2023) investigated the physiological effects of blue light exposure on circadian rhythms and found that evening screen use delays melatonin release, alters sleep stages, and contributes to chronic sleep disruption. Together, these studies highlight both the psychological and

biological pathways through which doomscrolling impairs sleep quality: emotionally arousing content disrupts the calmness necessary for rest, while blue light exposure interferes with circadian regulation

H3: There would be a positive correlation between span of attention and sleep quality among youth.

Table 3. Coefficient of Corelation between Span of Attention and sleep quality among youth

Variables	*r*	Level of Significance	
Span of Attention	-.107	p > 0.05	Not significant at 0.05 Level
Sleep Quality			

In Table 3, the value of coefficient of correlation (*r*) is –0.107 which is not significant even at 0.05 level. The value of r shows a negative correlation which means that as the score on attention awareness scale increases, the scores on sleep quality index decrease. According to the scoring system of Pittsburgh sleep quality index, low scores indicate good sleep quality. So, a statistically negative correlation between the variables; span of attention and sleep quality when compared with Pittsburgh sleep quality index scoring system practically means a positive correlation. Even though the variables are positively correlated but since the correlation is not significant, we can conclude that the relationship that occurred in the outcome is by chance factor. So, the hypothesis that 'there would be positive correlation between span of attention and sleep quality among youth' is rejected.

Much of the existing research highlights how poor sleep can weaken attentional control, yet emerging evidence points to the reverse relationship as well—where attention itself may shape sleep outcomes. (Udhaya Shri and Unnikrishnan, 2025), for example, explored the role of social media use, mindful attention, and attention span in predicting sleep quality among young adults. They found that the ability to regulate attention acted as a bridge between digital habits and sleep, with those showing stronger mindful awareness reporting better rest. This suggests that when individuals struggle to sustain attention, they may be more vulnerable to compulsive online behaviours such as doomscrolling, which in turn disrupts healthy sleep routines.

H4 Statement: Male and Female respondents would differ significantly in terms of doomscrolling tendency.

Table 4. Mean, Standard Deviation, and t-ratio of Doomscrolling among male and female youth

Variable	Gender	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	df	t-ratio	Level of significance
Doom-scrolling	Male	75	22.99	14.84	148	0.51	p > 0.05
	Female	75	24.24	15.35			

t-value at 0.05=1.98

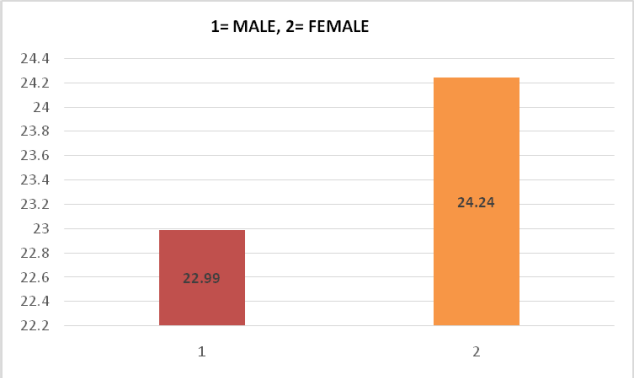

Fig. 1. Graphical representation of gender differences in Doomscrolling among youth

For testing this hypothesis t-ratio was calculated through mean, standard deviation and mean difference as shown in Table 4. The mean scores of males are 22.99 and standard deviation is 14.84 and mean scores of females are 24.24 and standard deviation is 15.35. Standard deviation clearly shows that there is variability in the responses of the participants. The mean difference between female and male is 1.25 and females have a higher mean score which shows that female have a higher doomscrolling tendency than males. t-ratio was calculated to test the significance of difference between the means. The obtained t-ratio was 0.51, which is less than the table value at 0.05 level. Thus, the value is not significant at 0.05 level, indicating the fact that there is no significant gender difference in doomscrolling tendency among youth. This means the hypothesis 'male and female respondents would differ significantly in terms of doomscrolling tendency' has not been supported.

Although this study did not find significant gender differences in doomscrolling tendency, other research has reported differences in how men and women experience its effects. (Grossekemper, 2023) examined sex differences in climate change doomscrolling and found that women reported greater

feelings of helplessness compared to men. This suggests that while the frequency of doomscrolling may not differ significantly by gender, the emotional consequences of engaging with negative online news can vary. Taken together, these findings imply that doomscrolling behavior itself is shaped more by universal stress responses, but its psychological outcomes may be moderated by gender and coping styles.

H5: Male and Female respondents would differ significantly in terms of Span of attention.

Table 5. Mean, Standard Deviation and t-ratio of span of attention among male and female youth

Variable	Gender	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	df	t-test	Level of significance
Span of Attention	Male	75	3.786	0.874	148	0.667	p >0.05
	Female	75	3.890	1.031			

t value at 0.05 = 1.98.

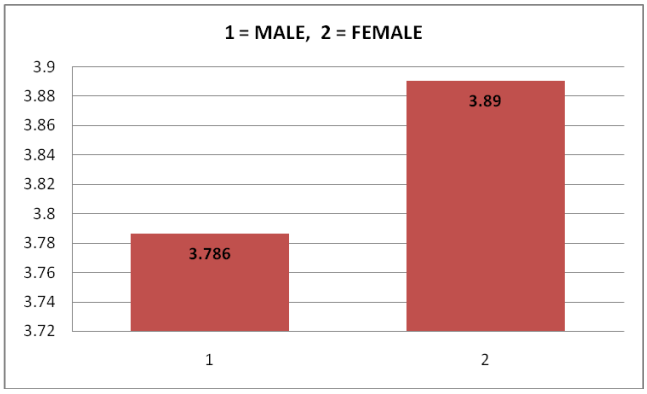

Fig. 2. Graphical representation of Gender differences in Span of attention among youth

In Table 5 the mean score of males is 3.786 and of females is 3.890 and the standard deviation is 0.874 and 1.031 for males and females respectively. The standard deviation shows that there is less inconsistency in the responses of the participants. The mean difference is 0.104 where the mean score of females is more than males, this shows that the span of attention of females is slightly better than males. Then to test the significance of difference between means t-ratio was calculated. The value of t-ratio came as 0.667, which is less than the table value at 0.05 level of significance. This indicates the fact that there is no significant gender difference in terms of span of attention among youth. So, the hypothesis 'male and female respondents would differ significantly in terms of span of attention' has been rejected.

In the current study, the gender differences in span of attention were not significant.This finding aligns with that of (Raffaelli and others 2018), which indicated that attentional control is similar in both genders, and no significant differences exist between males and females. Combined, this evidence points to the broad sharing of attentional vulnerabilities and not their strong gender specificity, which supports the need to explore contextual and environmental influences and not only gender based attentional situations.

H6: Male and Female respondents would differ significantly in terms of Sleep Quality.

Table 6. Mean, Standard Deviation and Sleep quality among male and female youth

Variable	Gender	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	df	t-test	Level of significance
Sleep Quality	Male	75	6.57	3.16	148	0.644	p > 0.05
	Female	75	6.24	3.17			

t value at 0.05 = 1.98

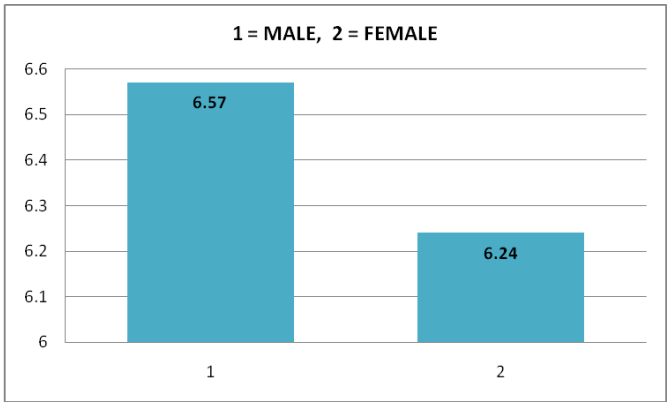

Fig. 3. Graphical representation of Gender differences in Sleep Quality among youth

Table 6 shows mean score of males is 6.57 and of females is 6.24 and the standard deviation is 3.16 and 3.17 for males and females respectively. The standard deviation suggests that there are considerable variabilities in the responses of the participants. The mean difference is 0.33 where mean score of males is more than females which implies that the sleep quality of females is slightly better than males according to PSQI scoring system. To test the significance of difference between means t-ratio was calculated. The value of t-ratio came to be 0.644, which is less than the table value 0.05 level of significance. This means that there is no significant gender difference in terms of sleep quality among youth. Thus, the hypothesis 'male and female

respondents would differ significantly in terms of sleep quality' has been rejected.

There were no significant gender differences in sleep quality in the present study. This finding is in line with (Buysse and others 1989) who established that sleep quality is mediated by behavioural as well as psychological factors but does not always vary by gender in non-clinical groups. Likewise, (Becker and others 2021) stressed that digital habits and stress levels are more convincing predictors of the quality of sleep than gender. Collectively, these results indicate that contextual and behavioural factors play a stronger role in determining sleep quality than differences in gender, which supports the validity of the current outcome.

Conclusion:

This study examined the relationship between Doomscrolling Tendency, Span of Attention, and Sleep Quality among Youth, along with possible gender differences. Findings revealed a negative correlation between doomscrolling and both sustained attention and sleep quality, showing that excessive exposure to negative online news undermines focus and disrupts sleep hygiene. Compulsive scrolling overwhelms mental processes, leading to cognitive overload, weaker working memory, and difficulty maintaining attention. It also interferes with circadian rhythm, as late-night scrolling heightens emotional arousal, increases anxiety, and exposes individuals to melatonin-suppressing blue light, delaying sleep onset and fragmenting rest. No statistically significant gender differences were observed, suggesting that traditional disparities in technology access and stress exposure are diminishing. With both male and female youth facing similar academic pressures and having equal access to digital devices, their experiences appear comparable. Overall, the results highlight that in contemporary society, behavioural habits and environmental influences are more decisive in shaping these outcomes than demographic factors such as gender.

Limitations:

Although the study provides useful insights into the relationship between Doomscrolling, Span of Attention, and Sleep Quality, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the sample size of 150 participants restricts the statistical power to detect weaker associations; a larger sample would have strengthened the analysis and improved generalizability. Second, the geographic scope was limited to a single urban town, which may not reflect the experiences of youth in rural or semi-urban areas where lifestyle, technology access, and sleep routines differ. Finally, socioeconomic status was not fully controlled, and variations in income, education, and work demands could have influenced digital use patterns and sleep outcomes. These factors suggest that caution is needed when extending the findings to broader populations.

Suggestions:

Although doomscrolling is often motivated by the need to stay informed, this study shows that it can undermine both span of attention and sleep quality. To counter these effects, several practical measures are recommended. First, individuals should replace endless scrolling with scheduled news use, limiting exposure to short, specific times during the day to avoid information overload and mental fatigue. Second, devices should be set aside at least an hour before bedtime to reduce blue light and prevent late-night emotional arousal. Third, social media tools such as mute, unfollow, and block can be used to filter out sensational or anxiety-provoking content, creating a calmer digital environment. Fourth, young people should be encouraged to adopt mindful scrolling habits, pausing briefly before engaging further to assess the value and emotional impact of content. Finally, parents and schools can reinforce healthier routines by promoting device-free bedrooms, which reduce temptation and protect sleep quality.

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