

*Review Paper*

## **Reasons for Establishing Film Festivals: A Systematic Literature Review**

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**Abstract:** Film festivals are increasingly appearing worldwide. They provide a platform for film practitioners to communicate with each other and play a positive role in generating income, promoting business, and improving the quality of life in the community. In the rapid development of film festivals, clarifying the reasons for establishing film festivals is conducive to the founders of film festivals clarifying their own positioning and promoting the smooth operation of film festivals in the future. This study uses the PRISMA method to conduct a systematic review of the literature from 2003 to 2024. Scopus and WoS were selected as the main literature sources for this study, and 580 relevant articles were retrieved. After manual screening and exclusion by the researchers, 22 articles related to the topic of this study were finally identified. Based on the textual analysis of these articles and assisted by the word cloud generated by Atlas. ti, this study summarizes the seven reasons for the establishment of film festivals: identity recognition, stakeholders, national ideology, promotion of national film industry, promotion of regional economic development, community empowerment, and social change. Clarifying these reasons will help the government and film festival organizers better grasp the focus and direction of the film festival, thereby promoting the success of the film festival they establish.

**Keywords:** Film festival; reason; systematic literature review; establish; stakeholder

### **Introduction**

Film festivals are important cultural events that play an important role in the film industry and contribute to the host countries' economy and culture. Specifically, Báez and Devesa (2014) summarized three key roles that film festivals play within the film industry: as exhibitors of films, providing opportunities for certain types of films that cannot be found in commercial cinemas; as distributors, assisting in the purchase and sale of films through screenings or other specific channels; by promoting film production, because they provide a gathering point for industry participants where new projects and opportunities may emerge.

In addition, as part of the cultural economy, film festivals will broadly generate income for the host countries, promote business and employment growth, and improve the community's quality of life (Baez-Montenegro & Devesa Fernandez, 2014). For example, film festivals provide a place for active interaction between filmmakers, audiences, and cinephiles (Iordanova, 2015), thereby attracting more cinephiles and tourists to join and ultimately driving the development of local tourism. At the same time, film festivals can create facilities that local people can use for a long time, and venues serving film festivals can be transformed into film museums daily to allow more people to understand film culture (Yolal et.al., 2019). With film festivals' development and increasing complexity, competition among film festivals has forced festival

managers to identify factors that attract and retain participants (Baez-Montenegro & Devesa Fernandez, 2017). It can be seen that there are many studies on the role of film festivals in the film industry, the impact of film festivals as cultural events on the host city, and the motivation of participants in film festivals (Yolal et.al., 2019).

However, as a cultural and artistic activity that links many stakeholders (Rhyne, 2009), while the benefits of various stakeholders are studied from multiple perspectives, the fundamental question of why film festivals are held is often overlooked. Tracing the initial motivations behind the founding of film festivals, De Valck (2007) systematically analyzed and categorized them into three stages: germination, development, and maturity. While De Valck’s research outlines the reasons behind the establishment of film festivals at different stages, it primarily focuses on summarizing historical phases rather than fully explaining why the idea of founding film festivals has been widely adopted worldwide over the years and continues to experience robust growth (Elsaesser, 2005).

Additionally, beyond examining the reasons behind the founding of European film festivals, Berry and Robinson explored the establishment of film festivals in Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan from the perspectives of replication and innovation. Their research ultimately concludes that cities play a crucial role in shaping the motivations behind the creation of film festivals (Berry, 2017). In general, in the current research on film festivals, some literature traces the history of the establishment of film festivals or explores the reasons for the establishment of individual film festivals. However, these documents are not timely and systematic. There is no broad, systematic discussion and conclusion on the reasons for establishing film festivals. Therefore, this study attempts to fill this gap and explores the reasons for establishing film festivals in a broad sense that are suitable for the present through a systematic literature review.

**Methodology**

This section elaborates on the resources, selection process, identification, screening, and eligibility criteria employed in this study and provides details of the systematic review process, data extraction, and analytical methods (Moher, 2009, p. 3). This study used the criteria and procedures introduced by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA). PRISMA is a standard guideline proposed and created by Moher (2009) to evaluate and ensure the quality and rigor of a specific review (Rosli et al., 2024; Sarkis-Onofre et al., 2021). In other words, PRISMA provides a method to examine a wide database of scientific literature within a specified time, ensuring a precise search of the literature on film festivals and their causes in many studies. These phases are:

**Phase 1: Identification Phase**

This study selected two of the most active electronic databases as the main sources of literature, namely Scopus and Web of Science (WoS). The Scopus database provides approximately 11,678 publishers (Elsevier, 2010), of which 34,346 are peer-reviewed journals in top subject areas, including the social sciences and humanities. This ensures the diversity of the sources of data for this study. WoS provides nearly 1.9 billion citations (Herawati et al., 2024; Quaderi, 2022), including but not limited to high-quality citation indexes in the social sciences, arts and humanities, and interdisciplinary fields. In addition, both databases provide advanced search functions, which ensure the accuracy and scope of data retrieval. The search string was determined to be the non-replaceable keyword "film festival" and synonyms of the keyword "reason," and it was completed using the advanced search in Scopus and WoS (see Table 1).

Table 1. Search Strings

Database search string	
Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY("film festival") AND (reason OR motivation OR motive OR cause OR explanation OR significant* OR purpose OR justification OR drive OR force OR stimulus OR origin* OR beginning OR inception)
WoS	TS=("film festival") AND (reason OR motivation OR motive OR cause OR explanation OR significant* OR purpose OR justification OR drive OR force OR stimulus OR origin* OR beginning OR inception))

### Phase 2: Screening Phase

The purpose of screening was to identify and review the data searched, determine its relevance to the study, and exclude duplicate articles. A strict list of inclusion and exclusion criteria was necessary to ensure the high quality and transparency of this study.

Articles published from January 2003 to July 2024 were selected for a systematic literature review. The start date reflects that research on film festivals gradually emerged in 2003 (as shown in Figure 1). Because this study started in early August 2024, the July 2024 date ensured that the most up-to-date studies would be included.

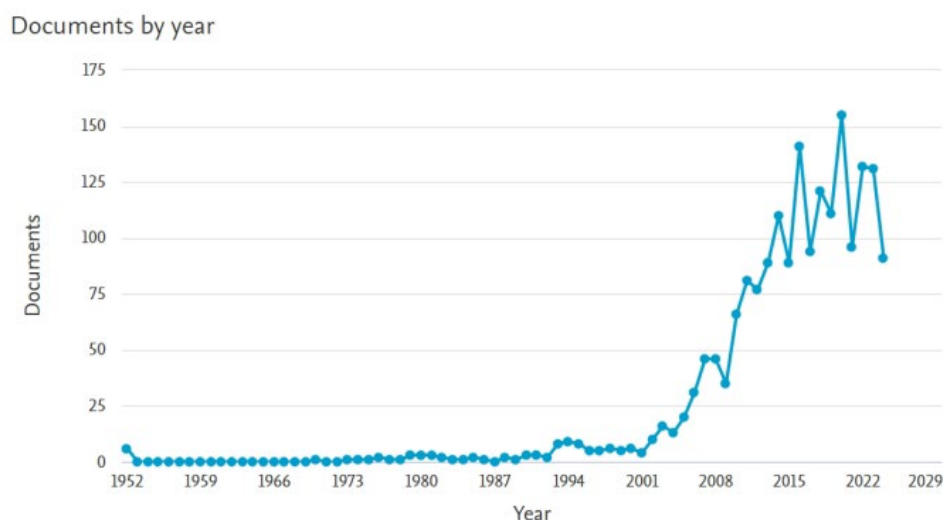


Figure 1. Publication Numbers by Year  
Source: Scopus

To ensure the quality of the literature, this study only selected peer-reviewed articles, excluding "grey literature" such as reports, notes, conference proceedings, and similar results. Books and book chapters were not included in our review. The subject categories should be social science subjects or arts and humanities. In addition, recognizing that a systematic literature review cannot cover all languages, this study limited the research to articles written in English. Finally, the research objects should be film festivals, film days established in film festivals, and film weeks. Film festival events and activities are often random, short-term, and impromptu. Therefore, only the former were selected for research (see Table 2). The researchers performed the search and screening at this stage manually and independently.

Based on this criterion, the researchers removed 252 articles from Scopus and 51 articles from WoS, leaving 282 articles for the next stage of screening.

Table 2. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Literature type	Journal articles	Books and book chapters, Conference proceeding, review article, notes, letter, interview script
Language	English	Non-English
Period range	2003 to 2024	Before 2003
Subject area	Social sciences, humanities, and arts	Other than social sciences, humanities, and arts
Research objective	Film festivals, including film days and film weeks that are parts of festivals	Individual film events or film activity

### Phase 3: Eligibility Phase

In this phase, the researchers thoroughly checked all keywords, titles, abstracts, and main contents of the 282 articles to ensure their relevance to the study. This resulted in the exclusion of 259 articles that did not focus on the reasons for establishing film festivals. Therefore, after comprehensive manual screening of the full text of 282 articles by multiple reviewers, only 22 articles were considered eligible for the review. Consistency checks were performed to ensure the reliability and consistency of the evaluation. Furthermore, the selected articles comprehensively analyzed the motivations and reasons for establishing film festivals, making their findings valuable for this study. The researchers performed the three stages specified in the PRISMA guidelines, namely identification, screening, and eligibility, and finally obtained the results (see Figure2).

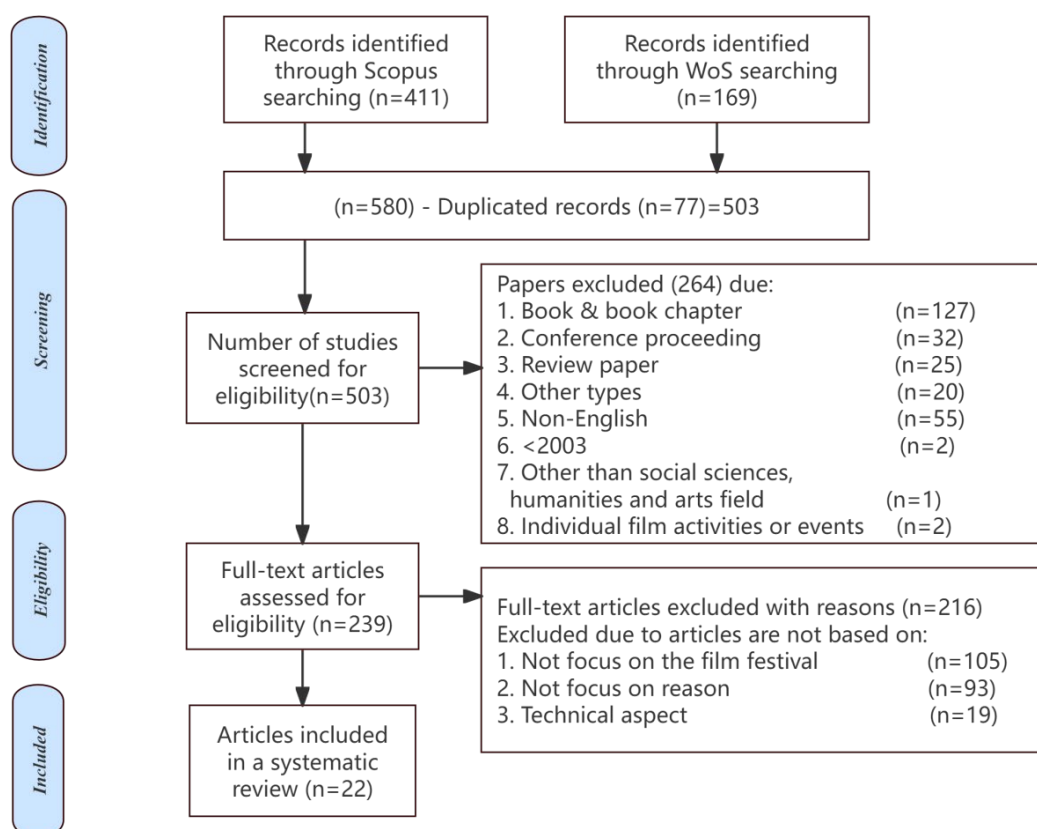


Figure 2. PRISMA Flowchart for Systematic Reviews  
 Source: Adapted from Mober et al. (2009)

### The Findings and Discussion

Following Kitchenham’s (2007) observation that data extraction tables and charts are an effective means to accurately record the information collected through a review, the relevant information extracted from the 22 eligible studies is shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Summary of Studies

No.	Author	Area	Method	Reason
1.	Popescu, S. (2015)	Australia	Qualitative (case study)	Identity
2.	Richards, S. (2016)	Australia	Qualitative (case study)	Identity
3.	Dhaenens, F. (2018)	Europe	Qualitative (interviews)	Identity
4.	Vince, F. (2019)	UK	Qualitative (case study)	Identity

5.	Hicks-Alcaraz, M.; Oishi, E. (2019)	North America	Qualitative (case study)	Identity
6.	Altunbulak, A. (2021)	Turkey	Qualitative (case study)	Identity
7.	Dasgupta, R. K.; Bakshi, K. (2023)	India	Qualitative (archive, autoethnography, and interviews)	Identity
8.	De Valck, M. (2014)	Netherlands	Qualitative (interviews)	Stakeholders
9.	Vallejo, A. (2014)	Europe	Qualitative (case study)	Stakeholders
10.	Leca, B.; Ruling, C. C.; Puthod, D. (2015)	France	Qualitative (interviews and archive)	Stakeholders
11.	Stevens, K. (2016)	Australia	Qualitative (empirical research)	Stakeholders
12.	Archer, N. (2022)	France & UK	Qualitative (case study)	Stakeholders
13.	Cordoba, C. (2024)	Switzerland	Qualitative (case study)	Stakeholders
14.	Papadimitriou, L. (2016)	Greece	Qualitative (archive)	National Ideology
15.	Pisu, S. (2020)	Italy	Qualitative (case study)	National Ideology
16.	Goh, T. F. (2021)	Japan	Qualitative (archive, interviews, document analysis)	National Ideology
17.	Karvelyte, K. (2021)	None	Qualitative (archive)	National Ideology
18.	Lauer, J. A. (2013)	Mexico	Qualitative (interviews and archive)	Promotion of National Film Industries
19.	D'Lugo, M. (2018)	Mexico	Qualitative (interviews and archive)	Promotion of National Film Industries
20.	Ellison, E.; Van Hemert, T. (2020)	Australia	mixed methods (desktop survey and interviews)	Promote Economic Development
21.	Pova, D. (2023)	Brazil	Qualitative (interviews)	Community Empowerment
22.	Clarke, P.; Knifton, L. (2009)	UK	Qualitative (case study)	Achieving Social Change

## 1. Research Method

Previous studies on the reasons for establishing film festivals used qualitative and mixed methods. Figures 3 and 4 show the distribution of research methods in the included studies. Only one study chose mixed methods, and the remaining 21 studies all chose qualitative research. After sorting out the specific methods of all qualitative studies, the most used were interviews, case analysis, and archival analysis. These three research methods can be used alone to complete the analysis of an entire project. In addition, ethnography, document analysis, and empirical research were all used once and combined with interviews, case analysis, or archival analysis during the use process. There was no case of using them alone to complete a study. Since the reasons for establishing film festivals are closely related to the host place's political, economic, and cultural policies and ideology (Kim, 2006), they are often unique. In addition, as an emerging research direction, the overall number of studies on film festivals is small, and there is currently no general conclusion or model that can be

used to unify the reasons for establishing film festivals. Therefore, when exploring the reasons for establishing film festivals, quantitative methods are not used alone, mixed methods are rarely used, and qualitative methods are still the mainstream research method.

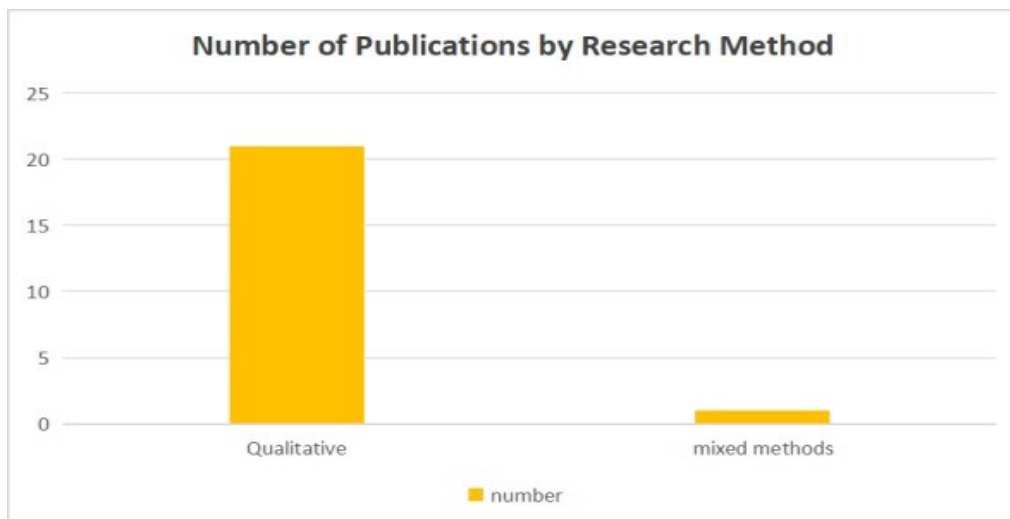


Figure 3. Number of Publication by Research Method

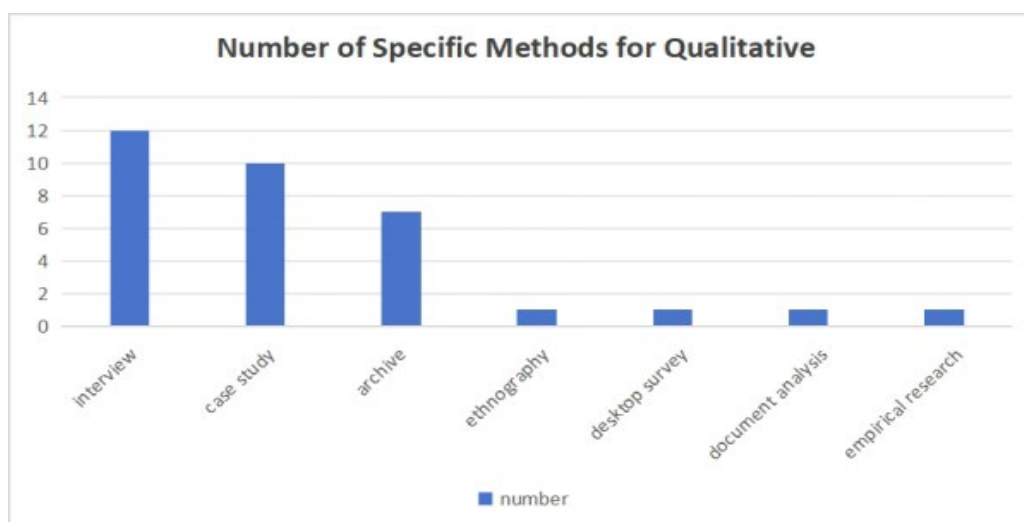


Figure 4. Number of Specific Methods for Qualitative

## 2. Regional Coverage

The study found noticeable regional differences in the current research on the reasons for establishing film festivals. As shown in Figure 5, at least 15 different countries are covered in the 22 studies. However, more than half of the research subjects are European film festivals, with a publication ratio of 50% (11 articles), followed by Oceania (18%; 4 articles), and then North America (13%; 3 articles). The proportions of articles referring to Asia and South America were less than 10%, at 9% (two articles) and 5% (one article) respectively. One article (5%) did not explicitly explore film festivals in a specific region but discussed the overall concept of film festivals. There are no relevant publications and studies in the 22 journal articles that explore the reasons for the establishment of African film festivals.

Nornes once pointed out that the research on film festivals presents a pattern of “Europe first, then elsewhere” (Nornes, 2011, p. 42). This study once again proves Nornes' point of view. Global film festivals now form a film festival network centered on Europe and spreading to the world. The film festival network is a network system composed of multiple film festivals that are interconnected and cooperate (De Valck, 2007). Film festivals at different locations in the network have different voices. The closer the film festival is to the

center of the network, the more voice and authority it has (Wong, 2011). If those film festivals scattered around the world want to obtain resources from the center of the film festival network, they must follow the existing rules of this network. At present, the voice of the film festival network center still belongs to the three major European film festivals (Wong, 2011). Therefore, it is unsurprising that the current research on the reasons for establishing film festivals presents a pattern centered on Europe.

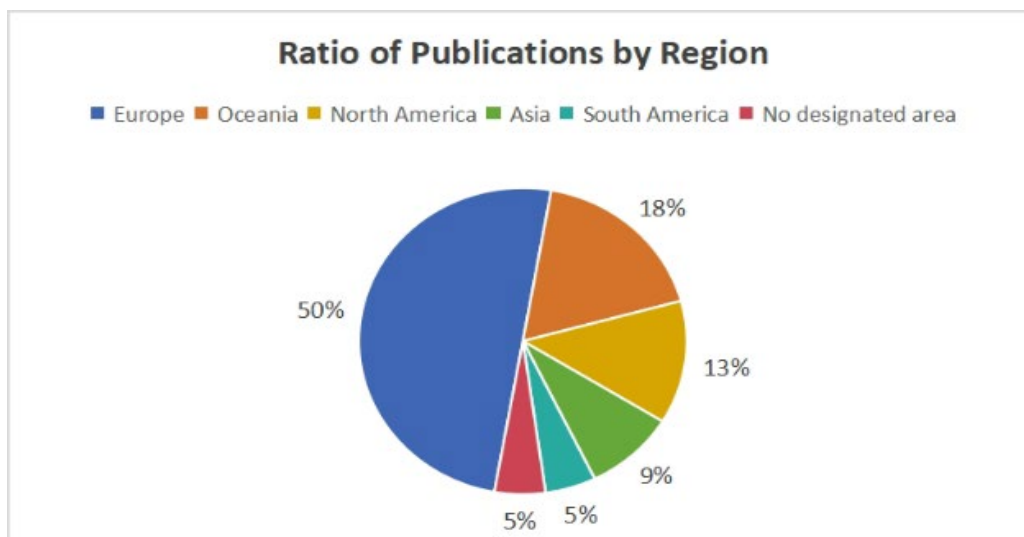


Figure 5. Publications by Region

### 3. Reasons for Establishing Film Festivals

Due to the diverse types of film festivals, the reasons for their establishment vary based on local contexts. So far, no general conclusions or models have been developed to explain these reasons universally. Therefore, this study summarizes seven main reasons for establishing different film festivals based on the article topics through analyzing the article content. While the reasons of identity and stakeholders were derived by extracting and summarizing insights from the article, the remaining reasons were directly identified from the article's main themes.

At the same time, this article also uses ATLAS.ti, a commonly used software in qualitative analysis, to generate a keyword cloud map of the article to assist in proving the rationality of the above summary. As shown in Table 3, the review of the 22 retained articles extracted seven different reasons for founding film festivals, including identity, stakeholders, national ideology, promotion of national film industries, promote economic development, community empowerment, and achieving social change.

#### *Identity*

Of the 22 confirmed articles, seven explored the reasons for establishing the film festival is identity. The identity mentioned here refers to people who come together because of niche hobbies, a desire to speak out for marginalized groups, or non-mainstream gender perceptions. They hope to create a film cultural space, a film festival, to provide this group with opportunities to communicate, find resonance with each other in life, and even open a living space at the political level. Through the word cloud (see Figure 6), this study finds that in addition to the keywords "film" and "festival/festivals", words such as "queer", "identity", "community", "cultural", "political", "audience", "interested" and "marginal" are widespread in the word cloud. Based on the above keywords and article content, this study summarizes that the reason for establishing the above film festivals is the search for identity by niche hobby groups or marginalized groups.







### Stakeholders

Among the 22 articles, six believe establishing film festivals is inseparable from the joint efforts of multiple stakeholders. The stakeholders of a film festival refer to individuals, groups, or organizations whose interests are directly affected or can impact the film festival during the preparation, holding, and subsequent impact of the film festival. The "inseparable from the joint efforts of multiple stakeholders" mentioned in this study refers to establishing a film festival jointly promoted by multiple interest groups.

According to the word cloud map (see Figure 7), in addition to the keywords "film" and "festival", which appear the most in the articles, the remaining words representing the government (such as "national", "political", "country"), the film industry (such as "market", "industrial", "distribution"), sponsors (such as "commercial", "funding"), filmmakers (such as "director", "cinema") and many other stakeholders are evenly distributed on the word cloud map. At the same time, combined with the full text of the six articles, an in-depth analysis was conducted, and it was finally concluded that one of the reasons for establishing film festivals is the result of the joint efforts of multiple stakeholders.



Figure 7. Stakeholders word cloud

Specifically, Stevens (2016) explored the reasons for the significant increase in the number and diversity of film festivals in Australia in the 1980s and concluded that the rise of Australian film festivals during this period was the result of the joint action of multiple stakeholders, including cultural needs, social movements, financial support and changes in the film market. Specifically, with the increase in film production, especially the rise of independent and non-mainstream films, Australian filmmakers need a platform to showcase and disseminate their works. Secondly, in the 1970s, Australia's film social movement peaked, promoting the demand for a wider range of film choices. At the same time, the spontaneous promotion of cinephile and community organizations led to the emergence of film festivals (Stevens, 2016). Finally, film festivals promote cultural exchanges and bring potential benefits to the local economy, so they have received government and private sponsorship, further promoting establishing more film festivals (Stevens, 2016). Therefore, filmmakers, social movements, cinephiles, governments, and market investment stakeholders jointly promoted the rapid rise of Australian film festivals in the 1980s.

In addition, many researchers have stated that the reasons for the establishment of film festivals will change due to the adjustment of the stakeholder structure (Vallejo, 2014; Leca et al., 2015; Archer, 2022; Cordoba, 2024; De Valck, 2014). Vallejo (2014) and Leca et al.(2015) believe that the original reason for establishing film festivals was to provide a venue for film exhibitions. Later, with the growth of the industry section in film festivals, film festivals became an important activity to drive economic growth in many regions, attracting governments (Vallejo, 2014) and the film industry (Vallejo, 2014; Leca et al., 2015) to become important stakeholders of film festivals. Therefore, in addition to the original reason for establishing film



Specifically, Goh (2021) analyzed the Japanese Film Festival and stated that the JFF was created to promote cultural exchange projects and Japanese culture abroad. Since the early 1990s, Japan has been actively promoting the construction of cultural diplomacy film festivals, and the JFF is an important representative of film diplomacy. The Japanese government hopes to use the film festival to spread Japanese culture, improve Japan's international image, and enhance cultural activities with influence. As of 2019, the film festival still plays a role in spreading Japanese culture to other countries in the Asia-Pacific region.

The case of creating a film festival to promote national ideology also occurred in Europe. Pisu (2020) pointed out that the reason why the Venice International Film Festival established the European Film Day was to "guide the public to support European unification and make contributions"(Pisu, 2020, p.115). The films shown on European Film Day, especially documentaries, use historical and authentic documentary materials to effectively present the various stages of European civilization and the continuous pursuit of unity and emphasize the inseparable nature of European countries to the audience through the form of film (Pisu, 2020). Promote the process of promoting European integration from a cultural perspective.

In addition, Papadimitriou (2016) reached a similar conclusion in his study of the Thessaloniki International Film Festival (TIFF). TIFF was founded to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Thessaloniki International Trade Fair. The organizers hoped to use the TIFF platform to allow more international audiences to see Greek films and understand Greek culture, thereby showcasing Greece's national image. Karvelyte (2021) concluded that the starting point for establishing these film festivals is to use culture and art to celebrate, beautify, promote, and strengthen the country's economic and political power so that more people can recognize the country's ideology.

*Promotion of National Film Industries*

Two articles believe that establishing film festivals promotes the development of the national film industry. The word cloud of these two articles shows that "film", "festival", "cinema", "production", "industry", "national", "Mexican", "Mexico" and other words related to the film industry appear frequently. Combined with the content of the articles, the reason for establishing these film festivals is summarized as promoting the development of the national film industry.



Figure 9. Promotion of national film industries word cloud

According to D'Lugo (2018), the Morelia International Film Festival was originally established to respond to the crisis of the Mexican film industry in the 1990s. After the Mexican film industry survived the crisis, it remained an important platform for demonstrating the influence of Mexican films worldwide. The film festival emphasizes redefining "Mexicanness" in the context of globalization and hopes that through this film festival, Mexican films will have the possibility of being visible in the global film industry. Lauer (2013)







Specifically, Clarke and Knifton (2009) note that the Scottish Mental Health Arts and Film Festival celebrates the artistic achievements of people with mental health problems through innovative art events. At the same time, the festival promotes the rights and recovery of people with mental illness. It provides an effective platform for exploring mental health and inequality issues that affect everyone (Clarke & Knifton, 2019). In general, the festival provides a channel for patients to express their inner world and opens a window for ordinary people in society to understand them. In this way, the film festival hopes to eliminate prejudice and misunderstanding about mental health issues and promote social tolerance and acceptance of this group.

### *Practical Significance*

Understanding the reasons for establishing film festivals can provide practical significance for multiple film festival stakeholders. Specifically, film festivals are important cultural activities. Good films can resonate with the audience and convey the cultural core and ideology to the audience. Based on the film festival cases mentioned in this study, the national government can actively formulate cultural policies and provide financial subsidies to spread the country's culture and enhance the country's international image. Second, film festivals are becoming more and more important tourism resources. The government and local communities can leverage a city's geographical location and historical culture to create a unique film festival identity, driving local tourism and economic growth. Third, film festivals are an important part of the film industry. The organizers of film festivals can learn from the founding model of internationally recognized film festivals and understand how to maximize the artistic quality of film festivals under the influence of policies and economic waves. In this way, combining the advantages and characteristics of the country, a successful film festival with a positive effect on the film festival industry and filmmakers can be created. Finally, niche cinephile or marginalized groups can also refer to existing cases and create a variety of film festivals based on their own hobbies and ideological cognition to achieve identity recognition and spiritual resonance and even promote social change.

### **Conclusion**

After the 1950s, the number and types of film festivals increased rapidly worldwide (Baez & Devesa, 2014), and the original political reasons for establishing film festivals are no longer applicable. Today, when film festivals have become one of the fastest-growing cultural activities in the world (Grunwell & Ha, 2008), it is very necessary to understand the reasons for establishing film festivals. This study is the first systematic literature review exploring the reasons behind the founding of film festivals. Its findings fill a gap in existing academic research and provide theoretical insights for various stakeholders involved in the film festival ecosystem.

This study selected 22 articles from Scopus and WoS databases. Through the review of these articles, it was found that there are noticeable regional differences in academic research on the reasons for the establishment of film festivals. Europe accounts for more than half of the research, and there is no research result in this field in Africa for the time being. Besides, research on the reasons behind film festival establishment primarily relies on qualitative methods, which is determined by the nature of the subject. In addition, this study summarizes seven reasons for the establishment of film festivals: identity, stakeholders, national ideology, promotion of national film industries, economic development, community empowerment, and achieving social change. Meanwhile, this study argues that while the establishment of film festivals is often driven by clear economic and political motivations, these motivations must be built upon a fundamental artistic purpose. Without this artistic foundation, a film festival cannot achieve long-term growth and prosperity.

This study has some limitations. First, this study limits the language and article type of the analyzed articles so that it may have overlooked the content of non-English and non-journal literature. In future research, the scope of research objects can be further expanded to summarize the reasons for establishing film festivals in a more comprehensive way. Second, this study did not classify or restrict the types of film festivals in more detail. Future research can further classify film festivals according to the nature of the founders, such as government-run, filmmakers-run, or cinephile-run. Analyze and compare the organizers of different types of

film festivals to see their similarities and differences in the reasons for founding the film festivals. In addition, researchers can compare and analyze the different types of film festivals and whether the reasons for founding the festivals are different, such as professional film festivals, audience film festivals, genre film festivals, queer film festivals, etc., to subdivide the film festivals for more precise research.

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