



INTRODUCTION

Doomscrolling (DS): is a dysfunctional behaviour where an individual habitually checks social media for negative news and is positively associated with anxiety (Sharma et al., 2022).

Research gap: to date, there has been no research conducted on the relationship between DS and political anxiety.

Rationale: political anxiety is an emotional state triggered by political events and the current political climate (Smith et al., 2023). It can be a negative emotion, but it motivates people into political action (Ford and Feinberg, 2020).

- People need to experience this negative emotion without resorting to maladaptive coping behaviours, such as DS, and still act in accordance with their values.
- Therefore, **psychological flexibility** and **emotion regulation** will be explored as protective factors against DS.

Hypotheses

- **H1:** DS is associated with political anxiety, psychological flexibility, and emotion regulation.
- **H2:** DS is negatively related to age.
- **H3:** Psychological flexibility, emotion regulation, and political anxiety can predict DS.
- **H4:** The individual elements of psychological flexibility, openness to experience, behavioural awareness, and valued action, will predict doomscrolling to varying degrees.

METHOD

Participants: 121 adults, with at least one social media account, were recruited using convenience and snowball sampling to take part in an online quantitative survey using Microsoft Forms.

Gender	Age	Social media usage
81.1% Women	29.62 Mean age of participants with a SD of 6.15	26.4% Spend 15-20 hours a week on social media
18.8% Men		

Design: A cross-sectional correlational design was employed for this study where participants filled out an online self-report questionnaire.

Materials: online survey with demographic questions as well as the following reliable scales:

- Doomscrolling Scale (Sharma et al., 2022)
- Political Anxiety Scale (Smith et al., 2024)
- CompACT-15 measuring psychological flexibility (Hsu et al., 2023)
- DERS-SF measuring emotion dysregulation (Kaufman et al., 2015)

Ethics: ethical approval was obtained from the DSB Ethics Committee and, due to the potentially distressing nature of the topics in the survey, ethical issues were carefully considered.

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics were calculated to understand the mean and midpoint for all of the main variables:

- Doomscrolling: $M=43.6$; $MP=60$
- Political anxiety: $M=48.8$; $MP=44$
- Psychological flexibility: $M=63.94$; $MP=60$
- Emotional dysregulation: $M=44.39$; $MP=54$

Inferential statistics were calculated to test each of the four hypotheses which are explained on the right.

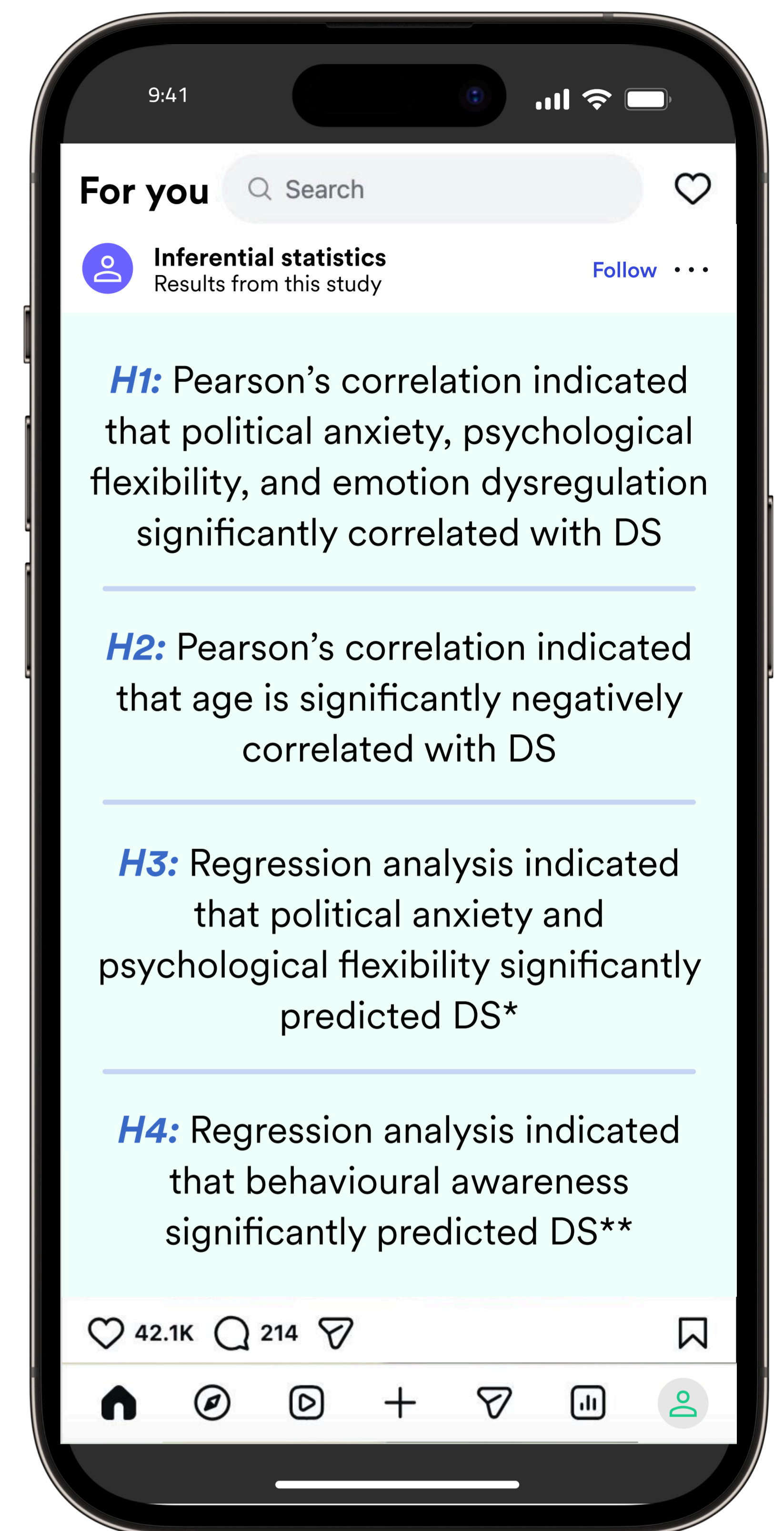
*($R^2 = .3$, $F(2, 114) = 17.79$, $p < .001$)

PA: ($\beta = .38$, $p < .001$, $CI[95] = .29, .73$)

PF: ($\beta = -.22$, $p < .04$, $CI[95] = -.59, -.01$)

** ($R^2 = .21$, $F(3, 114) = 11.41$, $p < .001$)

BA: ($\beta = -.34$, $p = .003$, $CI[95] = -1.7, -0.36$)



DISCUSSION

Summary: This study aimed to address a gap in the literature by understanding the relationship between political anxiety and DS, and exploring the protective factors of psychological flexibility and emotion dysregulation.

Findings: Political anxiety and psychological flexibility significantly predicted DS, with behavioural awareness the biggest significant predictor of DS of the three elements of psychological flexibility.

Future research: Future research should consider longitudinal studies to understand causality and a moderation analysis to understand the indirect effects of psychological flexibility in the relationship between political anxiety and DS.

Implication: Findings from this study suggest that those who experience high levels of political anxiety may have higher levels of DS, and psychological flexibility can protect against DS. Interventions for those experiencing political anxiety should target psychological flexibility to increase a person's behavioural awareness to help reduce and prevent doomscrolling (e.g. ACT), and conscious behaviour change interventions (e.g. mindful social media breaks and timers.)

References

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