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Research Article

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Doomscrolling and Psychological Resilience: The Indirect Role of Cognitive Flexibility

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Abstract

This study examined the relationships among doomscrolling, cognitive flexibility, and psychological resilience in adults and investigated whether cognitive flexibility was indirectly associated with psychological resilience and moderated the association between doomscrolling and psychological resilience. Using a quantitative cross-sectional correlational design, data were collected through an online survey from 212 adults aged 20-50 residing in Türkiye who actively used digital media. Participants completed a Demographic Information Form, the Doomscrolling Scale, the Cognitive Flexibility Scale, and the Brief Resilience Scale. Confirmatory factor analysis, structural equation modeling, bootstrap analysis, and hierarchical regression were used to examine the proposed relationships. Doomscrolling was negatively associated with psychological resilience and cognitive flexibility, whereas cognitive flexibility was positively associated with psychological resilience. The indirect association between doomscrolling and psychological resilience through cognitive flexibility was statistically significant but small. In contrast, the interaction between doomscrolling and cognitive flexibility was negligible and not statistically significant. These findings indicate that cognitive flexibility accounts for a modest portion of the association between doomscrolling and psychological resilience but does not appear to alter its strength. Given the cross-sectional design, interpret the findings as statistical associations rather than evidence of causal or temporal relationships.

Key Words

Cognitive flexibility • Digital media • Doomscrolling • Psychological resilience

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Introduction

The widespread adoption of digital media and information networks has substantially changed how individuals encounter information about crises, disasters, pandemics, wars, economic uncertainty, and other socially disruptive events. During periods of uncertainty and heightened risk perception, continuous and largely unregulated news flows may expose users to a dense stream of negative content (Samuel & Selvam, 2025). Although algorithmically organized social media feeds provide rapid access to current information, the repeated circulation of threatening and anxiety-provoking material may also prolong individuals' sense of danger and uncertainty (Sharpe et al., 2026; Stainback et al., 2020). Digital news consumption, therefore, cannot be understood solely as an information-seeking activity. It also represents a psychological experience shaped by emotion-regulation processes, cognitive appraisals, and individuals' capacity to recover from stress (Rodrigues, 2022).

One behavioral pattern that has attracted increasing attention in this context is doomscrolling. Sharma et al. (2022) define doomscrolling as the persistent search for negative or threatening developments on digital platforms and the repetitive consumption of such content. Unlike incidental exposure to distressing news, doomscrolling involves continued engagement even when the material causes discomfort, anxiety, or emotional exhaustion. Previous research has associated this behavior with neuroticism, problematic internet use, fear of missing out, and psychological distress (Satıcı et al., 2023). Studies conducted in Türkiye similarly suggest that doomscrolling may emerge as a maladaptive response to uncertainty. Individuals may continue following negative developments to remain informed or regain a sense of control, yet this pattern may be associated with heightened anxiety rather than relief (Canoğulları, 2025; Güme, 2024; Kaya & Griffiths, 2025).

Psychological resilience is particularly relevant to understanding the possible psychological correlates of this pattern of digital media use. Psychological resilience refers to an individual's capacity to maintain or regain psychological balance and adapt effectively when confronted with stress, adversity, or crisis (Smith et al., 2008). It does not imply the absence of emotional distress; rather, it reflects the ability to respond to difficult experiences without a lasting deterioration in psychological functioning. Repeated exposure to crisis-related information may be associated with lower resilience by sustaining emotional arousal, reinforcing threat perceptions, and limiting opportunities for psychological recovery (Kaya et al., 2025; Shannon et al., 2024).

Research on doomscrolling has consistently indicated that prolonged and repetitive engagement with negative news is associated with anxiety, stress, psychological distress, and reduced well-being (Satıcı et al., 2023; Sharpe et al., 2026). Nevertheless, identifying these associations does not fully explain why some individuals seem more psychologically affected by doomscrolling than others. Much of the existing research has focused on the adverse outcomes associated with repeated negative news consumption, while comparatively less attention has been paid to the cognitive capacities involved in how threatening information is interpreted, managed, and incorporated into broader psychological functioning.

Cognitive flexibility may help explain these individual differences. Broadly defined, cognitive flexibility is the ability to adapt one's thinking to changing circumstances, consider alternative interpretations, and generate different responses when existing strategies are ineffective (Martin & Rubin, 1995). This capacity may be especially relevant in uncertain environments in which information is incomplete, rapidly changing, or emotionally charged. Individuals with greater cognitive flexibility may better place negative information in

context, consider multiple explanations, and avoid interpreting each threatening development as evidence of an uncontrollable or enduring danger.

The relevance of cognitive flexibility can also be understood within the framework of Conservation of Resources Theory. Hobfoll (1989) proposes that individuals seek to acquire, preserve, and protect the resources necessary for effective adaptation. Persistent exposure to negative digital content may place continuing demands on attentional and cognitive resources by repeatedly directing individuals toward threat, uncertainty, and anticipated loss. As these resources become strained, individuals may find it more difficult to reconsider their initial appraisals, disengage from threatening information, or generate flexible coping responses (Cengiz, 2025). From this perspective, doomscrolling may be associated with poorer psychological functioning not only because of the negative content being consumed, but also because repetitive engagement with such content may narrow attention and restrict the range of cognitive responses available to the individual.

The way negative information is filtered and interpreted may therefore be relevant to the strength of its association with psychological functioning. Individuals with higher levels of cognitive flexibility are generally better able to approach situations from multiple perspectives, revise initial interpretations, and regulate the emotional consequences of distressing information (Genet & Siemer, 2011). By contrast, reduced cognitive flexibility may be associated with more rigid threat appraisals, catastrophizing, and greater difficulty disengaging from repetitive negative thoughts. These patterns, in turn, may be associated with lower psychological resilience by making stressful events appear more pervasive, uncontrollable, and personally consequential. Recent research also describes cognitive flexibility as a dynamic internal resource associated with resilience in professional and social environments characterized by high levels of stress (Çeken, 2025).

Taken together, the available findings suggest that doomscrolling, cognitive flexibility, and psychological resilience are conceptually interconnected. Doomscrolling has been linked to psychological distress, uncontrolled social media use, and trauma-related psychological reactions, particularly during and after disasters or other collective crises (Kaya et al., 2025; Satıcı et al., 2023). However, the literature remains largely dominated by cross-sectional studies, and the cognitive-adaptive processes that may help account for these relationships have not been examined sufficiently (Avcı et al., 2026). In particular, limited empirical attention has been devoted to whether cognitive flexibility may statistically account for part of the association between doomscrolling and lower resilience, or whether it may function as a personal resource that alters the strength of this association.

This limitation reflects a broader separation between research on digital media behavior and studies of cognitive adaptation and psychological resilience. Doomscrolling is often conceptualized primarily as a problematic pattern of media use, whereas cognitive flexibility and resilience are generally examined within the literature on stress, coping, and psychological adjustment. Integrating these perspectives may provide a more comprehensive account of why repetitive exposure to negative digital content is associated with different psychological outcomes across individuals. It may also help clarify whether the association between doomscrolling and psychological resilience is partly related to individuals' ability to revise threat-related appraisals and adopt alternative ways of responding to uncertainty. Cognitive flexibility may play two conceptually distinct roles in the association between doomscrolling and psychological resilience. From an indirect-association perspective, cognitive flexibility is considered part of the explanatory pattern linking the two

variables. Repeated engagement with threatening digital content may be associated with lower cognitive flexibility, which, in turn, is associated with lower psychological resilience. In this formulation, cognitive flexibility helps account statistically for why doomscrolling and resilience are related. The moderation hypothesis rests on a different assumption. Drawing on the view of cognitive flexibility as an adaptive psychological resource, individuals with greater flexibility may be better able to reconsider threatening information, shift perspective, and generate alternative responses under stress (Genet & Siemer, 2011; Hobfoll, 1989). If cognitive flexibility operates in this way, the strength of the association between doomscrolling and psychological resilience should differ according to individuals' level of cognitive flexibility. Thus, the indirect-association model concerns whether cognitive flexibility accounts for part of the observed relationship, whereas the moderation model concerns whether cognitive flexibility changes the strength of that relationship.

Against this background, the present study examines the relationships among doomscrolling, cognitive flexibility, and psychological resilience within the context of contemporary digital media use. Rather than treating doomscrolling solely as a media habit, the study conceptualizes it as a psychologically relevant pattern of engagement with crisis and threat related information. The study therefore seeks to clarify how doomscrolling is associated with psychological resilience and to examine the role of cognitive flexibility in this relationship. More specifically, cognitive flexibility is examined in two distinct ways: first, as a variable that may statistically account for part of the association between doomscrolling and psychological resilience, and second, as a personal resource that may alter the strength of that association. Accordingly, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H1: Doomscrolling is negatively associated with psychological resilience.

H2: Doomscrolling is negatively associated with cognitive flexibility.

H3: Cognitive flexibility is positively associated with psychological resilience.

H4a: Doomscrolling is indirectly associated with psychological resilience through cognitive flexibility.

H4b: Cognitive flexibility moderates the association between doomscrolling and psychological resilience.

Method

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative correlational design to examine the relationships among doomscrolling, cognitive flexibility, and psychological resilience. The research model was developed to assess the direct association between doomscrolling and psychological resilience, as well as the possible indirect and moderating roles of cognitive flexibility in this relationship. Doomscrolling was specified as the independent variable and psychological resilience as the dependent variable. Cognitive flexibility was examined in two distinct ways: as a variable through which doomscrolling might be indirectly associated with psychological resilience and as a moderator that might alter the strength of this association. Accordingly, the analyses tested whether doomscrolling was indirectly associated with psychological resilience through cognitive flexibility and whether cognitive flexibility moderated the strength of the association between doomscrolling and psychological resilience.

Participants

The target population comprised adults aged 20-50 residing in Türkiye who actively used digital media, social networking platforms, or online news portals. Participants were recruited through convenience sampling using an online survey. Participation was voluntary, and only individuals who provided informed consent were included in the study. An a priori power analysis was conducted using G*Power 3.1.9.7 (Faul et al., 2009) to determine the minimum sample size required for the regression-based analyses. The analysis was specified for a fixed-model multiple regression, with an alpha level of .05, statistical power of .80, and an anticipated effect size of approximately f^2 = .11. The minimum required sample size was estimated as 107. Recruitment continued beyond this threshold to improve the precision of parameter estimates and to allow for the exclusion of incomplete or invalid responses during data screening. Following data screening, the final sample consisted of 212 participants. The participants ranged in age from 20 to 50 years, with a mean age of 35.08 years (*SD* = 9.36). Women constituted 62.7% of the sample, men 36.8%, and one participant preferred not to report gender. Most participants held either a bachelor's or graduate degree and were employed in the public or private sector. More than half reported using social media or online news portals for one to three hours per day. Instagram, X, and digital news applications or websites were the most frequently reported platforms for following crisis-related news. The demographic characteristics of the sample are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Demographic characteristics of participants

Variable	**Group**	***n***	**%**
Gender	Woman	133	62.7
	Man	78	36.8
	I do not want to mention it.	1	0.5
Educational Background	High School	36	17.0
	Associate's Degree	33	15.6
	Bachelor's Degree	93	43.9
	Master's/Ph.D	50	23.6
Employment Status	Public Sector	48	22.6
	Private Sector	76	35.8
	Student	29	13.7
	Not working	35	16.5
	Self-employed / freelancer	24	11.3
Daily use of social media and news portals	Less than 1 hour	21	9.9
	1–3 hours	114	53.8
	3–5 hours	49	23.1
	More than 5 hours	28	13.2
A platform for following the crisis and current news	Instagram	82	38.7
	X	70	33.0
	News apps/ websites	41	19.3
	Television/traditional media	19	9.0
Age group	20–24	30	14.2
	25–29	46	21.7
	30–34	28	13.2
	35–39	38	17.9
	40–44	19	9.0
	45–50	51	24.1

Participants were recruited through convenience sampling using an online survey distributed to adults aged 20-50 residing in Türkiye and actively using digital media, social networking platforms, or online news sources. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was required before respondents could proceed to the survey.

After data screening, the analytic sample included 212 eligible participants with complete responses on the study variables. Because the survey was anonymous and no personally identifying information was collected, duplicate participation could not be verified based on identity. Response patterns were nevertheless screened during data preparation, and no cases were excluded solely based on suspected duplication.

Research Instruments and Processes

A Personal Information Form developed by the researchers was used to collect information on participants' gender, age, educational background, employment status, daily digital media use, and the platforms they most frequently used to follow crisis-related news. Psychological resilience was assessed using the Brief Resilience Scale, developed by Smith et al. (2008) and adapted into Turkish by Doğan (2015). The scale assesses individuals' perceived ability to recover from stress and adversity. It consists of six items rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale. Items 2, 4, and 6 are reverse-scored, and higher total scores indicate greater psychological resilience. The Turkish adaptation study supported the scale's one-factor structure and reported a Cronbach's alpha of .83 (Doğan, 2015).

Cognitive flexibility was assessed using the Cognitive Flexibility Scale, developed by Martin and Rubin (1995) and adapted into Turkish by Çelikkaleli (2014). The scale assesses individuals' perceived ability to adapt their thinking to changing circumstances, consider alternative perspectives, and generate different responses. It consists of 12 items rated on a 6-point Likert-type scale. Items 2, 3, 6, and 10 are reverse-scored, and higher total scores indicate greater cognitive flexibility. The Turkish adaptation study supported the scale's one-factor structure and reported a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .74 and a test–retest reliability coefficient of .98 (Çelikkaleli, 2014).

Doomscrolling was assessed using the Doomscrolling Scale, developed by Sharma et al. (2022) and adapted into Turkish by Anlı (2023). The scale assesses the tendency to repeatedly engage with negative, crisis-related, or threatening news on social media platforms and digital news feeds. It consists of 15 items rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale. The scale contains no reverse-scored items, and higher total scores indicate a stronger tendency toward doomscrolling. The Turkish adaptation study supported the scale's one-factor structure, reported adequate item-total correlations, and yielded a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .92 (Anlı, 2023).

Data Collection and Implementation

Data were collected through an online survey administered to adults aged 20-50 residing in Türkiye who actively used digital media, social networking platforms, or online news sources. Participation was voluntary. Before accessing the study measures, participants were informed about the purpose of the research, the voluntary nature of participation, confidentiality, the scientific use of the data, and their right to withdraw at any stage. Electronic informed consent was obtained before participants proceeded to the survey. No personally identifying information was collected, and all responses were analyzed anonymously. Because the survey was anonymous, duplicate participation could not be verified through personal identifiers. Responses were therefore reviewed during data screening for completeness, eligibility, and unusual or potentially invalid response patterns. Only responses meeting the study criteria and providing sufficient data for the planned analyses were retained in the final analytic sample. The instruments were administered in a fixed order: the Personal Information Form, the Doomscrolling Scale, the Cognitive Flexibility Scale, and the Brief Resilience Scale. Following completion of

data collection, the dataset was screened for missing data, scoring accuracy, potential outliers, and distributional characteristics before the main statistical analyses. The final analytic sample consisted of 212 participants.

Data Analysis

Before the main analyses, the dataset was screened for completeness, scoring accuracy, duplicate response patterns, outliers, and distributional characteristics. The analytic dataset contained 212 complete cases, and no missing values were identified for the variables included in the analyses; therefore, no imputation procedure was required. Univariate outliers were examined using standardized composite scores, with absolute *z* values greater than 3.29 considered potentially extreme. No cases exceeded this criterion, and no observations were removed on the basis of univariate outlier screening. Distributional assumptions were examined using skewness and kurtosis values. Across the study variables, skewness ranged from -.66 to .44 and kurtosis from -.64 to -.19, indicating no substantial departure from normality. Scale scores were calculated according to the scoring procedures described for each instrument.

Descriptive statistics, reliability analyses, Pearson correlations, and moderation analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics 26. Participants' demographic characteristics were summarized using frequencies and percentages, and means, standard deviations, skewness, and kurtosis values were calculated for the study variables. Internal consistency was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha and McDonald's omega coefficients. Confirmatory factor analyses and structural equation modeling were performed in IBM SPSS AMOS 24 using maximum likelihood estimation. The factor structure of each instrument was first examined separately, followed by evaluation of the overall measurement model comprising doomscrolling, cognitive flexibility, and psychological resilience. In the initial CFA of the Cognitive Flexibility Scale, Items 2 and 10 showed standardized factor loadings below .35. Because these items provided relatively weak representation of the latent cognitive flexibility construct in the present sample, they were removed from the measurement model, and the subsequent CFA and SEM analyses were conducted using the remaining 10 items. Model fit was evaluated using χ^2, degrees of freedom, χ^2/df, GFI, AGFI, TLI, CFI, RMSEA, the 95% confidence interval for RMSEA, and SRMR. Fit indices were interpreted collectively rather than against a single cutoff, with consideration given to model complexity, sample size, item structure, and theoretical coherence (Goretzko et al., 2024; Hu & Bentler, 1999).

After acceptable fit of the measurement model had been established, the structural relationships among the study variables were examined. The direct association between doomscrolling and psychological resilience was tested first, followed by the indirect association through cognitive flexibility. In these analyses, individual items were used as indicators of their respective latent variables. The statistical significance of the indirect association was evaluated using 10,000 bootstrap resamples and 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals. An indirect association was considered statistically significant when the confidence interval did not include zero (Hayes, 2022; Preacher & Hayes, 2004). The moderating role of cognitive flexibility was examined separately using hierarchical multiple regression analysis. Doomscrolling and the 10-item cognitive flexibility composite score were mean-centered, and an interaction term was created by multiplying the centered variables. Doomscrolling and cognitive flexibility were entered in the first step of the regression model, and the interaction term was entered in the second step. Moderation was evaluated based on the statistical significance of the interaction term

and the change in explained variance following its inclusion in the model (Aiken et al., 1991; Hayes, 2022). The significance level was set at .05 for all analyses.

Results

The analyses began with descriptive statistics, reliability estimates, and correlations among the study variables. The factor structures of the measures were then examined through confirmatory factor analysis, followed by evaluation of the overall measurement model. Once acceptable model fit was established, the direct association between doomscrolling and psychological resilience was tested, together with the indirect and moderating roles of cognitive flexibility.

Table 2

Descriptive statistics, reliability coefficients, and correlations for the variables

Variable	1	2	3	*M*	SD	α	ω	Skewness	Kurtosis
1. Doomscrolling	-			47.31	22.99	.96	.96	.44	-.64
2. Cognitive Flexibility	-.60***	-		43.91	10.13	.90	.91	-.66	-.19
3. Psychological Resilience	-.46***	.45***	-	19.30	5.79	.86	.86	-.18	-.42

Note. N = 212. M = mean; SD = standard deviation; α = Cronbach's alpha; ω = McDonald's omega. ***p < .001.

As shown in Table 2, the distributions of the study variables were within acceptable limits, with skewness and kurtosis values indicating no substantial departure from normality. Internal consistency was also satisfactory across all three measures, with both Cronbach's alpha and McDonald's omega coefficients ranging from .86 to .96. Doomscrolling was negatively associated with both cognitive flexibility (r = -.60, p < .001) and psychological resilience (r = -.46, p < .001), whereas cognitive flexibility was positively associated with psychological resilience (r = .45, p < .001). Thus, higher levels of doomscrolling were associated with lower cognitive flexibility and resilience, while greater cognitive flexibility was associated with higher resilience. This pattern of correlations was consistent with the associations examined in the subsequent structural model.

Confirmatory Factor Analyses and Measurement Model

Before testing the structural model, the factor structures of the Doomscrolling Scale, the Cognitive Flexibility Scale, and the Brief Resilience Scale were examined separately using confirmatory factor analysis. For the Cognitive Flexibility Scale, two items with standardized factor loadings below .35 were removed, and the revised 10-item structure was retained for the subsequent analyses. The original item structures of the Doomscrolling Scale and the Brief Resilience Scale were retained. An overall measurement model comprising doomscrolling, cognitive flexibility, and psychological resilience was then evaluated using the retained indicators for each construct. The fit indices suggested that the individual measurement models and the overall measurement model adequately represented the data.

Table 3

Fit indices for the confirmatory factor analyses and overall measurement model

Model	χ^2	df	*p*	χ^2/df	GFI	AGFI	TLI	CFI	IFI	RMSEA	95% CI for RMSEA	SRMR
Doomscrolling Scale	207.27	85	< .001	2.44	.88	.84	.95	.96	.96	.07	[.06, .09]	.04
Cognitive Flexibility Scale	40.07	33	.185	1.21	.96	.94	.98	.99	.99	.03	[.01, .06]	.03
Brief Resilience Scale	8.71	5	.121	1.74	.98	.96	.99	.99	.99	.03	[.00, .09]	.02
Overall measurement model	692.14	416	< .001	1.66	.84	.80	.93	.94	.94	.06	[.04, .07]	.06

Note: GFI = goodness-of-fit index; AGFI = adjusted goodness-of-fit index; TLI = Tucker–Lewis index; CFI = comparative fit index; IFI = incremental fit index; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation; CI = confidence interval; SRMR = standardized root mean square residual.

The fit indices presented in Table 3 indicated that the factor structures of the three measures and the overall measurement model provided an acceptable representation of the data. Model fit was evaluated by considering the indices collectively rather than relying on a single cutoff value. In line with methodological recommendations, χ^2/df, CFI, TLI, IFI, RMSEA, and SRMR were interpreted in relation to model complexity, sample size, item structure, and theoretical coherence (Goretzko et al., 2024; Hu & Bentler, 1999). The revised 10-item Cognitive Flexibility Scale showed particularly good fit, $\chi^2(33) = 40.07$, $p = .185$, CFI = .99, TLI = .98, RMSEA = .03, 95% CI [.01, .06], and SRMR = .03. The Brief Resilience Scale also showed good fit, $\chi^2(5) = 8.71$, $p = .121$, CFI = .99, TLI = .99, RMSEA = .03, 95% CI [.00, .09], and SRMR = .02. The Doomscrolling Scale showed an acceptable pattern of fit across the reported indices, $\chi^2(85) = 207.27$, $p < .001$, CFI = .96, TLI = .95, RMSEA = .07, 95% CI [.06, .09], and SRMR = .04.

The overall measurement model also demonstrated acceptable fit, $\chi^2(416) = 692.14$, $p < .001$, χ^2/df = 1.66, CFI = .94, TLI = .93, RMSEA = .06, 95% CI [.04, .07], and SRMR = .06. Although the GFI (.84) and AGFI (.80) values were somewhat lower than conventional benchmarks, the remaining fit indices were within acceptable ranges. Taken together, the fit pattern supported proceeding with the structural model analyses.

Direct and Indirect Association Model

After establishing acceptable measurement model fit, the study examined the structural associations among the variables. The direct association between doomscrolling and psychological resilience was tested first. Doomscrolling was significantly and negatively associated with psychological resilience ($\beta = -.52$, $p < .001$), indicating that higher levels of doomscrolling were associated with lower levels of psychological resilience. The direct association model showed an acceptable fit to the data, $\chi^2(181) = 387.70$, $p < .001$, χ^2/df = 2.14, CFI = .94, TLI = .93, GFI = .85, RMSEA = .07, 95% CI [.06, .08], and SRMR = .05. The model is presented in Figure 1.

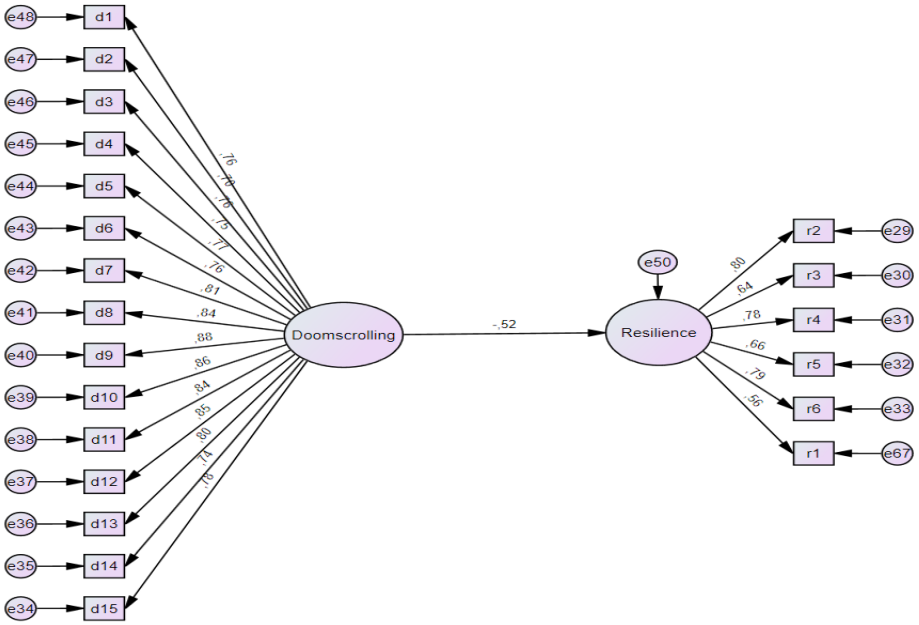


Figure 1. Direct association between doomscrolling and psychological resilience.

Following the direct association model, we examined the indirect association through cognitive flexibility. The structural model showed an acceptable fit to the data, $\chi^2(418) = 675.92$, $p < .001$, $\chi^2/df = 1.62$, CFI = .95, TLI = .94, GFI = .83, RMSEA = .05, 95% CI [.04, .06], and SRMR = .06. The model is presented in Figure 2.

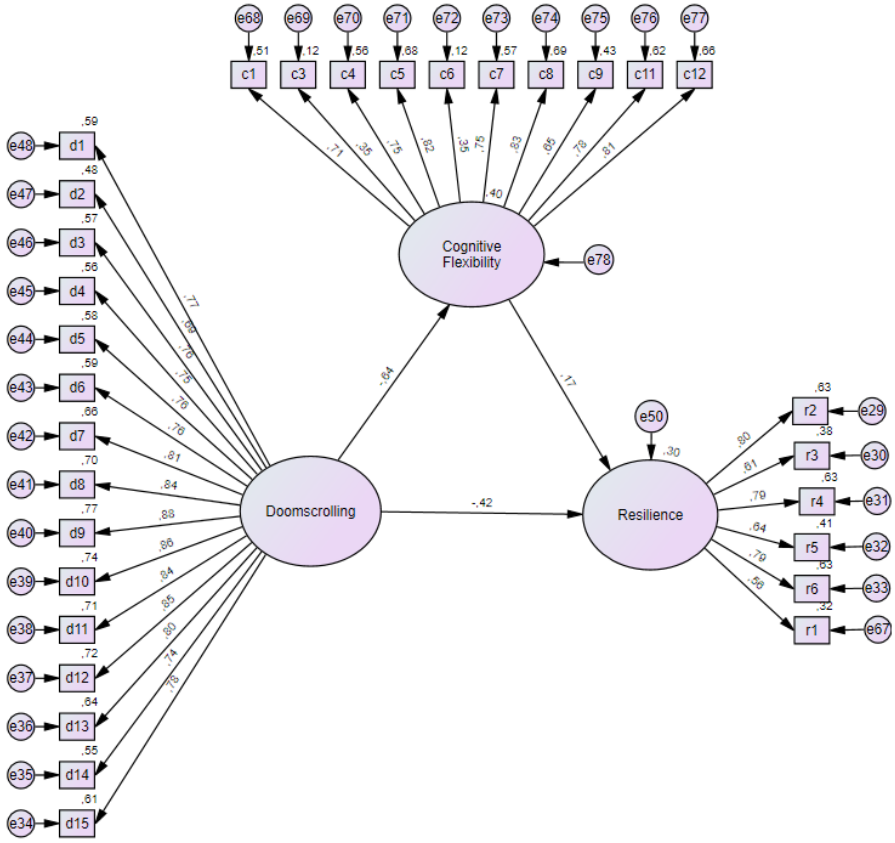


Figure 2. Structural model of the direct and indirect associations among doomscrolling, cognitive flexibility, and psychological resilience.

The standardized path coefficients for the structural model are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Standardized path coefficients for the structural model

Path	**β**	***p***
Doomscrolling → Cognitive Flexibility	-.64	< .001
Cognitive Flexibility → Psychological Resilience	.17	< .05
Doomscrolling → Psychological Resilience	-.42	< .001

Note. β = standardized path coefficient. The structural model explained approximately 30% of the variance in psychological resilience.

As shown in Table 4, doomscrolling was negatively associated with cognitive flexibility (β = -.64, $p < .001$), whereas cognitive flexibility was positively associated with psychological resilience (β = .17, $p < .05$). The direct association between doomscrolling and psychological resilience remained statistically significant after cognitive flexibility was included in the model (β = -.42, $p < .001$). Thus, the pattern of associations was consistent with a partial indirect association, as cognitive flexibility statistically accounted for part, but not all, of the association between doomscrolling and psychological resilience. The indirect association was evaluated alongside the individual path coefficients. Because the sampling distribution of indirect estimates may deviate from normality, statistical significance was assessed using bootstrap confidence intervals, in line with the recommendations of Preacher and Hayes (2004) and Hayes (2022). An indirect association was considered statistically significant when its confidence interval did not include zero.

Table 5

Bootstrap results for indirect and total effects

Effect	**β**	**95% CI**	**p**
Doomscrolling → Cognitive Flexibility → Psychological Resilience	-.10	[-.24, -.02]	<.05
Total Effects	-.52	[-.63, -.39]	<.001

Note. β = standardized effect estimate; CI = confidence interval. Confidence intervals were calculated using 10,000 bootstrap resamples.

The bootstrap results presented in Table 5 showed that the indirect association between doomscrolling and psychological resilience through cognitive flexibility was statistically significant, β = -.10, 95% CI [-.24, -.02], $p < .05$. Because the confidence interval did not include zero, the indirect association was considered statistically significant (Hayes, 2022; Preacher & Hayes, 2004). However, the magnitude of the standardized indirect association was small, indicating that cognitive flexibility accounted for only a modest portion of the overall association between doomscrolling and psychological resilience. The total association was considerably larger, β = -.52, 95% CI [-.63, -.39], $p < .001$. Moreover, the direct association remained statistically significant after cognitive flexibility was included in the structural model. Taken together, these findings suggest that cognitive flexibility contributes to the association between doomscrolling and psychological resilience, but its indirect contribution is relatively limited and should not be interpreted as the primary explanation for this relationship.

Moderation Analysis

To examine whether cognitive flexibility changed the strength of the association between doomscrolling and psychological resilience, a hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted. The main effects were entered in the first step, followed by the interaction term in the second step.

Table 6

Hierarchical regression analysis predicting psychological resilience

Step and Predictor	B	SE	β	*t*	*p*	95% CI for B	R^2	ΔR^2
Step 1							.265	-
Doomscrolling	-.072	.019	-.285	-3.83	< .001	[-.109, -.035]		
Cognitive Flexibility	.165	.043	.289	3.89	< .001	[.082, .249]		
Step 2							.265	< .001
Doomscrolling	-.072	.019	-.285	-3.82	< .001	[-.109, -.035]		
Cognitive Flexibility	.165	.045	.289	3.67	< .001	[.076, .253]		
Doomscrolling × Cognitive Flexibility	.0001	.0016	.002	.04	.970	[-.0032, .0033]		

Note. N = 212. B = unstandardized regression coefficient; SE = standard error; β = standardized regression coefficient; CI = confidence interval. Doomscrolling and cognitive flexibility were mean-centered before the interaction term was created. Step 1: $F(2, 209) = 37.68$, $p < .001$. Step 2: $F(3, 208) = 25.00$, $p < .001$. The interaction term did not result in a meaningful increase in explained variance, $\Delta R^2 < .001$, $\Delta F(1, 208) = 0.001$, $p = .970$.

The moderating role of cognitive flexibility in the association between doomscrolling and psychological resilience was examined using hierarchical multiple regression analysis. Doomscrolling and cognitive flexibility scores were mean-centered, and their product term was entered as the interaction term, following established procedures for testing moderation with continuous variables (Aiken et al., 1991; Hayes, 2022). In the first step, doomscrolling and cognitive flexibility together explained 26.5% of the variance in psychological resilience, $R^2 = .265$, $F(2, 209) = 37.68$, $p < .001$. Doomscrolling was negatively associated with psychological resilience, $\beta = -.285$, $p < .001$, whereas cognitive flexibility was positively associated with psychological resilience, $\beta = .289$, $p < .001$.

When the interaction term was added in the second step, it was not statistically significant, B = .0001, SE = .0016, β = .002, $t = .04$, $p = .970$, 95% CI [-.0032, .0033]. Its inclusion produced virtually no change in explained variance, $\Delta R^2 < .001$, $\Delta F(1, 208) = 0.001$, $p = .970$. Thus, the strength of the association between doomscrolling and psychological resilience did not vary according to cognitive flexibility, and H4b was not supported. The interaction effect was negligible, indicating that cognitive flexibility did not function as a meaningful buffering factor in this model.

Discussion

This study examined the relationships among doomscrolling, cognitive flexibility, and psychological resilience in adults, with particular attention to the different roles that cognitive flexibility might play in this association. Higher levels of doomscrolling were associated with lower psychological resilience and lower cognitive flexibility, whereas cognitive flexibility was positively associated with psychological resilience. The structural model also showed a statistically significant, although small, indirect association between

doomscrolling and psychological resilience through cognitive flexibility. In contrast, cognitive flexibility did not moderate the association between doomscrolling and psychological resilience. These findings suggest that cognitive flexibility may account for a limited part of the association between repeated engagement with negative digital news and psychological resilience, but does not appear to alter the strength of that association.

The first finding supported the negative association between doomscrolling and psychological resilience (H1). This result is consistent with previous research linking doomscrolling to psychological distress, reduced well-being, and difficulties in psychological recovery (Satıcı et al., 2023; Sharma et al., 2022; Sharpe et al., 2026). Digital news consumption is not limited to obtaining information; prolonged engagement with threat-related content may also involve sustained emotional involvement and repeated attention to uncertainty. As Rodrigues (2022) noted, repeated exposure to negative news may be related to emotion-regulation processes and threat appraisals. Similarly, doomscrolling has been described as a psychologically demanding pattern of media use associated with anxiety and heightened perceptions of danger (Güme, 2024; Samuel & Selvam, 2025). Findings from individuals exposed to crisis conditions likewise suggest an association between frequent engagement with distressing digital content and lower psychological resilience (Kaya et al., 2025). The present results extend this pattern to a broader adult sample of active digital media users. The findings also supported the negative association between doomscrolling and cognitive flexibility (H2) and the positive association between cognitive flexibility and psychological resilience (H3). Cognitive flexibility refers to the ability to adapt one's thinking to changing circumstances, consider alternative interpretations, and generate different responses when existing strategies are ineffective (Martin & Rubin, 1995). One possible interpretation is that repeated engagement with threatening or crisis-related information is associated with a more restricted range of appraisals and greater difficulty shifting attention away from a threat-focused perspective. This pattern can be considered within Conservation of Resources Theory. Hobfoll (1989) proposed that adaptation under stress depends partly on the availability and preservation of psychological resources. Persistent engagement with negative digital information may therefore be associated with greater demands on attentional and cognitive resources, leaving fewer resources available for flexible appraisal and coping (Cengiz, 2025). Because the present data are cross-sectional, however, this interpretation should not be taken to establish directionality. It is also plausible that individuals with lower cognitive flexibility are more likely to remain engaged with repetitive negative information.

The positive association between cognitive flexibility and psychological resilience is consistent with the view that flexible cognitive control supports adaptive emotional processing. Individuals with greater cognitive flexibility may be more able to reconsider an initial interpretation, entertain alternative explanations, and respond to negative information without remaining confined to a single threat-based perspective. Genet and Siemer (2011) showed that flexible cognitive control is related to emotional information processing and individual differences in resilience. In the present study, cognitive flexibility was therefore associated with psychological resilience in the expected direction, although the correlational design does not allow this association to be interpreted as evidence that cognitive flexibility produces greater resilience.

The indirect association through cognitive flexibility provides a more specific account of how these variables were related (H4a). Doomscrolling was negatively associated with cognitive flexibility, which was, in turn, positively associated with psychological resilience. The indirect association was statistically significant, but its

standardized magnitude was small. This distinction is important. Although cognitive flexibility statistically accounted for part of the association between doomscrolling and psychological resilience, its contribution was modest relative to the overall association. Moreover, the direct association between doomscrolling and psychological resilience remained statistically significant after cognitive flexibility was included in the model. Cognitive flexibility should therefore be viewed as one correlate that may help explain part of the observed relationship rather than as its primary explanatory mechanism. This interpretation is consistent with the broader literature linking doomscrolling to psychological adjustment while also pointing to the possible relevance of cognitive processes in this relationship (Kaya et al., 2025; Satıcı et al., 2023; Sharma et al., 2022; Sharpe et al., 2026).

The moderation findings provide a different perspective on the role of cognitive flexibility (H4b). The interaction between doomscrolling and cognitive flexibility was not statistically significant, and its magnitude was negligible. Thus, higher cognitive flexibility was associated with greater psychological resilience overall, but it did not meaningfully change the strength of the association between doomscrolling and resilience. This distinction is theoretically relevant because the indirect and moderation models rest on different assumptions. The indirect model examines whether cognitive flexibility statistically accounts for part of the association between doomscrolling and resilience, whereas the moderation model assumes that cognitive flexibility functions as a resource that changes how strongly doomscrolling is related to resilience. The present findings support the former pattern, albeit weakly, but provide little evidence for the latter.

Several explanations may account for the absence of moderation. Cognitive flexibility may not operate as an unlimited psychological resource under conditions of sustained exposure to negative digital information. From the perspective of Conservation of Resources Theory, repeated demands on attention and appraisal processes may gradually strain the resources available for adaptive responding (Hobfoll, 1989). In digital environments characterized by recurring crises, prolonged economic uncertainty, successive disasters, and a continuous stream of threatening news, individuals may have limited opportunities to disengage from negative information and recover cognitively. Previous work has similarly described doomscrolling as a pattern of repeated engagement with distressing content that may be accompanied by heightened psychological strain and persistent attention to threat (Rodrigues, 2022; Samuel & Selvam, 2025; Sharpe et al., 2026). Under such conditions, even individuals who are generally able to shift perspectives and generate alternative interpretations may experience attentional fatigue or cognitive exhaustion. This may help explain why cognitive flexibility was positively associated with psychological resilience in the present study but did not weaken the association between doomscrolling and resilience.

A second possibility is that any buffering role of cognitive flexibility depends on the availability of additional psychological and contextual resources. Persistent engagement with negative digital information may place demands on cognitive resources that flexibility alone cannot offset (Cengiz, 2025). Social support, emotion-regulation skills, media literacy, and self-compassion may operate alongside cognitive flexibility and may be particularly relevant under chronic digital stress. It is also important to note that interaction effects are generally more difficult to identify than main associations and may depend on sufficient variability in both the predictor and moderator. Nevertheless, the present interaction was not only statistically nonsignificant but also negligible in magnitude, suggesting that any moderating role of cognitive flexibility was very limited in this sample.

The findings may have some practical relevance, but they should be interpreted cautiously. The results do not demonstrate that increasing cognitive flexibility would reduce the psychological consequences associated with doomscrolling, nor do they establish that reducing doomscrolling would improve resilience. Rather, they suggest that the way individuals interpret and respond to threatening digital information may be worth considering alongside the amount or frequency of negative news consumption. Cognitive flexibility may therefore represent one relevant component within broader approaches to media literacy and psychological resilience, but the small indirect association observed here does not support treating it as a stand-alone intervention target. Programs that include perspective shifting, alternative interpretations, or flexible coping may be worth examining in future intervention research when combined with strategies addressing patterns of digital news consumption.

Limitations

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the present findings. Most importantly, the cross-sectional and correlational design does not allow conclusions about causality, temporal ordering, or directional effects among doomscrolling, cognitive flexibility, and psychological resilience. The observed relationships indicate only statistical associations. Accordingly, the findings should not be interpreted as showing that doomscrolling causes lower cognitive flexibility or psychological resilience, or that greater cognitive flexibility reduces the psychological correlates of doomscrolling. Reverse or reciprocal associations are also possible. For example, individuals with lower cognitive flexibility or psychological resilience may be more likely to repeatedly engage with negative digital content. Longitudinal and experimental studies are therefore needed to clarify temporal sequencing and to determine whether any of these associations reflect directional processes.

Second, all study variables were assessed using self-report measures, which may be affected by response tendencies, shared method variance, and participants' subjective interpretations of their own digital media use and psychological functioning. In addition, two items from the Cognitive Flexibility Scale were removed from the measurement model because their standardized factor loadings were below the specified threshold. Although the revised 10-item structure showed good model fit in the present sample, excluding these items may reduce direct comparability with studies using the original 12-item version and may have narrowed the representation of the construct.

Third, age and gender were not included as covariates in the structural or moderation analyses. Women constituted 62.7% of the sample, and possible gender-related differences in doomscrolling, cognitive flexibility, or psychological resilience were therefore not directly examined. Similarly, potential age-related differences within the 20–50-year range were not statistically controlled. Future studies may benefit from testing whether the observed associations remain similar after accounting for relevant demographic characteristics.

Fourth, the sociodemographic composition and recruitment strategy limit the generalizability of the findings. Participants were recruited through convenience sampling, and 67.5% had completed either a bachelor's or a graduate degree. The sample therefore represented a relatively highly educated group and may not reflect the educational profile or patterns of digital media use found in the wider population. The restriction of the sample to adults aged 20–50 also limits generalization to adolescents, older adults, and other age groups. Future research should include more heterogeneous and representative samples, particularly individuals with lower levels of education, younger and older participants, and people from a broader range of sociodemographic backgrounds.

Finally, the indirect association through cognitive flexibility was small, and the interaction effect was negligible. Thus, cognitive flexibility accounted for only a limited portion of the statistical association between doomscrolling and psychological resilience and did not meaningfully alter the strength of that association in the present sample. These findings should therefore be interpreted cautiously and should not be taken to imply that cognitive flexibility is a primary explanatory factor or a protective mechanism. Other potentially relevant variables, including emotion regulation, tolerance for uncertainty, self-compassion, social support, and news literacy, were not examined in the present study.

Implications and Recommendations

The findings may have practical relevance, but they should be interpreted cautiously. The results do not show that reducing doomscrolling would improve psychological resilience or that increasing cognitive flexibility would lessen the psychological correlates of repeated exposure to negative digital content. Rather, they indicate that cognitive flexibility is statistically related to both doomscrolling and psychological resilience and may be one of several psychological factors relevant to this association.

Future research should examine these relationships using longitudinal and experimental designs to clarify temporal ordering and possible directional processes. Studies with more heterogeneous samples, including individuals from different age, educational, and sociodemographic groups, would also help determine the extent to which the present findings generalize beyond this sample. It may also be useful to examine cognitive flexibility alongside other relevant variables, such as emotion regulation, tolerance for uncertainty, self-compassion, social support, and news literacy, and to assess whether the observed associations remain similar after demographic characteristics such as age and gender are taken into account.

Given the small indirect association and the negligible moderation effect observed in the present study, cognitive flexibility should not be regarded as a primary explanatory factor or stand-alone intervention target. Its potential relevance within broader media literacy or resilience-related approaches should therefore be examined in future longitudinal and intervention-based research rather than inferred from the present cross-sectional findings.

Ethic

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee of the National Defense University on June 19, 2026, with approval number E-35592990-050.04-6286430. All procedures were conducted in accordance with the APA ethical principles, the ethical standards of the institutional research committee, and the 1964 Declaration of Helsinki and its subsequent amendments.

Author Contributions

The study was conducted collaboratively, and the authors contributed to the entire work.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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