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

**Abstract**

Ideological fragmentation in news audiences has been studied by looking at either individual’s media selections, or by observing aggregate patterns of attention to news organizations. While the former set of studies typically shows evidence of fragmentation, the latter generally does not. This study engages with the mixed evidence on audience fragmentation through multilevel conceptualization and analysis. We develop a theoretical approach that builds upon the classic notion of niche news, and we then test this framework with multilevel survey data from the United States (N = 1,965). While results reveal three distinct-but-overlapping audience niches, we do not find support for clear fragmentation along ideological lines. Instead, news consumption within a niche reflects competition and symbiosis among news organizations, highlighting the influence of system-level factors, rather than individual ideology, on partisan news selection. Results are discussed in light of our current knowledge about audience fragmentation in the United States.

*Keywords*: audience fragmentation, audience overlap, community detection, network analysis, niche news, selective exposure