Manuscript ID JOU-22-0264

Developing the ‘News Niche’ as an Audience-Level Indicator of Fragmentation: A Theoretical Application of Community Detection Algorithms

**Editor’s Comments**

The reviewers have recommended specific revisions to your manuscript, which I believe will strengthen its argument and presentation overall. Therefore, I invite you to respond to these comments and revise your manuscript in accordance with them.

**Comment:** Thank you for facilitating the review. The reviews were challenging. We revised the manuscript for clarity (in terms of the scope, aims, and accomplishments). We expanded the Appendix to give a more complete account of the coding scheme, as well as report the process for filtering and creating the audience projection network. We added a Supplementary Data file to respond to Reviewer 2’s concerns about full reporting of the open-ended responses. R1 asked for substantive changes to the theoretical argument, namely around incidental exposure and political interest. We feel that the changes to the manuscript related to political interest strengthen the paper; we revised out theory around individual-level antecedents to news consumption and added a moderation model (Figure 4). However, we chose not to include incidental exposure in our models. While we see real value in this recommendation, ultimately this paper establishing grounds for the multilevel ‘niche’ concept. We simply cannot model all variables that may relate to audience behaviors at each level of analysis. However, these recommendations are exciting avenues for future research, which we note in the Discussion section.

**Reviewer’s Comments**

Reviewer: 1

**Comment:** I appreciate the ground being covered in this piece but have a number of theoretical-conceptual questions/concerns that point to some existing gaps that need to be addressed.  It is argued that (1) politically motivated selective exposure is at work but that (2) people do not necessarily avoid that which is incongruent (p. 6).  In addition, the actions of others in social media networks influence what content is presented to an individual (the actuarial function) (p. 7).  I believe that what needs to be added to this discussion is a more formal incorporation of the concept of incidental exposure.  Nanz and Matthes have been doing solid work on this concept, and I know Stroud is as well. However, there are two types of incidental exposure to consider in the current work. One, there is casual consumption.  This is where someone comes across a bit of political content while not actively seeking nor actively trying to avoid it. Causal consumption is something noted in the work under review when mentioning the FOX and MSNBC relationship.  However, there is another type of incidental exposure, ineffective avoidance. There needs to be a recognition that audience members may be trying to avoid specific pieces of content but are still having contact with this messaging regardless of their efforts.  This may be due to the algorithmic dynamics being noted in this work, but there is evidence of ineffective avoidance in traditional mass media as well (See Levendusky et al.’s Democracy Amid Crises, Oxford University Press 2023).  Overall, there needs to be an accounting of people being much more effective seekers than effective avoiders of media content across all media.  In general, people can find the content they want (if they really want it).  However, they are much less able to avoid that content which they wish to not be part of their diets.

**Response:** Thank you for your thoughtful reading of the manuscript. This is an excellent point, and we agree that incidental exposure (IE) is an important factor in explaining news consumption. Unfortunately, we simply do not have the space, nor the ability to fully implement this recommendation. Others have extensively addressed the challenge of IE for both thinking about, and measuring, news exposure. For one, we would be offering an incomplete view of the literature to say that there are only two types of IE. The recent special issue in Journalism (Kligler-Vilenchik et al., 2020) offers a set of articles that make it rather clear that there are multiple ways of thinking about, and empirically modelling IE. Those conversations are beyond the scope of the paper.

We discussed incorporating IE into the current manuscript at length, but we chose not to add IE in this study for important reasons. First, the open-ended measures capture only the sources people remember, and free-recall responses are less likely for incidental exposure, unless some deeper engagement occurs (thus, our measure taps a more directed selection of news). Second, the study is not solely focused on social media, where incidental exposure is most likely to occur.

However, we agree that this is an important issue. We made a few revisions to the paper to address this comment. First, we could have been more explicit in the scope and aims of the study (R2 notes this as well). We changed the title of the paper and revised the Abstract and Introduction to address this point. We also added a note in the discussion section for future research, where IE and niche membership is a potentially rich avenue.

Finally, we did have a measure of IE in our data set. We purposefully chose not include this in our models, as it only captures IE on social media (our study looks more holistically at news consumption, regardless of platform). Second, we re-ran our empirical models (Table 1) using IE as a predictor. The results are unchanged, and IE has no statistically significant effects in the models. Thus, for the sake of model efficiency we excluded it from the final analysis. We report the results from the alternative models in the discussion section as a footnote. Here are the coefficients and Log Likelihoods (LL) from those tests. Note that there are no differences in model fit when IE is added.

Model 1: b = 0.01, se = 0.02, LL = -1,722.72; Model 2: b = 0.01, se = 0.02, LL = -1,689.13; Model 3: b = 0.01, se = 0.02, LL = -1,688.02). ANOVA tests of differences between models with and without incidental exposure also revealed no statistically significant differences in the Log Likelihood statistic (Model 1, p = 0.72; Model 2, p = 0.58; Model 3, p = 0.58.

**Comment:** On the industry front, there needs to be an acknowledgement that the various social media platforms vary widely in how much they curate content based on individual activity versus a more networked approach.  For example, it is my understanding that TikTok takes much less of a network approach than a platform like Facebook. TikTok looks at the actions of others to dictate curated content for a specific individual, but those others are not directly part of one’s social network. Whereas a place like Facebook does not in terms of accounting for the actions of more direct social connections. In short, how much are your claims about the actuarial function appropriate for the varied Web 2.0 platforms?  It seems to me that it would be variable between platforms.  We know from the work of Russ Neuman and others that we should not generalize empirical findings from one platform (e.g., Twitter) to all of social media, but I believe this would also be true of the field’s theoretical and conceptual claims. How universal are your claims about the actuarial function to the varied digital platforms?

**Response:** This is a thought-provoking idea. There are a couple of notes here. First and foremost, since we are empirically looking at the broad ‘attention network’ as patterns at the audience level, we really cannot make any claims about effects due to specific platforms. Second, we looked more holistically at the media landscape as populated by organizations first, and platforms second. In fact, very few respondents reported general platforms, and most said they got their news from a specific news organization. While platforms no doubt are impacting niche construction (and most likely partisan valence), we cannot tease out platform effects with this research design. Considering that this is a ‘proof of concept’ project with the goal of rethinking the news niche with methods of network science, platform effects is an exciting avenue for future research.

We agree that actuarial mechanisms may not even be the same for everyone, as they would be dictated by one’s idiosyncratic choices (or at least dictated by some interaction between individual and their media environment). We can only claim that those within a cluster are more likely to share certain media habits relative to those in another cluster (we have evidence of that in the cluster results, as well as in the revised Appendix C). We assume that the most popular news organizations in our sample are most likely being consumed within and across platforms (for example, some may stick to cable news on TV, while others may watch FOX TV and watch FOX on YouTube). Thus, the actuarial metaphor can only explain that audience clusters exist relative to organizations, and based on that assumption, the individual and audience-level analysis can describe general characteristics of the clusters (e.g., the ideological makeup of these clusters), but they cannot tell us exactly how clustering takes place. This is due to as you point out, the ‘black box’ nature of algorithms, namely that we do not know exactly how platforms may differ in their content filtering strategies, nor can we account for everyone’s mix of attention or exposure to various content filtering systems. In short, we are attempting to identify and describe audience clusters, but the actuary metaphor cannot tell us exactly how clustering takes place, nor can it offer more details about the qualities of various filtering systems.

To address these comments, we added the consideration of platform effects to the Discussion section. We also feel that this comment stems from an incomplete accounting of how we coded our open-ended responses, which was not designed to capture platform effects. We revised the discussion of the opened-ended responses in the manuscript p.12 and added a full appendix to report our design (Appendix D).  
  
**Comment:** As for the competition and symbiosis distinction being made on p. 8, I believe there is a need to separate and flesh out the role of political interest (e.g., Prior’s work).  Heightened political interest creates shared audience for FOX and MSNBC.  Heightened political interest creates shared audience between The New York Times and The Washington Post.  With this being stated, shared audience may also come through a correspondingly low levels of political interest. For example, someone with low political interest may be television channel surfing and this leads to coming across both MSNBC and FOX content. Or, folks with low political interest may go to a media news aggregator on their smartphones (perhaps for entertainment news) and come across content from both The New York Times and The Washington Post.  Overall, I believe political interest plays a role in the communication dynamics being explored in this work, but this important concept has not been given its proper due in the work’s arguments.  The hypotheses and research questions are all about ideology, but what about the role of political interest?

**Response:** This topic is raised in your comment below. Please see our response there for a full discussion.

**Comment:** Some methodological assumptions to address as well – for example, the concept of “selection valence” (p. 13)– does the “selection” here refer to what outlets they offered in the open-ended responses or does “selection” mean that these are the outlets they actively selected for consumption?  If the former, that is fine (but may create some confusion). If the latter, then I think it is a big assumption that the three outlets people list are necessarily sought out by the audience members.  I would have liked to have seen follow-up questions for each asking (1) whether the respondents actively sought out the listed outlets and (2) whether the respondents actively sought to avoid these outlets.  Given these folks are only being asked to list the three outlets, perhaps the avoidance items are not needed.  However, I would think it would be wise to account for the active seeking component.

**Response:** Thank you for raising this point. First to answer your question directly: “the concept of “selection valence” (p. 13)– does the “selection” here refer to what outlets they offered in the open-ended responses or does “selection” mean that these are the outlets they actively selected for consumption?  If the former, that is fine (but may create some confusion).”

It is the former. These are the responses from the open-ended questions. These measures are, of course imperfect, but they are different than traditional survey measures that ask respondents to choose from a set list of news organizations. To pull from the revised Methods section (p. 12), the open-ended responses are meant to capture the news outlets that people most recently hold in their memory:

“Survey respondents were asked three times to “write the name of a news outlet (e.g., *The New York Times* or nytimes.com, Fox News or foxnews.com, WBRC Birmingham) that you used in the past week.” These open-ended news use measures require respondents to engage in free recall, which is more cognitively demanding than close-ended measures relying on cued recall (Kruikemeier et al., 2018). Because of this additional demand, open-ended measures reduce random error arising from patterned response or poor recall (Prior, 2009).”

These are limited in important ways, but we think once we account for their limitation, they are preferrable to other methods. From The Discussion on p. 27:

“Survey respondents were asked three times to “write the name of a news outlet (e.g., *The New York Times* or nytimes.com, Fox News or foxnews.com, WBRC Birmingham) that you used in the past week.” These open-ended news use measures require respondents to engage in free recall, which is more cognitively demanding than close-ended measures relying on cued recall (Kruikemeier et al., 2018). Because of this additional demand, open-ended measures reduce random error arising from patterned response or poor recall (Prior, 2009).”

As noted above, IE and motivations were not our aim with this study. However, we could offer a more complete accounting for the demographic makeup of the niche, as well as include a measure of news intention behaviors (pro- and counter-attitudinal, as well as avoidance of the other side). These two considerations show (see correlations; Appendix Table C3) that niche membership is defined by those interested in politics, who consume both pro- and counter-attitudinal news. So, while we do not have those follow-up measures you suggested above, we do see some patterns of news consumption that would indicate intentional news selection.

We revised the manuscript (as noted above), including the title and Introduction to more specifically note that we are interested in ‘politically motivated news consumption’.

**Comment:** I see that you do have a measure of political interest but that it is treated as exogenous.  Overall, I am making an argument in this review that political interest needs to be made more of an endogenous component for the study.  Ideology is one player, but interest is another. Given the ground being covered, I find it challenging to study one as endogenous while the other sits in the wings (as an exogenous element). The findings being offered represent viewing the mediated information world through a purely ideological prism.  However, what is being overlooked is the fact that people’s contact with political information is determined in no small measure by political interest as well.  The dynamics of ideology and interest need to be studied in combination, not in relative isolation of one another.  I would like to see what this work can do to make interest more of an endogenous element.   Such an undertaking would involve not just using the individual-level audience measure.  It would also involve coding the outlets for something like information complexity or original information gathering.  Places like The New York Times or The Washington Post or The Wall Street Journal are sought after by those high in political interest because these outlets are the primary information gatherers – they offer the new reporting that everyone else talks about. Is there a way to begin to look at the media system from a political interest lens and to then look at how this all shakes out? I could see the ideological-based analyses being offered and then looking at the same dynamics through a political interest lens, but then what would be interesting would be to look at a true combination of ideology and interest.

**Response:** We generally agree and appreciate your thought-provoking insights here. We do have a measure of political interest at the individual level, and it makes theoretical sense within our niche framework to delve into its role a bit further (see details below). Coding the organizational-level data for some interest-related variables is also interesting, but not a plausible avenue for us to pursue—as we have over 200 discrete organizations in our raw, cleaned data set (now included in the revised supplementary file) and we are not sure what an organizational-level news interest coding scheme would look like. Note that, in the previous version of the manuscript we had failed to include a full discussion of how we cleaned and coded the news organizations (now Appendix D), and this lack of clarity may have led to some ambiguity in our purposes for the organizational data.

Regarding interest at the individual level, we conceptually treat it as exogenous to the specific relationships in the visualizations. Prior’s 2010 piece rather clearly shows that political interest is a trait-like characteristic, showing stability over time (based on panel data from over 40 years). We assume that political interest is an antecedent to ideological news consumption in the first place (as it is for news in general). Thus, if endogeneity means a “variable that is affected by the other variables in the model” we do not think that niche membership would somehow change one’s level of political interest, rather, interest is a necessary pre-cursor to niche membership (Appendix Table C1) and therefore ‘outside’ the visualized models. But we are digressing from the important point: Empirically all variables are entered into the software in a single step and are treated equally. That is, we included political interest because as you correctly point out, it is an obvious indicator of audience behavior.

The previous version of the manuscript undersold the role of interest in news consumption. And we agree that it may offer some insight into how ideological news consumption relates to various levels of niche membership. To address these concerns, we: Reframed the exposition of individual-level factors and the news niche in the literature review (p. 7) to better highlight interest as a trait-like characteristic and a pre-requisite to politically motivated news consumption. We added a new research question (RQ5; p. 11), as well as added interaction models (Figure 4) and results (p. 19-20). Results show that interest tends to reduce the ideological valence of one’s news choices, a finding that coheres with previous work on selective exposure and counter-attitudinal news selection (Knobloch-Westerwick & Meng, 2009).

Reviewer: 2  
  
**Comment:** This was a very interesting article that made an argument for the use of “news niches” to evaluate media partisanship and audience news consumption habits instead of the more traditional hyperlink tracing that shows heightened polarization. The news niche perspective helps account for fluctuation, variation, and overlap in audience habits. It can also address the use of algorithmic recommendations for news content. On one hand, the methodology is sound - the Qualtrics distributed survey and statistical significance are clear. Yet, there were still many questions when it came to claims that could be inferred from this data:

**Response:** Thank you for your careful reading of the manuscript. Your suggestions helped us clarify some of our arguments, as well as revise the reporting around our coding in the text analysis. We appreciate your time and hope that the responses below adequately address your concerns.

**Comment:** 1. There is no clear definition of "mainstream" or "media system" in the literature review.

**Response:** Thanks for catching this. These terms are widely used in the field but rarely defined, and this can lead to some ambiguity. This is particularly the case for ‘media systems’, in which scholars have debated the utility of the term (Mancini, 2015). We ascribe to what Mancini refers to as to the ‘confrontational sense’ of the word. That is, as opposed to more ‘indicative’ uses that are broad and lack meaning beyond a basic reference to the media in general—and opposed to more loaded ‘functional’ applications that invoke the philosophical realm of systems theory—we rely a definition that assumes one can list the general features of a particular media context, and then use those features to compare and contrast media systems, either between countries, or within countries relative to other social or political institutions.

Accordingly, we clearly define our use of these terms in the Introduction page 1 (mainstream) as well as page 3 (media system).

**Comment:** 2. p.11 states that "survey respondents were asked three times to 'write the name of a news outlet' yet on p. 23 under limitations it stated that "multiple responses" from each participant were not included. Does that mean if they wrote Fox News twice, they didn't count it twice or does that mean that only one source from each participant was used? this needs to be clarified.

**Response:** Thank you for the close reading. On page 23, we are noting the limitation that we do not have traditional panel data, in which each respondent is contacted for interviews over multiple time periods (we cannot compare within-person changes over time). We re-worded that sentence to prevent readers from conflating the nature of the panel interviews with responses to the news preference questions.

Regarding the open-ended responses, we used all three responses where possible. However, for the network analysis, and following recommendations on data filtering, we eliminated ‘self-loops’ as to not artificially inflate the audience for any organization by double counting respondents. In other words, we used all three responses where appropriate, but any ‘double counts’ were dropped from the network projection (and any subsequent analysis). We clarified this point on p.13.

**Comment:** 3. Did the authors collect demographic information and if so, how did this factor into cable vs. elite?

**Response:** Demographics are included in the regression models and are reported on pages 12 and 13. Your suggestion to break-down the demographic profile of the niches is helpful, as it allows us to report on the different individual profiles of those in each niche. It also addresses some comments made by other reviewers. Thus, we added a correlation table to Appendix C section detailing full niche results, Table C3. We also briefly discussed these demographic differences in the Results section on p. 15.

**Comment:** 4. A frequency count of ALL listed sources is needed. On Table B1 it lists "right-leaning sphere" etc. but what was included in those spheres? why is Breitbart separate from this sphere? Does this sphere account for Podcasts, radio, and/or YouTubers?

**Response:**  Thank you for posing these questions. They offer us an opportunity to better communicate our methodological approach to coding the open-ended responses. We only briefly reported our rationale on page 11 (Measures section) in the manuscript, and again in a footnote to Table B1. However, based on these comments (and others), we agree that readers would benefit from a more complete explanation of our coding process. We revised the manuscript on page 11 (Open-ended responses section), Table B1, as well as added an entire section in Appendix D to fully inform readers of how we went about coding the open-ended responses. We also included a supplementary file that lists cleaned and coded responses prior to the final stage of coding the left/right/neutral spheres.

We address your specific questions in more detail below. This is a two-part comment.

1. A frequency count of ALL listed sources is needed. On Table B1 it lists "right-leaning sphere" etc. but what was included in those spheres?

As you correctly point out, the list reported in Appendix Table B1 is not the full list of responses. That table is technically the final (cleaned, categorized, and filtered) list of nodes as extracted from the filtered network projection. In creating the network, we followed recent recommendations to only look at the ‘core’ network. The purpose of this filtering is to minimize noise in the network from inflating error via the ‘long tail’ of audience dispersion (Mukerjee et al., 2018; Mangold & Scharkow, 2020; as cited in the manuscript).

Please see Appendix Figure D1, where the distribution of outlets is reported before and after the final step of coding for the left/right/neutral spheres. Proponents of news audience projection networks have rather strongly argued that Plot A should be avoided in favor of analyzing core networks without an inflated long tail (Plot B). This perspective influenced our goals for coding open-ended responses.

We chose not to report the longer lists of cleaned responses, because there were several rounds of cleaning, and we were not convinced that readers would find this information valuable. We instead chose to report the nodes (outlets) that made the ‘final cut’ into the network analysis. However, we agree that others working in this area may benefit from seeing how we treated the more detailed list of open-ended responses. Note that for all other analyses (e.g., determining selection valence) we used all cleaned responses.

We included the break-down of the valanced spheres, as well as the longer list of cleaned and coded outlets as supplemental data. We also updated Table B1 with a revised title and reporting of the degree centrality, so that readers will not conflate network nodes with the raw open-ended responses. In the process of recreating this table, we corrected two minor mistakes (AP/Reuters Newswire was deleted from the initial table and AOL was miscounted as neutral sphere, when it should be and Aggregator). These changes had no impact on subsequent network construction or results.

1. Why is Breitbart separate from this sphere? Does this sphere account for Podcasts, radio, and/or YouTubers?

After initial stages of coding, any outlet that received less than 10 mentions and did not fall into our primary coding scheme was wrapped into the ‘right’, ‘left’ and ‘neutral’ sphere (revised language on page 11). Collapsing smaller audiences into categories helps strike a balance between including important descriptive data and the need for concision in network construction (Appendix Figure D1). Breitbart received enough mentions to be treated as a discrete node in the network. Whereas other one-off mentions (Mother Jones) were folded into a category (Left Sphere). This was the same approach we took to collapsing call letters into local TV, local paper, local radio, etc. (now reported in Appendix D).

And, yes, these ‘spheres’ are platform agnostic and include podcasts or radio programs that did not fit cleanly into the previous rounds of coding. Essentially, the ‘spheres’ are the ‘other’ category that accounts for ideological valence.

The tradeoff of this approach is that some more nuanced responses, (e.g., Daily Beast, Dave Rubin Podcast, Drudge) are not discretely represented in the network. But unfortunately, the alternative is deleting these responses entirely, as proponents of network filtering would have us do (since they received so few mentions, they would be, a) disconnected from the core network graph and cut, or b) if they were connected, the shared audience would be too small to reach the filtering cutoff (edge weight < 2).

We hope that the addition of our coding scheme for the open-ended responses (Appendix D), along with the supplemental data, helps clarify these decisions.

**Comment:** 5. The separation from "elite" and "cable" still needs more work. Many of these sources in Table B1 are not either of those. For example, OAN is classified as "cable/tv" but few people watch through this medium. Also, how did you account for programs like Joe Rogan Experience or other podcasts (were none listed?) or Radio programs?

**Response:** There is unfortunately no perfect label for the clusters, as the nature of the media environment is one of complexity. At the same time, we take it as a given that platforms and organizations are not congruous. The network is inherently characterized by overlap as well, so we simply do not expect clean divisions. That is, the old saying holds: there is always a risk of failure when scholars attempt to ‘cut nature at its joints’. However, we agree that we need to do a better job of defending these labels in the manuscript, as well as mentioning the limitations of doing so.

We chose these labels based on our own qualitative, iterative interpretation of the clusters, which did not necessarily follow neatly upon any pre-determined set of characteristics. In our interpretation, we drew upon the notion of ‘media logic’, that is, the set of economic, technological, and institutional incentives and constraints on the production of media content. In general, we feel that the organizations within each category loosely reflect a particular logic, based on the medium and platforms that borne those organizations. Of course, there is considerable overlap, boundaries are fluid, and one could take exception to one or more outlets going in one category over another.

Based on these considerations, we relabeled the ‘right-leaning cable and television’ niche to ‘right-leaning cable dominant’. We also added a more complete explanation of our labels on p.15.

As for Joe Rogan, no respondent reported relying on that outlet for news. Note that data was collected before his recent merger with Spotify. Regardless, Rogan would only be treated as a discrete node if he reached the 10 audience-member threshold. Podcasts (and radio) were treated like any other response. If they reached a threshold of prominence, they are discrete news outlets, otherwise they are coded for partisanship and eventually folded into either a) category based on media logic/platform, or if this was not clearly identifiable, b) treated as the left/right/neutral spheres. For example, ‘news podcasts’ were folded into the neutral sphere when no other information was included, but ‘New York Times podcast’ would be treat as ‘New York Times’.

We hope that the addition of our coding scheme for the open-ended responses (Appendix D), along with the supplemental data, helps clarify these decisions.

**Comment:** 6. Although the authors said they used "clustering algorithms" and "Louvain clustering" it is still not clear how the network was built - what were considered nodes and what were considered edges/weight of those edges?

**Response:** Thank you for catching this. No doubt other readers will raise similar questions. We revised the methods section page 13 (relabeled ‘Analytic Strategy’ to ‘Analytical Strategy and Network Construction’), to more clearly report how the networks are composed. We also added clarification earlier in the paper, on page 3.

**Comment:** 7. Most organizations in the local niches were proximity based - does that mean they were coded as "neutral" b/c the editorial valence could not be determined or were these still highly partisan?

**Response:** Local TV news was coded as neutral, but local papers were individually coded for partisan valence. The list of codes is included in the supplemental data, and we emphasized this detail on Page 12.

**Comment:** 8. How were the ideological stances of non-traditional sources (like podcasts or tiktok influencers) coded. Were these not ever listed?

**Response:** These were rarely listed. In general, our political valence coding scheme was able to identify most discrete responses, but if we could not ID the ideology (or where there would be no clear bias), they were folded into the ‘neutral’ category. As noted above, we think the coding scheme discussion in Appendix D will clarify these questions for other readers.

**Comment:** 9. Labels "elite press" and/or "cable" read very dated given the subscriptions to newspapers continue to fall and I believe that less than 50% of people have cable anymore (there is a Pew study on this I think?)

**Response:** Thanks for raising this point. This led us to a Pew report that we think helps strengthen our justifications for the labels, but also our arguments for our conception of the news niche. First, see the comment above about labels derived from work on media logic.

Second, and more importantly, the flagging influence of cable news is a misconception. Local TV and especially local papers have been struggling, that point is correct. But according to a recent Pew study (2022), people are increasingly consuming news across platforms. Sure, digital devices and social platforms are rising in popularity, but people are supplementing, not replacing their broadcast sources. For example, while only 33% of respondents ‘prefer’ cable news, a whopping 65% of US adults get their news at least sometimes from cable. Comparatively, social media still lags cable (50% at least sometimes get their news here). Despite the popularity of these new platforms, at the time of data collection, Fox News was the dominant news publisher on Facebook (Nieman Lab, 2019). If you look at the dominant publishers on Facebook today, they are populated by ‘legacy’ media organizations: newspapers, public broadcasters, and cable TV drive news engagement on Facebook (Newswhip, 2022).

These considerations strengthen our theoretical framework for the news niche concept. Contrary to popular belief, people are not necessarily segmented by technology, nor are they by ideology. Instead, there is a competition and symbiosis of cross-platform news use, where the organizations and platforms that deliver news are no longer congruous.

We added these considerations from Pew to the Introduction on p.1

**Comment:** It is unclear what the "three" rhetorical construction advantages are that they state on p.9 - the first one sets off the preliminary advantage but the other two are lost in subsequent paragraphs and need to be clarified.

**Response:** Thank you for catching this. That sentence was revised for clarity and precision (p.9-10).   
  
**Comment:** Overall, it's challenging to identify what the central takeaway from this article is. The data set is impressive, so it's sure to be there but as it reads now is buried and needs to be more clearly identifiable. For example, they mentioned that cable/local niches do not align strongly with ideological slants or might be influenced by organizational symbiosis - could the authors provide some theoretical insights for why this is?

**Response:** We apologize for the lack of clarity. We revised both the Abstract, Introduction (p.1) and Discussion (p.24) to outline the paper’s goals and potential impact more clearly. To answer your question (and added to the revised Discussed on p.25): We explain these patterns— loose boundaries between niches, but rather strong evidence for general differences among the niches—via market competition and symbiosis at the organizational level and actuary mechanisms at the individual level. That is, there is a complex interplay between market forces and the algorithmic mechanisms that filter content (regardless of platform). News audiences are not fragmented structurally, but they do operate in a complex ecology characterized by political ideology.

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