

## **Audience Generations: Millennials, “Becomers,” and Beyond**

“Media mashup: ‘Broad City,’ millennials, and convergence”

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Rather than theorizing the contemporary televisual context as a fundamental break from post-network production and consumption practices, the current formation of new technologies that promote sociality, proliferate data, and blur the roles of producer and consumer can also extend and reify traditional industry structures. The Internet and its attendant infrastructure, hardware, platforms, and networks have certainly affected the way television is created and viewed, but in other ways the force of the television industry has shaped how new media technologies and practices have been taken up by both producers and audiences. In other words, while we are living through a time of profound changes in media industries, apparatuses, and ideologies, it is important to identify the processes and structures that remain stalwart, or even exert their own influence over the contemporary media landscape. Thinking through the pieces of television that seem immune to the whims of social media or rapid technological development can provide insights into the most fundamental aspects of the medium and how it relates to broader social structures such as globalization and late capitalism. The case study of *Broad City* provides access to a variety of questions about the intersection of television audiences, industry, and content through the lens of a specific generation and our historical moment. The Comedy Central series is a racialized, gendered artifact of contemporary production practices that flourish in a symbiotic relationship between independent and commercial industry structures that fundamentally rely on the active engagement of young audiences.

In 2010, Abbi Jacobson and Ilana Glazer posted the first season of *Broad City* on YouTube. The series features its creators in semi-autobiographical roles and its New York City

setting figures prominently in plots. Amy Poehler became a fan, partially through the web series' success but also via Jacobson and Glazer's involvement with the improvisation group Upright Citizens Brigade, to which Poehler also has connections. With the aid of an informal industry network that drew *Broad City*'s creators toward a successful television comedian, Poehler was midwifed Jacobson and Glazer through the process of moving the series from YouTube to a cable network. In interviews with popular and industry press, Jacobson and Glazer overtly describe their work on the web series as preparation for a cable program, specifically mentioning their shift between the first and second seasons to apply industry production standards more rigorously to their independent set. If we looked only at the content and reception of *Broad City*, we would see a much stronger argument for media convergence and could find evidence that distinctions between cable networks and their online activities are becoming less meaningful. For example, the content between the YouTube version of *Broad City* and its Comedy Central iteration is strikingly similar; plots, themes, and jokes are recycled and political commitments are maintained over the six years the series has been in production. Furthermore, Comedy Central uses Facebook and other online spaces to promote *Broad City* and its fans use YouTube, Hulu, and other digital channels to engage with the series in a variety of ways. Nevertheless, the narrative of *Broad City*'s history, including the impetus for its creation, its transition from YouTube to a cable network, and its critical and cultural reception, lets us explore the ways television simultaneously adapts to changing technologies, struggles to react to trends and developments, and also affects how content circulates in new mediated contexts.

The *Broad City* case study specifically speaks to questions of audiences (as well as producers) as generational. Jacobson and Glazer are squarely millennials, and their series functions in multiple mediated contexts. In addition to having started on YouTube, the Comedy

Central series still creates online-only content, primarily through their digital mini-series “Hack into Broad City” that promotes upcoming seasons. They have produced Vaudeville-esque traveling shows that feature Jacobson, Glazer, and their friends and colleagues in skits, improv games, and musical comedy. The target audience for the series is millennial women, a trend in Comedy Central’s recent programming and relevant to this roundtable’s question about how younger audiences are gendered; Jewishness, as it is taken up in the series, might also give us a way into conversations about the racialization of audiences.

In an increasingly fragmented media landscape that continues to appeal directly and aggressively toward millennial and other generational formations of young audiences, the lines between televisual and web-based content have become blurred, if not altogether meaningless. At the same time, the medium of television, as both a technology and a set of cultural protocols, remains recognizable in a variety of industry practices and viewer habits, including targeted marketing to youth. Exploring the push and pull of these forces with other case studies can help us sketch out a framework for theorizing media convergence and its relation to television studies.