In the Mood For a Vibe:

Decoding Vibes in Spotify's Mood-playlists

Student: Tim van Zanten (1997548)

Supervisor: Dr. Anne Helmond

Second Reader: Dr. Gerwin van Schie

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Abstract

This thesis situates itself within broader discussions within media studies. Drawing on insights from scholars such as Prey, Seaver, Beedie and Eriksson et al., it explores Spotify's Mood-playlists by constructing a framework to analyse their 'vibes', shedding light on the socio-technical processes and cultural dynamics and dabbling in debates surrounding cultural production, the influence of algorithms on user autonomy, and the commercialization of affective experiences in the digital marketplace. Through an in-depth analysis of playlist titles, song selection criteria, and personalised variations, leaning on the platform's API and a K-means analysis, the research uncovers how Spotify evokes specific emotional states, contexts and atmospheres and capitalises on certain vibes by intertwining cultural references, algorithmic processes, and user preferences.

Key findings highlight the dynamic nature of playlist construction, influenced by shifting cultural landscapes and emerging trends. However, despite variations in song selection, consistent characteristics shape playlist vibes, raising questions about the algorithmic understanding of user emotions. Overall, the research underscores the significance of playlists as cultural artefacts and their role in shaping user experiences and acting as cultural tastemakers.

1. Introduction

"Playlists are "just a name slapped on a list of songs [...] and at its very core that's what it is".[1]

The music streaming platform Spotify runs mainly on recommending new music to its 574 million users[2] on a fairly personalised level. Through homescreens and algorithmic radio stations tailored to each listener's unique preferences, Spotify guides users through its extensive catalogue.[3] While human curators play a role in manually curating playlists, as noted by the opening quote by Spotify curator Lizzy Szabo describing her job, the main engine driving recommendations is the platform's AI-powered algorithm.[4] How this algorithm works remains largely speculative, given Spotify's limited transparency on the matter.

However, in a post on Spotify's 'Engineering-Blog', which invites readers to "Read about the magic behind the music & more"[5] the platform adopts a mystical framing, a common theme often discussed by scholars. Here Spotify discusses that nearly all recommendations rely on a few core-systems that analyse users' taste profiles.[6] These systems take into account various factors such as recent listening history, top tracks and artists, 'embeddedness' (position in the musical landscape), and interactions within the Spotify app; for instance when and how often a song is skipped,[7] contributing to Spotify's complex musical taxonomy. Spotify tailors recommendations by predicting what users are likely to play next.[8] By utilising multiple machine learning-models, they promise tailored recommendations based on factors like the time of day, playlist purpose, and device. In their words, they cater to niche preferences.[9] They state that the platform offers the promise of

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[1] Stuart Dredge and Stuart Dredge, "Lorem, Pollen and Oyster: How Spotify's Genreless Playlists Are 'Driven by Culture'," Music Ally, May 11, 2023, https://musically.com/2020/09/23/lorem-pollen-and-oyster-spotifys-genreless-playlists-are-driven-by-culture/.
[2] "Spotify MAUs Worldwide 2023 | Statista," Statista, February 5, 2024, https://www.statista.com/statistics/367739/spotify-global-mau/.
[3] Nick Seaver, *Computing taste: Algorithms and the Makers of Music Recommendation* (University of Chicago Press, 2022), 19.
[4] Eriksson et al., *Spotify Teardown: Inside the Black Box of Streaming Music*, 138–60.
[5] Spotify Engineering, "Humans + Machines: A Look Behind the Playlists Powered by Spotify's Algotorial Technology - Spotify Engineering," Spotify Engineering, June 14, 2023, https://engineering.atspotify.com/2023/04/humans-machines-a-look-behind-spotifys-algotorial-playlists/.
[6] Spotify Engineering, "How Spotify Uses ML to Create the Future of Personalization - Spotify Engineering," Spotify Engineering, December 7, 2021, https://engineering.atspotify.com/2021/12/spotify-uses-ml-to-create-the-future-of-personalization/.
[7] Spotify Engineering, "Exclude From Your Taste Profile - Spotify Engineering," Spotify Engineering, October 23, 2023, https://engineering.atspotify.com/2023/10/exclude-from-your-taste-profile/.; Veronika Muchitsch, "'Genrefluid' Spotify Playlists and Mediations of Genre and Identity in Music Streaming," *IASPM@Journal* 13, no. 3 (December 14, 2023): 52, https://doi.org/10.5429/2079-3871(2023)v13i3.5en.
[8] Spotify Engineering, "Reach for the Top: How Spotify Built Shortcuts in Just Six Months - Spotify Engineering," Spotify Engineering, January 27, 2022, https://engineering.atspotify.com/2020/04/reach-for-the-top-how-spotify-built-shortcuts-in-just-six-months/.
[9] Engineering, "How Spotify Uses ML to Create the Future of Personalization - Spotify Engineering."

personalising the "soundtrack to every moment in life" by recommending an extensive, endless musical backdrop, claiming to enhance any activity or emotion.[10]

Here, playlists emerge as the driving force,[11] especially those curated by Spotify themselves.[12] Playlists "Rewrap individual commodities into a bundle under the assumption that the new whole is greater than the sum of its old parts".[13] Yet, according to Maria Eriksson et al., beneath this seemingly innocent service lies a more intricate motive – an attempt to systematise daily life, aligning music categories with targeted activities tailored for advertising clients.[14] This is akin to Robert Prey bringing attention to how everyday life is segmented into various *contexts* which corporations can manipulate for marketing purposes. This highlights how certain contexts, such as "party", "workout", and "chill time", not only align with popular music listening scenarios but also serve as effective marketing segments "for products like Bacardi, Gatorade, and Bose",[15] showing how affect has significant monetary value.[16] According to anthropologist Nick Seaver, this reflects a broader trend in technology toward crafting immersive cultural environments aimed at captivating and retaining users.[17] These "captivating algorithms" (*paragraph 2.1*) wield power in shaping our digital experiences, drawing us into their enchanting embrace with promises of personalised immersion and endless discovery.[18]

With this musical backdrop, Spotify now invites its users to experience algorithmically curated playlists that seamlessly "fit the vibe"[19] for a "particular mood" sharing the "same energy", This is achieved through a variety of channels, including 'For You' playlists, 'Daily Mixes', and another variant known as 'Mood' lists. This 'Mood' collection is one of many on Spotify's homepage (accessible via Search > Search All) alongside other collections such as genres (e.g., Rock), regional descriptors (e.g., Caribbean), temporal themes (e.g., Summer), third-party collaborations (e.g., Netflix), and discovery-focused categories (e.g., Fresh Finds). The "Mood" collection as a whole is

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[10] Eriksson et al., *Spotify Teardown: Inside the Black Box of Streaming Music*. 138–60.
[11] Nick Seaver, *Computing Taste: Algorithms and the Makers of Music Recommendation* (University of Chicago Press, 2022), 49–71.; "The Problem With Muzak | Liz Pelly," The Baffler, December 7, 2017, https://thebaffler.com/salvos/the-problem-with-muzak-pelly.
[12] Eriksson et al., *Spotify Teardown: Inside the Black Box of Streaming Music*. 142.
; "Are Spotify's Vibes the End of Segregated Listening? - News/Research - Berkeley Center for New Media," n.d., https://bcnm.berkeley.edu/news-research/5285/are-spotify-s-vibes-the-end-of-segregated-listening.
[13] Eriksson et al., *Spotify Teardown: Inside the Black Box of Streaming Music*. 140.
[14] Eriksson et al., *Spotify Teardown: Inside the Black Box of Streaming Music*. 143.
[15] Prey, "Nothing Personal: Algorithmic Individuation on Music Streaming Platforms," 1096.
[16] Siles et al., "Genres as Social Affect: Cultivating Moods and Emotions Through Playlists on Spotify," 9.
[17] Seaver, *Computing Taste: Algorithms and the Makers of Music Recommendation*, 2022, 69.
[18] Seaver, *Computing Taste: Algorithms and the Makers of Music Recommendation*, 2022, 49–65.
[19] Spotify, "Match Your Style to Your Tunes With Spotify's 'GetReadyWithMusic' Experience — Spotify," September 22, 2022, https://newsroom.spotify.com/2022-09-22/match-your-style-to-your-tunes-with-spotifys-getreadywithmusic-experience/.

not necessarily shown on the homepage, but rather the individual playlists within, such as the popular 'Jazz In The Background', influenced by various factors.

These so-called Mood-playlists thus convey a "vibe", an ambiguous and contemporary concept often used in online discourse to denote the shared energy or essence of an experience.[20] Spotify considers this a highly relevant way of classification in understanding people's motivations for listening to music.[21] According to them, these playlists strategically reorganise the listening experience around collective behaviours and feelings– rather than *genre/style*[22] - exploiting the link between music choices and personality traits,[23] arranging music by emotional similarity[24] and, as such, making emotional life an important 'object-target' for technologies of surveillance where the personal becomes quantifiable, and the uniqueness of our experiences is distilled into marketable datapoints.

In this thesis I posit that Spotify commodifies user emotional experiences and acts upon cultural shifts by curating content around the emerging mythical concepts of 'Vibes'.

This language of 'the vibe', once exclusive to countercultural circles, has over the last five years become widespread and has been co-opted by capitalism, becoming an unavoidable brand-lingo.[25] Building upon the initial contemporary understanding of 'the vibe', this thesis aims to unveil the mystique surrounding Spotify's Mood-playlists. While previous studies have explored some aspects of this topic, certain gaps persist, particularly concerning the lack of concrete empirical data.

The term 'vibe', originally slang for an aura/feeling, emerged during the 1960s in California, becoming synonymous with hippie culture through cultural references like The Beach Boys' "Good Vibrations",[26] later John Lennon saying it ("You give off bad vibes").[27] After this, other subcultures adopted this language, such as VIBE magazine's focus on Hiphop culture.

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[20] Svilen, "Spotify Vibes: Rethinking How We Enjoy Music - Svilen's Realm - Medium," *Medium*, December 7, 2021, https://medium.com/svilenk/spotifyvibes-455f677eaf14.; "Are Spotify's Vibes the End of Segregated Listening? - News/Research - Berkeley Center for New Media."; James, "No Genre, Just Vibes."; Dredge and Dredge, "Lorem, Pollen and Oyster: How Spotify'S Genreless Playlists Are 'Driven by Culture'"; "Moving in Stereo — Real Life," Real Life, n.d., https://reallifemag.com/moving-in-stereo/.

[21] Spotify Engineering, "The Audio Aura Story: Mystical to Mathematical - Spotify Engineering," Spotify Engineering, January 27, 2022, https://engineering.atspotify.com/2021/12/the-audio-aura-story-mystical-to-mathematical/.; Muchitsch, "'Genrefluid' Spotify Playlists and Mediations of Genre and Identity in Music Streaming."

[22] Eriksson et al., *Spotify Teardown: Inside the Black Box of Streaming Music*. 14, 145

[23] Greenberg et al., "The Song Is You."

[24] Seaver, "Everything Lies in a Space: Cultural Data and Spatial Reality," 44.

[25] James, "No Genre, Just Vibes."

[26] Naaman Zhou, "Vibe Check: What Does the Most Overused Word of Our Era Actually Mean?," *The Guardian*, March 22, 2023, https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2023/mar/22/vibes-definition-slang-language-meaning.

[27] Jann S. Wenner, "Lennon Remembers, Part One," *Rolling Stone*, June 25, 2018, https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-news/lennon-remembers-part-one-186693/.

Early research into the concept of vibe has predominantly focused on live settings, particularly in dance music/rave contexts, with scholars Maria A. G. Witek and Luis-Manuel Garcia leading the way. Their studies define 'the vibe' as an affective tone experienced collectively, influenced by sound and energy, which blurs the lines between individual and collective musical experiences. They argue that the term 'vibe' encompasses both metaphorical and literal meanings related to vibration. Metaphorically, it signifies mood, atmosphere, and shared sentiment, while literally referring to the physicality of sound vibrations that impact bodily sensations and emotional states.[28] More recently, critical scholar Peli Grietzer extends this understanding by classifying the classical notion of *style*/*aesthetic* (*2.2)* as a "vibe", while media scholar Ignacio Siles characterises curation around 'vibes' as "affective genres" in the context of music platforms,[29] further emphasising the significance of emotions and atmospheres in shaping digital music experiences.

Simultaneously, in the late 2010s, "vibes" became integrated into our language through the influence of social media/platform culture.[30] 'Vibe' is now often used metaphorically to denote atmosphere, collective feeling, and personal disposition, but can still be conceptualised in Witek and Garcia's words as a non-anthropocentric force, where subjectivity is not solely shared among individuals but is also diffused across a broader, partially non-human entity.[31]

In both popular discourse and academic circles, the concept of 'vibes' carries different connotations. While mainstream portrayals tend to simplify it as shared emotional resonance or atmosphere tied to specific moments, activities, or moods, scholars explore its complexities, delving into affective experiences, cultural resonance, and algorithmic mediation. While popular media and online discussions often use 'vibe' to describe intangible qualities of experiences or environments, its academic interpretation remains somewhat elusive. The consensus among journalistic sources is that people don't approach music with strict logic. As one article puts it, "When I think of Bohemian Rhapsody, I don't think 70's British Rock & Roll - I think of how it makes me feel, and those feelings and emotional states that influence our music selection are known as vibes".[32]

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[28] Maria a. G. Witek, "Feeling at One: Socio-affective Distribution, Vibe, and Dance-music Consciousness," in *Oxford University Press eBooks*, 2019, 3, https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198804352.003.0006.
; Luis-Manuel Garcia, "Feeling the Vibe: Sound, Vibration, and Affective Attunement in Electronic Dance Music Scenes," *Ethnomusicology Forum* 29, no. 1 (January 2, 2020): 27, https://doi.org/10.1080/17411912.2020.1733434.
[29] Ignacio Siles et al., "Genres as Social Affect: Cultivating Moods and Emotions Through Playlists on Spotify," *Social Media + Society* 5, no. 2 (April 1, 2019): 4, https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305119847514.
[30] "Vibe, Mood, Energy."; James, "No Genre, Just Vibes."
[31]Witek, "Feeling at One: Socio-Affective Distribution, Vibe, and Dance-Music Consciousness.", 3
Garcia, "Feeling the Vibe: Sound, Vibration, and Affective Attunement in Electronic Dance Music Scenes." 27.
[32] Svilen, "Spotify Vibes: Rethinking How We Enjoy Music - Svilen's Realm - Medium," *Medium*, December 7, 2021, https://medium.com/svilenk/spotifyvibes-455f677eaf14.

Attempting to bridge the gap between scientific interpretation and contemporary perceptions of 'vibes' is independent media scholar Robin James. James conducts in-depth research on the concept via her blog. She posits that within the sphere of online culture, its users have adopted a new language reminiscent of the mystical and occult. Exploring the widespread appeal of these quasi-mystical terms, she characterises vibes as "projecting visions of cosmic sympathies onto the blackboxes that organise and govern so much of contemporary life".[33] She argues music platforms position vibes as a sort of post-identity way of listening to music.[34] She suggests 'vibes' play a practical role in our solitary interaction with these blackboxes and their algorithms. Individuals deal with their powerlessness by calling upon these vague mystical contemporary words such as *vibes*, *moods*, and *same energies* (among others, such as 'core', 'it's giving', etc.). This imaginative reinterpretation transforms the technologies of surveillance and the impersonal logic of algorithms into something more profound and universally meaningful, like a vernacularization of our collective perception towards algorithms and blackboxes, inherently abstract and contextual.[35]

James further describes the vibe as the essence of an experience. For instance, imagine you're on a picnic, capturing the rustling leaves, spread blanket, and friends enjoying food. One collects these 'datapoints' and titles this collection "Picnic Vibes", summarising the sunny atmosphere, connection with nature, and shared enjoyment.[36] This *suggests* a more progressive and inclusive approach to categorization and experiencing something, rooted in behavioural patterns, actions, and shared experiences, recognizing that user preferences constantly change.[37] This offers an experience seemingly anyone can relate to.

However, recent research[38] reveals that this assumption doesn't always hold, exemplified by the popular 'genreless' playlist, 'Pollen', which aims for fluidity and inclusivity and is mostly composed of emerging Hiphop artists. The name itself already carries a gendered connotation, as only male plants produce pollen. In contrast, Pollen's counterpart, 'Oyster', currently spotlights lesbian pop-idol *Girl in Red* (App. 1) and features quieter, mostly indie-pop music, with a name that also

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[33] "Philosophy and Vibes with Robin James."
[34] Robin James, "Is The Post- in Post-identity the Post- in Post-genre?," *Popular Music* 36, no. 1 (December 13, 2016): 21–32, https://doi.org/10.1017/s0261143016000647.
[35] "Philosophy and Vibes With Robin James." 15.58.
[36] "Philosophy and Vibes with Robin James," Sound Expertise, June 30, 2023, 19.21, https://soundexpertise.org/philosophy-and-vibes-with-robin-james/.
[37] Prey, "Nothing Personal: Algorithmic Individuation on Music Streaming Platforms," 1089.
[38] Dredge and Dredge, "Lorem, Pollen and Oyster: How Spotify's Genreless Playlists Are 'Driven by Culture'"; "Are Spotify's Vibes the End of Segregated Listening? - News/Research - Berkeley Center for New Media." James, "No Genre, Just Vibes."

evokes some strong connotations in this context. While this aspect isn't central to this thesis, it's worth noting researching this could offer valuable insights in future studies.

Although I agree with most of James' observations, she relies heavily on assumptions rather than concrete data. In one of her works, she states that "all these songs share a common feel or sonic profile, lacking extremes, and feature understated or nonexistent percussion and bass".[39] Consequently, incorporating data to support her claims would enhance the depth of her research. This is what this thesis aims to do.

As music streaming platforms shape our music experiences, this form of classification based on emotions/feelings with playlists such as: 'pov: ur in an 80s film driving at night' and 'Liminal' calls for a reconsideration of how music is presented to the listener. Authors caution against viewing algorithms as mere blackboxes and urge for a deeper investigation into their inner workings.[40] This thesis delves into examining the socio-cultural and economic processes at play and it will shed light on the mechanisms through which 'vibes' are constructed and commodified within this digital music ecosystem. While Eriksson et al. conducted a study into Spotify's blackbox – challenging the opacity of these systems - their unconventional methods faced legal challenges from Spotify.[41] So, while I cannot employ their exact approach, I draw inspiration from their work, adopting a reverse engineering approach in this thesis.

I will argue, as the Spotify machinery gears more towards the provision of playlists that evoke intimate moods, that the service becomes (financially) dependent on users' willingness to disclose their feelings by selecting a playlist that suits them. Identifying this language as a mystical framing and language drawing upon contemporary concepts like *moods* and *vibes*, I argue the platform obscures the exact playlist curation mechanics, with which they seem to deliberately create a kind of blackbox for its users. This vagueness allows Spotify to maintain an illusion of magic and its output as universally meaningful while subtly shaping users' emotional experiences and consumption patterns. This thesis illuminates and unravels this phenomenon, shedding light on the underlying processes at play.

Using data collection I focused on gathering empirical evidence from Spotify's Mood-playlists to elucidate the platform's conception and operationalization of vibes. This

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[39] James, "No Genre, Just Vibes."
[40] Rob Kitchin, "Thinking critically about and researching algorithms," *Social Science Research Network*, January 1, 2014, https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2515786.; Richard Rogers, *Digital Methods*, *The MIT Press eBooks*, 2013, https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/8718.001.0001.
[41] Eriksson et al., *Spotify Teardown: Inside the Black Box of Streaming Music*. 12.

underscores the broader issue of corporate influence in shaping how we consume media and how we perceive and engage with different contexts in our daily lives. In this thesis, I will work with the following sub-questions:

Subquestion 1: Spotify's Discursive Construction of Vibes

How Does Spotify Discursively Define the Vibe?

In this chapter, I analyse how the platform discursively constructs vibes through its Mood-playlists, reflecting socio-cultural and economic influences. By examining how Spotify's playlists encapsulate specific atmospheres or shared experiences, I reveal the platform's role in shaping media consumption and user interactions. This investigation underscores the importance of understanding Spotify's influence on cultural trends and emotional connection.

Subquestion 2: Dissecting Spotify's Vibes

How can Spotify playlist elements and mood metadata be quantitatively analysed to reveal patterns and understand the construction of vibes on the platform?

Through quantitative analysis of playlist elements and metadata, this subquestion reveals patterns in the construction of vibes on the platform by dissecting and plotting the components such as tempo, mood, and valence of the songs making up these playlists.

Subquestion 3: *Your* Vibe

How personal are vibes within Spotify's platform?

Spotify's playlists are tailored to suit individual tastes and behaviours, evident in the "Made for" label on many playlists. By investigating the extent of personalization in Mood-playlists among 15 participants, the analysis explores how Spotify tailors playlists to suit individual tastes and behaviors, shedding light on the common and varying factors shaping these vibes.

2. Theoretical Framework

This section delineates a structured framework aimed at thoroughly investigating Spotify's Mood-playlists. It begins by contextualizing earlier scholarly works within the discourse surrounding digital music platforms, particularly focusing on conventional methods of categorization such as *genre/style*. Subsequently, the framework delves into the concept of 'moods', and the role of emotions, serving as a transition towards understanding how Spotify deploys 'vibes'.

The framework not only elucidates their significance but also underscores the interconnectedness among them. This approach lays the groundwork for a detailed examination of the intricate interplay between user emotions, algorithmic curation, and the digital environments cultivated by such platforms.

2.1 Recommendation and The Blackbox

Initially rooted in a search-based interface, Spotify's transition to recommendation-driven navigation reflects its goal of offering users personalised content aligned with their preferences and emotional states. Nonetheless, scholars such as Rob Kitchin and Allen Roger warn against perceiving algorithms solely as incomprehensible blackboxes, emphasising the need to understand their inner workings to maintain accountability and transparency. They advocate for analysing algorithmic systems within their socio-technical contexts to address these challenges effectively.[42]

Seaver further emphasises the significance of understanding these algorithmic systems that shape our digital experiences as "complex socio-technical systems".[43] Despite their pervasive influence, the inner workings of these systems often remain concealed, leaving users unaware of how recommendations are generated. He describes the music space as multifarious, a technical and abstract domain organised mathematically and derived from data, yet also part of a cultural imaginary linking proximity to similarity, relying on a shared intuition of how the natural world is organised.[44] Eriksson et al. add to this by characterising these systems as "[algorithms] made invisible by their own success".[45]

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[42] Rob Kitchin, "Thinking critically about and researching algorithms," *Social Science Research Network*, January 1, 2014, https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2515786.; Richard Rogers, *Digital Methods*, *The MIT Press eBooks*, 2013, https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/8718.001.0001.
[43] Nick Seaver, "Seeing Like an Infrastructure: Avidity and Difference in Algorithmic Recommendation," *Cultural Studies* 35, no. 4–5 (March 26, 2021): 771, https://doi.org/10.1080/09502386.2021.1895248.
[44] Seaver, *Computing Taste: Algorithms and the Makers of Music Recommendation*, 2022, 139.
[45] Eriksson et al., *Spotify Teardown: Inside the Black Box of Streaming Music*, 16.

Analysing algorithmic curation exposes underlying mechanisms, shedding light on potential biases and ethical challenges, and aiding in creating more transparent and equitable digital environments. Media scholar Robert Prey emphasises the construction of individuals through their data, highlighting the gap between the subject and the data subject in digital identity formation. He furthermore discusses how music platforms conceptualise the individual music listener differently and how they utilise data analytics to tailor content to users' tastes and preferences. Thus, algorithmic culture reduces decisions on taste to a few factors defining what is good and for whom, constructing social groups and cultural value in the process,[46] making it so users' musical identities on music-platforms are in constant flux. These platforms don't just stream music; they reflect the evolution of the listener. Context-based recommendation systems tailor content to users' current contexts, perceiving individuals as part of an ongoing process of individuation. This means that users' musical identities on Spotify are ever-changing, recognizing individuals as part of an ongoing development process rather than fixed entities. This dynamic approach acknowledges the fluidity of personal tastes and emphasises the role of context in shaping musical experiences. Subsequently, by considering users within the broader collective of listeners, these platforms highlight the influence of shared cultural contexts on individual preferences.[47]

As stated in the introduction, James posits that reinterpreting vibes as a collective, meaningful effort can elevate surveillance technologies and algorithmic logic to a deeper, more universally meaningful level.[48] This notion aligns with Ignacio Siles et al., who, drawing from theories by Berlant, define "intimate publics" as users' emotional attachments to digital discourses on platforms like Spotify. Together with "blackboxes", these concepts offer insight into how digital platforms influence user behaviour and perceptions, with intimate publics focusing on emotional and cultural dimensions, and blackboxes revealing the technical and hidden nature of algorithmic operations.[49]

Relating to this, Prey states that "On these platforms, there are no individuals, but only ways of seeing people as individuals",[50] suggesting that contemporary online platforms, particularly online music streaming services, do not perceive individuals as unique entities but rather as manifestations of certain categories or profiles defined by the platform's algorithms and commercial imperatives. Users are not seen as distinct individuals with unique tastes and preferences, but rather as part of predefined groups or segments based on their behaviour, consumption patterns, and demographic information.

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[46] Prey, "Nothing Personal: Algorithmic Individuation on Music Streaming Platforms," 1096.
[47] Prey, "Nothing Personal: Algorithmic Individuation on Music Streaming Platforms," 1096.
[48] James, "Is The Post- in Post-Identity the Post- in Post-Genre?"; James, "No Genre, Just Vibes."
[49] Siles et al., "Genres as Social Affect: Cultivating Moods and Emotions Through Playlists on Spotify," 9.
[50] Prey, "Nothing Personal: Algorithmic Individuation on Music Streaming Platforms," 1089.

Exploring Spotify's history reveals that the strategic decision to categorise audiences based on their moods aimed to enhance the platform's advertising business. By employing trap-like algorithms and segmenting days into various 'contexts', the platform can more effectively cater to advertisers. Presently, Spotify's vast access to mood-based user data stands as its most lucrative offering to brands and advertisers. This data empowers advertisers to precisely target ads inside and outside of the platform.[51] As demonstrated by Seaver, Spotify's strategic placement of playlists during relevant moments serves to captivate rather than merely engage users. This approach reflects a shift in the purpose of algorithmic recommendations on streaming platforms, from entertainment to user retention, indicative of a broader trend in technology towards crafting immersive cultural environments to keep users engaged. Aligned with Spotify's commitment to providing a musical wallpaper and an extensive, endless soundtrack, its algorithms operate within this framework.[52]

Moving forward, exploring Spotify's shift from genre-centric categorizations to nuanced emotional influences on music consumption sets the stage for understanding the concept of "vibe" and its role in shaping user interactions with digital music platforms.

2.2 Genre, Emotion, and Mood

Spotify's evolution from launching as a P2P network in 2006, initially seen as *the* solution to illegal music listening, but without a clear focus[53] to a recommendation-centric business model, progressed through several stages.

Initially, Spotify's classification and recommendation system revolved primarily around styles and genres. In this earlier traditional *genre/style* framework, individuals were confined into fixed "identities" e.g. gender, appearance or socio-economic background, predetermined at birth.[54] Despite some flexibility within this framework, conventional perceptions of music-genres often reinforce rigid stereotypes: Rock for men, Pop for women, Hiphop for African-Americans. While the platform nowadays prioritises curation based on emotions, these traditional notions continue to hold significance on the platform. While Spotify assigns genres only to artists (not songs), resulting in roughly 6000 genres on the platform,[55] it employs various categorization logics, dividing *genres* into different *styles*. *Genres* include umbrella-terms and subgenres like "Hiphop" and its variations ("Gangstarap"). Additionally, Spotify categorises music into *styles* based on factors like temporal

[51] Eriksson et al., *Spotify Teardown: Inside the Black Box of Streaming Music*, 13.
[52] Seaver, *Computing Taste: Algorithms and the Makers of Music Recommendation*, 2022, 49–65.
[53] Eriksson et al., *Spotify Teardown: Inside the Black Box of Streaming Music*, 17.
[54] James, "Is The Post- in Post-Identity the Post- in Post-Genre?", 22.
[55] "Everynoiseatonce," Everynoiseatonce, accessed February 20, 2024, https://everynoise.com/.

elements (“Retro-metal”), regional descriptors (“Oeteldonk”), moods (“Chillsynth”), activities (“Nightrun”), social identities (“LGBTQ+ Hiphop”), or more obscure factors (“Vaportwitch”). Users primarily encounter these genres through curated playlists on their homepage (e.g. “Rock-Party”).

One significant turning point in Spotify’s operation emerged in 2012 with the acquisition of Echo Nest, a company specialising in music analysis algorithms.[56] These algorithms empowered Spotify to move beyond traditional categorizations like ‘genres’ and ‘styles’. Unlike genres and styles, which categorise music based on shared aesthetic attributes, Spotify’s algorithms, as described by Seaver and Prey’s aforementioned research,[57] conceptualise data and evaluate song alignments. Spotify does this by breaking down songs into data points such as pitch, tempo, and note transitions, averaging around 2000 events per song.[58]

Concurrently, studies like that conducted by David M. Greenberg et al. highlight the (un)subjectivity of musical experiences, revealing correlations between certain musical attributes and diverse personality traits, such as age and education.[59] Consequently, Spotify integrated many insights from this study into their platform. This leads to factors such as instruments, lyrical content, vocal presence, vocalist gender, and geographical region being considered during (algorithmic) curation. The platform’s algorithm then curates playlists with songs sharing similar alignment or “energies”, enriching the user experience with tailored recommendations.[60] Quoting journalist Liz Pelly: “These playlists have spawned a new type of music listener, one who thinks less about the artist or album they are seeking out, and instead connects with emotions, moods and activities”.[61]

This shift towards mood-based curation is further supported by research into the nature of *moods* and *emotions*. As noted by Philippe Verduyn and Chris Beedie et al., the nuanced understanding of moods as enduring emotional states, distinct from transient emotions, illuminates how a platform such as Spotify curates playlists to resonate with listeners’ prolonged emotional experiences.[62] While *emotions* typically arise suddenly and have a clear cause (e.g., happy), and have

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[56] Echo Nest, “The Echo Nest Joins Spotify!,” *Blog.Echonest*, March 6, 2014, accessed October 23, 2023, https://blog.echonest.com/post/78749300941/the-echo-nest-joins-spotify.
[57] Prey, “Nothing Personal: Algorithmic Individuation on Music Streaming Platforms,”; Seaver, *Computing Taste: Algorithms and the Makers of Music Recommendation*, 2022.
[58] Prey, “Nothing Personal: Algorithmic Individuation on Music Streaming Platforms,” 1090–91.
[59] David M. Greenberg et al., “The Song Is You,” *Social Psychological and Personality Science* 7, no. 6 (June 23, 2016): 1–3, https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550616641473.
[60] Seaver, *Computing Taste: Algorithms and the Makers of Music Recommendation*, 2022.
[61] Bergman, “Big Mood Machine | Liz Pelly.”
[62] Chris Beedie, Peter C. Terry, and Andrew M. Lane, “Distinctions Between Emotion and Mood,” *Cognition & Emotion* 19, no. 6 (September 1, 2005): 864, https://doi.org/10.1080/02699930541000057.

a high intensity but short-lived duration,[63] *moods* on the other hand, tend to linger for longer periods but lack the intensity associated with emotions (e.g., romantic).[64] Consequently, Paul Allen Anderson describes *moods* as a "coloured lens through which we see and judge the world".[65] In this view, *moods* are not just musical classifications; they represent affective states that can influence the *style* or *genre* of creative works. For example, the emotional intensity conveyed in a piece of music may align with the *mood* of a particular genre, such as the melancholy tones in blues music or the uplifting melodies associated with pop-songs.

According to Eriksson et al., music streaming platforms like Spotify now have unprecedented access to our emotional states and moods; the company acts, in other words, not only as a music provider but as a private data broker.[66] Spotify redefines music consumption around behaviours and feelings. It is no longer just about music; it is about the act of listening itself.[67] Users and their moods have become the core business, transforming their listening habits into valuable behavioural data.[68] Prey adds to this by arguing that music now acts as a tracking device for Spotify, enabling the platform to categorise users based on their preferences. Advertisers then reflect this data in targeted ads to users;[69] "Spotify knows what you listened to and what it meant to you".[70] While users manage their moods as assets, Spotify monetizes these for marketeers.[71]

2.3 How Does Spotify Come Up with These Playlists?

According to a 2023 blogpost by Spotify,[72] the Mood-playlists are curated by (human) editors who begin by identifying specific collective user needs, such as a 'road trip playlist'. Once the user's needs are defined, the editor crafts a content hypothesis tailored to meet that need, like selecting familiar songs to sing along to. The process of playlist curation begins with the editor collecting tracks deemed suitable for inclusion and adding them to what Spotify refers to as a "pool". This pool reflects the

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[63] Philippe Verduyn, "Emotion Duration," in *Springer eBooks*, 2021, 5, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-82965-0_1.
[64] Chris Beedie, Peter C. Terry, and Andrew M. Lane, "Distinctions Between Emotion and Mood," *Cognition & Emotion* 19, no. 6 (September 1, 2005): 864, https://doi.org/10.1080/02699930541000057.
[65] Paul Allen Anderson, "Neo-Muzak and the Business of Mood," *Critical Inquiry* 41, no. 4 (June 1, 2015): 813–16, https://doi.org/10.1086/681787.
[66] Eriksson et al., *Spotify Teardown: Inside the Black Box of Streaming Music*. 13.
[67] Jess Bergman, "Big Mood Machine | Liz Pelly," The Baffler, June 10, 2019, https://thebaffler.com/downstream/big-mood-machine-pelly.
[68] William Flesch, "Ambient Meaning: Mood, Vibe, System," September 8, 2017, http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:39988028.
[69] Prey, "Nothing Personal: Algorithmic Individuation on Music Streaming Platforms," 1094.
[70] Eriksson et al., *Spotify Teardown: Inside the Black Box of Streaming Music*, 14.
[71] Flesch, "Ambient Meaning: Mood, Vibe, System."
[72] Engineering, "Humans + Machines: A Look Behind the Playlists Powered by Spotify's Algotorial Technology - Spotify Engineering."

editor's expertise, combining musical and cultural knowledge with algorithmic processes to identify the most relevant songs (Fig. 5). They focus on selecting potential candidates rather than finalising the exact order and contents of the playlist, allowing them to accommodate a broad range of tastes beyond the most obvious hits. Songs are selected based on the aforementioned values such as 'Popularity', 'Danceability', etc. Following this, algorithms analyse user preferences and behaviours to determine the suitable tracks and their order for each user.

This evolving dynamic in song selection and arrangement frames user listening behavior as a collective process, emphasizing each user's role as a potential tastemaker rather than reducing the process to mere computational algorithms.[73] Presenting vibes as a collective experience, Spotify prompts users to perceive playlist recommendations as authentic expressions of collective effort, instead of algorithmic output from a tech giant. Therefore, audiences on these platforms are commonly labelled as 'users'/'producers'. Their sharing of detailed consumer data through online engagement enables precise targeting and customization of content[74] for them and their peers. The individual music listener is recognized to have multiple music identities, which fluctuate based on factors such as current activity, time of day, and so on.[75] As highlighted by Astrid Mager and Christian Katzenbach, tech companies have embraced these notions to promote visions of new socio-economic orders aligning with their business interests and products.[76] Quoting playlist-curator Szabo again: "It's still humans who are doing the song selection and arranging, but instead of outside experts, it's users like you and me".[77] Consequently, Muchitsch argues the platforms' music curation has taken on an algotorial nature, seamlessly integrating automated algorithmic processes with human curatorial inputs.[78] In this context, vibes make it so that recommender systems transcend their conventional role as user assistance tools and now function as epistemic interfaces,[79] offering developers valuable insights into the preferences and behaviours of their audience.[80]

These core concepts form the theoretical framework for the thesis. Having outlined this theoretical framework, the next chapter discusses their operationalization to the method.

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[73] Eriksson et al., *Spotify Teardown: Inside the Black Box of Streaming Music*. 159.
[74] Prey, "Nothing Personal: Algorithmic Individuation on Music Streaming Platforms," 1087.
[75] Alex Heath, "Spotify Has a Secret 'taste Profile' on Everyone, and They Showed Me Mine," *Business Insider*, September 14, 2015, https://www.businessinsider.com/how-spotify-taste-profiles-work-2015-9?international=true&r=US&IR=T.
[76] Astrid Mager and Christian Katzenbach, "Future Imaginaries in the Making and Governing of Digital Technology: Multiple, Contested, Commodified," *New Media & Society* 23, no. 2 (February 1, 2021): 227, https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444820929321.
[77] Eriksson et al., *Spotify Teardown: Inside the Black Box of Streaming Music*. 152.
[78] Muchitsch, "'Genrefluid' Spotify Playlists and Mediations of Genre and Identity in Music Streaming." 52.
[79] Seaver, *Computing Taste: Algorithms and the Makers of Music Recommendation*, 2022.56.
[80] Seaver, "Seeing Like an Infrastructure: Avidity and Difference in Algorithmic Recommendation," 786.

3. Method

This chapter discusses the methodological approach for the analysis. First, the approach is embedded in literature. Then, the steps are outlined for each subquestion. The integration of digital methodologies into this research has been motivated by the digital shift in humanities research, as articulated by David Berry, emphasising the analysis of discourse alongside substantiating it with data.[81] This approach is crucial when examining platforms like Spotify, which rely heavily on digital technologies.

This methodology aligns with Richard Rogers' framework, which discusses the concept of (re)appropriating data as a methodological approach in digital research. Essentially, re-appropriating data involves repurposing existing digital artefacts, such as social media posts, website content, or online databases, for research purposes, allowing researchers to leverage the vast amounts of digital data generated by online platforms to gain insights into various phenomena. Furthermore, Rogers emphasizes the importance of reevaluating Internet research, suggesting that the Internet serves as a valuable site for diagnosing cultural change and societal conditions, underscoring its potential as a rich data source for understanding broader socio-cultural dynamics. In essence, Rogers advocates for leveraging the Internet as a tool for gaining insights into how society and culture evolve in response to technological choices and digital transformations.[82]

In this context, Spotify's Application Programming Interface (API)[83] provides valuable metrics about the musical qualities of songs, catering primarily to commercial parties but also useful for researchers like myself. These metrics, known as 'audio features' primarily focus on individual songs and cover straightforward musical aspects such as "loudness", "acousticness", "tempo", and a few more. Yet, they also encompass more nuanced qualities, such as "danceability" (reflecting tempo and rhythm) and "energy" (drawing from abstract concepts like timbre). Additionally, there are somewhat objective values such as "popularity" and "valence" (representing emotional sentiment).[84]

Building on the methodology outlined by Eriksson et al., reverse-engineering involves dissecting a platform's algorithms and technologies from an external perspective to understand its internal operations.[85] While some of the methods outlined in their study may be deemed illegal, there is much to learn from their approach. In my research, I've conducted reverse-engineering within legal bounds, primarily utilizing the Spotify API, which acts as a gateway to valuable data. Using insights

[81] BerryDM, "Digital Humanities: First, Second and Third Wave."
[82] Rogers, *Digital Methods*, 8–23.
[83] Rogers, *Digital Methods*, 3.
[84] "Web API Reference | Spotify for Developers," n.d.
[85] Eriksson et al., *Spotify Teardown: Inside the Black Box of Streaming Music*, 18–21.

acquired through this API[86] and employing the data-analysis library Pandas,[87] I've created a set of three codes to scrape all Mood-playlists on March 15, 2024 available on the platform, resulting in a dataset of 240 playlists containing approximately 30,000 unique songs (Appendix 2).

3.1 Subquestion 1: Spotify's Discursive Construction of Vibes

How Does Spotify Discursively Define the Vibe?

I adopt a contemporary understanding of the "vibe" as the shared energy or essence of an experience, encompassing immediate emotional resonance or ambience perceived in specific moments or settings. Building on prior research, I underscore the broader influences beyond physiological reactions, delving into how activities, contexts, and cultural elements shape vibes. Utilizing discursive analysis, I scrutinize playlists to uncover the discursive techniques employed by Spotify in crafting vibes, focusing on linguistic cues, contextual cues, and thematic cohesion within playlist titles. As a result, playlists are categorised based on their adherence to the established criteria for embodying a 'vibe'. Playlists explicitly prescribing artists or emphasising genre/style descriptors are excluded from further examination.

3.2 Subquestion 2: Dissecting Spotify's Vibes

How can Spotify playlist elements and mood metadata be quantitatively analysed to reveal patterns and understand the construction of vibes on the platform?

Through research conducted via Spotify's API and extensive data analysis, the process behind the formation of vibes has been unveiled. The 16 available metadata values (audio features) were analyzed and categorized into five increments from low to high, such as the 'Valence' score ranging from "sad" to "euphoric" and 'Danceability' ranging from "undanceable" to "super danceable". This allowed for discerning patterns and relationships between different features, ultimately deconstructing each Mood-playlist into its main components. By identifying these contributing factors, the aim was to grasp the essence of each playlist's vibe.

To make sense of all the data, this analysis has been conducted using a K-Means clustering analysis,[88] an unsupervised machine learning technique that partitions a dataset, a selected

[86] "Welcome to Spotipy! — Spotipy 2.0 Documentation," n.d., https://spotipy.readthedocs.io/en/2.22.1/.
[87] "Pandas Documentation — Pandas 2.2.0 Documentation," n.d., https://pandas.pydata.org/docs/.
[88] Scribbr, "What Is Cluster Sampling?," July 6, 2022, https://www.scribbr.com/frequently-asked-questions/what-is-cluster-sampling/.

Mood-playlist, into distinct clusters based on similarities in the data points' features. This is in line with Seaver's work, where he uses clusters to point out emotional or atmospheric qualities.[89] These clusters serve as categories or dimensions within the playlist, uncovering underlying patterns and structures and offering insights into the most significant features. Given that vibes "radiate the same energy", there are likely to be few clusters within each playlist, indicating close alignment among the songs. K-means clustering allows for the automatic grouping of similar data points without the need for predefined labels. By applying this algorithm, I aimed to uncover hidden structures and patterns within the playlist data that may not be immediately apparent.

Furthermore, Rogers' emphasis on grounding findings within the digital realm informs the interpretation of results.[90] While individual emotional responses cannot be directly measured, Spotify's vast user data allows for generalising assumptions within the Mood-playlists. The resulting clusters provide insights into the collective emotional resonance of the playlists, reflecting broader societal and cultural dynamics.

3.2.1 Gathering the Data

Initially, I utilised a Selenium[91] screenscraper to extract the playlist IDs. Subsequently, I accessed these IDs through the Spotify API[92] at various points and levels to collect all relevant information about the playlists and individual songs. It's worth noting that although I collected data once every day in February and March to monitor playlist dynamics, the final corpus represents a snapshot as of March 15, 2024, and comprises playlists from the Dutch market.

The genre data collected for each song revealed an inherent limitation: Spotify assigns genres only to artists, not to individual songs. Consequently, the genres assigned to songs in the CSV may not always be accurate, as artists sometimes explore different creative directions. However, upon closer examination, such discrepancies were not as common as initially anticipated. Despite this limitation, I believe that adding the genre to the analysis, particularly within the larger context, still provides valuable insights. Therefore, I decided to include the genre analysis in the broader scheme of the study.

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[89] Seaver, "Everything Lies in a Space: Cultural Data and Spatial Reality."
[90] Rogers, *Digital Methods*, 8–23.
[91] "Selenium With Python — Selenium Python Bindings 2 Documentation," n.d., https://selenium-python.readthedocs.io/.
[92] "Web API | Spotify for Developers."

3.2.2 Cleaning/Normalising the Data

When using distance-based algorithms like K-Means Clustering, normalising the data is crucial. If done wrong, variables with different scales are being weighted unevenly. Given that most values obtained through the API already ranged from 0-1, I normalised the values that fell outside this range (such as 'Loudness' in dB, 'Duration' in ms, and 'Tempo' in BPM) accordingly. I adjusted 'Loudness' to its quartiles/standard deviation to achieve a nuanced perspective. 'Tempo' indicates beats per minute, with 114 BPM representing the mean or *Moderato* tempo according to classical music theory.[93] As for 'Duration', I aligned it with pop music standards, where a track lasting approximately 3 minutes and 15 seconds is considered the norm nowadays.[94] Additionally, to ensure that the K-Means algorithm also reflects the **absence** of certain characteristics within clusters, I introduced non-variants for all values. For example, non-popularity to represent niche content, non-instrumentalness to signify vocal-heavy compositions, and so forth. This approach allows for a comprehensive representation of the dataset.

3.3 Subquestion 3: Your Vibe

How personal are vibes within Spotify's platform?

During my preliminary investigations, I discovered an additional layer of personalization within the algorithm: each individual's version of a Mood-playlist varies from one another. To explore this further, I gathered playlists from peers using the Exportify tool,[95] which utilises the Spotify API to extract data. While this tool presents slightly fewer audio features (14 instead of 16) and presents them in a less accessible manner, it allows the participants to easily export their playlists without having to run a local Python-code. This allowed for a comparison of the disparities between the data obtained through the API and the data presented to a user on a personal account.

To investigate the extent of this personalization, I have reached out to several peers, all of whom are students aged between 22 and 30, with some possessing an international background. All individuals are long-time users of the platform, thus, as emphasized by Seaver, have accumulated a substantial amount of listening data,[96] and asked them to export their data at roughly the same moment (1 PM on 18/04/2024) for the current two most popular Mood-playlists, both containing 100 songs

[93] "Basic Tempo Markings," Mosaicmusicinstruction, n.d., https://mosaicmusicinstruction.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/basic-tempo-markings.pdf.
[94] "Statistics About the Average Song Length, Gitnux."
[95] "Exportify," n.d., https://exportify.net/.
[96] Seaver, *Computing Taste: Algorithms and the Makers of Music Recommendation*, 2022, 67.

each: ‘'t Koffiehuis’ and ‘my life is a movie’. This has resulted in 15 personalized lists for both playlists. By cross-referencing these datasets with each other and the “base pool” from the API (as described in *4.3*), I aim to gain deeper insights into the construction of vibe playlists and the level of personalization within them.

In the next section, I transition from laying out the methodological framework to delving into the analysis of Spotify’s Mood-playlists. where I address each question in a different chapter.

4. Analysis

As discussed in the previous chapters, Spotify claims that their Mood-playlists are meticulously curated to evoke particular emotional states, contexts, or atmospheres, seemingly diverging from conventional genre-based categorizations. This section delves into the analysis for each sub-question. Sub-question one will focus on discursive elements, while sub-questions two and three will empirically demonstrate this through data analysis.

4.1 Spotify's Discursive Construction of Vibes

As seen in the introduction, the contemporary understanding of the vibe is described as the shared energy or essence of an experience. In this SQ I explore how Spotify discursively constructs this phenomenon. Understanding Spotify's discursive construction of vibe is crucial for unravelling the underlying socio-cultural and economic processes at play, shedding light on the broader issue of corporate influence in shaping media consumption.

While earlier research primarily focused on the physical aspect of the vibe,[97] I contend that this perspective is outdated. The evolution of vibe in online culture into a "shared energy" implies broader influences beyond physiological responses. Therefore, while activities may still shape vibes, their anatomical origins are not as clearly defined as those of *emotions* and *moods*. While individuals may have more influence over their *moods*,[98] *vibes* are often seen as spontaneous occurrences, happening to individuals rather than being consciously controlled. Thus, while *moods* provide a broader emotional backdrop, *vibes* represent the immediate emotional resonance or ambience perceived in a specific moment or setting.

Additionally, as highlighted in the introduction, Grietzer, in a recent study on popular media, classifies the traditional notion of *style* as a 'vibe'.[99] However, upon closer examination of Prey's text on *contexts*,[100] arguing daily (online) life is divided into various contexts such as 'chilling' and 'sports', I contend that these contexts take precedence in curating around vibes and that these 'contexts' are somewhat interchangeable with the idea of vibes, considering the examples he mentioned. For instance, "furiously working out" or "bored at work",[101] following Anderson's

[97] Witek, "Feeling at One: Socio-Affective Distribution, Vibe, and Dance-Music Consciousness.", 3
Garcia, "Feeling the Vibe: Sound, Vibration, and Affective Attunement in Electronic Dance Music Scenes." 27.
[98] Beedie, Terry, and Lane, "Distinctions Between Emotion and Mood."
[99] Flesch and Grietzer, "Ambient Meaning: Mood, Vibe, System," 58.
[100] Nick Seaver, "Everything Lies in a Space: Cultural Data and Spatial Reality," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 27, no. S1 (March 19, 2021): 56, https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9655.13479.
[101] Seaver, *Computing Taste: Algorithms and the Makers of Music Recommendation*, 2022, 89–111.

definitions,[102] are more of a *vibe* than a *mood*, although Prey does not explicitly label them as such. Consequently, I disagree with Grietzer's perspective and posit that *style* and *vibe* are not interchangeable. While *styles* could be better understood as descriptions of the content of a set of datapoints (as per James' characterization)[103] or what Seaver refers to as 'clusters'[104] (e.g., "**Smooth Jazz**"), *vibes* describe the form or arrangement of those points (e.g., "**Cheesy romantic candlelit dinner**"-vibes).

With this perspective in mind, you can see it reflected, for instance, in a road trip playlist titled 'songs to scream in the car' or a soft-rock list titled 'In the Arms of a Woman'. These playlists are curated around the interplay of various factors within a specific context, encapsulating the collective feeling or ambience of a situation or environment. This emphasises shared experience over individual agency. These shared experiences can be perceived as individual yet recognizable to others, no matter how niche they may be, as seen in playlists like 'Alone Again', 'Déjà Vu', and the already mentioned 'pov: ur in an 80s film driving at night'. Moreover, this notion of transpersonal feelings is apparent in playlists referencing certain locations, leaving room for certain connotations and imagination, such as 'Japanese Garden', 'Front Porch', and 'Ibiza Sunset'. Similarly, playlists referencing objects radiating "the same energy", like 'BUTTER', 'Lavalamp', and 'Silk Sheets', further illustrate this collective emotional resonance. By linking Seaver's discussion[105] on the abstraction of music into spatial arrangements based on similarity we can see how Spotify's approach to constructing playlists reflects a larger discourse surrounding the organization and interpretation of data within cultural contexts. It seems that Spotify operates on the assumption that all users share a common level of cultural knowledge, to anticipate the content of a playlist based solely on its name, even in more niche cases.

Additionally, cultural and linguistic cues are instrumental in shaping these playlists curated around vibes. For instance, as a user, it's important to understand that 'Spotify & Chill', a playlist that will be further analysed in SQ2, references 'Netflix & Chill'[106] to comprehend its content and realise that they won't find a playlist featuring 'chill' music. Similarly, playlists like 'Hot Pink' capitalise on broader cultural trends, such as the release of the new Barbie (2023) movie. By tapping into users'

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[102] Paul Allen Anderson, "Neo-Muzak and the Business of Mood," *Critical Inquiry* 41, no. 4 (June 1, 2015): 813–16, https://doi.org/10.1086/681787.
[103] James, "No Genre, Just Vibes."
[104] Seaver, "Everything Lies in a Space: Cultural Data and Spatial Reality."
[105] Seaver, "Everything Lies in a Space: Cultural Data and Spatial Reality," 44.
[106] "Urban Dictionary: Netflix and Chill," in *Urban Dictionary*, n.d., https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Netflix%20and%20Chill.

cultural, societal, and often online-centred knowledge, Spotify extends its playlist themes beyond the realm of music itself.

Another example of this can be found in 'Cottagecore',[107] a playlist around a visual trend popularised by teens on the platform Tumblr during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, evoking a romanticised British, rural lifestyle. This Mood-playlist was removed on February 7th and got replaced the day after with the playlist 'Shishalounge'. The recent removal of this playlist suggests its relevance has diminished, reflecting shifts in popular culture and indicating Spotify's responsiveness to changing trends. Curating for highly contemporary vibes adds another level of understanding to Spotify's approach in this regard. Additionally, vibes can contribute to the formation/gathering of (online) communities and subcultures where individuals connect over shared interests and experiences, as seen in examples like 'Sad Girl Starterpack' and 'K-Club Party' ("Clubbing with your favourite K-pop dance hits!!"),[108] fostering intimate publics.[109] This not only enhances user interaction but also reinforces the platform's identity as a curator of cultural trends and emotional connections.

As discussed, the duration of a vibe can fluctuate significantly based on the surrounding context. For instance, someone expressing "good vibes" about a situation may experience positive emotions for the duration of their interaction. Playlists like 'Calm before the storm' and 'Mellow Morning' exemplify this concept, capturing the immediate emotional atmosphere of a situation or environment. This feeling may change or fade rapidly as individuals transition to different experiences or as the situation itself evolves.

Users surrender a degree of control over their listening experiences to algorithmic recommendation systems. Through the analysis of user data, these systems curate playlists and recommendations tailored to users' preferences, thereby allowing vibes to emerge as a collective representation of a particular atmosphere. This underscores the importance of shared experiences over individual agency in the formation of playlists and recommendations.

While the individual emotional responses of listeners can be directly measured, neither in my analysis nor by Spotify, the platform does have access to a wealth of data from its extensive user base. Through analyzing patterns and trends across demographics, Spotify can identify overarching emotional states or atmospheres that resonate with a wide audience. While individual variations in emotional response may not be quantifiable, Spotify leverages its data insights to curate playlists that appeal to broad segments of its user base, making a vibe represent the immediate emotional resonance

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[107] "Urban Dictionary: Cottagecore," in *Urban Dictionary*, n.d., https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Cottagecore.
[108] "K-Club Party," Spotify, n.d., https://open.spotify.com/playlist/37i9dQZF1DX4RDXswvP6Mj.
[109] Siles et al., "Genres as Social Affect: Cultivating Moods and Emotions Through Playlists on Spotify," 9.

or ambience perceived in a specific moment or setting, for instance, seen in the already several times mentioned ‘pov: ur in an 80s film driving at night’ playlist. Such a playlist is full of assumptions, hypotheses, and various datapoints. Exactly this will be analysed in SQ2 where I will dissect and reverse-engineer how this translates into a cohesive auditory playlist conveying a distinct vibe.

4.1.1 The Vibe In Mood-Playlists, Corpus

As Spotify packages its platform around these ‘vibes’ securely curated for “everyone”, and “every mood”, they nurture a deeper sense of intimacy. Through playlists designed for daily activities and mood management, it bridges topics traditionally considered private.[110] However, not all Mood-playlists currently on the platform resonate with the contemporary understanding of ‘the vibe’.

Unlike *moods*, *vibes* are not typically associated with individual control. While one “can vibe”, often meaning that someone is ‘chilling’, vibes denote an immediate emotional impression or atmosphere experienced passively, rather than actively controlled. Likewise, while *moods* can be consciously managed, *vibes* are spontaneous and influenced by the interplay of various factors within a particular context, emphasising shared experiences over individual agency.

Much like *moods*, *vibes* can stem from various stimuli or circumstances, sometimes without individuals consciously understanding their origins.[111] They are shaped by internal states, external cues, and social dynamics, crafting a particular atmosphere or ambience within a context. While some vibes may be linked to specific events, others emerge from a “collective energy” or “shared emotional” tone beyond individual awareness. These often stem from culturally shared beliefs, trends, ideas, and experiences. Despite the niche nature of some ‘contexts’/vibes, they are recognizable to many, particularly on a platform like Spotify targeting a wide audience or a clear target group, often consisting of young, highly-online users. This aligns with Cheney-Lippold’s discussion, where control operates through guiding and determining mechanisms rather than overt disciplinary power. In this case, this idea suggests that Spotify’s algorithms shape users’ listening experiences based on collective emotional resonances rather than individual preferences alone.[112]

While *moods* stem from cognitive processes within the brain,[113] *vibes* surpass these anatomical associations. However, early studies on vibes in live settings highlight their association with activities like dancing and raving,[114] indicating a link to physical movement and energy. James’

[110] Seaver, “Seeing Like an Infrastructure: Avidity and Difference in Algorithmic Recommendation.”776.
[111] Beedie, Terry, and Lane, “Distinctions Between Emotion and Mood,” 865.
[112] Cheney-Lippold, “A New Algorithmic Identity.” 165.
[113] Beedie, Terry, and Lane, “Distinctions Between Emotion and Mood,” 864.
[114] Garcia, “Feeling the Vibe: Sound, Vibration, and Affective Attunement in Electronic Dance Music Scenes,” 27.; Witek, “Feeling at One: Socio-Affective Distribution, Vibe, and Dance-Music Consciousness,” 3.

picnic analogy further illustrates this embodied notion, portraying vibe as the essence of an experience.

In conclusion, vibes encompass a spectrum ranging from positive to negative, beautiful to ugly, or uniquely distinct/specific. They serve as conduits of emotion, providing a pre-verbal understanding and eliciting an immediate emotional impression or ambience experienced. Vibes reflect shared experiences within digital environments and resonate well in today's audiovisual-centric social media landscape, where they are constantly emitted and absorbed.

Certain Mood-playlists exhibited characteristics that diverged from the research focus, such as playlists focused on specific artists or albums rather than *vibes*. These playlists were deemed less relevant to the study's objectives and were therefore not included in the final selection.

Further investigation revealed that out of the initial 240 Mood-playlists, 133 playlists were identified as containing a distinct 'vibe' based on their titles. These playlists met the criteria outlined earlier, evoking specific connotations and atmospheres. The remaining 107 playlists, excluded from the analysis, typically paired a mood or feeling with a *genre* or *style* descriptor, such as 'Chilled Jazz' or 'Happy Beats'. Unlike these playlists, which dictate the expected emotional response, the identified 'vibe' playlists offer a more nuanced approach, providing a specific atmosphere without explicitly labelling the emotion as seen in playlists like 'Shisha Lounge' and 'pumpkin spice'. Appendix 3 details the breakdown of excluded playlists, while Appendix 4 presents the finalised corpus for analysis.

4.1.2 Vibes to Listen and Chill to

Building on the delineated corpus, approximately 37% (49 playlists) consist of Mood-playlists containing variations of 'Chill', 'Calming', 'Relaxing' and 'Easy' in their title and/or description e.g. 'Easy on Monday', 'Mellow Lo-Fi Morning' and 'Café Chillout'. This reflects a trend towards standardised and repetitive experiences on the platform. This observation, depicted in Figure 1 where all 133 "vibe" lists are plotted against each other, the red and orange cluster being the 'chill' playlists, resonates with the insights of scholars like Petrusich and McEnaney who have discussed the rise of repetitive experiences on streaming platforms. They argue that these terms serve as ergonomic tools, regulating psychological and affective states to promote "optimal productivity" by prioritising background music over active listening.[115] Additionally, both Pelly[116] and Eriksson et al.'s[117] critique of these "chill" playlists underscores how corporate agendas and algorithmic recommendation systems contribute to the cultivation and dissemination of specific moods and vibes, shaping not only individual listening experiences but also broader cultural trends. Describing how productivity-enhancing playlists are collected under terms such as "chill", "background" and "focus" rather than, say, "work", highlights the subtle influence of language on user perception.

While it's common to listen to non-distracting music while working, such as with playlists like 'Homework Motivation', Spotify's captivating algorithm extends this recommendation even into leisure time, as seen with playlists like 'Coffee+Chill'. This makes your relaxation mirror the same "chill vibe" as experienced during work hours, maintaining a consistent emotional state. The data confirms this trend, showing that these playlists share the same values, albeit with different songs.

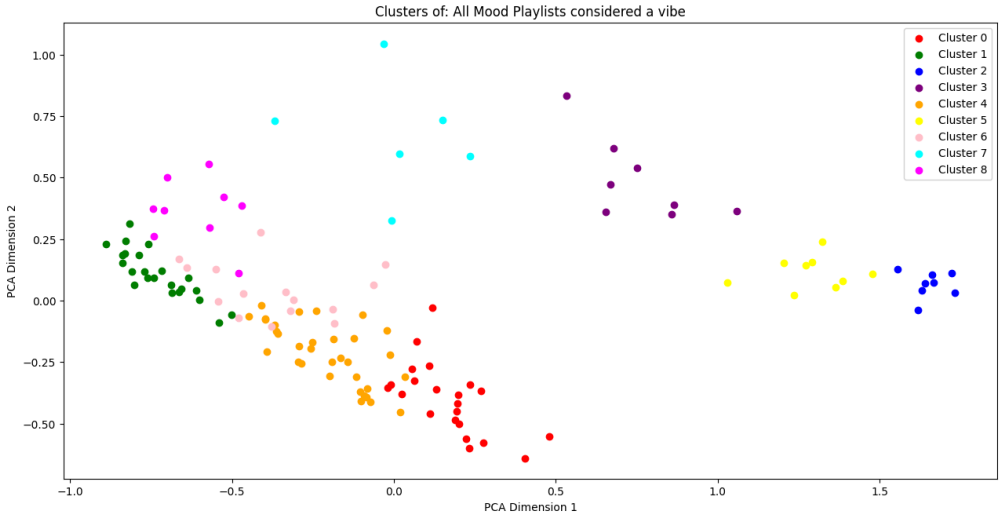

Fig 1. K-means of delineated corpus of 'All Mood playlists'

[115] "Are Spotify's Vibes the End of Segregated Listening? - News/Research - Berkeley Center for New Media." ; Petrusich, "Against Chill: Apathetic Music to Make Spreadsheets To."
[116] "The Problem with Muzak | Liz Pelly," The Baffler, December 7, 2017.
[117] Eriksson et al., *Spotify Teardown: Inside the Black Box of Streaming Music*, 146.

Consequently, the platform appears to particularly endorse this vibe, viewing it as, in the words of Pelly: "The purest manifestation of its goal to transform all music into emotional wallpaper".[118] This sentiment is underscored poetically by Petrusich in her New Yorker article on this popular vibe:

> "Despite acknowledging the utility of non-distracting study music, I find it disheartening to witness art repeatedly repurposed as a productivity tool—only to later serve as a means of winding down from work. [...] It left me feeling more agitated than relaxed, as if I were put on hold indefinitely—possibly for the rest of my life".[119]

The promise of personalizing the "soundtrack to every moment in life" seems in this case to emphasize convenience over diversity in musical experiences. Rather than offering a wide range of valuable music tailored to each moment and action, Spotify's approach tends to recommend similar content under different terms, particularly focusing on music meant to serve as background ambience. This strategy aligns with capitalist principles, where efficiency and consumption are prioritized. While the Mood-playlists certainly offer convenience and continuity, there's a trade-off between predictability and diversity. The platform's algorithmic recommendations may prioritise familiarity and comfort, potentially limiting users' exposure to new and diverse musical experiences.

The dominance of terms like "chill" and "background" in productivity-enhancing playlists, rather than explicit labels like "work", emphasizes the subtle influence of language on user perception. This discussion within the context of the first sub-question underscores the importance of understanding how Spotify constructs and promotes specific vibes, particularly those geared towards maintaining a consistent emotional state across various activities. Moving forward, delving into the next sub-question will provide further insights into how these constructed vibes intersect with user preferences and behaviours, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of Spotify's impact on user experiences and cultural trends.

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[118] "The Problem with Muzak | Liz Pelly," The Baffler, December 7, 2017.
[119] Petrusich, "Against Chill: Apathetic Music to Make Spreadsheets To."

4.2 Dissecting Spotify's Vibes

The next step is to dissect the vibes of these Mood-playlists. When people choose music, they typically don't think about specific musical characteristics. They think "I want to listen to some feel-good, upbeat music as I go for a run" instead of "I want to listen to a melodic, 2000s pop song with a high BPM and a female vocalist". Having a clear understanding of the contemporary concept of 'vibe' and delineated the final corpus in SQ1, we proceed to dissect playlists' vibes. By reverse-engineering the criteria songs need to meet to get added to a playlist's "pool" (*2.3*), we can deconstruct the essence of each Mood-playlist into its components, forming a particular vibe. Through this approach, I identified the primary contributing factors of the playlist.

Let's consider the now often mentioned 'pov: ur in an 80s film driving at night' example. This playlist encapsulates numerous connotations, or as referred to by James, 'datapoints', within a single, seemingly simple title. As pointed out in the previous SQ, these datapoints encompass various elements such as cultural references, linguistic cues, thematic associations, and emotional resonances. For instance, "pov" (point of view) is a commonly used TikTok term.[120] Moreover, the spelling of 'ur' and use of lowercase[121] confirms this playlist is primarily targeted at a younger audience/Gen-Zers, and coupled with 'pov' and 'film', it places the listener in the centre, embodying what's often termed as the *main-character* in popular culture. This trend is further highlighted by other Mood-playlists such as 'my life is a movie' and 'endcredits'. Moreover, the playlist taps into our contemporary obsession with 80s nostalgia, fueled by TV shows like *Stranger Things*.[122] This is an era that no Gen-Zer has lived through, thus evoking a longing or nostalgia for something they haven't experienced themselves. A glance at the data confirms this observation. Out of the 78 songs in the playlist, over half are from the 2020s, with only one song, "Tangerine Dream - Love On A Real Train (From 'Risky Business' Original Motion Picture Soundtrack)", a film score, actually originating from the 80's. Additionally, since Gen-Zers are just old enough to drive, the inclusion of 'driving' and 'at

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[120] "Urban Dictionary: POV," in *Urban Dictionary*, n.d., https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=POV.
[121] Kitty Grady, "The Rise of the 'Lowercase Girl,'" *Vice*, August 28, 2020, https://www.vice.com/en/article/y3z45v/internet-lowercase-spelling-taylor-swift-charli-xcx.; Jess Joho, "The Surprising Reasons We Turn off Autocaps and Embrace the Lowercase," *Mashable SEA | Latest Entertainment & Trending*, August 4, 2019, https://sea.mashable.com/culture/5415/the-surprising-reasons-we-turn-off-autocaps-and-embrace-the-lowercase.
[122] The New York Times, "'My So-Called Adulthood,'" *The New York Times*, August 7, 2011, https://www.nytimes.com/2011/08/07/magazine/the-gen-x-nostalgia-boom.html.; Mark Lawson, "Nostalgic Nightmares: How Netflix Made Stranger Things a Watercooler Smash," *The Guardian*, March 2, 2021, https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2016/aug/05/netflix-hit-stranger-things-highlights-tvs-trend-for-nostalgia.

night' likely serves as a metaphor, setting a tone of speed, freedom, coolness, and perhaps a hint of loneliness.

Let's take an even closer look at 'pov: ur in an 80s film driving at night'.

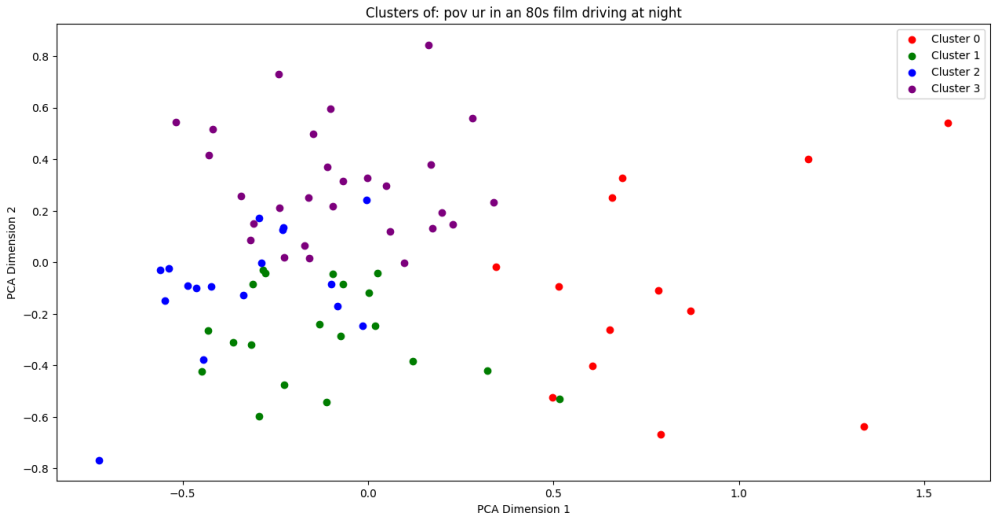

Fig 2. K-means of 'pov: ur in an 80s film driving at night'

Within the red cluster, a notable observation emerges: all thirteen songs exhibit a very low valence, indicating a mood of sadness. Furthermore, this cluster prominently features electronic music characterized by high volume, primarily instrumental compositions, and slightly popular tracks. The green cluster exhibits similar characteristics of sadness, acoustic instrumentation, instrumental tracks, and undanceable rhythms (20 items). The blue cluster comprises instrumental and acoustic tracks conveying sadness and low energy levels (17 items), while the purple cluster shares similarities with instrumental and electronic elements, sadness, and high volume (28 items). Taking the middle of each cluster, the recurring patterns suggest that the vibe of this playlist is primarily influenced by themes of sadness, instrumental and electronic sounds, and emerging popularity, with a dominant genre of Synthwave and most of the songs being released in the last two years.

As can be observed in Fig. 2, the list appears to be homogeneous, with some outliers in the red cluster. These outliers include Mike Dean's 'Hello Space' (Position in graph: 0.60, -0.40) due to its vocal-heavy nature (0.01 compared to a mean of 0.72) and low tempo (0.26 compared to 0.45), and Fantastisizer's 'Rendez-Vous' (Position in graph: 1.34, -0.64) due to its high energy (0.81 compared to 0.34) and more upbeat character (0.43 compared to 0.13). The presence of outliers adds complexity to the listening experience. These outliers exemplify tracks that depart from the playlist's overall

average, yet they may still exude a 'similar energy', aligning with the playlist's 'vibe' and not feeling out of place.

The findings closely align with the hypothesis presented earlier. Notably, most of the music in the playlists is recently released, reflecting contemporary cultural trends. However, it's essential to note that while Synthwave, a genre of Electronic music originating from the 2010s, dominates the playlists, it merely mimics 80s music,[123] evoking the vibe of, rather than featuring actual music from that era. The quantitative findings, such as the predominance of sad, electronic instrumental tracks, paint an idealized picture reminiscent of an over-stylized 80s era, characterised by large synthesiser setups, vibrant neon aesthetics, and nostalgia for perceived "better" times. Thus, it appears that this vibe heavily relies on a stylized *genre* with its own set of rules and connotations. This reliance on a particular genre may lead to the impression that the overall vibe is primarily driven by musical genre characteristics.

The same line of thought is evident in a playlist like 'Spotify & Chill' (Fig. 3), which can be interpreted from the playlist's cover of intertwined hands on a pink evening sky and the description stating "For those intimate moments."[124] This is a reference to "Netflix & Chill", which is itself a euphemism for hookup/sex. Plotting all songs in this playlist, we discover that the factors contributing to the vibe of 'Spotify & Chill' are vocal-heavy, loud, trending, highly danceable, and a dominant genre of R&B. Given the connotation associated with the title, these results come as no surprise.

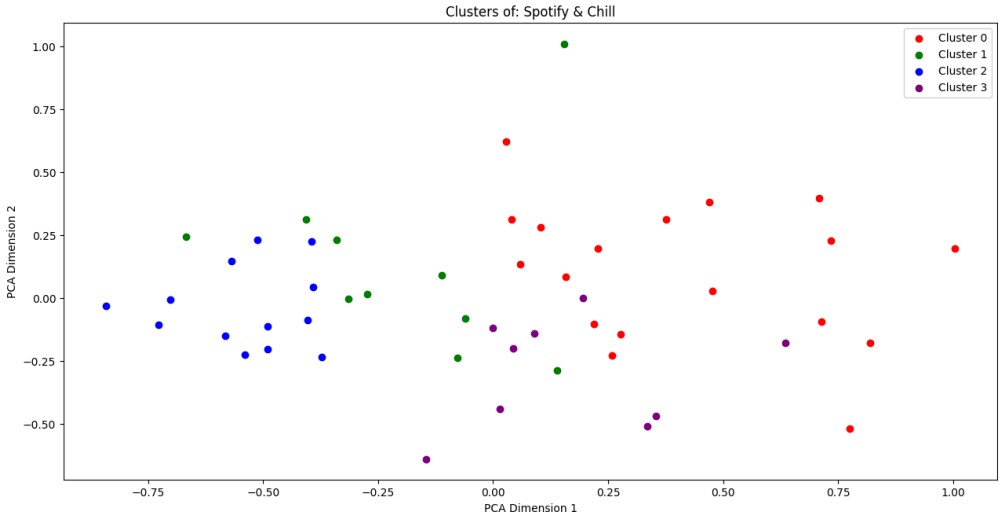

Fig 3. K-means of 'Spotify & Chill'

Building on the insights from Prey,[125] the creation of playlists such as 'Spotify & Chill' demonstrates how Spotify not only caters to users' musical preferences but also integrates cultural

[123] Rateyourmusic, "Synthwave," n.d., https://rateyourmusic.com/genre/synthwave/.
[124] "Spotify & Chill," Spotify, n.d., https://open.spotify.com/playlist/37i9dQZF1DX7ZnTv0GKubq.
[125] Prey, "Nothing Personal: Algorithmic Individuation on Music Streaming Platforms," 1090–92.

motifs, enriching the listening experience with nuanced meaning and context. This underscores the platform's significance as a tastemaker and cultural influencer, positioning itself as cultural intermediary.[126] This aligns with Siles' work on fostering intimate publics, emphasizing Spotify's ability to shape cultural tastes and preferences.[127] Additionally, as demonstrated by Seaver,[128] by strategically pushing these playlists on relevant moments of the day this technology becomes a trap for retaining users, in line with the promise of providing an "endless soundtrack", including the intimate moments.

Let's examine another playlist, 'Liminal' (Fig. 4), centred around the vibe of "Liminal Places"– locations evoking a strange blend of nostalgia and creepiness,[129] akin to abandoned swimming pools and office buildings, a contemporary aesthetic, popular on the platform Instagram. While liminality holds elements of familiarity, it also retains an elusive quality, evoking a sense of uncanniness. Nevertheless, it resonates with many—a shared emotional connection—regardless its somewhat ambiguous nature. Despite being inherently visual, Spotify translates it into an auditory experience with a playlist featuring acoustic elements, a melancholic tone, low energy, and instrumental tracks. This demonstrates Spotify's awareness of contemporary online trends and its capacity to tap into the cultural zeitgeist. This reflects Seaver's discussion on the abstraction of music into spatial arrangements based on similarity, illustrating how users engage with music beyond mere genres or styles.[130]

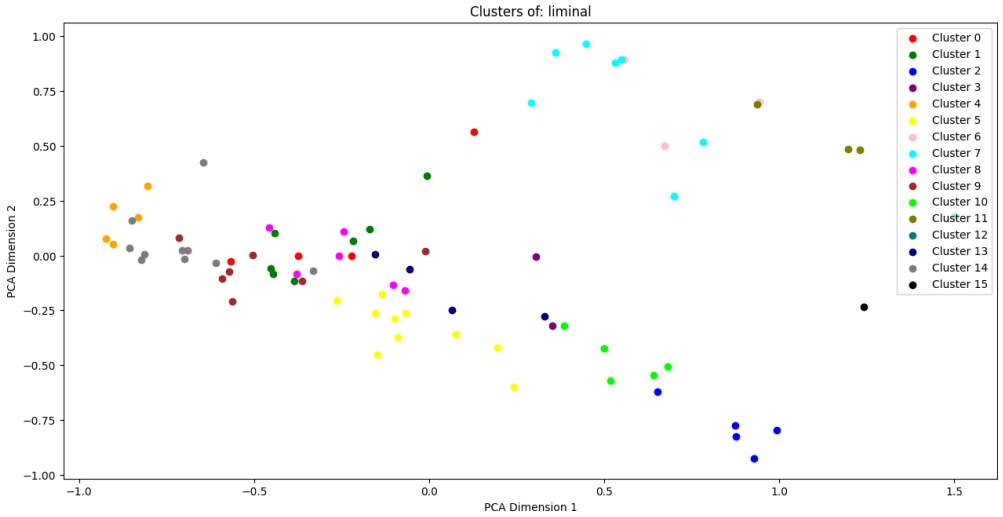

Fig 4. K-means of 'Liminal'

[126] Seaver, *Computing Taste: Algorithms and the Makers of Music Recommendation*, 2022, 144.
[127] Siles et al., "Genres as Social Affect: Cultivating Moods and Emotions Through Playlists on Spotify," 9.
[128] Seaver, *Computing Taste: Algorithms and the Makers of Music Recommendation*, 2022, 49–65.
[129] "Urban Dictionary: Liminal Places," in *Urban Dictionary*, n.d., https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Liminal%20places.
[130] Seaver, "Everything Lies in a Space: Cultural Data and Spatial Reality."

In summary, Spotify's Mood-playlists construct a vibe by curating collections of songs that evoke specific emotional states or atmospheres by intertwining cultural cues, linguistic elements, and emotional resonance, underscoring its role as a tastemaker. By reverse engineering using the API, I gained insights into the criteria for a playlist's "pool" of possible music. This process allows us to better understand or explain the cultural connotations of the intended vibe. Moving forward, the exploration will delve into the extent of personalization within these playlists.

4.3 *Your* Vibe

Previous studies have demonstrated that most of Spotify's playlists are far from uniform;[131] they are intricately tailored to cater to the distinct tastes and listening behaviours of each user. For instance, user x's, y's, and z's versions of a certain playlist are all different. This level of personalization is evident by the "Made for [user]" label displayed in the playlist description within the Spotify app (though not visible on the web version). Out of the 133 playlists in the corpus, 86 have this personalization aspect. This finding aligns with the pool process outlined in *2.3*, where playlists are initially curated for a broad audience and subsequently algorithmically adjusted based on specific user needs and preferences. Moreover, the corpus analyzed in SQ2 further supports this notion. Repeatedly running the code on a playlist consistently yields the same set of songs, indicating a foundational "base pool" for each playlist. The extent to which the content aligns or diverges between different listeners was delved into, examining personalized versions from 15 participants of two playlists: 'my life is a movie' and ''t Koffiehuis'. This exploration will shed light on the degree of personalized recommendations.

Next, an exploration was conducted into the extent to which vibes are personalized within Spotify's platform. As earlier studies already demonstrated, most of Spotify's playlists are far from uniform; they are intricately tailored to cater to the distinct tastes and listening behaviours of each user.[132] So, for example, user *x*'s *y*'s and *z*'s versions of a certain playlist are all different. This level of personalization is evident by the "Made for [user]" label displayed in the playlist description within the Spotify app (though not visible on the web version). Out of the 133 playlists in the corpus, 86 have this personalization aspect. This finding resonates with the pool process outlined in *2.3*, where playlists are initially curated for a broad audience and subsequently algorithmically adjusted based on specific user needs and preferences. Moreover, the analysis in SQ2 further supports this notion. Repeatedly running the code on a playlist consistently yields the same set of songs, indicating a foundational "base pool" for each playlist. The extent to which the content aligns or diverges between different listeners was delved into, examining personalized versions from 15 participants of two playlists: 'my life is a movie' and ''t Koffiehuis'. This exploration will shed light on the degree of personalized recommendations.

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[131] Eriksson et al., *Spotify Teardown: Inside the Black Box of Streaming Music*, 138–60.
[132] Eriksson et al., *Spotify Teardown: Inside the Black Box of Streaming Music*, 138–60.
; Seaver, *Computing Taste: Algorithms and the Makers of Music Recommendation*, 2022, 19–29.

Running the K-Means clustering algorithm on all ‘my life is a movie’ playlists consistently reveals that across all participants’ lists [see Appendix 5/6 for a few plotted examples], while the clustering may vary, the factors contributing to the playlist’s vibe remain constant: vocal-heavy, mainstream, and highly electronic elements. Similarly, for the playlist ‘'t Koffiehuis’, the defining factors across all instances include being vocal-heavy, trending, loud, gloomy, and calm in energy. In line with what I already argued in SQ2, these findings highlight the consistent themes and characteristics that shape the vibes of these playlists.

However, as previously observed, the songs differ across various lists. When comparing the API “base pool” with the participants’ datasets of ‘my life is a movie’ and ‘'t Koffiehuis’, the median number of shared songs is 52 for ‘my life is a movie’ and 56 for ‘'t Koffiehuis’. The highest count of overlapping songs is 67 between participant 3 and the “base pool” for ‘my life is a movie’, while the lowest count is 29 for participant 4. This indicates that approximately half of the content of the personalised lists overlaps with the “base pool”.

In ‘my life is a movie’ there are the same 16 songs present across all 15 participant’s lists, suggesting a relatively static segment within the playlist. Despite the potential for a total of 1500 songs distributed across all participants’ lists, only 25 songs appear uniquely in one participant’s list and are not shared across others. Moreover, one song, “Wet Leg - Wet Dream” (2021), was not found in the “base pool” but consistently appeared in all participant datasets. The reason for this could vary, such as a placement deal between Spotify and the artist/label (although this song happens to be one of the few across all 15 lists that was released on an independent label instead of Sony, Warner, etc.), renewed attention to the song, or an entirely different reason.

Another notable observation is that participant 8 and participant 15 share 84 common items in ‘'t Koffiehuis’ and even 87 in ‘my life is a movie’, where they share by far the most overlapping songs in both cases. The overlap observed between the personalized versions of the playlists for these two users might suggest that they exhibit a similar listening profile, indicating common preferences and behaviours in their music consumption habits, which resonates with Cheney-Lippold’s concept of algorithmic identity.[133] This concept suggests that Spotify categorizes users according to their behaviours and preferences rather than acknowledging them as distinct individuals. Consequently, users are transformed into “measurable types”, represented by sets of observed data patterns used to establish norms against which new user data can be compared and through which users can be categorised.[134]

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[133] Cheney-Lippold, “A New Algorithmic Identity.” 165.
[134] Eriksson et al., *Spotify Teardown: Inside the Black Box of Streaming Music*. 152.

Despite the emphasis on catering to individual preferences, Spotify goes beyond mere personalization. It embraces universalisation in its curation, redefining the listening experience around collective behaviours, feelings- *vibes*. In light of this, the platform redefines the listening experience around collectively felt "energies" and emotions, rather than solely focusing on individual tastes. By curating playlists based on collective vibes, Spotify fosters a sense of community and shared identity among its users, promoting unity and collective connection. However, one may question the extent of this unity when, on average, around 50% of a playlist differs from that of another user.

Additionally, the observation that roughly half of the playlist content remains static shows the platform's aim to balance personalization with broader appeal. This illustrates the platform's interplay between the individual and the collective. These findings align with the characterization of Spotify's curation as "algotorial",[135] wherein automated algorithms and human involvement blend seamlessly, with users playing a pivotal role in the process. They collaborate with algorithms at seemingly three different stages to curate personalized playlists (Fig. 5). This reflects a paradigm shift in social music dynamics. Drawing from Siles' work, Spotify fosters "intimate publics" when these Mood-playlists emerge as potent vehicles for fostering emotional attachment and social belonging within digital spaces.[136] Ultimately, this dynamic ensures that the defining characteristics of a playlist, uncovered through reverse-engineering, remain constant, while the music varies from user to user.

On a more abstract level, reflecting Prey's work,[137] these findings suggest that despite the personalization of playlists on Spotify, underlying patterns and themes persist across different users' versions of the same playlist. This indicates that while Spotify's algorithms may tailor playlists to individual preferences, overarching characteristics define the essence of certain playlists, regardless of the specific songs chosen for each user.

Furthermore, it implies that users with diverse tastes and listening behaviours may still gravitate towards similar types of music when choosing for these vibes. This underscores the importance of recognizing the influence of shared experiences and collective influences in shaping music consumption patterns, even within the context of personalised recommendations. As previously demonstrated by Prey in a case study,[138] a Christian rock band, although sharing sonic similarities with an indie rock band, fans are not brought in contact by the algorithm. This emphasizes the data used to identify cultural-level similarities between songs. It suggests that while recommendation algorithms

[135] Muchitsch, "'Genrefluid' Spotify Playlists and Mediations of Genre and Identity in Music Streaming." 52.
[136] Siles et al., "Genres as Social Affect: Cultivating Moods and Emotions Through Playlists on Spotify," 7–9.
[137] Prey, "Nothing Personal: Algorithmic Individuation on Music Streaming Platforms," 1095.
[138] Prey, "Nothing Personal: Algorithmic Individuation on Music Streaming Platforms," 1091.

strive to cater to individual tastes, they are still constrained by broader cultural trends and shared experiences within a fixed framework.

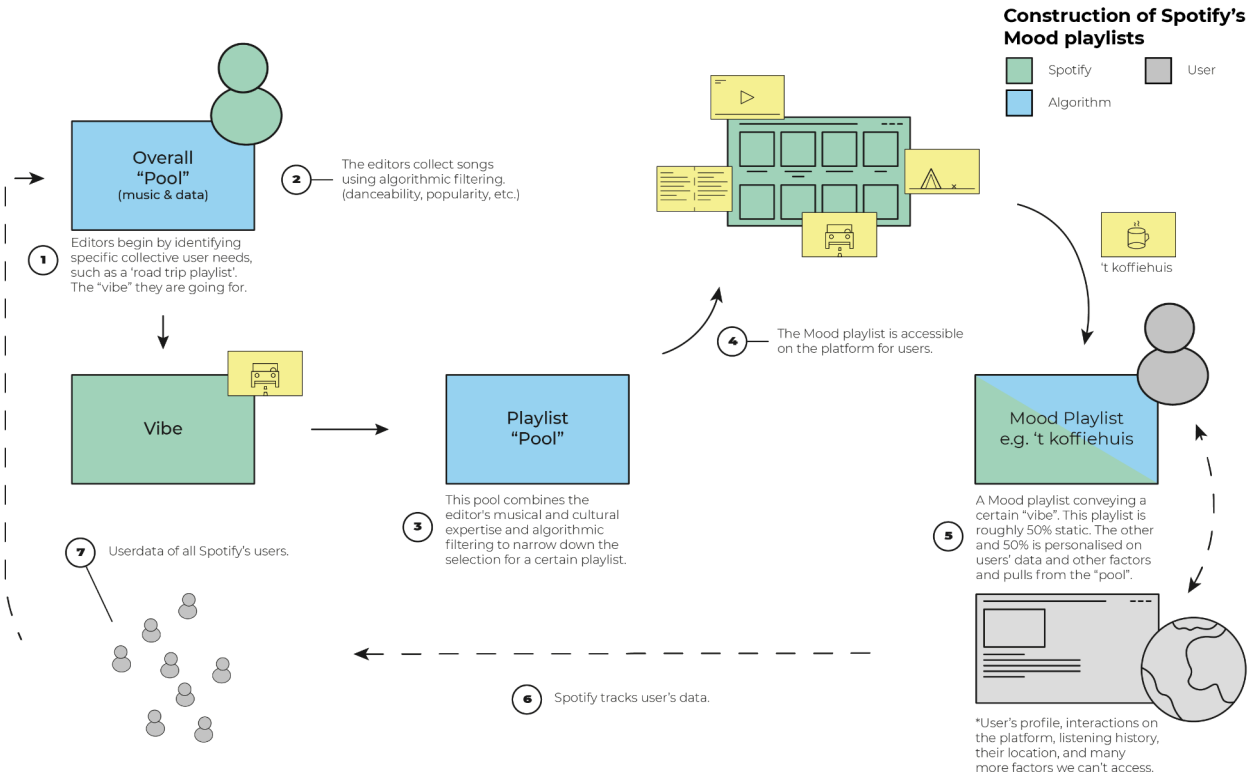

Fig 5. Visualisation of the construction of a Mood-playlist

However, this approach raises questions about the extent to which Spotify's algorithms truly understand and cater to users' emotional needs as they present homescreens centred around 'vibes'. While the platform may claim to "soundtrack every moment of your life", the reality is that these playlists are curated and influenced by various factors, many of which are outside the control of the user. While the Mood-playlists may appear to cater to users' individual preferences, they are ultimately shaped by a complex interplay of algorithmic processes, corporate agendas, and cultural dynamics, making the cause not as straightforward as *just* user input and their vibes.

5. Conclusion

The research findings offer a nuanced perspective on Spotify's Mood-playlists, highlighting the convergence of individual emotions, collective experiences, cultural references, and algorithmic curation. 'The vibe' holds a certain mystical allure, prompting users to willingly share their data, and allowing Spotify to utilise it creatively. Users, in turn, reinterpret these surveillance technologies and algorithmic logic as something universally meaningful. This serves the platform's commercial goals, leveraging the emotional resonance of vibes to boost user engagement and drive business objectives.

By reverse engineering using the API, I have gained valuable insights into how Spotify positions 'vibes', revealing how factors like song popularity, valence, and explicitness contribute to the selection process. These insights illuminate how Spotify's editors and algorithms curate playlists to evoke specific emotional responses and cater to diverse listener preferences. Central to the analysis is the recognition of how vibes intertwine with cultural references and associations, drawing upon shared experiences, nostalgia, and contemporary cultural trends, reflecting earlier findings by Eriksson et al.[139] Whether it's a playlist evoking the ambience of an 80s film or a (visual) trend like "Cottagecore", each vibe is enriched by its cultural context, resonating with audiences on multiple levels. Moreover, the investigation revealed that vibes persist on the platform as long as they remain culturally relevant. This highlights the dynamic nature of music curation in the digital age, where playlists evolve in response to shifting cultural landscapes and emerging trends. In line with Siles' work, this underscores Spotify's role not only as a music platform but also as a curator of cultural trends and emotional connections.[140]

The analysis of personalised playlists revealed consistency in characteristics shaping vibes, despite variations in song selection across users. This delicate balance between catering to individual preferences and fostering collective experiences raises questions about the algorithms' true understanding of users' emotional needs. While Spotify positions vibes as something radically new, it's important to acknowledge that even though it operates differently in practice, the curation still heavily relies on classic forms of categorization such as genre/style. While the platform aims to soundtrack your life, playlist curation is influenced by factors beyond user control. The complex interplay of algorithmic processes, corporate agendas, and cultural dynamics complicates the narrative of personalised recommendations, calling for further examination into the underlying mechanisms shaping user experiences. Additionally, in some cases, this promise of an endless musical backdrop

[139] Eriksson et al., *Spotify Teardown: Inside the Black Box of Streaming Music*.
[140] Siles et al., "Genres as Social Affect: Cultivating Moods and Emotions Through Playlists on Spotify," 7–9.

seems to prioritise convenience over musical diversity, particularly evident in ‘chill’ playlists, where content serves as background-ambience akin to muzak, creating an effortless, endless musical canvas. By making the music fade into the background for the user, Spotify essentially fulfilled its promise. his is related to Prey’s statement there are no individuals on these platforms, but rather predefined groups, segmented on their online behaviour.[141]

Vibes thus align with Prey’s theory of music-streaming platforms segmenting days into ‘contexts’.[142] However, viewing this development through the lens of ‘vibes’ provides a much clearer understanding. While ‘work’ and ‘sport’ are to some extent universal and recognizable to most, if not all, vibes tap into highly niche, contemporary, culturally relevant – in Seaver’s words; ‘contexts’.[143] This allows Spotify to promote even more catered content and gain insights into highly personal behavioural data for advertising purposes both on and off the platform, bolstering Spotify’s position as a ‘private data broker’. I’d say these ‘contexts’ in Seavers’s work can be seen as a predecessor of research into ‘the vibe’.

Moving forward, a follow-up study could explore the vibes and other affective states on Spotify by examining a larger and more diverse group. In my findings, I found many similarities among personal playlists. However, while I believe that everyone has distinct backgrounds, interests, and tastes, indicating a deeper significance to this finding, it could also be due to all participants having fairly similar listening profiles. Therefore, a larger group would strengthen this research. Alternatively, focusing on a single individual could offer valuable insights, with methods such as journaling recommendations providing a nuanced perspective.

Looking ahead, the future of Mood-playlists may be embodied by the highly adaptive “Daylist”, recently announced by Spotify.[144] This could spark further research within a similar theoretical framework, offering significant insights into playlist dynamics and user experiences.

I’ve decided to drop a sub-question that would delve into what factors contribute to the customization of vibes for individual users. Previous studies by Eriksson et al. and Greenberg et al. suggest the importance of this area. However, despite their significant financial backing and experience, they encountered numerous technical and legal hurdles, which, with my limited resources, I also soon ran into. Nevertheless, I believe studying this even if focused on a small aspect, could yield valuable insights.

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[141] Prey, “Nothing Personal: Algorithmic Individuation on Music Streaming Platforms,” 1095.
[142] Prey, “Nothing Personal: Algorithmic Individuation on Music Streaming Platforms,” 1096.
[143] Seaver, *Computing Taste: Algorithms and the Makers of Music Recommendation*, 2022, 49–65.
[144] Stacy.Goldrick@groupsjr.com, “Get Fresh Music Sunup to Sundown With Daylist, Your Ever-Changing Spotify Playlist &Mdash; Spotify,” Spotify, October 17, 2023, https://newsroom.spotify.com/2023-09-12/ever-changing-playlist-daylist-music-for-all-day/.

In SQ3, I discovered a song that appeared in everyone's 'personal' playlist. The likelihood of this being a coincidence is very low, indicating an additional factor in the generation of these playlists, perhaps financial or otherwise. Additionally, as mentioned in the introduction, I suggested a study to examine whether vibes genuinely foster inclusivity or if they perpetuate existing patterns. This area offers ample opportunities for further exploration and understanding.

Lastly, an avenue for investigation lies in the correlation between visuals and vibes. Initial testing by writing a code to identify the most prominent colour of each artwork in a particular playlist showed that there is consistency in visual/vibe association. For instance, the playlist 'Hot pink' is saturated with pink artwork (App. 7), suggesting visual elements play a role in constructing a vibe. This opens up possibilities for deeper exploration into the intersection of visual and auditory experiences on Spotify.

While Szabo dismisses playlists as merely "a name slapped on a list of songs",[145] it's abundantly clear that they are far more than that. Spotify meticulously constructs and curates playlists around niche contemporary culture-driven contexts, making it the cornerstone of its business model. Although, in the grand scheme, Szabo is just a cog in the wheel, with algorithms doing most of the heavy lifting.

[145] Dredge and Dredge, "Lorem, Pollen and Oyster: How Spotify's Genreless Playlists Are 'Driven by Culture'"

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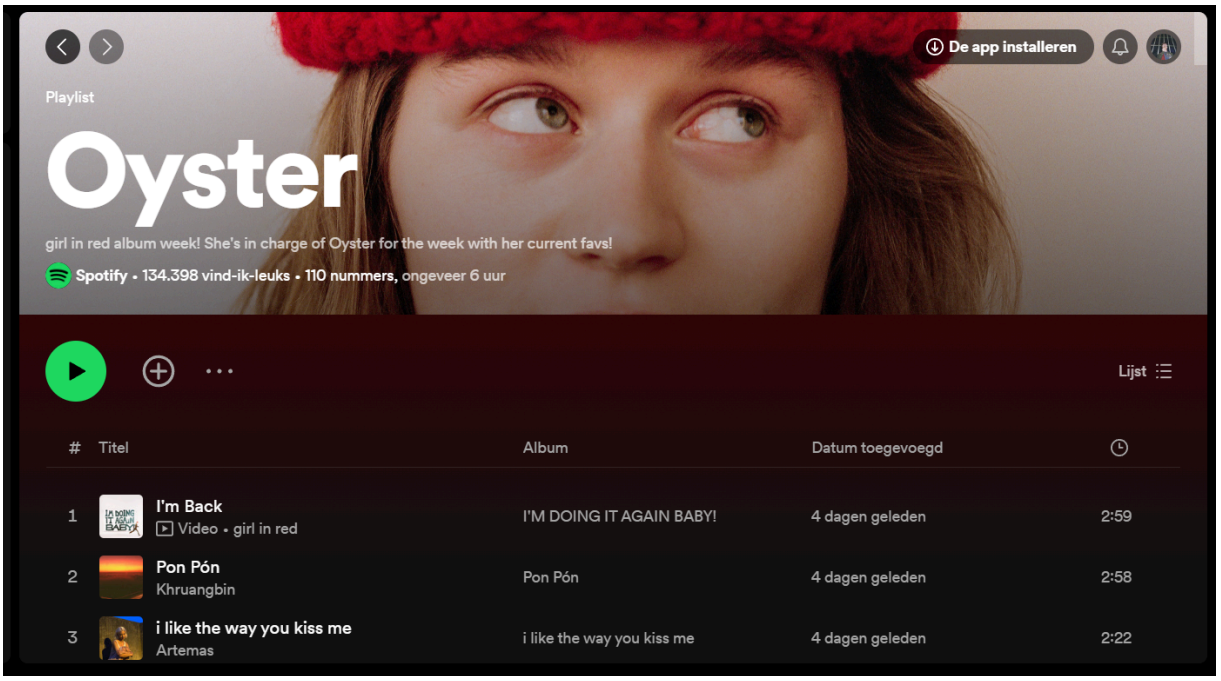
7. Appendix

7.1 Appendix 1: Screenshot of ‘Oyster’ on 15/04/2024



7.2 Appendix 2: All Mood-Playlists On March 15, 2024

't Koffiehuis	37i9dQZF1DWYPwGkJoztcR
Happy Tunes	37i9dQZF1DX9u7XXOp0l5L
Rustige hits	37i9dQZF1DX4WYpdgoIcn6
Peaceful Piano	37i9dQZF1DX4sWSpwq3LiO
Gen-Z Nostalgie ❤️‍🔥	37i9dQZF1DXanDkFGa4syx
Jazz in the Background	37i9dQZF1DWV7EzJMK2FUI
Summer Vibes	37i9dQZF1DWVLVzn60NyuA
Vrolijke hits!	37i9dQZF1DXdPec7aLTmlC
ff keihard janken	37i9dQZF1DWSsPOGuds90p
Deep House Relax	37i9dQZF1DX2TRYkJECvfC
Happy Beats	37i9dQZF1DWSf2RDTDayIx
Easy On Sunday	37i9dQZF1DWZpGSuzrdTXg
Summer Dance Hits 2024	37i9dQZF1DWZ7eJRBxKzdO
Quality Time	37i9dQZF1DWSY75PtDqTkW
Chillout Lounge	37i9dQZF1DWTvNyxOwkztu
Mood Booster	37i9dQZF1DX3rxVfibe1L0
Pre-Party Mood	37i9dQZF1DX47uat5buwl0
Feeling Good, Feeling Great	37i9dQZF1DWWeNODNe68OF
Tijdloze Liefdesliedjes	37i9dQZF1DX1X4eYJIURJC
Guilty Pleasures	37i9dQZF1DX4pUKG1kS0Ac
Zomer Top 30	37i9dQZF1DXdrqKE0y1EIt
Morning Tea	37i9dQZF1DX5dJCW6dyCUe
Chillin' on a Dirt Road	37i9dQZF1DWTkxQvqMy4WW
Sunny Day	37i9dQZF1DX1BzILRveYHb
Have a Great Day!	37i9dQZF1DX7KNKjOK0o75
Confidence Boost	37i9dQZF1DX4fpCWaHOned
Shisha Lounge	37i9dQZF1DX68x6hand0cN
Good Vibes	37i9dQZF1DWYBO1MoTDhZI
Broken Heart	37i9dQZF1DXbrUpGvoi3TS
my life is a movie	37i9dQZF1DX4OzrY981I1W
Dreamy Forest Music	37i9dQZF1DXdzGIPNRTvyN
Calming Classical	37i9dQZF1DWVFeEut75IAL
Life Sucks	37i9dQZF1DX3YSRoSdA634
Comfort Zone	37i9dQZF1DWYWddJiPzbvb
Wake Up Happy	37i9dQZF1DX0UrRvztWcAU
Daily Lift	37i9dQZF1DWU13kKnk03AP
Rustige nummers	37i9dQZF1DX6VdMW310YC7
Sweet Lobi	37i9dQZF1DXdpVnIAppzRq
Déjà Vu	37i9dQZF1DX5vd6FCn1mLx
Positive Vibes	37i9dQZF1DWUAZoWydCivZ
Nederlandse Zomerhits	37i9dQZF1DXcCQbOdQV38g
Love Ballads	37i9dQZF1DWYMvTygsLWlG
DOPAMINE	37i9dQZF1DX0E9XMGembJo
Feelin' Good	37i9dQZF1DX9XIFQuFvzM4
Energiebooster: pop	37i9dQZF1DX0vHZ8elq0UK
Weekend!	37i9dQZF1DX7CfwQr5vk7g
Lowkey Tech	37i9dQZF1DX0r3x8OtiwEM
Indie Chillout	37i9dQZF1DX9B1hu73DioC
Vibe Check	37i9dQZF1DX9TriA5Rm2k8
A Walk Alone	37i9dQZF1DWZLcGGC0HJbc
Feestcafé 2024	37i9dQZF1DX4gPeoZtjeC9
Energy Booster: R&B	37i9dQZF1DWTUHzPOW6Jl7
goosebumps	37i9dQZF1DXdl6IPOySdX4
Timeless Love Songs	37i9dQZF1DX7rOY2tZUw1k
Summer Throwbacks	37i9dQZF1DXd1MXcE8WTXq
ik voel je	37i9dQZF1DX2SxQo075DqT
Villain Mode	37i9dQZF1DX3R7OWWGN4gH
Factor Happy	37i9dQZF1DXaOO2GjFtdA0
end credits	37i9dQZF1DX2DKrE9X6Abv
Café Chillout	37i9dQZF1DX8hhMi0eJdu5
Balearic Beats	37i9dQZF1DWZdlSSSctCmk
Easy On Friday	37i9dQZF1DWTwSObeI4Abp
Make Out Jams	37i9dQZF1DXbEm2sKzgoJ8
Lieflijke jazz	37i9dQZF1DWSVO64ma1pNY
Peaceful Rhythms	37i9dQZF1DX4mWCZw6qYIw
wanderlust	37i9dQZF1DWWMGLiuK4OqL
Cozy Coffee Shop	37i9dQZF1DWUZBIhSC4FGF
Soft jazz	37i9dQZF1DWWpO97CaFM3p
Indie Love Songs	37i9dQZF1DWTr1aQUUVrXx
Relaxing Music	37i9dQZF1DX949uWWpmTjT
Relaxte klassieke covers	37i9dQZF1DWZIQpJDqCc10
Afterhours	37i9dQZF1DX9FcC8tuoPzi
Energy Booster: Indie	37i9dQZF1DX21hEmly67Fg
Soak Up The Sun	37i9dQZF1DX0AZ24QB6TCx
Party Hard	37i9dQZF1DX8hY56Fq3fM0
Calm Kids	37i9dQZF1DX6ALfRKlHn1t
Long Distance	37i9dQZF1DWV67mFOgnpbl
Relaxing Mozart	37i9dQZF1DXcr2UzLGERUU
Relaxing Bach	37i9dQZF1DWTaHkGYBpGRM
Lazy Country Morning	37i9dQZF1DX8qVlPzYQL5d
Kalm	37i9dQZF1DWU1JctQodQRj
B.A.E.	37i9dQZF1DX6UaqbKdP2Bt
Feel Good Classical	37i9dQZF1DWTC99MCpbjP8
Soft Instrumental	37i9dQZF1DWX3387IZmjNa
Beach Vibes	37i9dQZF1DX5Lm1ZiObdc3
Feel Good Piano	37i9dQZF1DXdPDLmy88MDk
Midnight Blues	37i9dQZF1DX83I5je4W4rP
sad girl starter pack	37i9dQZF1DXcEKFjZJYZcc
pumpkin spice	37i9dQZF1DXcc6f6HRuPnq
Arab Mood Booster	37i9dQZF1DWW2hj3ZtMbuO
Verliefde stelletjes	37i9dQZF1DX6cFbK8tUIPC
BUTTER	37i9dQZF1DWYBAUZiPMirH
Chill Folk	37i9dQZF1DX19jOGJFjAzV
Easy On Monday	37i9dQZF1DWVzZlRWgqAGH
Cozy Jazz	37i9dQZF1DWVl5gPCRkquk
Vibra Tropical	37i9dQZF1DWYlXpl3xXzDI
50s Love Songs	37i9dQZF1DX52ln8eMkne9
A Tranquil World	37i9dQZF1DX3fXJqxGjuEP
Sad Soul	37i9dQZF1DWUGhrXBsyMVJ
it's alt good	37i9dQZF1DX1aJqrYHYkGX
Sad Classical	37i9dQZF1DXchlyaSeZp0q
Deep Dark Indie	37i9dQZF1DX2SK4ytI2KAZ
late night vibes	37i9dQZF1DXbm0dp7JzNeL
zwoele lofi	37i9dQZF1DWTtTyjgd08yp
ALLURE	37i9dQZF1DXdQvOLqzNHSW
sad instrumentals	37i9dQZF1DXc8kgYqQLMfH
Creativity Boost	37i9dQZF1DX9G93rIVMmzM
Chill Vibes	37i9dQZF1DWZrc3lwvImLj
Romantic Smooth Jazz	37i9dQZF1DX56qfiUZBncF
Jazz Noir	37i9dQZF1DX889U0CL85jj
Jazz Relax	37i9dQZF1DWSUA8piie2LD
Arabic Love Songs	37i9dQZF1DWWR73B3Bnjfh
Peaceful Hideaway	37i9dQZF1DXbOVU4mpMJjh
Feel Good Soundtracks	37i9dQZF1DX0UetYTdFoTk
Relaxing Classical Guitar	37i9dQZF1DX4fQhfyVRsHW
situationship	37i9dQZF1DWXahxq4Q8el6
Jazz for Lovers	37i9dQZF1DWXBq4mDDFnfA
Happy Jazz!	37i9dQZF1DX6Pu7l5vEGMM
Music for Plants	37i9dQZF1DX76YsWjvbz9I
Silk Sheets	37i9dQZF1DX5YTAi6JhwZm
droevige piano	37i9dQZF1DXclWedfNUp3z
Summer Indie	37i9dQZF1DWVGy1YP1ojM5
Japanese Garden	37i9dQZF1DX9YGSllK2cJ4
Gentle Classical	37i9dQZF1DWVsh2vXzlKFb
Front Porch	37i9dQZF1DX0x3hhpH7R9I
creamy	37i9dQZF1DX7cBprxbt1Fn

Feel Good Classics	37i9dQZF1DWVinJBuv0P4z
Warm Fuzzy Feeling	37i9dQZF1DX5IDTimEWoTd
Feel-good jazz	37i9dQZF1DWZCkamcYMQkz
Calming Acoustic	37i9dQZF1DXaImRpG7HXqp
Easy	37i9dQZF1DX2czWA9hqErK
liminal	37i9dQZF1DWZ7VnoXD1s7S
Sad Indie	37i9dQZF1DWVV27DiNWxkR
Slow Jamz	37i9dQZF1DWX9mGYsaqc7V
sad hour	37i9dQZF1DWSqBruwoIXkA
Totally Stress Free	37i9dQZF1DWT7XSlwvR1ar
The Pop Lounge	37i9dQZF1DXcQRnVXaCXYk
Hot Pink	37i9dQZF1DX45grRWk2ghU
Umami	37i9dQZF1DWVUxkQFrGCkK
Dance Chill	37i9dQZF1DX6Z0nWFAx7KL
Feel-Good Indie Rock	37i9dQZF1DX2sUQwD7tbmL
Coffee + Chill	37i9dQZF1DXa1BeMIGX5Du
young, wild & free	37i9dQZF1DX843Qf4lrFtZ
Dark & Stormy	37i9dQZF1DX2pSTOxoPbx9
Happy Folk	37i9dQZF1DWSkMjlBZAZ07
Alone Again	37i9dQZF1DWX83CujKHHOn
Jazzy Romance	37i9dQZF1DWTbzY5gOVvKd
Morning Rhythm	37i9dQZF1DX3ohNxI5tB79
Love Language	37i9dQZF1DXaPeYMCDRQeg
Chilled Classical	37i9dQZF1DWUvHZA1zLcjW
mid:nite storm	37i9dQZF1DWYiatDTQvsFP
Mellow Bars	37i9dQZF1DWT6MhXz0jw61
Spotify & Chill	37i9dQZF1DX7ZnTv0GKubq
Ibiza Sunset	37i9dQZF1DX9FIMhEujaK6
Levitate	37i9dQZF1DWVY5eNJoKHd2
Just Chill	37i9dQZF1DX0FJ8JYkqiJu
Acoustic Chill	37i9dQZF1DWYGZAMYM8S
Ballad Uurtjes	37i9dQZF1DWViiUS7TyGN3
Country Coffeehouse	37i9dQZF1DWYiR2Uqcon0X
Feel Good Acoustic	37i9dQZF1DWXRvPx3nttRN
Poolside Grooves	37i9dQZF1DX2cEUXdJJLVG
Easy Classical	37i9dQZF1DX0Aaer4Jzfgm
Zonnige beats	37i9dQZF1DXbtuVQL4zoey
calm vibes	37i9dQZF1DX1s9knjP51Oa
scarf season	37i9dQZF1DX1WY4wcXo9Hn
Wild & Free	37i9dQZF1DX5Q5wA1hY6bS
Rustgevende cello	37i9dQZF1DX9dX3aBjsxqd
lofi cafe	37i9dQZF1DX9RwfGbeGQwP
Country Kind of Love	37i9dQZF1DX8WMG8VPSOJC
Feel-good beats	37i9dQZF1DXcNb6Ba0LuVc
Sfeervolle piano	37i9dQZF1DWURCUUKWCX
Chill Out Music	37i9dQZF1DX32oVqaQE8BM
Rustige jazz	37i9dQZF1DX2vYju3i0lNX
adrenaline	37i9dQZF1DWTBN71pVn2Ej
Homework motivation	37i9dQZF1DWWGzo2lhvYlP
Chill Rock	37i9dQZF1DX2UXfvEIZvDK
Soul Coffee	37i9dQZF1DXaXDsfv6nvZ5
Chilled Reggae	37i9dQZF1DWYtKpmml7moA
Classical Garden	37i9dQZF1DWUajed02NzWR
Beach Party	37i9dQZF1DX4Y4RhrZqHhr
Mellow Lofi Morning	37i9dQZF1DX6QClArDhvcW
Easy Acoustic	37i9dQZF1DX4CgJVlGEIo5
hopeless romantic	37i9dQZF1DX6DLB6M8zkNk
In the Arms of a Woman	37i9dQZF1DWTtOKhkK5Mem
Walk Like A Badass	37i9dQZF1DX1tyCD9QhIWF
60s Love Songs	37i9dQZF1DWYUCqLrWKr4p
Energy Booster: Rock	37i9dQZF1DWZVAVMhIe3pV
Relaxing Piano Covers	37i9dQZF1DWSADWNdZfn11
Heart Beats	37i9dQZF1DWSRc3WJklgBs
Acoustic Love	37i9dQZF1DWSlwBojgQEcN
Anger Management	37i9dQZF1DXbtuVQL4zoey
songs to scream in the car	37i9dQZF1DX1s9knjP51Oa
Sunny Day Jazz	37i9dQZF1DXa2PsvJSPnPf
Electronica Romantica	37i9dQZF1DXdgz8ZB7c2CP
Island Time	37i9dQZF1DX0tnKPLNG9Ld
K-Club Party	37i9dQZF1DXaRycgyh6kXP
Arabic Coffee	37i9dQZF1DX2HC3xQbIKZ8
Salsa Lessons	37i9dQZF1DX4RDXswvP6Mj
License To Chill	37i9dQZF1DX9h1d4VhVGeh
idk.	37i9dQZF1DWZtHtrp0izBF
The Wind Down	37i9dQZF1DXa9xHlDa5fc6
The Wilds	37i9dQZF1DX59NCqCqJtoH
Calming Retreat	37i9dQZF1DWYYeI1QdFxzU
Upbeat Blues	37i9dQZF1DWUDoJcM4v6Tm
intertwined	37i9dQZF1DWYaxoJ3YwOh3
Chill Covers	37i9dQZF1DXaPpS4GmGB4L
Sad Covers	37i9dQZF1DX1BGjF5N5O7F
Kora Chill	37i9dQZF1DWXnscMH24yOc
Peaceful Summer Nights	37i9dQZF1DX64Y3du11rR1
Heartbreak Jazz	37i9dQZF1DX8NCuSFtLG2H
Rainy Day Jazz	37i9dQZF1DWTjLfR5thd2p
snow globe	37i9dQZF1DX70dqoLSWJrU
lofi summer haze	37i9dQZF1DWYxwmBaMqxsl
Dalkom Cafe	37i9dQZF1DX64iwDddhmfW
Quiet Moment	37i9dQZF1DX8NMUtC3b3gL
Soft Morning	37i9dQZF1DX5g856aiKiDS
Sweater Weather	37i9dQZF1DX7KrTMVQnM02
Instrumentals	37i9dQZF1DXb5Mq0JeBbIw
Calm Before the Storm	37i9dQZF1DWUvZBXGjNCU4
Summer Rock Classics	37i9dQZF1DWWTdxbiocWOL
rainy day lofi	37i9dQZF1DWU3bkMPOyjie
sad lofi	37i9dQZF1DXdaIjAsPE9ht
pov: ur in an 80s film	37i9dQZF1DXarebqD2nAVg
driving at night	37i9dQZF1DWZKQs3zP6ZD6
Sad Beats	37i9dQZF1DWVrtsSlLKzro
Gentle Waves	37i9dQZF1DX3f9U3gq0DBT
Quiet Hours	37i9dQZF1DWVTkoPB1rnwz
Rainy Day Piano	37i9dQZF1DX4uB43NNq1P7
Higher Love	37i9dQZF1DWYhr4P5Boce5
Sauna	37i9dQZF1DX9fjJYrDYYSw
Lava Lamp	37i9dQZF1DWWtqHeytOZ8f
The Stress Buster	37i9dQZF1DWUvQoIOFMFUT
Coping With Loss	37i9dQZF1DWVxpHBekDUXK
Summer Chill	37i9dQZF1DX4psg7TSYpot
Hope & Heartbreak	37i9dQZF1DWXeI0OwDbgC4
Ballads International	37i9dQZF1DXaFm6IhSHlyi
Boho & Chill	37i9dQZF1DWSNmwgf7Nv11
Low-key Weekend	37i9dQZF1DXbLx6H12mpQk
Morning K-Pop!	37i9dQZF1DX1uG5byNIgDA
Be Yourself	37i9dQZF1DWSAdqTQgzvYM
Nocturna Cinematica	37i9dQZF1DX2a5qdpzYkGY
Happy Classical	37i9dQZF1DWVVxga48uUzj

7.3 Appendix 3: Excluded Playlists

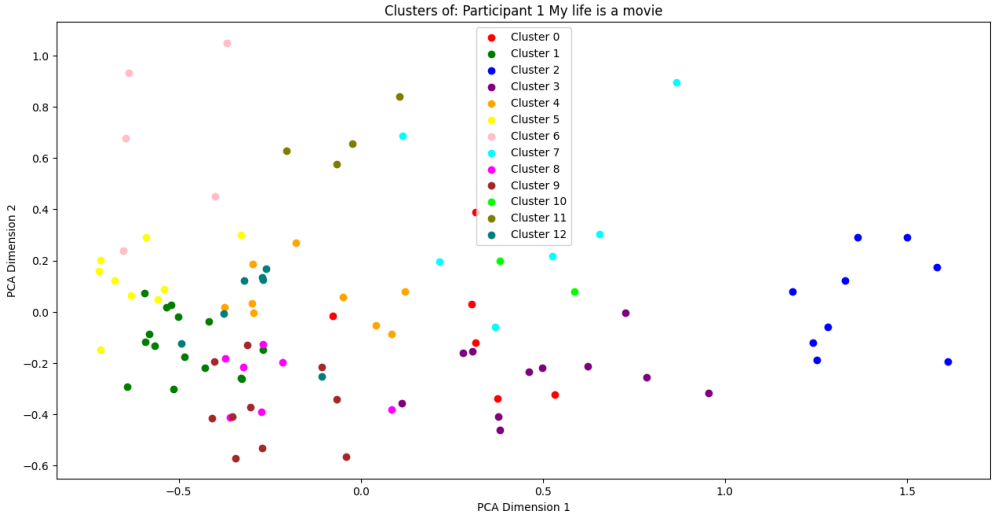
Genre/Style Focused	50s Love Songs
	60s Love Songs
	Acoustic Chill
	Acoustic Love
	Arab Mood Booster
	Arabic Love Songs
	Atmospheric Piano
	Balearic Beats
	Ballads International
	Calming Acoustic
	Calming Classical
	Chill Covers
	Chill Folk
	Chill Hits
	Chill Out Music
	Chill Rock
	Chill Tracks
	Chilled Classical Covers
	Chilled Classical
	Chilled Jazz
	Chilled Reggae
	Cozy Jazz
	Dance Chill
	Deep Dark Indie
	Deep House Relax
	Easy Acoustic
	Easy Classical
	Electronica Romantica
	Energy Booster Indie
	Energy Booster Pop
	Energy Booster R&B
	Energy Booster Rock
	Feel Good Acoustic
	Feel Good Beats
	Feel Good Classical
	Feel Good Classics
	Feel Good Jazz
	Feel Good Piano
	Feel Good Soundtracks
	Feel-Good Indie Rock
	Gentle Classical
	Happy Beats
	Happy Classical
	Happy Folk
	Happy Hits!
	Happy Jazz!
	Happy Tunes
	Heartbreak Jazz
	Indie Chillout
	Indie Love Songs
	Jazz for Lovers
	Jazz in the Background
	Jazz Noir
	Jazz Relax
	Kora Chill
	Love Ballads
	Lowkey Tech
	lush lofi
	Mellow Bars
	Mellow Cello
	Midnight Blues
	Morning K-Pop!
	Nederlandse Zomerhits
	Peaceful Piano
	Peaceful Rhythms
	Relaxing Classical Guitar
	Relaxing Music
	Relaxing Piano Covers
	Romantic Smooth Jazz
	Sad Beats
	Sad Classical
	Sad Covers
	Sad Indie
	sad instrumentals
	sad lofi
	sad piano
	Sad Soul
	Slow Jamz
	Soft Instrumental
	Soft Jazz
	Summer Dance Hits 2024
	Summer Indie
	Summer Rock Classics
	Sunny Beats
	Sunny Day Jazz
	Sweet Jazz
	Tijdloze Liefdesliedjes
	Timeless Love Songs
	Upbeat Blues
	Zomer Top 30
Cater to specific moments, emotions, or activities rather than aiming to create a broader atmospheric feel	Anger Management
	Creativity Boost
	Daily Lift
	Factor Happy
	it's alt good
	Mood Booster
	Party Hard
	Salsa Lessons
	Soul Coffee
	Rainy Day Jazz
	rainy day lofi
	Rainy Day Piano
	The Stress Buster
	Wake Up Happy
Artist	Relaxing Bach
	Relaxing Mozart

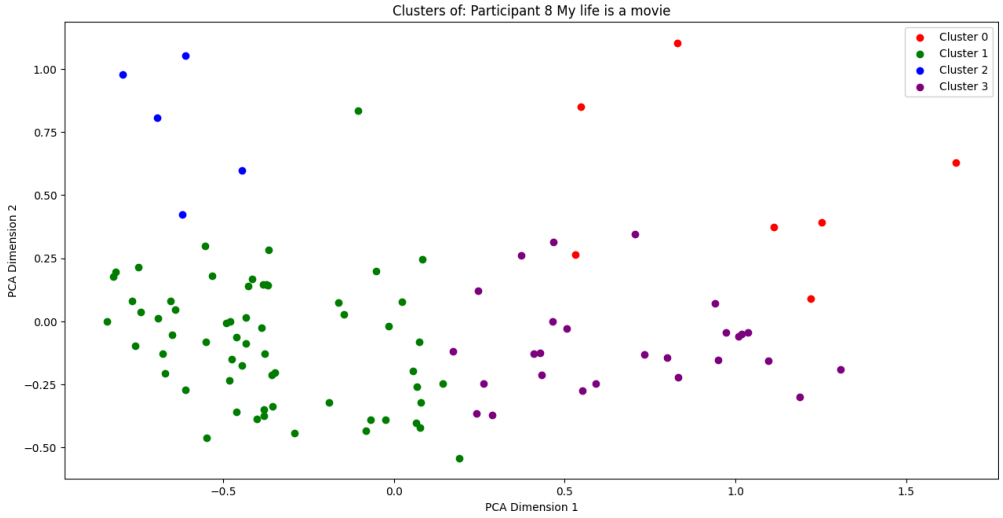
7.4 Appendix 4: Delineated Corpus

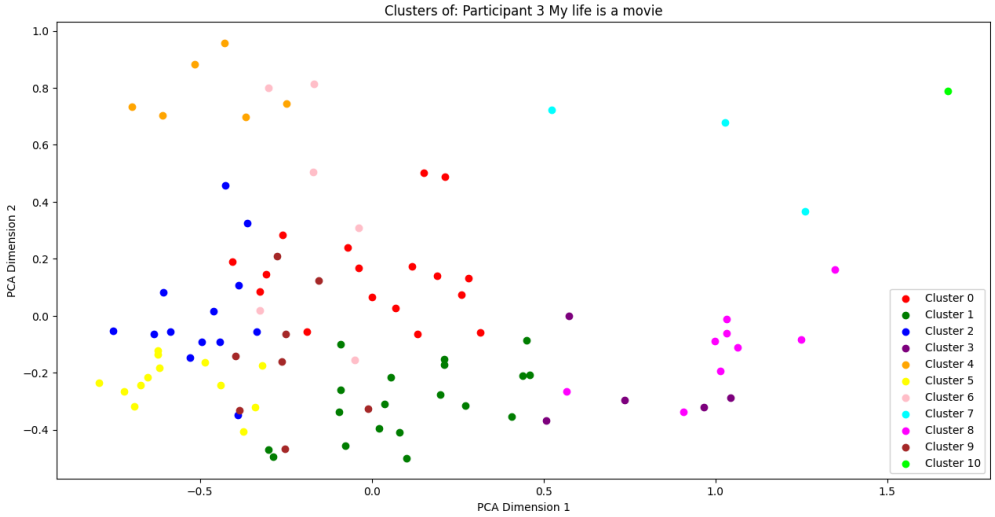
't Koffiehuis	37i9dQZF1DWYPwGkJoztcR
A Tranquil World	37i9dQZF1DX1aJqrYHYkGX
A Walk Alone	37i9dQZF1DWZLcGGC0HJbc
adrenaline	37i9dQZF1DWTBN71pVn2Ej
Afterhours	37i9dQZF1DX0AZ24QB6TCx
ALLURE	37i9dQZF1DX9G93rIVMmzM
Alone Again	37i9dQZF1DWX83CujKHHOn
Arabic Coffee	37i9dQZF1DX9h1d4VhVGeh
B.A.E.	37i9dQZF1DWX3387lZmjNa
Ballad Uurtjes	37i9dQZF1DWViiUS7TyGN3
Be Yourself	37i9dQZF1DWSAdqTQgzvYM
Beach Party	37i9dQZF1DX4Y4RhrZqHhr
Beach Vibes	37i9dQZF1DX83I5je4W4rP
Boho & Chill	37i9dQZF1DWSNmwgf7Nv11
Broken Heart	37i9dQZF1DXbrUpGvoi3TS
BUTTER	37i9dQZF1DWVzZlRWgqAGH
Café Chillout	37i9dQZF1DX8hhMi0eJdu5
Calm Before the Storm	37i9dQZF1DWWTdxbiocWOL
Calm Kids	37i9dQZF1DXcr2UzLGERUU
calm vibes	37i9dQZF1DX1s9knjP51Oa
Calm	37i9dQZF1DWTC99MCpbjP8
Calming Retreat	37i9dQZF1DWYaxoJ3YwOh3
Chill Vibes	37i9dQZF1DX889U0CL85jj
Chillin' on a Dirt Road	37i9dQZF1DWTkxQvqMy4WW
Chillout Lounge	37i9dQZF1DWTvNyxOwkztu
Classical Garden	37i9dQZF1DWUajed02NzWR
Coffee + Chill	37i9dQZF1DXa1BeMIGX5Du
Comfort Zone	37i9dQZF1DWYWddJiPzbvb
Confidence Boost	37i9dQZF1DX4fpCWaHOned
Coping With Loss	37i9dQZF1DWVxpHBekDUXK
Country Coffeehouse	37i9dQZF1DWYiR2Uqcon0X
Country Kind of Love	37i9dQZF1DX8WMG8VPSOJC
Couples In Love	37i9dQZF1DX19jOGJFjAzV
Cozy Coffee Shop	37i9dQZF1DWTr1aQUUVrXx
creamy	37i9dQZF1DXdgz8ZB7c2CP
Dalkom Cafe	37i9dQZF1DX5g856aiKiDS
Dark & Stormy	37i9dQZF1DX2pSTOxoPbx9
DOPAMINE	37i9dQZF1DX0E9XMGembJo
Dreamy Forest Music	37i9dQZF1DXdzGIPNRTvyN
Déjà Vu	37i9dQZF1DX5vd6FCn1mLx
Easy On Friday	37i9dQZF1DWTwSObeI4Abp
Easy On Monday	37i9dQZF1DWYlXpl3xXzDI
Easy On Sunday	37i9dQZF1DWZpGSuzrdTXg
Easy	37i9dQZF1DX2czWA9hqErK
end credits	37i9dQZF1DX2DKrE9X6Abv
Feelin' Good	37i9dQZF1DX9XIFQuFvzM4
Feeling Good, Feeling Great	37i9dQZF1DWWeNODNe68OF
Feestcafé 2024	37i9dQZF1DX4gPeoZtjeC9
ff keihard janken	37i9dQZF1DWSsPOGuds90p
Front Porch	37i9dQZF1DXa2PsvJSPnPf
Gen-Z Nostalgie ❤️‍🔥	37i9dQZF1DXanDkFGa4syx
Gentle Waves	37i9dQZF1DX3f9U3gq0DBT
Good Vibes	37i9dQZF1DWYBO1MoTDhZI
goosebumps	37i9dQZF1DXdl6IPOySdX4
Guilty Pleasures	37i9dQZF1DX4pUKG1kS0Ac
Have a Great Day!	37i9dQZF1DX7KNKjOK0o75
Heart Beats	37i9dQZF1DWSRc3WJklgBs
Higher Love	37i9dQZF1DWYhr4P5Boce5
Homework motivation	37i9dQZF1DWWGzo2lhvYlP
Hope & Heartbreak	37i9dQZF1DWXeI0OwDbgC4
hopeless romantic	37i9dQZF1DX6DLB6M8zkNk
Hot Pink	37i9dQZF1DX45grRWk2ghU
Ibiza Sunset	37i9dQZF1DX9FIMhEujaK6
Japanese Garden	37i9dQZF1DX0x3hhpH7R9I
Jazzy Romance	37i9dQZF1DWTbzY5gOVvKd
Just Chill	37i9dQZF1DX0FJ8JYkqiJu
K-Club Party	37i9dQZF1DX4RDXswvP6Mj
late night vibes	37i9dQZF1DXdQvOLqzNHSW
Lava Lamp	37i9dQZF1DWWtqHeytOZ8f
Lazy Country Morning	37i9dQZF1DX6UaqbKdP2Bt
Levitate	37i9dQZF1DWVY5eNJoKHd2
License To Chill	37i9dQZF1DXa9xHlDa5fc6
Life Sucks	37i9dQZF1DX3YSRoSdA634
liminal	37i9dQZF1DWZ7VnoXD1s7S
lofi cafe	37i9dQZF1DX9RwfGbeGQwP
lofi summer haze	37i9dQZF1DX8NMUtC3b3gL
Long Distance	37i9dQZF1DWTaHkGYBpGRM
Love Language	37i9dQZF1DXaPeYMCDRQeg
Low-key Weekend	37i9dQZF1DXbLx6H12mpQk
Make Out Jams	37i9dQZF1DXbEm2sKzgoJ8
Mellow Lofi Morning	37i9dQZF1DX6QClArDhvcW
midnite storm	37i9dQZF1DWYiatDTQvsFP
Morning Rhythm	37i9dQZF1DX3ohNxI5tB79
Morning Tea	37i9dQZF1DX5dJCW6dyCUe
Music for Plants	37i9dQZF1DXclWedfNUp3z
my life is a movie	37i9dQZF1DX4OzrY981I1W
Nocturna Cinematica	37i9dQZF1DX2a5qdpzYkGY
Peaceful Hideaway	37i9dQZF1DX4fQhfyVRsHW
Peaceful Summer Nights	37i9dQZF1DWTjLfR5thd2p
Poolside Grooves	37i9dQZF1DX2cEUXdJJLVG
Positive Vibes	37i9dQZF1DWUAZoWydCivZ
pov ur in an 80s film	37i9dQZF1DWZKQs3zP6ZD6
Pre-Party Mood	37i9dQZF1DX47uat5buwl0
pumpkin spice	37i9dQZF1DX6cFbK8tUIPC
Quality Time	37i9dQZF1DWSY75PtDqTkW
Quiet Hours	37i9dQZF1DWVTkoPB1rnwz
Quiet Moment	37i9dQZF1DX7KrTMVQnM02
sad girl starter pack	37i9dQZF1DWW2hj3ZtMbuO
sad hour	37i9dQZF1DWSqBruwoIXkA
Sauna	37i9dQZF1DX9fjJYrDYYSw
scarf season	37i9dQZF1DX1WY4wcXo9Hn
Shisha Lounge	37i9dQZF1DX68x6hand0cN
Silk Sheets	37i9dQZF1DWVGy1YP1ojM5
situationship	37i9dQZF1DX6Pu7l5vEGMM
snow globe	37i9dQZF1DX64iwDddhmfW
Soak Up The Sun	37i9dQZF1DX6ALfRKlHn1t
Soft Morning	37i9dQZF1DXb5Mq0JeBbIw
songs to scream in the car	37i9dQZF1DX4mWCZw6qYIw
Spotify & Chill	37i9dQZF1DX7ZnTv0GKubq
Summer Chill	37i9dQZF1DX4psg7TSYpot
Summer Throwbacks	37i9dQZF1DXd1MXcE8WTXq
Summer Vibes	37i9dQZF1DWVLVzn60NyuA
Sunny Day	37i9dQZF1DX1BzILRveYHb
Sweater Weather	37i9dQZF1DWUvZBXGjNCU4
Instrumentals	37i9dQZF1DXdpVnIAppzRq
Sweet Lobi	37i9dQZF1DXcQRnVXaCXYk
The Pop Lounge	37i9dQZF1DWUDoJcM4v6Tm
The Wilds	37i9dQZF1DWYYeI1QdFxzU
The Wind Down	37i9dQZF1DWT7XSlwvR1ar
Totally Stress Free	37i9dQZF1DWVUxkQFrGCkK
Umami	37i9dQZF1DX9TriA5Rm2k8
Vibe Check	37i9dQZF1DX3fXJqxGjuEP
Vibra Tropical	37i9dQZF1DX3R7OWWGN4gH
Villain Mode	37i9dQZF1DX1tyCD9QhIWF
Walk Like A Badass	37i9dQZF1DWWpO97CaFM3p
wanderlust	37i9dQZF1DX5IDTimEWoTd

idk.	37i9dQZF1DX59NCqCqJtoH
ik voel je	37i9dQZF1DX2SxQo075DqT
In the Arms of a Woman	37i9dQZF1DWTtOKhkK5Mem
intertwined	37i9dQZF1DX1BGjF5N5O7F
Island Time	37i9dQZF1DX2HC3xQbIKZ8
Warm Fuzzy Feeling	37i9dQZF1DX7CfwQr5vk7g
Weekend!	37i9dQZF1DX5Q5wA1hY6bS
Wild & Free	37i9dQZF1DX7KrTMVQnM02
young, wild & free	37i9dQZF1DX843Qf4lrFtZ

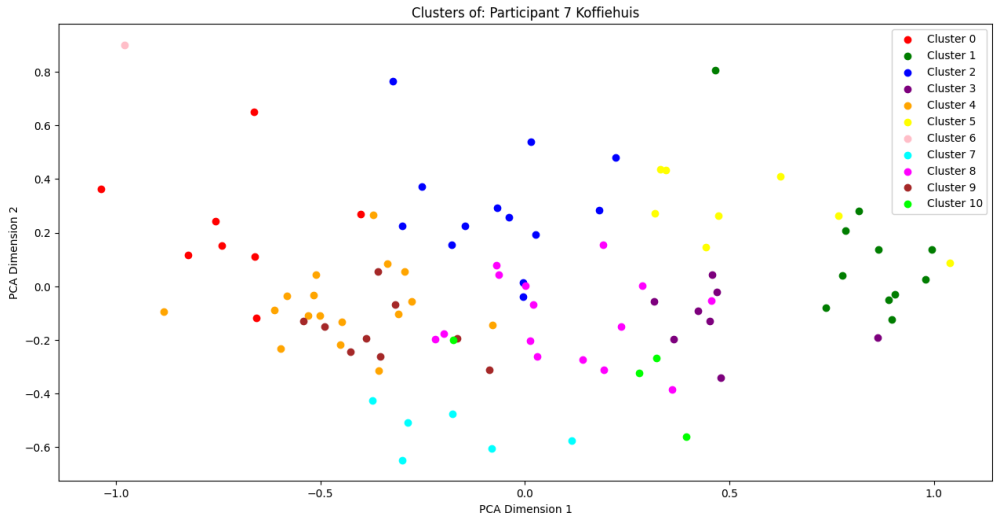
7.5 Appendix 5: Clusters of ‘My life is a movie’

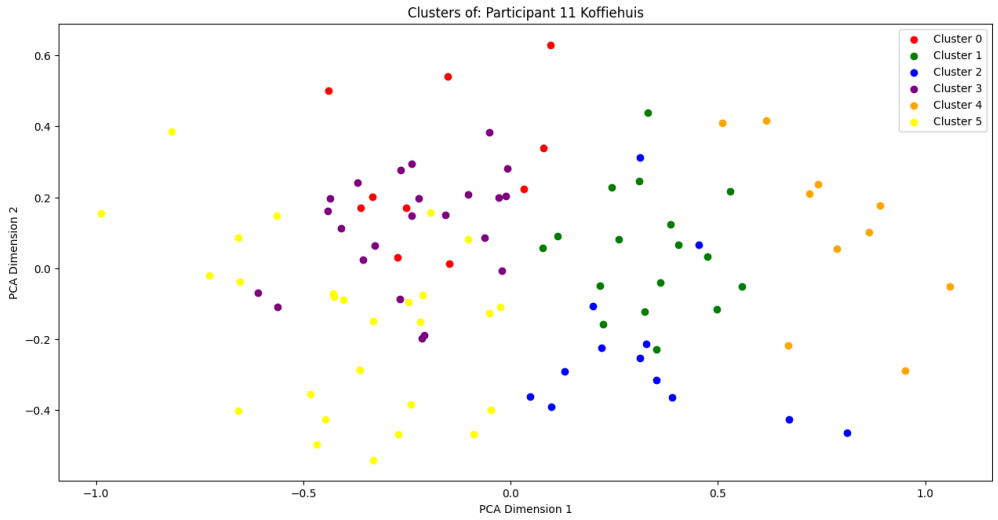


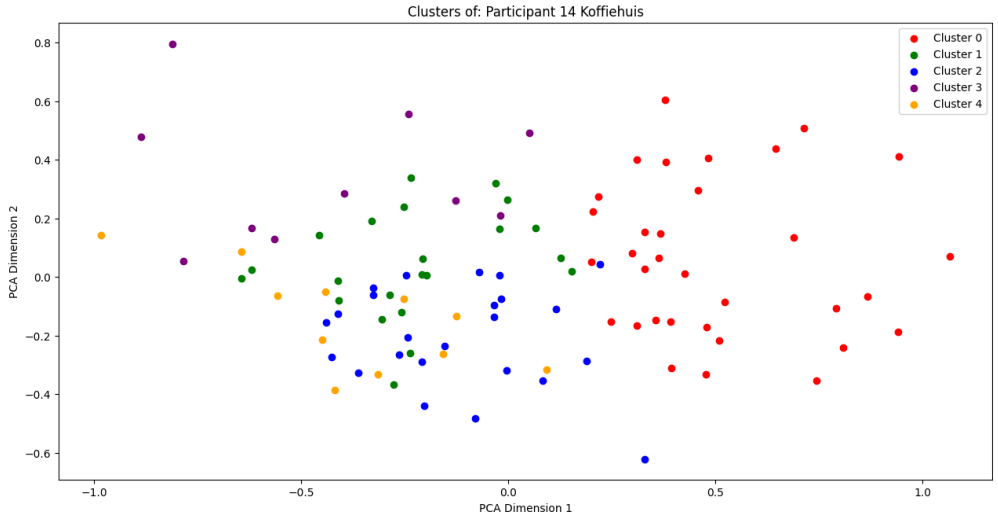




7.6 Appendix 6: Clusters of 't'Koffiehuis'







7.7 Appendix 7: Initial Visual Study

Be Yourself

Dalkom Cafe

Hot Pink

A Walk Alone

pov ur in an 80s film driving at night

Shisha Lounge