

Design **Brief:**

“Design a hybrid system for Letterboxd that fosters identity-driven behavior, re-enchants cinema-going, enables micro-economies for young creatives, and strengthens the analog-digital relationship—reviving film culture as a lived, participatory act.”

The overall goal is to use the nuanced understanding of an individual’s psychology to consider design features within the broader scope of the Letterboxd experience. Specifically self-perception theory has helped to establish a way of thinking about framework driven behavioural changes and how then to best cater to the ‘cinophile’ for richer in-person activities and the tangible experience of cinema-going. The design also needs to consider how to drive a wider demand for movie-going and peripheral spheres of economic activity that is necessary to bolster an industry for a young creative generation in precarious times.

I see the opportunity for hyper-niche platforms to drive the next wave of digital-analog interaction and unlock economic growth. Letterboxd has the opportunity to innovate in the cinema-space at a time where the experience value has decreased relatively to peripheral areas of entertainment (gaming, social media, content and streaming). Letterboxd could deliver brand value to independently owned cinemas that gives consumers confidence in the financial exchange for a cinema experience. Furthermore the opportunity Letterboxd has to just focus on how to actually consider and design the greatest experience for the hybrid-engagement demands of the modern world, would provide a greater margin of leverage in guiding cinema operations towards a higher standard and more consistent turnover demand without impeding on the esoteric qualities that make each individual experience of that cinema unique.

User Objectives

The design is primarily aimed at the **modern, emotionally-attuned cinephile**—a culturally engaged, intellectually curious individual, between the ages of 17 and 35, who doesn't just watch films but *feels shaped by them*. This person is not defined by a specific profession or background, but rather by their **desire to connect** with film on a deeper, more personal level. They're often students, creatives, or young professionals—people navigating a precarious world where traditional artistic spaces feel either inaccessible or underfunded, and where meaning is increasingly sought in online platforms, personal rituals, and niche communities.

This user is self-aware and hungry for identity formation. They're looking for platforms that **reflect who they are becoming**, not just what they consume. They want to **build a public-facing sense of self** around their film taste, participate in cultural conversations, and discover spaces—both online and real—that give them belonging. They value intimacy, curation, and authenticity over algorithmic convenience. But at the same time, they're overwhelmed by noise and fragmentation—they need **tools that feel emotionally resonant, slow in all the right places, yet frictionless when it counts**.

This user requires a platform that enables **identity expression through action**: logging films, attending screenings, writing reviews, joining events. They want to feel that their participation means something—that it's not just engagement, but cultural contribution. They also need the platform to help them navigate the **hybrid nature of their lives**: watching at home vs. going out, sharing online vs. experiencing something privately, discovering something new vs. rewatching something sacred.

The user needs confidence—confidence in the cinema experience being worth the money, in small theaters being alive and magical, in their own taste being seen and valued. They need access—not just to tickets or listings, but to people, ideas, and inspiration. And they need tools—tools that let them organise, express, connect, and even create micro-opportunities for income or recognition. The design should treat this user not as a customer or a metric, but as an emerging artist, critic, programmer, or cultural curator in their own right.

Psychological Objectives

To successfully integrate psychological principles with design, particularly through the lens of **Self-Perception Theory** (SPT), we need to focus on how users perceive themselves and how their behaviour is influenced by their interactions with the Letterboxd platform. Self-Perception Theory essentially posits that individuals learn about their attitudes, preferences, and identities through their behaviour and experiences. When applied to design, this suggests that Letterboxd's user-interface should subtly reinforce identity and build a sense of self, all while encouraging users to reflect upon and express their individuality. However, other key psychological principles must also be considered to create a balanced, nuanced experience.

Context Description

We are designing for a **dynamic digital platform**—Letterboxd—that serves as both a personal journal and a social network for cinephiles. The context in which this design exists is one that intersects the worlds of **film culture, digital social interaction, and cinema-going experiences**. Our user base includes passionate film lovers, curious outsiders, and those who identify

somewhere between these two personas. We aim to create an experience that reflects the evolving nature of how people interact with **cinema in an age of streaming**, while also **reconnecting** them with the visceral, social, and **tangible** elements of movie-going.

This platform exists in an ecosystem where streaming has dominated, reducing the traditional cinema experience to a more passive one. As a result, the emotional and social engagement that once defined the cinematic experience has shifted. **Letterboxd** has the potential to serve as a **bridge** between the digital and analog, reviving the magic of cinema through **community-driven insights, thoughtful reviews, personalized recommendations, and curated experiences**. Our goal is to provide users with not just a catalog of films but a **rich, interactive, and immersive** journey into the world of film. By doing so, we aim to reintroduce cinema as a **cultural activity** that is not merely passive consumption but an evolving, reflective, and active engagement with media.

The context is further framed by the **growing importance of niche digital platforms** that cater to the needs and interests of increasingly segmented groups, cinephiles, who value **deep, meaningful engagement** with films and film communities. We are working in a time when film experiences must **adapt to hybrid engagement models**. This context demands that the platform seamlessly integrates the digital with the physical world of cinemas, offering tools to not only **consume and share content** but also to **discover and experience films in person** in a way that is financially viable, culturally enriching and fundamentally joyful.

Contextual Requirements

Cultural and Emotional Context

- **Cinephile Community:** The design must speak to the deep emotional connection people have with cinema. This is not just about watching films—it's about identity, nostalgia, and community. Users of Letterboxd are looking for a platform that respects their passion for film while also helping them engage with others who share that passion. It's about being able to drive style, design and shared activities that improve people's lives.
- **Cinema Revival:** Considering the current state of the film industry, with the growing dominance of streaming, the design should cater to supporting independent cinemas and help users rediscover the magic of movie-going. The goal is to make cinema a social and cultural activity again, not just a solitary experience at home. Being able to integrate the Letterboxd API into local cinema's programming can help to bolster the box office lulls between blockbuster driven commodities. By having a clearer picture of the culturally relevant films in the zeitgeist, cinemas can plug into a new generation of cinephiles to create events themed around films of the past.

Technology Context

- **Cross-Platform Consistency:** Your design needs to work seamlessly across mobile, desktop, and potentially an integrated in-person experience (See also AR/VR possibilities here though the focus is the theatrical tangible real world). Letterboxd users will expect an interface that is intuitive and efficient, whether they're planning a movie night on their phone or browsing through films on their laptop. It should feel branded and cohesive, a tool in its own right with custom interactions and symbols so that it can almost operate as its own OS (please read that people spend thousands of dollars on their latest iPhone to use Instagram)
- **Real-Time Integration:** The design must integrate real-time data such as showtimes, cinema locations, reviews, and user-generated content. This requires a flexible back-end system and APIs that work smoothly across different platforms.

Social and Economic Context

- **Social Interaction:** The film industry is inherently social, and Letterboxd's design should reflect that. Features like social recommendations, group movie planning, and event organizing (e.g., film nights or cinema meetups) could be interesting features to explore in the design. The aim is to make the platform a hub for social interaction around film and create peripheral communities from programming like we used to do when the world didn't suck.
- **Supporting Economic Sustainability:** As the design might involve monetisation strategies (e.g., partnerships with cinemas, premium memberships, distribution deals, etc), it's vital to ensure that any economic exchanges feel seamless and beneficial to both users and the industry. Supporting independent cinemas and promoting local screenings can be a key feature in boosting cinema attendance.

User Diversity

- **Varied User Types:** Letterboxd serves a wide spectrum of users, from casual movie-watchers to hardcore cinephiles. The design should cater to both ends of the spectrum by offering features like easy-to-navigate lists and reviews for newcomers, while also providing deeper, more detailed content (e.g., director insights, film essays, video content) for experienced users.
- **Generational Differences:** Different age groups (Millennials, Gen Z) expect different interactions with technology, especially when it comes to social media and recommendations. The design should strike a balance between modern expectations (like personalised recommendations, social engagement) and traditional film-loving values (nostalgia, craftsmanship, history of cinema). By doing so it recognises that the majority of users although young are more likely to appreciate communicated craft and art of Design, the way a film would. Furthermore by adhering to values of craft and cinematic experience in the app itself being able to extend the user base to incorporate older demographics of the film industry could offer a way of bringing the generations together to facilitate meaningful interactions and relationships in a relationship driven industry.

Testing and Iteration

- **Realistic Testing:** Testing should occur in environments that reflect the real-world use cases of the platform, such as movie-goers interacting with cinema showtimes, film fans sharing recommendations, or users exploring new cinema events. User feedback should be collected not only on usability but also on emotional engagement with the platform.
- **Scalable Prototyping:** The design should allow for flexible, iterative testing, especially with features that encourage engagement (e.g., group movie nights, film event organizing). Test prototypes should be functional enough to gather meaningful feedback but also flexible enough to evolve based on user needs and emerging trends in film culture.

Measures of Success

1. Positioning Letterboxd as a Cinema Hub:

The goal is to position **Letterboxd as the central hub** for cinema-going in the same way Airbnb transformed accommodation and Uber transformed transport. **Self-perception theory** comes into play here: by associating users' identity with the cinema experience (i.e., "I am a movie-goer, I am part of the film community"), Letterboxd can drive a sense of **belonging and pride**. As users interact with the platform, they feel they are part of something bigger—a social movement around **in-person cinema experiences**. This will motivate them to integrate cinema-going into their lifestyle and identity.

To achieve this, Letterboxd needs to be more than a listing platform—it needs to be a **community-driven experience**. Think of features like customizable cinema event nights, user-generated film clubs, and the ability to share personalized cinema journeys. By allowing users to

define their own film culture, Letterboxd can create the kind of **organic, hyper-niche communities**. A great example of success from this blueprint is the way Strava and the creation of the Runner-identity and community going activity has also helped to bolster the fitness brands like Hoka or New Balance. These communities build identities around their shared passions, and this will be the foundation of your cinema-driven ecosystem.

2. Building Group-Driven, Analog Experiences:

The idea of creating **in-person, group-driven experiences** to fuel a broader economic sphere is highly relevant in today's post-digital, experience-driven economy. The core of this strategy is making cinema-going feel like a **cultural event** that people will want to attend together in shared third places (LET'S SAVE THE THIRD PLACE PEOPLE). The emotional pull here is **shared experiences** and **connection**. Self-perception theory shows that people are more likely to engage in behaviors that align with their **self-identity** and the groups they belong to. As people start to **associate themselves with cinema-going as a key part of their identity**, they'll naturally invite others to join and reinforce the community.

3. Driving Brand Satisfaction through Self-Perception:

To facilitate **brand loyalty**, Letterboxd needs to create a **self-reinforcing cycle** where users' behaviors enhance their identity as cinema enthusiasts, and in return, their involvement drives them deeper into the platform and its experiences. A satisfaction growth hack that benefits the community, the user and the platform.

4. Facilitating the Peripheral Lifestyle through Cinema:

The idea is for **Letterboxd to provide the tools for users to embrace cinema-going as part of their broader lifestyle**, much like running groups have driven the growth of brands in the fitness space.

The design should include features that seamlessly integrate **cinema culture** into users' everyday lives, such as:

- **Film Night Kits:** Curated collections of films, cinema snack ideas, and themed décor to make a night out at the cinema (or a movie night at home) a complete experience. → This kind of thinking also could be applied to leveraging Letterboxd as an experience driven brand that allows cinemas to create more relevant offerings from partnerships with snacks, to the offerings of merchandise and even down to layout design (LET'S CREATE CINEMA HEAVEN)
- **Cinema Memberships/Subscriptions:** Support local cinema memberships or offer discounts to active users who regularly attend events. (Mubi and A24 already cater offerings of this kind to their audience but Letterboxd could do it at even greater scale by partnering with a collection of distributors - something that A24 and Mubi simply couldn't afford to offer for their own business models)
- **Cinematic Travel Guides:** Offer experiences or curated lists of iconic cinemas around the world. Users who travel could check out bucket-list cinemas, integrating film culture with wanderlust.
- **Social Media Integration:** Users can share their cinema experiences on other platforms, spreading the joy of cinema culture to the wider social media ecosystem. (Though Letterboxd does already have an incredible team that have really captivated the online audience's attention across multiple channels with their intelligent design strategies. Still it's an evolving game so one can never stop, nor never settle).

Conclusion

To turn Letterboxd into the **central tool for cinema culture**, we need to leverage **self-perception theory** to create a design that taps into users' identity as passionate film lovers, facilitates group-driven cinema experiences, and connects cinema to a broader **lifestyle**. By positioning Letterboxd as a cultural hub for cinema, we can create a **dynamic, experiential ecosystem** that drives brand loyalty and fosters sustained growth in the cinema space.

This approach **leverages both digital and analog worlds** by making digital interactions translate into physical experiences. This hybrid model creates **real-world value** and will amplify users' sense of **belonging** in these communities.

I want to envision **Letterboxd as the Strava for cinema enthusiasts**—a hub for film-related identities, social connections, and immersive cinema experiences. By weaving together these digital and physical layers, we can unlock the potential for meaningful engagement and help drive the next wave of economic prosperity for the film industry.

Timeline for build and design

Timeline for Assignment 2: Build & Testing Protocol

March 21st

- **Assignment 1:** Assignment 1 should be completed by this date, allowing for focus on planning and building for Assignment 2.

March 22nd – 28th

- **Start planning/testing ideas:** Begin the planning phase for Assignment 2, including researching and refining ideas based on my design concept. Focus on understanding psychological motivations and my target users.

March 28th – April 4th

- **Research and ideation phase for Assignment 2:** Deepen my research and develop detailed ideas for the design. Focus on mapping out the psychological and experiential aspects based on self-perception theory and user goals.

April 4th – 11th

- **Initial concept sketches/prototype planning:** Begin creating initial sketches of the prototype, considering how to represent my design ideas in a tangible form. Think about interaction flow and how it aligns with user motivations.

April 11th – 18th

- **Start building prototype:** Begin building the prototype. Focus on creating a workable version that feels like it works, even if it isn't fully functional.

Start integrating the experiential aspects, making sure it aligns with the psychological motivations I have identified.

April 18th – 25th

- **Continue building prototype, testing protocol drafting begins:**

Continue to develop the prototype while also starting to draft my testing protocol. Make sure to define how I will control for confounding variables and identify participants.

April 25th – May 2nd

- **Mid-point review and testing protocol revision:** Take stock of my progress. Review the prototype and refine it based on early feedback. Revise my testing protocol to ensure it will gather meaningful feedback. Make any necessary adjustments to the build.

May 2nd – 5th

- **Final prototype testing, writing protocol:** Conduct final testing of your prototype. Gather feedback, analyze it, and make necessary revisions. Continue writing my testing protocol, ensuring it's thorough and well-structured.

May 5th – 9th

- **Final protocol and design revisions:** Finalize prototype and testing protocol. Make sure everything is polished, and that testing plan is aligned with APA formatting guidelines. Prepare for submission.

May 9th

- **Assignment 2 submission deadline:** Submit build and testing protocol.

