Seeking legitimacy through specialization and diversification

How do film festivals select films

Hayder Mahdi A Al Dawood
Abstract

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In recent years, academics have taken an interest in film festivals, examining their economic and cultural effect from various angles. The study of film festivals through the lens of industrial management was one of these approaches. This thesis seeks to expand the theoretical construct of institutional isomorphism by using a gatekeeping model to understand the process of film festival selection. The research uses qualitative methods, data collected through semi-structured interviews with gatekeepers at six international short film festivals. According to the findings, film festivals use a similar gatekeeping procedure. Festivals become coercively isomorphic due to external influences such as social expectations and reliance on other organizations. Furthermore, since an uncertain environment characterizes the cultural industry, neo-institutionalism claims that organizations seek legitimacy over time and model themselves after other organizations in the same field. As a result, the most successful approach for building legitimacy over time is to become distinctive or specialized. Thus, film festivals should concentrate on a single specialization before diversifying within that niche. Film festivals will be labeled and recognized based on their selection procedures, regardless of how neutrally they present themselves. This reputation is mainly the result of external pressure and interactions with other actors.

Keywords: Film festivals, Programming, Gatekeeping, Isomorphism
Popular scientific summary

People make daily decisions; their social behaviors and other factors influence those decisions. The purpose of this thesis is to examine decision-making on a larger scale, specifically in institutions or organizations. This study focused on film festivals among various industries due to their economic, social, and cultural significance. This thesis seeks to investigate and comprehend how film festivals choose films for their programs. For film festivals and authors, film programs are the primary element and output of film festivals. The film programmer is the direct and accountable party for selecting films to be shown to the audience. The study interviewed international film programmers from various countries to gain a global perspective on the decision-making processes to understand the process better. The study discovered that selecting films is quite similar across film festivals: the selection mechanism, structure, and strategies. Like any other creative industry, film festivals employ a gatekeeping selection process. Films are submitted (unsolicited film submissions) or pursued out by programmers via networking and scouting. The similarity in structure reflects the number of selection committee members who screen films in an initial phase before the program director, art director, or equivalent position makes the final decision.

Additionally, the similarities between film festivals manifested themselves in their selection strategies, with film festivals aiming to be inclusive and diverse. These strategies can affect the selection process, such as quotas to ensure equal representation of gender, sex, race, and country. As with any other institution governed by norms and rules, film festivals select programmers with specific characteristics to meet their objectives. Finally, this study discovered that film festivals are similar due to the everyday pressures they face. This pressure may be a result of the uncertain environment in which film festivals operate. However, perhaps most significantly, the pressure results from film festivals' dependence on other organizations. Film festivals rely on a variety of actors, including distribution companies, government regulations, and society. The source of pressure varies according to the location, size, and focus of the film festival. For instance, the study argues that western festivals and their selection processes are influenced by social expectations, whereas local regulators primarily influence eastern festivals.
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1. Introduction

Every day, many decisions are made at the individual and group levels. All decisions, from the simplest to the most complex, influence our lives, both directly and indirectly. Among the critical choices are those that need evaluation between various alternatives. Assume we concentrate our efforts on opportunity-seeking viewpoints. A recent college student, an aspiring artist who wants to offer their services to an organization, and employees who are seeking employment all play a role in this process. A process by which people apply to institutions and organizations with the aim of being selected from a pool of several candidates. Institutions and organizations, like people, have difficulty making decisions based on a variety of factors. When faced with a flood of applications, and especially when the selection procedure inspects unsolicited work or unknown candidates, most applications suffer continual rejection.

Decision-making has been debated extensively by academics. Numerous decision-making theories and models have been discussed and applied in a wide range of fields. The purpose of this thesis is to improve our understanding of the decision-making process, specifically the selection process that institutions use as a primary practice. From the industrial engineering and management perspectives, the term "industry" denotes the economic activity concerned with processing raw materials and the manufacture of goods in factories (Oxford dictionary n.d). However, researching industries entails examining how value is created in general. Products and services are developed to add economic, social, and environmental value to industries and society. In other words, any product or service that adds value to society can be studied by industrial engineering and management. Therefore, among various industries, we choose the creative industries as the focus of this study. According to the European Commission (2018), the creative industry/sector includes "all sectors whose activities are based on cultural values, or other artistic individual or collective creative expressions." So, fashion, video games, music, books, and films are just a few examples of those activities and expressions. Cultural and creative industries (CCI) have demonstrated their economic importance, as evidenced by data collected over the last 15 years, by generating income, jobs, and exports. According to UNESCO estimates, CCI generated $2.3 trillion (3 percent of global GDP) and 29.5 million jobs (1 percent of the active global population) in 2013 (Palanivel, 2019). However, this study chose CCI for their economic impact in addition to their social and cultural significance. CCI is an inclusive industry where people from all social classes, indigenous to elites, participate as producers and consumers. This thesis intends to study and focus on one part of the creative industry, the film industry, and film festivals.
Researchers, in general, have overlooked researching film festivals (Charles-Clemens Rüling & Pederse, 2010; Bosma 2015; de Valck, 2007). This overlooked situation, combined with a limited literature on film festivals in general, does not eliminate the importance of film festivals. On the contrary, practitioners and schoolers cannot neglect film festivals and their significant role within the film industry. Film festivals have a huge impact on the production, distribution, and reception of films, both industrially and institutionally (Wiedemann & Krainhöfer, 2020). According to Iordanova (2015), "a film festival is no longer mainly an exhibition operation but becomes a participant in many other aspects of the creative cycle—such as production, financing, networking, and distribution—and thus turns into a key player in the film industry, as well as society at large." In addition to this, the film festival also provides a platform for young filmmakers to present their creative ideas (Pangborn, 2021). Film festivals have acquired this significance because of the cultural product they showcase, films. Films are not only a valuable economic asset and a form of cultural heritage. However, they are also meaningful because they construct reality and connect to social structures that assign quality and give meaning to cultural things (Caldwell, 2008; Sutherland & Feltey, 2012). Films combine visuals, music, conversation, lighting, sound, and special effects. This combination may evoke strong emotions and help reflect on our own lives, which is why films profoundly impact many people today. They are considered cultural goods (Hirsch, 1972) created in art worlds and result from the collaboration of many actors involved in their creation (Becker, 1982). Each one has the potential to help us better understand ourselves, the people in our immediate environment, as well as how our society and culture function (Mahmood, 2013).

Films can be studied from a social studies perspective, as scholars discovered that studying history through film, for example, "can serve as windows into the past." As with artifacts and photographs, films help students connect with the people and events being studied" (Matz & Pingatore, 2005, p.189). Film festivals are venues for presenting new film productions. The art curator who selects films for public screening is considered a gatekeeper (Janssen & Verboord, 2015; Bosma, 2015). According to Shoemaker & Vos (2009), gatekeepers are senior data decision-makers who monitor the flow of information throughout an entire social system. They permit certain information through their audience based on personal preference, professional experience, social influences, or bias. Therefore, Wiedemann & Krainhöfer (2020) argue that film festivals are more than celebrities and a red carpet. Instead, they should serve as crucial gatekeepers that define film culture by cultivating notions of quality, significance, and meaning. So, it was critical to examine film festivals and their selection process.
1.1 Previous research and research gap

Thomson (2003), Ma (2017), and others argued that despite the importance of film festival selection process, few have written and discussed it to understand its mechanics. Although research on film festival and its selection process has increased in the past few years compared to past studies that were more general when discussing the selection process, key research gaps remain. Firstly, although a growing number of studies on film festivals are conducted in different academic fields or literature, there are still few about industrial management and institutional analyses. Secondly, literature that targeted film festival selection process was very general (Bosma, 2015; Czach, 2004; de Valck, 2007), describing strategies and criteria without referring to a specific festival context. Alternatively, very narrow, like studying only a single case (i.e., LGBTQ film festivals) (Wiedemann & Krainhöfer, 2020; June 2003). Thirdly, if other papers explored film selection process, most likely the goal behind it is too specific (i.e., exploring gender equality in festival programs) (Markt, 2019). This narrow approach can direct such research towards a particular area. Fourthly, most of the empirical data were from the western world (Jullien-Ramasso et al., 2012; Peranson, 2010), especially when it comes to the selection process of films (Simmonds, 2018). Perhaps the process could be different if we see it from other perspectives. Lastly, quantitative approaches become the dominant method, like analyzing an existing or previous film festival selections (Inoue & Sakuma, 2014; Haslam, 2004). Using such methodology will not necessarily answer the question of how film festivals select films. Instead, exploring film festival selection process needs more in-depth understanding.

In conclusion, closing at least one or two of these research gaps could have a broader perspective and contributions. It understands the effect of different elements that can influence film festival selection process, like studying other countries, regions, or film formats (short films or feature films). Moreover, exploring film festivals from institutional theories can reconstruct our perception of the film industry. Alternatively, the creative industry, in general, has similar elements to other sectors and understands its “behavior” in their selection practices. Finally, understanding film festival selection process using other sample group than what authors have built from previous research can help and contribute to future research. It can also inspire researchers to provide broader models, accurate charts, and even a theory on how films are selected regardless of the film festival type. Until that happens, the below research objectives and questions (s) shall describe how this thesis can address the above gap(s).
1.2 Main research problem and objectives

After briefly describing the research gaps identified through a review of related literature, the objective was to gain a broad understanding of how film festivals select films. So, the study will focus on exploring film selection processes among film festivals, particularly international short film festivals. The choice of short film festivals as there are very few studies that focused on targeting only international short film festivals. The selection of short films was motivated and justified because short films (those lasting less than or equal to 60 minutes) are the most popular film format among young, amateur, and professional filmmakers. Short films are relatively reliable for festival screenings (Lewis & Reddiough, 2001; Rea & Irving, 2015). This research will then focus on selecting films at the festival in general through examining short films selection. Additionally, the study aims to provide a more global perspective. The thesis examined European and non-European festivals, such as those in the Middle East and Asia. By conducting qualitative research and interviewing programmers worldwide, the study can gain more insights into how film festivals select their films. The objective is to provide an answer to the following research question:

RQ: How do film festivals select films?

To address this research question, a qualitative method is adopted, followed by an analysis of the empirical data utilizing relevant literature that directly or indirectly addressed the same question on how film festivals select films regardless of the film festival's theme or expertise (animation, thematic, etc.). Additional literature discussing the process of selecting or making decisions about other cultural items, such as books and music, might be beneficial. Finally, this thesis made use of institutional theory and the concept of gatekeeping.
2. Literature review

After introducing the topic and research question, one might ask, on the one hand, how and when film festivals reached that level of significance, and on the other hand, how the process of gatekeeping is performed at film festivals. To further illuminate this context and the research question and add additional justifications for the study's selection, the following sections will introduce the reader to the field study, relevant literature, and the theoretical foundations of this thesis. The following section will provide a brief history of film festivals additionally, how they developed as a European phenomenon from geopolitical motivations to economic and cultural contributors.

2.1 Field and background: The history of film festivals and festival programming

On 28 December 1895, the Grand Cafe in Paris hosted the world's first commercial film screening. Two French brothers, Louis, and Auguste Lumière created a camera projector known as the Cinematographe and screened their film (Vasudev et al., 2002). Films afterwards developed as a production and distribution system on a national and international scale, and film productions became industrialized. In the early 1900s, few studios dominated the market. In Europe, Pathé became a major player in France around 1905 and later in Europe and America. Italy had a production industry comparable to France's, while Denmark was a global exporter (Wong, 2011). In the US, Edison, Biograph, and Vitagraph competed against Pathé's dominance. However, one cannot isolate global events happened during that time such as the First World War and their effect on all industries and economics. So, during the First World War, European film production was generally disrupted, on the one hand. On the other hand, the American film industry blossomed and dominated other markets. As one of the world's major film producers, Italy was the most affected by this situation. Its output fell from 371 films in 1920 to only eight in 1930. Italy lost market share without film production. As a result, the Fascist regime needed to save Italian cinema and saw it as a political tool (Wong, 2011). Therefore, in 1932, the idea of the first international film festival was born when Benito Mussolini founded Venice as the first international film festival. The festival aims to showcase national cinemas' promotion, arguably with geopolitical motives (de Valck, 2007). The Venice international film festival (The Mostra Cinematografica di Venezia) combined international and national films by inviting nations to participate in a global showcase. According to de Valck (2007, p.24), describing the nature of films screened in Venice film festival, "films were not treated as mass-produced commodities, but as national accomplishments; as conveyors of cultural identity; as art and as unique artistic creations." Such logic differs fundamentally from that of the Hollywood agenda as commercial films dominate it. In contrast, Benito Mussolini's fascist regime saw cinema as art. As Wong (2011, p.37) put it, "a way to "glorify the nation-state and to further their goals, insisting that Italy as a film-producing nation could compete with Hollywood."
Unlike most film production that only produces films for mainstream or pure entertainment, films at film festivals tend to be associated with aesthetics and artistic techniques (Bosma, 2015). Building on the above, Bosma (2015); Wong (2011) define film festivals as cultural institutions that show some of the most recent film productions. Film festivals act as an alternative tool to address the imbalance between commercial/mainstream and marginal. In the post-World War II era, another major European festival was founded due to geopolitical motives to address cultural dominance. The Cannes Festival took place in 1946, was an initiative combining French, British and American efforts as anti-fascism to oppose Venice's international film festival (Gold & Gold, 2020; Wong, 2011). Later in 1951, another international film festival took place and was founded due to geopolitical reasons as well. The Berlin international film festival started as a political tool for the Americans in the Cold War by promoting the Western world and Western values in Eastern Berlin and Eastern Europe. Hence, the festival excluded films from communist countries (de Valck, 2007). Those previous international film festivals mentioned earlier (Venice, Cannes, and Berlin) are referred to as the "Big Three" (Kuhn & Westwell, 2020; Gaydos, 1998). The Big Three originated from geopolitical and cultural dominance roots. To legitimize cultures or emphasize specific policies (de Valck, 2007). These influence festivals have shown the importance of international film festivals as a function and gates to cultural legitimization based on the agenda of the festivals and types of films presented (De Valck, 2007). Once again, films proved their influence not only economically and aesthetically but also culturally and politically. Initially, film festivals selected films solely to celebrate a national achievement, but festivals abandoned this approach in the early 1970s. Films were no longer linked as a national achievement only but as an artistic accomplishment to their makers to be recognized globally. Because of that, film festivals select films this time to emphasize individual and creative choices. Also, major European festivals adopted the open selection strategy. Film festivals were intrigued by unfamiliar cinematic cultures, particularly those sprouting from the "Third World" (de Valck, 2007). This era is called "the age of programmers."

Referring to the term "the age of programmers," programmers or curators are the people who compile a film program (the film screenings) that is considered the product and the backbone of the film festival (Winton, 2020). Bosma (2015) prefers the term "film curator" over "film programmer" because "curator" is more closely associated with art and art installations such as galleries and museums. This thesis will use "film curator" or film programmer interchangeably. Similar words like referees, judges, to name a few, were also used from different literature depends on the context of the film festival, but they all mean the same role. As time passes, film festivals spread out internationally almost in most cities of the world. Film productions increase, technology to produce them improve, and festivals vary in size, influence, power, status, to name a few. Moreover, the rivalry has increased between film festivals to attract new audiences and expand their practices to provide a support platform for the film industry and greater cultural recognition (Winton, 2020).
Film festivals, on the other hand, cannot make those critical decisions that define cultural value without film programming. There was a need to assign a particular body to select films, especially when film festivals were no longer associated with national cinema. From this moment, film festival programming has started. Film programming is the selection process of films at festivals. Film programmers select films that are then screened to the public, making them considered tastemakers or gatekeepers that mediate between films and audiences (Czach, 2004; Rastegar, 2012; Stevens, 2016). Film programming has become the core activity of film festivals, serving a multitude of objectives and interests through the films they promote (Báez-Montenegro & Devesa-Fernández, 2017). Moreover, film festival programming has become a dynamic process of articulating the agenda-setting and determining a film festival's position (Ma, 2017). Film programmers find themselves creating a recognizable "corporate identity" and a clear curatorial profile through their film choices (Rüling & Pedersen, 2010). Suppose we build on what authors like Winton (2020) and Bosma (2015) have argued that film programs are the "product" of a film festival. Then, from an industrial management point of view, the programming process of "gatekeeping" can be like the product development process when examining its definition. From that point, it was vital in this research to look in-depth and understand the process of selecting films that compile a film program, the festival's product. Programmers are the responsible party for selecting films and conducting a film screening program and film programming helps define the festival's identity based on what films are selected. So, this process of choosing is necessary economically, socially, culturally, and symbolically for the film festival's participants and stakeholders.

2.2 Theoretical framework

After defining the field and history of film festivals, the next section will review and discuss the theoretical framework used in this thesis.

2.2.1 Neo-institutional theory and institutional isomorphism

According to the institutionalism theory, the term organizational fields describes "those organizations that, in aggregate, constitute a recognized area of institutional life: key suppliers, resources and product consumers, regulatory agencies, and other organizations that produce similar services or products" (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, p.148). For Scott (1994), organizational fields are organizations that share meaning systems and similar symbolic processes. Also, when governed by similar regulatory processes. Furthermore, according to DiMaggio & Powell (1991), the organizational field is defined by the various actors who make up the recognized organizational field. Those actors socially construct the field by their cognitive view, which includes relational and cultural elements. Authors like Nadavulakere (2008); Simmonds (2018) examined film festivals through the lens of institutional theories. They studied and saw that film festivals constitute a recognized organizational field, which is the main component of institutional theory. Based on the definition, the field actors within the organizational
field, in our case, film festivals, can be internal actors like festival standards, rules, and policies, or external actors like distributors, producers, sales agents, sponsors, governments, etc. (Peranson, 2010). As a subset of organizational fields, film festivals are part of an institutional environment that can influence the formation of formal structures within an organization (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). According to Scott (1987, p.498), institutional environments "are characterized by the elaboration of rules and requirements to which individual organizations must conform to receive legitimacy and support." Suchman (1995, p.574) defines legitimacy as a "generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions." Those shared interpretations and activities are socially acceptable to gain legitimacy, which can help ensure institutional survival (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). As a result of this environment, neo-institutionalism assumes that organizations, to ensure survival and gain legitimacy, then the institutional environment pressures increase the homogeneity of organizational structures. Neo-institutionalist refers to this pressure by "Institutional Isomorphism" and defines it as the similarity of one organization's processes or structures. Organizations achieve Institutional Isomorphism by imitating other organizations or independently develop their system under similar constraints (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Organizations are making these efforts in response to the pressure on communities to conform to the outside world. There are three types of forces that cause organizations to adopt similar structures. According to DiMaggio & Powell (1983), three isomorphic mechanisms can cause isomorphic changes. Those mechanisms are coercive, mimetic, and normative isomorphism. According to DiMaggio & Powell (1983) and illustrated in (Figure 1):

- **Coercive isomorphism** is a result of both formal and informal pressures placed on organizations by other organizations on which they rely, as well as cultural expectations in the society in which they operate (institutional environment).
- **Mimetic isomorphism**; is characterized by uncertainty, which is a powerful motivator for imitation. Regarding mimetic isomorphism, "March and Olsen (1976) found that when organizational technologies are poorly understood, when goals are ambiguous, or when the environment creates symbolic uncertainty, and when legitimacy has not yet been established, organizations may model themselves on other organizations" (DiMaggio & Powell 1983,150-151).
- **Normative isomorphism** relies extensively on professionals. It occurs when professions use a variety of social rewards and punishments to force individuals in organizations to conform to the dominant behaviors of their professional communities (DiMaggio and Powell 1983).
Hirsch (1972); Franssen & Kuipers (2013) states that the production and distribution of "cultural" items often face highly uncertain environments at their input and output boundaries. According to Janssen & Verboord (2015); Bosma (2015), distribution in the cultural industry (films, books, music, etc.) is the process of selecting those products to be circulated (displayed). In film festivals, the equivalent activity or process to select products for display or circulation is the programming process and performed by curators (programmers). Bosma (2015) viewed film programming as the process of creating/developing the organization's primary product. Also, film programming is regarded as a gatekeeping process (Janssen & Verboord, 2015; Bosma, 2015) and is affected by the organizational actors (Peranson, 2010; Simmonds, 2018). From the definition of DiMaggio & Powell (1983), institutional isomorphism occurs in the structure and the processes. As a result, this study will try to extend neo-institutional concepts and institutional isomorphism to study the process of selecting films (film programming) at film festivals. The following section will dive into the programming process itself and understand its mechanism in the light of gatekeeping models.

2.2.2 Gatekeeping process

The previous section viewed the reason behind using neo-institutional theory as it can explain the motives when institutions have similar process or structures. However, neo-institutional theory cannot be used to understand how the actual process of selection occurs and procedures. Therefore, this thesis will support the understanding of film festival programming by using the gatekeeping concept and a gatekeeping model. Together, the gatekeeping model and neo-institutionalism can be extended and give
a broader experience of film festival programming in specific and cultural industries in general. On the one hand, the model can help explain the process of selecting films at festivals. On the other hand, if those processes are similar among other film festivals, then the theory shall explain why they are identical. According to Shoemaker & Vos (2009, p.1), "gatekeeping is the process of culling and crafting countless bits of information into the limited number of messages that reach people each day." Scholars used gatekeeping at first in the journalism field. Still, previous research showed that authors have applied in different social studies, like mass media and the creative industry, such as a published book (Chong 2013), book translation (Franssen & Kuipers, 2013), and fashion model (Mears 2011). Gatekeeping within cultural/creative industries is the activity of selecting and rejecting cultural goods. A classic version of gatekeeping is David Manning White's vision of gatekeeping in a newspaper editorial process, see Figure 2.

![Figure 2: McQuail and Windahl, 1981, pp. 100–101 cited in Shoemaker & Vos, 2009, p.16](image)

Figures 2: According to White, the selection decisions were "extremely subjective." Around a third of the time, stories were rejected based on the editor’s assessment of the item’s merits, most notably whether he believed it was true. The remaining two-thirds of items were rejected due to a lack of space or because similar items were already running (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). The gatekeeping model can aid in the study of the selection process for films, particularly unsolicited submissions. Unsolicited submissions, or what is known by the literary journal field as "blind submissions." They are materials (in this case, films) that arrive with no prior knowledge of their history or creator (Simmonds, 2018; Fürst, 2018). Therefore, most of these submissions get rejected by gatekeepers. On rare occasions, those submission gatekeepers choose them to be screened (Fürst, 2018). Gieber (1956) criticized the White model as having less importance for personal subjectivity than structural factors such as the "number of news articles available, their size and time and mechanical pressures" (Gieber, 1964, p.175). He concluded that the organization and its routines are more important than the characteristics of the individual worker. Westley & MacLean (1957) updated the model (see Figure 3).
According to Westley & MacLean's (1957) model, multiple events or items (X) discovered by the sender (A) then travels to the mass media gatekeeper (C) gatekeeper, then to the receiver (B). According to (Figure 3), several sources (films) represented by (Xn) either flow/discovered by the sender. The process of selection can be as follows:

New film sources (Xn) enter the film festival (the gate), and one or more gatekeepers process them. The model depicted three primary passageways through which information (films) flows. The sender (A) and the gatekeeper (C) are presumed to be accountable for gatekeeping. If the films require preliminary filtering process, the sender (A) is responsible for that task. The sender is not permitted to distribute those materials or films directly to the audience (B). However, it must first pass through the gatekeeper (C). They are the primary actors in the gatekeeping process. They are capable of processing items (films) after they have been processed and filtered by the sender to the audience (B).

Additionally, the programmer can process items (films) directly, bypassing the sender (A), as the model suggests. As a result, the programmer or gatekeeper is responsible for performing a gatekeeping process and deciding whether or not to pass them on to the audience. Moreover, the model presupposes that a feedback loop exists between the audience and the programmer and between the programmer and the sender. Radical quality uncertainty conditions the gatekeeping situation in the cultural industry (Hirsch, 1972). So, in an unsolicited submission situation, or when no formal guidelines or evaluation standards exist, finding the suitable "film" is based on embodied tacit knowledge (Polanyi 1967) or accumulative experience (Franssen & Kuipers, 2013). Because the cultural goods and their creator lack a reputation, there are no networks to reduce uncertainty. Economic sociology addressed quality uncertainty by recurrent ties between cultural goods producers and gatekeepers and by the producer's reputation and past performance (Fürst, 2018), which solves the solicited submission type.
According to Simmonds (2018, p.170),

"Solicited submissions – films where programmers know the people associated with them (filmmaker, producer or studios) and where these films are solicited through engagement and discussions with members of the films project team. Then a decision is made, and these films are directly watched by members of the programming team based on specified regions or genres."

In general, the gatekeeping process serves as a link between artists and audiences. Along with describing the process through a gatekeeping model, neo-institutional theory demonstrates that multiple actors, such as standards and policies communicated through programmers, influence the selection process. Gieber (1964) confirmed this by stating that "gatekeepers" are exposed to not only routines but also institutional values and constraints that influence their selection process (Donohue et al., 1989). After establishing the main theoretical framework within which this study will proceed. The methodology part will be discussed in the following chapter.
3. Methodology

The goal of this research is to learn about and gain a better understanding of the film festival selection process, as well as to understand the logic behind their decisions. Thus, in order to address and resolve this research question and problem, the study employed a relativistic ontological approach, focusing on the collection of experimental data. The objective is to generate contextual real-world knowledge about a certain group of people's actions, social structures, and common ideas. Thus, the objective is to employ a qualitative approach in order to investigate and analyze what the responsible body (programmers) has to say about their own programming process. According to Bryman and Bell (2011), qualitative research seeks out rich, detailed responses, whereas quantitative research seeks out broad, general responses.

Bosma (2015, p.17) also confirm the choice of methodology, “qualitative research aims to gain an understanding of underlying reasons and motivations, to provide insights into the setting of a phenomenon, to uncover prevalent trends in thoughts and opinions.” Primary dataset was gathered instead of using existing data. Interviews were the most convenient and standard way. Although unstructured interviews typically result in a high level of comprehension and participant own perception, the interview desired to focus on the selection process in comparison to other participants rather than focusing on individuals. As a result, primary in-depth data were acquired using semi-structured interviews. Because it was presumed that the interviewer was unfamiliar with film festivals and their film selection procedure, a structured interview was considered unreliable. Because qualitative research is often subjective, the following section will focus more on the choices regarding participants and sampling and explain how data collection was conducted.

3.1 Data collection

Semi-structured interviews were the primary method of data collection. This method is most frequently used in the domains of social science and film studies, and it is by far the most appropriate method for gathering data and addressing this specific research subject, along with focus groups. Because the purpose was to gain an understanding of the film selection process or programming, the sampling was purposive and targeted decision makers at film festivals, primarily the programmers. To begin, I compiled a list of all possible international short film festivals based on one created by (Show Me Shorts, n.d.). I contacted and emailed number of film festivals and programmers both through the festival site or reach out to programmers directly. It was very challenging to locate a significant number of participants within the timeframe decided. It was challenging to reach out to participants due to several reason. One of them is that some film festivals run at different times of the year and not full time. Some festivals were contacted while the festival was running which was also hard to get hold of them. As a result, I contacted additional programmers through my personal network, which helped the sampling process. So, the sampling would be considered both purposive and convenience.
So, eight programmers consented to take part in the interviews, which occurred between February and April 2021. There were eight participants from six different international short film festivals, so there were eight interviews with them (see table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position of the interviewee</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Identifier</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Programmer</td>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>X1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programmer</td>
<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>X2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head of Programming</td>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>X3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programmer</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>X4</td>
</tr>
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<td>Program director</td>
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<td>X5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Festival director</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>X6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program director</td>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>X7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program director</td>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>X8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 1: Interviewee information*

Each interview lasted between 30 and 90 minutes, with some extending up to 120 minutes. The interview schedule was designed to accommodate participants' availability, and interviewers were asked to participate via video call via the online meeting platform Zoom. Additionally, I obtained their permission to record the interviews for the purpose of transcription and analysis. English was used as the medium of communication during the interviews. Additionally, the participants include an equal number of men and women between the ages of 20 and 40 years old. The interviewees were either hired temporarily as programmers by film festivals or worked full time for the same organization as part of the selection committee. All participants either programming at international short film festivals or festivals that required programming for their short film sections. Some programmers held higher positions, such as programming director, while others worked on a volunteer basis. The diversity of participants helped to foster a more holistic view of the programming process. The questions were designed to elicit information about the programmer's experience with programming, their process, and any additional information they wished to include. Most interviewees described the selection process and further steps prior to the selection. For instance, they talked about how decisions are made and how they get films; is it just from submission? And what are their film festivals' preferences? Knowledge and understanding of the festivals, as well as the context and logic behind some of the decisions, were gained as a result of these semi-structured interviews.
The interview began with a series of brief introductory questions and then focused on asking the research question. The participants that were hired by the film festivals talked about why they were hired in the first place. The follow-up questions were only asked when participants started to talk about the selection process. Follow-up questions were asked to clarify their meaning and, if necessary, to simplify particular terms. When it came to discussing other topics, the participants were not interrupted. They were, however, kindly reminded to describe the process of selecting films in as much detail as possible.

3.2 Ethics

The societal and ethical aspects were considered. The participants were informed about how important this topic might be for society and how vital to know what is going on during the selection process. Because film programmers work with cultural products that can influence, they were eager and willing to share their knowledge and experience. They felt that participating in such research was a social responsibility. That is why some programmers requested a copy of the interview (audio and video format) for documentation purposes. Anonymity was considered, because it could be problematic for some participants if their details were made public. Therefore, we decided to keep all participants' information private. This anonymity gives the participants greater freedom to speak and express themselves while accurately reflecting reality in the absence of bias or conflict of interest. In terms of ethics, all participants were approached individually before the interview and briefed about the research details following the Swedish Research Council guidelines (Vetenskapsrådet, 2018). During the interviews, participants appeared to be comfortable and relaxed—this fostered trust, which resulted in a better understanding and more validity to the study. Because we believed that this research would be beneficial, we wanted to be as inclusive as possible. So, we desired a balanced representation of male and female participants and various backgrounds and positions, i.e., conducting interviews with volunteer programmers which was aimed to improve research credibility as well. The following section will discuss the quality of the research reflected in the design, method, analysis, and use of resources.

3.3 Quality of research

This section reflects on the reliability and validity of this study. There are two types of reliability which are external and internal (Bryman & Bell 2007). External reliability measures the study's ability to be replicated. It is challenging to apply external reliability to this research, as it is hard to re-create the exact same social setting and context. Because the sample was convenient and the participants were engaged and responsive, this resulted in a greater amount of information and details that may not be easily repeated. Concerning the analytical generalization, the study focused on a specific phenomenon in a particular population but not expect generalizability from the findings. Regarding validity, Bryman
& Bell (2007) classify validity as internal and external. Internal validity represents a strong correlation between the researcher's observations and the previously developed theoretical ideas that determine the research's strength. This thesis study satisfied internal validity in later chapters and addressed a match between empirics and theoretical ideas. External validity is the extent to which results may be generalizable to other situations in a specific environment. This study cannot claim to reach external validity.

3.4 Thematic analysis

This study has used thematic analysis, coding and examining the data in detail in order to uncover general themes and trends. Initially, the thematic framework was adapted from the theoretical framework and related literature (see section 1.3). The themes and codes generated from the data pattern to analyze the data from the theoretical lens and help answer the research question. So, because it’s assumed that programmers are gatekeepers, we started with the most relevant gatekeeping model by Westley & MacLean, (1957) (Figure 3) and building on it to have a modified model (see Figure 4).

![Figure 4: Modified gatekeeping model](image)

Suppose we revisit the original model (Figure 3). When compared to the model, the previous literature mainly from Simmonds (2018), Markt (2019), and others shows that the senders (A) role is assumed to be the same as the screening committee role. The selection committee performed various festival criteria and policies. The selection committee also has no final say on the film to be accepted to the film program. According to Ma (2017), the screening committee filters out many films submitted from submission platforms to create a filtered list for the programmer or the program director (C) to view. Moreover, after the films pass the screening committee to the programmer, they (programmers) apply specific curatorial processes influenced by festival goals and strategies. After the gatekeeping process from the programmer, we added another player in the model (D). The player (D) represents any possible
higher position that films still need to pass from before being viewed by the audience (B). The player (D) can be the program director or even the festival director. They are not necessarily involved in the programming process. The updated model (Figure 4) integrated other ways of programming, like scouting and using festival/programmers' networks. Building on the above, the thematical (see Figure 5) will assist in analyzing the data from the theoretical framework will focus on the process of selecting and programming strategies.

**Figure 5: Thematic analysis model and codes**

Simmonds (2018); Markt (2019) classify the type of films received to film festivals into three sections (Unsolicited, Solicited submissions and, others). Moreover, the strategy mentioned from the theoretical framework focused on a diversity of a film program. The model took into account the actors' influence on the process of selecting. Based on the festival's goals and strategies, the process and the structure can be affected.

### 3.5 Limitations

Because this research aims to investigate the programming process in film festivals, it is not easy to cover all aspects and fully cover what is happening. Ethnographic work that can aid in examining and comprehending programmers' behavior and how they work may be widespread in this context. So, understanding the social context and the situation and understanding the group members' interpretation of such behavior may be also suitable way for approaching this study. Almost all programmers, however, do their film selection in their personal spaces (homes, private offices, etc.) and then meet with the rest of the team to discuss their choices in a private setting. Moreover, because of the spread of COVID-19 and its restrictions, festivals have been shifted to online and with distance, so it is not
even possible to conduct ethnographic study. Conducting interviews online has become the only practical choice. It becomes a drawback as the distant interview might be less effective than physical face-to-face meetings. Taking this limitation to strength, the international pool of programmers could not reach without online and distance meetings. One limitation of interviews as a method is that the process of selecting films requires more than one person. Therefore, focus groups may be another good choice. However, conducting focus groups and effectively moderating them was more difficult than conducting interviews, which produced high-quality data.
4. Results and analysis

The findings divided film festival programming into processes, structure, and strategies. Programming processes deal with films mainly from three categories: solicited, unsolicited, and unsubmitted films (Simmonds, 2018). I like to refer to the process of programming with solicited and unsolicited submissions as passive programming. At the same time, active programming refers to unsubmitted films. Passive programming occurs when programmers do not actively seek out films but rather receive them through a particular platform. Those platforms vary and could be film entries, submission platforms, physical format of the film, and, in the case of solicited submissions, the festival/network programmer's sending their films to the festival. As a result, all of these films have in common: they all submit their films to the festival. Programmers act as gatekeepers to choose which films to allow inside from this pool of submissions. On the other hand, active programming is when festival programmers go out and find the films they want to show at their festivals, like scouting and researching. However, after conducting the interviews, the empirical data also revealed that most festivals have film programs divided into competition films and non-competition films, which may affect film programming. Competition films enter the festival program and compete against other films in the same category for an award or similar recognition. Competition films can be classified into several sections, depending on the film festival type and position; for example, international, national, or regional competitions. Other sections can be based on format and genre, such as children's or animated films. Non-competition films, also known as special/side programs, are unconnected to award competitions. Both categories, competition films, and non-competition, film programmers select them by active or passive programming. However, film entries are subject to organizational constraints such as film lengths, genres, and categories, communicated via festival websites or written rules. Each film festival has its own set of rules and regulations and its own set of film entry criteria. International film festivals regulate and accept film entries worldwide for film competitions or special programs produced in the current or previous year (production year) using specialized and standardized online platforms or the festival's website. Following the submission of films, the programmers act as gatekeepers, deciding which films should include in the program. The standards and norms of the institution and the individuality of the programmers or program directors shape this process. When it comes to film programming structure, it is directly affected by the number of films entering the festival—the greater the number of people required to screen them, which creates a programming structure. Film festivals and sections receive thousands to tens of thousands of submissions every year, and each festival's structure differs. Also, each competition has a selection committee to which films are assigned. Some programmers are volunteers at the festival, while others, the festival hire them. Still, the festival has in-house programmers that are working full time and part of the organization. In the following sections, findings will be presented and analyzed in the light of gatekeeping model and isomorphism.
4.1 Film programming structure

According to the findings, festival norms and policies control and influence the film programming process at film festivals. Furthermore, when festivals have a clear goal and strategies for achieving that goal, programmers must articulate those goals during the selection process. One of our interviewees [X2], a Saudi male programmer, was hired by an international film festival to program/curate a small section called Tajreeb (Experiment in Arabic). The festival is a non-profit organization founded by the Minister of Culture to support the Saudi film industry in cinema production, distribution, and education. The interviewee said that the film festivals chose him with specific qualities in mind. Tajreeb section had to select films from a pool of submissions (outside the competition). When asked about his programming experience, he says the following:

“Every cultural event, including film festivals, hires programmers and already have a plan in mind. When I programmed [Tajreeb], they put me from the beginning to a certain theme. They told me what they wanted and the duration of the films”.

[X4], a volunteer-based female programmer, revealed that an international short film festival chose her in Sweden for her foreign background. The festival screens over 300 short films in various sections that explore the diversity and richness of the short film "from new film to retrospective programs, from fiction film, documentaries, experimental film, and animations." – taken from the festival's website. She was a member of a selection committee tasked with selecting films for the international competition program, supervised by a programming director. It appears that the film festival for which [X4] works have a specific strategy to include even among the selection committee to program an international competition. For example, she had an equal number of female and male programs and diverse backgrounds on the selection committee to stimulate a diverse program.

[X4] discusses her volunteer experience selecting for the international competition:

“They chose me because of my strong film knowledge. However, I lacked experience and knowledge regarding short films. When I saw the group, I assumed they chose me because I was young and from another country. Four women and four men were responsible for selecting films from the international competition. Perhaps it is my bias, but as a non-European, I tend to favor and pay more attention to non-European films.”

It appears from the discovery that film festivals include volunteers who lack high expertise as long they are passionate individuals. We argue that the selection process performed by the selection committee and volunteer-based programmers are primarily managerial rather than artistic.
It is comparable to Ma's (2017) work. Her research mentioned one of the most significant numbers of screening committee members. About 100 of them, with 50 considered experts or "gatekeepers" to evaluate and select. The rest were primarily post-graduate students from local universities who dealt with technical issues and preliminary categorization. [X1] is a professional female programmer hired by an international short film festival to be part of the film festival selection committee (as described by the film festival). The festival, is based in Iran, is an international film festival with a strong presence in Iran and throughout the region. The festival, affiliated with the Iranian Ministry of Culture, is an important local event that introduces national and international films to young filmmakers. However, when it comes to the selection committee, each film festival has its own set of standards and norms; they look for someone who "fits their culture," regardless of their competence.

[X1] shares her experience:

“The festival for which I worked as a member of the selection committee was extremely selective when it came to selecting female programmers compared to the male committee. They are looking for individuals who meet certain criteria for their policy.”

[X1] would like to emphasize that it is not the case whether a programmer is competent or experienced; instead, they fit in and can follow what the festival wants. Currently, [X1] is a member of the official selection committee as of the date of this research, which helps us understand that to be a part of or remain a part of any organization, people must adapt to their policies and norms. We can compare the above findings with the research of Jullien-Ramasso et al. (2012), who investigated the International Animated Film Festival in Annecy, France, which selects the best-animated films. The film festival also has various formats, such as short films, feature films, school films, and web films. Jullien-Ramasso et al. (2012) state that the selection process includes three programmers of various nationalities and professional backgrounds. In addition to the overall evaluation, the festival asks programmers to select films based on four main criteria assigned by the festival in advance: scenario, aesthetics, animation techniques, and soundtrack. We argue that such criteria from the film festival are considered internal actors mentioned from neo-institutional theory. Internal actors can be but are not limited to festival standards, rules, and policies. Internal actors do not only affect the selection process. It also applies to the selection team, where members are chosen/hired by the festival based on their explicit or implicit consent to certain norms and rules. This point is expressed verbally in an interviewee from Sweden or indirectly (as in Iran). Furthermore, members of the selection committee are sometimes assigned technical and managerial tasks such as reducing the number of input films from submission through technical screening and comparing it to general festival criteria such as length, format, language, etc.
4.2 Passive programming process

This sub-section is crucial as it will attempt to answer the main research question from the findings compared with the thermotical framework. After selecting the people who will select the films, it is time to present what the interviewees have said about the programming process.

In the case of [X4], she described the programming process for the international competition that has eight members (Four males and four females) as follows:

"The program director randomly selects 100 different films for each programmer to watch within a month. We put our comments on them (films) and send them to him (the program director), and he can see through a page what we have selected, and he can watch them and add his comments. We meet every week, and at the end of the month we have a complete list for each of us, and then we start to watch each other's films and give comments on some specific films. I am part of a team that I think watches the same number of films every five months. We are equal in terms of gender in selecting films."

For comparison, here is the work of June (2003, p.20) that discussed qualitatively LGBTQ film festivals' process of selecting summarized in their interview findings:

“The most frequently used method of selecting films was by a programming or screening committee comprised of between 3 and 12 people, with the final approval coming from a senior programmer or artistic director. This common process allows for more opinions regarding a particular film, with the final decision resting on one responsible party”.

There is an apparent similarity between the two processes. Both the processes have the same range of screening/selection committee (3-12) members. Most importantly, neither committee has final approval over their selection; instead, the program director has the final say.

The selection committee usually rates the films on their list and meets weekly to discuss their collective choices. However, the program director or festival director will impose specific or broad guidelines on selecting films during the initial phases.

We interviewed the festival director [X6] from the same festival as [X4] and puts it:

"The program director is the artistic director and is accountable for films' artistic selection and content."
"The program director is the team leader, and they are ultimately responsible for getting the film into the program. Regardless of how much we (the selection committee) enjoy the films, they are the ones who make the final decision. We make every effort to persuade them, but ultimately it is up to them."

From the above point, it appears that the program director is always associated with art matters. The selection committee can assist the process and filtering mechanism for the program director when it comes to passive programming.

[X2], where he emphasizes the program director's influence again:

"Usually, we are 5-7 members of the committee, and we watch the films separately. We watch around 50-100 films each, then we meet to talk about them. After we come up with a shortlist, we watch those films together and the final list. We mainly choose and program films from the film submissions that enter the festivals. For example, this year, we have around 5000 submitted films. What we did is that we divided those films into five members. Each of us watches around 1000 films. It is crazy like watching films the whole summer (laughing)."

The above process is similar to Jullien-Ramasso et al. (2012), who provide a general overview of the international film festival selection process. They briefly described that programmers watch approximately 600 films in the short film format to compare their quality. "Naturally, the selection process is supervised by the organization committee."

From the findings, there was not only similarity in the process and the number of the team members, which is what isomorphism theory anticipated, but also similar tasks and procedures. Again, it's worth noting that the organization supervised the selection process: the festival director, program director, or someone else. Additionally, empirical data and literature almost conclusively established that film festival selection committees are composed of programmers and oversight bodies from the same organizations. Suppose we compare the above findings to Westley & MacLean's (1957) gatekeeping model (see Figure 3). In that case, we may argue that the sender (A) or the selection committee sends the films to the primary (gatekeeper) in this case, the program director from the same organization, who should always pass the films. However, the model could not articulate a scenario in which films could flow directly from the sender to the audience (A). If we consider the senders (A) as a selection committee, the model is accurate, as they have no final say over films and direct them to the audience. However, for film festivals that receive a sufficient number of submissions, the selection committee can also function as a program, with authority to select films for the final program if space or slots are available.
However, this approach is unusual without being observed and recommended by other programmers. Multiple programmers must screen all films. In other words, programmers have the authority to select but not the final decision-making authority that an art director or a different higher position would have. The empirical findings corroborate previous research by Jullien-Ramasso et al. (2012), Iordanova & Cheung (2010), and June (2003) that festivals employ a programming team rather than a single programmer. The logic behind having multiple programmers view the films is to avoid bias programs or skewed ones toward a single point of view (Dhaenens, 2018).

In a nutshell, the findings indicate that programmers are classified into three types based on their organizational structure: selection committee, programmer, and program director. The selection/screening committee, responsible for screening and selecting films, must adhere to the festival's rules and policies and is supervised by the organizations. They do not have the final say on films that are selected or shortlisted. They can be volunteers who are enthusiastic about films but do not necessarily have vast experience. The programmer is more influential than the selection committee, and they occasionally work for them. The festival may hire a programmer with a specific objective in mind. The programmers prioritize the artistic component and articulate both the festival's and their selection criteria. In the circumstance that the programmer(s) do not have the final say, then; The program/art director is ultimately responsible for selecting films. Depending on the festival's size, the program director may be involved in the selection process or oversee and establish standards. The program director is the primary programmer for small film festivals, while the selection committee works under them. As will be discussed later, program directors are also primarily involved in active programming.

To back up the above findings, primarily concerning the selection committee.

When [X4] describes their first weeks as a new member of the selection committee, she emphasizes this important point once more:

"At first, I didn't know what films to choose, so mainly I was looking for their [film festival] approval. For example, I ask them, "is this film okay to include?" So later, they explained to me what they liked. We had a weekly meeting, which helped me tremendously in determining what they liked and disliked. I say to myself, "oh, I don't like this at all, but they like it, so next time I can pass it."
[X2] reflects on the process of their film festival and how strategies of the festival and its perception from the public can change the process of selection:

“If the film festival is more Inclusiveness, then the process might change a little as we try to include everyone as possible and give them a chance. For example, we select our initial list, and then we discover that we do not have many female directors, so we watch the whole list again and try to fill the gap.”

From the findings, film festival applies their criteria to the selection process, and programmers should adapt to what the festival wants. To follow the above point, applying the festival criteria on submitted films is shortlisted by selection committees. Later in the process, those shortlisted films are then viewed by programmers or program directors to decide. Making sure that those films meet their general criteria and, for example, fit their diversity strategy. In other words, the process of selecting films is heavily influenced by what the festival wants, confirming that the institution impacts the programming process. Film festivals occasionally exclude films from particular countries, violate festival criteria, or censor local laws and regulators.

According to [X1], who works as a member of the selecting committee for the international short film festival, she discusses her experience in preparing for the international competition, where the roles of the festivals are strict when it comes to censorships:

“Film festivals, regardless of their location, all operate under a set of rules that require the selection committee to adhere to them. For instance, from the very first moment of viewing a film, certain elements must be censored, such as nudity and any sexual scenes, even in foreign films.”

Filtering films to festivals is first filtered by festival norms, policies, and guidelines. It is said to be the first filtration to overcome the overabundance of many film entries. This reason is an important discovery that the process of gatekeeping, particularly in unsolicited submissions, must be reduced through a preliminary filtering method before reaching the programming phase performed by programmers or art directors. They don't want to see a film because it doesn't even qualify for the designated section or meet the basic criterion of length and format, for example. According to the isomorphic theory, the selection process is heavily influenced by governmental policies, rules, and even society. According to the definition, coercive isomorphism is the best fit. For example, [X1] and [X2]'s festivals rely heavily on other organizations, specifically the Ministry of Culture, which acts as an external pressure. The findings are also consistent with the modified gatekeeping model, which demonstrates a gatekeeping process that begins with the selection committee that receives films from submission and includes similar processes.
4.3 Active programming process

This section will look at active programming, which is the second type of programming. It is when film programmers actively seek out films and go to them rather than having films come to them. The selection process is more direct, as they choose films that meet both the festival's and the programmer's criteria. The primary reason for this active process is that festivals cannot rely solely on film for a variety of reasons.

When it comes to selecting films for competition, [X6] explains why they pursue films, for example:

“We do not always receive everything we wish for from the films submitted, particularly when it comes to diversity, ethnicity, country representation, and other issues.”

Film festivals will have to rely on their capabilities and capital since not everything they want is available or sufficient through film submissions, particularly after applying a gatekeeping process—additionally, their connections and network.

Here [X6] says how to get films added to their programs actively:

“We select films through a variety of methods, including scouting and attendance at other film festivals.”

The network refers to the contacts and friends in the film industry to which the film festival has access. Both competition films and side-programmers benefit from film festivals' networks. The process type varies depending on the kind of program, the festival's status, and its resources. If the festival is appealing and famous and depends on "blind submission" yet lacks enough programmers, the festival will receive an excessive number of films from all over the world without a proper programming process. As a result, reaching out to the network can be an excellent way to find the films that festivals are looking for without relying on film submissions.
[X5] a program director discusses how his festival selects films for competition through networking:

"We contact distributors in search of films that are not automatically submitted to our competitions. - "Is there a particular film they wish to submit? We have heard of this film and would like to screen it "and so forth. Asking, "What do you have planned for us this year?" Occasionally, we ask them to connect us with their network for a particular region where we don't receive many films. One of the reasons we programmers attend film festivals is to actively seek out new films and encourage producers to submit to us. In terms of national competition, there are usually obstacles to obtaining the film you desire, as other festivals want it as well and require that the films be world premieres. We have no difficulty obtaining the films we desire for national competition [Referring to their festivals' regional status]."

The selection of films for the competition is difficult. The film festival's position, power, and resources heavily influence that process. Markt's (2019, p.40) research on Dutch film festivals also confirms the significance of distribution companies and networks in the selection process:

“Programmers collect films through scouting, based on field research and network connections. Programmers visit film festivals and premieres. They correspond with other programmers, filmmakers, distribution companies, sales agents, and production companies to update what is being released shortly. [..], also commonly used by programmers, selects from the offer of films that distribution companies already buy. This confirms the influence of distribution companies as they decide which films will be spread across festivals and theatres.”

Some film festivals hire the best programmers to obtain high-quality films rather than relying on public submissions that vary in quality. Respondent [X8] explains that most large film festivals look for programmers from prestigious and elite competitions in their competition sections.

“*The festival for which I worked was ambitious, with numerous sections, and I was the sole local programmer assigned to the tiniest one. They hired programmers from prestigious international film festivals such as Sundance.*”

We can compare the findings to isomorphism's hypothetical claim that "the greater an organization's dependence on another organization, the more similar it will become to that organization in structure, climate, and behavioral focus" (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). However, things aren't always ideal, particularly for small festivals with limited resources. They can only rely on film entries, and even those aren't always enough. Because film producers assume what constitutes success, they prefer to submit their films to major film festivals.
As a result, the only approach that small film festivals can take is to become known for something specific rather than compete with large festivals or suffer from festival rivalry between them.

According to [X8], who holds a programing director position, the answer to making film festivals, particularly small ones, stand out is a specialty:

“Among the numerous film festivals, the more a festival wishes to distinguish itself and make an impact, the more it must specialize in something”

For instance, when scouting (when programmers visit other film festivals to select films), it is not always necessary to attend the world's most prestigious film festivals; instead, the short film festivals need to follow the best festivals within the specialty. Most film festivals, particularly short film festivals, prefer to collaborate with other short film festivals and select films from other short film festivals. The festival itself is more significant than its overall position.

As [X7] stated:

“We visit festivals that focus on short films, such as Berlin because they have an interesting focus on short films. We rarely travel to Venice or Canne, but we have a relationship with their short film programmers. Rather than that, we visit and collaborate with the most prestigious short film festivals, even if they are less well-known to the public, such as Hamburg, Go Short, Clermont-Ferrand, and the Vienna short film festival.”

So, if a film festival is dependent on other entities, then, over time, according to the theory, they should copy them or be influenced by them. If a book publishing company is dependent on a particular genre, they automatically should strive to be known for that genre and be constructed by it, and so on. Film festivals are the same. If they are dependent on local producers and filmmakers, then their strategies should be centered on local films and so on. Franssen & Kuipers (2013) studied the book market has strong national rivals that depend on a specific supplier. In film festivals (local producers, filmmakers, distributors, etc.), they run on similar boundaries (same country and law) as they are both national competitors. Then they are assumed to have coercive pressure, which can lead to adapting similar processes or developing an independent process within the same boundaries (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Additionally, we discovered that networking and scouting are how festivals can obtain the films they desire when traditional film submissions do not apply fulfill. Often, the film festival's strategy and objectives constrain the selection process. If, for example, a film is concerned with diversity and fair representation, relying solely on submissions is not feasible.
Confirming this with the experience of [X4]:

“The representations of countries should be equal. For example, we usually have many good films from France, but it has become an overrepresented country. So, the festival will try and look for the film from underrepresented countries even if France has so many good films. At the end of the selecting phase, it gets an instance because we will have few slots for a specific country, and other counties might not have those good films, but if they come from underrepresented countries, we consider it. If a film is from an underrepresented country and has a female director, then it is more likely to be chosen because it is hard to find such a combination.”

Comparing it with Markt's (2019) work primarily explored gender representation at film festivals in the Netherlands. She interviewed programmers at various Dutch international film festivals to learn about their goals and whether they consider gender equality in their film programming. She discovered that most of those festivals were attempting to be diverse by using quotes, for example, and using different techniques to include a balanced number of female directors/characters in the program. Franssen and Kuipers (2013, p.57) work studied the book translation market. They found that using networking and scouting is to "reduce uncertainty and the abundance of supply." However, findings discussed other reasons. They use active programming mainly because films submitted do not meet their criteria, as evidenced by the above. Let's go back to the definition of coercive isomorphism from DiMaggio & Powell (1983). We see it's a result of formal and informal pressures placed on organizations by other organizations on which they rely and cultural expectations in the society they operate. For some festivals, those organizations are other festivals or external actors like distributors and regulators. However, European short festivals showed that similar film festivals from the field, regulators, and most importantly, society's expectation influences the programming process.

To demonstrate the above findings, the festival directors [X6] shared with us the films they (the festival) prefer:

“We have realized that we have always been working with human rights. We are also working with LGBTQ issues in various ways, both in the competition programming and special side sections for LGBTQ, for example, a Queer program. We are not a political festival, but we always take relevant issues about people's lives, society, psychology, etc. For some years, a certain topic had more attention than the others; for example, one of the years was migrations, so we screened interesting films about migrations. It’s a bit tricky, but we try to target the local audience with our programs, but we as a festival get influenced by the global context of international short films. We want to provide the local audience with new things and sometimes shock them and let things question about the films and what is all about.”
It is clear from the answer that local audiences significantly influence the content and films screened at festivals. The audience is an important actor to film festivals, Haslam (2004) ensues at their festival to show the best work from around the world. To achieve that is through diversity as a strategy. Czach (2004, p.84) gave more explanation why diversity matter in the programming process.

"As we increase the diversity of our offerings, more people will see themselves and their communities represented on our screens and realize that they are welcome at our festival. Their voices, their spirituality, their values, their customs, their ideas and expertise, their energies are all welcome."

To summarize, both active and passive programming are viable approaches to film festival programming. It is dependent on the coercive isomorphic mechanism as translated by external pressure (uncertainty, rivalry, local regulations, censorship, social expectations, etc.). We argued that the outside world influence by society's expectations or other organizations upon which the festivals rely. As a result, the programming process will be modeled after and like other festivals within the same organizational field, resulting in institutional isomorphism following gatekeeping processes.

4.4 Short films vs feature films programming

As this research was focusing on how programmers select films regardless of format, the short film format yielded more findings that can help further understand the selection process. Peranson's (2010) classification of festivals into two ideal models: audience and business, with festivals falling into either category or combining elements of both (see table 2). Short film festivals appear to be more audience-oriented than feature film festivals.

Since film festivals are different from each other, especially regarding their institutional goals, being flexible on how to have desirable films is not always an easy task. So, the best way is to be flexible in terms of format or theme or the way films enter the festival and push filmmakers to submit their films to them. Because the independent artist can produce short films than and the only criteria for short films are their running time, the content can be anything, allowing for freedom of expression and more variety of films to choose from them. [X8] thinks that because small film festivals do not always have the resources and money to have their desired films, they tend to become more creative to complete their shortage of films from archives and film rentals:

“Film rentals and archives are being used in efforts to complete films on a tight budget. As a result, short film festivals do not seek out similar films, as each festival strives to be distinctive and specialized. I believe that short film festivals foster a stronger sense of community and collaboration than feature film festivals do. There are also fewer competitions among international short film festivals.”
Table 2: Two models to understand film festivals (Peranson, 2010)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BUSINESS FESTIVAL</th>
<th>AUDIENCE FESTIVAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High budget, operating revenue not primarily audience/ticket sales</td>
<td>Low budget, a good deal of operating revenue comes from attendance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Premiere oriented (world or international)</td>
<td>Not concerned with premieres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major corporate sponsorship</td>
<td>Limited corporate sponsorship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guests present for most films</td>
<td>Limited number of guests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Market/business presence</td>
<td>Little business presence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large staff</td>
<td>Small staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major competition</td>
<td>Minor competition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Film-fund/third-world investment</td>
<td>No investment in films</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retrospectives</td>
<td>Few retrospectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most films are submitted</td>
<td>Most films are seen at other festivals or solicited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hollywood studio involvement</td>
<td>Little Hollywood studio involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always expanding</td>
<td>Content to remain the same size</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When refereeing to Short Film Conference, it supports [X8] point on collaborations, as specified in full clause 7.1 "The Short Film Conference promotes collaboration among short film festivals." (Conference on Short Films, 2020).

According to [X7], film festivals that depend on film entries are more independent and have more "organic" programs that reflect current trends and topics.

"When festivals become less mainstream and smaller, they become more independent, relying heavily on submissions and the knowledge and experience of programmers. Following such method will result in a more organic program, which aids in the discovery of the year's current trend."

Therefore, specialization is vital for film festivals' sustainability, particularly for newcomers with limited resources. If there are no awards to give out, no help to select high-quality films, then the only way is to change the format and be unique in something.

These findings are exactly what [X7] did when they founded their film festival. It's argued that they have followed independent development rather than imitation by specializing in short films. They committed to bringing films to the local audience to stimulate discussion. They also create a side section that accepts short films through open submission until they reach a screening time of 120 minutes and screen them immediately without any selection or programming, first come, first served. As a result, other initiatives, such as changing film formats, can encourage innovation and creativity.
[X6] can discuss other reasons for their festivals to focus on short films.

"For me, working with short films is more interesting because it allows us to choose more interesting programs in terms of artistic value and quality. It's all about money and occasionally politics when it comes to feature film festivals. If we were a feature film festival, we would screen films that could then be screened in regular cinemas after a couple of weeks, which is not interesting. I'm not sure why we put so much effort into a festival if we only show films that will become widely available soon. Thus, by hosting short film festivals, we accomplish something unique, as these films are rarely seen in other venues. In general, I prefer short films to feature films because they are more formless and accurately reflect the filmmaker's perspective. You can do whatever you want in it without anyone else telling you "You should do that," or "you shouldn't do that" due to commercial considerations."

Changing the format of a film from feature to short can create an impact even in terms of exclusivity. Exploring alternatives and addressing imbalance is what film festivals are trying to do. It is also good to mention that it is hard for festivals to stay neutral and not having any subjectivity even if the film festival kept itself from any labeling or known for a specific theme. Again, [X6], as the festival director says, although his film festival is not political, it cannot ignore societal context and hot topics and trends.

“We are not a political festival, but we are always taking relevant issues about people’s life, society, psychology, etc. For some years, a certain topic had more attention than the others; for example, one of the years was migrations, so we screened interesting films about migrations”.

Furthermore, film festivals have a hidden identity, and when short films are chosen as their primary form, it is challenging to escape serious topics and politics. The program director, when asked, said:

“I believe that short film programming lends itself well to political discussions because it is, at its core, about diversity. Not the diversity that everyone understands, but the variety of representation and how to see things with different perspectives.” [X5]

As a result, no matter how unlabeled film festivals try to be, many elements can still provide a label to them. The institutional norms and the film festivals' country laws, social, economic, and political systems are from those elements. All of this makes staying neutral difficult. It does not mean something wrong. However, being clear about where they want to go and what they want to achieve improves transparency and understanding of how the festival chooses films.
5. Discussions

This research focused on answering the question: **How do film festivals select films?**

The findings indicate that film festival programming is the function responsible for selecting films for film festival programs. Film festival programming selects films based on three elements: structure, process, and strategy. First, the festival programming must establish a programming structure that addresses who will be in charge of the programming processes, how and why those programmers are chosen, and who has the greatest authority to make final selection decisions. In the majority of film festivals, the programming director, festival director, or an individual with comparable authority has the most influence over the selection of films. The second element is the programming process, which is the technique for revealing and selecting films and controlling the flow of films from various sources. According to the findings, the process or workflow used to choose films and the gatekeeping model have a strong correlation. The third element is the programming strategy for the festival. Each film festival adopts specific strategies, objectives, and themes to be applied to their film selections and the processes of the selected films; these strategies are either announced beforehand at the highest level or implemented at the individual level to achieve a desired program. According to the analysis and data, the majority of film festivals strive for the most inclusive and diverse film program possible.

*Interpretation: Structure, strategy & programming process*

Before performing the film selection process, the film programming function always considers a programming structure to carry out programming activities and the distribution of roles and responsibilities, as indicated by the data. According to the research conducted by Ma (2017), for instance, there is always a structure to follow when deciding, organizing, and distributing authority and power in selecting decisions. Although factors such as the number of films, the size of the film festival, and its degree of resources do influence the number of programmers involved in selection. The data and analyses of the examined festivals, however, support the findings of Jullien-Ramasso et al. (2012) and June (2003), which observed that film programming functions have a consistent structure consisting of a selection committee and programming directors. Different variables might influence the process by adding or removing steps. For example, if the quantity of films is huge, certain programmers will serve a filter, and only selected few films will be shortlisted and screened by a group with greater authority. Furthermore, if the group of programmers is small and deals with many films, the programming director will set guidelines and criteria for the programmers to follow, reducing their efforts (Jullien-Ramasso et al. 2012; June 2003).
The data reveals that after deciding on a programming structure, the selection process goes into iterative steps, which were not elaborately described in the literature. Nonetheless, the data revealed clearly that films flow and are filtered by one or more programmers with less influence on the next programmer with more influence until they reach the program director, who makes the final decision. Implementing Westley & MacLean's (1957) gatekeeping model within the context of a film festival's selection process led to a better understanding of the structure and programming process. After films are shortlisted, they go into evaluation by applying festival strategy and theme. The data indicates that the film program does not necessarily select the best films in terms of techniques and quality, but rather films that are diverse and provide a balanced representation of international, gender, and ethnic perspectives. In other words, the film programming process based on the gatekeeping model is incomplete without a selection strategy that serves as the motivation and engine for taste and selection. The results may suggest that the identity and strategy of a film festival have a direct impact on the selection. However, the findings support other similar studies in indicating that the individual taste of a programmer does play a role in the selection, particularly if it does not contradict the overall film festival strategy, which is generally geared toward inclusiveness and diversity. The data shows, for example, that a woman programmer can promote films about women's issues and that a programmer from another country can promote films with a broad perspective that goes beyond the local context.

**Interpretation: Institutional Isomorphism**

The above results confirm what the authors have stated: that film festivals rely on film programming to manage the entire film festival selection process (de Valck, 2007; Bosma, 2015; Winton, 2020). Film programming as a function is regarded as the most important aspect of film festivals, which display films and the latest productions (Báez-Montenegro & Devesa-Fernández, 2017). From previous work, we understand that displaying films is considered a form of distribution. Similarly, when it comes to the cultural industry, because it involves the selection of films, books, music, etc., display is synonymously used for circulation and exhibition (Janssen & Verboord, 2015). Therefore, film festivals are film exhibitors and are considered among the cultural institutions (Bosma, 2015; Wong, 2011). As a result, the analysis supports what Simmonds (2018) had previously discovered: that it is applicable to examine film festivals empirically via the perspective of institutional theory. According to the institutional theory, any organization that enters an organizational field will be subjected to norms and requirements that act as a guide for social conduct and must conform to them to obtain legitimacy, support, and survival in that field (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991; Scott, 2004). The Neo Institutionalism adds to the above by assuming that until organizations that operate inside organizational fields reach legitimacy and survival, the pressure of the environment will cause organizations to develop institutional isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).
According to the definition, institutional isomorphism is when organizations act similarly and resemble other organizations in the same field, particularly in their processes or structures. Institutional isomorphism occurs when organizations copy other organizations or independently create systems with comparable restrictions to achieve survival and be accepted in the field (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). In accordance with this hypothesis, the results from the previous section indicate that film festivals as cultural institutions (Bosma, 2015; Wong, 2011) also engage in institutional isomorphism in their film programming. The data demonstrated that although film festivals differ in size, subjects, etc., the majority, if not all, have similar structures, processes, and strategies that are consistent with the isomorphism hypothesis and satisfy its predictions. The data indicates that film festivals are similar in structure, process, and strategy. Additionally, analysis demonstrates that film festivals are affiliated with, funded by, supported by, or even dependent upon other organizations, which is consistent with Peranson's previous studies (2010). Typically, film festivals are non-profit organizations that receive support and funding from the ministry of culture or an equivalent organization. This dependency, along with the actions of other actors, will cause the film festival's processes to mimic those of other film festivals, according to DiMaggio & Powell (1983). Dependence is illustrated in film festivals since data shows that they require films from producers, distributors, and archives and can only guarantee film availability based on a range of factors, including their status, position, budget, and capacity, according to data and literature. Bosma (2015) also supports the data when he characterized film festivals as temporary events requiring a place and films. Therefore, film festivals are prone to isomorphism, particularly coercive isomorphism, according to this study, along with others presented previously and empirical evidence. Coercive isomorphism results from formal and informal demands from other organizations (festivals, actors, governments, etc.) and cultural expectations from the society they represent and serve. Nonetheless, based on the findings of this study, the data revealed an additional manifestation of isomorphism, which occurs when film festivals establish independent processes as opposed to imitation, as per the definition (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). This is an unexpected and highly significant finding, as it is exclusive to small film festivals, the primary focus of this study. The case of the Indonesian film festival demonstrates that the majority of small film festivals begin by screening primarily short films, and if they are unable to replicate large festivals due to a lack of resources, they find creative solutions such as redesigning the selection process or employing alternative workflow methods. The primary finding that demonstrates how small film festivals compensate for a lack of resources is the application of a specialised strategy. This result validates Franssen and Kuiper's (2013) argument that specialization helps facilitate resistance to external pressure.
**Implications – Theoretical:**

This study has both methodological and theoretical implications. To understand and predict the programming activities of film festivals over time, it was justifiable to apply neo-institutionalism to film festival fields. Data and previous research appear to support the hypothesis that any organization which is dependent on other organizations and operates in uncertain environments, such as the cultural industries, will mimic the processes of their peers. To survive this external pressure, film festivals not only imitate but also create a norm or standard, as well as develop their own independent processes. This study employs a methodological sample of international short film festivals that has received relatively little attention in prior research. This methodology contributed to the extension of what other scholars had written about the programming of film festivals, and the additional sample provided the foundation for generalizing and concluding that film festivals are encouraged to resample one another. This is not the first time that researchers have focused on describing the selection process in individual cases. However, the use of the gatekeeping model in this study gives more details to film festival programming and has resulted in the classification of film festival programming processes into two categories: passive programming and active programming. As a result of these findings, passive and active programming can be applied to other cultural products, such as books, journals, etc., because all cultural industries are assumed to have some level of similarities. As a result, earlier sections included a proposed model of gatekeeping to better understand the film selection process for further consideration and discussion. In conclusion, the use of neo-institutional and gatekeeping models in the context of film festivals was a fruitful combination that supported previous literature, contributed to theory, and expanded the understanding of film festival studies.

**Implications – Practical:**

This study has the practical implication that film festivals must comprehend their strengths, audience, commercial preferences and even its location. However, film festivals when function under the same conditions over time, they are subjected to the pressures of competitiveness and festival rivalry and other external and internal factors. As a result, the data suggest that film festival must be specialized and be distinctive on a specific identity or theme. Overtime, when many festivals appear to have similar products, processes, themes, and film programs. Then, diversification is the second phase for managing continuous competitiveness to overcome such pressure from specializations. Diversification within a specific niche is an effective strategy for attracting an audience. These outcomes should be considered while determining how to construct the identity of the organizations. The study encourages film festivals to decide on a special theme and identity. Most of the time, it is hard for film festivals to be conceived neutral and present themselves as “all-purpose film festival”. For instance, even when film
festivals do not solely focus on a specific theme, still hidden identities emerge due to their programming decisions. The analysis by Akser (2014) examines two highly competitive international film festivals with a substantial national presence. Although these two film festivals are incredibly inclusive and diverse and do not claim to be specialized in a particular theme or to have a distinct identity. Still, external forces from politics, social standards, and the industry have labeled them. Also, producers, filmmakers formed a certain image for each festival. Moreover, even when film festivals are less bound by government laws, society continues to influence the programming process and film selections. In her discussion of the history of film programming, de Valck (2007) noted the emergence of thematic programming as a response to the state's national preferences. In contrast, thematic programming (such as LGBTQ+ film festivals) was formed in response to a cultural and social demand for change. Even if the festival looks to be independent, film festivals are however strongly dependent on the expectations of other actors. As stated previously, they require film submissions from other filmmakers, producers, and distributors. As a result, as mentioned by de Valck (2007) in her book, several film festivals provide funding and support to emerging filmmakers to develop their own distinctive films to be screened later at the film festival. This strategy and these assumptions apply to festivals that are financially viable. Therefore, practitioners in the field of film festivals must articulate and slightly expand the need for a specialized film festival that serves a subset of people in society. Due to the scarcity of literature on the subject, particularly for short international film festivals, this study's empirical data on the short film selection process at film festivals and their experiences can serve as a useful reference.

**Implications – Social & Political:**

This study can broaden society's perspective when seeking film representation. Following the context of understanding film festival programming, survival factors, and how to overcome them through specialization and diversification, society can strive for the establishment of cultural institutions independently or with government support. Those cultural institutions can shed light on social issues and open a window for discussion. The study's findings advise filmmakers to submit their films to multiple film festivals and to keep in mind that rejection does not indicate a film's lack of desirability, significance, or quality standards. Rather, each film festival is impacted by particular (hidden) themes, and it is quite possible that the same film will be accepted when submitted to a different film festival. The study suggests that filmmakers should expect several rejections before finally being accepted, and this generally applies to unsolicited work. Lastly, governments should promote rules and incentives to encourage film festivals to include specific programs that target a trending topic and ask filmmakers to exhibit their films to generate public conversation. This can encourage openness and emphasize the significance of film festivals as an alternative cultural platform.
6. Conclusion & Recommendation

The goal of the research is to obtain a better understanding of the film festival selection process. According to the qualitative analysis, which focused on international short film festivals and primarily used interviews, film festivals select films via film festival programming, and films either enter the festival program through submissions and apply a passive programming process, or film festivals directly approach films through active programming. The findings suggest that film programming is subject to isomorphic pressure, particularly coercive isomorphism. The findings also highlighted the need of being distinctive and special in order to overcome a festival's lack of power and fierce competition. Specialization in a single theme, format, or genre is a successful technique for film festivals that are unable to compete with larger festivals while still offering the films they desire. This study exemplified the broader issue of film selection by employing and benefiting from the gatekeeping model used in other fields. However, it raised the question of when to be unique or specialized versus when to be diverse. Apart from answering the primary research question, the methodology used in this study yields a number of other noteworthy outcomes. If practitioners find themselves unable to compete on a resource level, they should explore inventing new approaches and applying innovative processes, according to these findings. Finally, the research contributed to filling at least one gap in the examined literature by providing a larger perspective from the sampled population (international short film festival) and successfully implementing an existing theory. Future research could concentrate on expanding the organizational structure and strategy models to better understand film festivals and the role of organizational strategy. Society appears to have a substantial influence on the content of a film program and festival identity and strategy. Film festivals are cultural institutions that consider input from the industry and the public. Because the major goals of festivals are legitimacy and survival, they must overcome formal and informal pressures as well as societal cultural expectations. Due to the ongoing demand, film festivals will be forced to balance diversification and specialization.
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