
The Role Of Social Media In Quarter-Life Crisis Among Emerging Adults: A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract

Quarter-life crisis is a psychological phenomenon commonly experienced during emerging adulthood. One factor that has been suggested to contribute to this condition is the use of social media. This study aimed to examine the role of social media in quarter-life crisis among emerging adults using the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach. The literature search followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines and was conducted across several scientific databases. The identification stage yielded 401 articles, which were subsequently screened according to predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria, resulting in four eligible studies for qualitative synthesis. The findings indicate that three studies reported a positive and statistically significant relationship between the intensity of social media use and quarter-life crisis. In contrast, one study found that the intensity of social media use did not moderate the relationship between religiosity and quarter-life crisis. Overall, the evidence suggests that social media contributes to increased social comparison, heightened pressure to achieve life milestones, and greater anxiety about the future, all of which may exacerbate quarter-life crisis among emerging adults. Therefore, promoting mindful social media use and strengthening protective psychological factors are essential strategies for mitigating the adverse effects of social media on the psychological well-being of emerging adults.

Keywords: Social Media, Quarter-Life Crisis, Emerging Adulthood

INTRODUCTION

Emerging adulthood represents a developmental stage characterized by substantial biological, psychological, and social changes. During this period, individuals begin to face increasing demands to achieve independence, establish career paths, develop interpersonal relationships, and make important decisions regarding their future. According to Hasyim et al. (2024), emerging adulthood is a transitional period between adolescence and adulthood, marked by increased responsibilities and expectations to attain maturity across multiple domains of life. When individuals are unable to adapt effectively to these developmental changes, various psychological challenges may arise and negatively affect their psychological well-being.

One of the psychological phenomena frequently experienced during emerging adulthood is quarter-life crisis. Robbins and Wilner (2001) defined quarter-life crisis as a period of crisis characterized by uncertainty regarding life direction, heightened anxiety about the future, and feelings of helplessness when confronted with major life choices. Similarly, Fischer (2008) described quarter-life crisis as a developmental period occurring during one's twenties, characterized by considerable emotional distress resulting from changing social roles and increasing life demands. If not managed adaptively, this condition may develop into more serious psychological problems (Sunan, 2023).

Previous studies have consistently demonstrated that quarter-life crisis is prevalent among emerging adults. In a systematic literature review, Hasyim et al. (2024) reported that quarter-life crisis is experienced by a substantial proportion of young adults across various countries. Likewise, Alkaziah (2024) found a high prevalence of quarter-life crisis among emerging adults in Indonesia. Furthermore, Artiningsih and Savira (2021)

reported that the majority of participants experienced moderate to high levels of quarter-life crisis. Similar findings were reported by Herawati and Hidayat (2020) and Alkatiri and Aprianty (2024), who found that most emerging adults experienced quarter-life crisis at a moderate level, while a smaller proportion experienced high levels of psychological distress. Collectively, these findings suggest that quarter-life crisis constitutes an important psychological issue warranting further scholarly attention.

According to Arnett (2004), the emergence of quarter-life crisis is influenced not only by developmental processes but also by a combination of internal and external factors. Internal factors include identity exploration, emotional instability, and self-doubt, whereas external factors encompass academic demands, employment, interpersonal relationships, economic circumstances, and changes in the social environment. Atwood and Scholtz (2008) further argued that social and cultural environments, together with advances in digital technology, contribute to the occurrence of quarter-life crisis among emerging adults.

The rapid advancement of digital technology has made social media an integral part of the daily lives of emerging adults. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and WhatsApp are widely used for communication, information seeking, self-expression, and maintaining social relationships. Despite these benefits, social media may also increase individuals' tendency to engage in social comparison, experience fear of missing out (FoMO), and develop dissatisfaction with their personal achievements. Continuous exposure to idealized portrayals of others' lives may influence individuals' self-evaluations, thereby increasing anxiety and exacerbating quarter-life crisis.

Several empirical studies have demonstrated an association between social

media use and quarter-life crisis. Alkatiri and Aprianty (2024) reported that the intensity of social media use significantly contributes to the occurrence of quarter-life crisis among emerging adults. Similarly, Permatasari et al. (2022) found that exposure to social media content influences individuals' perceptions of success, economic status, and life achievements, thereby increasing their vulnerability to experiencing quarter-life crisis. Furthermore, Zarkasi (2025) reported that social media plays an important role in shaping self-perception, identity formation, and social expectations, all of which may intensify psychological distress during emerging adulthood.

Although numerous studies have investigated the relationship between social media use and quarter-life crisis, the available evidence remains heterogeneous in terms of participant characteristics, the social media platforms examined, research methodologies, and the magnitude of the reported effects. While some studies primarily focus on the intensity of social media use, others emphasize social comparison, identity formation, or social pressures within digital environments. Consequently, the existing body of evidence remains fragmented and has yet to be comprehensively synthesized.

Given these considerations, a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) based on the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) 2020 guidelines was conducted to identify, evaluate, and synthesize existing evidence regarding the role of social media in quarter-life crisis among emerging adults. This approach is expected to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how social media contributes to quarter-life crisis, the factors underlying this relationship, and its implications for the psychological well-being of emerging adults.

Accordingly, this study aims to: (1) identify empirical evidence regarding the role of social

media in quarter-life crisis among emerging adults; (2) analyze the forms of influence exerted by social media as reported across previous studies; and (3) develop a comprehensive synthesis to inform future research and psychological interventions targeting emerging adults.

METHODS

This study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to identify, evaluate, and synthesize empirical evidence concerning the role of social media in quarter-life crisis among emerging adults. The review process was conducted systematically in accordance with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) 2020 guidelines developed by Page et al. (2021).

A comprehensive literature search was conducted using three scientific databases: Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, and PubMed. The search strategy incorporated combinations of the keywords "social media," "media sosial," "quarter-life crisis," "dewasa awal," and "emerging adulthood" using the Boolean operators AND and OR. Only articles published between 2022 and 2026 were considered eligible for inclusion.

The inclusion criteria comprised peer-reviewed national and international journal articles that investigated the relationship between, or the role of, social media in quarter-life crisis among emerging adults, were available in full-text format, and employed either quantitative or qualitative research designs. The exclusion criteria comprised articles that were not relevant to the research focus, duplicate publications, review articles, and articles for which the full text was unavailable. The article identification and selection process followed the PRISMA 2020 guidelines, as illustrated in Figure 1.

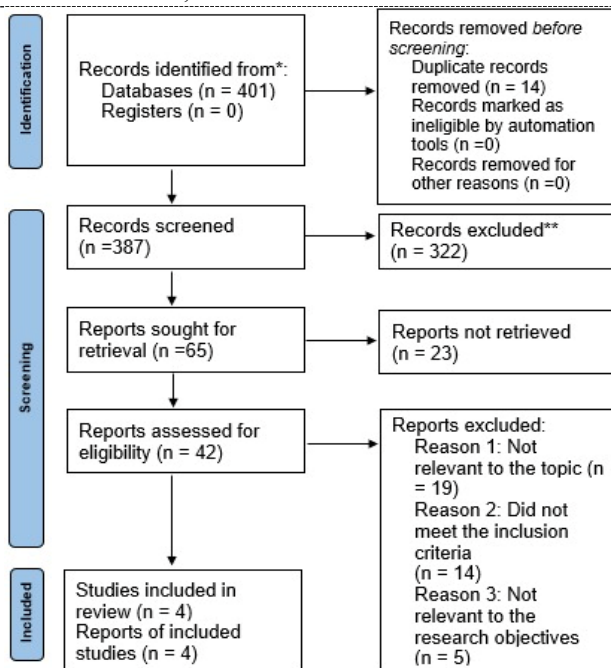


Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram of the Article Selection Process

The data extracted from each included study comprised the authors' names, year of publication, research design, participant characteristics, research instruments, and principal findings. Subsequently, the extracted data were analyzed using a qualitative descriptive approach through data extraction, categorization, and synthesis to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of social media in quarter-life crisis among emerging adults.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Following the identification, screening, and selection processes based on the predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria, four eligible studies were included in the final analysis. These studies originated from different geographical contexts and demonstrated considerable variation in terms of research settings, participant characteristics, and study designs. The findings from each study were then systematically synthesized to identify common patterns, similarities, and differences concerning the role of social media in quarter-life crisis

among emerging adults. The synthesized findings are presented below:

Table 1. Summary of the Selected Study

Component	Description
Title	The Effect of Social Media Use Intensity on Quarter-Life Crisis among Emerging Adults
Authors	Hanin Alkatiri and Rizqi Amalia Aprianty
Year	2024
Research Design	Correlational quantitative study
Participants	344 emerging adults aged 20-29 years
Instrument	Quarter-Life Crisis Scale and Social Media Use Intensity Scale
Findings	The intensity of social media use had a significant effect on quarter-life crisis ($p < .05$), accounting for 4.1% of the variance ($R^2 = .041$). A positive correlation was identified ($r = .203$), indicating that higher levels of social media use were associated with a greater tendency to experience quarter-life crisis. Most participants were classified as experiencing a moderate level of quarter-life crisis (70%), while Instagram and WhatsApp were the most frequently used social media platforms.

Table 2. Summary of the Selected Study

Component	Description
Title	The Effect of Instagram Use Intensity on Quarter-Life Crisis among Final-Year Students at University X
Authors	Annisah Lutfia Nur Rahma, Ima Fitri Sholichah, dan Priangga Amelasantih
Year	2026

Research Design	Quantitative survey employing a correlational approach
Participants	120 final-year students at University X who were active Instagram users, selected using purposive sampling
Instrument	Quarter-Life Crisis Scale and Social Media Use Intensity Scale
Findings	The study demonstrated that the intensity of Instagram use had a positive and statistically significant effect on quarter-life crisis among final-year university students ($p < .001$). Instagram use intensity explained 10.8% of the variance in quarter-life crisis, whereas the remaining 89.2% was attributable to other factors, including emotional intelligence, personal experiences, economic conditions, and social support. Most participants reported a moderate level of Instagram use (76.7%) and a moderate level of quarter-life crisis (58.3%). These findings indicate that higher Instagram use intensity is associated with a greater tendency to experience quarter-life crisis, particularly through increased social comparison, negative self-evaluation, anxiety about the future, and concerns regarding life achievements.

Table 3. Summary of the Selected Study

Component	Description
Title	An Analysis of the Quarter-Life Crisis Phenomenon among Young Adults: A Study of Active Instagram Users

Authors	Fitria Rahmi & Irwa R. Zarkasi
Year	2025
Research Design	Qualitative descriptive study
Participants	Four individuals aged 20-30 years who had been employed for at least two years in Jakarta, actively used Instagram for more than two hours per day, and experienced low self-confidence.
Instrument	Semi-structured interviews guided by an interview protocol. Data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model, including data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing.
Findings	The study found that social media, particularly Instagram, contributes to intensifying quarter-life crisis through social comparison, pressure to meet idealized standards of achievement, and the phenomenon of context collapse, which makes it difficult for individuals to manage their identities across multiple audiences. These conditions trigger anxiety, emotional instability, feelings of being left behind, and uncertainty regarding life direction. The study further emphasizes that increased self-awareness, effective management of social media use, and adequate social support are important protective factors in reducing the adverse psychological effects associated with quarter-life crisis.

Table 4. Summary of the Selected Study

Component	Description
Title	Religiosity and Quarter-Life Crisis among Young Adults: The Moderating Role of Social Media Use Intensity
Authors	Nadia Zulfa Shafrina, Eben Ezer Nainggolan, & Sayidah Aulia Ul Haque
Year	2025
Research Design	Correlational quantitative study with a cross-sectional design
Participants	350 young adults in Surabaya, Indonesia, selected using probability sampling.
Instrument	Quarter-Life Crisis Scale (18 items), Religiosity Scale (30 items), and Social Media Use Intensity Scale (15 items).
Findings	The findings demonstrated that religiosity was significantly and negatively associated with quarter-life crisis, indicating that higher levels of religiosity were associated with lower levels of quarter-life crisis among young adults. However, the intensity of social media use did not function as a moderating variable in this relationship ($p > .05$). In other words, the intensity of social media use neither strengthened nor weakened the relationship between religiosity and quarter-life crisis. The study also reported that most participants experienced a moderate level of quarter-life crisis (30.86%), followed by high (26.29%) and very high (12.00%) levels.

The synthesis of the four selected studies indicates that social media plays a meaningful role in the emergence of quarter-life crisis (QLC) among emerging adults, although the nature and

magnitude of its influence vary across studies. Overall, social media may increase individuals' susceptibility to quarter-life crisis through processes of social comparison, the development of unrealistic standards of life achievement, and social pressures arising from interactions within digital environments. These findings are consistent with Atwood and Scholtz (2008), who argued that social media constitutes one of the external factors contributing to the emergence of quarter-life crisis during emerging adulthood. Likewise, Arnett (2004) described emerging adulthood as a transitional developmental period characterized by identity exploration, instability, and multiple developmental demands, making individuals more vulnerable to psychological crises.

Consistent with these perspectives, Alkatiri and Aprianty (2024) found that the intensity of social media use had a positive and statistically significant effect on quarter-life crisis. The findings suggest that greater intensity of social media use is associated with a higher likelihood of experiencing quarter-life crisis. Although social media accounted for only 4.1% of the variance in quarter-life crisis, the results nevertheless indicate that it represents one of several factors influencing the psychological well-being of emerging adults, while the remaining variance may be explained by other factors such as social support, resilience, economic conditions, and individual characteristics.

Similar findings were reported by Rahma, Sholichah, and Amelasasih (2026), who found that the intensity of Instagram use had a positive and statistically significant effect on quarter-life crisis among final-year university students. In this study, Instagram use accounted for 10.8% of the variance in quarter-life crisis, suggesting that more intensive Instagram use may increase individuals' tendency to engage in social comparison, develop negative self-evaluations, and experience anxiety regarding their life

achievements. These findings indicate that social media particularly Instagram may serve as a contributing factor that intensifies quarter-life crisis during emerging adulthood.

The quantitative findings are further supported by the qualitative study conducted by Rahmi and Zarkasi (2025). Their study demonstrated that social media not only increases the frequency of social comparison but also creates psychological pressure through the phenomenon of context collapse, as described by Boyd and Marwick (2011). Under these circumstances, individuals are expected to present identities that are acceptable to multiple audiences simultaneously within a single social media platform. Consequently, many emerging adults experience pressure to project an idealized self-image, conform to others' standards of success, and feel anxious when perceiving themselves as falling behind in life achievements. These experiences reinforce quarter-life crisis, which is characterized by uncertainty about the future, emotional instability, and self-doubt.

Nevertheless, the findings reported by Shafrina, Nainggolan, and Ul Haque (2025) present a different perspective. Their study found that the intensity of social media use did not function as a moderating variable in the relationship between religiosity and quarter-life crisis. In other words, social media use neither strengthened nor weakened this relationship. Instead, religiosity demonstrated a significant negative association with quarter-life crisis, indicating that individuals with higher levels of religiosity tended to experience lower levels of quarter-life crisis. These findings suggest that the influence of social media on quarter-life crisis does not operate independently but is also shaped by other psychological characteristics possessed by individuals.

Based on the synthesis of the four studies, it can be concluded that social media is not the sole determinant of quarter-life crisis. Arnett (2004)

argued that internal factors, including identity exploration, emotional instability, and the search for meaning in life, together with external factors such as interpersonal relationships, employment, education, and the social environment, all contribute to the emergence of quarter-life crisis. This perspective is further supported by Hasyim et al. (2024), who emphasized that quarter-life crisis is influenced by multiple factors, including social support, religiosity, resilience, employment conditions, and the development of digital technology.

Overall, the findings of this Systematic Literature Review indicate that social media plays a complex role in quarter-life crisis among emerging adults. On the one hand, social media may increase the risk of quarter-life crisis through social comparison, social pressure, and heightened expectations regarding life achievements. On the other hand, its influence is not always direct, as it is moderated by several protective factors, including religiosity, social support, resilience, and individuals' ability to regulate their social media use. Therefore, strengthening digital literacy, enhancing self-regulation skills, and promoting healthy social media use are essential strategies for minimizing the adverse effects of social media on the psychological well-being of emerging adults.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this Systematic Literature Review (SLR) of four studies that met the inclusion criteria, it can be concluded that social media plays a role in the emergence of quarter-life crisis among emerging adults. Three studies demonstrated that the intensity of social media use, particularly Instagram, was positively and significantly associated with an increased tendency to experience quarter-life crisis. High levels of social media use may encourage social comparison, increase pressure to achieve life milestones, promote negative self-evaluation, and heighten anxiety about the future, all of

which contribute to a greater likelihood of experiencing quarter-life crisis.

In contrast, one study found that the intensity of social media use did not function as a moderating variable in the relationship between religiosity and quarter-life crisis. This finding suggests that the influence of social media on quarter-life crisis is contingent upon the research context as well as other psychological factors.

The findings of this synthesis further indicate that social media is not the sole factor contributing to quarter-life crisis among emerging adults. Other factors, including religiosity, social support, resilience, emotional intelligence, and self-regulation, also play important roles in shaping individuals' psychological well-being. Therefore, promoting mindful social media use, strengthening digital literacy, and enhancing protective psychological factors are important strategies for minimizing the adverse effects of social media on quarter-life crisis among emerging adults.

Furthermore, future research is encouraged to broaden the scope of the literature by including a larger number of studies from a wider range of scientific databases and by examining additional psychological variables. Such efforts would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the role of social media in quarter-life crisis among emerging adults.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this Systematic Literature Review, emerging adults are encouraged to use social media mindfully by managing the intensity of their social media use and avoiding excessive social comparison. In addition, future research should expand the scope of the review by incorporating a greater number of studies from diverse scientific databases and by investigating other factors that may influence quarter-life crisis among

emerging adults. Such efforts are expected to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the role of social media in quarter-life crisis.

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