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**NONFICTIONAL CONVENTIONS AND CREATIVE MARKETING
STRATEGIES IN FILM PRODUCTION**

SUMMARY

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SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

In the context of a digital world oversaturated with audiovisual content—where identities are constructed through social media and cultural value is increasingly measured by viral impact—I began to ask myself: how does the audience still engage with film through a critical or aesthetic lens? Is film still a singular work of art, or merely a node within a content ecosystem? This thesis starts from the premise that film marketing is no longer just a promotional tool, but a central player that profoundly influences the perception, consumption, and production of contemporary cinema.

The thesis focuses on the idea that modern marketing strategies can transform a film from a consumer product into a cultural and social event, often part of a larger “universe” that includes merchandise, fan communities, and forms of active participation. I propose the concept of “nonfictional conventions” to describe this translation of fiction into the everyday reality of audiences—whether through objects (T-shirts, games, mugs) or through collective emotions and attachments. Through these mechanisms, a film is not merely watched, but lived. I am particularly interested in how these phenomena manifest in the Romanian film industry, and why “middlebrow” films—those productions that fall between arthouse cinema and commercial comedies—are missing from the current landscape.

The thesis is structured into three parts, following a thread that begins with the international history of film marketing, continues with the present state of Romanian cinema, and concludes with a case study drawn from my own professional experience.

The first chapter, titled “*Nonfictional conventions in film marketing*,” analyzes a series of major campaigns that changed the way audiences perceive film. I refer to examples such as *Gone with the Wind*, *Psycho*, *Star Wars*, *Twin Peaks*, *The Blair Witch Project*, *The Dark Knight*, *Avatar*, and the early stages of the Marvel Cinematic Universe. These case studies were chosen because they demonstrate how marketing not only created interest but also built mythologies, communities, forms of loyalty, and active participation. Analyzing these moments is key to understanding how marketing works today in the TikTok era, and to showing that many current mechanisms have older roots.

The second chapter, “*Marketing in Romanian cinema*,” investigates the post-2000 local film industry, particularly the paradox between the international acclaim of arthouse films and the absence of a domestic audience. In recent years, influencer-made films have altered this

balance, attracting a new audience and achieving box office success with commercial releases. However, this success has not been accompanied by the emergence of a “middle” zone where artistic quality coexists with accessibility. I analyze relevant campaigns for films such as *Child’s Pose*, *Of snails and men*, *Two lottery tickets*, *The New Year that never came*, as well as documentaries like *Planeta Petrila*, *Collective*, or *Arsenie: An amazing afterlife*. I aim to understand why marketing works in some cases but fails to sustain consistent industry development.

The third chapter, “*Creative film production*,” offers an in-depth study of the production process of *To the North*, directed by Mihai Mincan, which I produced together with my partner Radu Stancu. The film was made through a complex international co-production and was launched in the Orizzonti competition at Venice 2022, with a budget exceeding two million euros. The chapter analyzes the development, financing, and release processes, as well as the challenges faced in market positioning. I also present the next major project I produced—*Milk Teeth*, also directed by Mihai Mincan—which is set to premiere following its selection at a major festival in 2025.

The motivation for conducting this research stems from over 12 years of experience as a film producer. I have produced more than 25 titles, from fiction and documentary to animation, always drawn to films that say something meaningful about the world we live in. In recent years, I have noticed a transformation in the European industry: funding bodies in Germany, the Czech Republic, and Greece are adjusting their support schemes to clearly encourage films with audience potential. Many professional discussions I have across Europe, particularly in co-production contexts, already reflect this shift. This is a moment when marketing becomes an essential tool, and understanding it can help position films in a competitive market without compromising artistic ambition.

I chose a qualitative research methodology, based on case studies and interviews. I also used exploratory research to understand phenomena that are known in practice but less theorized. The interviews, included in the annexes, feature conversations with professionals in production, marketing, and distribution, including Anca Macoviciuc, Cătălin Anchidin, Anamaria Antoci, Diana Caravia, Alexander Nanau, Paul Negoescu, and Gabriela Suciu Pădurețu.

Through this research, I aim to formulate a coherent understanding of how marketing can become a genuine development tool for the Romanian film industry—and to argue why middlebrow films are not just necessary, but essential.

SUMMARY PART I.

NONFICTIONAL CONVENTIONS IN FILM MARKETING

1.1. Why film marketing was born in the United States

In this subchapter, I analyze the history and transformations of film marketing, starting with the relationship between cinema and the historical and technological events that have shaped both narrative forms and production and promotional strategies. I outline two major industrial paradigms—the American model, focused on entertainment, and the European model, oriented toward auteur cinema—and show how marketing evolved from a mere distribution tool into a central practice that shapes both content and audience perception. I focus on how the spectator has become a decision-making factor even from the development stage, forcing marketing to adapt through increasingly sophisticated strategies tailored to different audiences and available media. I examine key historical examples—such as the campaigns for the films of George Lucas and Steven Spielberg—and show how these laid the foundation for modern marketing. I argue that today’s marketing should be understood as a form of “nonfictional convention,” which extends the cinematic universe into the audience’s everyday reality and transforms the film experience into a cyclical process of cultural consumption.

1.2. Increasing film visibility through racial controversies in *Gone with the Wind*

This subchapter analyzes the social, cultural, and political context of 1930s America, highlighting the influence of the Great Depression on artistic taste and film production. *Gone with the Wind* becomes a representative example of how Hollywood combined technological innovation, romanticized aesthetics, and commercial strategies to produce an unprecedented success. The subchapter details the complex process of adapting the novel, including casting decisions, screenplay alterations aimed at avoiding racial controversy, and significant thematic omissions. It highlights the tensions between fidelity to the novel and the film's commercial and ideological necessities, as well as the racial stereotypes and simplified gender roles present in the final product. The chapter also emphasizes the impact of pressure from the NAACP, responses from the African-American press, and the role of Hattie McDaniel’s Oscar win—which, although historically significant, did not quell criticism regarding the film’s romanticization of the South and marginalization of Black characters. Ultimately, the chapter

demonstrates how the marketing strategy integrated these controversies into the film's lasting success, turning *Gone with the Wind* into a relevant case study for analyzing cultural representation and promotion in American cinema.

1.3. *Psycho* and the use of suspense as a marketing tool

This chapter examines Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* through the lens of its innovative marketing strategy and its impact on audiences. Hitchcock designed a campaign that turned the act of watching the film into a highly controlled event: viewers were not allowed to enter the theater after the screening had begun, and access to plot details was strictly managed, including a ban on early reviews. This strategy generated an unprecedented wave of curiosity and anticipation. The film was released using a deliberately slow and calculated distribution model. The campaign relied on pre-recorded messages from Hitchcock, posters with explicit instructions to audiences, and a promotional network that cultivated silence and mystery around the film. The suspense built into the narrative was amplified by this experiential marketing approach, which played a decisive role in its box office success. By the end of its first year, *Psycho* had become a cultural phenomenon, earning over \$15 million—a remarkable result for a low-budget film. The chapter argues that, in this case, marketing was not merely a sales tool but an integral part of the film's aesthetic and reception.

1.4. Modern marketing and the merchandising of *Star Wars*

This subchapter analyzes the *Star Wars* franchise as a reference model for global film marketing. Starting with the release of the first film in 1977, it highlights how George Lucas transformed a sci-fi project with an unknown cast into an intergenerational cultural phenomenon, redefining the relationship between film, audience, and commercial products. The chapter details how marketing was conceived from the beginning as both a narrative and commercial tool: collaboration with Marvel Comics for a comic book adaptation, early integration of toys and tie-in merchandise, as well as innovative strategies for cross-promotion and transmedia storytelling. It explores the franchise's evolution through the three trilogies and the key moment of Disney's acquisition, which expanded the *Star Wars* universe into a comprehensive media ecosystem—theme parks, TV series, digital platforms, and mass-market products. The chapter shows how *Star Wars* marketing evolved from promoting a single film into building a global mythology, where each release became part of a multichannel strategy,

narratively coherent and expressed across diverse formats, influencing the entire entertainment industry.

1.5. *Twin Peaks* and unconventional fan communities

This subchapter examines the *Twin Peaks* series as a turning point in American television history and as a complex example of marketing strategy and participatory culture. Created by David Lynch and Mark Frost, the series became a phenomenon due to its cinematic aesthetic, unconventional narrative structure, and dreamlike atmosphere. The promotional campaign, backed by ABC, presented *Twin Peaks* as an innovative form of television art, attracting both mainstream and intellectual audiences. Although ratings declined in the second season, fan communities mobilized to save the show, and the film *Fire Walk with Me* expanded the universe's mythology. In 2017, *The Return* relaunched the series in a radically different format, with minimal marketing that relied on the expectations of an already established fandom. The chapter argues that *Twin Peaks* served as an early model of convergence between television, cinema, and participatory culture, and that the strategies for activating and sustaining fan communities—from forums to social media—anticipated today's transmedia marketing practices. The analysis is supported by Jenkins' concepts of participatory culture and Caldwell's ideas on "televisuality," showing how fan involvement turned a media product into a lasting cultural phenomenon.

1.6. The invisible boundary between real and fictional in *The Blair Witch Project*

This subchapter examines *The Blair Witch Project* as a crucial case study for understanding viral marketing and audience engagement in the digital age. Made on an extremely low budget and released independently, the film became a global phenomenon thanks to an innovative promotional strategy focused on blurring the line between reality and fiction. Its marketing was built around an extended universe that included an interactive website, mockumentaries, paratextual materials, and a fictional legend presented with the rigor of authentic historical narrative. The Internet, forums, alternative media, and campus campaigns were key channels through which the film attracted a young audience eager for participatory experiences. The subchapter explores how these tactics created deep cognitive and emotional engagement, prompting viewers to actively interpret and disseminate the *Blair Witch* myth. This approach redefined the boundaries between fiction and reality, profoundly influencing cinematic marketing strategies and paving the way for modern viral campaigns.

The chapter demonstrates that the film's success was based not only on content, but on a carefully orchestrated manipulation of audience perception, transformed into a form of cultural co-creation.

1.7. Building alternative reality in *The Dark Knight* campaign

This subchapter analyzes the groundbreaking marketing campaign of *The Dark Knight* trilogy, directed by Christopher Nolan, focusing particularly on the second film as a model of transmedia strategy and active audience engagement. Warner Brothers, in partnership with the agency 42 Entertainment, designed an alternate reality game (ARG) that expanded the Gotham universe beyond the screen, involving millions of participants in interactive narratives across both online and offline environments. The campaign created narrative continuity between *Batman Begins* and *The Dark Knight*, using websites, emails, games, fake newspapers, and live events to construct a believable parallel world. The audience was transformed into active participants, investigating stories, contributing to promotion, and experiencing the film even before its release. This mobilization helped define a new kind of film marketing focused on participation, emotional investment, and fan community loyalty, creating the sensation of an alternate reality. The chapter demonstrates how *The Dark Knight* redefined blockbuster promotion through a fusion of brand strategy, storytelling, and digital innovation.

1.8. 3D technology in *Avatar* and digital campaigns on new social networks

This subchapter provides an in-depth analysis of the marketing and distribution strategies for *Avatar*, highlighting how it became a benchmark for blockbuster releases. Designed as a total cinematic experience, *Avatar* combined a global wide release, strategic commercial partnerships, and an innovative digital campaign that leveraged new technologies and social media platforms. Its multi-platform release (IMAX, 3D, 2D), events like "Avatar Day," and collaborations with international brands increased fan anticipation and engagement. The campaign also emphasized the film's ecological message, symbolically choosing April 22 (Earth Day) for the DVD release. The chapter emphasizes how this campaign, alongside revolutionary visual aesthetics and globally accessible themes, established *Avatar* as a media phenomenon and a model for transnational marketing. The film set new industry standards not only through its financial success and technological innovation but also by transforming how studios create and promote blockbusters in the digital era.

1.9. The new digital era – Marvel Cinematic Universe and the multiverse structures

This subchapter explores the construction of the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) as a paradigmatic model of transmedia franchise and global success in film marketing. I begin by showing how superhero mythology reflects the needs and tensions of each era, with the MCU offering an ideological mirror of the social and political climate of recent decades. The analysis traces Marvel's transformation from a nearly bankrupt publishing house in the 1990s into a global brand—thanks to licensing strategies, financial restructuring, and especially the launch of Marvel Studios and the film *Iron Man*, which paved the way for a coherent, long-term cinematic universe.

I detail how Marvel employed fragmented storytelling across multiple films, post-credit scenes, easter eggs, and recurring elements to build a spherical narrative form that rewards full viewing and fan loyalty. The chapter emphasizes how the MCU has redefined marketing: trailers, merchandise, and teasers are no longer just promotional tools but active components of narrative construction. Furthermore, I expand on the concept of transmedia storytelling (as theorized by Jenkins), demonstrating how each platform—from games and comics to TV series and social media—contributes to the development of the universe rather than simply extending it.

The MCU is analyzed as both a narrative and commercial ecosystem that builds audience loyalty through active engagement, creating a global community of co-narrators. Thus, Marvel's strategy becomes a landmark of contemporary cinema, where marketing and storytelling merge to sustain a franchise with unprecedented impact on popular culture.

SUMMARY PART II.

MARKETING IN ROMANIAN CINEMA

2.1. The post-covid paradigm shift and the TikTok era

This subchapter examines major changes in the landscape of audiovisual consumption and film marketing in a context dominated by social media and streaming platforms. Two fundamental developments are analyzed: the rise of short-form video content (Reels, TikTok, YouTube Shorts) and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, which accelerated digital consumption and blurred the boundaries between audiovisual formats. From professional experience, I observe that audiences no longer clearly distinguish between arthouse films or

films, television series, or commercial products, which affects both reception and distribution strategies. The Netflix model has imposed a standardized aesthetic and consumption style, impacting local markets—as seen in the example of *Subteran*, an original series clearly influenced by TV formats already present on other national platforms in Romania. Through my professional experience in the Midpoint Series Launch and EWA Series Accelerator programs, these trends became apparent, as did a creative return to classical serial dramaturgy and a strategic push by platforms to expand into Eastern Europe. This section also discusses European directives aimed at creating obligations for global platforms to invest locally, thereby supporting regional production and values.

The subchapter then details changes in digital marketing: the growing influence of social media, content personalization, decreasing tolerance for intrusive advertising, and the rise of influencer-based marketing. Demographic profiles and preferred content types are analyzed for major platforms (Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, Twitter/X), emphasizing the importance of tailoring messages to each network's specificities. The implications of the “windows of release” model are also discussed, along with how social media can support all stages of a film’s distribution. The role of FOMO (fear of missing out) in audience behavior is highlighted, showing how this phenomenon can be leveraged in film promotion. The TikTok case study illustrates both the viral potential and the risks of relinquishing control of messaging to creators. Finally, the relationship between digital marketing strategies and European policies for cultural identity preservation is examined, including directives and funding programs such as Creative Europe MEDIA and Eurimages. The subchapter argues that success no longer depends solely on budget, but on the ability to build coherent campaigns tailored to the digital context and integrated from the earliest stages of production.

2.2. Romanian New Wave and marketing campaigns from 2000 to 2015

The Romanian New Wave marked a profound shift in local cinema starting in the early 2000s, bringing to the forefront a minimalist aesthetic, a realist approach to social issues, and a formal rigor that quickly drew the attention of major international film festivals. The films of Cristi Puiu, Cristian Mungiu, Corneliu Porumboiu, Cătălin Mitulescu, and Radu Muntean were praised for their artistic strength and lucid representation of post-communist reality, but they struggled to reach a wide audience in Romania. Although they accumulated major awards—such as *Un Certain Regard*, *Caméra d’Or*, and the *Palme d’Or*—and were sold internationally

in dozens of territories, these films had a limited impact at the domestic box office, often being perceived by local viewers as inaccessible or overly austere.

This dissonance between critical and commercial success sparked numerous reflections within the industry. It became clear that, despite their obvious artistic value, these films lacked promotion strategies adapted to Romanian audiences and failed to build an active relationship with potential viewers. At the same time, local audiences were rarely exposed to critical discourse that could help them understand the conventions of this type of cinema, and the lack of a systemic film education contributed to the perception gap.

Starting in 2016, however, signs of a transition toward a new model began to emerge: directors such as Bogdan Mirică and even Corneliu Porumboiu proposed hybrid formulas in which genre cinema elements (thriller, noir, crime) were combined with auteur aesthetics. These films—more accessible in terms of narrative and visuals, though still classified as arthouse—achieved a better balance between international recognition and domestic reception, attracting larger audiences to cinemas. This suggests an evolution toward a contemporary Romanian auteur cinema that retains the artistic coherence of the New Wave while exploring new ways to connect with audiences both nationally and internationally.

2.3.New “Romanian New Wave” of... commercial films?

This subchapter explores the image and consumption crisis between Romanian auteur cinema—particularly the kind associated with the New Wave—and domestic audiences. Several causes for this disconnect are identified: the decline of cinema infrastructure, audience preferences shaped by television and American film, and a lack of diversity in the Romanian film offering. This divide has created an imbalance in the local industry’s development, forcing it to oscillate between award-winning but non-commercial films, and lightweight comedies produced for general audiences, often without strong artistic ambition.

In this context, the chapter argues for the necessity of so-called “middle films”—productions that combine artistic value with accessibility and broad appeal—essential for building a healthy and sustainable film industry. Interviews with industry professionals add depth to this reflection: Cătălin Anchidin highlights the evolving audience and the growing distance between Generation Z and established auteurs, while also noting the declining interest in influencer-based commercial films. Anamaria Antoci acknowledges the importance of the emergence of these films but points out their inconsistent quality. Diana Caravia emphasizes the lack of a tradition of middlebrow cinema that could balance the market, while Anca

Macoviciuc suggests a number of recent titles that fit into this middle category, noting the differences in approach between commercial films and more cinematic works with audience potential.

Thus, the subchapter argues that only through a conscious diversification of film production—understood as both cultural and economic products—can the Romanian film industry achieve long-term sustainability and relevance, both locally and internationally.

2.4. *Child's Pose* and the “we support Romania at Berlinale” campaign

This subchapter analyzes the case of the film *Child's Pose* as a rare example of simultaneous success both internationally and domestically—a notable achievement for Romanian auteur cinema. The film won the Golden Bear at the Berlinale and attracted nearly 120,000 viewers in Romania, becoming a benchmark for effective film marketing. The promotional strategy, coordinated by Cătălin Anchidin, employed an emotional approach, building a narrative of national pride around the film and turning its festival participation into a collective event. The campaign was supported by three main directions: association with top Romanian athletes, consistent media presence, and intensive communication through social media. The film's success demonstrated that an auteur production can become a public phenomenon if it is strategically positioned in public discourse and promoted intelligently. This subchapter suggests that the lessons from this model could be essential for the consolidation of mid-range films in Romania.

2.5. Romanian middlebrow film – *Two lottery tickets*

This subchapter analyzes the case of *Two lottery tickets* as an example of independent success that exceeded expectations in a cinematic market dominated by the polarization between award-winning auteur films and commercial comedies lacking artistic ambition. Produced without funding from the Romanian Film Center and on a modest budget, the film emerged as a model of middlebrow cinema—accessible to a broad audience yet well-crafted and culturally grounded. The promotional strategy, centered on the direct involvement of the creative team, organic virality, interactive contests, and creative handling of controversies, played a decisive role in its success. The film attracted over 100,000 viewers in cinemas, went viral on social media, and was later distributed internationally, including in the United States. Through gentle humor, intelligent marketing, and a campaign tailored to the local context, *Two*

lottery tickets managed to reconnect Romanian audiences with local cinema, becoming a benchmark for future middlebrow productions in the Romanian landscape..

2.6. *Collective*, *Arsenie: An amazing afterlife* and documentary mechanisms

This subchapter examines how two recent Romanian documentaries—*Collective* (Alexander Nanau) and *Arsenie: An amazing afterlife* (Alexandru Solomon)—generated strong public reactions through marketing strategies tailored to their themes. *Collective*, promoted via prestigious international channels and distributed by Magnolia Pictures and Participant Media, became a global cultural brand, reinforced by Oscar nominations and wide distribution. Its strategy relied on international validation and alignment with civic momentum, turning the film into a symbol of anti-corruption activism. In contrast, *Arsenie: An amazing afterlife* aimed to spark an internal dialogue through a campaign focused on local communities and the sensitive management of religious controversies. Its visibility was amplified by polarization and heated debate but did not translate into significant box-office success. Both films demonstrate the power of documentary cinema as a tool of cultural influence—whether as an internationally recognized export product or as a mirror reflecting internal tensions in Romanian society.

2.7. *The New Year that never came* or the new middlebrow

In this subchapter, I analyze the recent remarkable success of the film *The New Year that never came* (2024) as a model of balance between festival recognition and commercial impact. The film premiered in Venice, where it won four major awards, and was subsequently screened at over 40 festivals and sold to key European markets. In Romania, its release in multiplexes and a marketing campaign led by Forum Film contributed to a box office of over 2.4 million RON and wide visibility. The promotional strategy leveraged a well-known cast, the film's tragicomic and historical components, and messaging adapted to varied audience segments. Pre-screening tests as focus groups, media partnerships, and collaborations with influencers from relevant fields reinforced the campaign. The film positioned itself as a middlebrow product—accessible yet of high quality—successfully drawing wide audiences without compromising on thematic depth. The subchapter highlights this case as proof of the Romanian film industry's potential to navigate between art and commerce through well-calibrated marketing strategies.

2.8. Building marketing strategies from the development stage

This subchapter analyzes the structural differences between European auteur cinema and the North American commercial model, focusing on their impact on marketing and distribution strategies. Unlike U.S. studio productions, which are financed by private capital and designed as blockbusters, European auteur films rely largely on public funding, European grants, interest-free loans, and state aid such as Romania's cash rebate scheme. These support mechanisms condition the development of marketing strategies as early as the project development stage, particularly in a market dominated by American cinema.

I highlight the importance of tailored marketing strategies for auteur films, emphasizing the role of major film festivals (Cannes, Berlin, Venice) as gateways to international distribution. The case of *Collective* by Alexander Nanau is offered as an example, where the road to the Oscars was triggered by selections at Venice and Toronto. I explain key analytical tools used by professionals—benchmarking, SWOT analysis, positioning, Audience Design—and how these help define target audiences, key messages, and optimal promotional channels.

Drawing from my experience as a film producer and my participation in EAVE workshops and collaborations with specialized agencies, I outline a practical guide to strategic film marketing. Romanian case studies—*Illegitimate*, *The Fixer*, *Men of Deeds*—are presented with a focus on how festival selection and social messaging influenced positioning. I also address real-world market challenges: minimal budgets, delayed promotion, limited distribution, and the reduced impact of conventional communication strategies.

The subchapter concludes with a look at European audiences, using demographic studies and segmentation data that reveal limited interest in auteur cinema and underline the role of empathy, interdisciplinary collaboration, and strategic positioning in building genuine audience connections. Director Radu Jude is analyzed as an example of consolidated notoriety that generates organic visibility, while also illustrating the ongoing gap between international success and domestic reception.

SUMMARY PART III.

CREATIVE FILM PRODUCTION

3.1. *To the North* - Introduction

This subchapter analyzes the trajectory of *To the North*, the fiction debut of director Mihai Mincan—a psychological thriller inspired by real events, distinguished by its unique

aesthetic and profound moral approach. With an international cast, dialogues in five languages, and an intense maritime setting, the film explores ethical dilemmas between salvation and authority. Critically acclaimed for its narrative complexity and visual power, *To the North* had a remarkable festival career (Venice, Karlovy Vary, TIFF) and was acquired by HBO and SBS Australia, securing its artistic standing internationally.

In Romania, however, the film faced challenges in theatrical distribution, hindered by the post-pandemic context and the absence of a promotional campaign targeting a broad audience. Despite receiving major recognition at the Gopo and UCIN Awards (including for cinematography, screenplay, performance, and editing), *To the North* did not manage to attract a large audience in cinemas. This gap between artistic value and commercial impact underscores the current limitations of the Romanian market for ambitious auteur cinema and highlights the need for marketing strategies tailored to the content and the contemporary modes of media consumption.

3.2. *To the North* – Creative development stage

This section traces the genesis and development of *To the North*, Mihai Mincan's fiction debut, inspired by a real case reported by *The New York Times* in 1997. The initial journalistic investigation, which laid the foundation for the first script draft written in 2016, was complemented by thorough research on Romanian migration in the 1990s and the phenomenon of stowaways on commercial ships. The team chose to fictionalize these events not through classic social realism, but by integrating a moral and aesthetic discourse influenced by genre cinema. Steering away from an explanatory approach, the narrative focuses on ethical dilemmas, power dynamics, and faith, as embodied by the three main characters—a Romanian migrant, a religious Filipino seaman, and an authoritarian Taiwanese captain. The screenplay underwent several rewrites between 2016 and 2021, shaped by feedback from EAVE workshops and by production constraints. Visually, the film is defined by the contrast between the vastness of the ocean and the claustrophobic spaces of the ship, with tension built through rhythm, mise-en-scène, and meaningful silences. The sound design, created by Nicholas Becker (Oscar winner for *Sound of Metal*), combines the ship's authentic industrial noises with organic musical compositions, contributing to the film's intense atmosphere. Thus, *To the North* proposes a distinct cinematic model within the Romanian context, blending existential themes with a refined visual and auditory style in a genre-based auteur film.

3.3. *To the North* – Project development stage

This subchapter details the complex project development process of *To the North*, centered on the close collaboration between writer-director Mihai Mincan and the production team, following an integrated model where creative, production, and strategic dimensions were developed in parallel. The project development stage included establishing a shared vision and creating a professional presentation package—the minikit—which contained materials such as synopsis, treatment, moodboard, and the director's and producer's notes. Participation in workshops, pitching sessions, and international markets served both to refine the artistic discourse and to attract coproduction partners, decisively shaping production decisions: locations, international crew, technical format, and shooting schedule.

Key strategies were organized across three pillars: production, financing, and marketing. The financing strategy relied on support from the Romanian Film Center, supplemented by an international coproduction scheme to meet the above-average project budget. The marketing strategy was initiated early in the development phase and included SWOT analysis, benchmarking, empathy maps, and international workshops—all contributing to the positioning of the film and the identification of its target audience. These actions led to a European-market-oriented marketing strategy, incorporating visual proposals and communication lines, which in turn influenced creative decisions and distribution planning. The chapter demonstrates how a strategic approach from the earliest stages is essential for the successful realization of an ambitious auteur film.

3.4. *To the North* – Production strategy

This section explores the production and international coproduction strategy of *To the North*, whose primary objective was integration into an accredited European circuit to facilitate both production and festival launch. Participation in elite programs such as EAVE Producers Workshop, Ties That Bind, Sofia Meetings, ApostLab, and New Horizons Studio+ was crucial in refining the project's creative, financial, and marketing components, with input from international experts and the consolidation of a strong partnership network. Based on this strategy, the project secured financing from multiple sources (Romanian Film Center, MEDIA, Eurimages, national funds from Greece, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, and France), resulting in a multilateral coproduction involving five countries, each contributing financially, artistically, and logistically.

The implementation of the film faced major production challenges, particularly regarding maritime locations and international legal constraints, which were resolved by splitting filming across multiple territories (Romania, Greece, France). The production strategy included sophisticated technical solutions—greenscreen, set extension, VFX—executed in collaboration with renowned European studios. The international team included actors, technicians, and sound artists from the coproducing countries, ensuring a cohesive transnational artistic approach. The Romanian contribution remained predominant, supported by Romanian Film Center, Romanian Television, MEDIA funds, and private investments through the national media tax scheme. This chapter illustrates how an ambitious debut film can be realized through a carefully constructed strategic framework that coordinates artistic development, financing access, and integration into relevant international networks.

3.5. *To the North* – Financing strategy and international coproduction

This subchapter outlines how the financing strategy for *To the North* was implemented in accordance with Romanian and European regulations regarding film coproduction. Since Romania has only five active bilateral treaties, the project relied on the 1992 European Convention on Cinematographic Co-production, which permits multilateral collaboration among signatory states. Thus, *To the North* was officially produced as an international coproduction involving Romania (57.17%), France (12.83%), Greece (10%), Bulgaria (10%), and the Czech Republic (10%), with a total budget of €2.1 million. Filming took place in 2021 across Romania, Greece, and France, and postproduction was completed in spring 2022, in line with the convention's standards and with creative and technical contributions from each participating territory.

3.6. *To the North* – Marketing strategy in development

This subchapter offers an in-depth analysis of the marketing and positioning strategy of *To the North*, focusing on the evolution of ideas developed from the earliest stages, beginning with the EAVE Producers Workshop 2018 under the guidance of expert Sarah Calderon. A SWOT analysis was central in formulating the film's strengths (true-story inspiration, contemporary themes, relevant cinematic approach), opportunities (the need to reinvent distribution strategies in a pandemic context), as well as risks (first-time director, violent ending, lack of female characters, predominantly male cast). The strategic objective

was to secure a world premiere at an A-list festival (Cannes or Venice), followed by a public-awareness campaign centered on Romanian migration—employing real-life narratives and digital content promoted through influencers and online media. The film was strategically positioned as a drama with thriller elements, depending on the pitching context, funding applications, and creative consultations, resulting in four international communication frameworks blending dramatic and suspenseful tones.

The subchapter also details the positioning challenges on the international market: the film was perceived neither as an Asian product in Asia, nor as a recognizably European one in Europe, which hindered its distribution. Ongoing consultations with experts also highlighted the absence of a central female character—an essential element for audience identification in Europe, where female viewers make up the majority. Despite a notable festival run and strong strategic choices, the film's post-pandemic release entered an oversaturated market dominated by blockbusters and lacking efficient promotional channels for local films. The film's poorly communicated positioning—especially the underutilization of its thriller component—led to limited public engagement in Romania, despite international critical acclaim. This chapter thus highlights the complexity of building a marketing strategy for an auteur film, showing how positioning, genre framing, promotional discourse, and release timing are crucial for a film's success in a fragile and deeply transformed post-pandemic market.

3.7. *Milk Teeth* – development, financing, production

The subchapter dedicated to *Milk Teeth* offers an in-depth exploration of the artistic, ethical, and production development of director Mihai Mincan's second feature film. Inspired by a true story about the disappearance of a child in the final years of communism, the film follows the inner journey of an eight-year-old girl, Maria, as she attempts to understand and overcome the trauma of her sister's disappearance. The directorial vision is grounded in an aesthetic of silent trauma, placing the child's perspective at the center of the narrative and interpreting horror through absence and the dissolution of reality. The project blends realist and fantastic registers, choosing a cinematic form that visualizes the tension between childhood and the violence of recent history, set against the backdrop of a Romanian context shaped by transition and rupture.

From a production standpoint, the film was strategically developed as a multilateral co-production with partners from France, Greece, Bulgaria, and Denmark, building on the partnerships established during *To the North*. The strategy emphasized creative contributions

from each territory, ecological sustainability, and international distribution. Filming was adapted to work with minors, and the casting process included selections from underrepresented backgrounds. The project was awarded at TorinoFilmLab and is currently in post-production. From a marketing perspective, the strategy targets crossover potential, combining auteur sensibilities with genre elements such as mystery and fantasy. The intended distribution includes A-list festivals, VOD platforms, and national theatrical releases through local partnerships. *Milk Teeth* thus emerges as an allegory of loss and hope, a reflection on collective memory, and a tribute to the silenced voices of the post-communist generation.

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

The concluding chapter synthesizes the central argument of the thesis: contemporary film marketing functions as a form of extended narrative that builds bridges between fiction and reality, shaping audience perception and turning films into complex cultural experiences. The case studies – from *Gone with the Wind*, *Psycho*, *Star Wars*, *Twin Peaks*, and *The Blair Witch Project* to *The Dark Knight* and the Marvel Universe – illustrate a wide range of creative strategies, from spectacular campaigns and interactive events to transmedia extensions and viral mechanisms. What they all share is the aim of transforming the viewer from a passive consumer into an active participant in the fictional world. This type of marketing not only promotes but also creates communities, identity, and emotional engagement, influencing a film's success and longevity.

At the same time, the chapter highlights the urgent need to adapt these practices within Romanian cinema. In a landscape polarized between internationally acclaimed arthouse films that often fail to connect with local audiences and easily digestible commercial comedies, there is a noticeable gap in the middle – the so-called middlebrow films, capable of reconciling artistic ambition with popular appeal. Recent examples such as *Two lottery tickets* or *Teambuilding* have shown the potential to mobilize audiences, while also revealing challenges related to quality and sustainability. The proposed solution lies in the consistent support of mid-range productions and the implementation of creative marketing strategies tailored to local realities, capable of transforming Romanian films into vibrant cultural experiences. Marketing should not be viewed as a mere "accessory," but as an integral component of the filmmaking process, playing a key role in reconnecting Romanian cinema with its audience and positioning it more firmly on the European market.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Interview with Anca Macoviciuc (cultural communication expert)

Appendix 2 – Interview with Cătălin Anchidin (expert in marketing and cultural communication)

Appendix 3 – Interview with Anamaria Antoci (film producer)

Appendix 4 – Interview with Diana Caravia (film producer)

Appendix 5 – Interview with Alexander Nanau (film director and producer)

Appendix 6 – Interview with Paul Negoescu (film director and producer)

Appendix 7 – Interview with Gabriela Suciș Pădurețu (film producer and distributor)

Appendix 8 – Development excerpts from *Milk Teeth*