digital i

TREND REPORT: NOSTALGIA ON DEMAND

WHY U.S. STREAMERS ARE BETTING BIG ON CLASSIC CONTENT

OCTOBER 2025

What is Old is New Again

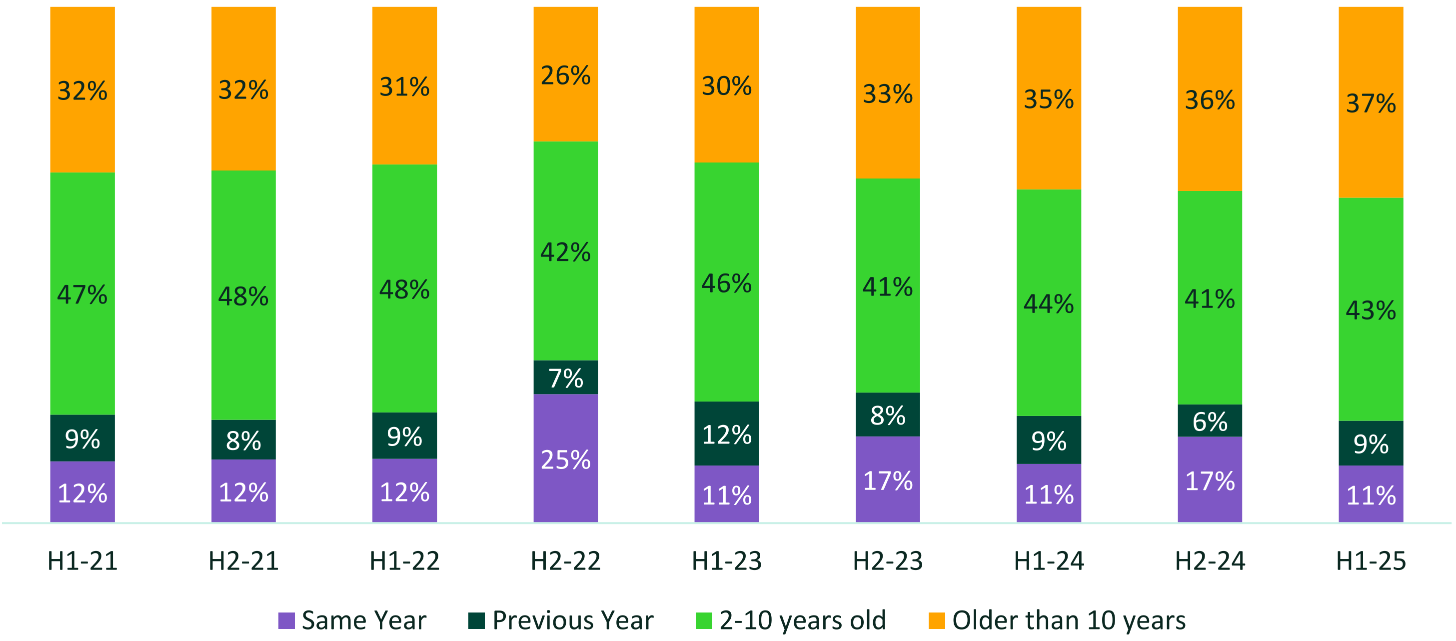
The acquisition of older, popular, content by global streaming services is hardly a recent strategy, but as our data shows, it is one that is increasingly paying off due to the part these shows play in the wider, ongoing, global nostalgia trend.

This Digital i Trend Report focuses on the U.S. market to show how audiences have been turning to older shows on Disney+, Prime Video and Netflix, either to view for the first time or to reconnect with old favourites.

Our data demonstrates that the share of viewing time to content that launched a decade or more ago has been rising in recent years, with U.S. audiences having spent billons of hours viewing series that first debuted years ago.

Audiences are increasingly spending more of their viewing time watching older titles

Share of Viewing Time by Year of Release – January 2021 -June 2025 – U.S. – Netflix, Prime Video & Disney+



Since 2021, there has been a rising share of viewing time to content that debuted more than 10 years prior.

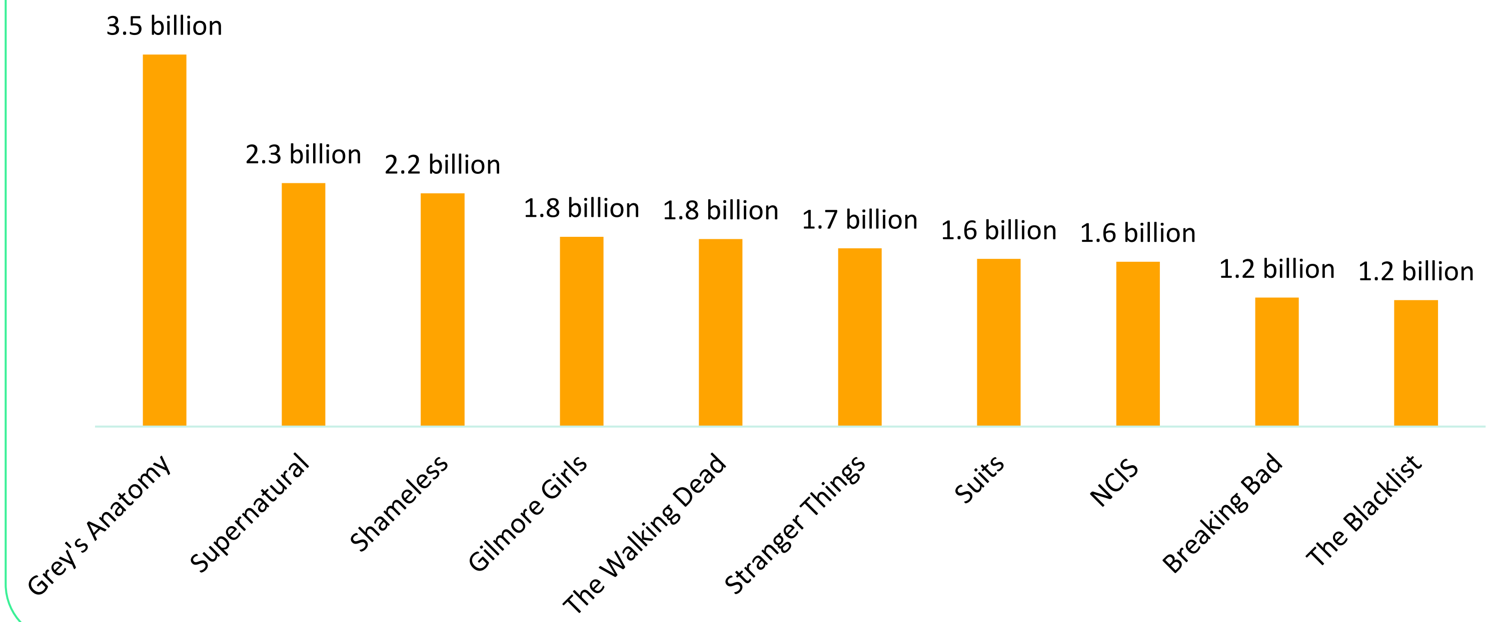
H2 2022 bucked this trend, and we suggest this was due to high viewing to popular and highly anticipated titles like *Wednesday* S1 and *Stranger Things* S4, with a knock-on boost to 'Previous Year' viewing into H1'23.

While audiences are not spending less time on titles released that year, the share to older content is growing.

Source: Digital i. Interval: 01/01/2021 – 30/06/2025, All subscriber accounts, U.S.

Licensed content dominated U.S. viewing time, but Stranger Things did happen

Top Titles by Hours Viewed – January 2021 – June 2025 – U.S. - Netflix, Prime Video & Disney+



Only one streaming original, Netflix's *Stranger Things*, made it into the top ten series, ranked by hours viewed, between January 2021 and June 2025.

Debuting in 2016, the horror series (itself steeped in 1980s nostalgia) had released just 34 episodes by the end of this period, with its presence on the list reflecting its high viewership.

The other nine titles were all licensed series that debuted between 2000 (*Gilmore Girls*) & 2013 (*The Blacklist*).

Source: Digital i. Interval: 01/01/2021 – 30/06/2025, All subscriber accounts, U.S.

Legacy series with multiple seasons fill streaming libraries and bring old content to new audiences

Top Titles by Hours Viewed – January 2021 – June 2025 – U.S. - Netflix, Prime Video & Disney+

Rank	Title	Number of Episodes	Release Year	Hours Viewed	Avg Hours Viewed per Episode
1	Grey's Anatomy	432	2005	3.5 billion	8.1 million
2	Supernatural	328	2005	2.3 billion	7 million
3	Shameless	158	2011	2.2 billion	13.9 million
4	Gilmore Girls	153	2000	1.8 billion	11.7 million
5	The Walking Dead	177	2010	1.8 billion	10 million
6	Stranger Things	34	2016	1.7 billion	49.4 million
7	Suits	136	2011	1.6 billion	11.6 million
8	NCIS	486	2003	1.6 billion	3.2 million
9	Breaking Bad	62	2008	1.2 billion	19.6 million
10	The Blacklist	219	2013	1.2 billion	5.5 million

Eight out of the ten titles on the list produced more than 100 episodes.

NCIS **offers the biggest library of these shows, with 486 episodes viewed between January 2021 and June 2025.**

Legacy titles help SVODs to reduce churn and attract substantial viewing.

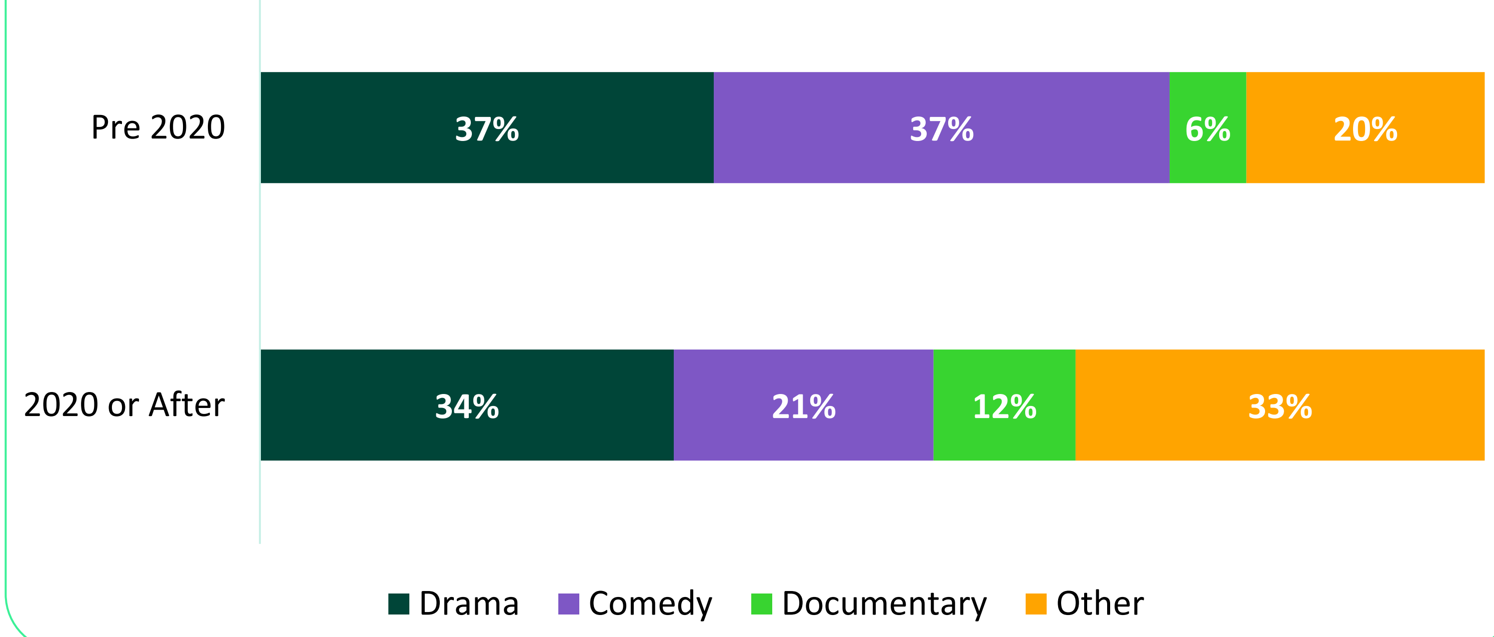
However, more recent titles such as ***Stranger Things*** **can do the same.**

It has so far released just 34 episodes but generated an average of 49.4 million hours viewed per episode.

Source: Digital i. Interval: 01/01/2021 – 30/06/2025, All subscriber accounts, U.S.

Comedy is king as subscribers look for laughter from their viewing to older titles

Top Titles by Share of Viewing Time – H1 2025 – U.S. – Netflix, Prime Video & Disney+



During H1 2025, 37% of viewing time to content that launched before 2020 by U.S. Netflix, Disney+, and Prime Video subscribers was to comedy.

This was much higher than the 21% of share to comedy from 2020 onwards.

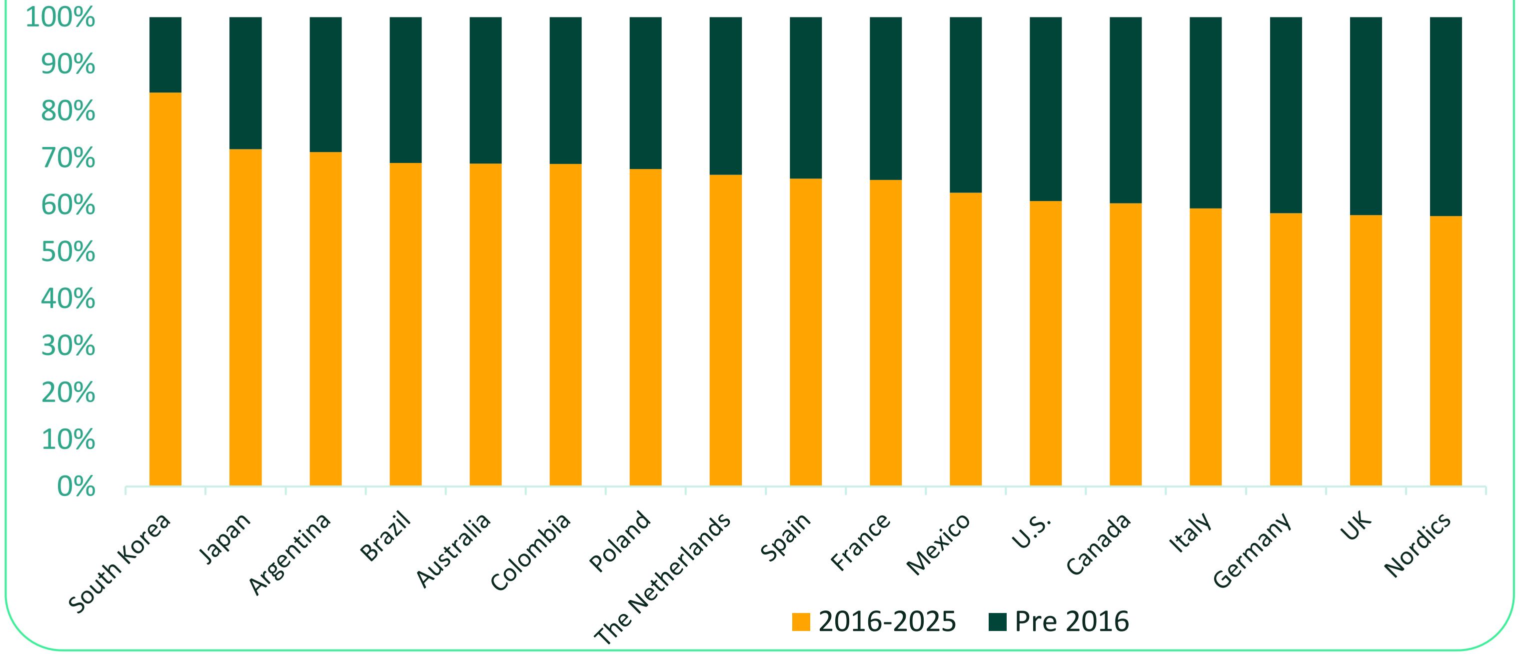
However, the share of viewing to documentaries from content released in 2020 or after was double that of titles that were released before 2020.

Viewing to pre-2020 dramas was also 3% above the share to later dramas.

Source: Digital i. Interval: 01/01/2025 – 30/06/2025, All subscriber accounts, U.S.

Not every country watches as much classic content as the U.S. (but some watch more)

Share of Viewing Time by Region to Titles Released Pre & Post 2016 – H1 2025 – Netflix, Prime Video & Disney+



While this report has focused on U.S. viewing trends, it should be noted that not every country has been caught up in the nostalgia wave.

In the first half of 2025, South Korean SVOD viewers spent just 16% of their average viewing time on content released in 2016 or later, showing a clear preference for newer content.

Whereas in the Nordics, 42% of viewing time was to pre-2016 content, higher than the 39% share in the U.S.

Source: Digital i. Interval: 01/01/2025 – 30/06/2025, All subscriber accounts, U.S., Canada, Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, Colombia, UK, France, Italy, Germany, Spain, Denmark, Norway, Finland, Sweden, Poland, Netherlands, Japan, South Korea, Australia

Riding the Wave

As our data suggests, U.S. streaming audiences are increasingly spending their viewing time on older content. These multi-season shows, some with many hundreds of episodes, are keeping audiences hooked – and, more importantly for the streamers, reducing churn.

Some shows in our top ten list, such as *Grey's Anatomy* and *NCIS*, undoubtedly continue to receive high viewing due to their longevity and the fact that they are still running - and there are likely other factors at work than pure nostalgia. As discussed in our May Trend Report, *Are You Still Watching?,* fewer original streaming series are being commissioned each year, pushing audiences to spend more of their viewing time on older shows.

Streamers are also leaning into the nostalgia trend. Netflix commissioned sequel miniseries *Gilmore Girls: A Day in the Life* and the performance of *Suits* on the streamer led to NBC ordering spin-off *Suits: LA*. Other spin-offs, such as *Breaking Bad* follow-up *Better Call Saul*, have found new and returning fans once available to watch and binge on the streamers.

As our research shows, viewing share to newly released streaming shows is holding steady in the U.S. – the streaming nostalgia wave is growing, but it is not drowning out new content.

Want to know how older shows can perform for you?

Find out by getting in touch for exclusive performance data from Digital i.
No one knows viewers like us.

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