

# “Are you still watching?” Technicity, Temporality, and Excess in Streaming Consumption

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## Abstract

This article understands binge-watching, binge-searching, and speed-watching practices as forms of contemporary consumption on streaming platforms. Employing mediation theory and defining excess as the fruition of representation, this work proposes a theoretical study of streaming consumption practices as technicities impregnated with “excessive temporalities.” The article points to the relevant presence of Martín-Barbero’s thinking as a necessary alternative (and an opposition to technicism) for interpreting digital consumption. It also proposes the replacement of excess as an ontologically qualitative cultural category. As a final consideration, “excessive temporalities” of consumption are theorized about in three subdivisions: 1) Excess in terms of the fruition in the quantity of the represented content (binge-watching), 2) Excess in terms of the fruition during the peregrination to the represented content (binge-searching), and 3) Excess in terms of the fruition in the pace of the represented content (speed-watching).

**Keywords:** *Mediation Theory; Streaming; Audience; Excess; Latin American School of Communication.*

## 1. Introduction

The main purpose of this article is to theoretically debate digital consumption and interaction practices on streaming platforms. The theoretical framework is guided by one of the most significant contributions made to the field of communication sciences, media studies, and cultural studies in Latin America: Jesús Martín-Barbero’s mediation theory. Proposed in the late 1980s, the sociocultural mediations are reallocated and understood here as a complex analytical cosmovision in the contemporary understanding of streaming studies.

In that sense, the practices of binge-watching, binge-searching, and speed-watching found on streaming platforms are brought to the center of the debate. Therefore, Martín-Barbero’s work (1982, 1992, 2004, 2009), from the Latin American Communication School, is associated with Calabrese’s reflections (1992), the Neo-Baroque theorist of studies on “excess,” drawing a line that shapes, characterizes, and endorses the three practices mentioned above.

Thus, Martín-Barbero’s visions are called upon in order to present a map of mediations by the concepts of “technicity” and “temporality.” These two notions — whose epistemological and ontological

status alters quite considerably — are used as sociocultural elements that place the singularities of binge-watching, binge-searching, and speed-watching practices in a *sui generis* interaction context. Secondly, such practices are understood under the lens of Calabrese's observations (1992) about excess in: (a) excess represented as content, (b) excess as the structure of a representation, and (c) excess as the fruition of a representation.

As a central hypothesis, we state that the flow, the rituality, and the consumption experiences in streaming are understood through technicities impregnated with "excessive temporalities." That means that in media streaming: 1) there is an "excess" in the quantity of watched content, 2) there is an "excess" in the content supply, and 3) there is an "excess" in the pace of watching the content. Under those circumstances, it is important to delineate which model should define the "excess" of those temporalities. One of these possible models is related to excess on a recurring ground of comparison that is still in the pattern of the consumption of electronic/analog media (within the framework of broadcasting and narrowcasting). Conversely, another path in the studies of streaming (Ladeira, 2016), through the logics of microcasting, could explain excess as the "new normal" or "new pattern" of consumption in digital media. This last perspective is adopted in this article where excess shifts from an analytical and quantitative normative framework to a qualitative ontological perspective of communication practices and processes.

## 2. Mediation Theory: a Latin American Communication Paradigm

The field of communication studies in Latin America traces back to the end of the 19th century. According to Melo (2000), the beginning of Latin American media knowledge production starts:

"[...] just when the national presses distanced themselves from the hegemonic standards in the old metropolises, seeking flight autonomy. In the main countries of the subcontinent, a constant concern with the rescue of the memory of the press emerges. Its most emblematic expressions are the inventories of José Toribio Medina in Hispanic America and Alfredo Carvalho in Portuguese America." (Melo, 2000, p. 21)

In turn, *De los medios a las mediaciones. Comunicación, cultura y hegemonía*<sup>7</sup> can be included as part of the concern in building an autochthonous research path in Latin America. This work, originally written in 1987 by Jesús Martín-Barbero, can still be seen as a founding landmark of a "[...] critical reflection on the phenomena generated by the action and impact of the media in Latin American societies, [that] only takes shape in the second half of the 20th century" (Melo, 2000, p. 21). At first glance, to the unfamiliar reader, Martín-Barbero's work could give the impression of being another academic production solely focused on the media and its discursively manipulative practices. Or it could be seen incorrectly as another book on how hegemonic media are so powerful, to the point that we, as mere spectators, do not have the weapons to fight back nor the strength to resist what is imposed on us. What is presented by the author is exactly the opposite.

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<sup>7</sup> Translated to English as *Communication, Culture and Hegemony: From the Media to the Mediations* (Martín-Barbero, 1993).

The Spanish researcher, who had been establishing his personal and professional life in Colombia for many decades, wrote his work at the height of Functionalism's and the Frankfurt School's ideas (Martín-Barbero, 1999). Consequently, terms such as cultural industries, mass culture, and domination were very in vogue. According to Bustamante (2017), Martín-Barbero's book is an intellectually mature production that condenses an exceptionally large theoretical and conceptual work in Latin American academic circles. That is a book that "[...] traces clear signs for an important renewal of communication studies, connecting them to the culture at an early stage, a liaison that was not at all evident in the intellectual scene of the 80s," (Bustamante, 2017, p. 105).

Martín-Barbero's ideas are distinct in relation to British cultural studies, specifically for bringing the issues of resignification and appropriation of cultural studies in the context of the plural and multi-diverse Latin American reality. Martín-Barbero manages to leave the commonplace, that is, to think of communication beyond the molds of what was already cast by the then-current matrices of Marxism and Christianity in the Latin American School of Communication (Melo, Gobbi & Kunsch, 2002).

At the time, the understanding of cultural industries and their productions such as alienating, dominating, bourgeois, and resulting from cultural imperialism that would deform everything and everyone was the *sine qua non* condition for developing research on communication and culture (Kunsch, 2002, p. 14). In a completely opposite position, cultural studies in Latin America began to question the limits and boundary areas between popular cultures and the cultural industries, trying to identify other aspects than those pursued by Marxist-Christian-oriented academic pieces. As Ortiz (1999, p. 72) states: "Martín-Barbero's proposal deviates slightly from the sphere of 'mass culture' production. [...] The author is aware of the intrinsic commercialization of cultural industries. However, it is no longer the core of his analysis."

In the Latin American context, the mere translation of cultural studies to "*estudios culturales / estudios culturais*" does not represent the complete conceptual environment when the ideas of this field arrived on the continent. Likewise, it is naive to understand this movement as a simple transposition of the ideas from the group of original British thinkers to the mobilizations initiated by the Latin American scholars in the area of media and culture (Melo, 1999). With specificities that characterize the movement in the continent, cultural studies started to flourish in Latin America during the 1980s. Thus, privileging the receivers and their ability to resist and respond, the Latin American School of Communication consequently created a brand-new theoretical framework that understands the audience as a co-creator of messages and meanings.

However, more than following the perspective of the receiver as a subject of communication and culture — as the British had already done — Latin Americans reflect their ideas in an environment full of new conjectures. In other words, concepts such as nationalism, populism, resistance, anarchism, and appropriation were experienced and intersected mainly with the lives of researchers as well as in the development of their analyses (Rabelo, 1999). Escosteguy (2010, p. 19) points out that the most important and innovative contribution of the Latin American movement is revisiting the existence of exchanges and negotiations between the culture understood as "legitimate" and the daily cultural formats taken as "insignificant" by the Academia.

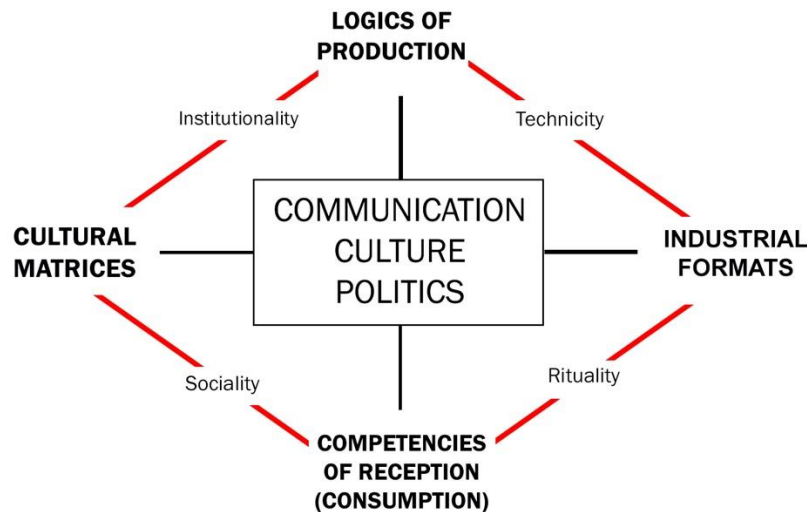
What is crystal clear in Martín-Barbero's ideas is the methodological shift of the study of communication situated not on the media itself, but on the possibilities of interactions provided by sociocultural mediations. For the author, the mediations are part of human socialization in the way we share our perceptions, interpretations, and responses to the media discourse.<sup>8</sup> In order to understand mediation in the way the audience receives media content, it is necessary to review the familiar everydayness, social temporality, and cultural competence of the subjects as important and constitutive elements in the communication process (Martín-Barbero, 2009, p. 233).

Therefore, the core idea of the mediation theory can hardly be defined by a laconic or simplistic sentence exactly because it addresses complex matters such as the interrelationships between communication, culture, and hegemony. In the preface by Néstor García Canclini to the book *Dos meios às mediações: comunicação, cultura e hegemonia*, the researcher attests that mediation theory does not separate, or is rudimentary when studying, the connection between mass culture, popular culture, and erudite culture. García Canclini (2009, p. 23) states that Martín-Barbero is able to exemplify in which way the process of massification was taking place even before the presence of electronic media, that is, by observing the relations among communication and school, church, melodrama, cordel literature, etc.

For this reason, Martín-Barbero created a conceptual map of mediation that is set over two axes, which the author refers to as diachronic and synchronic. There is an interdependence between the elements on the diachronic axis (defined by its length duration) that relate the Cultural Matrices to the Industrial Formats. By the same token, the relationships on the synchronic axis, the one dedicated to the Production Logic and the Consumption and Reception Skills, are completely mediated by the aspects emerging from daily life. These aspects are the institutionality, technicity, sociability, and rituality present in the social, religious, cultural, political, and economic circumstances that involved the lives of the receivers (Martín-Barbero, 2009, p. 20). Rejecting a technicist perspective, the author works with the notion of mediation considering the following configuration (Figure 1).

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<sup>8</sup> Apropos of this, this conception is still broadly used in current studies of reception and communication performed in Latin America (Moragas, Terrón and Rincón, 2017).



**Figure 1. Map of Mediation. Source: Translated from Martín-Barbero (2009, p. 16).**

Considering the relationship between Cultural Matrices and Industrial Formats as well as the Logics of Production and Competencies of Reception (Consumption), Martín-Barbero argues that recognizing such a relationship from the perspective of culture and the media allows us to:

“[...] shift structural Manichaeism that has disabled us for a long time. And also to think the complicity network of hegemonic and subaltern discourses as much as the constitution – throughout the historical processes – of discursive grammars generated from the sedimentation of narrative knowledge, habits, and expressive techniques [...] as well as the constant movement of intertextuality and intermediality that nurture the different genres and the different media.” (Martín-Barbero, 2009, p. 17)

The motivation behind the creation of this map is based on demystifying the concepts of “mediation” and “mediators” that are reinforced by technological determinism. Namely, a misconception that is inclined to the single thought that technology is the “great mediator” of our days and, for this reason, forgets about the human factor in the reception process. Besides that, one of the fundamental ideas brought from the map of mediation is to think about how the media is the place for the condensation and intersection of power and cultural production relationships. And, at the same time, Martín-Barbero's ideas reaffirmed a position that does not ignore, of course, the consumption of media discourse – as is the case, for example, of the fruition of streaming productions.

### **3. Technicity and Temporality under the Lens of Mediation Theory**

The concept of technicity within the scope of mediation theory has a very peculiar historical evolutionary path. Thus, as Lopes (2018) points out, the need to discuss technicity for Martín-Barbero can be observed at various moments in his works. The first of them occurs in the conceptual implicitness of technicity as an area considered strategic in Latin American research (Martín-Barbero, 1982). Secondly, technicity becomes an entry in the map of mediation on the condition of a secondary connection (in the second and third versions of the map created by the author). Finally, technicity

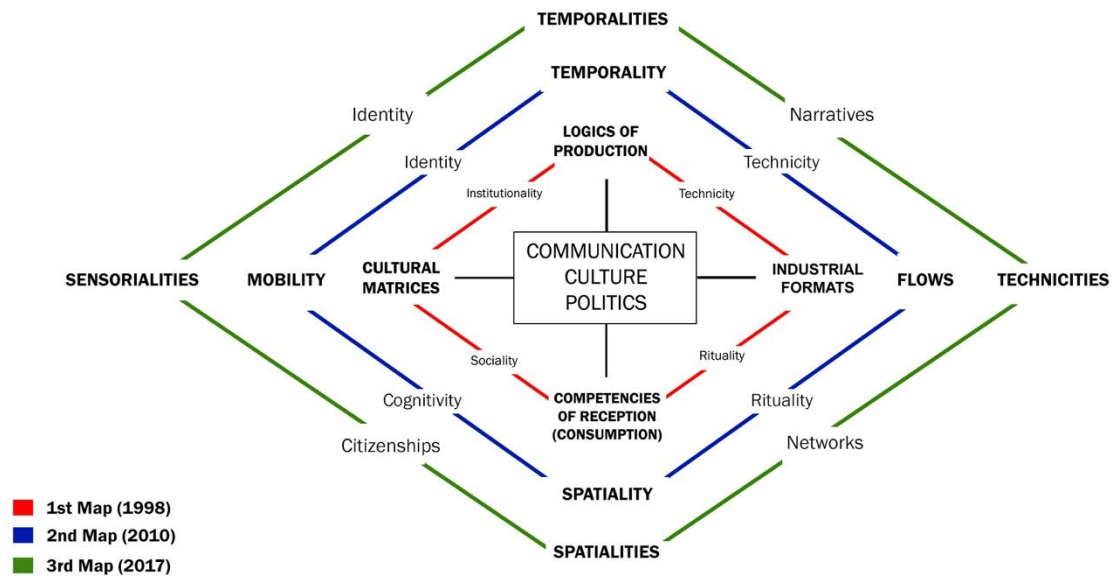
reaches its maximum representation relevance when it becomes a structural concept of the diachronic axis in the fourth and most recent version of Martín-Barbero's map (Jacks, Schmitz & Wottrich, 2019).

In an attempt to completely avoid the possibility of confusion between technicity and technicism, Martín-Barbero states that “[...] technicity is less a matter of apparatus than of perceptive operators and discursive skills” (Martín-Barbero, 2009, p. 18). In other words, technicity is associated with the ways in which communication and media discourses use the technique to generate significations that are permeated by a unique and unrepeatable socio-historical time and place.

In the Martín-Barbero work, it is possible to perceive that technicity has an important role in the way that production logic and industrial formats are mediated. Moreover, technicity is responsible for the “[...] new context of the media; [that is] technical, perceptive and aesthetic operators” that involves the current communication landscape, as Lopes (2018, p. 55) argues. Hence, with technological advances, new forms of communication consumption are read as a process caused by technicity, which, combined with particular ritualistic forms, gives the opportunity for the subjects to create their own viewing/watching flows, as is the case with streaming platforms.

The relevance of technicity in the understanding of communication and culture as indissociable interfaces in the social configuration of the present time is related to what Martín-Barbero calls technicity as a “universal connector into the global” (Martín-Barbero, 2009, p. 19). Borrowing the definitions from the Brazilian intellectual Milton Santos on the studies of globalization, the author goes even further and states that: “The questions emerging from technicity reveal the new social status of the technique, the reestablishment of the meaning of the discourse and of the political praxis, the new status of culture and the avatars of the aesthetics” (Martín-Barbero, 2009, p. 19).

As a result, the more recent revisions of Martín-Barbero's map of mediation (third and fourth versions) show that temporality has a clear place on the synchronic axis. It also brings to attention how the concept of temporality is in dialogue with the notions of technicity (in a different ontological status) in the two cartographic versions. In the third version of the map, technicity was responsible for the connection between temporality and the flows (on the axis of what is conventionally called Industrial Formats). Conversely, in the fourth one, temporality and technicity share a central and equitable place as conceptual elements that interact through the process of sociocultural mediations aligned with the narratives (Figure 2).



**Figure 2. Maps of Mediation (merged). Source: Translated from Silva and Baseio (2009, p. 171) - based on Martín-Barbero's works.**

Additionally, an important distinction/relationship between time and temporality in the work of Martín-Barbero, according to the reading proposed by Rocha and Roche (2019), is that:

"Time is a concept. A notion created by human society to account for the explanations about the transformations it undergoes. Temporality is the experience with time. Its social use is what defines the rhythm of human life and what defines temporalities. In other words, the way in which the notion of time is realized." (Rocha & Roche, 2019, p. 68)

What Martín-Barbero (2009, p. 136-137) calls "ruptures in the sense of time" concerns the process of deformation of cyclical time (typical of popular culture and festivities) to something that, marked by spectacularization and capitalism, is transformed into a time of production, time no longer lived, but seen. Afterward, to think of time from the perspective of mediation theory is to shift the center of the media debate "[...] to the articulations among communication practices, [...] to the different temporalities and for the plurality of cultural matrices" (Martín-Barbero, 2009, p. 261). According to him: "There is a [...] difficulty for our societies to assume that we live with a mutation that began to disrupt our experience of time because it does away with the modern and the hegemonic conception of time in an uninterrupted linear sequence" (Martín-Barbero, 2017, p. 25).

#### 4. Digital Temporality and Excess: Interaction Correlations

Thinking about temporalities in the context of network-based consumption is something that sparks the debate about how, according to Alonso Enguita (2019, p. 12), the "[...] digital era brings a kind of schizophrenia hardly noticed, a double reality that responds to assonant rules [...]." In other words, rules that may sound as if they were constituted under an alleged harmony, but, in the end, play an ambiguous role in the question of consumption controls by users.

At the same time that the subject controls his own viewing flow by choosing what to watch according to their own timing and pace, issues such as the algorithmic construction of consumption based on recommendation and machine learning point to the coexistence of who controls and who is controlled. And then, as the Spanish researcher argues, the cooperation protocols between machine and man begin to set the tone for what he calls the possibility of a definition of digital time based, essentially, on the interaction regimes present in the digital interface (Alonso Enguita, 2019, p. 233). Finally, he points out that digital time, as Martín-Barbero already warned in his work, is also experiencing new ruptures of meaning. What is different now is that: "We have the time, therefore, which is not a circle and neither a line, nor a fold; digital time that is fractal: it is like a flock of starlings in a common frenzy, waves and pulses creating other fractals [...]" (Alonso Enguita, 2019, p. 244).

In turn, with respect to the understanding of excess as a cultural category able to produce meaning in interaction correlations with digital temporality, Omar Calabrese (1992) is responsible for theorizing on excess as part of a neo-baroque era. Postulating his ideas during the same period as Martín-Barbero, Calabrese understands the Neo-Baroque to be a complex system of aesthetic-political thinking that includes cultural phenomena and its transformations, continuities, and ruptures present in the contemporary world — forms that were no longer concerned with what was conventionally called "modern." Thus, when talking about the neo-baroque, Calabrese (1992, p. xii) seeks to identify the "taste of our era" even though, according to the author, it is difficult to deal with an aesthetic-political classification that belongs to this "confused, fragmented, and indecipherable time."

Consequently, even though neo-baroque is not a pure and simple return of the baroque movement in all its multiplicities of artistic and cultural expression around the world, the neo-baroque has something very in common with the baroque by analogy. This relationship is based on the presence of excess, exaggeration, and what is considered to be outside a classical order or outside a pre-established norm of an "epochal specificity":

"[...] The entire culture of an age speaks, to a greater or lesser extent and to a more or less profound degree, in all our work. It is precisely by not producing hierarchies and ghettos among texts that we can discover recurring trends that distinguish "our" mentality (in this case our taste) from that of other periods [...]" (Calabrese, 1992, p. xii)

In relation to the investigations of Neo-Baroque taste, Calabrese lists nine conceptual pairs that, according to him, are complementary and not exclusive or intrinsically oppositional. They are mobilized in order to bring a line of argument that not only describes what the neo-baroque is, but that can serve as a methodological illustration for understanding the form acquired by the studied cultural phenomena. In other words, the concepts are always placed in tension from a perspective that puts at stake "a loss of entirety, totality, and system in favor of instability, polydimensionality, and change" (Calabrese, 1992, p. xii).

In a condensed manner, the neo-baroque is read by means of the following conceptual pairs: rhythm/repetition, limit/excess; detail/fragment; instability/metamorphosis; disorder/chaos; knot/labyrinth; complexity/dissipation; approximate/inexpressible, and distortion/perversion (Calabrese, 1992). According to Oliveira (2012, p. 199): "[...] these nine pairs are the pillars of an analysis method



that builds a system that has shown great procedural strength in the treatment of narratives." Thus, it is precisely by understanding the conceptual pair "limit/excess" as a type of cultural activity that it is necessary to understand why it is fundamental to the neo-baroque taste in the form of a configuration of media consumption on streaming platforms.

In agreement with Calabrese (1992, p. 66) there are time periods that move more towards the idea of "organized stabilization of a centered system" (in which the appreciation of "periphery" norms is predominant: for the limit, for the ordered, for the respect to the "boundary"). In turn, there are periods that are much more interested in the need to "experiment with excess" to break existing or standardized limitations. It is exactly because he perceives excess as "the way out of the contour" that the author claims to be the cultural character of the neo-baroque tightly linked to a time that tastes excess and transforms it into a rebel form of existence, almost a subversive one. (Calabrese, 1992, p. 66).

"Excess, precisely because it goes beyond limits or boundaries, it is obviously more destabilizing. Furthermore, any excessive action, work of art or individual wants to throw doubt upon an existing order, as well as possibly to destroy it or to construct a new order. All societies or systems of ideas, in any case, accuse that which they cannot or do not want to absorb of excess. Each order isolates itself and defines excess by forbidding it. The enemy becomes a cultural enemy: in the word of a classical culture, a 'barbarian.'" (Calabrese, 1992, p. 58)

Moreover, the excess in the neo-baroque taste can be understood based on three main ideas: excess represented as content, excess as the structure of a representation, and excess as the fruition of a representation (Calabrese, 1992, p. 59). The two first modes of excess (as content and as the structure of a representation) are understood by the Italian intellectual as "codependent" on each other. That is to say, the relationship is symbiotic, since the content represented as excessive, in a neo-baroque era, tends to come from a container also structurally excessive in its form of representation. Such a relationship is even stronger when we realize, based on the statement of the author, that excess is internally present. In both cases, its materiality is outlined by an endogenous neo-baroque era of social communication and media (Calabrese, 1992, p. 62).

The third mode of excess (in terms of the fruition of a representation) is what the author called, even in the late 1980s, "shows of fruition", that is, "[...] increasingly common 'marathon entertainments'; 'all-nighters' in which four films are shown consecutively" (Calabrese, 1992, p. 63). Among the three definitions, this last one is closer, for example, to the contemporary understanding of "marathoning" by watching TV shows, series, sitcoms, movies for many hours on streaming services such as Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, Hulu, Apple TV+, Facebook Watch, Globoplay, Vix, MUBI, Blim, Oldflix, Looke, Disney+, and YouTube. Therefore, excess as the fruition of a representation is Calabrese's definition of major interest in this article precisely because it is from this conception (allied with technicity and temporality ideas) that digital consumption practices such as binge-watching, binge-searching, and speed-watching can be interpreted.

## 5. Streaming Consumption Practices

It is impossible to discuss the present scenario of streaming without taking into account the changes that technicity (beyond the technique) has produced in addressing discourses and narratives consumed

daily by people in different periods of time that vary from individual to individual. For this reason, the concept of temporality, also placed under the umbrella of Martín-Barbero's thinking, is still extremely appropriate and topical for understanding such forms of digital consumption. As García Canclini (2017) states, even though Martín-Barbero's work was written in the late 1980s, it is possible to affirm the relevance of the reflections brought in mediation theory to the phenomena experienced almost thirty-five years after the original publication. "Perhaps the novelty, the great disruption, is now in the algorithms, in the datafication that offers the promise of universal contacts for everyone with everyone and everything (the Internet of Things) and, at the same time, brings the threat of imprisonment by surveillance [...]," (García Canclini, 2017, p. 123).

The creative industry market is undergoing constant innovation processes that are present in existing technology enhancement projects and in the creation of disruptive spaces that start new ways of producing, distributing, and consuming media productions (Ladeira, 2016; Orozco Gómez, 2020). One exemplar case of a rupture in previous models of consumption is found in the entertainment productions of streaming platforms such as Netflix. The biggest and best-known company in the business, Netflix is present in every continent in the world and has specific catalogs adapted to the glocalization processes of each country and market where it operates (Halprin, 2018; Penner, Straubhaar, 2020, Piñón, 2020).

The term "innovation" in streaming consumption could be understood by Rossetti's ideas (2013) when she suggests the reflection on innovation as a social, symbolic, and technological phenomenon that generates new types of experiences not only in the industry itself but especially for the subjects that consume it. As a result, the innovation brought by streaming platforms regards the act of innovation in the way dramas and movies are produced, presenting new windows of exhibition, for example, that are not restricted to the television broadcasting flow or to the complex cinematographic distribution system at movie theaters. The innovation of streaming is also linked to the transformations in the rituality of consumption and in the ways in which the receivers capture the meanings generated in these digital environments.

In that sense, Innocenti and Pescatore (2015, p. 10) call the individuals that consume content originally produced or later distributed on streaming platforms "new viewers." This adjective is justified by a radical transformation of the weekly viewer (who would follow the TV series along their weekly episodes) and daily viewer (who would follow the chapters of a telenovela or soap opera at least 5 or 6 days a week) into a new kind of fruition of serial fiction. The new viewer is the spectator that self-controls his own rituality of consumption. This kind of receiver controls the way they watch the episodes (being able to consume them in the traditional way or in a more compulsive way and even watch them again when they want). Additionally, the new viewer is the product and producer of the redesign of the negotiations between the production's emission and the audience's reception (Innocenti & Pescatore, 2015).

### A) Binge-watching

The first innovative practice in streaming consumption is binge-watching. This term refers to repeated watching at a pace set by the viewer, in a flow that can consume several episodes or even an entire season in a few hours in a row, as stated by Silva (2015). The phenomenon of binge-watching has been studied over the years (Jenner, 2014, 2020; Pittman & Sheehan, 2015) and reveals, through the term “binge,” the understanding of an excessive, compulsive, or even devoted practice of something. Thus, binge-watching (also referred to as “binge-viewing” or “marathon-viewing”) is shown as a phenomenon that, allowed by the structure of streaming, is closely linked to the sociocultural uses of digital media as mediations permeated by new techniques.

In contrast, authors such as Smith and Telang (2017), Cheney-Lippold (2017), and Alonso Enguita (2019) highlight the complexity of the “new spectator” involved in a tangle of decisions not always made unilaterally by them during the binge-watching. In other words, for the authors, it is necessary to place in this equation the role of artificial intelligence (AI) and big data, much more than simply propagating the idea of a receiver replete with freedom on an innovative platform. It is important to keep in mind how the algorithmic processes experienced in the streaming consumption affect and configure the process of spectatoriality and digital interaction of receivers. Hence, besides the AI, the techniques involved in binge-watching are determined by four views: 1) the quality of the internet in which streaming products are distributed and consumed, 2) plural techniques of spectatorial experiences depending on how they are consumed, 3) singular techniques connected to the spatial conditions where binge-watching is practiced, and 4) the experience of sharing a product in streaming on multiple screens (as is the concomitant consumption of dramas in relation to the use of social networks).

### B) Binge-searching

The practice of binge-searching is related to the recurrent and reinforced habit of searching for content on streaming platforms with a rate close to “marathon-viewing.” The action resembles television “zapping” (channel surfing) when the receiver would employ long minutes searching for something to watch. This practice occurs in front a large offering of available productions on streaming and happens for two major reasons: 1) The viewer binge-searches because nothing is interesting in his opinion (and then the very tedious action of searching already tires the spectator) or 2) The viewer does this because the “compulsive” search experience *per se* can be a pleasant activity in itself even if there is nothing to watch.

This kind of practice is not understood as something to be incentivized in streaming platform viewers (as much as binge-watching is<sup>9</sup>). It is quite the opposite: on Netflix, there are software and combined algorithms like AVA (Aesthetics Visual Analysis) that are specifically designed to analyze images, for example, of a whole season (in a series of around 10 episodes) and extract (from a total of nearly 9 million frames) the best image to be highlighted in the thumbnails. Using tools such as frame notation,

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<sup>9</sup> For metalinguistic examples, see: 1) The last part of all episodes of the first season of the reality show *Next in Fashion* (Netflix, 2020). The hosts Alexa Chung and Tan France invite the viewer to engage in binge-watching; 2) The closure of American talk shows and reality shows (such as *Jimmy Kimmel Live!* and *RuPaul's Drag Race*). The hosts – whose names are in the title of the shows – perform the same kind of invitation to the users of their official YouTube channels.

classification algorithms enable the indexing of a subset of frames that respond to the purposes of aesthetics, creativity, gender, and ethnic diversity (Riley *et al*, 2018). Thus, the viewer is captured more quickly, the practice of binge-searching is avoided, and the consumer does not leave the platform given the “excess” of the content offered and the inability or indecision of the subject in the act of choosing.

Likewise, Hoyle, Antelo, and Coutinho's (2019) study demonstrates the possibility of avoiding the practice of binge-searching by extracting the “perfect” frame through AI. This process begins with a synchronous extraction with the video, the text of the synopsis of each episode, and the closed captions (CC) mechanism. Subsequently, very strict protocols are placed on the images that should be highlighted in the thumbnails of Globoplay dramas (a Brazilian streaming company owned by Grupo Globo). The main goal, the authors explain, is to create conditions so that the viewer does not feel “lost” or have great difficulty in choosing what to watch.

### **C) Speed-watching**

The practice of speed-watching consumption is the phenomenon of watching videos on streaming platforms (especially on YouTube and Netflix) at a rhythm and speed that are different from what was originally proposed by the emitter responsible for uploading/distributing the product. The viewer can intentionally manipulate the video to a playback speed of 0.25x, 0.5x, 0.75x, 1x (normal pace), 1.25x, 1.5x, 1.75x, and 2x. Then, the receiver can consume it at a fast rate, as Jost (2016, 2019) points out.

It is worth noting that this practice, as well as the other two mentioned before, seems to bring to light how digital consumption challenges the generational gaps. For many people, the practice of speeding up the consumption of content to an extreme pace is perplexing, almost a nonsensical behavior. Furthermore, this practice recalls Rocha and Roche's (2019) reading of how Martín-Barbero has been calling attention to the “new ruptures in the sense of time” for many decades. For the authors, such temporal ruptures did not remain situated only in the context of the works of Martín-Barbero in the 1980s:

“The reflection on time and temporality gains new specificities in the late 1990s and early 2000s, a time when the author [Martín-Barbero] places the dawn of the growth of digital culture and the establishment of the domain of virtuality as a system of interaction social and media. For him, we would start to live in a society in a profound process of transformation,” (Rocha & Roche, 2019, p. 75-76).

According to Jost (2016), some viewers choose to speed-watch dramas to prevent the series's unfolding from being “ruined” by spoilers bubbling up on social networks or even as a way to “save time” in relation to the stream of viewed content. Also, speed-watching practices could be also observed in students who consume audiovisual educational content and online classes at a super-fast pace to assimilate, in a short time, relevant information to take tests.

## **6. Excessive Temporalities**

This article understands binge-watching, speed-watching, and binge-searching practices as digital consumption experiences strongly shaped by technicities impregnated with “excessive temporalities.” In this sense, what I call “excessive temporalities” can be understood from what Martín-Barbero, in his

latest version of the map of mediations (Silva and Baseio, 2019), has already said is the connection between the notions of temporality and technicality, that is, the contemporary narratives of media discourses. Hence, the “excessive temporalities” shape the consumption of narratives (fictional, non-fictional, or of any other nature) located within the streaming platforms through practices such as binge-watching, speed-watching, and binge-searching. As Ronsini (2011) explains, technicity is understood as a perceptive organizing element in the way the forms of consumption are made by subjects.

In other words, it is possible to identify: a) an “excess” in the amount of content watched (through binge-watching), b) an “excess” in the offer of available content that often leads to an obsessive search for programs that, when not found, encourage disinterest in the platform itself (by means of binge-searching), and c) an “excess” in the pace of watching some content by very peculiar temporal constraints (as is the case of speed-watching).

However, it is important to first pose a question of the notion that the understanding of this “excess” in such temporalities is archaically linked to a basis of comparison that is situated in the traditional framework of watching, consuming, and examining products from television, cinema, and other pre-streaming media. What this article proposes, then, is that such “excessive temporalities” conforming to the three digital consumption practices explained here should be read in another way, that is, within the rationale of the streaming platforms themselves. Thus, the way of understanding excess as the fruition of a representation (Calabrese, 1992) unfolds to the point that it may be possible to subdivide it into three types of consumption on streaming platforms: 1) Excess in terms of the fruition in the quantity of the represented content (binge-watching), 2) Excess in terms of the fruition during the peregrination<sup>10</sup> to the represented content (binge-searching), and 3) Excess in terms of the fruition in the pace of the represented content (speed-watching).

Another hypothesis to be better theorized in future research points to the feeling of control versus the feeling of lack of control by viewers as the responsible element for allowing experiences ambiguously considered pleasurable or unpleasant in the streaming consumption. Therefore, there is the possibility that the feeling of control brings positive experiences to the viewers (in the way the receivers understand their self-organizing role by means which the amount of content and pace are enjoyed). Conversely, the feeling of lack of control can generate the experience of tiredness and frustration (through the peregrination in search of certain content amid “a sea of offerings and information” on the platform). For further reflections, it is worth returning to Martín-Barbero's discussions to think about “excessive temporalities” and their technicities from the perspective of the sensorialities exposed in his more contemporary version of the map of mediations (Silva and Baseio, 2019). Therefore, a clue to understanding the feeling of control versus the feeling of lack of control by viewers

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<sup>10</sup> The search for content to be enjoyed and the act of searching (in itself) as a meta-fruition through the apparently endless “fields” of the streaming platforms reinforces the use of the term peregrination. This word evokes its religious background as ambiguously pleasant (in the feeling of searching for what is sacred) and unpleasant (due to the physical and mental weariness associated with such a sacred search). Something related is experienced in the search, understood as a pleasant “marathon” looking for what to watch and, at the same time, as an unpleasant action followed by the feeling of an unsuccessful search for content not found on the platform.

may be in how and in which sensorialities are activated in the interaction between the viewer and the streaming platform during consumption.

Ultimately, it is necessary to remember what Calabrese (1992) explains when he says that certain “excessive” practices can be considered “degeneration” or “scandal-producing” at a certain time. And, even so, these practices manage to resist to the point of co-opting or penetrating the zeitgeist in a process of reiterating the dynamics of excess in society. Therefore, such phenomena are capable of causing a normalization, tolerance, or acceptability of excess to occur in these cultural practices, blurring the boundaries between the limit and the excess: at times confusing them, at times not distinguishing them (Calabrese, 1992, p. 65-67).

As Corona and Orozco Gómez (2020, p. 216) warn, in the context of contemporary streaming audience and consumption studies: “We are faced with the need to reflect from other places and perspectives, in addition to the market and advertising, about concepts such as the audience, for example, especially because their practices to a certain degree seem to hybridize in such a way that they become confused.”

In this sense, such “excess” that qualifies the digital temporalities experienced in these digital environments needs to be interpreted based on an analytical framework centered on sociocultural mediations. Namely, the mediations produced by the viewers promote a shift from the idea of excess as something quantitatively abnormal to a perspective where the “excessive temporalities” of streaming consumption are analyzed ontologically and qualitatively — an analysis that values observing the communication practices and processes proper to these streaming platforms and is no longer based on the comparative principles of analog media.

Finally, the contemporary practices of binge-watching, binge-searching, and speed-watching can be understood as technicities that are structured by “excessive temporalities” because:

“[...] technicity leads us to the construction of new practices through different media languages. Thinking in terms of technicity means an effort to understand the complexity of the discourses (the power relations and the historical contexts that constitute them). In addition, technicity points to the ways in which technology will shape culture and social practices.” (Ronsini, 2011, p. 88)

In this way, such practices can be seen as reflections and refractions of a “new normal” in the digital universe: not so much in the sense of a rule, norm, or inflexible dictate, but from the conception that such practices start to be presented as “ordinary” in the daily process of digital streaming consumption.

## 7. Conclusion

The discussion proposed in this work aimed to think about digital consumption on streaming platforms through a theoretical composition based on the contributions of the Latin American School of Communication, specifically from the mediation theory by Jesús Martín-Barbero (2009). Postulating a discussion that understood the practices of binge-watching, binge-searching, and speed-watching in their particularities, this theoretical article drew on Omar Calabrese (1992) as secondary support for the characterization of excess as the fruition of represented content. In other words, the examination of

sociocultural mediations linked to the definition of excess as fruition enabled the conceptual constitution of the three consumption practices mentioned above as techniques endowed with “excessive temporalities.”

The decision to explain the practices of binge-watching, binge-searching, and speed-watching through a genuinely Latin American theoretical framework was due to the need to oppose a discussion that is almost always located on technicist bases. Therefore, to put these three practices under theoretical analysis is to put in context a conjunctural view that approaches the broader understanding of cultural matrices, industrial formats, temporalities, and the development of plural technicities that involve communications processes and products. Thus, this work demonstrated the topicality of Martín-Barbero’s thought (produced in the late 1980s) as an extremely valid matrix of critical thinking, drawing close to the contemporary phenomena of digital consumption in the first and second decade of the 2000s.

Thinking about the process of production, exhibition, circulation, and consumption of streaming by technicality, temporality, and excess requires not only an understanding of the internal mechanisms of machine learning and algorithmization of platforms (especially from software and combined algorithmic tools such as AVA, for example); it also demands to discuss that “the meaning of technicity is not related to the idea of mere technological apparatus, but to competence in language, to materialities of discourse referring to the constitution of grammars that create formats and media products,” (Lopes, 2018, p. 57-58).

Excess as a cultural category that produces meanings were considered in this discussion via the repositioning of its ontological status. That is, it is necessary to reject the idea that would categorize excess as something overboard, something that would escape the norm or disrespect the limits (a perspective most often found under an outdated analogic understanding of fruition). It then dove into a perspective of excess as a qualitative and commonly present element of digital consumption practices (now seen within the rationale of streaming fruition). Thus, “excessive temporalities” that orbit around the phenomena of binge-watching, binge-searching, and speed-watching are understood as constitutive forms of endogenous singular practices in interactive environments in which the spectatorial experiences occur. In conceptual terms, it is possible to state that binge-watching is excess in terms of the fruition in the quantity of the content represented, binge-searching is excess in terms of the fruition in the peregrination over the represented content, and speed-watching is excess in terms of the fruition in the pace of the represented content.

In conclusion, the interaction correlations of excess with technicity and temporality brought theoretical reflections as theoretical contributions, as stated in the abstract of this article. Such contributions may come to assist or even serve as clues to future empirical audience inquiries and reception studies. Likewise, this work was limited to reflecting on how streaming and digital consumption can be critically observed by mediation theory. Hence, it would be promising that further research could advance this discussion towards a more synchronic axis of the map proposed by Martín-Barbero (2009), but to look at the diachronic axis, that is, to go towards long-term research. Moreover, it is necessary

and urgent to observe the concrete field of spectatorial experiences to understand how reception skills can handle the practices of binge-watching, binge-searching, and speed-watching.

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