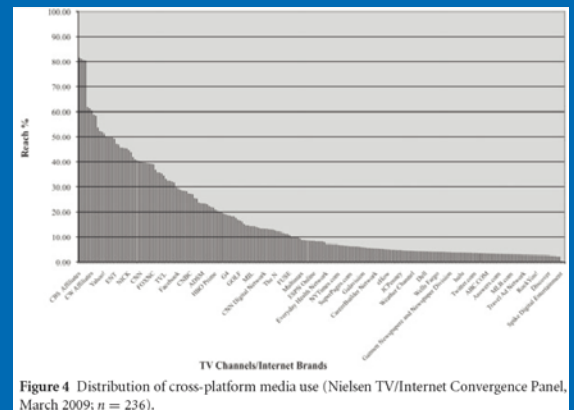


# Fragmentation of online audiences

What the analysis of large-scale usage data can bring to the table  
Merja Mahrt

## 1 Does the “long tail” of online offerings lead to fragmentation of audiences—and society in general?

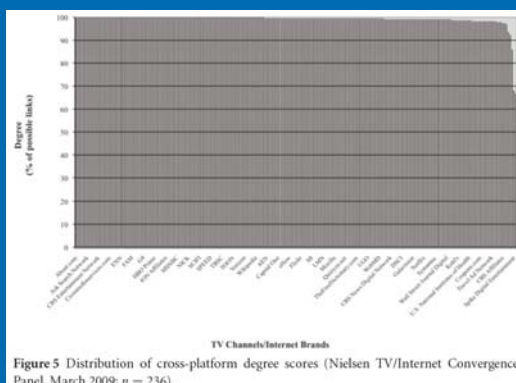


Webster & Ksiazek (2012), p. 49

Online, many more contents are available, affording media users with more possibilities for selective exposure.

The fragmentation of the audience in the online era could contribute to a loss of integration in society—increased political polarization and/or social segmentation.

Indeed, in a high-choice media environment, audiences for single outlets become smaller, with only few reaching a large audience (which results in a long tail distribution).



Webster & Ksiazek (2012), p. 50

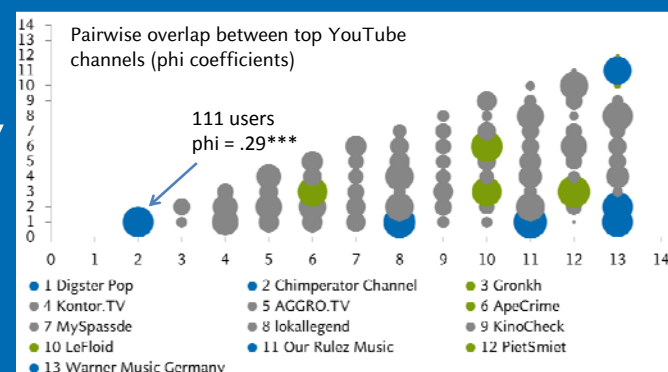
## 2 Or do we live in a “massively overlapping culture” because people combine multiple media in their daily repertoires?

Webster and Ksiazek (2012) assess the overlap of 236 TV channels and websites (“audience duplication”). Virtually all outlets share their audience with almost all of the respective 235 other outlets.

“Overlap” is assumed when the *observed* shared reach is larger than the shared reach that would be *expected* due to chance.

Example: YouTube has a reach of 15%, Spiegel Online of 3%. Their *expected shared reach* is 0.5%, while their *observed shared reach* is 2%. Overlap is thus assumed between this pair of sites.

## 3 But how can we take into account what people actually use within large websites? Can more fine-grained usage data help?



Nielsen clickstream data from June 2014 for use of large websites (YouTube and Spiegel Online) reveal the wide variety of contents accessed *within platforms*.

YouTube: 8,147 users accessed 244,925 videos, stemming from 109,093 channels. Only 13 channels have a reach > 2.5%.

Spiegel Online: 1,779 users accessed 8,002 articles. Only 11 topics have a reach > 2.5%.

Pairwise overlap between YouTube channels and topics on Spiegel Online (not pictured), respectively, exists only in few instances.

YouTube: Usage of music videos (charts) and popular vlogs (e.g., by LeFloid, Gronkh, ApeCrime) overlap. Spiegel Online: A small group of hard-news users access multiple topics. Soft news do not lead to much overlap. The majority of users only come to the site sporadically.

**Reference** Webster, J. G., & Ksiazek, T. B. (2012). The dynamics of audience fragmentation: *Journal of Communication*, 62(1), 39-56.

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