



Sankranthiki Vasthunam: A genre-defying-blockbuster

In the era of action blockbusters, family comedy Sankranthiki Vasthunam has emerged as the biggest Sankranti grosser at the Telugu box office post the pandemic. A deep-dive into the film's success

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Summary

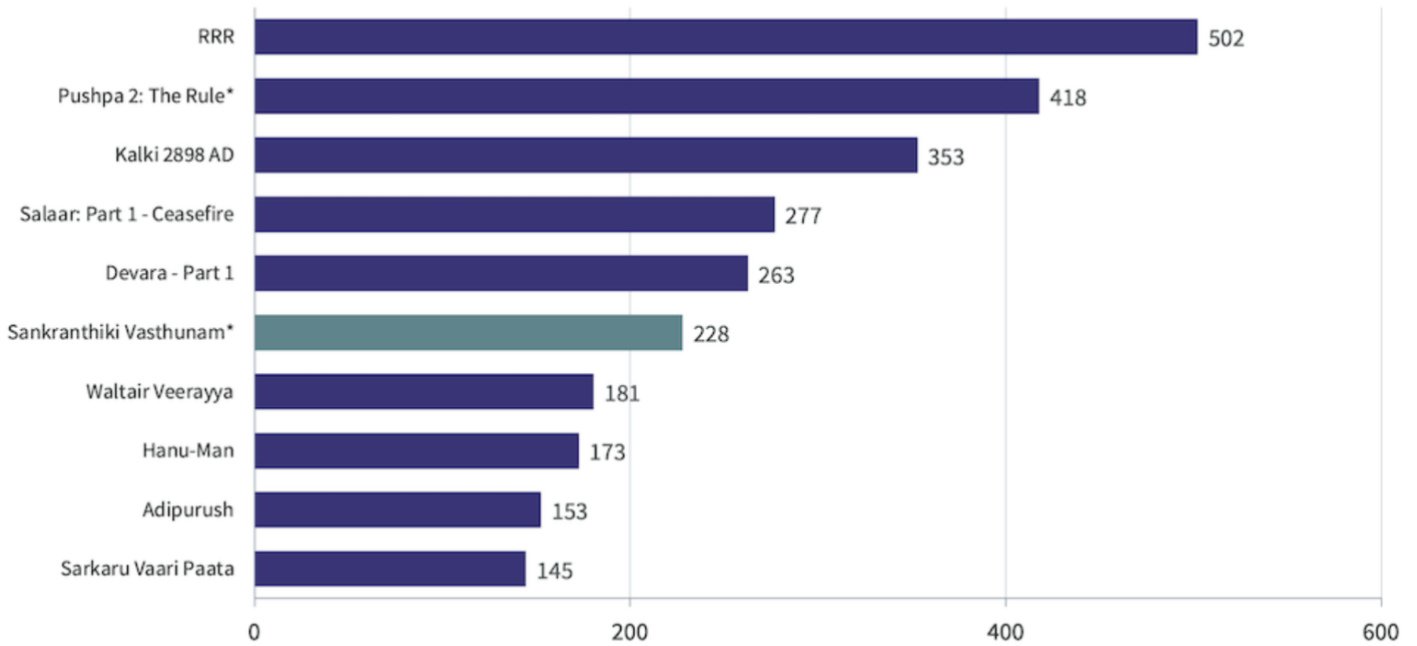
- Sankranthiki Vasthunam, a comedy film starring Venkatesh, has emerged as the highest-grossing Sankranti release in Telugu post the pandemic
 - The film's success is particularly remarkable, because Telugu box office in the recent years has been dominated by high-octane blockbusters in the action genre
 - The authors analyse the film's content to understand its success, especially in the context of its family comedy genre
 - They also highlight how the film's core audience profile is significantly different from youthful comedies that have done well post-pandemic, as well as other Sankranti releases this year
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Telugu cinema has seen some of the biggest Indian theatrical successes in the post-pandemic era. With the success of films like the Pushpa franchise, RRR, Kalki 2898 AD, Devara, etc., the Telugu film industry is strongly associated with high-octane action blockbusters, hyper-masculine protagonists, and larger-than-life canvases. Almost all big-ticket Telugu releases in the last 2-3 years seem to cater to this 'formula'.

This year's Sankranti festival period saw the release of two high-profile, action-packed films: Game Changer, starring Ram Charan, and Daaku Maharaaj, starring Nandamuri Balakrishna. However, it was Sankranthiki Vasthunam, a comedy film starring Venkatesh, directed by Anil Ravipudi, that has emerged as the highest-grossing Telugu film of the season.

Sankranthiki Vasthunam defies the 'formula' mentioned above, emerging as an outlier. The film is a full-fledged family comedy, which does not overtly rely on high production value, action set-pieces, or machismo. The list of the top 10 Telugu grossers post the pandemic (chart below) is dominated by action and mythology films, but Sankranthiki Vasthunam, with expected gross domestic lifetime box office of ₹228 Crore, is the genre-defying entry in the list.

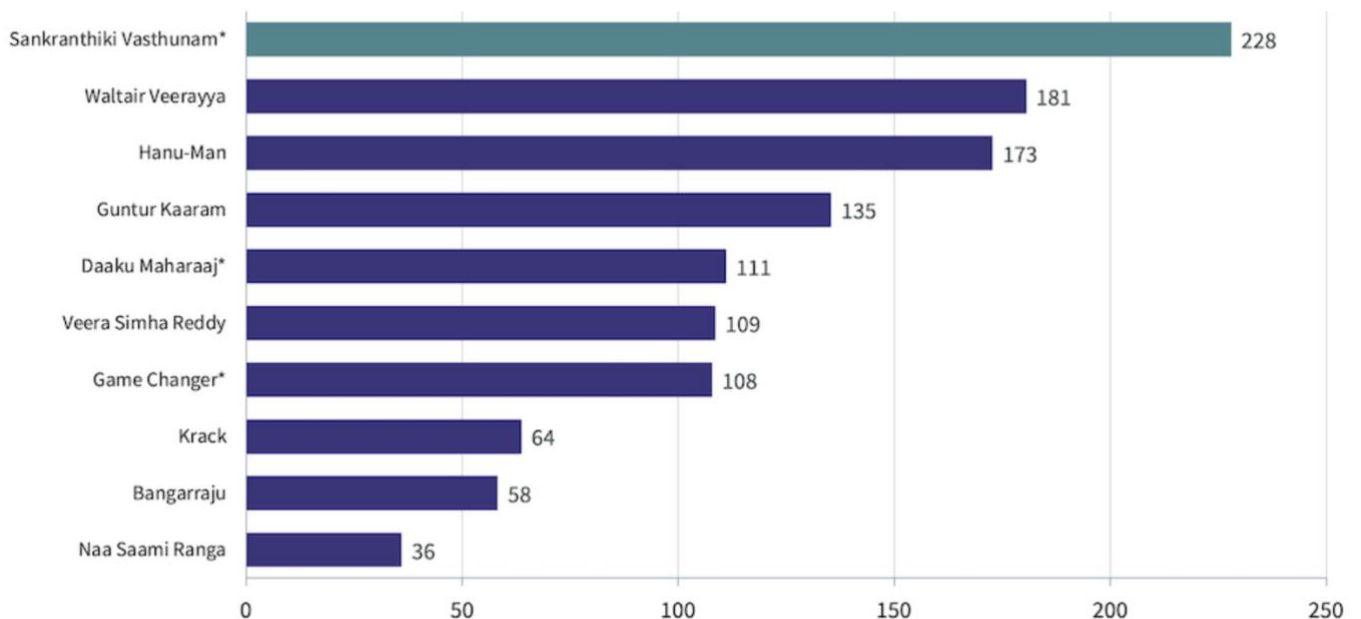
Top 10 Telugu films post-pandemic (Domestic Gross in Telugu language in ₹Cr)



**Estimated lifetime box office (films still running in theatres)*

Sankranthiki Vasthunam has also emerged as the highest grossing Sankranti film post-pandemic, displaying how the film has managed to use the potential of the festival period because of its family-friendly content.

Top 10 Telugu Sankranti releases post-pandemic (Domestic Gross in Telugu language in ₹Cr)



**Estimated lifetime box office (films still running in theatres)*

What sets Sankranthiki Vasthunam apart? In a market where over 40 comedies are released annually, how did this family comedy become one of the highest-grossing Telugu films of all time? Here's a deep-dive.

Evolution of the comedy genre in Telugu cinema

A closer look at the highest-grossing comedy Telugu films post-pandemic shows that the most successful ones appeal to a younger demographic. Films like Tillu Square (2024), Jathi Ratnalu (2021), MAD (2023), and Mathu Vadalara 2 (2024) use elements like pop culture references, relatable young characters, and contemporary settings, to generate humour. These films resonate deeply with today's youth, offering comedy that feels fresh, and in tune with their sensibilities.



Though these films have met with success, this style of comedy is understandably alienating for certain audience. For families who enjoy wholesome, age-inclusive humour, or older generation that gravitates towards more traditional comedic sensibilities, this modern and youth-centric tone can create a disconnect. These films, while engaging younger viewers, often lack the broad appeal that once characterized Telugu comedies, which offered humor for multiple age groups and both genders, making them suitable for family viewing. As the genre evolved, a divide has been created between films that speak primarily to younger viewers, and those that cater to a wider family audience. It's the latter that director Anil Ravipudi has addressed through his filmography.

Anil Ravipudi's compelling brand of comedy

Director Anil Ravipudi places comedy at the front and center of his films, making it the driving force of the narrative. Furthermore, his films are deeply rooted in the dynamics of family life, which youthful comedies do not address. Ravipudi's comedy resonates with audiences because it's based on everyday situations that are universally relatable, such as playful power struggle between spouses, the quirks of living in a joint family, or the ups and downs of married life. This gives his films certain warmth and accessibility that appeals to a wider audience. His films also stand out for their memorable comic one-liners, which have become iconic in their own right. These one-liners are easy for viewers of all ages to pick up, making them quotable and popular in everyday conversations. While these features were utilized in his previous films, *Sankranthiki Vasthunam* masters them, to deliver one of the biggest Telugu blockbuster in recent times.



The film also features an ensemble of characters, each with their own quirks, which is another signature in Ravipudi's work. This broad range of characters creates scope for humor throughout the film, where interactions between them often lead to comedic chaos. Ravipudi ensures that even female characters are actively involved in the humour, breaking away from the traditional portrayal of women in comedy genre films.



A devoted husband, stuck between his wife and his ex-girlfriend



A loving wife from a village, innocent and oblivious to the real world



A kid addicted to OTT content, using the language he picks up online in the real life



A sincere yet delusional jailer, blinded by his misjudgement



A funny and supportive housekeeper

Making the comedic hero mainstream... again

Sankranthiki Vasthunam also presents a prominent star as a comedic hero, in a landscape where stars have moved away from comedic roles. In the 2010s, actors like Jr. NTR in *Adhurs* (2010), Mahesh Babu in *Dookudu* (2011), and Pawan Kalyan in *Attarintiki Daredi* (2013), successfully blended their larger-than-life personas with humor. However, in mainstream films today, stars tend to play more intense and macho roles, while the humor is often carried by comedians or supporting actors. *Sankranthiki Vasthunam* breaks this pattern with a star like Venkatesh actively delivering comedy.



Jr. NTR in *Adhurs* (2010)



Mahesh Babu in *Dookudu* (2011)



Pawan Kalyan in *Atharintiki Daaredi* (2013)



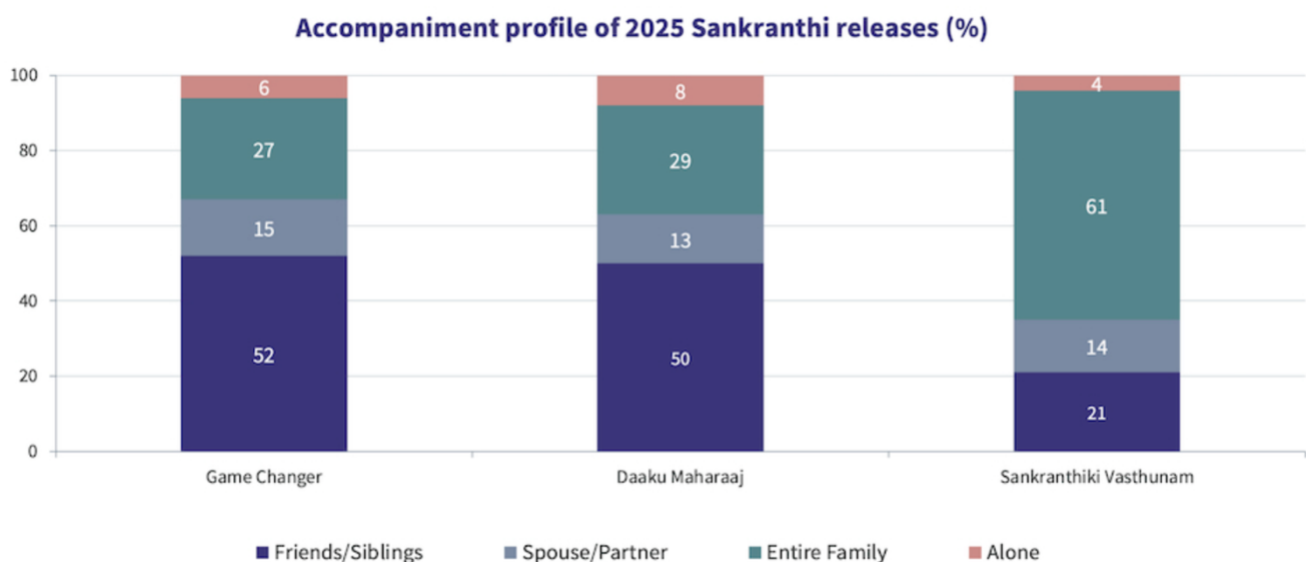
Allu Arjun in *Race Gurram* (2014)

Family is at core

The premise of *Sankranthiki Vasthunam* revolves around an older man who is forced to work with both his ex-girlfriend and his wife. The film humorously explores how he navigates the challenges that arise from this situation. At the core of the protagonist's conflict are his relationships with his wife and ex, with a large portion of the film focusing on the dynamics of a man's life post-marriage. Unlike many recent films, the protagonist's struggle is more aligned with his life-stage, and how he deals with familial and marital conflicts with humour. Additionally, the film stands out for its portrayal of family dynamics

within a traditional joint family setting, which sets Sankranthiki Vasthunam apart from the other blockbuster films of recent years, where action or production scale comes out as a stronger benefit.

The extent of the film’s family inclusivity is reflected even in its accompaniment profile. In a recently-conducted survey, viewers of the three major Sankranthi releases in Telugu this year were asked to pick one out of the four options based on whom they went to the theatre to watch the film with. The chart below captures this data.



While Game Changer and Daaku Maharaaj mirror industry benchmarks, whereby films are generally watched with people of the same-age group, typically friends and siblings. Sankranthiki Vasthunam, however, emerges as a significant outlier, with a staggering 61% family accompaniment.

In conclusion, Sankranthiki Vasthunam's success highlights the sustained appeal of family-oriented comedies in Telugu cinema, even as action and mythological spectacles have dominated the box office in recent times. The film's reception suggests that broad-based humor, rooted in familiar family milieu, continues to draw audiences, particularly during the festive season. Whether this will lead to a lasting shift in commercial trends, or will remain an aberration in an action-driven market, will depend on how filmmakers and studios interpret the success of this film.