**Between Individuals and Organizations: How News Audience Niches Shape Exposure to Partisan News**

I. Review of audience overlap literature

A. Description and utility of approach

**Audience Overlap**

As media choice accelerated with cable television and the internet, scholars examined the role of choice in creating isolated, fragmented audience clusters. Broadly referred to as the study of *audience overlap*, or the tendency for an audience of one program to be represented in another, the line of research is less concerned with the individual-level motivations for partisan media preferences, as selective exposure research is, and more concerned with the extent to which news audiences are split along ideological lines. Generally, these studies follow a social network analysis approach, treating news organizations as nodes in a network and connections between news organizations as edges (for an overview, see Ksiazek, 2011), and this type of analysis allows studies of audience overlap to occupy a middle ground between “media-centric” research that looks at the relative popularity of news organizations (e.g., XXX), and “user-centric” research that observes micro-level patterns of news use and the psychological processes that shape them (e.g., Althaus & Tewksbury, 2007). Thus, the study of audience overlap takes a third, “audience-centric” approach, which is based on the interplay between media supply and user demand (Fletcher & Nielsen, 2017; Webster & Ksiazek, 2012, p. 45). Here, the audience is conceptualized as groups of people within a media ecosystem who pay attention to the same sources, creating various levels of audience overlap (Webster, 2014), and this approach allows researchers to identify how audiences are dispersed across the media landscape.

B. Review and summary of main findings

Recent research on audience overlap has generally converged on several important conclusions, some of which have been enabled by methodological innovations. First, and perhaps most importantly, overlap studies regularly find that audiences are not quite as fragmented as feared (Fletcher & Nielsen, 2017; Webster & Ksiazek, 2012). Despite concerns about political clustering, audience “silos” are less common than expected. Employing both large-scale datasets of online linking patterns (e.g., Mukerjee et al., 2018) and survey responses (e.g., Weeks et al., 2016) audience studies have found considerable evidence of heterogeneous news consumption, resulting in a substantial degree of audience overlap across channels. Second, recent scholarship has developed additional methodological techniques to observe the “backbone” network (Majó-Vázquez et al., 2019; Mukerjee et al., 2018), revealing a power-law distribution in which the majority of audience attention goes to a core set of primarily mainstream news outlets. Legacy media organizations often represent the most powerful organizations in these core networks, suggesting that the structure of media systems has an influence on the centrality of particular outlets (Majó-Vázquez et al., 2019). Indeed, some researchers in this area have argued that these audience structures—that is, the relationship between media supply and user demand—may be more important in shaping audience attention than the ideologies of individuals or news organizations alone (Fletcher & Nielsen, 2017).

C. Our contribution

Third, recent research has also developed methods for observing individuals’ positionality within audience networks, and they have used it to explain the ideological valence of their attention (Barnidge et al., 2021). This methodological innovation centers on characterizing individuals according to their roles within a broader network, bridging the gap between audience-level and individual-level studies. Drawing on core concepts from network analysis, a person’s centrality to the attention network can be calculated based on their news selections, and this position in the network reflects how isolated their habits are: Individuals positioned farther from the center of the network share news experiences with a narrower portion of the audience, whereas individuals positioned more centrally in the network share experiences with a wider portion of the audience. Positionality within the attention network matters for the ideological valence of news exposure: While media scholars tend to think of partisan news as “peripheral” as compared to an imagined “center” of politically neutral media, evidence shows that media outlets at the center of the attention network also carry ideologically slanted content, which means that even people with high levels of attention centrality are exposed to a healthy dose of partisan news. For example, Fox News often amplifies radical right-wing talking points (Benkler et al., 2018) and their position as a dominant force in the market means that people are exposed to ideological content without traveling to the extreme edges of their information environment (Barnidge et al., 2021).

II. What’s new about this paper?

A. Concept of niche

1. Audience may not be that fragmented, but can also identify segments of audience in which individuals and organizations have more in common than with others

2. If shared experience shapes exposure, the impact should be greater as experience is more similar

3. Follows that individuals within niche should have similar experience with partisan media

B. Niche and individuals

1. Product of shared motivations

2. Product of shared repertoires

C. Niche and organizations

1. Product of common market strategies

2. Competition and symbiosis

III. Utility of concept

A. More fine-grained look at audience

1. Can identify characteristics of both organizations and individuals

2. Can describe differences between niches

3. RQs

a. RQ1: What news niches can be observed in the American attention network?

b. RQ2: Are there ideological differences among news organizations in one niche versus another?

c. RQ3: Are there ideological differences among news users in one niche versus another?

B. Parse out influence

1. H1: Individual’s political ideology will be related to the ideological valence of their news attention.

2. H2: The average ideology of news organizations within each niche will be related to the ideological valence of individuals’ news attention within each niche.

3. H3: The average ideology of the audience within each niche will be related to the ideological valence of individuals’ news attention within each niche.