# THE YEARNING TO BE EVERYTHING TO EVERYONE: EXAMINING THE HOMOGENIZATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS IN THE CONTEXT OF CONVERGENCE

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**Abstract**

Social media platforms are continually adding new features and enhancing existing ones to attract users and extend their screen time. These platforms constantly innovate to capture users' attention and gain an edge in the competitive landscape of social media. This study focuses on identifying the similarities between features of popular social media platforms and examines whether these similarities lead to homogenization. Specifically, presenting the chronological development of these features over time is crucial for understanding the historical development and evolution of social media. The framework of this research is based on the concept of convergence. The convergence concept is used to assess whether there are commonalities in the tools, interfaces, and interaction modes offered by the platforms to their users. In this context, the study investigates how the features provided by social media platforms become similar over time and how user experiences become homogenized. The 'walkthrough method' was employed to analyze the interfaces of the selected platforms. This method involves a step-by-step examination of user experiences on the platforms to understand how features are presented and how they are utilized by users. Data were collected through notes and recordings made by researchers while using the platforms. The results indicate a significant similarity and convergence in the features offered by popular social media platforms. For instance, features such as story sharing, live streaming, filter usage, and the explore tab have become widespread across different platforms. Platforms that consider users' habits and preferences offer familiar and easily accessible experiences through these similar features. Consequently, it can be said that social media platforms create a form of homogenization in user experiences by providing similar features over time. This phenomenon offers important insights into the evolution and future development of social media. Additionally, the study suggests that the concept of convergence not only encompasses the merging of features from different technologies but also indicates a tendency for similar platforms to converge internally.

*Keywords*: *Social media, convergence, homogenization, feature similarities, social media history*

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# HERKES İÇİN HER ŞEY OLMA ARZUSU: SOSYAL MEDYA PLATFORMLARININ HOMOJENLEŞMESİNİN YAKINSAMA BAĞLAMINDA İNCELENMESİ

**Öz**

Sosyal medya platformları, kullanıcıları çekmek ve onların ekranda kalma sürelerini uzatmak için sürekli olarak yeni özellikler eklemekte ve mevcut özellikleri geliştirmektedir. Bu platformlar, kullanıcıların ilgisini çekmek ve platformlar arası rekabette öne çıkmak amacıyla sürekli yenilik yapma eğilimindedir. Bu araştırma, popüler sosyal medya platformlarının özellikleri arasındaki benzerlikleri tespit etmeye odaklanmakta ve bu benzerliklerin homojenleşmeye yol açıp açmadığını incelemektedir. Özellikle, sosyal medya platformlarının özelliklerinin zaman içindeki gelişiminin kronolojik olarak sunulması, sosyal medyanın tarihsel gelişimi ve evrimi anlamak açısından önem taşımaktadır. Araştırmanın temel çerçevesini yakınsama kavramı oluşturmaktadır. Yakınsama kavramı, platformların kullanıcılarına sunduğu araçlar, arayüzler ve etkileşim biçimlerinde ortak noktalar bulunup bulunmadığını değerlendirmek için kullanılmaktadır. Bu bağlamda, sosyal medya platformlarının sunduğu özelliklerin zaman içinde nasıl birbirine benzediği ve kullanıcı deneyimlerinin nasıl homojenleştiği incelenmiştir. Seçilen platformların arayüzlerini analiz etmek için 'walkthrough method' kullanılmıştır. Bu yöntem, platformların kullanıcı deneyimlerini adım adım inceleyerek, hangi özelliklerin nasıl sunulduğunu ve bu özelliklerin kullanıcılar tarafından nasıl kullanıldığını anlamayı sağlar. Veriler, araştırmacıların platformları kullanırken aldığı notlar ve yaptığı kayıtlar yoluyla toplanmıştır. Elde edilen sonuçlar, popüler sosyal medya platformlarının sunduğu özellikler açısından belirgin bir benzerlik ve yakınsama olduğunu göstermektedir. Örneğin, hikâye paylaşma, canlı yayın yapma, filtre kullanımı ve keşfet sekmesi gibi özellikler, farklı platformlar arasında yaygın hale gelmiştir. Kullanıcıların alışkanlıklarını ve tercihlerini göz önünde bulunduran platformlar, bu benzer özelliklerle kullanıcılarına tanıdık ve kolay erişilebilir deneyimler sunmaktadır. Sonuç olarak, sosyal medya platformlarının zaman içinde benzer özellikler sunarak kullanıcı deneyimlerinde bir tür homojenleşme yarattığı söylenebilir. Bu durum, sosyal medyanın evrimi ve gelecekteki gelişimi hakkında önemli ipuçları sunmaktadır. Ayrıca çalışmada yakınsama kavramının, sadece farklı teknolojilerin özelliklerinin birleşmesini değil, aynı zamanda benzer yapıdaki platformların kendi içlerinde de yakınsama eğilimi gösterebileceğini ifade etmektedir.

*Anahtar Kelimeler: Sosyal medya, yakınsama, homojenleşme, özellik benzerlikleri, sosyal medya tarihi*

## Introduction

When a social media platform is introduced, it is observed that it stands out with a unique characteristic that sets it apart from the competition. For instance, Twitter is differentiated by its microblogging feature, Instagram by its photo-sharing feature, YouTube by its video-sharing feature, and LinkedIn by its ability to shape the business lives of its users. Nowadays, however, many platforms offer multiple features to keep users engaged for a longer period of time (Zuboff, 2019). These efforts are driven by platform ownership and their goal of maximizing profits (Andrejevic, 2011; Dahlberg, 2015). This study aims to determine whether social media platforms have become specialized by their purpose and creation model, or whether there is homogenization in terms of form and content. To answer this question, eight social media platforms were selected as samples, each with a unique feature that could be representative of other platforms of its kind. The interfaces, mobile applications, and functions offered to users of these platforms were compared using historical analysis, biography of platform approach (Burgess and Baym, 2020), and the walkthrough method. The analysis revealed that the sampled platforms shared similarities in features such as direct messaging, live broadcasting, photo filters, stories, discover/for you, vertical video, live audio, video calling, and emoji usage. These similarities indicate a trend toward homogenization of social media platforms.

## 1. Concept of Convergence

The concept of convergence is addressed in various disciplines, including economics (Baumol, 1986; Barro, 1991), technology (Baldwin, 2016), media (Jenkins, 2006), and mathematics (Rudin, 1976). In our study, this concept is discussed within the framework of media.

Thanks to technological advances, services that were once accessible only through individual devices can now be used in a variety of ways, blurring the boundaries between means of communication (de Solo Pool, 1983). The term convergence usually refers to the merging of video, telecommunications, and computer technologies (Silverstone, 1995). Rheingold (2000) explains that technological development and progress leads to the convergence of virtual, social, and physical worlds, causing them to collide, merge, and coordinate.

Many studies define convergence as the combination of media, telecommunications, and information communication technologies that offer similar products and services (Blackman, 1998; Collins, 1998; Mueller, 1999; Gates, 2000; McPhillips and Merlo, 2008). However, Jenkins (2006, p. 3) highlights the cultural changes and use cases that arise from technology. He believes that convergence should refer to the various nomadic behaviors of users in different media networks. While Manovich (2001) focuses on the technological aspect, Jenkins looks at convergence from a cultural perspective, and praises the participatory culture that new media foster.

Jenkins discusses how the concept of convergence has influenced the media in different periods. He highlights several features of convergence, including the ability of audiences to move, the centrality of mobile phones, changes in the relationship between technology, industry, and audiences, grassroots media production, and participatory culture (Jenkins, 2006, 2008, 2014). The audience becoming nomadic means they are not tied to a single device, but can access the same content from different devices. Mobile phones have become centralized due to their portability, smart device features, and internet connectivity. This allows people to communicate, read news, watch movies and series, play games, take photos and videos, and create content all from a single device. These advances have made it easier for users to create and share their content interactively.

During the period when traditional media dominated, each sector made progress through its technology and ownership structures. Technical possibilities also played a role in this situation. Digitalization and mergers have made media tools more accessible and has led to convergence (Murdock, 2000). According to research by Zotto and Lugmayr (2016), media convergence is influenced by factors such as digitization, market irregularities in communication, and shifts in user preferences. In addition, they argue that the technological impact of convergence affects the structure of media companies and the experiences of their consumers. Arsenault and Castells (2008, pp. 716-717) emphasize digitalization in communication, noting that this situation is constantly reducing the boundaries between media forms. As the boundaries between old and new media forms are no longer as distinct as they were in the past, access varies, and the roles of sender and receiver has become complex. In his assessments in this context, Lister (2009, p. 202) points out two different meanings of convergence. The first is the merger of media companies to meet various horizontal integration requirements. The second is encouraging consumers to connect with dispersed media content and seek out new information.

In 2000, Fujiwara predicted that the independent broadcasting and communications infrastructures and the content of telephone, television, and the Internet would gradually converge as a result of convergence. He stated that after 2010, Internet services will reach a structure that includes the content provided by telephone and television (Veltman, 2006, p. 15). These predictions have come true today as Internet-based services facilitate communication and access to information. Today, it can be said that all written, visual, and audiovisual publications are united in digital technologies. Van Dijk (2006) also defines convergence as one of the most important structural features of new media. According to him, mass communication is intertwined and united

in a single environment through convergence. One of the studies that aims to understand and define the concept of convergence is by McPhillips and Merlo (2018). In this study, they adapted the theory of media evolution established by Stöber (2004) to the development of convergence. They refer to the transition from analog to digital structure with the invention phase, the ability to distribute and consume different types of media on the same platform with the innovation phase, and the introduction of a new system with the introduction of technology, cultural, legal/political and economic elements with the institutionalization phase. This approach underscores the importance of digitization in the convergence process and the possibility of merging production and consumption relationships on a single device. In addition, the prediction at that time when the study was written was that with the increasing developments in communication technologies, the effects of convergence would be felt much more intensely in daily life. At the point we have reached today, it is clear that this prediction has registered true.

The dimensions and impact areas of convergence have also been discussed in various studies (Murdock, 2000; Jenkins, 2001). While Murdock notes that convergence occurs in the form of culture, communication systems, and corporate ownership, Jenkins emphasizes technological, economic, social or organic, cultural, and global convergence. All these approaches show us how far-reaching the effects of convergence are and that they can take various forms.

## 2. The Meaning of Social Media Convergence

Each social media platform offers its users the opportunity to create content, share that content, and connect with others on the network within the framework of its technical architecture. Although all social media platforms seem to offer different user experiences, it can be seen that the features offered are gradually becoming more similar by the day. When a new application is made available or existing platforms develop a new feature and share it with their users, derivatives of these features can be found on other platforms as well. Since popular apps and features can lead to a loss of users and ad revenue, if left out of social media platforms, the absence of these features can be perceived as a threat. To maximize revenue from advertisement, protect existing users, and attract new users, platforms strive to offer all popular features, along with features with similar characteristics.

In the past, when social media platforms were launched, they differed from existing applications and served different purposes. Today, platforms are very similar in terms of the features they offer. The preference to differentiate has been replaced by a phase in which new applications or popular functions of existing platforms are copied. It can be said that the main reason for companies to create such content similarity is to convince users to spend time on their platforms, instead of using other applications. Platform operators provide their users with many features and encourage them to do all their work on these platforms. This has led to a situation where there are too many functions on each social media platform and there is no longer a feature that distinguishes one platform from the other.

In the past, when a new social media platform emerged, there was nothing like it on the market, so it filled the gap in the market with the unique features it offered. At the point we have reached today, however, it seems that the boundaries that used to separate social media sites offering different services have disappeared (Tolcheva, 2023). Even if existing users of a platform are offered copycat features, this may secure their loyalty and preclude the possibility of trying alternatives. Social media platforms and the companies that own them, not only mimic the features found on a variety of social media platforms, but also try to be everything to everyone and meet

all the needs of their users through internet-mediated tools (daily material and spiritual needs such as shopping, grocery ordering) (Lacy, 2023).

Trying to understand people's interests by observing the features offered by different platforms has led to the emergence of countless social media platforms with different names but similar features. This situation paves the way for homogenized social media and a kind of "digital déjà vu" in terms of user experience (wired.com, 2020). Although the features offered are new for the current platform, they are just repetitive for users who have memberships in different networks. The use of old and proven functions on a new platform, leads to the increase of imitations and copies and the disappearance of originality. Thus, users can use the functions they have used in the past on different social media platforms on the new platforms they are members of.

For these reasons, research looks for answers to the following question:

RQ1: Does each of the social media platforms specialize in terms of their purpose and model of their emergence, or, on the contrary, is there a homogenization in terms of form and content on these platforms?

## 3. Method

To conduct this research, the walkthrough method was preferred. As explained by Light et al. (2018), this method involves systematic data collection by the researcher navigating the application to analyze an application in its entirety. Duguay and Gold-Apel (2023) criticized this application method for not including the application history directly into the method. Burgess and Baym (2020) state that this evolution can be better understood by developing the platform biography approach. This approach indicates that there may be difficulties in tracking the changes made, because the platforms do not archive the updates that they make. Within the scope of the research, official announcements explaining the new features of the applications, news, and scientific works on this subject were examined to overcome these difficulties and obtain data.

For this purpose, 8 social media platforms that were sufficient to represent their counterparts with their features and stood out with a specific usage feature when put into service, were selected as samples. Then, over a period of 6 months (01.04.2023-01.10.2023), memberships were created on all platforms and these platforms were used on mobile devices with Android and IOS operating systems and on the website. The features offered by the platforms were identified. The logic of use was understood by practically testing the working conditions of all these functions on all the specified platforms. In addition, updates of the platforms' applications and functions were tracked throughout the process through written and visual news sources and the websites of the platforms.

## 4. Findings and Analysis

Eight social media platforms were examined within the scope of the study. Nine feature similarities were identified between these platforms. The table containing the social media platforms discussed in this context and their features is given below:

**Table 1. Social Media Platforms and Platform Features**

| Platforms | Direct Message | Live Video | Photo Filters | Stories | Explore | Vertical Video | Live audio | Video Calling | Emoji |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Facebook | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| YouTube | | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ |
| WhatsApp | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | | | ✓ | ✓ |
| Instagram | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| TikTok | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Snapchat | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ |
| Twitter (X) | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| LinkedIn | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ |

Social media platforms implement various updates and applications so as to constantly keep user interest alive. When a feature tried by a platform is liked by users, another platform includes this update in its applications. However, there is no guarantee that every feature or application will produce the same results on every platform. In addition, each platform that incorporates new updates and applications always has the opportunity to use its features on other platforms. The features of social media platforms listed in the table below are presented chronologically in terms of their emergence over time:

**Direct message:** The direct message feature allows users to connect with other users within the platform they are a member of. However, this feature was added later, in parallel with the development of the platforms, and was not a feature that the platforms introduced right after their inception. For example, Twitter launched its direct message feature in 2006 (Halavais, 2014; Weller, et al., 2013), Facebook in 2008 (Nieborg and Helmond, 2019), and LinkedIn launched its direct message feature in 2009 (Ambrogi, 2009; Elad, 2011). Instagram offered this feature to its users in 2013 (about.instagram.com) and Snapchat in 2014 (Aamir and Hayat, 2022). In addition, WhatsApp, founded in 2009, stands out as a platform that allows instant messaging. In addition, TikTok (support.tiktok.com, 2023) also offers this service to its members. While TikTok allowed users to message their friends or followers in 2019 (newsroom.tiktok.com, 2019), with the work it carried out in November and December 2022 (tiktok.com, 2022), it aims to compete with Instagram and allow users to spend more time on its own application (Malik, 2023). With direct messaging, users can directly share written, audio, and visual content with their friends on the platform. This shows that platforms, whose main starting point was to perform functions such as sharing photos and watching videos, have evolved to the point where they serve users to chat with each other within the application. This serves to increase user engagement on the platform and

extend the time spent on the platform, thereby preventing people from using different services to communicate.

**Emoji:** Emojis are small images used to convey emotions and expressions. Although emojis are widely used in social media today, they were not developed specifically for these platforms. The first emoji was created in 1999 by Japanese artist Shigetaka Kurita. The goal was to allow people to communicate information simply and concisely on their cell phones (Kiaer, 2023). Emojis, which were first used on cell phones, began to find a place for themselves with the development of social media platforms. For example, applications such as WhatsApp and Snapchat have supported the use of emojis since their inception. Instagram has always supported the use of emoji. It has even introduced updates so that emoji characters can even be used in hashtags (instagram-engineering.com, 2015). In addition, Twitter introduced the feature of adding emojis to users' 140-character texts in 2014 (blog.twitter.com, 2015). Facebook developed the like button in 2016, allowing users to react to posts with different emojis (Krug, 2016). LinkedIn, on the other hand, introduced a reaction bar with limited emoticons in 2019 (Smith, Hillberg, and Levonian, 2023). TikTok, on the other hand, allowed users to add emojis to their videos in 2021 (Jamie, 2021). YouTube also launched its Twitch-like "YouTube Emotes" feature in 2022 (Warren, 2022).

**Photo Filters:** The iPhone 4 phone model was influential in the advent of photo filters. This phone was the first to use the front camera, and users began to use the front camera shots, called selfies very intensively. This situation attracted the attention of the social media platform Instagram, and the first photo filters on social media were put into operation by Instagram in 2010 (Caoduro, 2014, pp. 68-69; Johnson, 2017; Rudulph, 2015). Filter applications allow users to adjust the saturation, contrast, and hues of their photos. Flickr and Facebook were also quick to provide this feature to their users and began using it (Sun, et al., 2017, p. 1870). Twitter introduced this feature in 2012 (blogtwitter, 2012; Zhang, 2012). Another platform that uses the photo filter feature is Snapchat (Vendemia et al., 2021, p. 77). Snapchat has been using this feature since 2015. Another platform that offers this feature to users is TikTok. TikTok has been using this feature since 2016 (banuba.medium.com, 2019). The date when LinkedIn offered photo filters to its users was March 2017 (Rahim, 2018). WhatsApp also introduced and enabled the photo filter feature in the same year (Sulleyman, 2017). With the intensive use of filter applications, AR (Augmented Reality) filters were developed. With this application, users have the opportunity to experience how photos or videos will look like when these filters are applied before sharing them.

**Explore:** This feature on social media platforms was created to allow users to see content or popular posts that match their interests. It is offered to users by platforms under various names such as "Explore", "Discover", "For You", and "Trends". YouTube introduced this feature in 2010 (Allocca, 2010), Instagram in 2012 (about.instagram.com, 2012), Snapchat in 2015 (Spalding, 2016), and Facebook in 2017 (Perez, 2017). TikTok has offered this feature to its users since the day it launched its service. Also, Twitter shared its "For You" feature with its users in 2017 (blog.twitter.com, 2017). The platform, which continued as X after Elon Musk's acquisition, allowed users to follow the flows in the form of "For you" and "Following" tabs in 2023 (twitter.com, 2023). Although this tab, which many platforms have, is used in different designs and with different names, its main function is not only to help users discover more content, but also to pave the way for them to spend more time on the platform. These functions, which include analyzing users' actions through algorithms, have been criticized because they trap people in a filter bubble (Pariser, 2011; Nagulendra and Vassileva, 2014; Kitchens, Johnson and Gray, 2020).

**Figure 1. Examples of Explore Features of Social Media Platforms**
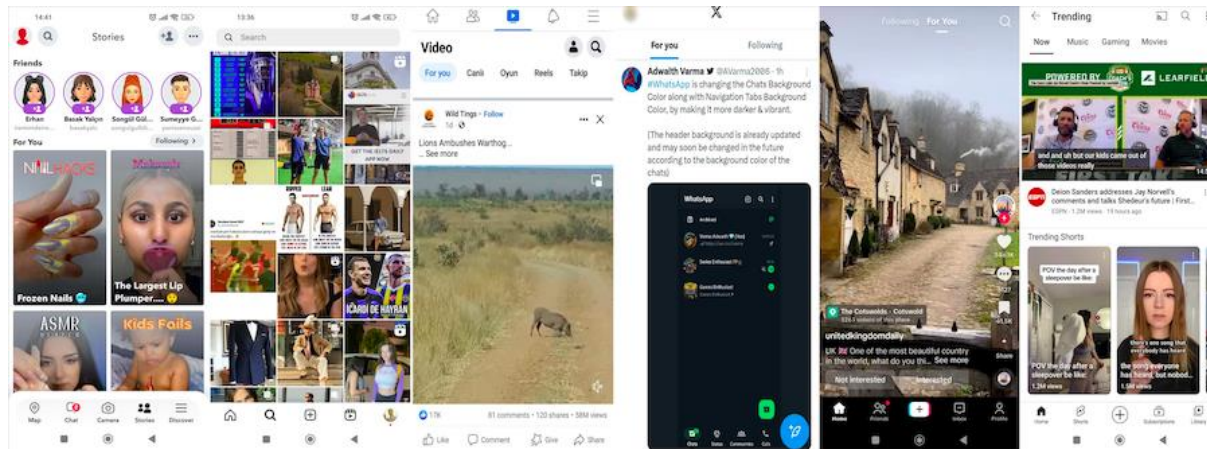


**Live Video**: The oldest live social streaming platform was ComVu Pocket Caster, launched in 2005, followed by the Bambuser and Ustream platforms. These platforms allow users to record video from mobile devices and share it with an online community, watch live broadcasts, access archived clips, and interact with users by following them (Juhlin et al., 2010, p. 36). The first live broadcasting feature in applications on social media platforms, Periscope, was introduced in 2015 by Meerkat platforms in the same year. This feature was later integrated into Twitter after Periscope was acquired by Twitter in 2016 and is now also offered on Twitter (Morrison, 2015; Wagner, 2015). Facebook, which enabled its users to broadcast live in 2015, introduced the Facebook Live service in April 2016 (Skjuve and Brandtzaeg, 2019, p. 589; Cohen, 2016). Facebook initially offered the live broadcast feature for 90 minutes, but later began offering the feature without interruption. This feature, which was used on YouTube as early as 2011 (Malinowski, 2011), has been offered as YouTube Stream in the mobile application since 2016. Instagram introduced its live broadcast feature in 2017. (Malinowski, 2011). In 2018, Snapchat rolled out this feature (Wagner, 2018). By 2023, platforms such as Reddit, TikTok, LinkedIn, Pinterest, and Spotify had followed suit and started to support this feature.

**Video Calling**: This feature allows users to chat with 2 or more people. When it comes to video calling, MSN is one of the main platforms that comes to mind. It was first introduced with the Windows 95 operating system on August 24, 1995. In 2006, the name was changed to 'Live'. The software, called Msn Messenger, has been released under the name Windows Live Messenger since its eighth version (as cited in Şişman, 2012, pp. 95-96). Windows Live Messenger 2011 allows full-screen video calls with support from HD. Individuals can communicate with their friends from a single area by recording video messages. Windows Messenger 2011 has worked compatibly with social networks like Facebook and Myspace. Connecting to your Facebook or Myspace account within Messenger allows for status updates, sharing content, and communicating through the chat system (Şişman, 2012). Platforms such as Skype, Facetime, and WeChat also allow those who want to make video calls with their friends, especially those who are far away (Bylund and Stenliden, 2022, p. 588). WhatsApp also enabled the video calling feature and offered it to its users in 2016 (Boulos et al., 2016; Maged et al., p. 3). Instagram had to wait until 2018 to offer this feature to its users (Lardinois, 2018; Chang, 2018). In 2020, TikTok offered this feature to users (pandaily.com, 2023). In the same year, LinkedIn also started to offer this feature to its

users (Sodhi, 2020; Southern, 2021; Ahmed, 2021). Twitter announced that it will enable this feature in 2023 (Ray, 2023; Perez, 2023).

**Vertical video:** Platforms such as Snapchat (2012) (Moriarty, 2017) and Vine offered the ability to share videos vertically. However, TikTok was a major milestone for vertical video and it popularized this feature. The ability to sync with music and use effects led to the adoption of this type of video by users. This situation has led to a new ground for competition between platforms. In 2017, Facebook made its vertical video feature available to all users watching videos on iOS and Android (Sittler and Li, 2017). Instagram's offering of Reels (Alexander.com, 2020) and YouTube's offering of Shorts (techcrunch.com, 2020) to its users in 2020 are key examples of how they are trying to capitalize on this popular feature. In 2021, Twitter is also among the platforms offering this feature (Öğütcü, 2021). These similarities have also prompted TikTok users to repost the videos they created on Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts (Abidin, 2020). All of these examples show that social media platforms, each with their unique characteristics, have a structure that allows essentially the same type of content to be shared.

**Story:** Story is the term used to describe the feature that allows users of social media platforms to share ephemeral content that disappears after 24 hours. Snapchat, launched in 2011, popularised this feature with the introduction of the Stories feature in 2013 (Fonseca, 2019). However, about a year before this feature was introduced, 6-second videos were shared on the social media platform Vine (Anderson, 2020). The fact that users were attracted by the possibility of sharing moments from daily life without being permanent paved the way for platforms to introduce this feature in their application. That same year, Facebook CEO (now Meta) Mark Zuckerberg attempted to buy Snapchat for $3 billion in cash (Bercovici, 2013). After this attempt failed, Instagram in 2016 (about.instagram.com, 2016) and Facebook and WhatsApp in 2017 (Newton, 2017; Constine, 2017) offered their users a Stories feature similar to the Snapchat application. YouTube, on the other hand, announced it would discontinue YouTube Stories, launched in 2017 as YouTube Reels (D'onfro, 2017), in 2023 (Saw, 2023). Not to be left out of these developments, Twitter announced that it would remove the feature it had offered to its users under the name "Fleets" in 2020 (blog.twitter.com, 2020), as it had not had the expected impact in 2021 (blog.twitter.com, 2021). Another noteworthy point is that Telegram will introduce the Stories feature in 2023 (telegram.org, 2023).

**Figure 2. Examples of Stories Features of Social Media Platforms**
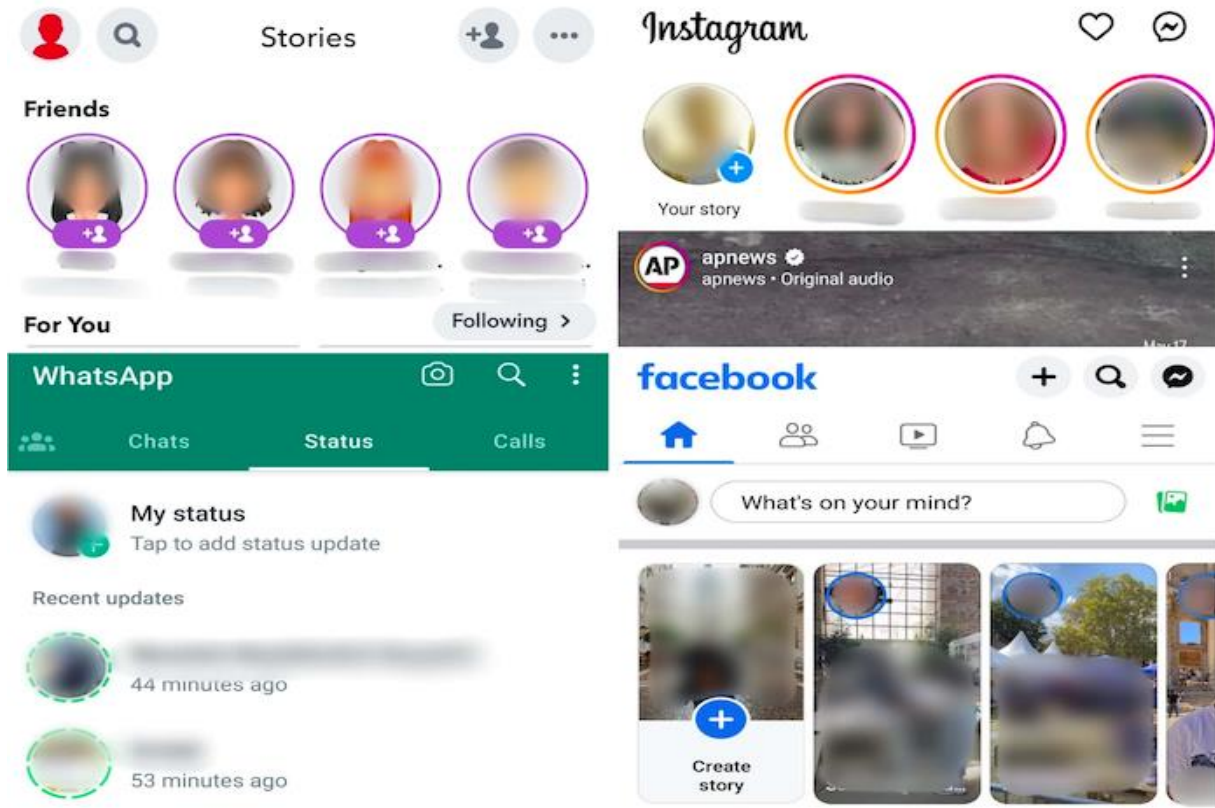


**Live Audio:** Live audio allows users on social media platforms to broadcast live audio and interact with listeners via audio. The Clubhouse platform has helped this feature gain popularity. In Clubhouse, users can listen to conversations in "chat rooms" with different topics, contribute to those conversations, and create their conversations (Strielkowski, 2021; Jung et al., 2022). In December 2020, Twitter announced that it would introduce Clubhouse-like voice chat rooms called Spaces (twitter.com, 2020). In contrast, Facebook demonstrated its presence in audio-based communications in 2021 with its Live Audio Rooms feature (Perez, 2021). Also in 2021, Instagram announced that it had improved its Instagram Live feature to counter the threat of Clubhouse, adding new features that allow users to turn off their microphones and even videos while using Instagram Live (techcrunch.com, 2021). LinkedIn, in turn, introduced voice communication functionality under the Events tab in 2022 (Macready, 2022). WhatsApp is working on a voice chat feature that 32 people can participate in as well as provides written, audio, and video communication opportunities (Shakir, 2023; Sato, 2023).

**Figure 3. History of features of social media platforms**
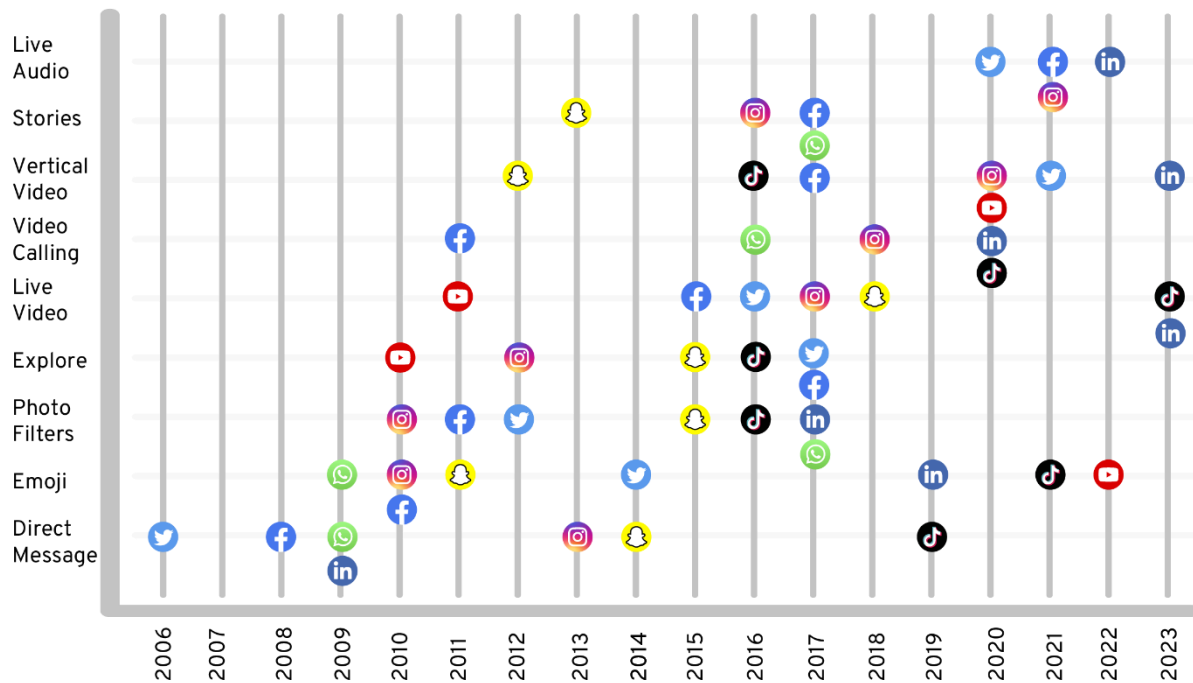


The historical evolution of the features of social media platforms is shown in Figure 3. Apart from these features, there are other functions on the platforms. One of these features is the so-called "infinite scroll." Design principles of "infinite scroll" (Raskin, 2006) are implemented on many social media platforms and provide users with a continuous stream of content to consume (Ertemel and Aydın, 2018). In this flow, users experience a sense of timelessness (Widyanto and Griffiths, 2006) and tend to consume more (Zalta and Knipprath, 2018). Thanks to this feature, users are encouraged to use the platforms for a longer period. Thus, the goal is to show users more ads while they spend time viewing the content. Futhermore, to profit from the data obtained from their interactions during this time.

On the other hand, TikTok provides us with another feature similar to other social media platforms by allowing its users to create content through text posts (newsroom.tiktok.com, 2023). This feature provides the ability to share text-based posts with music and stickers, similar to Instagram Stories. This approach can also be seen as an attempt to attract users from other text-based social media platforms (Sato, 2023). This is one of the recent examples of providing a similar feature to another application in cross-platform competition.

Meta company, which also owns Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram, launched Threads on July 5, 2023, a text-based platform that can be an alternative to Twitter. This text-based platform is accessed through Instagram (Newton, 2023; Kelso, 2023). The period in which the Threads platform emerged coincided with a period in which developments such as Twitter introduced restrictions on viewing tweets, offered the blue checkmark feature to businesses for a fee, and blocked inactive accounts (Newton, 2023). It should also be noted that Twitter's premium subscription called Twitter Blue removes all restrictions and technical shortcomings that could put users in a difficult situation. It promises users free access provided that the fee is paid (Demirkol, 2023). The value of imitating the Twitter platform through Threads in relation to the subject of the study is that homogenization sets in due to a monopoly situation. The fact that multiple platforms

are owned by one company leads to homogenization, which could be refered to as convergence between platforms. It could be argued that platforms no longer compete with unique features, but adopt or improve the functions of their competitors. In effect, diversity becomes an illusion and the platforms offered to the user become equivalent tools.

### Discussion

Convergence, which is the main subject of the study, deals with the similarity of platforms in terms of content and usage style. Today, it is difficult to talk about the diversity of characteristics of the platforms when they emerged. The similarity of the tools used by these platforms and the functions they offer for sharing content reminds us of the 'myth of media pluralism' (Schiller, 1973), previously defined. Although the features are similar, the fact that services are offered to users under different names leads individuals to the illusion that they have a choice.

It can be said that social media platforms are competing with the goal of attracting users, retaining existing users, and reaching the most users and that they want to constantly update their interfaces or applications. This desire also includes goals such as attracting advertisers and generating revenue from user data (Fuchs, 2012, 2015; van Dijck, 2013; Zuboff, 2019).

The convergence of the technical structure of social media platforms affects the services offered by these applications and the creation, sharing, distribution, and consumption of content by their users. This directly determines how users share content and how other users consume that content. In addition to sharing videos, photos, and texts, the activities people perform here also lead to repetition. In the future, this trend of homogenization is expected to shape the features of new social media platforms as well as the new features of existing platforms.

### Conclusion

In this study, 8 social media platforms were examined based on 9 characteristics. The similarity rates between these platforms in terms of features are 87.5% for direct messaging, 87.5% for live video, 87.5% for photo filters, 50% for stories, 75% for explore, 87.5% for vertical video, 50% for live audio, 62.5% for video calling, and 100% for emoji use. The similarity rate of these platforms in terms of all features is 76.38%.

The ways in which each of the social media platforms examined in the study adopted features that were already available on another platform were identified chronologically. In addition, the platforms that were the first to use this function were identified. During the historical investigation, it was found that these platforms were similar in terms of the features offered to users. It can be stated that once the platforms were created, apart from the purpose for which they were created, they became homogeneous by repeating the features present on other platforms. This situation, which causes a similarity in user experiences, leads to a convergence of the functions of social media platforms.

### Genişletilmiş Özet

Bir sosyal medya platformu tanıtıldığında onu rakiplerinden ayıran kendine has bir özellik ile öne çıktığı gözlemlenmektedir. Örneğin Twitter mikroblog özelliğiyle, Instagram fotoğraf paylaşım özelliğiyle, YouTube video paylaşım özelliğiyle, LinkedIn ise kullanıcılarının iş hayatlarını şekillendirebilme özelliğiyle farklılaşmaktadır. Her ne kadar tüm sosyal medya platformları farklı kullanıcı deneyimleri sunuyor gibi görünse de sunulan özelliklerin gün geçtikçe daha da benzer hâle geldiği görülmektedir. Yeni bir uygulama kullanıma sunulduğunda veya mevcut platformlar yeni bir özellik geliştirip kullanıcılarıyla paylaştığında, bu özelliklerin

türevleri diğer platformlarda da bulunabilmektedir. Popüler uygulama ve özellikler kullanıcı ve reklam geliri kaybına yol açabileceğinden sosyal medya platformlarının dışında bırakılması durumunda bu özelliklerin bulunmaması bir tehdit olarak algılanabilmektedir. Reklamlardan elde edilen geliri en üst düzeye çıkarmak, mevcut kullanıcıları korumak ve yeni kullanıcıları çekmek için platformlar, benzer özelliklere sahip özelliklerin yanı sıra tüm popüler özellikleri sunmaya çalışmaktadır.

Geçmişte sosyal medya platformları hayata geçirildiğinde mevcut uygulamalardan farklılaşmaya ve farklı amaçlara hizmet etmeye başlamaktaydı. Ancak günümüzde platformlar sundukları özellikler bakımından birbirlerine oldukça benzemektedir. Farklılaştırma tercihinin yerini yeni uygulamaların ya da mevcut platformların popüler fonksiyonlarının kopyalandığı bir aşamanın aldığı görülmektedir. Firmaların bu tür içerik benzerliği oluşturmalarının temel nedeninin, kullanıcıları diğer uygulamaları kullanmak yerine kendi platformlarında vakit geçirmeye ikna etmek olduğu söylenebilir. Platform operatörleri kullanıcılarına birçok özellik sunmakta ve onları tüm işlerini bu platformlar üzerinden yapmaya teşvik etmektedir. Bu durum her sosyal medya platformunda çok fazla işlevin bulunması ve artık bir platformu diğerinden ayıran bir özelliğin kalmaması gibi bir duruma yol açmıştır. Sosyal medya platformları ve onlara sahip olan şirketler, çeşitli sosyal medya platformlarında bulunan özellikleri taklit etmenin yanı sıra, herkesin her şeyi olmaya ve kullanıcılarının tüm ihtiyaçlarını internet aracılı araçlarla karşılamaya çalışmaktadır. Farklı platformların sunduğu özellikleri gözlemleyerek insanların ilgi alanlarını anlamaya çalışmak, farklı isimlerde ancak benzer özelliklere sahip sayısız sosyal medya platformunun ortaya çıkmasına neden olmuştur.

Yakınsama kavramı, bu araştırma için temel bir çerçeve işlevi görmektedir. Sosyal medya platformlarının özelliklerini incelerken, yakınsama kavramı, platformların kullanıcılarına sunduğu araçlar, arayüzler ve etkileşim biçimlerinde ortak noktalar bulunup bulunmadığını değerlendirmek amacıyla bir analitik çerçeve sunmaktadır. Bu kavram, farklı sosyal medya platformlarının zaman içinde birbirlerine benzer özellikler ve işlevler sunmaya başlaması olgusunu anlamamıza yardımcı olmaktadır. Ayrıca, kullanıcıların farklı platformlar arasında benzer deneyimler yaşamasına neden olan faktörleri de analiz etmeyi sağlar. Dolayısıyla, yakınsama kavramı, sosyal medya platformlarının gelişim dinamiklerini ve gelecekte nasıl evrilebileceğini öngörmek için kritik bir kavramdır.

Bu nedenlerle araştırmada şu soruya yanıt aranmaktadır: "Sosyal medya platformlarının her biri amacı ve ortaya çıkış modeli açısından uzmanlaşıyor mu, yoksa tam tersine bu platformlarda biçim ve içerik açısından bir homojenleşme var mıdır?" Seçilen platformların arayüzlerini analiz etmek için 'walkthrough method' kullanılmış ve veriler, notlar ve kayıtlar yoluyla toplanmıştır. Bu yöntem, platformların kullanıcı deneyimlerini adım adım inceleyerek, hangi özelliklerin nasıl sunulduğunu ve bu özelliklerin kullanıcılar tarafından nasıl kullanıldığını anlamayı sağlamaktadır. Bu amaçla özellikleriyle benzerlerini temsil etmeye yeterli olan ve hizmete girdiğinde belirli bir kullanım özelliğiyle öne çıkan 8 sosyal medya platformu örnek olarak seçilmiştir. Daha sonra 6 ay gibi bir sürede tüm platformlarda üyelikler oluşturulmuş ve bu platformlar Android ve IOS işletim sistemli mobil cihazlarda ve web sitesinde kullanılmaya başlanmıştır. Platformların sunduğu özellikler belirlenmiş ve tüm bu fonksiyonların çalışma koşulları pratik olarak test edilerek kullanım mantığı anlaşılmıştır. Ayrıca platformların uygulama ve fonksiyonlarına ilişkin güncellemeler, yazılı ve görsel haber kaynakları ve platformların internet siteleri aracılığıyla süreç boyunca takip edilmiştir.

Bu çalışmada sekiz sosyal medya platformu dokuz özelliğe göre incelenmiştir. Bu özellikler; doğrudan mesajlaşma, canlı video, fotoğraf filtreleri, hikayeler, keşfet, dikey video, canlı ses, görüntülü arama, emoji kullanımı olarak sıralanmaktadır. Sosyal medya platformlarının teknik yapısının yakınlaşması, bu uygulamaların sunduğu hizmetleri ve kullanıcıların içerik oluşturmasını, paylaşmasını, dağıtmasını ve tüketmesini etkilemektedir. Bu durum kullanıcıların içeriği nasıl paylaşacağını ve diğer kullanıcıların bu içeriği nasıl tüketeceğini de doğrudan belirlemektedir. Video, fotoğraf, yazı paylaşımının yanı sıra insanların burada yaptığı aktiviteler de benzeşmeye başlamaktadır. Araştırmada incelenen sosyal medya platformlarının her birinin başka bir platformda halihazırda mevcut olan özellikleri nasıl benimsediği kronolojik olarak belirlenmiştir. Ayrıca bu fonksiyonu ilk kullanan platformlar da belirlenmiş, tarihsel inceleme sırasında bu platformların kullanıcılara sunduğu özellikler açısından benzerlikler olduğu tespit edilmiştir. Platformların oluşturulduktan sonra, yaratılma amacı dışında diğer platformlarda bulunan özellikleri tekrarlayarak homojen hale geldikleri ifade edilebilir. Kullanıcı deneyimlerinde benzerliğe neden olan bu durum, sosyal medya platformlarının işlevlerinin yakınlaşmasına yol açmaktadır.

Sonuç olarak, sosyal medya platformlarının zaman içinde benzer özellikler sunarak kullanıcı deneyimlerinde bir tür homojenleşme yarattığı söylenebilir. Bu durum, sosyal medyanın evrimi ve gelecekteki gelişimi hakkında önemli ipuçları sunmaktadır. Ayrıca çalışmada yakınsama kavramının, sadece farklı teknolojilerin özelliklerinin birleşmesini değil, aynı zamanda benzer yapıdaki platformların kendi içlerinde de yakınsama eğilimi gösterebileceğini ifade etmektedir. Geleceğe yönelik olarak, bu homojenleşme eğiliminin yeni çıkacak sosyal medya platformlarının ve var olan platformların yeni özelliklerini de şekillendireceği öngörülebilir.

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