This paper explores changes in the field of television, due to changes in audience measurement. Since audience measurement functions as a “market information regime” around which the field of television is constituted, this study argues that changes in audience measurement systems have reconstituted the field, but few studies in audience measurement have holistically identified factors that are driving this development.

To identify these factors, the study advocates that both endogenous and exogenous “functional pressures” contribute to such changes. These pressures for television are: a) the imperfect but accepted nature of television ratings (endogenous) and b) the shift in user preference to increasingly consume media online (exogenous). I draw on past literature in audience measurement to explain how these functional pressures have facilitated the rise of new media (online) information regimes and what their existence means for audience measurement in the field of television. Specifically, this study seeks to address two questions: What degree of institutional diffusion causes television audience measurement to change? What are the consequences of the actions taken by the audience measurement industry leader in response to these changes in the field of television ratings?

To answer these rather broad questions, I argue that as the television ratings industry leader, Nielsen will be at the forefront of recognizing and responding to these changes in television ratings, for they have the most to lose if they fail to adapt. Therefore, using television industry and digital media industry trade publications as my data source, I conducted a historical institutional analysis of Nielsen’s response(s) to the rise of new media information regimes, which denoted changes in the field of television that coalesces around ratings as the market information regime. Unsurprisingly, Nielsen has secured a leadership position in audience measurement within the still developing new media environment. Future new media studies must focus on continuing developments using a historical institutional lens, as it enables researchers to answer questions pertaining to how and why these developments transpire.