



## The curious case of The Kashmir Files

Does the success of The Kashmir Files underline the changing audience taste in a post-pandemic Bollywood? Or is there more to it? This analysis decodes the film's box office performance

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### Summary

- Does the huge box office of The Kashmir Files suggest that audience taste has changed over the course of the pandemic? The author analyses the film's post release data to find out
  - The analysis reveals that the film got an unusually-high proportion (61%) of its audience in the first week from irregular and non-theatre goer segments
  - The film received unprecedented political support, and its marketing campaign featured the country's three most powerful politicians as endorsers
  - The author concludes that the film's success speaks more about the political mood in India, than about the content taste and choices of regular Bollywood audiences
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The Kashmir Files has emerged as a huge blockbuster at the box office. There have been instances of small films surpassing expectations in the past too (1975's Jai Santoshi Maa comes to mind, as does 2019's Uri: The Surgical Strike). But 'surpassing expectations' is an understatement to describe the box office of The Kashmir Files (TKF). The film has managed to break every conventional norm of box office trending, starting with about ₹3 Cr (domestic nett) on its first day (March 11), and peaking at ₹26 Cr on its second Sunday (March 20). On its way, it took down Bachchan Paandey, a film that would normally be expected to touch the ₹100 Cr mark, but will end up about ₹50 Cr short.

A day before the release, TKF was tracking at a notch less than ₹1 Cr on Ormax Cinematix (OCX). OCX is our tool that tracks a film's campaign from its trailer till its release, reporting FBO (First-Day Box Office forecast) as a primary output. There have been instances in the past where the actual performance of small films has exceeded their FBO because of good reviews and audience advocacy on the day of the release, leading to additional footfalls after 6 PM on Friday. But here, no conventional box office logic explains how well the film (which the meteorologically-obsessed film trade has described as a tornado, a hurricane and a tsunami) has performed.

Is the success of TKF a watershed moment in Hindi cinema? Has the time come for star vehicles to take a backseat, and 'content-driven cinema' to lead the way? The Indian entertainment industry is not immune to drawing hasty conclusions (till mid last year, the theatrical sector was being written off because streaming was supposed to be the future of cinema). The narrative that TKF will fundamentally alter the kind of films that are made, because it represents the changing audience taste, gained ground over the film's first weekend.

I am generally skeptical about hypothesis that question habits and taste built over several years, if not decades. What surprised me in particular was that the film had unusually-high advance bookings even on its first day. Even the biggest films don't get much traction on advance bookings in the major multiplexes in the metros, simply because tickets are easily available most of the time.

Using some hard numbers, I decided to investigate. Having reached a conclusion of sorts, I tweeted the following on the fourth evening of the film.



This tweet led to several questions, tempting me to write this report. Since the tweet above, more data has come in. And the numbers tell a fascinating story. Read on.

## The Regulars

At the heart of this analysis is an audience segment called “Regulars”, which we define as people who watched three or movie Hindi films in a theatre in the last 12 months. At just one film in four months, it’s not a very stringent definition. This audience segment drives the Hindi box office, including that of the biggest films. 79% of Bollywood’s 341 Mn footfalls in 2019 (the last pandemic-free calendar year) came from the Regulars. If you look at just the first-day footfalls, the contribution of the Regulars goes up to 92%.

There are only about 34 Mn Regulars in India. 74 Mn Indians watched at least one Hindi film in a theatre in 2019 (). But less than 50% of them went on to watch at least three. The fate of an entire ‘mass’ industry, thus, is in the hands of these 34 Mn (3.4 Cr) Indians. This number has been tracked as a part of The Ormax Bollywood Audience Report (TOBAR) over the years, and has been in the 30-40 Mn range through the last decade. There are no signs of it changing post the pandemic either.

Understandably then, OCX tracks only the Regulars. The ₹1 Cr opening that TKF was expected to get was based on data collected from a sample from the Regulars. Hence, when the eventual number turned out to be three times, I wondered if the ‘Others’ (the Irregulars and non-theatre goers) have contributed disproportionately to the film’s box office.

### The Findings

This analysis is based on the first-week (domestic) footfalls of four recent films: Sooryavanshi, 83, Gangubai Kathiawadi and The Kashmir Files. The table below compares the proportion of footfalls of the four films from the Regulars, vis-à-vis the ‘Others’.

FILM	FIRST-WEEK FOOTFALLS (MN)	FOOTFALLS FROM ‘REGULARS’ (MN)	FOOTFALLS FROM ‘OTHERS’ (MN)	% CONTRIBUTION OF REGULARS
Sooryavanshi	10.0	7.2	2.8	72
83	4.5	3.8	0.7	85
Gangubai Kathiawadi	5.5	4.9	0.6	89
The Kashmir Files	8.2	3.2	5.0	39

83 and Gangubai Kathiawadi got more than 85% of their first-week footfalls from the Regulars, a typical scenario for most films. Sooryavanshi was a Diwali release, and festive

releases manage to get the Irregulars to the theatres, which is why the contribution of the Regulars is lower at 72%.

TKF saw a staggering 61% contribution from the 'Others', many of which may not even be the Irregulars. These are people who rarely, if ever, go to a movie theatre. 5 Mn of them made a trip to watch TKF in its first week. In the Diwali week, Sooryavanshi managed only 2.8 Mn from this 'secondary' audience group.

A search in our database to find a film that got more than 50% of its first week audience from outside the Regulars group drew a blank. Among all the films with lifetime box office of ₹25 Cr or more, Tanhaji (2019) is on the top of list, with 38% contribution from the 'Others'. Some of these are Marathi (but not Hindi) film audience who watched the film because of its evident regional significance.

An interesting name, however, comes up if one takes a cursory look at the less-than-₹25Cr list. PM Narendra Modi, the 2019 biopic got 43% of its 2 Million footfalls from outside the Regulars group. At 61%, TKF has broken that record by a distance.

## **The Others**

The evident question, then, is: Who are these 5 Mn 'Others' who thronged the theatres to watch TKF? The answer, like the film, is political in nature. The film has been endorsed by the Central Government and several BJP-led State Governments since its release. This includes photo-ops with the Prime Minister, the Home Minister and arguably the most powerful Chief Minister in the country today.



**Vivek Ranjan Agnihotri**   
@vivekagnihotri



Thanks a lot [@AmitShahOffice](#) ji for your encouragement. Your consistent efforts for the human rights of Kashmiri people and security forces is commendable. Your vision for a peaceful and prosperous Kashmir will strengthen humanity and brotherhood.  
[#RightToJustice](#)



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**Yogi Adityanath**   
@myogiadityanath



फिल्म [#TheKashmirFiles](#) मजहबी कट्टरता व आतंकवाद की अमानवीय विभीषिका को निर्भीकता से प्रकट करती है।

निःसंदेह यह चलचित्र समाज व देश को जागरूक करने का काम करेगा।

ऐसी विचारोत्तेजक फिल्म निर्माण के लिए पूरी टीम को बधाई देता हूं।

[@AnupamPKher](#) [@vivekagnihotri](#)



5:04 PM · Mar 20, 2022



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**Vivek Ranjan Agnihotri**   
@vivekagnihotri



Thank you [@PMOIndia](#) [@narendramodi](#) for making such a strong argument for FoE and TRUTH. A [#NewIndia](#) is emerging.



6:50 PM · Mar 15, 2022



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WhatsApp messages recommending the film as a must-watch have been rampant in groups that are political as well as apolitical in nature. I received some of these myself, and in groups where films are rarely discussed, if ever. Corporates, generally the Right-leaning ones, have been booking shows for their staff, and administrations are conjuring up innovative schemes to incentivize a theatre visit to watch TKF.



### Movie Time

Dear All,

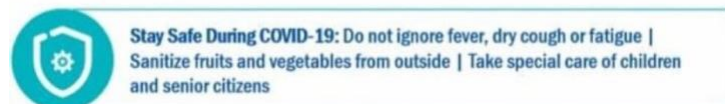
We are planning to book seats for the movie **"The Kashmir Files"** for our employees and their spouses (only) in Delhi.

You all are requested to fill up the form for us to capture the necessary information by **Monday 14th March, 11:00Hrs.**

Date : 18th March' 22 To 20th March' 22  
(as per availability of tickets)

Please click on the link for the submission of the nomination.

**Note : The cost of the tickets will be borne by the company and necessary information will be shared with the interested employees.**





This is film marketing taken to another orbit altogether. No conventional campaign, even with the best creative and media brains spearheading it, can achieve this. News channels, especially those supportive of the Central Government, have run non-stop prime-time debates around the film and its theme. The narrative has been built not just around the Kashmiri Pandits community, but as one about Hindus vs. Muslims. Many politicians and news anchors have gone on to suggest, sometimes in so many words, that every Hindu must watch this film, to know what happened to Hindus in Kashmir in 1990.

After a point, the line between the Regulars and the 'Others' may have blurred. The narrative begins to seem more organic than it originally was. Many Regulars would go to watch the film simply because they don't want to miss out on a 'masterpiece' (the term is used to describe the film in its own trailer!).

# MASTERPIECE

The success of The Kashmir Files says a lot about the political mood prevalent in India today. There is an evident correlation between the states where the film has performed better and the political disposition chosen by the electorate in these states. It also serves as good research material to understand how religion is being seen in a social context in today's India. The film, however, is not a study on the taste of the Hindi film audience in the country.