Curated Cinema: MUBI as a Patron of the Arts

A thematic analysis of MUBI's branding and industry positioning in the global streaming economy

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ABSTRACT

The contemporary streaming economy is characterized by increased fragmentation and competition, enabled by demarcated access to content. Media branding is essential for streaming platforms to differentiate themselves and strengthen their brand identities. Yet, research on the branding of streaming platforms has mainly focused on dominant algorithm-driven platforms such as Netflix. MUBI is presented as an alternative to algorithmic platforms, as it operates under a curation-based model, in an effort to promote arthouse and quality films. To investigate MUBI's branding and strategic positioning in the industry, the study was guided by the following research questions : "How does MUBI use strategic branding to position itself as a cultural tastemaker in the streaming industry?", and "How is MUBI positioned as a cultural tastemaker within industry discourse?". To answer these research questions, qualitative thematic analysis of MUBI's curated collections, promotional materials (including Instagram posts and newsletters), and industry trade press publications was conducted. In addition, this thesis was grounded in the media industry studies approach. This allowed inquiry into how MUBI's institutional practices are shaped by the broader industry and how this affects the platform's industry positioning. Open, axial, and selective coding, revealed three main patterns of findings. Firstly, by promoting auteur, regionally and thematically diverse films, and foregrounding its editorial voice, MUBI cultivates symbolic capital, signalling how curation is both an aesthetic choice and a strategic branding tool for the platform to gain cultural authority. Second, MUBI strengthens its brand identity by deliberately employing scarcity, emotional tone, and aligning with traditional cinephile practices. Through these practices, the platform cultivates trust and loyalty, which reaffirms its tastemaker status. Lastly, in the examined trade press articles, MUBI's institutional practices are positioned as both artistically and commercially viable, signifying how the company is able to expand its operations whilst maintaining its core brand values. This helps the platform differentiate from other streamers and gain a competitive advantage in the market. Overall, this thesis offers evidence for an analytical framework to understand how niche streaming platforms position themselves in the streaming economy, and how this is perceived and influenced by the wider industry. It also contributes to media industry studies by illustrating the nuanced interaction between modern-day niche media companies' institutional practices and the production of symbolic capital. By providing a detailed case study on MUBI, this thesis demonstrates the dual function of branding as being both a symbolic and strategic tool for differentiation and growth in the digital streaming economy.

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1. **Introduction**

Streaming platforms have transformed the contemporary film industry, challenging the traditional "Hollywood model" and revolutionizing the ways and mediums in which media can be consumed (Capalbi et al., 2021, p. 23). During and following the COVID-19 pandemic, there was an increase in subscription-video on-demand (SVOD) users and global consumption. This further led to a surge in the strategic implementation of algorithms as SVOD platforms started competing for subscribers and revenue (Pajkovic, 2021, p. 215). Dominant algorithm-based SVOD players seek to grow their subscriber base through content delivery and acquisition strategies that include offering a vast and seemingly endless catalogue and collecting user data to give personalized recommendations (Higson, 2021, p. 9). Yet, the advent of streaming has also resulted in a democratization of film access and content diversity, proliferated by platforms such as MUBI (Smits & Nikdel, 2018, p. 22).

The story of MUBI, originally a global information-sharing platform named the Auteurs, begins in 2007, when it was founded by CEO Efe Cakarel, aiming to make niche, arthouse, and independent films accessible (Hessler, 2018, p. 3; Smits & Nikdel, 2018, p. 25). MUBI was created due to the CEO's frustration with the lack of quality films available online, which is highlighted by his interview statement: "It was eight years ago in 2007. I was sitting in a café in Tokyo. I wanted to watch a particular movie, *In the Mood for Love*, by Wong Kar-wai but I could not find a service that allowed me to watch it - and here I was in the third largest film market in the world" (Efe Cakarel, as cited in Walsh, 2015, para. 20).

What differentiated MUBI from the beginning was the platform's rhetoric of building a global platform for "cinephile culture", as well as their curation business model. This was clear from MUBI's early partnerships with acknowledged companies Criterion Collection and Celluloid Dreams, which had an important role in establishing MUBI early on (Hessler, 2018, p. 3). Having re-launched their brand as an SVOD platform in 2012, MUBI operated under a '30 films for 30 days premise', whereby viewers had the limited option of choosing from a rotating catalog, which changed monthly (Smits & Nikdel, 2018, pp. 25-26). Now the platform offers a wider selection of films but still operates under a curated model, which includes hand-picked films by the editing staff and curated collections such as *Yasujirô Ozu: Tatami Tales*, featuring films by the renowned Japanese director. These collections span different themes, regions, and genres, highlighting how MUBI promotes diversity on its platform. This is paired with curatorial features such as "Our Take", editorial notes that accompany each film that aim to further contextualize the

curators' picks (Smits & Nikdel, 2018, p. 29). Furthermore, MUBI also has its own digital publication, "Notebook". The publication offers film reviews, festival highlights, and a plethora of other cinephile-oriented features, showing how MUBI critically engages with film and acts as an educator in the digital streaming landscape (p. 29). Overall, this approach has positioned MUBI as a "central platform for cinephile culture" (Şahin, 2024, p. 387), making it not just a streamer but a preserver of artistic patronage (Hessler, 2018, p. 4). As stated on their website, to answer "What is MUBI?", the editors write: "A streaming service? A curator? A publisher? A distributor? A cinema lover? Yes" (MUBI, n.d.-g).

Having introduced MUBI as a company that operates under the principle of curatorial authority to shape the symbolic boundaries of cinematic value, the inquiry follows into how the platform utilizes strategic branding to position itself as a cultural tastemaker. With the platform spanning its availability across 190 countries and the subscriber base exceeding 15 million paid users, it is important to further investigate its positioning within the global streaming industry (Ildır, 2024, p. 1646). To explore how MUBI constructs its brand identity, this thesis will employ a qualitative research design, situated in the media industry studies (MIS) framework. The goal of this study is to provide a comprehensive overview of MUBI's branding practices and answer the following research question: *How does MUBI use strategic branding to position itself as a cultural tastemaker in the streaming industry?* To answer the research question, thematic analysis (TA) will be applied as the primary qualitative method. Furthermore, to understand the institutional and production processes of MUBI, which are grounded in the MIS framework, industry-based, media, and trade press articles will also undergo TA (Havens et al., 2009, p. 249). Therefore, the analysis will also be informed by the following question: *How is MUBI positioned as a cultural tastemaker within industry discourse?* Through TA, relevant and overarching themes can be observed across data, offering a rigorous and extensive approach to analyzing and answering the research question (Clarke & Braun, 2016, p. 297).

Research on MUBI and other curated streaming platforms is scarce and often overshadowed by research on mainstream, algorithmic streamers such as Netflix, Amazon Prime, and Disney+ (Frey, 2021, p. 6). Grgić (2023) investigated the transnational flow of content on MUBI, specifically for Southeast Asian horror films, while Aşılıoğlu (2024) thematically analyzed Turkish short films on the platform. Using in-depth semi-structured interviews, Ildır (2024) studied audience reception and experiences of MUBI users in Turkey. Şahin (2024) explored how MUBI constructs its representational and economic

capital as a cinephile-oriented platform. Hessler (2018) and Smits and Nikdel (2018) analysed how MUBI differentiates itself from other SVOD platforms by looking at MUBI's history and practices. Finally, in the book "MUBI and the Curation Model of Video on Demand", Frey (2021) gives a comprehensive overview of the platform's business model and user experience.

Notably, research about MUBI's branding strategy and its positioning within industry discourse has been underdeveloped. Media branding is significant as it helps develop brand equity, cultivating consumer commitment, and engaging with potential new customers (Wayne, 2017, p. 727). Furthermore, branding is essential for differentiation and identification, with strong brand images leaving lasting impressions on the consumer, positively influencing their perceptions, and giving the brand a competitive advantage in the market (Jahan et al., 2024, p. 657). Therefore, studying the symbolic and strategic intersection that branding operates for niche platforms can enhance the understanding of their unique industry positioning. Research on mainstream SVOD platforms demonstrates the importance of branding for recognition and consumer loyalty. Escurignan (2017) analyzed how HBO Max constructs its brand identity as a provider of quality television through transmedia marketing of shows such as Game of Thrones (Benioff & Weiss, 2011) (p. 26). Pitre (2022) outlines how Disney+ capitalizes on the association with the Disney brand to build a lasting brand image under the premise of future consistency, which the author calls brand futurity (p. 713). Lastly, Wayne (2017) contrasted the portal-as-brand strategy of Netflix with the licensing strategy of Amazon (Prime Video). While the latter focuses on forming symbiotic relationships with network brands to establish its identity, Netflix prioritizes promoting its brand through the minimization and marginalization of external network names (pp. 732-735).

Following the introduction of the topic, the study will present a thorough theoretical background exploring the topics of branding, MUBI's business model, and contextualize the research within the MIS approach. This will be followed by a comprehensive outline and rationalization of the methodological procedure, the data collection and analysis process, and a reflection on the credibility and ethical implications of the research. The subsequent section will report the results of the TA, and finally, a conclusion and a discussion of the findings and subsequent implications will be provided.

In the context of academic research, this thesis contributes to the field of media studies by focusing on the branding strategies of curated streaming platforms, specifically

MUBI. As mentioned, research on curated platforms has been insufficiently explored in academia, as emphasis has largely been put on mainstream, algorithm-based SVOD platforms (Frey, 2021, p. 6). This study aims to fill the existing research gap and expand on existing literature on curated streaming platforms by studying how MUBI constructs its brand identity as a cultural tastemaker within the contemporary streaming landscape. It will also contribute to literature on media branding through the exploration of curated models on brand construction. In an era of streaming dominated by algorithms and personalization, framing research around theoretical concepts such as gatekeeping and tastemaking is highly relevant. Furthermore, grounding this study within the MIS framework allows for a holistic and multidisciplinary approach, bridging together academic, marketing, and industry scholarship. This will enable a thorough understanding of how MUBI promotes its brand to generate symbolic value, foster artistic patronage, and how this influences MUBI's position within the industry discourse.

This research also bears societal relevance. Through intentional scarcity and an emphasis on editorial value, MUBI overcomes the "paradox of choice", the notion of human uncertainty when faced with endless options, a key issue for streamers relying on content abundance (Smits & Nikdel, 2018, p. 27). Meza and D'Urso (2024) found that users faced with the Netflix recommender system spent up to 30 minutes evaluating what they would watch, which was correlated with user frustration and propensity to switch platforms or give up the search (p. 364). Studying MUBI presents the alternatives to algorithm-driven consumption and combats algorithmic monoculture. Personalization can create filter bubbles, exposing users to similar content to what they have seen before, which limits their viewing options (Mejtoft et al., 2020, p. 148). In contrast, MUBI's curatorial approach promotes elevated discovery, challenging the dominance of mainstream media. This thesis foregrounds how MUBI democratizes the arts by making independent, niche, and arthouse films more accessible, and subsequently, how this influences the platform's cultural positioning. Understanding MUBI's curatorial philosophy translates into its institutional practices can contribute to understanding how specialized players operate in the contemporary industry, by looking at the dual nature of branding as being both strategic and symbolic. Through these practices, MUBI also plays a vital role in preserving the cultural heritage of national cinema, amplifying underrepresented narratives and giving the spotlight to lesser-heard voices, such as in Turkey and Malaysia, making it a relevant institution in the era of algorithmic dominance (Aşılıoğlu, 2024, p. 1070; Grgić, 2023, p. 638).

Overall, this thesis highlights MUBI's significance as a curated streaming platform by studying its strategic use of branding and curation to gain cultural authority. By employing a TA and grounding the analysis in the MIS framework, this study contributes to a growing body of research on non-algorithmic streaming platforms and offers insights into how curation can symbolically create cultural value and effectively position MUBI as a valuable player in the streaming economy.

2. Theoretical background

2.1 Branding in the digital media landscape

2.1.1 Defining branding

The American Marketing Association defines brand identity as "the visual and symbolic elements that represent a brand…. These elements work together to create a recognizable image for the brand, which consumers can identify and connect with" (American Marketing Association, n.d.). Branding is essential for companies to build their unique identity and to promote themselves to existing and potential consumers, while differentiating themselves from competitors (Jahan et al., 2024, p. 656). It is crucial for establishing the link between the consumer and the brand. How one perceives the brand and its quality translates into the brand experience, the different dimensions of the relationship between the consumer and the brand, including sensory, behavioral, affective, and intellectual (ErciŞ et al., 2021, pp. 345-346). For new customers, especially, brand equity, or perceived value, is an essential indicator for whether they should become loyal customers (Wayne, 2017, p. 727). This signifies the importance of understanding how branding practices shape and influence consumer behavior, and how this can impact the brand's market positioning and future expansion. Here, branding serves as a cultural context for understanding how products and brands are utilized to create symbolic value, rather than just being a company's logo (Asmar et al., 2022, p. 27)

The practice of branding has evolved since its early forms, driven primarily by the advent of the Internet and social media becoming prominent features of daily lives. The 21st-century market has been defined by fragmentation, increased competition, and rapid technological changes (Craig & Douglas, 2000, p. 273). As Edelman (2010) highlights, one of the key outcomes of this change is the way that consumers are able to communicate with the brand. Whereas in the past guerrilla marketing was the driver of building brand awareness, companies now must adjust to the potential of using the Internet and social media to build their consumer base and brand image (p. 2). Therefore, the success of branding can be attributed to the brand's adaptable managing and marketing techniques (Chan-Olmsted, 2011, p. 4).

Naturally, this shift has influenced the media industries and their paradigmatic approaches to branding. The fragmentation of media markets has increased the number of channels a brand can communicate its content through, emphasizing the significance of the quality of this content to compete and gain recognition in a saturated market environment

(McDowell, 2015, pp. 146-147). Additionally, this means that the content must be synergetic across different platforms to maintain consumer engagement and foster relationships with the brand (Chan-Olmsted & Shay, 2015, pp. 11-12). Thus, content delivery needs to transcend traditional boundaries to engage with consumers and compete for their attention in a highly competitive market. Given this change in dynamic, brands have the opportunity to leverage this communication to build impactful brand experiences. The different channels of communication can serve as immersion points to attract consumers. Platforms also need to decide how they communicate their brand image between their programming and channel or organization, emphasizing the nuanced relationship between the two (Chan-Olmsted, 2011, pp. 6-7). For example, HBO developed its brand identity under the premise of delivering high-quality programming, exemplifying the power of branded programming on platform image (Johnson, 2007, p. 8).

In light of these changes in branding strategies across media industries, subscription-video-on-demand (SVOD) platforms present a unique context for studying the evolution of media branding. SVOD platforms differ from traditional media outlets in both their business models and branding. Platforms such as Netflix, Amazon (PrimeVideo), and MUBI emerged as a result of a fragmented market, each offering a distinct lens to study branding in the streaming industry. Therefore, understanding the role of branding in the SVOD industry is crucial to get a deeper understanding of how these platforms, especially niche-curated ones, are positioned within the market. The next subsection will further explore branding in the context of SVOD platforms, transitioning into MUBI's unique curated branding model.

2.1.2 Branding of SVOD platforms

Branding has been an important part of the television industry since the 1980s, when differentiation and identity building became necessary to stand out amongst an increasingly competitive market (Wayne, 2017, p. 727). During this period, networks in the United States built their brand identity around "heavily marketed flagship content", programs with which they wanted to reflect their authoritarian role. As niche audiences in themselves were insufficient, conglomerates started to attract multiple target audiences to sustain market power (p. 728). Branding became a strategic tool for navigating fragmented audiences and generating appeal. As Grainge (2007, p. 52) explains, by prioritizing the branding of content

through multiple platforms, companies were able to reach new, unexplored, and global markets (as cited in Wayne, 2017, p. 729).

      With Netflix launching its SVOD platform in 2007, the streaming environment started expanding rapidly, leading to diverse new players and innovative branding strategies (Wayne & Sienkiewicz, 2022, p. 300). Some of these strategies mirror legacy media, while others are shaped by the newly digital environment. As Lotz (2022) outlines, internet distribution has made it possible for platforms to adapt direct-to-consumer subscription-funded models (p. 514). Streaming platforms are, therefore, differentiated by their subscription-driven model and on-demand content, meaning that their priorities differ from traditional linear TV conglomerates. These platforms rely on user engagement to gain prominence, and their success is measured via different metrics, such as subscriber numbers (p. 511). Perhaps one of the most obvious differences between traditional media and streaming platforms lies in the ability of platforms to leverage their online interfaces to brand themselves (Van Esler, 2020, p. 730). For example, Netflix is able to translate its brand image of being a platform that offers an abundance of personalized content through its interface (p. 733). As Wayne (2017) states: "Netflix's disregard for contemporary TV branding practices is also reflected in the company's liberal use of the label [original]" (p. 735). Moreover, the mechanisms of SVOD platforms differ from legacy television platforms as they do not depend on nation-based structures to build their business models (Lotz et al., 2022, p. 120). Netflix builds its transnational appeal and attracts audiences through strategies such as differentiation, representation, indigenisation, and cosmopolitanism (Asmar et al., 2022, pp. 35-36). Through this, Netflix tries to achieve the advantages of scale by an aggregated niche strategy, targeting multiple subgroups simultaneously, akin to the practices of traditional TV conglomerates (Higson, 2021, p. 12).

      As Major (2024) describes, the beginning of the streaming revolution also opened the possibilities to tend to niche audiences and rely on curation to build business models (pp. 52, 55). Akin to algorithm-based SVOD platforms, MUBI aims to attract audiences through its content, however, the curation business model focuses on discovery and elevating taste, rather than the possibility of endless personalized choice (Frey, 2021, p. 6). Furthermore, niche streaming platforms effortfully engage with segmented audiences as a part of their brand rhetoric. While Crunchyroll engages with Anime fans to build their niche identity, MUBI engages with arthouse cinema fans, who represent a specific taste culture, rather than targeting diverse subgroups simultaneously (Wayne & Sienkiewicz, 2022, p. 302). This

positions MUBI as an "anti-Netflix" platform, benefiting from its approach to focus on a single audience as opposed to the conglomerated niche strategy of mainstream streamers (Hessler, 2018, p. 3; Higson, 2021, p. 12). According to Anderson's (2008) long tail theory, a large quantity of niche products can be sold in a profitable way, which is enabled by the digital entertainment economy (pp. 8, 16). Whereas Netflix and other algorithm-based SVOD platforms use this approach to target a wide variety of niche audience subgroups, MUBI leverages its curatorial model to provide its audience with a collection of niche, selected films to promote editorial value and artistic merit (Frey, 2021, pp. 5-6). In this sense, curation is no longer just a programming decision but a branding mechanism to signal cultural authority. The following section will explore how MUBI uses curation as a practice to brand itself as a cultural tastemaker in the streaming industry by leveraging the concepts of cultural gatekeeping and building a global platform for cinephile culture.

2.2 MUBI's strategic branding through curation

2.2.1 Curation as branding

Davis (2016) writes: "A defining characteristic of a networked society is the abundance, rather than scarcity, of information" (p. 770). Increasingly fragmented users are faced with a broad spectrum of media offerings which they must sift through, increasing their choice autonomy (Sadlowska et al., 2019, p. 415). According to the long tail theory, the digital environment has democratized access to niche content aggregated across singular platforms, which is the unique selling point that keeps the products alive in the market (Anderson, 2008, pp. 8, 16). However, in the streaming industry, the promise of this theory is not fully met. Mainstream SVOD platforms aggregate niche content, yet they operate under business models that rely on them to constantly expand their catalogs to attract more subscribers (Stone, 2024, p. 3). In his work, Anderson (2008) discusses niche products, but emphasizes algorithmic platforms as the means to sustain the long tail (Frey, 2021, p. 37). Frey (2021) criticizes the long tail theory and redirects the conversation to the value of "less is more" - users want to be able to find the content they are searching for without being faced with the challenge of endless choice (p. 36). Sadlowska et al. (2019) confirm this by finding that a reduced number of options on platforms correlates with greater user satisfaction (p. 416). In the digital environment, then, curation can serve as a meaningful tool or guide to deal with "mass conformity and informational choice" enabled by proliferated access to content (Kompatsiaris, 2024, p. 3).

MUBI employs curation as a business strategy that shapes both their operational practices and brand identity, amidst the disruptions in the industry brought on by mass players such as Netflix. Despite these disruptions, influencing both the industry and wider society, MUBI is determined to create a platform that honors cinematic excellence and brings together a community of film lovers, ultimately celebrating the art form (Smits & Nikdel, 2019, p. 30). Throughout its development, from the film-a-day model to the now expanded Library, MUBI has always maintained a curatorial approach to its platform. By doing so, MUBI both eliminates the cognitive burden of choice fatigue users face on mainstream platforms and encourages engagement with its limited offerings (Hessler, 2018, p. 11). In this way, MUBI mirrors the traditional practices of film festivals and cinemas, which utilize curation to promote discovery and visibility of film, with the overall goal of promoting artistic merit (Gaupp, 2019, pp. 3-4).

Moreover, through its curated approach, MUBI distinguishes itself from algorithm-based streaming platforms to leverage its business model and attract viewers. For example, Netflix relies on systematic labelling and algorithmic sorting of content to increase engagement, instead of developing cultural understanding for its audience (Česálková, 2023, p. 299). The way the platform categorizes its films is a better reflection of their "on-demand" premise than the cultural value of the film (p. 301). In contrast, by employing curators, MUBI's catalog embodies artistic value and merit, which is prompted by contextualizing efforts that shape engagement with the platform (Barnes, 2022, p. 145). For example, the "Our Take" feature rationalizes each pick in MUBI's catalog by a brief description from one of its curators and hence sets the platform apart from its algorithmic counterparts (Smits & Nikdel, 2018, p. 29). Therefore, MUBI operates under a principle of "curation and control" as opposed to "selection and satisfaction", as the emphasis lies on delivering intentionally scarce, high-quality content rather than an overabundant catalog driven by user data (Frey, 2021, p. 47).

As Re (2024) highlights, the demarcating feature between content aggregation and curation lies in the added value of "human agency and evaluation" the latter offers (p. 8). Here, the link between the etymological origin of the word curation, which in Latin means "to care", and its application for MUBI can be found. MUBI benefits from the appeal of marketing itself as a platform on which all films are chosen with care and consideration. Through this, MUBI builds connections with its audience and differentiates itself from

mainstream streamers, as recommendations are not based on the users' previous watches but rather on quality, effort, and trust (Frey, 2021, p. 42).

Frey (2021) brings into question just how diametrically opposed algorithmic and curated streaming platforms are. Both are approaching the same issues of balancing demand and growth, but via different mechanisms - personalization and abundance versus curation and scarcity. Yet, what defines and ultimately distinguishes MUBI is its efforts to promote taste and create reputational value through curation (p. 48). Curation aims to create value through careful selection and display of content, creating narratives around what is considered "good" or "worthy" (Kompatsiaris, 2024, p. 8). The following section will explore how MUBI actively positions itself as a cultural gatekeeper and tastemaker to create symbolic value and promote itself as a patron of the arts.

2.2.2 Cultural gatekeeping and tastemaking

Cultural gatekeeping is a process through which experts decide which "messages to allow past the gates", meaning what reaches society and, in turn, how this frames social reality (Wallace, 2017, p. 274). In this sense, gatekeepers are the intermediaries between the production of culture and cultural taste (Janssen & Verboord, 2015, p. 1). Gatekeeping can be the result of aesthetic, economic, or political morals of a critic or institution (p. 4). In the entertainment industry, distributors are vital gatekeepers, as they decide which films reach audiences and play a part in the cultural and economic valorization of artistic goods (Smits, 2019, p. 2). Platforms are the new distributors of the digitized age, meaning that the role of gatekeeping can be taken on by algorithms. Through personalization, algorithms can create echo chambers of content, reducing the diversity of films one watches (Mejtoft et al., 2020, p. 148; Wallace, 2017, p. 277). By contrast, curation is a form of human gatekeeping that is personal in the sense that it is purposeful, transparent, and intimate (Frey, 2021, p. 3). Instead of reducing or filtering content, curation is about finding meaningful ways to combine the content together under one platform (p. 16). Through its curated programming, distribution, and acquisition strategies, MUBI acts as a cultural gatekeeper, actively shaping access to certain films and narratives (Smits & Nikdel, 2018, p. 31).

As Frey (2021) outlines, MUBI plays a role in moulding niche audiences' tastes "by reinforcing cultural binaries and posing as a benign, trusted friend, a gatekeeper from within the users' group" (p. 79). Therefore, by acting as a gatekeeper, MUBI becomes a cultural tastemaker for its audience, educating them on film through their curated identity.

Tastemaking is the active process of influencing value perceptions and shaping cultural hierarchies, which MUBI achieves through evaluation and curation. One way MUBI does this is by aligning with the practices of cultural institutions such as museums and film festivals, which are traditional gatekeepers in the art world (p. 129). Film festivals are propellers of high status, and they operate under a dissemination system that seeks to increase visibility to quality film (Janssen & Verboord, 2015, pp. 6-7). Furthermore, MUBI draws on traditional values of scarcity to promote films, as exemplified by their "Now Showing" section that seeks to reflect how exclusivity is a marker of value, as only a select number of films are being highlighted on the platform (Frey, 2021, p. 129).

Moreover, through their gatekeeping function, MUBI is able to preserve cultural heritage and highlight niche and unique cinema voices that might be underrepresented across other platforms. In Southeast Asia, MUBI played a vital role in the circulation of regional films, specifically horror, which is a popular genre. By supporting a transnational flow of content, broadening the appeal, and increasing the visibility of smaller film industries, such as Malaysia, MUBI helps champion culturally rooted genre cinema and preserve cultural heritage (Grgić, 2023, p. 638). In their thematic analysis of Turkish short films on MUBI, Aşılıoğlu (2024) found that they cover the topics of marginalized communities, societal issues, and economic disparities, which are often underrepresented in mainstream Turkish media (p. 1070). Lastly, Smits and Nikdel (2018) highlight how MUBI is more likely to license films outside the main competition programmes at acclaimed festivals such as Cannes and Berlinale, further exemplifying how the platform seeks to exhibit lesser-known but critically renowned films (p. 33). These examples illustrate how, through gatekeeping, MUBI promotes global cultural diversity and underrepresented cinematic narratives, underscoring the importance of curation as a cultural intervention. This aligns with the concept of the cultural critic, as MUBI not only selects which films are on their platform but also assigns status-based value to them through evaluation (Janssen & Verboord, 2015, p. 2).

Cultural critics play a vital role in the art world, determining what is reputable. Their own reputation is based on their previous judgments and status (Janssen & Verboord, 2015, p. 9). By employing curators as cultural critics, MUBI is involved in the production of the cultural value of its content and its platform. Through these curatorial and evaluative practices, MUBI aims to position itself as a cultural tastemaker in the industry, mediating the production of symbolic value and cultural taste (Frey, 2021, pp. 79-80). Critics' judgments

ultimately engage in cultural consecration, distinguishing between works that are "pure & sacred and facile & profane" (Bourdieu, 1984 as cited in Janssen & Verboord, 2015, p. 11). By praising and showcasing works of distinguished auteurs through their curated collections, MUBI curators engage in retrospective consecration (p. 11). The platform does not simply distribute film but actively shapes global taste hierarchies within the streaming economy.

Yet, for MUBI to be recognized as a meaningful tastemaker within the industry, it needs to have accumulated significant symbolic capital–legitimacy, that allows other forms of capital to be recognized (Bourdieu 2006, p. 111 as cited in Şahin, 2024, p. 388). Herbert (2011) explains how platforms challenged by economic barriers need to construct their own legitimacy to compete and survive in the industry (pp. 23-24). MUBI acquires capital by collaborating with other film institutions such as festivals, through its curated interface, "ancillary texts" that serve as platform vernaculars, and mainly, by showing quality arthouse film (Şahin, 2024, pp. 393-395). By emphasizing artistic credibility over commercial viability and marketability, MUBI, through its institutional practices, cultivates increased symbolic capital (p. 396). This capital establishes the platform as a "godfather of taste", which reflects their cultural authority and integrity (Hessler, 2018, p. 4).

Gatekeeping, tastemaking, and symbolic valorization are highly intertwined. Through gatekeeping, MUBI is able to position itself as a cultural tastemaker, which in turn increases the company's capital and cultural legitimacy. Furthermore, by engaging in these practices, MUBI actively promotes and sustains cinephile culture. By distinguishing between "high and low" culture, MUBI is able to differentiate hardcore cinephiles from regular film fans (Şahin, 2024, pp. 391, 396). The ways in which celebrating cinephile culture aligns with MUBI's branding will be discussed in the following subsection.

2.2.3 Cinephile culture and emotional branding

According to Elsaesser (2005), cinephilia encompasses more than just a passion for film and the theatrical experience—it's a life philosophy, providing perspectives that define how one approaches life (p. 27). The author notes how the concept of cinephilia has adapted to changes in the film industry, including new technologies, and can now be conceptualized as "cinephilia: take two". The new generation of cinephiles finds itself in between traditional theatrical experiences and digitalized environments in fragmented markets, influencing how film culture is perceived and consumed (p. 36). Lotz (2022) explains how the rise of SVOD

platforms has further prompted this shift through the democratization of access to films, but also increased user control, enabled by digitalization (p. 514). SVOD platforms are, in a sense, disruptors to traditional cinephile culture. The rise of these platforms has correlated with increased pressures on cinemas, a traditional site for cinephiles. This is due to increased practices of piracy, illegal streaming, and competition from players who operate under a digital business model (Taillibert, 2024, p. 1).

Yet, internet access has amplified the opportunities for film lovers to engage on social platforms and digital forums, sharing their passion for cinema, but also increasing film discovery due to wide online libraries (Jullier & Leveratto, 2012, p. 144). In this sense, Hessler (2018) explains how cinephilia is "not dead, it has simply transformed", as online platforms such as Letterboxd, FilmStruck, MUBI, and even YouTube are active sites for keeping cinephilia a practice in the modern digital age (p. 5).

MUBI has been a platform promoting cinephile culture since its original launch as "The Auteurs" in 2007 (Smits & Nikdel, 2018, p. 25). As MUBI operates under a curated model, it is at a unique intersection between traditional and new cinephilia. The platform mirrors traditional practices of cinemas and film festivals by echoing the concept of "fleeting experiences" and exclusivity (Ildır, 2024, p. 1650). By adapting to digital practices, MUBI embodies what Elsaesser (2005) describes as a defining feature of "cinephilia: take two" (p. 36). MUBI has positioned itself as a community and user-oriented site by giving its subscribers opportunities to engage with the platform, create their own film lists, and write reviews on the platform's Community forum (Capalbi et al., 2021, p. 30). In addition, MUBI offers features such as its own film publication and curatorial commentary on its interface that further highlight the platform's innate cinephile orientation (Smits & Nikdel, 2018, p. 29).

MUBI employs its curation branding model to position itself as a niche platform with a passion for film and cinephile culture. The company successfully capitalizes on the potential of this niche market by aggregating users onto their platform and hence differentiates itself as a unique streaming player (Capalbi et al., 2021, p. 29). This can also be seen outside the streaming industry, for example, Twitch, a gaming-based community that maintains its identity through partnerships and events that cater to its target demographic and therefore sustain loyalty and trust (Spilker & Colbjørnsen, 2020, p. 1221).

As Frey (2021) notes, interfaces are the first point of interaction between the content and consumers on SVOD platforms, and a well-crafted interface "can add value by infusing

emotional attachments to its presented content, engendering customer loyalty and even working to confirm viewers' self-identities" (pp. 56-57). MUBI's interface, in addition to its curatorial voice, plays a role in fostering emotional engagement with the platform, reinforcing its brand identity. Balanzategui and Lynch (2022) note how niche SVODs brand their identity around their users and specific subcultures. The way these platforms organize content reflects the symbolic cultural value they are trying to emulate (pp. 157, 160). The authors bring up the term "platform vernaculars" to describe how the visual and textual elements of SVOD interfaces influence content consumption, user perception, and brand identity framing (p. 163). For example, by using language such as "I" and "We", streamers can create a feeling of immersion and personal connection with the audience throughout the platform, but also their associated channels of communication (Taillibert, 2024, p. 11). MUBI uses its editorial voice and curatorial identity as vernaculars to shape audiences' perceptions and foster deep connections with them through emotional branding. Emotional branding is a newly emerged marketing strategy that aims to build a strong relationship between the consumer and the product or brand and is associated with repeated purchasing and customer loyalty (Rossiter & Bellman, 2012, pp. 291, 295). It aims to inspire, nurture passion, and create memorable experiences for consumers through meaningful and authentic dialogue and personal identification with the brand (Akgün et al., 2013, pp. 504-505). For example, features such as "Our Take" and "Notebook" serve this function, as they build trust between the consumers and the brand, which fosters loyalty and emotional connection (Smits & Nikdel, 2018, p. 30). Ultimately, MUBI utilizes cinephile culture to form its identity beyond its core platform by cultivating a symbolic and immersive cultural space for viewers to emotionally engage with film.

2.3 Positioning MUBI in the streaming landscape: A media industry studies approach

The following section will delve into understanding how MUBI's branding practices are shaped and legitimized by the broader media industry. By taking an outwards perspective into how niche platforms operate under the conditions of the contemporary streaming economy, this section will highlight the role of industry discourse in the symbolic valorization of MUBI. Firstly, "industry lore" will be introduced as a concept to contextualize the conditions in which niche platforms operate. Next, media industry studies (MIS) will be introduced as the appropriate framework to study how industry discourse

shapes institutional narratives, grounding the research in relevant structural and theoretical contexts.

2.3.1 Industry lore

Chalaby (2023) writes: "Platforms are the hallmark of the digital economy" (p. 554). The distribution process changed radically with the arrival of platforms and internet distribution of content through SVOD platforms further fueled this radicalization (Lobato & Lotz, 2021, p. 90; Perren, 2013, p. 165). This transformation marked a shift towards a platform economy, in which digitally mediated activities are expanding across businesses, politics, and other areas of social life (Kenney & Zysman, 2016, p. 62). As Kenney and Zysman (2016) explain, the platform economy operates under a winner-takes-all premise, meaning that only a few key players emerge from each sector that gain monetary value from digitalization (p. 68).

In the context of the competitive SVOD platform environment, the term "streaming wars" appears prominently across the media industry and trade press publications. It refers to the competition between SVOD conglomerates to gain dominance in the streaming market (Meimaridis et al., 2020, p. 66). Yet, Lobato and Lotz (2021) criticize the term "streaming wars" as being monolithic and reductionist, oversimplifying the current streaming environment to a rivalry between a select number of media conglomerates. The authors state that such an essentialist view is "an artifact of trade commentary and industry hype" and fails to adequately capture the realities of the industry (p. 90). Herbert et al. (2018) outline how such "siloization" stems from a narrow theoretical lens when examining the intricate divergences in the operations of different industries and companies (p. 350). This gap in both academic and industry literature needs to be addressed, especially in the context of niche streaming platforms, which have long been overshadowed by research on the "Big Three" - Netflix, Disney+, and Amazon Prime Video (Major, 2024, pp. 49-50). Overall, these criticisms indicate a need to look at platform operations from an institutional perspective to fully understand how their positioning and how their business models operate.

In their research on specialized streaming platforms, Wayne and Sienkiewicz (2022) identify key differences between niche and mainstream streamers and how the institutional practices of the former are shaped by the latter. They found that diasporic Israeli and Jewish streaming platforms are indirectly affected by the operations of larger platforms such as Netflix. This is both in their very need for existence and due to the conglomerate companies'

content acquisition strategies, which can restrict access to certain content, pushing platforms to specialize (pp. 310-311). The authors note that niche platforms are defined by the "degree to which their industrial practices are shaped by limited economic resources and the industrial practices of more powerful industry players" (Wayne & Sienkiewicz, 2022, p. 302). This means that specialized streamers build their business model to target niche audiences, both as an economic necessity but also due to the institutional environment of mainstream streamers. Smits and Nikdel (2018) find this pattern in MUBI's licensing strategy. The authors explain how the decision to limit the catalog was strategic, due to the financial burdens of long-term licensing agreements (p. 26). Therefore, platforms such as MUBI drive value creation and shape their brand identity around their content acquisition strategies, which are brought on by economic limitations of being a niche streamer (Wayne & Sienkiewicz, 2022, p. 311).

Having defined how strategies of niche SVOD platforms are shaped by economic limitations and other SVOD players, to further understand how these platforms are positioned in the industry, it is essential to look at how these strategies are defined and framed within industry discourse. This type of internal institutional discourse is often referred to as "industry lore", which serves institutional goals and shapes institutional practices through deep-insider knowledge that acts as a form of power (Havens, 2013, p. 4). Yet, industry lore is not made publicly available. Digital platforms often share limited information about their audience data and accurate success metrics, due to insufficient economic justification (Wayne, 2021, p. 194). Furthermore, Colbjørnsen (2020) outlines how these metrics often serve little indication of the production and distribution practices of platforms, limiting their use and application (p. 1270). Digitalization has also played a pivotal role in shifting the balance towards institutional practices as the key area of understanding contemporary media (Havens et al., 2009, p. 235). Therefore, it is essential to find alternative sites for research on institutional practices. Here, media industry studies emerges as a comprehensive framework for studying the dynamics of power in production cultures, especially in contexts limited by data transparency.

2.3.2 Media industry studies

Media industry studies (MIS) is a research framework that examines the complex interplay of organizational logics in cultural and economic fields by taking a micro-level approach of studying institutional dynamics (Havens et al., 2009, p. 235).

MIS draws on various pre-existing frameworks and theories such as critical political economy and academics from renowned institutions such as the Birmingham school (Havens et al., 2009, pp. 236-237). Whilst MIS scholars acknowledge the importance of these early theoretical frameworks and their writings on power and hegemony, the MIS approach centers its analysis on lower-level institutional practices and the "micropolitics of everyday meaning making" (p. 238). MIS scholars also criticize Marxist and critical political media scholars for approaching the field of media studies through a lens of economic overdeterminism, as, according to them, one entity is not capable of exercising uncontested control, as suggested by the mentioned theories (p. 248). As Havens et al. (2009) state, the aim of MIS is to analyze the unspoken rules that are embedded in the cultural practices of industry professionals, rather than subscribing to an overly deterministic model (p. 248). Therefore, to understand how knowledge about texts arises and, subsequently, how this shapes industry practice, MIS scholars study culture from both business and aesthetic perspectives (p. 235).

Industry trade press publications are, hence, a key source of research for MIS scholars. Contextual analysis of news media helps ground the understanding of the ongoing social, economic, and cultural practices in the industry (Hodgetts & Chamberlain, 2014, p. 383). Moreover, as Perren (2013) highlights, trade press authors can act as "disintermediaries", bridging the gap between the industry and wider society (p. 167). Havens et al. (2009) present the value of this analysis by emphasizing the "myriad ways in which specific discourses are constructed and articulated at various institutional sites…and how such discourses are incorporated or resisted in the practices of cultural workers" (p. 249). Scholars such as Smits (2019), Wayne (2017, 2021), Wayne and Sienkiewicz (2022), and others have highlighted this value through their research.

Given that MUBI positions itself as a "patron of the arts", it presents as a unique case study for analyzing how the platform's institutional practices are framed by the broader industry, and subsequently how this shapes MUBI's brand identity. Examining contemporary industry trade publications will reveal how MUBI is positioned within the industry by looking at the dual nature of maintaining artistic integrity and expanding institutional practices. Subsequently, by employing this framework, this research aims to answer the question: *How is MUBI positioned as a cultural tastemaker within industry discourse?*

3. Methodology

The following chapter describes the methodological procedure of the study to ensure transparency and enable this research to be replicated. The first section argues the cogent rationale behind the choice of the methodological approach, followed by an outline of the data collection process. Next, the data analysis procedure will be debriefed, indicating the steps of the analysis and operationalizing the key sensitizing concepts. After this, a justification of the credibility and reflexivity will be provided, and lastly, the chapter will discuss the ethical considerations of the research.

3.1 Research design and rationale

This study employs a qualitative research design to investigate MUBI's positioning as a cultural tastemaker in the industry. This allows the data to be collected, organized, and analyzed in a structured way, enabling a thorough study of the data and the context from which the data is derived (Malterud, 2001, p. 483). Qualitative research methods can be employed to analyze a variety of data types, which makes this approach suitable for this research, given the nature of this study and the data used for the analysis (Grossoehme, 2014, pp. 109-110). Furthermore, this research is grounded in the media industry studies (MIS) approach, focused on understanding the modus operandi of the media industries in various contexts, such as the cultural, political, and economic (Havens et al., 2009, pp. 249-250). Given the interdisciplinary nature of this approach, MUBI can be positioned not just as a streamer but as a cultural institution. This allows for a thorough exploration of MUBI's institutional and production practices and the role of curation and branding in the creation of symbolic value and cultural legitimacy.

Thematic analysis (TA), a particular type of qualitative content analysis, was selected as the primary research method. TA is used for "identifying, analyzing and interpreting patterns of meanings (themes) within qualitative data" (Clarke & Braun, 2016, p. 297). Themes are useful for the systematic organisation of data to construct analytical frameworks (p. 297). They are generated through coding, a process through which data is reduced into smaller patterns of meaning, which are then, through iteration, transformed into larger, meaningful themes. For example, open coding is used to generate the initial themes that appear during data familiarization (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017, p. 3355). For the purpose of this research, systematically organizing patterns that emerge from the large dataset is highly relevant. Moreover, as TA is considered a method, rather than a methodology, it makes this

approach suitable for being used across various frameworks, such as investigating MUBI's positioning in the streaming industry (Clarke & Braun, 2016, p. 297). Flexibility is considered one of the hallmarks of TA, allowing researchers to adapt their approaches, whilst still maintaining scientific rigor and conducting credible research (Riger & Sigurvinsdottir, 2016, p. 36). In addition, TA can be conducted in a deductive way, relying on subsumption. Subsumption comes from context, meaning that previous knowledge shapes how the data is perceived and analyzed (Reichertz, 2014, p. 127). With the intent of this research, subsumption is highly relevant as it allows for the theoretical context to be translated into the findings, and it directs the inquiry towards answering the research questions. Therefore, sensitizing concepts derived from the theoretical background can be used to guide the TA and ensure that there is meaningful coherence and resonance to the research.

By situating this research within the MIS framework and analyzing the data through TA, this study aims to uncover how MUBI creates symbolic value and meanings that underlie the platform's branding and curation strategies, and how this is perceived within the wider media industry.

3.2 Data collection and sampling

Three main sources were analyzed in this study: MUBI's promotional materials, curated collections, and industry media and trade press articles discussing the platform and its strategies. Data was collected through the means of purposive sampling, a non-random sampling technique, which ensures the diversity and pertinence of data through deliberate selection of data that aligns with the purpose of the study (Etikan, 2016, p. 2). The specific sampling and inclusion criteria will be discussed per dataset. Overall, data collection continued until data saturation was reached, meaning that additional data would no longer provide new insights or themes. Triangulation, which was ensured by using three different data sources, ensures that the data will be saturated enough to approach the study with rigor (Fusch & Ness, 2015, pp. 1408, 1411). The value of this lies in the depth of the data, which in turn yields more meaningful results.

The first data set included a selection of 20 curated collections from MUBI's platform, such as *In Love: The Cinema of Wong Kar Wai*, *A Woman's Bite: Female Vampires,* and *Festival Focus: Rotterdam*. Each collection needed to have a clear thematic, auteur, genre, or regional focus and include a short description of the collection. The

purposive sampling allowed a diversity criterion to be applied, therefore, the collections were selected to reflect diversity in genres, themes, and geographical regions. The rationale behind selecting the curated collections lies in their role in MUBI's branding and promotion, reflecting the platform's editorial choices and curatorial values, meaning they are a form of platform vernaculars (Balanzategui & Lynch, 2022, p. 163). A full overview of the curated collections and other data can be found in Appendix 1.

Secondly, a selection of 110 promotional materials published directly by MUBI across their official communication channels was selected. These communication channels include email newsletters and Instagram posts from their official account @mubi. Initially, data collection took place across multiple social media channels, however, after noticing the duplicating posts and overall higher activity on one platform, Instagram was selected as the main secondary source of data for the promotional materials. The posts were selected based on several criteria. Only posts promoting MUBI, their products, curated collections, and releases were selected. Single posts serving only aesthetic value (such as film stills) or honoring a filmmaker or actor (such as honorary, eulogy, or birthday posts) were excluded. Overall, 45 posts were selected, dated from 2023 to 2025, as this timeframe captures the most recent and relevant period of MUBI's branding. Furthermore, when recurring patterns became clear across the dataset, data saturation was reached, meaning that no additional materials needed to be collected (Fusch & Ness, 2015, pp. 1408, 1411). As for the newsletters, 65 were selected. The newsletters were chosen to reflect a variety of topics such as introductory emails, film launches, campaigns, and brand identity statements. Purely functional emails, such as password setups and subscription notices, were excluded from the analysis. Taken together, the promotional materials were selected as a data source to reflect MUBI's tools for brand communication, identity reinforcement, and audience engagement.

Lastly, 40 industry trade press articles were selected from five platforms: *Variety*, *The Hollywood Reporter*, *IndieWire*, *ScreenDaily*, and *Deadline*. All of these platforms are considered reputable within the entertainment and media industries and regularly publish articles on the industry positioning of streaming platforms, recent events, and updates. Furthermore, industry trade press articles are regularly employed in MIS research as relevant sites of knowledge into institutional practices (Havens et al., 2009, p. 250). Therefore, analyzing these articles provides relevant insight into industry discourse and how MUBI is framed in the media. Yet, as Wayne (2021) points out, analyzing industry publications requires a level of critical thinking and awareness of potential biases in the data. This can be

accounted for through triangulation, whereby the media coverage adds relevant context to institutional practices (p. 196). As this study used multiple data sources and the researcher was mindful of their reflexivity, the potential limitations of using industry media were mitigated. The articles were selected in a timeframe between 2017-2025, reflecting MUBI's key operations, but still being temporally relevant. All articles needed to be at least 300 words in length, and explicitly discuss MUBI's brand, expansion, operations, acquisitions, market positioning, and preferably include interviews and real-life quotes. The keywords used for the search included: MUBI, MUBI branding, MUBI strategy, and, when possible, filters were used to select articles based on the aforementioned criteria. To ensure diversity in content and potential themes, articles discussing the same topics (such as the acquisition of Cineart, found in *Variety*, *The Hollywood Reporter*, and *Screendaily*) were selected from one platform. An exception was made for the two articles discussing MUBI's acquisition strategy of a single film, as they offered distinct quotes and lenses, making them thematically relevant.

3.3. Data analysis and operationalization

Before the analysis took place, four main concepts were operationalized to guide the TA and ensure that the data is looked at from a proper lens and ultimately, that the research question is answered. The four main concepts include: curation, cultural gatekeeping, branding, and market positioning. Curation refers to the intentional selection and presentation of artifacts, in this case, films, which are used to represent cultural value and create meaning. To operationalize curation, several aspects were examined, including thematic descriptions within curated collections, curatorial notes, and editorial framing. Cultural gatekeeping was operationalized as MUBI's strategic moves to promote the inclusion of specific films, artists, and genres to understand how this is leveraged to influence audience perceptions and build the identity of a cultural tastemaker. Branding ascribes the processes that MUBI utilizes to construct its brand identity, therefore, the language and visual elements of MUBI's advertisements will be operationalized. Lastly, market positioning refers to the strategic efforts that MUBI utilizes to distinguish itself within the streaming industry. The operationalization was based on industry discourse discussing the licensing deals, acquisitions, partnerships, and unique innovations of the platform. These operationalizations were used as sensitizing concepts throughout the analysis, by serving as guides to distinguish what is relevant from the data (Bowen, 2006,

pp. 13-14). The purpose was not to create predefined categories of themes, but rather to ensure that the analysis is focused and grounded in theory.

The data analysis aligned with the six-step theoretical framework for conducting TA outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006, pp. 88-93). By doing so, it allowed for a robust research approach, whilst still relying on the flexibility and recursive nature of the framework (p. 86). The initial step of this framework was to get familiarised with the data. This was done throughout the process of data collection and after the exclusion of irrelevant data, by re-reading and analyzing each data piece several times and taking notes. The second step was open coding. This is the initial part of the coding procedure, characterized by writing down the earliest concepts that emerge from the dataset (Williams & Moser, 2019, p. 48). Given the large amount of data from different sources, the next logical step was to categorize it according to different themes. The third step of the Braun and Clarke (2006, pp. 88-93) framework involved axial coding, during which the codes are organized and refined to form early themes by examining the relationship between the codes and identifying overarching patterns (Williams & Moser, 2019, p. 50). As the data was stored on the researcher's computer, it was categorized by folders and labelled, which was also accompanied by handwritten notes, organized by different colors as recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 89). Each code was cross-referenced and deductively analyzed based on the sensitizing concepts and relevant theory to ensure that the themes were coherent. These initial themes served as a guideline for selective coding, which took place in further steps of the analysis. It also helped refine the understanding of the TA process, as well as capture any errors during the initial coding, which, according to Williams and Moser (2019), is essential for critical comprehension of the themes (p. 51).

Following the axial coding, the data were once again revisited to ensure that no information was overlooked in earlier coding stages and that the themes were sensible and refined. During this process, the researcher also took a break between the coding process, which meant that the knowledge could be consolidated, and new ideas could emerge during the temporal delay. The last step of the coding procedure involved selective coding, during which the main themes are developed by selecting meaningful patterns from the codes (Williams & Moser, 2019, p. 52). Selective coding revealed eight themes, which can be grouped together into three core concepts: *Branding through symbolic valorization, curating an experience: emotional branding and community building*, and *institutional positioning in the streaming economy*. The first core theme emerged prominently across the curated

collections and reflects how MUBI builds symbolic capital and positions itself as a tastemaker via its editorial and curatorial practices. The second core theme explores how MUBI uses its editorial voice and fosters a sense of community to build affective relationships with its audience, contributing to its brand image and positioning. This core theme appeared most prominently in the promotional materials. Lastly, the third core theme reflects MUBI's positioning within the broader media industry by looking at how the company's operations are framed by the trade press. Hence, this theme drew evidence from industry articles published by established institutions. Additionally, amongst the three sub-themes, 12 subcategories appeared during axial coding. For example, the sub-theme *emotional engagement and discovery* was disaggregated into four categories of patterns: *urgency, aesthetic value, discovery*, and *community*. A thematic map of the core concepts, sub-themes, and subcategories can be found in Appendix 2. Furthermore, an example coding frame of the curated collections can be found in Appendix 3. The same logic of coding was applied across all data, therefore, this table is illustrative of the coding procedure. These themes were developed in a way that helped promote the final step of the TA, reporting the results (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 93). During this phase, each theme was interpreted and related to the theoretical framework to prompt subsequent reporting. The themes were then organized in a coherent order to outline the results section in a sensible manner and to answer the research questions.

3.4 Validity and reliability

Reliability in qualitative research can be understood as the "degree to which the findings of the study are independent of accidental circumstances in their production" (Kirk & Miller, 1986, p. 20 as cited in Silverman, 2011, p. 360). Essentially, this means that the findings will, to some extent, be replicable if there are no external factors influencing the analysis. Reliability in qualitative research is ensured by providing a transparent process of the research and theoretical framework (Silverman, 2011, p. 360). In this study, transparency of both was provided through thorough descriptions, warranting that the research could be replicated and reveal comparable findings. In addition, all of the data was provided (Appendix 1), which leads to the conclusion that this research can be deemed reliable.

In qualitative contexts, the overall quality of the study reflects its validity, meaning that the findings produce meaningful results that are both credible and trustworthy (Golafshani, 2015, p. 602). Tracy (2010) outlines credibility as one of the eight pillars that

determine the quality of a qualitative research study (p. 839). Credibility is achieved through thick description, triangulation, multivocality, and member reflections (pp. 842-844). Given that the analysis did not include data from real-life participants, the latter two do not apply to the context of this research. Thick description and triangulation were provided throughout the study to ensure credibility. As mentioned, in-depth and thorough descriptions of the data analysis and research procedure, alongside a comprehensive theoretical background, were provided throughout this study. The theoretical background aims to provide tacit knowledge, which gives the reader an understanding of the contextual background of the research that will deepen the implicit understanding of the provided materials (p. 843). By using more than two sources of data, this research increases its credibility through triangulation. This helps minimise bias, because the findings are cross-referenced across datasets, which makes the analysis overall more comprehensive and robust (p. 843).

Considering the nature of qualitative research, reflexivity is crucial to warrant credibility. This entails reflecting on one's research practice by examining how their social and demographic nature relates to the subject of the research and, subsequently, how this can influence the results (May & Perry, 2014, pp. 109-110). The process aims to increase self-awareness of one's limitations and biases, which can be supported by transparent reporting of the reflections (Tracy, 2010, p. 842). As the researcher in this study is a regular user of MUBI and has an interest in auteur and arthouse cinema, this could have increased the subjectivity of the findings. However, through continuous self-reflection and documenting each part of the research process, the researcher tried to counterbalance this by focusing on obtaining credible, scientifically rigorous findings. The research process was reported transparently, and all the data were provided in Appendix 1, minimizing the risk of subjective biases in reporting.

3.5 Ethical considerations

According to Mertens (2014), ethics in qualitative analysis encompasses a morally just research process from the beginning to the end, including the research rationale, theoretical integration, and reflection (p. 510). Given the nature of this research and the data used for the analysis, it raises no ethical concerns nor poses harm to any individual or organisation. The data used was publicly available, contained no personal or sensitive information, and was used only for the purposes of the research. All of the data will be properly cited and referenced to avoid infringement of intellectual property. To ensure

transparency and confirm authorship, a declaration of the use of artificial intelligence can be found in Appendix 4. Furthermore, this research, the data, and its findings will not be shared with individuals outside of Erasmus University Rotterdam and the Examination Board.

4. Results

The following chapter presents the findings from the thematic analysis (TA) applied across MUBI's curated collections, promotional materials, and trade press publications. This chapter will be organized according to the three core themes that emerged throughout coding: *Branding through symbolic valorization, curating an experience: emotional branding and community building*, and *institutional positioning in the streaming economy*. The first two core themes discuss how MUBI brands itself via mechanisms such as curation, editorial tone, and community building, while the third core theme shifts the focus to external framings of MUBI within industry discourse. Among these core themes, the findings will be further organized by sub-themes and subcategories. The thematic map and an example coding table can be found in Appendix 2 and Appendix 3. These findings show how MUBI constructs its brand identity as a tastemaker and subsequently, how this influences MUBI's positioning within the streaming industry. Each theme will be introduced in light of its significance, followed by empirical evidence from the data and relevant theoretical context. The data analysis draws on the concepts of curation, cultural gatekeeping, tastemaking, symbolic capital accumulation, and industry positioning, as discussed in the theoretical framework.

This chapter provides an empirical foundation for the discussion, which will highlight the broader significance of the findings within the context of the two research questions guiding this study, namely: *"How does MUBI use strategic branding to position itself as a cultural tastemaker in the streaming industry?"* and *"How is MUBI positioned as a cultural tastemaker within industry discourse?"*. Answering these questions will provide a nuanced understanding of the hybrid role of symbolic capital in forming and legitimizing MUBI's identity.

4.1 Branding Through Symbolic Valorization

The first core theme explores how MUBI constructs symbolic value and positions itself as a cultural tastemaker through the process of curation. Throughout the TA, this theme emerged prominently in the curated collections and promotional materials. Within this theme, three main sub-themes arose: *Honoring auteur visions, global cultural heritage and diversity*, and the *value of curation: editorial voices and expertise*. While these sub-themes are distinct, they draw on similar theoretical concepts such as gatekeeping, tastemaking, and valorization, therefore, they will also be discussed in conjunction with one another. Overall,

this core theme and its sub-themes aim to directly answer the question of *how* MUBI positions itself by looking at how MUBI honors visionary auteurs, represents global and marginalized voices, and editorially frames itself as a cultural tastemaker.

4.1.1 Honoring Auteur Visions

The first sub-theme reflects one of MUBI's key branding strategies, which is to highlight the works of auteur filmmakers, renowned for their bodies of work and their impact on the cinematic landscape. French filmmaker François Truffaut described auteurism as the notion of creative control that translates into a clear artistic vision (Niu, 2024, p. 21). MUBI celebrates auteurism through its curated collections and promotional materials. Through retrospective consecration and symbolic valorization, MUBI accentuates the value of artistic expression, which in turn strengthens the platform's tastemaker identity.

MUBI's auteur-driven curated collections reflect the platform's efforts to use curation as a means to cultivate reputational value (Frey, 2021, p. 48). This is illustrated by collections such as *David Lynch: Delusions and Dreams*, where MUBI editors write about the filmmaker: "So recognizably singular, yet defiant of categorization is his cinema that 'Lynchian' has become a ubiquitous shorthand for anything that straddles the uncanny perimeters of dream and reality, resisting the marked boundaries of definition" (MUBI, n.d.-c). By using language such as "Lynchian," MUBI evokes the concept of idiosyncrasy, which effectively canonizes the director and illustrates the hybrid role of editorial framing as both cultural criticism and an effective branding strategy, which reaffirms the platform's artistic identity. Curating auteur-driven collections aligns with Bourdieu's (1984) concept of cultural consecration, specifically retrospective consecration, through which critics (in this case, MUBI's curators) identify cultural legitimacy and discern artistic merit (as cited in Janssen & Verboord, 2015, p. 11). This supports Şahin's (2024) argument that MUBI increases its prestige capital by emphasizing artistic value, building legitimacy through associations with revered auteurs (p. 396). Evidently, this is highlighted in other collections such as *Everyone's Obscene: Films by Luca Guadagnino,* where MUBI writes: "[Guadagnino's] cinema dances with gods and monsters…In thrall to sensuous excess, the prolific auteur tangles with the riskier sides of human nature, swirling violence, sex, and extreme feeling into spectacular films" (MUBI, n.d.-d). These curated collections exemplify MUBI's tastemaking ambitions and reinforce its cultural authority within the contemporary streaming industry.

The platform's commitment to celebrate auteurism extends beyond revered and widely known filmmakers. This logic is reflected in MUBI's newsletter, such as in the 'Welcome to MUBI' email, where they write: "And so it begins…From iconic directors and emerging new voices" and an email titled '3 up-and-coming directors you should know', stating: "Meet the new pioneers of cinema…Browse our collection of hand-picked debut films from the brightest and most exciting emerging directors from all around the world". Hence, cultural consecration serves as a strategic apparatus for MUBI to curate cultural hierarchies by honouring both established and up-and-coming filmmakers. This solidifies MUBI's dual role as a curator of high art and as a cultural tastemaker, through practices that transform curation into a symbolic tool for institutional legitimacy and niche market positioning (Frey, 2021, pp. 79-80; Şahin, 2024, p. 396).

4.1.2 Global Cultural Heritage and Diversity

While the previous sub-theme focused on how MUBI celebrates auteurship as part of their branding, this sub-theme explores how MUBI highlights voices from global, underrepresented, and culturally significant cinema. Hence, this theme reflects MUBI's efforts to establish cultural authority through cultural preservation and gatekeeping practices. In line with the previous sub-theme, results were primarily based on curated collections and promotional materials.

Out of the 20 analyzed curated collections, 11 were categorized within the current sub-theme. Within these 11 collections, there was a rich array of both regional and thematic narratives, bound together by their collective significance, rather than by auteurship. Collections such as *Around the World: The International Oscar* directly emphasize the value of representing global cinema, the description stating: "This collection brings together some of the [amazing films] that have either won or been nominated for the Academy's Best International Feature Film. Their dialogue may be spoken in myriad tongues, but the language of cinema is universal" (MUBI, n.d.-a). Furthermore, MUBI's newsletters explicitly frame the appeal of certain films based on their country of origin, such as newsletters titled "A Bitterly Funny Romanian Classic…" and "A Swedish Sexploitation Classic". The prominence of geographic markers across the TA signal MUBI's strategic branding through a selection of culturally diverse films. This aligns with MUBI's mission to position itself as a cultural tastemaker via gatekeeping (Smits & Nikdel, 2018, p. 31). By filtering their content, MUBI deliberately presents certain cultural narratives, which

influence the production of cultural tastes (Janssen & Verboord, 2015, p. 1; Wallace, 2017, p. 274). Through this, the platform is able to engage in both cultural preservation and cultural consecration, which serves a symbolic and strategic function (Aşılıoğlu, 2024, p. 1070; Bourdieu, 1984 as cited in Janssen & Verboord, 2015, p. 11; Grgić, 2023, p. 638).

The platform's efforts to promote diverse stories transcend geographical regions and extend to different thematic expressions and marginalized voices. For example, in their collection *Cut to Black: Celebrating Black Cinema* MUBI editors write: "A celebration of Black talent in cinema, both in front of and behind the camera…these films powerfully articulate the struggles, resilience, and joy experienced by the Black community all around the world" (MUBI, n.d.-b). Other diverse themes include *Bon Appétit: Culinary Cinema, A Woman's Bite: Female Vampires*, and *Neo Westerns: A New Frontier*. Overall, this mirrors the argument from the previous sub-theme, which posits that MUBI cultivates symbolic capital through an association with artistic merit, whilst focusing on promoting cultural diversity (Şahin, 2024, p. 396). Through this, MUBI shapes audiences' tastes and educates them on the refinements between high and low culture (pp. 391, 396). Furthermore, this strengthens MUBI's brand equity by associating its curator identity with increased symbolic value (Wayne, 2017, p. 727). Taken together, findings from this sub-theme underline how MUBI purposefully utilizes curation as a means for thematic representation and cultural preservation, which elevates its tastemaker status.

4.1.3 Value of Curation: Editorial Voices and Expertise

The last sub-theme outlines how MUBI reaffirms its identity by valorizing the status of its curators and editorial features. While the previous two sub-themes focused on *what* content MUBI curates, this sub-theme emphasizes the value of *how* the content is framed, highlighting the role of MUBI's curators as mediators of cultural taste. The thematic results will discuss how MUBI leverages its curation features as a tool for both strategic branding and valorization.

One standout example for this theme was the curated collection *Hand Picked by Mati Diop*. This was a unique collection in the dataset, which focused particularly on films selected by the French director, which made it stand out against the other collections, which are all curated by MUBI's editors. As the description reads: "Mati Diop's [*Dahomey*] is a vital work of cinematic imagination. To celebrate the arrival of this prismatic hybrid documentary, the French filmmaker has curated a trio of dazzling shorts that spark a

conversation with her spellbinding feature" (MUBI, n.d.-e). By canonizing the director, MUBI strategically increases the value of its platform and the films in the collection. This reflects Re's (2024) notion of human agency as the added value of curation (p. 8). Unlike algorithmic sorting and personalization, human curation is deliberate and thoughtful, guided by expertise, and serves a culturally interpretative function. Given that the platform chose to foreground the voice of a respected filmmaker reflects their efforts to highlight curation as a form of cultural legitimacy, which, according to Bourdieu (2006), is essential to cultivate institutional recognition (as cited in Şahin, 2024, p. 388).

Given that this editorial logic extends MUBI's curated collections to their promotional materials foregrounds the value of curation as a branding tool. In an alternative "Welcome" email, MUBI writes: "A new beautiful, incredible film, every single day. All hand-picked by our curators. Always". In the newsletter "What's new on MUBI" the editors state: "Our curation team is always on the hunt for undiscovered gems from all around the world". Through these statements, MUBI positions their curators as cultural critics, focusing on their value and reputation, which Bourdieu (1984) outlines is necessary for critics to engage in meaningful cultural consecration (as cited in Janssen & Verboord, 2015, p. 11). By employing curators to serve as cultural critics, the platform distinguishes itself from its algorithmic counterparts, who rely on content aggregation and personalization to gain appeal (Frey, 2021, pp. 79-80; Stone, 2024, p. 3). Rather, his theme illustrates how MUBI leverages human agency and expertise to elevate its cultural status as a tastemaker within the streaming world.

4.2 Curating an Experience: Emotional Branding and Community Building

In contrast to the last theme, which illustrated how MUBI uses curation to gain cultural authority, the second core theme explores how the platform's editorial status creates a meaningful brand experience. It discusses how MUBI strategically employs emotional branding and cinephile affiliations to establish a unique identity in the market and differentiate itself from other players in the streaming industry. Three main sub-themes emerged during the TA, namely *scarcity and exclusivity, emotional engagement and discovery*, and *celebrating cinephile culture*. These sub-themes reflect how MUBI fosters affective relationships and creates cultural participation through their limited catalogue, vernacular, and community-building efforts, which were most prominently reflected in MUBI's promotional materials.

4.2.1 Scarcity and Exclusivity

This sub-theme demonstrates the role of intentional scarcity and evoked exclusivity as part of MUBI's branding strategy. MUBI has operated under a model of intentional scarcity since its early days, following a 30 films for 30 days model, with its operations now expanding to a larger, but still limited, content catalog called "Library" (Smits & Nikdel, 2018, pp. 25-26). Evidence for how MUBI utilizes scarcity and exclusivity to create brand equity will be drawn primarily from promotional materials.

MUBI's limited catalog was both an economic necessity and a deliberate means to symbolically differentiate itself from other streamers (Smits & Nikdel, 2018, p. 26). In contrast to streamers such as Netflix, which aggregate abundant content as their primary strategy to attract subscribers, MUBI creates brand equity through its intentionally scarce and exclusive content (Higson, 2021, p. 12). Therefore, rather than being a limitation, scarcity is framed as a marker of value. MUBI utilizes scarcity to evoke exclusivity, which strengthens its identity as a curated alternative to mass-aggregated streamers. Here, curation serves as a symbolic apparatus to guide viewers in an era of platform dominance characterized by abundant information and choice (Kompatsiaris, 2024, p. 3). This was evident throughout thematic coding, in newsletters titled "This week on MUBI…", "Now showing only on MUBI", and "MUBI releases: [film]". One of the newsletters read: "There are lots and lots of great movies on MUBI. Including our own exclusive releases from today's most exciting filmmakers". This illustrates how MUBI deliberately frames its limited catalog to increase its brand equity, supporting Frey's (2021) argument about how MUBI's "Now Showing" section marks exclusivity as value (p. 129). Figures 1 and 2, which are Instagram posts promoting films exclusive to MUBI's content library, provide further evidence of this rhetoric.

Figure 1

Instagram post of MUBI's exclusive release

Post retrieved from @mubi, 2025 (MUBI [mubi], 2025b)

Figure 2

Instagram post of MUBI's exclusive release

Post retrieved from @mubi, 2025 (MUBI [mubi], 2025c)

The exclusivity code appeared prominently across MUBI's Instagram, reflecting the company's efforts to attract subscribers through its platform-specific offerings. This highlights how MUBI simultaneously embraces the long tail whilst rejecting its premise. The long tail theory entails bringing together a vast amount of niche content under one platform (Anderson, 2008, pp. 8, 16). Yet, MUBI reinterprets this by emphasizing the quality of films over quantity. This aligns with Frey's (2021) criticism of the theory and the author's views that by limiting its content, MUBI signals that their platform and catalog are value-laden. (p. 37). Through curation, the platform can position its limited catalog as intentionally scarce, as MUBI frames their curatorial rhetoric as part of their cultural authority and tastemaking function (p. 47). By using language such as "A visceral glimpse into the past… [streaming exclusively]" in their Instagram posts (Figure 1), the platform strategically utilizes curation to create a sense of exclusivity, whilst still promoting the

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quality of their features. Therefore, MUBI constructs its identity around the premise of delivering pristine, yet intentionally scarce content, which is enabled by its editorial nature.

This sub-theme reflects MUBI's strategic efforts to build a strong brand image and distinguish itself from algorithmic platforms through scarcity and exclusivity. It supports the notion of branding as a means of differentiation and identity building outlined by Jahan et al. (2024, p. 656). Ultimately, scarcity is framed as a symbol for cultural refinement, which reinforces MUBI's status as a cultural tastemaker.

4.2.2 Emotional Engagement and Discovery

The second sub-theme emphasizes how MUBI uses platform vernaculars and tone to build affective relationships with its audience and create a sense of trust and belonging, which fosters its role as a cultural tastemaker. Whilst analyzing the promotional materials, four main patterns of cognitive and affective mechanisms emerged: *Urgency, aesthetic value, discovery*, and *community*.

Urgency

The first subcategory relates to how MUBI increases the exclusivity of its catalog by cultivating a sense of urgency for content leaving the platform. Several newsletters titled "Films you wanted to watch are leaving soon", "You only have 7 days left to watch [film]", and "Don't miss [film]" fit this theme. One of these newsletters reads: "Before it's too late…Some of the great films you wanted to watch leave MUBI in 7 days. Catch them now before they're gone". Through these fleeting experiences, MUBI fosters emotional engagement with its users by cultivating the "fear-of-missing-out" (FOMO). FOMO has been associated with increased rumination and heightened anxiety when missing out, especially in the digital context of the Internet and social media (Gupta & Sharma, 2021, p. 4883). By linking urgency with emotional experience in phrases such as "Before it's too late" and "Catch them now before they're gone", MUBI elevates the status of its films through emotional branding. Cultivating affective experiences is a key part of emotional branding, through which platforms aim to foster continuous and meaningful relationships with their audience (Akgün et al., 2013, pp. 504-505). Therefore, MUBI is able to increase the value of its content by deliberately employing emotional branding to create a sense of urgency for the films that will no longer be available.

Aesthetic Value

Aesthetic value relates to MUBI's use of its editorial tone to promote films in a way that frames them as emotional and personal journeys. For example, emails such as "A love letter from Martin Scorsese", "Gilded Passions: Films by Merchant Ivory", "A Jaw-Dropping Animated Fantasia", and "Shakespeare but make it GTA" promote MUBI's content in a way that signifies emotional and aesthetic appeal. When writing "A moving documentary portrait…narrated by legendary filmmaker Martin Scorsese, " MUBI calls attention to the project as worthy and emotionally resonant. This illustrates how MUBI employs textual elements as platform vernaculars, which, according to Balanzategui and Lynch (2022), influence how content is perceived and consumed (p. 163). Hence, the platform can shape its audience's taste perception by framing films as culturally relevant. This pattern also appeared in the curated collections, such as *The New Coven: A Female Horror Renaissance,* where it is stated: "The titles in this collection are among the most innovative and creative horrors of recent years…" (MUBI, n.d.-f). Through vernacular such as "most innovative and creative", MUBI legitimizes its content, which increases the platform's value. This is an efficient form of communication as MUBI is able to signal that its content aligns with their organizational philosophy, meaning that the two interact in a fluid, yet dynamic way (Chan-Olmsted, 2011, pp. 6-7). Furthermore, as this is consistent across multiple communication channels, the platform is able to maintain engagement with its audience and gain recognition in the streaming market (Chan-Olmsted & Shay, 2015, pp. 11-12; McDowell, 2015, pp. 146-147). Framing content as aesthetically valuable is both symbolic and deliberate by nature, which in turn increases MUBI's cultural authority and tastemaker role.

Discovery

The *discovery* category illustrates how MUBI uses its editorial tone to promote new and old releases, and MUBI exclusives. This is evident in newsletters such as "What's new on MUBI", "Explore our curated collections", and "Escape into great cinema" in which MUBI writes: "From iconic titles full of famous faces, to the best films you've never heard of". By promoting discovery through curation, MUBI eliminates the cognitive burden of choice fatigue and reduces content echo chambers, which are inherent to algorithmic platforms, which encourages engagement with their content (Hessler, 2018, p. 11; Mejtoft et al., 2020, p. 148; Wallace, 2017, p. 277). As Frey (2021) notes, curation is a purposeful, transparent, and intimate type of gatekeeping, connecting the viewers to the content (p. 16).

Therefore, by curating discovery, MUBI creates meaningful experiences for its audience, which mirrors a key aspect of emotional branding (Akgün et al., 2013, pp. 504-505).

Community

Lastly, through their promotional materials, MUBI frames film watching as a collective experience, which creates a sense of cultural participation and fosters strong brand connections. As exemplified in the newsletter "Refer a friend and get rewarded", MUBI writes: "One of the best things about great cinema is sharing it. Chatting about stories. Debating endings". In another newsletter titled "That one perfect gift." MUBI writes: "Make your movie-loving-mother-in-law finally love you. Give your ex Timothée Chalamet, as a peace offering. Bond with your boss over Bong Joon Ho". Subsequently, this vernacular fosters an emotional experience with the platform as community branding becomes a strategic marketing move, through which MUBI makes its users become loyal to the brand. This strategy aligns with Akgün et al.'s (2013) view on emotional branding as a means to cultivate customer loyalty through both product identification and satisfaction (pp. 504-505).

In conclusion, this sub-theme illustrates how MUBI builds its brand identity by employing emotional vernacular to foster affective engagement with its audience. Through this, MUBI nurtures a meaningful dialogue with its consumers, which establishes a relationship built on trust and loyalty. Furthermore, it emphasizes how MUBI successfully brands itself through its adaptable and synergetic strategies, which are also adjusted to the digital environment (Chan-Olmsted, 2011, p. 4; Edelman, 2010, p. 2).

4.2.3 Celebrating Cinephile Culture

The third sub-theme reflects MUBI's efforts to strategically position itself as a platform oriented towards cinephiles to affirm its cultural authority. While the previous sub-themes focused on how MUBI builds its brand through its editorial voice and features, this section explores how MUBI cultivates a sense of cultural belonging by creating a shared digital and cultural space for cinephiles. This theme is distinct from the *community* category of the previous sub-theme as it addresses how MUBI fosters cultural belonging through affiliations with their audiences' cultural traditions, rather than employing an affective tone.

MUBI's efforts to promote cinephile culture on their platform reflect Hessler's (2018) view on how digital disruptions have transformed modern-day cinephilia (p. 5). In line with the author's views, MUBI has made efforts to adapt to digital transformations while still echoing traditional cinephile practices. MUBI often promotes its digital

publication "Notebook" and its podcast through its newsletter and Instagram page @mubi. Several newsletters, such as "MUBI Podcast returns with second season", "First look at Notebook Issue 6", and "The more of MUBI" (Figure 3), reflect how the company promotes community and creates a cultural dialogue surrounding film. This draws on practices of traditional cinephile institutions such as film festivals and arthouse cinemas, which is a defining feature of Elsaesser's (2005) concept "cinephilia: take two", a hybrid of digital accessibility and nostalgic viewing traditions (p. 36). By aligning with both the traditional practices and adapting to digital transformations, MUBI is able to create a shared space for film lovers and position itself as a trusted tastemaker, akin to original cinephile institutions (Gaupp, 2019, pp. 3-4). MUBI also aligns itself with other digital cinephile platforms. Throughout MUBI's Instagram posts, several references are made to other cinephile-based platforms such as Letterboxd and the Criterion Channel (Figure 4 and Figure 5). The latter is a streaming service from the Criterion Collection, with which MUBI had established connections from its starting days (Hessler, 2018, pp. 3, 5). Through these affiliations, MUBI strengthens its cultural capital and reaffirms its positioning in the digital streaming environment.

Furthermore, this exemplifies how MUBI establishes its distinct brand identity through aesthetic commitment, shared perspectives, and a deep cultural understanding of its audience. The latter enables MUBI to build lasting connections by cultivating trust and resonance, and to differentiate itself from platforms such as Netflix, which rely on algorithms and personalization, rather than cultural identification, to increase engagement (Česálková, 2023, p. 299).

Figure 3

MUBI's newsletter "The more of MUBI"

The MUBI community is made of more than just great movies.

Open Notebook. Our publication about everything cinema.

Hear the latest news on the newest projects, from filmmakers like Pablo Larraín and Kelly Reichardt. Read coverage of greatest film festivals, from Cannes to Berlin and Rotterdam. Discover the "moviegoing memories" of some of our favorite filmmakers, including Joanna Hogg and Takashi Miike. Plus, our beloved movie poster of the week column.

And be sure to follow along on social media to be the first to hear all our latest news. To join lively movie debates. Or just to share your favorite scene from The Big Lebowski.
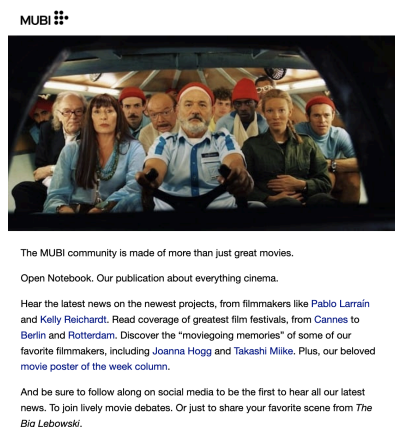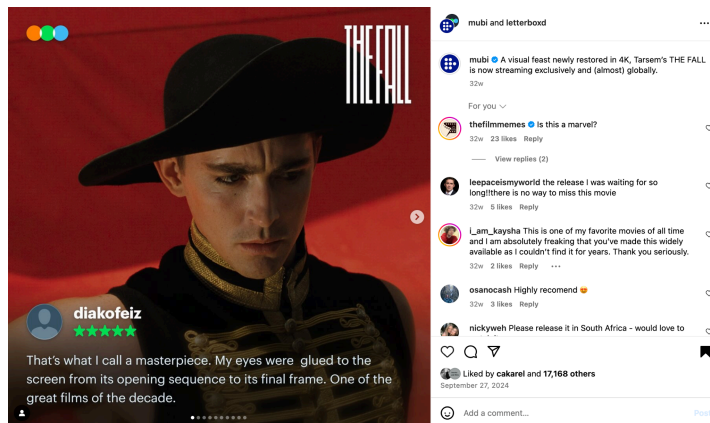
Figure 4

Instagram post of MUBI's exclusive release

Post retrieved from @mubi, 2024 (MUBI [mubi], 2024b)

Figure 5

Instagram post "The best MUBI mentions of the week"
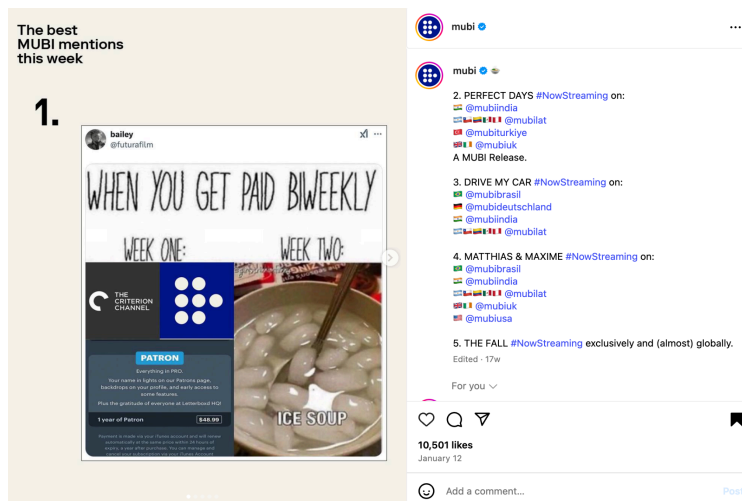
Post retrieved from @mubi, 2025 (MUBI [mubi], 2025a)

Another way MUBI fosters engagement with its audience is by promoting cinephilia as part of daily life. Interestingly, throughout coding, several items referencing one of MUBI's merchandise items - the MUBI tote bag appeared (Figure 6 and Figure 7). This prompted further research on the role of tote bags in cultural performance. Dane (2020) found that carrying a tote bag from a specific cultural institution is used to indicate one's cultural capital as it signifies belonging and elevated taste (p. 3). This aligns with Elsaesser's (2005) argument that cinephilia reflects one's cultural identity and personal values, and highlights how MUBI leverages this to create a brand identity that aligns with its audiences' cultural preferences (p. 27). The platform's branding extends digital curation to daily

aesthetic performance, which signifies how MUBI transforms its brand into a symbolic marker of taste, aligning with Asmar et al. 's (2022) argument that branding is a tool to cultivate status-based capital (p. 27).

Figure 6

*Instagram post of MUBI's tote bag*

Post retrieved from @mubi, 2024 (MUBI [mubi], 2024a)

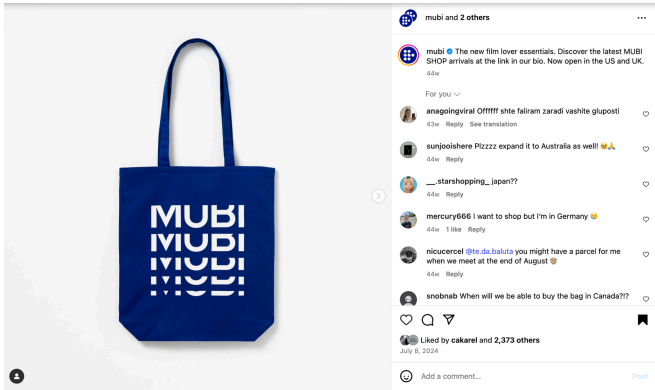**Figure 7**

Instagram post "The best MUBI mentions of the week"
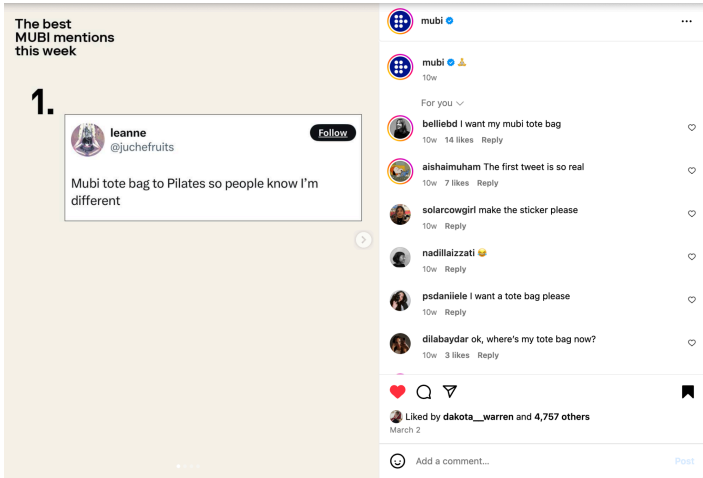
Post retrieved from @mubi, 2025 (MUBI [mubi], 2025d)

Overall, this sub-theme represents MUBI's calculated efforts to become a cultural space for film lovers and translate its brand into an aesthetic and behavioral marker of taste by appealing to hybrid cinephile traditions. Through this, MUBI curates both digital content and cultural meaning, which strengthens its position as an arbiter of taste.

4.3 Institutional Positioning in the Streaming Economy

The final core theme aims to present evidence as to how MUBI is positioned as a cultural tastemaker within industry discourse. In contrast to the previous two core themes, which examined MUBI's internal practices as part of their positioning and branding strategy, this section takes an outwards perspective to look at how MUBI's practices are framed within the industry. This section draws data from industry publications of established sources that discuss MUBI's expansion, acquisitions, and competitive position within the global streaming landscape. Thematic coding revealed two main sub-themes, namely *global expansion and strategic growth*, and *positioning MUBI through distribution and in-house production strategies*. As this thesis is grounded in the media industry studies (MIS) framework, this theme will examine how the broader media industry shapes MUBI's institutional practices and how this affects the company's positioning as a cultural tastemaker.

4.3.1 Global Expansion and Strategic Growth

The first sub-theme details how MUBI's investment relationships, regional expansions, acquisitions, executive hiring, and new business ventures are framed by the media and how these strategies relate to MUBI's institutional positioning. Throughout the coding, five categories of this sub-theme emerged: *Acquisitions, global market entries, diversification, partnerships with art institutions*, and *strategic leadership appointments*. This sub-theme draws heavily on Havens's (2013) concept of "industry lore", the insider industry knowledge that shapes the institutional practices of a platform (p. 4). Hence, this sub-theme focuses on MUBI's strategic and structural efforts to expand its global operations and how the wider industry frames these efforts.

Acquisitions

The first sub-category that emerged reflects how MUBI's acquisitions are framed as deliberate efforts for the company to gain global prominence. These include the acquisitions of the Benelux distributor Cineart in 2024 and the production company Match Factory in 2022 (Ritman, 2022a, para. 2; Ritman, 2024a, para. 1). As these acquisitions granted MUBI early access to particular productions and expanded their theatrical distribution operations to the Benelux area, both were notable in scaling its operations. In the examined press articles, these acquisitions are discussed as strategic expansions that simultaneously reinforce MUBI's symbolic legitimacy. For example, the term "aggressive shopper" was used to

highlight MUBI's global efforts to establish itself in the competitive indie streaming market. As noted in *The Hollywood Reporter*:

> "Buying an entire company whole is a sizable step up from landing film rights, but the Match Factory lends considerable firepower to [MUBI] as it continues to expand outside of its core streaming business… The streamer/sales combo gives [MUBI] huge leverage – potentially enough clout to attract big arthouse directors… alongside the ability to do global deals on its films" (Ritman, 2022b, para. 3, 5).

By framing these acquisitions as part of MUBI's arthouse-oriented identity, the press legitimizes the streamer's institutional practices, invoking what Havens (2013) refers to as "industry lore" (p. 4). Acknowledging the legitimacy of Match Factory and Cineart underlines how MUBI deliberately aligns with like-minded and reputable companies by employing deep insider knowledge of industrial practices to increase their value. Phrases such as "leading Indie distributor" and "The Match Factory has built up a reputation for distinct independent and specialty films" demonstrate how MUBI aligns itself economically and symbolically with other esteemed arthouse institutions (Ritman, 2022a, para. 3; Ritman, 2024a, para. 1). Hence, by framing these acquisitions as both economic and symbolic, MUBI's institutional practices and vertical integration efforts are legitimized by the industry, which consolidates its brand identity.

Global Market Entries

This sub-category reflects how MUBI's global expansion is framed as culturally sensitive localization, exemplified by their expansion into India. In 2018, MUBI received backing from India's leading media conglomerate Times Bridge, and in 2019, the company officially launched "MUBI India", marking their first localized channel of business (Bhushan, 2019, para. 1-2; White, 2018, para. 1). "MUBI India" offers the same service as MUBI's regular channel but focuses specifically on catering the content for Indian audiences. To ensure this, MUBI hired Indian producer Guneet Monga to handle local operations and offered a competitive price for their subscription at 6.99$ (499 rupees) (Bhushan, 2019, para. 2, 6). The media framed this expansion as a form of culturally sensitive localization, as the company was able to expand whilst maintaining its curated ethos and integrity. This is underscored by a quote from Monga for *The Hollywood*

Reporter: "I'm thrilled we have launched a dedicated channel for Indian cinema as it means that film lovers can now watch amazing films like *Salaam Bombay*…alongside globally renowned gems like *Moonlight*" (Bhushan, 2019, para. 6). Additionally, as MUBI's localization practice mirrors Netflix's indigenisation strategy, this positions the streamer as a formidable player in India's highly competitive streaming market (Asmar et al., 2022, p. 32; Bhushan, 2019, para. 7). As both streamers adapt their platform to suit the preference of local audiences, it signifies how MUBI legitimizes its presence in the Indian market whilst reinforcing its brand identity through arthouse oriented and culturally embedded content. Furthermore, through discursive language such as "MUBI bills itself as a 'hand-curated' cinema service" and "As part of the company's global reach…" the industry frames MUBI's localization practices as institutionally legitimate. As MUBI is positioned as a global and culturally sensitive brand, it exemplifies how its localization efforts are framed to reflect its institutional practices and signify a symbolic form of globalization. This solidifies MUBI's tastemaker status by highlighting how global expansion can coexist with editorial integrity.

Diversification

As part of their expanding operations, MUBI diversified into several projects, including the "MUBI Podcast", a global publishing arm "MUBI Editions", the MUBI fest, screening films across nine global cities, and MUBI Go - a premium subscription offering a weekly ticket to local film theatres (Greene, 2021, para. 1; Goldsmith, 2022, para. 4; Tabbara, 2024a, para. 1; Ritman, 2024c, para. 1-2). These operations reflect how MUBI is expanding from being a traditional streamer to a broader cultural institution through projects that symbolically align with their curatorial practices. Several trade press publications support this. For instance, the "MUBI Podcast" is discussed as an audio extension of the company's current mission, which is to educate people on cinema and culture. As stated in *IndieWire*, one episode discusses "the cultural impact of the [film] upon its release and the impact it had on generations of Dutch filmmakers that came after" (Greene, 2021, para. 3). The way these projects are framed reflects MUBI's curatorial and cinema-oriented ethos, illustrating the company's calculated efforts to grow whilst reaffirming their brand identity. These projects exemplify the "micropolitics of everyday meaning making" discussed by Havens et al. (2009), the daily practices such as curation and publication that serve as strategic tools to build an institutional identity and cultural authority (p. 238). As highlighted by a quote from Daniel Kasman, vice president of editorial content of MUBI about their publishing arm:

"With MUBI Editions, we are building upon the great work done by our online and print publication, Notebook, and going even further… MUBI will continue to deepen its mission to bring audiences around the world together through their love of great movies and the culture and history of cinema" (Ritman, 2024c, para. 6).

This illustrates how, through diversification, MUBI generates cultural capital which solidifies its identity as a patron of the arts. Additionally, it reiterates its tastemaker status by legitimizing MUBI's broader institutional operations and cultural infrastructure.

Partnerships With Art Institutions

This category reflects how the trade press framing of MUBI's partnerships with film festivals as both strategic and symbolic helps affirm the platform's status as a cultural tastemaker. A notable example is MUBI's partnership with the Locarno film festival to give a monetary award to a debut director, valued at 10,000 Swiss Francs (Tabbara, 2024b, para. 2-3). This affiliates the platform's institutional practices with the festival's reputation, which legitimizes the streamer. Additionally, MUBI partnered with Hay Literary Festival to screen their releases, marking the first screening event for the literary organization (Ntim, 2025, para. 2, 6). This supports Frey's (2021) argument about how MUBI positions itself as a trustworthy peer and educator in the cinema space by aligning with other art institutions such as film festivals (p. 129). The industry framing of these partnerships serves as evidence of MUBI fostering cultural dialogue surrounding film, reaffirming the platform's symbolic and cultural status. This is highlighted by a quote from Tsari Paxton, Director of UK Marketing at MUBI: "We hope the thought-provoking films we champion inspire audiences and spark conversations in dialogue with Hay's rich, culturally diverse programme" (Ntim, 2025, para. 4). Altogether, these value-laden partnerships reiterate MUBI's cultural authority by legitimizing its practices in the industry.

Strategic Leadership Appointments

Furthermore, MUBI reinforces its positioning through the executive hiring of established industry professionals. This illustrates the dual function of this strategy for promoting operational growth and symbolic reiteration. Notable leadership appointments include the hiring of Michael Lieberman, the former head of publicity at Metrograph; Ibtisam Omer, formerly employed at Netflix and Arianna Bocco, former IFC Films

president. They were hired for the role of Director of Communications, Global Marketing Director and SVP of Global Distribution, respectively (Hipes, 2021, para. 1; Rosser, 2021a, para. 1; Welk, 2025, para. 1). Furthermore, in 2024 Chinese billionaire Zhang Xing joined MUBI's board of directors, marking a significant upscale for the company (Keslassy, 2024b, para. 1). In the examined trade press publications, these appointments reaffirm MUBI's brand identity by focusing on the expertise and knowledge of the personnel MUBI hired. *Variety* calls Xing a "patron of the arts" and *Deadline* highlights Lieberman's earlier work on programming retrospectives of renowned auteurs (Hipes, 2021, para. 3; Keslassy, 2024b, para. 3). These moves reflect how MUBI strategically utilizes "industry lore" to cultivate prestige capital (Havens, 2013, p. 4). Hiring prominent executives from established institutions is a status signal for the platform, as they gain both operational expertise and institutional recognition via legitimization. This reflects Bourdieu's (2006) notion that legitimacy is required to generate symbolic capital (p. 111 as cited in Şahin, 2024, p. 388). Through expert hiring, MUBI is able to increase its symbolic capital and strengthen its identity as a globally respected curator.

Taken together, these five categories provide an overview of how the industry frames MUBI's expansion practices to serve both a market-driven and symbolic function, which legitimizes them and reaffirms the platform's brand identity. The platform can grow and innovate its operations across territories, expand its global reach, and hire expert staff, whilst preserving its core brand values. This signals that MUBI's institutional practices are legitimized as the platform is able to seamlessly transition from a niche platform to an acknowledged global cultural institution.

4.3.2 Positioning MUBI Through Distribution and In-house Production Strategies

The last sub-theme illustrates how the industry frames MUBI's strategic acquisitions and productions as part of MUBI's growing evolution into a legitimized studio. Given that MUBI only took on its producer role recently, this theme mainly focuses on its role as a distributor but still highlights the importance of its growth and how this differentiates MUBI from other streamers. Three main subcategories emerged from this theme: *Distribution strategy, MUBI as an evolving studio*, and *strategic differentiation and competitive positioning*.

Distribution Strategy

MUBI first delved into theatrical distribution back in 2016, with the operations expanding in 2019 when they started distributing in-house films and in 2022, when they acquired producer Match Factory (Goodfellow, 2022, para. 3; Mitchell, 2017, para 9; Welk, 2025b, para. 9). The way MUBI's distribution strategy is framed by the examined trade press articles reveals four patterns of strategy, all aligned with MUBI's curatorial ethos. These patterns include licensing films from auteurs, film festival affiliations, short theatrical windows, and lastly, strategic distribution due to economic limitations.

Firstly, MUBI's emphasis on acquiring productions from auteur filmmakers appeared clearly throughout coding. In *The Hollywood Reporter,* following an early acquisition of Italian director Paolo Sorrentino's latest project, *La Grazia* (Sorrentino, n.d.), MUBI CEO Cakarel is quoted saying: "[Sorrentino] has always been a master of cinematic poetry, but *La Grazia* is something truly special… We at MUBI are honored to be the home for this film and cannot wait to share its brilliance with audiences worldwide" (Vlessing, 2025, para. 3). Other notable auteur-driven acquisitions from celebrated arthouse and independent filmmakers include works from Andrea Arnold, Sofia Coppola, and Xavier Dolan (Keslassy, 2024a, para. 1; Ramachandran, 2023, para. 1; Wiseman, 2020, para. 1). Through consistent, and value-laden acquisitions of films from acknowledged filmmakers, MUBI reinforces its commitment to artistic merit, which aligns with Şahin's (2024) argument that this allows the platform to reinstate its identity as an educator and tastemaker in the streaming industry (p. 396). Hence, these acquisitions are not merely commercial but serve a symbolic function to affiliate MUBI with artistic excellence and renowned auteurs.

The second pattern supports these findings, as MUBI's acquisitions extend to licensing films from established film festivals, which the industry frequently framed as major wins for MUBI in the film festival circuits. Press coverage during the Cannes film festival often highlights the success of the film MUBI acquired, such as whether the film won any awards, was part of the main competition, etc. Phrases such as "Cannes-premiering" and "Cannes competition entry" recurred often in *Variety* articles (Keslassy, 2024a, para. 1; Ravindran, 2022, para. 8). Anaïs Lebrun, director of international content for MUBI commented on how festivals are a significant buying ground for MUBI: "We discover a lot during larger festivals such as Venice, Cannes and Toronto, but we also follow projects from very early on, even before the festival selections happen" (Rosser, 2021b, p. 6). As these festivals hold significant legitimacy in the industry, licensing films from their programs strengthens MUBI's curatorial authority and validates its institutional

practices. By affiliating with acknowledged tastemakers and gatekeepers, MUBI is able to reaffirm its own identity.

The next pattern that appeared refers to MUBI's strategy to release films they licensed for their platform in a short proximity from the theatrical release. Whilst this code appeared scarcely, it stood out due to the media framing this strategy of bypassing traditional theatrical windows as "radical" (Goodfellow, 2022, para. 13). This term specifically refers to the "seminal moment" of releasing the documentary *Junun* (Anderson, 2015) from director Paul Thomas Anderson on the platform the same day as the film premiered at the New York Film Festival in 2015 (para. 11, 13). Yet, despite this being an innovative strategy at the time, it also turned out to be very successful for the platform. As CEO Cakarel states: "It was watched ten times more than even the best films ever made on our platform, which opened our eyes to what really drove the business, new films that are exclusively available on the platform in an earlier window" (para. 14). In 2022 *Variety* described the early window strategy to now be part of MUBI's brand identity (Ravindran, 2022, para. 19). In another statement Cakarel justifies this strategy as part of MUBI's brand rhetoric, a "singular vision to show great cinema" (para. 22). Hence, by framing this strategy as innovative, MUBI challenges legacy distribution models and offers alternative standards for cinematic access. By including theatrical windows in their release models, MUBI reinstates its commitment to fostering traditional cinephile practices and differentiates itself from streamers who operate under direct-to-consumer subscription-funded models (Lotz, 2022, p. 514).

Lastly, across the trade press articles, MUBI's licensing deals were described as strategic and deliberate, which is due to the company's size and ability to only license a certain number of films. Cakarel notes how data from the company and the subscriber engagement (which MUBI does not publicly reveal) "informs a lot of economic decisions of how much [we're] prepared to pay for" (Ravindran, 2022, para. 8). This supports the argument of Wayne and Sienkiewicz (2022) about the role of economic constraints in shaping the brand identity of niche streamers. According to the authors, niche platforms leverage their limited ability to license productions to specialize in one type of content, based on which they build their brand identity (p. 311). Yet, acquisitions such as Park Chan-wook's *Decision To Leave* (Park, 2022), which is one of MUBI's costliest acquisitions, illustrate how MUBI is willing to invest more money into projects they deem valuable (Ravindran, 2022, para. 8). In doing so MUBI transforms economic limitations into symbolic differentiation, which is crucial to affirm the platform's tastemaker authority. As

Cakarel states the decision to invest into the project was based on user retention data and "pure love of cinema, as is the case for all the company's acquisitions" (Goodfellow, 2022, para. 6). He added: "We paid an irrational amount because my data showed me that that film is worth significantly more than what the distributors were prepared to pay" (para. 7).

These patterns reveal how the press frames MUBI's distribution practices as both logistical efforts and a core part of its symbolic and institutional identity. It supports Smits's (2019) argument about how distributors are modern-day gatekeepers, meaning that they play a key role in the valorization of film and hence, how the broader media industry perceives this (p. 2).

MUBI as an Evolving Studio

In 2017 *ScreenDaily* announced that stepping into production is "next on the agenda" for the streamer's growth plan (Mitchell, 2017, para. 12). As Cakarel said: "In the next two to three years, we'll do some wonderful co-productions. You'll start seeing our logo in front of films playing in competition at Cannes." (para. 13). This soon became reality, as MUBI's first co-production *Port Authority* (Lessovitz, 2019) premiered as part of the Un Certain Regard (A Certain Glance) section of the festival, making this a successful first endeavor into the production field (Vivarelli, 2019, para. 1). Yet, that same year MUBI lost out on the rights for *Parasite* (Bong, 2019) to indie distributor Neon, which later went on to win the Palme D'or and Best Picture at the Academy Awards. Cakarel notes this "*Parasite* moment" as a turning point for the company (Goodfellow, 2022, para. 19). He stated:

> "We couldn't get that film in the pay-one window, because it became so
> big…We said this can never happen again. If you want to show [*Parasite*]
> on your platform, you have to own the whole thing — you have to own all
> rights" (Ravindran, 2022, para. 18).

Across the examined articles, MUBI's growth into a production arm is consistently framed as the company's efforts to reaffirm its status as a globally relevant, arthouse-oriented streamer. Cakarel further noted for *ScreenDaily*:

> "If you want to have a meaningful, long-term, sustainable differentiation,
> you have to be producing your own content…There's no reason why we
> could not be doing the next Alfonso Cuaron in a couple of years, instead of

Netflix. Because MUBI is the right home for these kinds of major productions" (Rosser, 2021b, para. 12).

By entering the production field, MUBI symbolically asserts its authority to become a platform that will shape cinema's future. The trade press frames this as a natural extension for the platform to expand from being a streamer to a fully developed cultural and production institution. Other illustrative quotes from Cakarel reaffirm this: "MUBI will be a studio, with its own production, distribution, direct to consumer, and editorial, and more — a modern media company" (Ravindran, 2022, para. 3).

Strategic Differentiation and Competitive Positioning

This sub-category reflects how MUBI strategically differentiates itself from other studios and streamers via its distribution and production operations and how this affects its competitive positioning in the market. Whilst the previous sub-categories focused on how the media frames MUBI's operations to affirm its identity, this sub-category emerged to explain how these practices position MUBI within the competitive film landscape.

The first pattern that emerged within this category is MUBI's deliberate use of data and "industry lore" to differentiate itself from other prominent streamers such as Netflix (Havens, 2013, p. 4). The platform's acquisition of producer Match Factory in 2022 highlights this. *The Hollywood Reporter* states that this sale "pushes MUBI into waters not even traversed by the major streamers, creating a new and potentially extremely viable model in an age where indies are being squeezed out" (Ritman, 2022a, para. 5). As the article explains this acquisition gives the platform early access to major indie productions and the opportunity to collaborate with acclaimed directors, which reaffirms MUBI's curatorial identity and gives the platform significant competitive advantage. MUBI's Chief Content Officer Jason Ropell outlines how MUBI's strategic operations are also motivated by the aim to become a "Netflix alternative" (Kohn, 2023, para. 2). As he states, "Netflix will create or buy a film and it will only be on Netflix…It's the exclusive access to the platform that's their value proposition. Our job is to support films through every facet of the distribution chain" (para. 4). Wayne (2017) calls this the portal-as-brand strategy of Netflix, whereby the platform valorizes its brand through the premise of exclusive content access proliferated by the "liberal use of the label [original]" (p. 735). In contrast, MUBI affirms its tastemaking authority and differentiates from its algorithmic counterparts through its symbolic, art-driven distribution strategies. *The Hollywood Reporter* highlights MUBI's

"broader fixation on singular, director-driven filmmaking", indicating how they position MUBI as a platform that prioritizes artistic patronage and cultural value. Thus, MUBI is framed as a platform that is able to mobilize insider knowledge to align its acquisition strategy with valued industry practices, which gives the platform a competitive advantage.

The second pattern highlights how MUBI strategically and symbolically leverages wider industry economic pressures to position itself as an opportunistic player in the streaming landscape. Jason Ropell commented on the current state of the "dwindling" film market by saying: "Yes, there is downward pressure on budgets because there's downward pressure on revenues" and that MUBI needs to "create an ecosystem where there is more effective way to get these films to audiences so we can pay more" (Kohn, 2023, para. 16). This supports the argument of Wayne and Sienkiewicz (2022), stating that niche platforms are defined by the "degree to which their industrial practices are shaped by limited economic resources and the industrial practices of more powerful industry players" (p. 302). Yet, MUBI is able to leverage the current market conditions to strengthen its positioning and gain a competitive advantage, which was evident during the 2024 Cannes Film Festival. As *IndieWire* reports in 2024 smaller studios such as MUBI, Meteograph Pictures, and Sideshow "established themselves as major buyers" and that the "declining market worked to the benefit of the new kids" (Welk, 2024, para. 1, 4). As the platform explains, the current box office challenges faced by many mainstream studios led them to make more conservative choices. Conversely, studios such as MUBI felt more inclined to take risks to prove themselves as formidable forces in the competitive festival market. MUBI's most successful Cannes 2024 acquisition, *The Substance* (Fargeat, 2022) is described by *Variety* as the company's "splashiest release" and that it "helps establish [it] as a new, innovative and daring speciality distributor in a market where A24 and Neon have previously dominated that space" (Ritman, 2024b, para. 8). Hence, this acquisition marks both a commercial and symbolic success for MUBI to establish itself in the independent film market, previously led by Neon and A24. MUBI is able to demonstrate how, through calculated curation, niche players are able to carve out their own viable cultural space in an already saturated market. MUBI is able to gain a reputation by navigating market limitations with cultural ambition, which increases its institutional and symbolic legitimacy.

Findings from this sub-theme outline how MUBI's distribution and production strategies are framed as simultaneously commercially astute and culturally relevant. By maintaining its art-house identity, MUBI is able to maintain and increase its capital as a

growing studio. Through this, MUBI is able to gain prominence in the competitive and saturated film market. Therefore, the media reiterates how MUBI is able to consolidate its role as a cultural tastemaker both through its institutional and symbolic practices.

5. Conclusion and discussion

This thesis aimed to investigate how MUBI strategically brands itself as a cultural tastemaker through its curated identity and how this affects MUBI's positioning in the wider streaming industry. Hence, this thesis was guided by two main research questions: *"How does MUBI use strategic branding to position itself as a cultural tastemaker in the streaming industry?"* and *"How is MUBI positioned as a cultural tastemaker within industry discourse?"*. Thematic analysis (TA) was employed as the primary qualitative method for this analysis to uncover meaningful patterns across the data. Furthermore, the research was grounded in the media industry studies (MIS) approach, which highlighted the nuanced interplay of institutional practices and symbolic capital accumulation. The analysis revealed three core themes, which will be theoretically summarized in this chapter. This will be followed by a description of the academic relevance and methodological limitations of the research, and lastly, a reflection on the opportunities for future studies that could build on the provided framework.

The first core finding from this research is that MUBI reaffirms its cultural authority and strengthens its brand identity by embedding symbolic value into its curatorial practices. MUBI achieves this by strategically aligning itself with auteurs and regional and thematically diverse cinema, and by valorizing its curatorial logic. This supports Şahin's (2024) argument that MUBI cultivates symbolic capital through associations with artistic merit (p. 396). Across the curated collections and promotional materials, MUBI consistently highlights the authors and geographic origins of films as markers of value, which aligns with Bourdieu's (1984) concept of cultural consecration, which is used to discern artistic merit and promote legitimacy (as cited in Janssen & Verboord, 2015, p. 11). Furthermore, by linguistically reinforcing the legitimacy of their curators, MUBI positions them as cultural critics. By framing their curators as legitimate cultural critics, MUBI creates prerequisites for them to engage in cultural consecration, which aligns with Bourdieu's notion that legitimacy is necessary to make meaningful judgements (as cited in Janssen & Verboord, 2015, p. 11). Hence, these findings show how MUBI positions itself as a cultural tastemaker through reputational, artistic, and cultural alignments, and by reinforcing the expertise and value of its curators. MUBI's curation rhetoric thus serves as both a strategic and symbolic branding apparatus to signal cultural authority and trust.

The findings from the second core theme revealed how MUBI uses deliberate scarcity, emotional tone, and affiliations with hybrid digital and traditional cinephile

practices to brand itself as an arbiter of taste. By framing their films as exclusive and promoting their catalog as intentionally limited, MUBI translates scarcity into a maker of value. This aligns with Frey's (2021) view on how the platform rejects the long tail theory by Anderson (2008) by focusing on the quality of niche content rather than quantity (p. 37). Through this, MUBI translates its curation model into a sign of cultural authority, which strengthens the platform's brand identity. Furthermore, through platform vernaculars and emotional tone, MUBI engages in emotional branding to foster engagement and loyalty with its audience (Akgün et al., 2013, pp. 504-505). By invoking FOMO, promoting discovery, and the artistic value of its films, MUBI creates an emotional and symbolic connection with its audience that reaffirms its tastemaker identity. Lastly, MUBI appeals to cinephile culture by operating at a unique crossroads between traditional and digital cinephile practices, embodying Elsaesser's (2005) concept of "cinephilia: take two" (p. 36). The platform achieves this by affiliating itself with other digital cinephile institutions and creating a shared space for meaningful cultural dialogue through its ancillary features, such as the MUBI Podcast and Notebook publication. Interestingly, MUBI cultivates cultural capital amongst its audiences by making its brand a marker of cultural capital and taste. They achieve this through their branded products (e.g., tote bags), which signal belonging and identification with MUBI's brand (Dane, 2020, p. 3). Taken together, the second core theme demonstrated how MUBI's deliberate branding exceeds symbolic curation to emotional and experiential domains, displaying its continuous efforts to build a strong identity across its communication channels.

Lastly, the third core theme revealed patterns in the framing of MUBI's broader industry positioning by examining trade press publications. Consistently, across these publications, MUBI's expansion was described as an astute market effort to maintain the platform's core artistic values. By utilizing insider industry knowledge to shape its institutional practices, MUBI is able to reinforce its legitimacy whilst expanding its operations, aligning with Haven's (2013) concept of "industry lore" (p. 4). As MUBI is able to balance industry growth with artistic integrity through its acquisitions, global expansions, strategic leadership appointments, and other institutional endeavors, the media framing of these practices affirms them as both economically viable and symbolically legitimate. For example, by partnering with other art institutions such as the Locarno film festival, MUBI gains both industry acclaim and cultivates symbolic capital, which aligns with Frey's (2021) argument that these affiliations help establish MUBI as a trusted educator and tastemaker in

the industry (p. 129). Moreover, this logic is apparent in MUBI's role as a distributor and growing studio, as this evolution further demonstrates how MUBI is able to operate at the unique crossroads between market feasibility and artistic integrity. These findings are highly relevant in understanding MUBI's positioning as an evolving studio and competitive player in the market. By mirroring their curatorial ethos in their production and distribution strategies, MUBI is able to maintain and reaffirm its cultural status as a renowned tastemaker. The dual nature of MUBI's institutional practices is further reinforced by how the streamer differentiates itself from other industry players, such as Netflix, by focusing on productions that are artistically credible rather than just commercially viable. This illustrates how niche platforms operate under market conditions shaped by dominant players, echoing the argument of Wayne and Sienkiewicz (2022, p. 302). Yet, MUBI is able to leverage the current market conditions to its competitive advantage, which was evident during the 2024 Cannes film festival when MUBI gained recognition for acquiring the critically renowned film *The Substance* (Fargeat, 2022). This acquisition helped MUBI stand out amongst both the mainstream buyers and independent studios such as A24 and Neon, cementing MUBI as a growing and astute cultural institution.

The thematic findings provide valuable insights into understanding how MUBI navigates the current streaming economy. The company's recent visibility, prompted by their acquisitions and expansions, signals its transformation into an acknowledged and legitimate cultural institution through practices such as branding, curation, symbolic alignment, and strategic positioning. These findings also demonstrate how MUBI is actively challenging the binary between niche and mainstream, by acting as both a preserver of the arts and a competitive industry player. Even though MUBI presents itself as a niche arthouse platform, its expanding institutional practices reflect the ambitions of major media companies, highlighting its dual nature. What makes MUBI an interesting case study is its transition from operating in a purely digital space, under a platform economy, to operating as a physical studio, expanding into theatrical distribution and production (Kenney & Zysman, 2016, p. 62). Whilst operating in limited conditions set by dominant streamers, through the aforementioned symbolic branding strategies, MUBI managed to carve out its own niche and establish itself in the digital realm (Wayne and Sienkiewicz, 2022, p. 302). This in turn, positively influenced their wider industry expansion, as MUBI's long established curatorial ethos and arthouse identity allowed it to take risks and leverage its business models to gain recognition and strengthen its symbolic positioning.

In an era where film culture is dominated by algorithmic recommenders and ethical debates regarding the use of artificial intelligence in the creative industries, having a distinct and artistically sensitive identity is giving smaller players competitive advantage in a market in which conglomerates are increasingly 'playing it safe' to remain commercially viable (Kohn, 2023, para. 16; Welk, 2024, para. 4). As Smits and Nikdel (2019) write: "In a climate where convenience and excessive choice can breed a culture of apathy, MUBI conversely strives to build a 'house for cinema' where films are nurtured and a sense of pride and passion for the medium is restored" (p. 30). Hence, these findings illustrate how specialized companies such as MUBI instrumentalize cultural legitimacy to operate at a unique intersection between symbolic authority and marketability to expand their businesses and achieve global success. Therefore, whilst it is important to acknowledge how MUBI's practices are influenced by market-driven logic, it is also necessary to understand how its growth reflects current societal tensions in an era of algorithmic monoculture. As personalized recommenders continue to evolve, curation business models may gain a renowned appeal, providing audiences with original, good quality, and meaningful content.

This research contributes to the field of media and culture studies by addressing the critical gap in the literature on curated streaming platforms and actively contributes to global discussions surrounding the streaming industry, branding, and cultural legitimacy. By focusing on MUBI, this thesis offers an analytical framework for understanding how niche and specialised streaming platforms operate and position themselves within the contemporary industry and builds on existing frameworks regarding symbolic valorization to illustrate the complex interplay between symbolic and economic capital accumulation. Moreover, as this research is grounded in the MIS framework, its findings have wide applications for other curated cultural institutions, such as film festivals and museums. It exemplifies how MUBI coalesces symbolic branding with institutional growth by demonstrating the role of micro-level institutional practices in effective brand formation. Findings from the TA highlight the dual reputational and economic role of institutional strategies in gaining cultural legitimacy and global prominence. Furthermore, MUBI's prosperity may be indicative of an industry shift where success is measured by cultural authority, artistic integrity and community rather than by scale and data.

However, this study is not exempt from methodological limitations. A large proportion of the dataset consisted of materials produced by MUBI, meaning that they could provide a highly idealized picture of their brand, potentially introducing bias to the results.

Including more critical and external sources would have balanced the findings, especially by contrasting MUBI with other platforms and examining how its brand image translates into user experience. The data in this thesis had a primarily English-language and Western focus, due to access and language constraints, which limits the generalizability to foreign markets. Considering the qualitative nature of thematic analysis, it is possible that the findings could have been interpreted differently by another researcher. Since the researcher's background involves an interest in arthouse film and cinephile practices, it is important to consider the influence of potential subjectivity on data collection and analysis.

To overcome these limitations, several potential avenues for future research are suggested. Firstly, future research should investigate how audiences perceive MUBI's branding and tastemaker authority by analyzing the comments in MUBI's Community feature and incorporating the framework from Ildır's (2024) audience reception study across multiple populations. Next, future research should conduct comparative studies of MUBI and other streamers, both mainstream and niche, such as Netflix or the Criterion Channel, to get a more balanced understanding of MUBI's practices. Overall, conducting more research on specialized streamers could broaden the understanding of the logic of niche platform economics. Lastly, MUBI's localization practices, such as in the Indian market, require further inquiry. This could lead to a better understanding of how MUBI's branding functions in local markets and how MUBI participates in the global cultural flow of content.

To conclude, this thesis demonstrates how MUBI utilizes strategic curation and branding to position itself as a cultural tastemaker and how its institutional legitimacy is reaffirmed by the broader media industry. It offers a nuanced perspective to understand the dual role of MUBI's institutional practices as both symbolic and economic, underlining how MUBI is able to expand whilst preserving its curatorial ethos, by operating at the intersection of niche and mainstream. Through editorial valorization, fostering affective commitment with its audience, and strategically navigating the current market, MUBI exhibits how curation is not just an aesthetic choice but a viable business model in the current streaming economy.

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Appendix 1
Curated collections

	Title	Link
1.	Outlaws and Misfits: Jim Jarmusch's Cinema of Outsiders	https://mubi.com/en/nl/collections/jim-jarmusch-special
2.	This is Not a Coming Out Story	https://mubi.com/en/nl/collections/this-is-not-coming-out-story
3.	David Lynch: Delusions and dreams	https://mubi.com/en/nl/collections/david-lynch-fr
4.	Everyone's Obscene: Films by Luca Guadagnino	https://mubi.com/en/nl/collections/luca-guadagnino
5.	The New Coven: A Female Horror Renaissance	https://mubi.com/en/nl/collections/new-coven
6.	A Woman's Bite: Female Vampires	https://mubi.com/en/nl/collections/female-vampires
7.	Neo Westerns: A New Frontier	https://mubi.com/en/nl/collections/neo-western-nl
8.	Magnificent Obsessions: The Films of Pedro Almodovar	https://mubi.com/en/nl/collections/almodovar-fr
9.	In Love: The Cinema of Wong Kar Wai	https://mubi.com/en/nl/collections/wkw
10.	Embracing Infamy: Cult Films	https://mubi.com/en/nl/collections/cult-films
11.	Festival Focus: Cannes Film Festival	https://mubi.com/en/nl/collections/cannes-film-festival
12.	Festival Focus: Rotterdam	https://mubi.com/en/nl/collections/festival-focus-rotterdam
13.	Around the World: the International Oscar	https://mubi.com/en/nl/collections/international-oscar
14.	Bon appetit : Culinary Cinema	https://mubi.com/en/nl/collections/cooking
15.	Fantastic Voyage: Three by Rene Laloux	https://mubi.com/en/nl/collections/rene-laloux
16.	Cut to Black: Celebrating Black Cinema	https://mubi.com/en/nl/collections/cut-to-black
17.	Hand-picked by Mati Diop	https://mubi.com/en/nl/collections/handpicked-mati-diop

18.	Social Animals: Greek Weird Wave	https://mubi.com/en/nl/collections/new-greek-cinema
19.	Growing Pains: Coming of Age Films	https://mubi.com/en/nl/collections/coming-of-age
20.	Nouvelle Vague: Where it All Began	https://mubi.com/en/nl/collections/nouvelle-vague-global

Promotional materials - newsletters

	Title	Date received	Quotes
1.	You only have 7 days left to watch ALPHAVILLE	23.04.2025	"Before it's too late…ALPHAVILLE leaves MUBI in 7 days. Catch it now before it's gone."
2.	This week on MUBI: Watch The Dreamers by Bernardo Bertolucci	03.04.2025	"Infatuated with cinema, revolution, and youth, The Dreamers smolders with the sense of possibility that suffused the city of love in 1968. Recently restored, this seductive homage to the French New Wave stars Louis Garrel and Eva Green as the smoking-hot instigators of a tempting ménage à trois."
3.	Revenge, rage and rams.	28.03.2025	"A shifting story of bad blood, repressed rage and revenge – BRING THEM DOWN is Christopher Andrews' thrilling debut, set amidst the looming mountains of rural West Ireland. Starring Barry Keoghan and Christopher Abbott."
4.	This week on MUBI - Yasujirô Ozu: Tatami Tales	27.03.2025	"These four films are among Yasujirô Ozu's greatest, each one a masterpiece in which calm waters belie currents of longing and regret, of hopes and dreams, of compromise and resignation. Here is a cinema of stillness, but one in which a single surface ripple can sound an earthquake."
5.	Films you wanted to watch are leaving MUBI soon	24.03.2025	"Before it's too late…Some of the great films you wanted to watch leave MUBI in 7 days. Catch them now before they're gone"
6.	Shakespeare, but make it GTA	21.02.2025	"It's funny, it's moving, and it's unlike anything you've seen before. GRAND THEFT HAMLET is now streaming exclusively on MUBI."
7.	GRAND THEFT HAMLET is loading…	17.02.2025	"Filmed entirely in Grand Theft Auto, this SXSW-winning documentary turns stolen cars and digital weapons into props for a

			Shakespearean showdown. It's bold, bizarre, and absolutely bonkers. Streaming exclusively February 21."
8.	They'll fall in love with this film	14.02.2025	"If you love someone, gift them a great film. Send them a movie that means something. To you or to them. Show them you know them. Show them you care. Say 'I saw this and thought of you', with some great cinema. Or you could just give them a giant stuffed bear or something. (Don't do that.)"
9.	A film you wanted to watch is now on MUBI	07.02.2025	"Great news. A film you wanted to watch is now showing on MUBI. We hope you like it as much as we do."
10.	Share SWEET BEAN with your friends	02.02.2025	"If you loved SWEET BEAN, share it with somebody. Pick a friend (or a few) and we'll send them an invitation to watch it too. For free."
11.	Festival Focus: Rotterdam | IFFR	30.01.2025	"From January 30 to February 9, Rotterdam will be all about film. The renowned festival brings together special guests, filmmakers and enthusiasts from around the world to celebrate independent cinema in all its forms."
12.	New year, new debuts	04.01.2025	"Let's begin at the beginning. Celebrate the birth of the careers of renowned auteurs, from Luca Guadagnino to Pedro Almodóvar. Featuring a lineup of trailblazing debut features, First Films First is now streaming."
13.	This week on MUBI: Watch First Cow by Kelly Reichardt	02.01.2025	"Kelly Reichardt, an inimitable voice of American cinema, redefines the notion of what a western can be. Set among outcasts on the edge of capitalism's grasp, First Cow is a rare tale of the blossoming of a heartfelt male friendship, and one told with sublime gentleness and touching compassion."
14.	2025: The year you watch everything.	30.12.2024	"We've got a great tip to help your new year resolutions stick: Watch more great cinema. (It really works. Trust us) Planning to travel more? Learning a new instrument? Need more laughs in your life? Great cinema can do all of that, and more. Start exploring right now. Get your Watchlist filled up. And as January starts to drag, we'll be here to keep you going."

15.	You only have 7 days left to watch BELLE DE JOUR	23.12.2024	"Before it's too late…BELLE DE JOUR leaves MUBI in 7 days. Catch it now before it's gone."
16.	Stream THE SUBSTANCE. This Friday.	23.12.2024	"Dear Miss E. Sparkle, Your order will be ready to collect in five days. 35N Byron Alley. Box 503. Take care of yourself. - Friday"
17.	Step into a living painting with Rohrwacher & JR	21.12.2024	"Fresh from its premiere at the Venice Film Festival and directed by celebrated auteur Alice Rohrwacher and renowned artist JR, AN URBAN ALLEGORY follows a ballet dancer's son as he breaks free from a rehearsed life and begins an odyssey of liberation across a wintry Paris."
18.	Newly Added for Students | December	12.12.2024	"Take a break from your classes and delve into this month's recommended ~~reading~~ viewing, a film curated for students by our alumni: First Cow, by Kelly Reichardt."
19.	First look at Notebook Issue 6	07.12.2024	"The upcoming Notebook magazine issue is arriving soon—subscribe now to reserve your copy plus an exclusive surprise before it sells out.

Exploring the different expressions of youth on film, this edition delves into what it means to be young in cinema and how artists reflect on their younger selves. From the inspired "microcinema" of TikTok to the iconic animated series Daria—plus graffiti-inspired stickers designed by visual artist Cuca Berenguer—the issue is full of delightful and unexpected subjects." |
| 20. | Retrospective Recommendations. | 06.12.2024 | "Did your Retrospective surprise you? Have you compared with your friends yet? (It's a great way to figure out who's the coolest.)

We hope you've found it enlightening. But don't stop at enlightenment.

Check out our new MUBI Retrospective: Best of 2024 collection. It's full of this year's most-loved movies. Take a look and make sure you didn't miss anything great." |
| 21. | This week on MUBI: Watch Chungking Express by Wong Kar Wai | 05.12.2024 | "Shot in just 23 days while making Ashes of Time, Wong Kar Wai's international breakthrough remains among the most beloved of his pictures. From Brigitte Lin, iconic in |

			bleached wig and shades to Faye Wong's California dreams, it blushes with reasons to fall for its hurtling, newly restored charms."
22.	Introducing MUBI Editions	04.12.2024	"We're excited to introduce MUBI Editions, our new publishing arm dedicated to cinema and the arts. From books devoted to film culture and republications of rare texts to titles that explore our releases, we will publish across multiple formats and genres, expanding what cinema-related publishing can be."
23.	Happy Birthday, Jean-Luc Godard!	03.12.2024	"Despite passing away two years ago, Jean-Luc Godard continues to endure and influence. On what would have been his birthday, we celebrate the life and work of an inimitable master with a new short film, first presented in Cannes in 2023."
24.	A love letter from Martin Scorsese	26.11.2024	"A moving documentary portrait of visionary writer-directors Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger (The Red Shoes, A Matter of Life and Death), narrated by legendary filmmaker Martin Scorsese."
25.	That one perfect gift.	23.11.2024	"Make your movie-loving-mother-in-law finally love you. Give your ex Timothée Chalamet, as a peace offering. Bond with your boss over Bong Joon Ho. Give them all the worlds best movies. By gifting them MUBI. For 3 months for €39,99. Or a whole year, for only €99,99."
26.	This week on MUBI: Watch Voyage of Time: An IMAX Documentary by Terrence Malick	21.11.2024	"Narrated by Brad Pitt, Terrence Malick's majestic documentary is a symphonic mosaic of ecstatic grandeur and pure visual poetry. This rare, shorter version of Voyage of Time leaps from the dawn of the universe to the age of the dinosaurs and beyond—all in just 46 hypnotic minutes."
27.	Start streaming SELF-PORTRAIT AS A COFFEE-POT	18.10.2024	"Welcome to the extraordinary place where William Kentridge's ideas are formed, sketched out and rehearsed, eventually blossoming into art. Meet his collaborators and alter egos — both real and magically summoned in playful conversation — as they discuss culture, history, politics and the role of the artist today."
28.	A sneak peek into the future…	17.10.2024	"Very soon, a whole new selection of great movies will be arriving on MUBI. And we wanted you to be the first to know.

			Make sure you don't miss any of them, by adding to your watchlist. We'll remind you to watch, once they arrive. It's going to be a great month. Get ready."
29.	Escape into great cinema	09.10.2024	"Quiet evening in? Longing to escape on your commute? Bored at a wedding? Disappear into cinema by downloading our app. Browse trailers to find something that speaks to you, or dive straight into our entire library of films from all around the world. Anytime, anywhere."
30.	Now showing only on MUBI	05.10.2024	"There are lots and lots of great movies on MUBI. Including our own exclusive releases from today's most exciting filmmakers. Everything hand-picked. Nothing like you've ever seen before."
31.	Get lost in A PLACE WITHOUT FEAR	05.10.2024	"Artist, designer and filmmaker Susanne Deeken transforms an abandoned house in Detroit into a haunting dream-world in her latest short film A PLACE WITHOUT FEAR. Through a blend of large-scale paintings, stop-motion animation and digital renderings, Deeken crafts an immersive and surreal exploration of the human psyche. Now streaming exclusively."
32.	What's new on MUBI	01.10.2024	"Our curation team is always on the hunt for undiscovered gems from all around the world. That's why we're constantly adding new films to MUBI and saying farewell to others. To help guide you through what's fresh and what's on its way out, we've created two collections for you to take a look at it."
33.	Refer a friend and get rewarded	27.09.2024	"One of the best things about great cinema is sharing it. Chatting about stories. Debating endings. That feeling when someone loves a film you recommended. So when you invite a friend to join MUBI, they'll get 30 days free — and so will you. And when your first 3 friends become subscribers, we'll send you a free MUBI tote bag."

34.	3 up-and-coming directors you should know	23.09.2024	"Meet the new pioneers of cinema…Browse our collection of hand-picked debut films from the brightest and most exciting emerging directors from all around the world."
35.	Our top 10 films of the week	19.09.2024	"Our most popular films of the week, updated every Friday. Check out all the new entries and discover what the MUBI community is loving right now. And if you spot any films you haven't seen yet, just add them to your watchlist for later. (Or watch them right now, of course.)"
36.	Explore our curated collections	13.09.2024	"From iconic titles full of famous faces, to the best films you've never heard of. Every kind of great film is waiting for you in our carefully curated collections — whatever your taste, we've got you covered."
37.	Welcome to MUBI	02.04.2024	"We'll try to keep this short. You've got films to watch. There are just a few things we wanted to let you know. You've just joined the biggest community of film lovers on earth. Twelve million members, and counting. Hello from all of us. We carefully hand-pick every single film on MUBI. Transformative films from all over the world. From iconic directors and emerging new voices."
38.	Don't miss Masculin Féminin	15.07.2023	"Masculin Féminin is on your watchlist. And it leaves MUBI in 7 days."
39.	MUBI Podcast | Special episode on CLOSE with Lukas Dhont	23.04.2023	"This week we take a break from talking movie music to bring you a special episode with Cannes-winning director Lukas Dhont. He discusses his Oscar-nominated CLOSE with Rico — explaining why he writes like a dancer and revealing what his quiet, tender drama has in common with TITANIC."
40.	MUBI Podcast | A deep dive on iconic needle drops	23.03.2023	"The award-winning MUBI Podcast returns today with its third season – a six episode mixtape for film lovers. Each episode explores an iconic needle drop that permeated pop culture, starting with how Stanley Kubrick paired waltzes and spaceships with his soundtrack for 2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY."
41.	Home is Where the Heart is... Right?	26.02.2023	"From acclaimed filmmaker Azazel Jacobs (Terri) comes this autobiographical story featuring Azazel's father, master of the

			avant-garde, Ken Jacobs. With quiet, thoughtful direction, Momma's Man is a convincing realist comic-drama—a complex portrait of children, parents, New York, and adulthood."
42.	Gilded Passions: Films by Merchant Ivory | QUARTET	25.02.2023	"Starring Isabelle Adjani in a four-way love affair, Merchant-Ivory's impeccable adaptation invokes the sordid glamor of Jean Rhys's eponymous novel. Waltzing through cozy cafés and sexy nightclubs, Quartet dines on the bohemian hedonism of 1920s Paris while exposing the callousness of the idle rich."
43.	In the Mood for Love: Romance on Screen	10.02.2023	"Whether it's the thrill of that first encounter or the depth of a decade-long affair, a true love story is never boring. Our In the Mood For Love season offers some of the best swoon-worthy cinematic romances to warm the coldest of hearts."
44.	Artist in Focus: Emilija Škarnulytė | BURIAL	07.02.2023	"Emilija Škarnulytė continues to tunnel into layers of ecology, geology, and time in this stunningly immersive documentary, studying the world and systems that try to chart and control it. Snaking into various terrains, Burial uncovers the complex, often explosive histories that tremble beneath them."
45.	Festival Focus: Rotterdam | PHANTOM PROJECT	02.02.2023	"The sudden presence of a hand-animated, cardigan-wearing ghost adds a spooky edge to Roberto Doveris's sunny comedy on the beautiful chaos of being in your twenties. Enlivened by a playful mix of the everyday and the fantastic, the travails of a young actor are rendered with both realism and humor."
46.	Festival Focus: Rotterdam | A HUMAN POSITION	30.01.2023	"Pastel surrounds, gentle sighs, the calm contentment of a housecat—on the west coast of Norway, a young woman lives in cozy domesticity. Gradually she is stirred by a curiosity that opens her up to the outside in this elegantly framed, quietly moving film about finding our place in the world."
47.	MUBI Podcast: Charlotte Wells on AFTERSUN	11.01.2023	"Charlotte Wells's acclaimed debut AFTERSUN follows a father and daughter on a summer vacation where much is implied but little is said…unless you listen closely to the soundtrack. In this special episode of the MUBI Podcast, Wells talks with host Rico Gagliano about the needle drops that pepper the film, from Bran Van 3000 to the accidental discovery of a Queen track

			that suddenly spoke volumes."
48.	MUBI Podcast returns with Park Chan-wook	08.12.2022	"In this special episode of the award-winning MUBI Podcast, director Park Chan-wook talks with host Rico Gagliano about the influence of music on his latest film, unveils the musical inspiration for a possible future project, and explains why his action sequences always leave his characters breathless."
49.	What is Love?	24.11.2022	"Based on a novel by Hindi author Dharamvir Bharati, The Seventh Horse of the Sun weaves reality with fiction to create a mystical ode to the art of storytelling. A poignant meditation on romance, class, and the passing of time, this is a subtly layered portrayal of life ethics in 1990s India."
50.	A Jaw-Dropping Animated Fantasia	30.10.2022	"René Laloux's beloved fantasia is a shimmering treasure in the canon of science-fiction cinema. Cosmic landscapes populated by strange, otherworldly creatures—thanks to the distinct cut-out animations of Roland Topor—and set to an ice-cool psychedelic jazz score: The results are out of this world."
51.	World Cinema Project Restorations: DRY SUMMER	29.02.2022	"Metin Erksan's Golden Bear-winning melodrama is the first Turkish film ever to win a top prize at a major festival. An intensely stylized, ravishingly sensual tale of violence and greed, Dry Summer portrays the plodding patterns of rural life, and the raging passions that spring from its midst."
52.	An Experimental Ode to the Lumière Brothers	07.09.2022	"A part of Peter Tscherkassky's CinemaScope trilogy, this experimental short manipulates classically-shot found footage into an explosive cacophony of sound and images. Evoking the origins of cinema, the film also deconstructs the innate artificiality of the medium by playfully tugging at its seams."
53.	Festival Focus: Locarno Film Festival | PUBLIC TOILET AFRICA	09.08.2022	"Evoking the vitality of African New Wave gem Touki Bouki, this pulpy revenge tale marks the bold and visually-arresting debut of Ghanaian filmmaker Kofi Ofosu-Yeboah. A spunky genre mash-up of road movie and gangster film that's alive to the music of Afrobeat and the rhythms of present-day Accra."
54.	Great filmmakers on great cinemas | Listen Now	04.08.2022	"The new season of our award-winning podcast is here, featuring great filmmakers telling stories of cinemas that made movie history.

			Episode 4 explores the rise and fall of London's infamous Scala Cinema, a punk-rock movie palace that beckoned to the UK's Thatcher-era subcultures — from dusk till dawn. Host Rico Gagliano brings the era to life with the help of directors Mary Harron, Peter Strickland, Prano Bailey-Bond, and producer and Scala founder Stephen Woolley."
55.	MUBI Podcast returns with second season	30.06.2022	"Our award-winning podcast returns today with an episode on the Cinémathèque Française, a cinema that sparked two "revolutions" and launched the Nouvelle Vague generation."
56.	A Bitterly Funny Romanian Classic Now Beautifully Restored	19.06.2022	"A riotous Romanian classic, Lucian Pintilie's savage satire conjures the apocalyptic chaos that reigned during the dying days of the Ceauşescu regime. Rendering bitter reality through a surreal, ironic lens, this journey through a nation in flux strives for spiritual meaning amid political darkness."
57.	MUBI Podcast: Mahamat-Saleh Haroun's LINGUI honors women's invisible resistance	05.05.2022	"In this special episode, the Cannes-winning filmmaker discusses his latest film LINGUI, one of the best-reviewed movies of the year and one that is now especially timely. Haroun opens up about real-life inspirations, the collective power of women, and his native Chad's only movie theater."
58.	A Swedish Sexploitation Classic	07.04.2022	"Arthouse meets grindhouse in this sexploitation classic from genre stalwart Gustav Wiklund. Starring Bergman veteran Åke Fridell (The Seventh Seal) and the queen of Swedish erotica Christina Lindberg, Wide Open hops cheekily between drama, comedy, and softcore. A cult object if ever there was one."
59.	MUBI Podcast: Joachim Trier sympathizes with THE WORST PERSON IN THE WORLD	01.04.2022	"In this special episode of the MUBI Podcast, acclaimed filmmaker Joachim Trier tells host Rico Gagliano how and why he made his tender look at messy modern romance, THE WORST PERSON IN THE WORLD. He also reflects on the movies—and movie theaters—that shaped him."
60.	A Cannes-winning Account of a Military Atrocity	29.03.2022	"Winner of the Golden Eye for Best Documentary in Cannes, this harrowing account of a 2009 Israeli massacre in a Palestinian village unfolds with procedural clarity. Told through an evocative series of hand-drawn, animated flashbacks, Samouni Road is a devastating

			"reckoning with military atrocity."
61.	True American Independent Cinema	26.03.2022	"Shot on grainy film stock at the director's family home, Jess+Moss is true American independent cinema, gorgeously shot and sound-scaped to capture the feeling of hazy childhood memories sliding away. A provocative, mesmerizing trip that premiered at Sundance."
62.	MUBI Releases: Peter Tscherkassky's TRAIN AGAIN	02.03.2022	"Set to the relentless industrial rumble of train tracks and film leader, the latest film from the Austrian master of the avant-garde mounts a frenetic, flash-framed tribute to early cinema's love affair with trains. All aboard a phantasmagoric journey into the flickering mechanics of moving images!"
63.	The more of MUBI	26.01.2022	"The MUBI community is made of more than just great movies. Open Notebook. Our publication about everything cinema. Hear the latest news on the newest projects, from filmmakers like Pablo Larraín and Kelly Reichardt. Read coverage of greatest film festivals, from Cannes to Berlin and Rotterdam. Discover the "moviegoing memories" of some of our favorite filmmakers, including Joanna Hogg and Takashi Miike. Plus, our beloved movie poster of the week column. And be sure to follow along on social media to be the first to hear all our latest news. To join lively movie debates. Or just to share your favorite scene from The Big Lebowski."
64.	Cinema everywhere	23.01.2022	"If you're going anywhere at all, bring the MUBI app with you. Watch all our films, anytime. Stream them online, anywhere. Or download to any device. There are also reviews to read, brand new trailers to watch, and more cinema to explore. The best movies in the world. Now available in your pocket."
65.	Welcome. Please activate your account.	20.01.2022	"Welcome to MUBI. A new beautiful, incredible film, every single day. All hand-picked by our curators. Always.

| | | | Explore the work of cinema's greatest directors. Discover modern masterpieces and exclusive releases that you can only see on MUBI.

All that cinema. Just one more click away." |
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Promotional materials - Instagram posts

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Trade press articles

Source	#	Title of the article	Link
Variety	1.	Mubi Buys Majority Stake in European Indie Distributor Cinéart (EXCLUSIVE)	https://variety.com/2024/film/global/mubi-buys-cineart-european-distributor-1235899263/
	2.	MUBI buys Andrea Arnold's Bird at Cannes	https://variety.com/2024/film/global/mubi-buys-us-andrea-arnold-bird-cannes-1236016023/
	3.	MUBI Founder on Evolving Into a Studio, Building Global Cinemas and Outbidding Competitors: 'We Paid an Irrational Amount for 'Decision to Leave	https://variety.com/2022/film/global/mubi-strategy-efe-cakarel-toronto-decision-to-leave-123536941 7/

	4.	'The Substance' Becomes Mubi's Biggest Box Office Success to Date as Company Plants Theatrical Flag in U.S. (EXCLUSIVE)	https://variety.com/2024/film/news/the-substance-mubi-biggest-box-office-us-1236160040/
	5.	Mubi Launching Global Publishing Arm, Sets First Book Release for 2025 (EXCLUSIVE)	https://variety.com/2024/film/global/mubi-publishing-arm-book-editions-1236225946/
	6.	Sofia Coppola's 'Priscilla' Acquired by Mubi for International Distribution	https://variety.com/2023/film/global/sofia-coppola-priscilla-mubi-1235701887/
	7.	Mubi Welcomes Chinese Billionaire Zhang Xin to Board of Directors as Closer Media Invests in 'The Substance' Distributor	https://variety.com/2024/film/global/mubi-zhang-xin-1236238696/
	8.	MUBI, in Cannes With 'Port Authority,' Steps Up Production Activity (EXCLUSIVE)	https://variety.com/2019/film/news/cannes-mubi-port-authority-production-activity-1203214336/
	9.	Mubi Takes Global Streaming Rights to South African Artist William Kentridge Series 'Self-Portrait as a Coffee Pot' (EXCLUSIVE)	https://variety.com/2024/film/global/mubi-streaming-rights-south-african-artist-william-kentridge-series-self-portrait-as-a-coffee-pot-1235944425/
The Hollywood Reporter	10.	Mubi Acquires Paolo Sorrentino's La Grazia Multiple Territories	https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/movies/movie-news/mubi-acquires-paolo-sorrentino-la-grazia-1236148943/
	11.	Why Art House Streamer Mubi Is Bulking Up to Buy Match Factory	https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/business/business-news/why-art-house-streamer-mubi-is-bulking-up-to-buy-match-factory-1235076771/
	12.	Art House Streaming Platform Mubi Buys European Sales Company Match Factory	https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/business/business-news/mubi-buys-match-factory-1235075286/
	13.	Art House Streamer Mubi Outlines India Launch Plans	https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/general-news/mubi-outlines-india-launch-plans-prices-1248646/
	14.	Specialist Streamer Mubi Launches in India, Reveals Pricing	https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/business/business-news/mubi-launches-india-reveals-pricing-1255109/

	15.	Mumbai: Mubi Streaming Service Eyes India Expansion, Local Content Acquisitions	https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/general-news/mubi-expanding-india-1155740/
IndieWire	16.	Why Distributors Like Neon and MUBI Won Cannes	https://www.indiewire.com/video/why-neon-mubi-won-cannes-1235010792/
	17.	How Mubi, Metrograph, and Sideshow Became the Biggest Buyers at Cannes	https://www.indiewire.com/news/business/mubi-metrograph-sideshow-biggest-buyers-cannes-analysis-1235008095/
	18.	MUBI Hires Former IFC Films Chief Arianna Bocco to Handle Global Distribution	https://www.indiewire.com/news/business/mubi-hires-former-ifc-films-chief-arianna-bocco-svp-global-distribution-1235083011/
	19.	Mubi Launches Historic Partnership with Whitney Biennial to Stream Eight Films for Exhibit	https://www.indiewire.com/news/breaking-news/mubi-historic-streaming-partnership-whitney-biennial-1234972109/
	20.	MUBI Wants to Be a Netflix Alternative to Support World Cinema	https://www.indiewire.com/news/general-news/mubi-netflix-alternative-1234897378/
	21.	Mubi Podcast Season 3 Tunes Into the Best Needle Drops in Film History	https://www.indiewire.com/features/general/mubi-podcast-season-3-needle-on-the-record-1234819725/
	22.	Mubi's Library Is the Latest Indie and Classic FIlm Streaming Service	https://www.indiewire.com/features/general/mubi-library-indie-classic-films-streaming-1202233250/
	23.	MUBI Launching Film Podcast Next Week with Debut Episode on Paul Verhoeven	https://www.indiewire.com/features/general/mubi-podcast-host-premiere-date-1234640078/
	24.	MUBI Podcast Announces Seventh Season, with Guests James Cromwell, Roger Deakins, Rebecca Hall, and More	https://www.indiewire.com/news/general-news/mubi-podcast-seventh-season-1235058458/
ScreenDaily	25.	Mubi unveils Mubi Fest to take place in nine cities worldwide (exclusive) | News | Screen	https://www.screendaily.com/news/mubi-unveils-mubi-fest-to-take-place-in-nine-cities-worldwide-exclusive/5194229.article
	26.	Independent VoD players in focus: Mubi | Features | Screen	https://www.screendaily.com/features/independent-vod-players-in-focus-mubi/5161811.article

	27.	Mubi buys hot UK Cannes title 'Aftersun' starring Paul Mescal (exclusive) | News | Screen	https://www.screendaily.com/news/mubi-buys-hot-uk-cannes-title-aftersun-starring-paul-mescal-exclusive/5170946.article
	28.	Mubi appoints former Netflix exec as head of global marketing (exclusive) | News | Screen	https://www.screendaily.com/news/mubi-appoints-former-netflix-exec-as-head-of-global-marketing-exclusive/5158234.article
	29.	Mubi strikes UK-Ireland content deal with Pathé (exclusive) | News | Screen	https://www.screendaily.com/news/mubi-strikes-uk-ireland-content-deal-with-pathe-exclusive/5150678.article
	30.	What's next for curated film platform MUBI? | Features | Screen	https://www.screendaily.com/whats-next-for-curated-film-platform-mubi/5124772.article
	31.	Mubi and Locarno partner on award for debut features | News | Screen	https://www.screendaily.com/news/mubi-and-locarno-partner-on-award-for-debut-features/5195845.article
	32.	Mubi launches UK Cinema Fund to support exhibitors during lockdown (exclusive) | News | Screen	https://www.screendaily.com/news/mubi-launches-uk-cinema-fund-to-support-exhibitors-during-lockdown-exclusive/5149366.article
Deadline	33.	Mubi To Launch Screening Series At Hay Literary Festival	https://deadline.com/2025/03/mubi-hay-festival-screening-series-2025-hot-milk-1236309084/
	34.	Online Movie Service Mubi Receives Backing From India's Times Bridge	https://deadline.com/2018/01/online-movie-service-mubi-receives-backing-from-india-times-bridge-1202245263/
	35.	MUBI Acquires Major Territory Rights To Xavier Dolan's Cannes Drama 'Matthias & Maxime'	https://deadline.com/2020/05/mubi-acquires-major-territory-rights-to-xavier-dolans-cannes-drama-matthias-maxime-1202946395/
	36.	Streamer Mubi Launching Curated Movie-A-Week Cinema Pass, Mubi Go, For U.S. Members Starting In NYC This Month	https://deadline.com/2021/10/mubi-svod-movie-pass-arthouse-passing-netflix-1234858139/
	37.	Mubi U.S. Distribution Chief On NYC Cinema Pass Success, 'Great Freedom' Open – Specialty Box Office	https://deadline.com/2022/03/mubi-movie-go-cinema-pass-great-freedom-specialty-box-office-1234972197/

	38.	Mubi Ramps Up Podcast Focus, Taps Rico Gagliano As Head Of Audio	https://deadline.com/2022/03/mubi-podcast-rico-gagliano-as-head-of-audio-1234974034/
	39.	Mubi Founder Efe Çakarel Talks Strategy Behind 'Decision To Leave' Acquisition – Toronto Industry Talk	https://deadline.com/2022/09/mubi-founder-efe-cakarel-decision-u-s-toronto-1235115901/
	40.	Mubi Hires Michael Lieberman As U.S. Director Of Communications	https://deadline.com/2021/05/mubi-michael-lieberman-director-of-communications-hire-1234762029/

Appendix 2

Thematic map

Selective code	Axial codes		(Example) Open codes
Branding Through Symbolic Valorization	Honoring Auteur Visions		"Lynchian", "One of the great contemporary filmmakers", "And so it begins…From iconic directors and emerging new voices", "From acclaimed filmmaker Azazel Jacobs (Terri)"
	Global Cultural Heritage and Diversity		"queen of Swedish erotica", "A celebration of Black talent in cinema", "A riotous Romanian classic" "this delectable collection embarks on a vibrant culinary tour through global cinema"
	Value of Curation: Editorial Voices and Expertise		"the French filmmaker has curated a trio of dazzling shorts", "All hand-picked by our curators. Always", "Our curation team is always on the hunt for undiscovered gems", "Browse our collection of hand-picked debut films"
Curating an Experience: Emotional Branding and Community Building	Scarcity and Exclusivity		"This week on MUBI…", "Now showing only on MUBI", "streaming exclusively", "MUBI releases: [film]"
	Emotional Engagement and Discovery	Urgency	"Before it's too late", "Catch them now before they're gone"

	Emotional Engagement and Discovery	Aesthetic Value	"A moving documentary portrait", "A shifting story of bad blood, repressed rage and revenge"
	Emotional Engagement and Discovery	Discovery	"From iconic titles full of famous faces, to the best films you've never heard of", "Our curation team is always on the hunt for undiscovered gems from all around the world."
	Emotional Engagement and Discovery	Community	"One of the best things about great cinema is sharing it", "If you loved SWEET BEAN, share it with somebody."
	Celebrating cinephile culture		"this edition delves into what it means to be young in cinema", "And when your first 3 friends become subscribers, we'll send you a free MUBI tote bag.", "The award-winning MUBI Podcast returns today with its third season"
Institutional Positioning in the Streaming Economy	Global Expansion and Strategic Growth	Acquisitions	"The streamer/sales combo gives [MUBI] huge leverage", "further bolstering its global firepower", "aggressive shoppers for arthouse films", "buying hugely well-respected", "The Match Factory has built up a reputation for distinct independent and specialty films"
	Global Expansion and Strategic Growth	Global Market Entries	"As part of the company's global reach", "localization push", "building its own content library and that it will also get into Indian productions at some point", "a new player in specialist film service Mubi"
	Global Expansion and Strategic Growth	Diversification	"helping introduce significant works in international cinema to a wider audience, something that's long been part of the overall MUBI goal.", "wake of other recent MUBI expansions", "global publishing arm dedicated

			to cinema and the arts", "the latest significant step in a period of major growth for the company"
	Global Expansion and Strategic Growth	Partnerships With Art Institutions	"Mubi has officially made history with the iconic Whitney Museum", "the thought-provoking films we champion inspire audiences and spark conversations in dialogue with Hay's rich, culturally diverse programme"
	Global Expansion and Strategic Growth	Strategic Leadership Appointments	"formerly head of publicity at Metrograph", "the latest hire from Mubi", "MUBI is expanding its global theatrical footprint, and it is hiring a seasoned indie film vet to lead the charge", "a new chapter for the rapidly expanding company", "A patron of the arts"
	Positioning MUBI Through Distribution and In-house Production Strategies	Distribution Strategy	"Cannes-premiering", "Cannes competition entry" "Sorrentino has always been a master of cinematic poetry" "costliest acquisitions to date" "radical release strategy"
	Positioning MUBI Through Distribution and In-house Production Strategies	MUBI as an Evolving Studio	"distributor's plans to grow into a studio player" "stepping up film production activity" "Parasite moment""
	Positioning MUBI Through Distribution and In-house Production Strategies	Strategic Differentiation and Competitive Positioning	"one of the more prominent distributors for international cinema", "eye-catching acquisition", "grow the business of arthouse cinema to suit the demands of the streaming era", "the declining market worked to the benefit of the new kids", "art films and originals pose too great a risk for the major studios and tech companies"

Appendix 3

Example coding frame of curated collections

Collection	Open codes	Axial code	Selective code
Outlaws and Misfits: Jim Jarmusch's Cinema of Outsiders	"Jim Jarmusch has crafted a rich cinematic universe of rootless outsiders and fringe figures out of sync with the modern world", "Laconically cool, existentially downbeat, and steeped in a wry, deadpan sense of humor", "His long, languid takes create space to explore gestures", "Jarmusch plucks from the pantheons of punk, new wave, rockabilly, and hip-hop", "Jarmusch's characters are cut off from the world by the barriers of language or loneliness", "Jarmusch continues to mine American subcultures"	Honoring auteur visions	Branding through symbolic valorization
This is Not a Coming Out Story	"beautiful rainbow of queer experience", "defiantly resists facile attempts at categorization", "breaking free from the celluloid closet", "the bold and audacious films in this collection", "vaster emotional terrains and sociopolitical frameworks", "righteous anger, ecstatic euphoria, and camp chaos", "Eclectic in their range of explorations"	Global cultural heritage and diversity	Branding through symbolic valorization
David Lynch: Delusions and dreams	"It's hard to think of another filmmaker as attuned to the avant-garde", "So recognizably singular, yet defiant of categorization", "Lynchian" has become a ubiquitous shorthand for anything that straddles the uncanny perimeters of dream and reality", "without compromising the integrity of his *sui generis* vision", "manifest itself as an eruption of his subconscious", "the alluring nightmares of David Lynch oscillate between beauty and chaos", " ecstatic body of work unlike anything else in modern cinema"	Honoring auteur visions	Branding through symbolic valorization
Everyone's Obscene: Films by Luca Guadagnino	"Luca Guadagnino's cinema dances with gods and monsters", "the prolific auteur",	Honoring auteur visions	Branding through symbolic valorization

	"he calls on the most divine among actors", "slaking his insatiable thirst for cinema", "extracts from it one of his most ravishing pictures of infatuation yet", ""obscene" is certainly the order of the day all across Guadagnino's oeuvre"		
The New Coven: A Female Horror Renaissance	"The rich and varied history of women-directed horror", "a burgeoning wave of woman-directed horror cinema that seeks to reframe and subvert male-prescribed tropes", "A historical corrective when it comes to genre canons is gaining pace", "These are films that seek to reclaim female agency", "Reconsidering horror mythos through a female gaze", "The titles in this collection are among the most innovative and creative horrors of recent years","as thematically bountiful and varied as the genre itself.",	Global cultural heritage and diversity	Branding through symbolic valorization
A Woman's Bite: Female Vampires	"Dangerous, alluring, and above all insatiable", "As the female vampire moves from the horror genre to the realms of comedy or science fiction, she bites back", "leaving her mark as one of the most ferocious archetypes in cinema",	Global cultural heritage and diversity	Branding through symbolic valorization
Neo Westerns: A New Frontier	"A genre as old as cinema itself", "rife with the tension between social order and the immense wilderness", "Galloping toward new anti-colonial and feminist frontiers", "Treating the traditional archetypes of the western hero with ambivalence", "lay bare the cruel subjugation endured by women at the hands of frontier men", "existential satire", "provide alternative portrayals of relationships between men", "exciting revivals of the western"	Global cultural heritage and diversity	Branding through symbolic valorization
Magnificent Obsessions: The Films of Pedro Almodovar	"Scintillating with burning passions, serpentine narratives, dazzling colors, and multi-layered references", "career of master Pedro Almodóvar",	Honoring auteur visions	Branding through symbolic valorization

	"fascination with themes such as sexuality, Spanish identity, motherhood, memory, and resurrection", "his fiery new western", "this collection illustrates his affectionate, loyal, and daring relationship with actors", "The unique world of Pedro Almodóvar is one that triggers"		
In Love: The Cinema of Wong Kar Wai	"Steeped in love, lust, and melancholy", "he films of Wong Kar Wai are a true cinephile's dream", "One of the great contemporary filmmakers", "Wong is a master at capturing the many forms of love and courtship", "Wong's woozy, non-linear visions", "His atmospheric cinematic worlds", "Deeply influential, the innovative director has turned generations onto arthouse cinema", "ravishing recent restorations of his beloved classics"	Honoring auteur visions	Branding through symbolic valorization
Embracing Infamy: Cult Films	"weird, wonderful and irreverent world of the cult film", "cinematic outsiders", "nonconformist allure", "Cult films have little time for the boundaries of decorum or taste, and are invariably defined by their resistance to definition", "These are the genre oddities that clawed their way to the top"	Global cultural heritage and diversity	Branding through symbolic valorization
Festival Focus: Cannes Film Festival	"Evocative of excellence, glamor, and glasses of rosé", "the crème de la crème of world cinema", "celebrate a star-studded slate of the year's finest films"	Global cultural heritage and diversity	Branding through symbolic valorization
Festival Focus: Rotterdam	"A constant vanguard for daring, risk-taking cinema", "presenting hundreds of film premieres from around the world each January"	Global cultural heritage and diversity	Branding through symbolic valorization
Around the World: the International Oscar	"Foreign is, of course, a matter of perspective", "diverse nature of the seventh art", "Their dialogue may be spoken in myriad tongues", "the language of cinema is universal"	Global cultural heritage and diversity	Branding through symbolic valorization

Bon appetit : Culinary Cinema	"food is a powerful expression of cultural identity", "fosters connection between people from all around the world", "An international hit upon release", "a dish that helps foster empathy across three generations", "food is also emblematic of larger social and economic forces" "a lively tableau of Hamburg's colorful multiculturalism."	Global cultural heritage and diversity	Branding through symbolic valorization
Fantastic Voyage: Three by Rene Laloux	"René Laloux's animated marvels have to be seen to be believed", "Vivid and spectacularly strange", "His surreal visions", "A trippy brew of psychedelic imagery set to an acid-laced score", "the visuals are downright delirious", "Laloux masterfully juxtaposes", "Laloux's transnational masterpieces"	Honoring auteur visions	Branding through symbolic valorization
Cut to Black: Celebrating Black Cinema	"A celebration of Black talent in cinema", "the titles in this series bear witness to the incredible wealth of Black artistry" "vibrantly present in an eclectic range of works" "these films powerfully articulate the struggles, resilience, and joy experienced by the Black community" "this selection of distinctive achievements in film"	Global cultural heritage and diversity	Branding through symbolic valorization
Hand-picked by Mati Diop	"the French filmmaker has curated a trio of dazzling shorts", "this is the film's real tour de force", "this cathartic performance acts on our unconscious", "For me, *L'avance* isn't just a debut short film, but also ground zero for a new generation of Afro-descendants", "A scene that particularly touched me"	Value of curation: Editorial voices and expertise	Branding through symbolic valorization
Social Animals: Greek Weird Wave	"a group of writers and directors whose work is characterized by an unsettling deadpan tone", "the absurdities of social structures and cultural traditions", "Yorgos Lanthimos' inventive and moving", "Babis Makridis' stylish portrait of alienation",	Honoring auteur visions	Branding through symbolic valorization

	"Athina Rachel Tsangari's intelligent comedy"		
Growing Pains: Coming of Age Films	"the coming-of-age film is an infinitely malleable genre marked by emotional upheaval", "these invariably character-driven films, in all their permutations", "tales of awakenings brought on by external forces", "stories of resilience and hope, of growing pains and teenage rebellion", "every one of them a testament to the universal truth that growing up never comes easy"	Global cultural heritage and diversity	Branding through symbolic valorization
Nouvelle Vague: Where it All Began	"critics-turned-directors Jean-Luc Godard and François Truffaut" "the young Turks of the Nouvelle Vague boldly took their cameras out into the world to capture and create the reality of an explosive era", "frenzied cinematic invention", "this vibrant creative scene was marked by lively exchange, fruitful collaboration" ,"each of the auteurs of this collection marched to the beat of their own drum, crafting distinctive personal visions", "a vision of youthful rebellion—the allure of which remains unmatched today",	Honoring auteur visions	Branding through symbolic valorization

Appendix 4

Declaration Page: Use of Generative AI Tools in Thesis

Student Information
Name: Staša Milenković
Student ID: 592575
Course Name: Master Thesis CM5000
Supervisor Name: Dr. Michael Wayne
Date: 25.6.2025.

Declaration:

Acknowledgment of Generative AI Tools
I acknowledge that I am aware of the existence and functionality of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools, which are capable of producing content such as text, images, and other creative works autonomously.

GenAI use would include, but not limited to:
- Generated content (e.g., ChatGPT, Quillbot) limited strictly to content that is not assessed (e.g., thesis title).
- ~~Writing improvements, including~~ grammar and spelling corrections (e.g., Grammarly)
- Language translation (e.g., DeepL), without generative AI alterations/improvements.
- Research task assistance (e.g., finding survey scales, qualitative coding verification, debugging code)
- Using GenAI as a search engine tool to find academic articles or books (e.g.,

☒ I declare that I have used generative AI tools, specifically ChatGPT in the process of creating parts or components of my thesis. The purpose of using these tools was to aid in generating content or assisting with specific aspects of thesis work.

Extent of AI Usage
☒ I confirm that while I utilized generative AI tools to aid in content creation, the majority of the intellectual effort, creative input, and decision-making involved in completing the thesis were undertaken by me. I have enclosed the prompts/logging of the GenAI tool use in an appendix.

Ethical and Academic Integrity
☒ I understand the ethical implications and academic integrity concerns related to the use of AI tools in coursework. I assure that the AI-generated content was used responsibly, and any content derived from these tools has been appropriately cited and

☐ I declare that I have NOT used any generative AI tools and that the assignment concerned is my original work.

Signature:
Date of Signature: 25.6.2025.

attributed according to the guidelines provided by the instructor and the course. I have taken necessary steps to distinguish between my original work and the AI-generated contributions. Any direct quotations, paraphrased content, or other forms of AI-generated material have been properly referenced in accordance with academic conventions.

By signing this declaration, I affirm that this declaration is accurate and truthful. I take full responsibility for the integrity of my assignment and am prepared to discuss and explain the role of generative AI tools in my creative process if required by the instructor or the Examination Board. I further affirm that I have used generative AI tools in accordance with ethical standards and academic integrity expectations.

Signature:
Date of Signature: 25.6.2025.

Prompts used:

1. Im doing my thesis on MUBI's strategic positioning in the streaming industry can you suggest alternative names for these theme titles for my thematic analysis - do not lose their meaning just make it more stylistic : Celebrating auteur cinema, Editorial voices and tastemaking, Cultural heritage and global storytelling, Scarcity and exclusivity, Emotional experience and discovery, Connecting to cinephile culture, Global expansion and market positioning, Strategic market moves

2. Can you suggest alternative theme names for the core themes the subthemes fall under: Curation as symbolic valorization, Curation as brand experience, Market positioning through industry discourse

3. Can you explain to me what Bourdieu meant by symbolic capital accumulation? (attached a file referenced in the theoretical background)

4. Based on the research questions "How does MUBI use strategic branding to position itself as a cultural tastemaker in the streaming industry?" and "How is MUBI positioned as a cultural tastemaker within industry discourse?" and my thesis title Curated Cinema: MUBI as a Patron of the Arts suggest a few options for the subtitle for my thesis something along the lines of thematic analysis of MUBI's strategic positioning in the streaming economy through branding and industry discourse