

Rewatching Content on Streaming Platforms: The Pursuit of Ontological Comfort

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Abstract

Why do people tend to rewatch series and films when they have numerous new options at their disposal? This article develops the notion of rewatching on streaming platforms as an essential and enduring aspect of televisuality. Our analysis draws from diary reports completed during one month by 40 streaming platform users in Costa Rica, as well as focus group conversations with 13 of these participants. We examine rewatching as a pursuit of *ontological comfort*, that is, the sense of well-being derived from people’s understanding of everyday life and their conscious capacity to act in it. We argue that rewatching expresses an active search for stability, predictability, and orchestrated surprise through the narratives and conventions of certain televisual genres and the self-schedule affordances of streaming platforms. This study thus examines the nuanced significance of rewatching and its fundamental connection to the notion of comfort.

Keywords

audiences; comfort; Latin America; ontological security; rewatching; television; television genres; temporality

1. Introduction

The so-called “age of streaming” is commonly referred to as a period of abundance. According to Echauri (2023, p. 2), “infinity” is the prevailing media paradigm of our time, profoundly influencing the “landscape and experience” of contemporary media. Similarly, Boczkowski (2021, p. 1) contends that dwelling in a world of “abundance” and “information plenty” is a singular historical product of technological advancements and

content innovations. Arditì (2021) goes on to depict the current era as characterized by “unending consumption,” a defining element of platform capitalism.

Given this landscape, why do individuals opt to rewatch series and films when seemingly limitless new options are available? What prompts rewatching in an era of “infinite” and “abundant” media? Rewatching remains an enduring feature of televisuality, spanning various media technologies such as DVDs, cable, and reruns throughout television history (Kompare, 2006). Yet, within the exploration of “streaming cultures,” rewatching is often overlooked and overshadowed by the study of other important phenomena like binge-watching practices and the influence of algorithms (Arditì, 2021; Siles, 2023; Siles, Espinoza-Rojas, et al., 2019).

This article contributes to the study of televisuality by conceptualizing rewatching as a fundamental practice of the “televisual audience” (Caldwell, 1995) and examining its role in everyday life within the context of streaming technologies. While existing literature has explored the pragmatic reasons behind rewatching series and films, our contribution lies in investigating rewatching as a pursuit of ontological comfort. *Ontological comfort* describes the sense of well-being that stems from people’s understanding of everyday life and their conscious capacity to act in it. We argue that rewatching represents an active quest for stability, predictability, orchestrated surprise, and a grasp of their ability to navigate daily existence through specific televisual genres and technological means such as streaming platforms. In this way, this article sheds light on the importance of rewatching and its intrinsic link to the notion of comfort. Our analysis derives from month-long diary reports submitted by 40 Costa Rican streaming platform users, supplemented by discussions in focus groups involving 13 of these participants.

Costa Rica provides a pertinent case for examining the pursuit of ontological comfort through media practices for several reasons. First, Costa Ricans, having held the top spot in the Happy Planet Index for several years, perceive happiness as a societal imperative (Xirinachs-Salazar et al., 2023). Costa Rica has positioned happiness as a key commodity that allows it to distinguish itself on the global stage. This perspective contrasts with the internal perception of a decline in the overall quality of life. Over the past decades, the nation has transitioned from a social democratic welfare to a neo-conservative state, leading to repercussions in accessing fundamental public services like education and healthcare (Molina Jiménez & Díaz Arias, 2021).

Second, Costa Rica stands out as one of the countries with the highest per capita use of streaming platforms in Latin America (Siles, 2023; Siles, Espinoza-Rojas, et al., 2019). A 2024 survey indicated that 84% of the population uses at least one platform for entertainment purposes, including YouTube (80% of the population), Netflix (33%), Disney+ (12%), and Max (10%; Brenes Peralta et al., 2024). Finally, Costa Rica is characterized by specific sociocultural features that aid in comprehending the global patterns of content circulation in platform capitalism, owing to its history of cultural and political proximity to the US (Muñoz-González, 2023, 2025; Muñoz-González & Siles, 2025).

2. Why Do Audiences Rewatch Content?

Scholars have examined rewatching through various perspectives and analytical traditions. Focusing primarily on recent reconfigurations of the television industry, researchers in media and communication

studies have demonstrated that contemporary television is fundamentally organized around the concept of rewatchability (Kompare, 2006). From an audience studies perspective, Mittell (2015) focused on the evolution of television narratives, concluding that television has become too complex to be watched only once. For Mittell, contemporary television thus *demand*s that people rewatch content to fully grasp the narrative, structural, and aesthetic complexity that shapes its narratives.

From a political economy perspective, scholars have also argued that the film and television industry promotes the unlimited repetition of different formats and narratives to perpetuate economic gain cycles (Echauri, 2023). In this view, the industry strategically promotes rewatchability as a means of capital accumulation, employing diverse tactics to encourage viewership. One such key industrial tactic is what Klein and Palmer (2016) call “multiplicities,” texts such as sequels, adaptations, remakes, and imitations that deliberately reuse and capitalize on images, stories, or characters from earlier works. Multiplicities work by “volatilizing” the meaning of repeated texts, a process that “disperses critical attention across textual borders that are readily displaced or replaced by the continuing flow of texts” (Klein & Palmer, 2016, p. 3).

Few empirical studies have specifically addressed why audiences rewatch content. In the analysis of complex television mentioned above, Mittell (2015) identified the “rewatcher” as a specific kind of viewer (distinct from “fresh” and “spoiled” viewers). For Mittell, the rewatcher is not unlike the television critic who watches content by “simultaneously experiencing and analyzing media texts, foregrounding the operational aesthetic [through] a playful engagement with past experiences [that adds] another layer of viewing pleasure” (Mittell, 2015, p. 177). Rewatching thus involves a pleasurable combination of both anticipation and surprise.

By combining survey data and interviews, Bentley and Murray (2016) focused on the practical reasons that motivate audiences to rewatch content. They considered three reasons that led people to watch certain content again: social connection (rewatching provides an opportunity to connect with others who are watching or have also watched certain content); mood cultivation (rewatching offers a means to manage certain emotions); and nostalgia (rewatching allows the experience of ideas or feelings associated with a previous time or process in people’s life.) For Bentley and Murray (2016), specific conditions shape these motivations: rewatching allows people to “prepare” for new seasons or sequels by having all the information necessary fresh in their mind; it is surrounded by the centrality of recommendations whether from other people or algorithms; it is involved in issues of self-performance as viewers use rewatched content to signal an aspect of their identity; and it is a way to make sense of the narrative complexity that characterizes contemporary television (as theorized by Mittell).

Finally, another analytical tradition has focused on a more philosophical dimension of rewatching, exploring its significance as a social practice. Shuster (2021) developed a phenomenological approach to contend that rewatching is grounded in predictability, which entails interaction with an actual and mediated reality. This distinction extends beyond the act of merely repeating content; instead, it is a constant pursuit of pleasure and joy. Shuster (2021) notes that at first rewatching seems to derive from a sense of powerlessness, which finds pleasure in abdication and repetition. In this logic, it is a tactic deployed to fathom the passing of time in a world that overpowers individual agency. However, Shuster then notes that rewatching also entails a form of freedom. This is because predictability provides a sense of joy linked to the prioritization of the past or future, functioning as “a sort of sundial to the present moment, revealing broader social and political conditions” (Shuster, 2021, p. 25).

3. Theorizing Rewatchability and Ontological Comfort

Building on previous studies' valuable empirical and analytical insights, this article develops the notion of *ontological comfort* as a theoretical framework to make sense of rewatching practices. References to comfort permeate public culture, appearing in contexts ranging from the language of therapy and healthcare to concerns about the climate crisis, the design of physical spaces, and economic aspirations for a particular lifestyle. As the Oxford English Dictionary summarizes it, comfort typically refers to “a state of physical and material well-being, with freedom from pain and trouble, and satisfaction of bodily need” (Comfort, n.d., par. 10).

Etymologically, “comfort” emerges from the Late Latin verb *confortō*, which is composed of the prefix *con-* (together) and *fortis* (strong), conveying the sense of strengthening a relationship or condition. This aptly expresses the deliberation involved in doing something to gain solace. Comfort thus comprises seeking predictability for the sake of “ease, well-being, and satisfaction” (Tutton & Seers, 2003, p. 690).

Comfort in everyday life has evolved from an expectation to an obligation. This shift is tied to the development of capitalism. As Maldonado (1991, p. 35) succinctly puts it, “Comfort is a modern idea. Before the Industrial Revolution, the need (or expectation) for comfort—in the sense...of convenience, ease, and habitability—was the privilege of the few.” According to Maldonado (1991), comfort solidified as an “ideology” in Victorian England, particularly through its connection to social control categories such as hygiene and order. Crowley (1999) demonstrates how, in eighteenth-century Anglo-American culture, comfort then served to legitimize patterns of popular consumption by disrupting the traditional economic and moral distinction between necessity and luxury. Building on this historical development, comfort has emerged as a keyword that “helps tap into neuralgic points of contemporary cultures” (Birke & Butter, 2020, p. 8). Hickey (2023, p. 8) goes so far as to call comfort “the most pressing challenge facing human existence,” as it encapsulates “what it means to live and what it will take to sustain the very possibility of life.”

Recent literature in social sciences and humanities has emphasized how the obligation of comfort is largely achieved through “personal attachments with everyday devices” (Beer, 2012, p. 361), or, in other words, how comfort is derived from and through material things, most notably media technologies (Miller, 2008). This approach to comfort also has important antecedents in the literature on televisuality. In his classic work *Television and Everyday Life*, Silverstone (1994) argued that the media provide a feeling of regularity in people's lives through the reiteration of content. Drawing on psychoanalytic and sociological theories, Silverstone contended that television is fundamental in fostering a sense of “ontological security,” that is, “the confidence that most human beings have in the continuity of their self-identity and in the constancy of the surrounding social and material environments of action” (Giddens, 1990, p. 92). According to Silverstone, this sense of security is essential for maintaining the sphere of social life and generates experiences of contentment. Similarly, Radway (1984) showed that genre conventions are key in allowing audiences to know how a media narrative will unfold. The repetition of aesthetic traits satisfies an audience's taste and, simultaneously, confirms their identity within a social order.

In this article, we argue that Costa Rican streaming users engage in a quest for ontological comfort through rewatching. To this end, we differentiate security and comfort as specific ontological conditions. There is a clear relationship between security and comfort. Ontological security involves experiencing a continuous and

regular state of affairs derived from being part of a concrete and complete social reality. As Silverstone's work showed, security is about stability in social life. Etymologically, "security" comes from the Latin noun *securitas* and adjective *securus*, derived from the prefix *se-* (without) and *curus* (care). Ontological security thus involves a carefree environment since there is a general existential base for everyday life which is constant and stable. As Giddens (1990, p. 92) summarized it, security "is an emotional, rather than a cognitive, phenomenon, and it is rooted in the *unconscious*" (added emphasis). As a supplement, we contend that ontological comfort involves an active and conscious pursuit of pleasure and joy derived from stable and consistent social practices (including rewatching). In addition to the sense of stability inherent in ontological security, comfort denotes a state of well-being.

In what follows, we unpack how rewatching practices on streaming platforms fit within this broader trajectory of seeking comfort through relationships with technologies and media texts.

4. Research Design

Our study relied on two methods: daily reports of streaming platform usage and focus groups with a subset of these diarists. To construct our sample, we issued a call for participation across various university-associated profiles on social media. We selected a group of 40 individuals among those who completed an initial questionnaire to participate, prioritizing sociodemographic diversity. The final sample consisted of individuals between the ages of 20 and 50. Twenty-eight of these participants identified as women, 11 as men, and one person as non-binary. Most participants had some type of formal education. They were mostly either students or professionals in diverse fields.

Participants were asked to submit reports of their streaming platform usage over one month. Respondents detailed all content watched, including both what informants viewed for the first time and what they rewatched. In each report, participants were encouraged to comment on practical aspects (content watched, devices used, time invested, etc.), cognitive elements (explanations of platform functioning, interpretations of interfaces and algorithmic recommendations received, etc.), and affective experiences (emotional responses to the viewed content and the use of streaming platforms). Individuals could complete a brief online form or send audio messages through a messaging platform (like WhatsApp). In total, participants submitted 276 daily reports between March and May 2023.

After receiving these reports, a subset of 13 individuals was selected for the focus groups. We aimed for a representative sample in terms of age and occupation diversity. We conducted four focus groups in June 2023 (two in person and two via Zoom). In these conversations, we delved into the findings from the daily reports and addressed topics such as the most-viewed content during the study (both first-time views and rewatched content), their thoughts on the platforms used, and the role of these platforms in their everyday lives. Focus groups lasted between 56 and 94 minutes (with an average of 79 minutes).

We analyzed data from the diaries and focus groups inductively. We conducted three rounds of coding following grounded theory procedures. In the initial round, we identified numerous categories in our informants' responses, including rewatching. The second round specifically focused on rewatching, seeking to understand the meanings participants attributed to this practice. The third coding round expanded the data analysis into four major categories that provided thematic coherence to the discussion: (a) motivations

for streaming platform use; (b) the pleasure derived from using these platforms; (c) the type of content viewed to seek ontological comfort; and (d) aspects of temporality within the process. In what follows, we develop these four categories further.

5. Rewatching and Ontological Comfort in Costa Rica

Our findings significantly validate the underlying practical motivations for rewatching as identified in earlier studies (Bentley & Murray, 2016; Mittell, 2015). Both in their diary reports and focus group conversations, our interlocutors indicated rewatching certain series or films as these provided them with opportunities to connect with others, cultivate feelings and emotions, reconnect with certain moments or past processes in their lives, get ready for a new season, perform their identities about their fandom, and discover elements individuals had not necessarily noticed the first time they watched them. To supplement extant research, in what follows we focus instead on the case of rewatching as an active pursuit of ontological comfort.

5.1. Streaming to “De-Stress”

In order to better comprehend the significance of rewatching, we examine first the broader motivations that initially attracted individuals to use streaming platforms. Virtually all of our interviewees expressed dedicating substantial daily time to consuming content across various platforms, most notably Max (HBO Max at the time of the study; 40% of participants mentioned in their diaries having watched it at least once at some point during the study) and Netflix (37.5%). Participants also reported having watched Disney+ (25% of participants), Amazon Prime Video (17.5%), Star+ (15%), Apple TV (12.5%), and Crunchyroll (12.5%). Netflix was the most frequently mentioned platform in these diaries: it appeared in 26% of reports, followed by Max (18% of reports).

Participants in our study were straightforward in what made watching content so compelling: it offered a means to “disconnect” from the stress associated with their everyday lives. The words of Clara (a 40-year-old supervisor) are representative of this sentiment: “[Watching content on streaming platforms] is my refuge after I leave work because it relaxes me.” Clara’s use of the term “refuge” implies a sense of protection from a threat, danger, or risk. During a focus group, Giselle (a 26-year-old university student) echoed these words: “[I watch content] because it provides quietness. I like to focus on other stories and avoid my own.” Thus, Giselle openly suggests that the stories portrayed in the series and films she watches offer her an escape from the reality of her own life.

Using their terms, streaming offered diarists valuable opportunities to “de-stress” and “disconnect” because of its self-schedule affordances, that is, because platforms allowed them to watch content whenever and wherever they pleased (Lüders & Sundet, 2022). According to Martina (a 50-year-old IT project manager):

I look for things that really disconnect me from daily stress. I consume [platforms] a lot at night when I have finished everything else. It is a way to not think about the routine anymore. I watch [content] that is familiar to me and that I know is going to disconnect me and relax me. That is why I watched *Modern Family* the most [during the study]. I like it because it is entertaining, it clears my mind.

For Martina, rewatching *Modern Family* at the end of the day felt like a reward for having endured the stress of everyday life. To achieve this goal, Martina expressed a preference for a certain type of content: what was “familiar” to her. In this sense, for interviewees like Martina, rewatching provides a secure sense of comfort against the stress derived from daily obligations and pressures. Rewatching was thus a deliberate and purposeful activity, tailored to each individual’s everyday life and schedule.

The tendency to envision streaming platforms as a content “archive” for daily disconnection was a common theme among our informants (Lüders, 2021). For example, Giselle prepared for the reboot of *Sex and the City* by watching its first six seasons during the month of our study. Her engagement with the streaming service Max was thus shaped by the satisfaction of knowing she had access to a complete and permanent archive of the series on the platform, available whenever she chose to watch.

Silverstone’s notion of ontological security helps to make sense of the use of streaming platforms to find a “refuge,” through a content archive, to disconnect from daily stress. However, a more detailed analysis is required of the active and deliberate efforts of people to obtain a sense of pleasure through predictability. This search for pleasure through rewatching is the focus of Section 5.2.

5.2. The Pleasure of Rewatching

Selecting what to watch often involves uncertainty as viewers can’t anticipate the results of an unknown series or film. Miguel, who is 35 and works as a lab assistant, eloquently expressed why he preferred to rewatch content to deal with this uncertainty: “If I’m going to sit down and watch something, I’ll go to my comfort zone. If it’s something new, it stresses me out.” For Miguel, streaming platforms operate as a secure space where he can “disconnect.” In this space, the familiar provides a sense of comfort that helps him overcome the distress of not knowing what to expect from an unseen series or film. Martina, who we cited above, expressed a similar sentiment: “I usually repeat the series that I like because I’m going for something *safe and good*” (emphasis added). For both Miguel and Martina, rewatching is thus a secure way to daily comfort that has been previously tested and experienced.

Mittell’s (2015) notion of the rewatcher as a distinct kind of television viewer aptly highlights the differences between rewatching and experiencing narrative elements without knowing what to expect. In other words, rewatching provides a *specific* kind of comfort. When asked to explain what made rewatching his main way of engaging with streaming platforms, Miguel asserted: “It generates emotion in me to remember when I watched something at one time, or something I had to wait a whole week for it to happen.” For Miguel, rewatching evoked a cascade of emotions layered atop each other: it was exciting for him to rewatch something, reminiscing about the initial anticipation it had stirred. Through rewatching, he aimed to relax in the present by reliving what had excited him in the past.

The comfort of rewatching lies partly in the specific combination of anticipation and surprise. This combination is a fundamental component of the pleasure that rewatching provides to our interlocutors. Miguel articulated the importance of anticipation in his use of streaming platforms this way: “I normally use HBO [Max] to rewatch things. I’m a big fan of *Game of Thrones*, I’ve watched it like 1,000 times. I love certain scenes and [when I watch them] I’m almost reciting them from memory.” Miguel also stressed the importance of streaming service Max’s self-schedule affordances as one of the reasons he subscribed to the platform. He found comfort (and

a means of self-identifying himself as a big fan of *Game of Thrones*) in his capacity to predict the lines of his favorite scenes.

However, anticipation was just one aspect of the rewatching experience. Another component involved willingly embracing surprise, even if individuals were already expecting it. In her second diary report, Valentina (who is 28 years old and administers a property on Airbnb) captured this feeling of orchestrated surprise by referring to the series *Lucifer*, which she was watching for the second time: “I’m watching it for comfort, I’ve already watched it....[It makes me] laugh! And surprises me (even though I already knew what was happening).” Valentina explicitly found comfort in both knowing what to expect in the series’ plot while being surprised by not recalling the specific details of how the events unfolded. In this case, the comfort lies in the reassurance of knowing the narrative outcome without precisely remembering the journey. Valentina thus actively places herself in a position to be surprised.

On many occasions, rewatching provided comfort not to the broad vicissitudes of everyday life but to the specific emotions of the day. Our interlocutors referred to these occasions as a matter of dealing with or cultivating “moods” (cf. Siles, Segura-Castillo, et al., 2019), thus pointing to the fleeting nature of the emotions that needed to be addressed through rewatching. During a focus group conversation, Francesca (a 43-year-old psychologist) explained how she selected what to watch on any given day:

It all depends on how I feel that day. Sometimes I remember a movie and say to myself: “I’d love to watch it again!” Or maybe I’m nostalgic. Or I may remember a part of the movie and not everything else, so I rewatch it.

In her third diary report, she noted she had opted to rewatch something because she didn’t want to feel lonely while doing other domestic activities. In her words: “I watched it while I was cleaning the house. It makes me feel like I’m not alone.” Knowing the series relatively well allowed her to divide her attention between the screen and household chores. A wide variety of emotional states thus guided Francesca’s content selections: from the emotional state of nostalgia (Grainge, 2000; Muñoz-González, 2025) to the specific moods experienced on any given day (including the sense of loneliness). As with other interlocutors, Francesca believes that rewatching series offers a consistent source of comfort, allowing for the exploration of a wide range of emotions.

Like Francesca, many of our interlocutors found solace in the sense of companionship that television has historically provided. Rewatching deepens this comfort by allowing viewers to engage with a story without the need for full attention, as they already know what will happen. The use of mobile devices further enhances this experience, blending companionship and comfort, as captured in Mónica’s (34 years old) words:

I take my phone to the bathroom and place it here while hanging up laundry. The series follows me wherever I go in the house. That way, I can watch an entire series or several movies in a single day.

Mónica’s account places herself at the heart of the action: She moves through her house, with the series “following” her on her mobile phone, offering constant and instant comfort.

Unlike ontological security, comfort is not an unconscious state but rather a deliberate pursuit. Our interlocutors discovered solace and peace in what was familiar to them. Moreover, they navigated the

details of everyday life by consciously fostering the right moods that would contribute to their well-being. In short, ontological comfort is derived from predictability—be it orchestrated surprises—and specific efforts to nurture the moods in which it can thrive.

5.3. A Universe of Rewatchable Genres

According to Shuster (2021), genres are key to rewatching as they “suggest a kind of epistemological fingernail into the world” (p. 24). As an interpretive contract, genres and their conventions provide expectations that lead to a sense of predictability and orchestrated surprise underlying ontological comfort.

Genre expectations were also central to our participants’ decisions on what to rewatch. Martina, for example, explained her selections during the study in this manner: “I had already watched [*Modern Family*] twice, but I had just finished watching *The Office* and thus repeated *Modern Family* because it is in the same vein.” Martina characterized rewatchable content by referring to an implicitly shared set of common characteristics that she labeled “the same vein.” As with most of our interlocutors, the predictability created by genre conventions was much more important for Martina than other criteria when deciding what to rewatch, including algorithms or platform affordances.

As Martina’s words suggest, although participants mentioned they could rewatch any kind of series or film, they also revealed a preference for specific types of content. In her third diary report, a 20-year-old university student named Susana felt the need to clarify why she was rewatching the series *Arrested Development* and *Gilmore Girls*: “I like that I’ve watched both series before so I don’t need to invest a lot of time/attention/commitment/emotional burden.” Although short, Susana’s list groups a complex set of requirements that the content should meet to be suitable for rewatching: neither too emotionally demanding nor too cognitively challenging.

Interlocutors tended to employ one specific term to refer to the series or films that met this mix of criteria: They enjoyed rewatching “light” content (a term originally used by participants in English). In everyday language, Costa Ricans often use the term “light” to express the qualities of something that can be either superficial or healthy. In the context of televisual content, “light” means “not something silly but rather easy to process” both emotionally and cognitively, as Valentina put it in one focus group. In terms of traditional genre categories, rewatchable “light” content involved a certain dose of comedy or comedy-inflected material. Comedies are “light” in that they are interpreted as accessible for most people and their characters deal with what seem to be relatively trivial situations (which helps avoid “one’s own stories,” as Giselle’s quote above expressed it). This expectation was strictly tied to the way participants felt that comedy’s genre conventions could securely allow them to disconnect from everyday life and find comfort. In Mónica’s words: “For me, it is important to have comedy among all the series I watch because it lifts my mood and takes away the stress of work.”

When participants mentioned their appreciation for “light” material and comedies, they were primarily referring to content produced in the US. The comfort of rewatching thus came from the genre conventions provided by people in comedic situations as defined by the US television industry. For example, in *Modern Family*, our interlocutors found appealing the recurring set of characters and events and situations that are usually resolved within single episodes. Similarly, participants rewatched *The Office* because they enjoyed its

particular sense of humor and felt an affective connection with its characters. Other “light” series that participants mentioned included *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* and *How I Met Your Mother*.

To be sure, comfort doesn’t necessarily imply passive reception or uncritical acceptance. Instead, Muñoz-González (2023) refers to Costa Ricans’ relation to transnational content as “critical resignation,” a reflexive interpretative operation based on both appreciation of and resistance to American culture. Seen in this way, the comfort of rewatching partly consists of engaging in a critical operation where Costa Ricans both relate to the ordinary situations from American life reflected on the screen while sustaining a critical awareness of their differences and political significance.

The geographic origin of the content viewed was a recurring topic of reflection in both the diaries and focus groups. Valentina, the Airbnb administrator, articulated the notion of critical resignation most compellingly during our focus group discussion: “I’ve definitely fallen into the sin of consuming Americanized [*agringado*] content, especially with series. I do enjoy watching other kinds of content, but I don’t have the time [to explore].” For Valentina, watching “Americanized” content is a pragmatic choice, saving her the time required to navigate the unfamiliar generic conventions of other television industries. Valentina also acknowledged that watching series in English helps her improve her language skills, which she considers essential for her work as an Airbnb property manager. To support this professional goal, Valentina, like many others, ensures that subtitles are set to the original English.

When asked why she described this as a “sin,” Valentina expanded on her perception of television consumption as an ideological practice:

It’s not the same to watch an American series as it is to watch one produced in a Latin American country, which might even feel more relatable. [It’s a sin] because I’m contributing to the idea that here [in Costa Rica], we’re heavily influenced by US culture. Americans are evil! I’m sorry [to say this]! But it’s interesting because some of their own series show just how messed up they are and the problems they face.

Thus, Valentina’s critical resignation is both practical and political: She acknowledges that the US television industry itself offers material to support her critique, elevating her resignation into a deliberate and reflective engagement with American culture.

As noted previously, our interlocutors often preferred to rewatch something rather than venturing into the uncertain territory of discovering new series or films because of the comfort rewatching provides. However, occasionally, some relied on the genre expectations of content they had rewatched to try something new. That was Susana’s case, the university student, who stated during a focus group:

I almost always watch things I’ve already watched. I’m too lazy to start new things. During this month [the period of our study], maybe I started new series because they were a continuation of other series [I have watched]. Like *Queen Charlotte* [is a continuation] of *Bridgerton*, which I had already watched....They’re from the same universe.

Susana’s expectations came from the fact that new series were “multiplicities” based on the previous series she had rewatched (Klein & Palmer, 2016). Her expectations that the new series would help her “disconnect” from

everyday life stress were based on genre conventions, that is, they belonged to the same symbolic “universe.” However, these expectations failed to materialize. According to Susana: “I didn’t finish [it] because [it was] kind of bad.” This confirmed to her that rewatching something was a more secure way to obtain comfort than trying something new.

Our interlocutors’ relationship with “old” and “new” media was complex. Their decision of what to rewatch is not necessarily based on when a series or film was released. Instead, this content must satisfy certain criteria to become rewatchable. The textual properties examined above were the entry point upon which participants started to develop rewatching as a fundamental practice in their everyday lives.

5.4. *Rewatching Time and Time for Rewatching*

Temporality offers another key dimension to further understand the relationships between rewatching and comfort. In the most obvious sense, rewatching is predicated on temporality as it is based on the recurrence of a practice over time. In short, rewatching is a quest for comfort time and time again, a pursuit that recurs due to the repetitive nature of everyday life within capitalist societies.

Rewatching is a temporal practice also in that it is typically carried out at certain moments of the day. As noted earlier, for some, comfort lies in the ability that platforms (as permanent “archives” of content) and mobile devices provide to rewatch things throughout the day, offering a sense of constant companionship. For others, as suggested by Martina’s quote in Section 5.1, rewatching was a reward expected at the end of the day, meant to soothe the stress of everyday life.

In addition to being a temporally situated practice, rewatching has its specific temporality. Susana’s intervention during a focus group made this process evident. She explained:

Gilmore Girls is always in my queue on Netflix and, when I don’t know what to watch, I just put on *Gilmore Girls*. I rarely watch new things. Whenever I open it, I feel like I don’t explore [Netflix’s interface] as much because I always go to what I already know I’m watching.

Susana’s words emphasize how both watching content and deciding what to watch takes time. For Susana, rewatching is best understood as an automatic process that allows viewers to regulate and maximize time. In short, rewatching is a safe *space* also because it offers an assurance that no time is “wasted.” In Susana’s account, rewatching is also endowed with specific temporal dynamics: Rewatching is a loop that “synchronizes” the pursuit of comfort. This synchronicity, achieved through a rewatching loop each time she uses streaming platforms, allowed Susana to understand her capacity to act (that is, her agency) in opposition to the actions she feels Netflix would like to impose on her: always watch its new “original” series, explore its catalog, navigate rows of genres, or pay attention to algorithmic recommendations (Siles, 2023).

Susana’s example brings into focus the links between time and space in rewatching. During focus groups, our interlocutors highlighted how some spaces (including bedrooms, kitchens, living rooms, and even the bus while commuting) were tied to the deliberate action of rewatching. Simultaneously, rewatching rendered manageable the size of streaming platforms’ catalogs, thus creating a material and symbolic “comfort zone” in everyday life.

6. Conclusion

This article has developed the notion of ontological comfort as the sense of well-being arising from rewatching series and films. We have argued that rewatching constitutes an intentional pursuit of stability, predictability, orchestrated surprise, and a conscious understanding of one's capability to navigate everyday existence, through specific televisual genres (such as "light" content) and certain technological means (notably the self-schedule and "archival" affordances of streaming platforms). In dissecting the dynamics of rewatching, our intention is not to suggest that individuals do not watch new content altogether. Our interlocutors also found pleasure in discovering fresh series or films, typically in specific circumstances and with particular companions. Instead, we have sought to demonstrate that rewatching is not an exception but rather the cornerstone of many individuals' relationships with televisuality in everyday life.

By differentiating ontological comfort from ontological security, we have added nuance to the study of the relationship that contemporary audiences have not only with the media but with society at large. This distinction helps us understand a dialectic between the more immediate instances of social reality and its more abstract and structural conditions. In rewatching, people actively seek to make their quotidian spheres more manageable and predictable (that is, comfortable) while also maintaining a broader sense of security that results from "an active engagement in the world, an active engagement in the events and patterns and relationships of everyday life" (Silverstone, 1994, pp. 5-6).

At its core, when Costa Rican streaming platform users and audiences rewatch specific content, they seek to make sense of a world that is not entirely theirs. Searching for ontological comfort is a response to the pressures and duties of everyday life, from household chores to work-related activities. As Morley (1992) noted more than three decades ago, audiences participate in unequal power relations that make them vulnerable on many fronts. A key example of this power struggle comes from Costa Ricans' relationship with televisual content produced in the US. As we demonstrated, the references through which our interlocutors made sense of the structural conditions in everyday life (from the stresses of "the office" to the tensions of the "modern family") came primarily from such genres as American comedies. Nevertheless, it was *through* their critical engagement with this kind of content, both appreciating and resisting it, that participants built notions of self-worth and purpose in their everyday activities (Muñoz-González, 2023, 2025). Thus, by rewatching, our interlocutors developed a sense of agency over their lives that, although limited, gave them comfort to wake up every day and deal with a capitalist society that is not a creation of their own. At the same time, this critical resignation underscores how comfort has transformed from a possibility into an obligation in contemporary life.

In popular culture, streaming platforms are typically portrayed as gateways to infinite content. And, for many, they certainly serve this purpose. However, they also signify the opposite: a portal to the finite and the restricted of what has already been watched, sometimes even before the rise of streaming technologies. From this perspective, "streaming cultures" scholarship could be overemphasizing the importance of algorithms, interfaces, and technological features in the contemporary experience of televisuality. Most of our participants appreciated streaming not primarily for the accuracy of algorithmic suggestions or the vastness of content catalogs, although they occasionally found value in both. Rather, they embraced streaming technologies mostly for their capacity to seamlessly integrate rewatching into the nuances of everyday life and facilitate the cultivation of specific emotions that contributed to their overall well-being in a society that demands them to be the "happiest" nation in the world.

As Kompare (2006, p. 198) noted in his analysis of repetition in American television, “New technologies, business models, regulatory structures, programming forms, and modes of viewing increasingly mesh with the old, with widely varying, and often unpredictable results.” Consistent with this observation, our analysis revealed a dimension of streaming technologies that is often overlooked by the emphasis on content novelty and discovery, namely how streaming can also work to extend long-standing practices of televisual audiences (such as rewatching) and contribute to consolidating enduring aspects of televisuality (such as the centrality of repetition in the production, distribution, and consumption of content; Caldwell, 1995).

The pursuit of ontological comfort is not confined exclusively to rewatching or the use of streaming platforms. New research could further explore other ways in which individuals exert their agency concerning how they experience their lives with technological means in ways that are consistent with this search for ontological comfort (Siles, Gómez-Cruz, & Ricaurte, 2024). In this regard, extending the study to include larger and more diverse samples could provide a deeper understanding of the significance of rewatching practices in relation to other cultural practices and platforms. Our findings also differ from studies that tend to view platform usage as a site of oppression for individuals, as we prioritize how people find pleasure and joy in their ambivalent relationship with technology. Scholars have observed social media users employing platforms such as TikTok also for escapism and pleasure (Schellewald, 2024; Siles, Valerio-Alfaro, & Meléndez-Moran, 2024). Thus, further research could shed light on how the pursuit of ontological comfort shapes the use of other platforms, including social media. It would also be valuable to examine the tension between the quest for comfort and the exertion of power by technology companies through these platforms.

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Conflict of Interests

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