As media choice accelerates alongside the rise of social and mobile platforms, market forces in the United States have incentivized news organizations to create politically valanced content for the motivated news consumer (Benkler et al., 2018; Prior, 2007), raising concerns about a news audience that is fragmented along ideological lines, and not without good reason: Partisan news preferences have been connected to political sectarianism (Finkel et al., 2020), a lack of consensus on issue agendas (Hart & Nisbet, 2012), declining institutional trust (Suiter & Fletcher, 2020), and a communication environment in which facts are contested (Waisbord, 2019). While much of the literature has focused on the psychology of media selection (e.g., Garrett, 2009; Knobloch-Westerwick & Meng, 2009; Peacock et al., 2021; Stroud, 2011), a parallel line of work has examined macro-level patterns in audience dispersion (Fletcher & Nielsen, 2017; Majó-Vázquez et al., 2019; Mukerjee et al., 2018; Webster & Ksiazek, 2012; Weeks et al., 2016). Generally, these studies do not find considerable evidence of audience fragmentation at the macro-level, seemingly alleviating fears related to ‘echo chambers’ or ‘filter bubbles’ (Flaxman et al., 2016).

Yet, despite these recent advances in the study of audience fragmentation, the literature has largely overlooked the role of audience-level attributes in shaping news exposure at the individual-level (Barnidge et al., 2021). This omission represents a significant oversight, as the algorithms that filter content in online spaces increasingly rely on the activity of others within a news niche. That is, news exposure is shaped not only by one’s own choices, but also by the behaviors of others in the network. Yet, we know very little about whether audience-level factors matter for news preferences. The present study addresses this need by revisiting and elaborating upon an older concept—*the news niche*. Certainly, the concept of a news niche isn’t novel—to find a similar use of the label, one need only look at Stroud’s now classic *Niche News* (2011), a study of selective exposure in the United States in the late 2000s. But our approach not only incorporates elements from selective exposure research, particularly its focus on individual news selections, it also borrows from the audience-centric approach (Fletcher & Nielsen, 2017; Ksiazek, 2011), which looks at the shared audience for a given news organization. This conceptualization of the news niche has several advantages. It promises to not only improve our understanding of audience segmentation, but it also affords the ability to assess the influence of the distributed, ‘imagined’ audience (Anderson, 2006) on people’s news exposure. Thus, researchers can better parse individual-level, audience-level, and organizational-level factors that shape people’s exposure to ideological news.

In this paper, we propose a framework for identifying news niches within audience networks, and employ that framework to examine their various influences on the ideological valence of individuals’ news selections. We perform network and cluster analyses on open-ended survey data (*N* = 1,965; 17 Waves) to re-create the audience attention network (Barnidge et al., 2021; Weeks et al., 2016) and identify news niches. We then test a hierarchical model that parses the influence of (a) individual ideology, (b) organizational ideology, and (c) audience ideology on the valence of individual’s news choices.