AN INSIGNIFICANT MAN

HI5 IMPACT CASE STUDY:

Pushing the bounds of free expression and strengthening democracy in India

Film Still An Insignificant Man
An Insignificant Man chronicles a most outrageous political debut in the largest democracy in the world. Set against the backdrop of anti-corruption protests throughout India in 2012, a new political party emerges: the Common Man’s party (also referred to as the “AAP”). At the helm is Arvind Kejriwal, one of the most polarizing men in India today. The film follows the party’s entry onto the scene as it shakes up Indian politics and contends with country’s two oldest and most powerful political establishments, wielding basic public issues like water and electricity.

As Kejriwal rails against traditional power holders in government and calls for greater transparency, he also arms everyday working class people with the information they need to make informed governance decisions. So, the filmmakers take him at his word and go behind the scenes to understand what transparency and participatory democracy could look like up close.

The result is a film that transports audiences smack bang into the middle of party offices, daily meetings, heated arguments, inside jokes, campaign strategies, and the true events and ideologies that inform rhetoric in the public space. It follows activists, politicians, and academics on their best days and their worst, as they navigate the absurdities, trials and chaos of Indian politics; and as they reveal their agendas, intentions, and ambitions. And it gives an insider’s view into Kejriwal’s brand of politics, which has split popular opinion into two prominent factions: one labels it selfish and anarchic, while the other sees it as a major shift in the Indian political paradigm.

The Film

Capturing moments of triumph and despair, An Insignificant Man is a moving cinematic journey through the narrow lanes of Delhi’s slums to the closed corridors of political power.
WHO SAW IT?

35+ COUNTRIES

53 THEATERS FOR 8 WEEKS between November-December 2017

Ticket sales: 30,839

INTERNATIONAL:

50 non-theatrical screenings reaching 500 people

SOCIAL MEDIA

Twitter
1,740 Likes
3,355 Followers

Facebook
48,794 Likes
50,990 Followers

WHO SAW IT?

55 FESTIVALS, INCLUDING:

Toronto International Film Festival, 2016;
IDFA 2016;
BFI London Film Festival 2016;
CPH:DOX 2016;
Busan International Film Festival 2016;
International Film Festival and Forum on Human Rights 2017;
American Film Institute Docs 2017;
Sheffield Doc/Fest 2017;
Sydney Film Festival 2017

BEST DOCUMENTARY PRIZE
WARSAW FILM FESTIVAL 2016

BEST DOCUMENTARY PRIZE
NYIFF 2017

BEST DOCUMENTARY PRIZE
IFFLA 2017

BEST DOCUMENTARY PRIZE
BROOKLYN FILM FESTIVAL 2017

Sweeping cinematics, conscientious editing and unrivalled access to the AAP

openDemocracy @openDemocracy

An Insignificant Man | The Film
The An Insignificant Man team was not able to forge partnerships due to the political precarity of their situation and campaign roll-out.

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER
Vijay Vaidyanathan

CO-PRODUCER
Ruchi Bhimani

ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR
Vinay Rohira

MUSIC
Ola Fløttum

A Memesys Culture Lab production

CAST
Arvind Kejriwal
Yogendra Yadav
Santosh Koli
Sheila Dikshit
An Insignificant Man | The Film

TRADITIONAL DISTRIBUTION

Theatrical Bookings:
Vkaao (PVR Pictures Ltd)

International/Distributors:
Shiladitya Bora

Broadcasters:
Tata Sky

Press/PR:
Prabhat Choudhary, Shilpa Handa

IMPACT DISTRIBUTION

Fundraising:
Naomi Shah

Campaign Advisors:
Khushboo Ranka, Vinay Shukla

IMPACT CAMPAIGN

Campaign Director:
Naomi Shah

Campaign Producer:
Arjunraj Natarajan

Campaign Advisors:
Khushboo Ranka, Vinay Shukla
PRODUCTION BUDGET TOTAL: $200K USD

IDFA Bertha Fund
Crowdfunding Campaign
Sundance Documentary Grant
Bertha Britdoc Journalism Fund
The Sheena and Vijay Vaidyanathan Fund at The Silicon Valley Community

IMPACT CAMPAIGN BUDGET TOTAL: $26,844 USD

Bertha Connect Fund
An Insignificant Man emerged in a context that is generally unfriendly to documentaries. There is little doc funding in India and because of this, the only money to make documentaries tends to come from abroad. Filmmakers have noticed that this can lead to unfortunate accusations that documentaries in India are biased towards a Western imperialist agenda. There are also no documentary distributors or film festivals in India, and there is certainly no documentary-impact infrastructure or community. Only one film festival in India played the film, so the team had to get creative and make their entire distribution plan up themselves. But more on that below...

Political films of any sort are also very rare in India. This is mostly because freedom of expression is frail and any film that is critical of the ruling parties is immediately red-flagged. So, directors Khushboo Ranka and Vinay Shukla knew they would face censorship challenges when they set out to make An Insignificant Man – they just didn’t know what form those challenges would take.

As predicted, India’s Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) denied their application to release the film to the public. Before it could be released, they required that the film remove all references to the two biggest political parties of India and receive written consent from politicians to allow usage of their public speeches. This was an unprecedented move with far-reaching consequences for free expression in the country, especially for political filmmakers.

After weighing their options and considering their impact priorities – which included fostering transparency – the team had no other option but to appeal the decision. The legal battle that ensued took time, resources, and relationships to fight. It landed them directly in the crosshairs of the highest tribunal of the censorship board in India, the FCAT. Eventually two other cases, levied against them by individual petitioners to block the film led to Supreme Court decisions in their favor – the Supreme Court now uses An Insignificant Man as a precedent. The next battle was getting a theatrical distributor to take a chance on them.

A year after the film’s international festival release and eight months after the ban, the film was released in India in November 2017. With grit and a creative spirit, the team worked hard to make the documentary widely accessible and get it to the people, so that it could pull back the curtains on the Indian political process and broaden political debate in the country about the issues that erode democracy. They also hoped their efforts would galvanize public participation in civil society, especially among the country’s youth. In the end, the court case, the press surrounding it, and an innovative distribution strategy all led to unprecedented success. An Insignificant Man became the most watched political documentary of all time in India.

This film and its campaign shows that even with very little funding (in fact, the smallest budget in the 2019 slate of films) and a small team — but with a strategic and well-executed plan (sprinkled with a bit of good fortune) — game-changing impact is possible, even against a behemoth.

“Requiring NOC [No Objection Certificates] from public personalities would render the making of a documentary on political scenarios nigh on impossible.”
— Scroll.in

“A real-life Indian House of Cards”
— The Hindu

1This is based on oral confirmation by Tata Sky that this was the biggest documentary they have ever had in their catalogue, as well as the fact it had the highest theatrical sales for a documentary released in theaters.
REACH
- Collected anecdotes about audience reactions through Facebook and the screening hosts’ videos

ENGAGEMENT
- Collected audience surveys at screenings
- Collected quotes/anecdotes from their backers about the film’s impact
- Observed audience engagement at post-screening events

INFLUENCE
- Tracked and collected press coverage about the film that discussed the issues
- Tracked the emergence of new political films reportedly inspired by the film
- Captured legislators’ positions on clean energy on camera
Freedom of expression in India is not absolute. This means that making and releasing a political film there is no small feat.

In 2018, Forbes Magazine ranked India among the most corrupt countries in the world. Transparency International attributes this to an overall weakening of democratic institutions and political rights in the country. Under the current Hindu nationalist government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, for example, journalists are intimidated, bullied, ostracized, and threatened. This is especially the case when journalists are critical of Modi and his Bharatiya Janata Party. In fact, the culture of suppression is so commonplace that political parties wantonly intervene in the arts, and self-appointed pressure groups and the state frequently stall and derail the creative process as well.

This climate has a chilling effect on filmmakers who want to make documentaries about political themes, as they fear the long, protracted, and costly battle they will inevitably face, and the possibility of mass disruption and conflict at their events. In fact, there are examples of other political films in India that have led to riots at some of the biggest colleges in the capital. For example, the filmmakers of Muzaffarnagar Baaqi Hai (an Indian documentary available on Netflix that investigates the triggers and outcomes of the 2013 communal riots in Uttar Pradesh) had stones thrown at them at one of their post-screening discussions at a prominent university.

So it’s hardly surprising the filmmakers faced a challenge from the CBFC, the gatekeeper known for making decisions that uphold the ruling establishment. It is in this highly ENTRANCED political context, and against massive and organized opposition, that An Insignificant Man enters the scene with the aim of inspiring a generation.

The filmmakers set out to counteract the apathy and political disengagement that can come with a massive and repressive government bureaucracy. In the context of India, which is set to have the youngest population of any country in the world by 2020, this is especially important. The high aspirations of youth are stifled in a context with few means to achieve them. So, the team hoped this honest portrait of a complex man who goes against tremendous pressure and adversity to try and create a better path forward could HUMANIZE the struggle, push back against cynicism, and galvanize popular will to get involved in politics and democracy.
An Insignificant Man
Story Environment:

- Fresh: Reveal
- Familiar: Spotlight
- Hidden: Investigate
- Entrenched: Humanize

STORY ENVIRONMENT

See impact field guide section 1.3 - understand the story environment
As a tool for analyzing campaign strategies, Doc Society uses what we call the Four Impact Dynamics: broad categories for the kinds of change you can make in the world with film.

This has been developed by studying the films, NGOs, and activists that we have worked with, in order to understand how each conceptualizes their campaigns. More information on the Impact Dynamics can be found at www.impactguide.org. Here we apply the Impact Dynamics to the goals of An Insignificant Man.

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| **Create a network of supporters and solidarity around the film** | **Use the court case to counteract censorship and carve out more space for future political filmmakers** | **Deepen popular understanding of Indian political-electoral processes and counteract cynicism about democracy.** | **Strengthen participation in democracy and civil society** | **Target audience:** international festival audiences, influencers and youth allies in India  
**Target audience:** international festival audiences | **Target audience:** students, young working professionals, self-employed and jobless youth, citizens in both major urban centers and smaller cities | **Target audience:** students, young working professionals, self-employed and jobless youth, citizens in both major urban centers and smaller cities | **Target audience:** international festival audiences | **Target audience:** international festival audiences, influencers and youth allies in India  
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When Vinay and Khushboo, early career filmmakers, set out to make An Insignificant Man, they wanted to make a film that was accessible to and represented everyone, whether they were from major urban centers or smaller cities - especially youth. However, they had almost no resources, and in order to capture the fledgling AAP party's inner workings and lay bare its strategies, tactics, and growing pains, they would absolutely need a team to record footage at rallies around the country. So, they turned to younger filmmakers for help. Despite the risks, particularly to their personal security, inherent in certain filming situations, the filmmakers were adamant about getting the footage. Where possible, threats were mitigated - but working as a team, and evolving practice, was essential to the success of this group effort. In this way, the film was a collective project; the philosophy of its making ran parallel to the film's core message; that there must be room for all kinds of people (including politicians and creatives) in a true democracy.

By the time the team had reached the impact campaign stage they had completely run out of funds, were mired in legal problems, and had uncertain prospects for a distribution deal. So, while at the time crowdfunding was not popular in India — and certainly not for documentaries — they decided to give it a shot. In fact, because there was no crowdfunding platform available in India (Kickstarter was not an option because it requires a U.S. bank account) they built their own crowdfunding platform! This involved launching a film website and borrowing a friend's online payment gateway. Then, they cut a trailer and launched the campaign with a goal of raising $20,000 USD. To their surprise, the crowdfunding trailer went viral and they ended up raising $120,000 USD - six times their campaign goal. But this would also help them with more than just raising funds. The team cultivated the film's 782 backers into “guardians of the film.” They did this by continuously engaging them through social media and building the community’s goodwill and trust by modeling the transparency they were advocating for in the film and treating them as co-owners. This meant the community would:
- review rough cuts
- attend private and buzzworthy sneak previews held only for them and select influencers
- regularly be apprised of developments
- mobilize legal resources when needed

The end result of these early efforts was not only the largest crowdfunding campaign ever for a documentary in India, but also a motivated and committed community of backers.

The team understood that international attention would help to foster some measure of pressure and needed credibility as they faced off in the censorship challenge. So, they used the international film festival circuit to build a profile for the film, and to get out ahead of the Indian censor board. Through that process they forged strategic partnerships with Doc Society, Sundance, and the International Documentary Association (IDA). These relationships solidified their integrity as filmmakers.

Then, once the CBFC banned the film, they worked with these strategic partners to launch an international campaign to pressure the CBFC to justify their stance. Their partners wrote blog posts, circulated newsletters, and used social media to build awareness of the censor board’s stance. A June 2017 IDA post by Claire Aguilar notes:
"Ultimately, these requirements make it nearly impossible for the film to be shown in India. To draw a comparison, this would be like asking Michael Moore to furnish an NoC [No Objection Certificate] from George W. Bush before clearing Fahrenheit 9/11."

This international support baffled the CBFC and even led its chief to claim that no Indian film should be shown outside the country without the board’s permission. But they received swift and widespread backlash from the filmmaking community, since the Indian censor board simply doesn’t have jurisdiction over any other country. This further strengthened support for the film.

The team believes the international coalition that formed around the film was a key factor in the Indian court upholding its commitment to democratic principles.

**What Happened**

To get out ahead of the censorship battle and mobilize public opinion in their favor, the team decided to form a two-pronged influencer strategy.

**Strategy**

**Strategy: Engaged Indian Influencers at an Early Stage**

They conducted several community screenings and many secret screenings for policy influencers outside the government (senior lawyers, former court judges, etc.) in unconventional venues such as museums, bars, independent screening spaces, and even the homes of volunteer hosts in all major cities in India.

This helped them to build a legal team who aligned with their cause and fostered a very vocal campaign on both social and mainstream media.

They also reached out to various organizations affiliated with issues in the film. However, due to the politically sensitive controversy around the film, they didn’t receive any concrete support from any such institutions in India.

On the other hand, their crowdfunding backers held strong and became the spine of their campaign, offering direct help and resources to get it done. This ranged from legal advice to graphic design skills.
IMPACT: SPARKED VITAL PUBLIC DEBATE INTERNATIONALLY

The censorship ban created an opportunity and the team seized upon it to catalyze a broader conversation about participatory democracy, transparency, and accountability in politics, both in India and internationally. The film played extensively in Pakistan and in over 55 film festivals around the world. It resonated especially in countries with a similar history of protest against political establishments, such as Mexico, Hong Kong, South Korea, Greece, and Italy. For example: in August 2017, the film played in Nairobi prior to the Kenyan elections and sparked conversation about political newcomers, with parallels drawn between the film’s protagonist, Arvind Kejriwal, and the socio-political activist Boniface Mwangi, who had been battling entrenched corruption in Nairobi.

WHAT TRACKING IMPACT TELLS US

The team knew they successfully created a network of supporters and solidarity around the film because:

- They raised six times their crowdfunding goal.
- They developed a large and active network of crowdfunding backers throughout India, ready and willing to help support the film in various ways and at various stages.
- The film began to get international press attention through the advocacy of film festivals and their audiences internationally.
The An Insignificant Man campaign used the court case to counteract censorship and carve out more space for future political filmmakers. Before the film's release, the team worked extensively with lawyers recommended by Doc Society to protect themselves as much as possible for the legal challenge ahead. Together they went through a rigorous fact check of the film to identify any potential scenes that could be used in defamation suits. They then made adjustments accordingly - for example, instead of naming specific villages, they generalized the story to refer to “North India.”

After that, it was a waiting game until they learned of the legal objections and could formulate their formal legal strategy. It wasn’t until they realized the CBFC required no-objection certificates (NOCs) from any politician named in the film that they decided, with a lawyer’s help, to appeal to a tribunal to overturn the board's decision.

In India, even Facebook posts can end in jail time, so throughout the entire process, the team also worked with lawyers to make the case sound as banal as possible. For example, they never called their film a “documentary” because documentaries have a reputation of being politically biased. They called it a “non-fiction political” film instead.

They also never called this a “freedom of expression” case. Instead, they talked about the fact that there was no constitutional provision requiring No Objection Certificates, and the implication of this requirement on any filmmakers’ ability to make a political film.

The Safe+Secure handbook (updated July 2019) now contains an Indian-jurisdiction specific section in the chapter on Legal Security.
**IMPACT: A NEW LEGAL PRECEDENT FOR POLITICAL DOCUMENTARIES**

The An Insignificant Man team could have backed away from the legal fight and made a very different film that did not disrupt or criticize the political status quo. But that was the entire point of the story: to shed light on the electoral process and behind the scenes maneuvering that weakens participatory democracy. They wanted to use their film to invigorate debate and call for transparency and accountability, not to sustain the status quo. So, they galvanized the community they had started building early on, took on the mainstream establishment, and... they won!

The resulting court decision in their favor was a landmark judgement that expanded the bounds of lawful freedom of expression in the country. This verdict makes demands such as the requirement for a No Objection Certificate from public figures and politicians illegal. This was a victory for any filmmakers in the future who hope to use the names of politicians and political parties in their films.

The bench observed:

“A film or a drama or a novel or a book is a creation of art. An artist has his own freedom to express himself in a manner which is not prohibited in law and such prohibitions are not to be read by implication to crucify the rights of an expressive mind. Human history records that there are many authors who express their thoughts according to the choice of their words, phrases and expressions, and also create characters who may look absolutely different than an ordinary man would conceive of. A thought-provoking film should never mean that it has to be didactic or in any way puritanical. It can be expressive and provoke the conscious or the subconscious thoughts of the viewer. If there has to be any limitation, that has to be as per the prescription in law.”

The fallout of this decision, as well as decisions relating to a couple of other films, forced the Censor Board Chief to step down - a significant indication of the pressure and popular mood that accompanied the decision. While there is still much more work to be done to ensure free expression in the country, this win, in the context of growing threats to free expression all around the world, is vitally important.

**WHAT TRACKING IMPACT TELLS US**

The team know they successfully used the Supreme Court case to counteract censorship and carve out more space for future political filmmakers because:

- They won the court case and set a new legal precedent in the country for political documentaries!
- The chair of the Censorship Board resigned, likely due to the political fallout of his decisions surrounding the film.
BYPASSING TRADITIONAL DISTRIBUTORS

While they had won their right to release the film, the team were not having much luck with traditional distributors, which tend to focus on big Bollywood releases rather than documentaries. In fact, most distributors found the idea of releasing *An Insignificant Man* in theatres outlandish. Even those who were appreciative of the film were only so behind the scenes, as they feared the political repercussions of being publicly associated with it.

So, the team decided to bypass traditional distributors and take a chance on a cinema-on-demand model with the then-fledgling Vkaao platform. Through this platform, audiences could decide on their preferred time and venue and advertise the sale of tickets through their social networks. However, Vkaao was not yet convinced the film could stand on its own. So, the team asked for a chance to hold three preview shows to demonstrate the demand. And once more, they turned to their own community.

STRATEGY + IMPACT: GALVANIZING BACKERS WITH ADDITIONAL CONTENT FOR ENHANCED LOYALTY

Working with the support of this core community, the team prepared them to advocate on the film’s behalf. This meant supplying them with valuable resources, including funny memes about the film, additional video content breaking down complex ideas and explain political structures and institutions, and offering a reimagining of moments from the film as political thought experiments. They also engaged major celebrity influencers in their community on social media, from stand-up comedians to young film personalities in Bollywood and beyond, by getting them to watch and endorse the film:

They trusted that these “guardians of the film” could use the tools to draw in audiences, and they were right.

*All three of the theatrical-on-demand screenings sold out within the first 24 hours,* another unprecedented milestone for a documentary that proved there was indeed demand for the film.
STRATEGY: A DELIBERATELY ITERATIVE RELEASE STRATEGY TO LEVERAGE THE FILM’S MOMENTUM

With very little funding for marketing or promotion, the team had to be smart about leveraging each moment of the film’s distribution life to bolster the next. The court battle had generated press about the film and they had already developed a strong and ready base of supporters.

“The vexed question is: Can press freedom, which includes the screening of a movie, be restricted on the grounds that it hurts the sentiments of some members in the community or that it distorts historical facts? It may be noted that the concept of hurt sentiments is inherently vague. Whose hurt sentiments are to be taken into account? According to judicial decisions, they are of level-headed reasonable persons, not hyper-sensitive souls and fanatics who perceive insult and offence in any speech or song or painting which they do not approve of.”

— Soli J. Sorabjee
The Indian Express, November 22, 2017

“Of course, we have had a second genre of usually foreigner-made documentaries that delve into the deeper social realities of India, often through alien eyes that focus on the pathos or the exotic nature of the country to Westerners. (You may call this Mahakumbh chic, if you will). Some documentaries have been banned, including Satyajit Ray’s work on Sikkim. An Insignificant Man scores in such a backdrop because it stops short of wearing its sympathies on its sleeves. While others, including the phoren-made [sic] India chroniclers, are educative. They do not get behind the closed doors of a political group at the upper-echelons like this one does. The fact that it is having a theatrical release is something to celebrate.”

— Madhavan Narayanan
First Post, Nov 15, 2017

The team cared first and foremost about getting the film out far and wide. They had fought a long battle to ensure the film would see daylight, so they wanted to remove all barriers to the film’s reach and visibility. They decided, therefore, to sign their global and online streaming rights to Vice Media, which had a ready and growing subscriber base.

They signed with the agreement that Vice would immediately release the film for free on YouTube - and they did so while it was still in theaters. The international run of the film at various film festivals, the court cases, and the successful theatrical run had generated a tremendous amount of buzz and curiosity surrounding the film. And they intended to maximize on the attention it was getting. The agreement also ensured the team finally got paid for their film. It was a win-win agreement - they were paid by Vice to put the film up on their feed, but it also allowed them to retain all their rights. That’s because the film came at a time when Vice was hoping to make headway with Indian audiences, which this popular film was introducing them to.
IMPACT: THE MOST WATCHED DOCUMENTARY IN INDIA

“If it does not cause a flutter in their hearts, a lump in their throats or a searing pain in their inner being, there is something wrong with them – or maybe, India”

— Madhavan Narayanan
Firstpost (Nov. 15, 2017)

An Insignificant Man went on to become a box office hit and garnered unprecedented success for a documentary film - the highest theatrical sales ever for a documentary released in theaters. The theatrical run went national for 8 weeks – also a record. To date, it continues to be the longest running documentary in India, with an estimated reach of 30,839 (ticket sales).

The film was also seen in 50 non-theatrical community screenings, in university settings as well as small and intimate screenings with backers, influencers, and community groups. These took place in ten cities throughout the country, from Goa in the Southwest to Kolkata in the Northeast, with an estimated audience reach of 500. On top of this, there have been nearly 2 million views of the film on YouTube, where the film was made freely available by Vice Media.

IMPACT: MORE INFORMED AUDIENCES

For such a small impact budget and legally challenged campaign, it is impressive that the team thought to collect surveys at screenings. But they did that too!

A qualitative survey of a random selection of audiences during the theatrical release (sample size: 1,237) affirmed that the film was helping to educate audiences. Almost three quarters (72%) of those surveyed reported that they felt they knew more about Indian politics because of the film than they had before. In addition, the team observed that audience members were coming back a second time with friends and families in tow.

WHAT TRACKING IMPACT TELLS US

The team knows they deepened popular understanding of Indian political-electoral processes and countered cynicism about democracy because they:

— Successfully got the film into theaters and won wide viewership (highest theatrical sales ever for a documentary in India) and 2 million views on YouTube, ensuring audiences had a chance to see it and learn more
— Noted that 72% of audiences surveyed learned more about Indian politics because of the film
— Secured new press and observed (informally) that press coverage about the film largely discussed political repression and related issues
— Received testimonials from influencers articulating the importance of the film/issues covered
— Noted (informally) that audiences at events were deeply engaged in discussion of the issues
SPARKED DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY ONLINE AND AT SCREENINGS

With robust press coverage in India - a strong majority of which focused on political repression due to the restraint the film was experiencing - and growing online engagement, there were positive indications that the team was succeeding at elevating the debate in the country.

Online, the team put out a great deal of content on their Facebook feed that they directed audiences to. This included videos that covered a range of themes, from the political process to the NOCs. This content, and the film, led to robust online engagement about Kejriwal himself, about democracy, about what kinds of films eventually get released to the public in India, and about the structural barriers that documentaries face in the country.

This was also apparent in person during screenings. The team observed enthusiastic support for the film and the themes it covers. Similarly to online discussions, in-person discussions were related to the political process itself and explored how the filmmakers had got access and protected against creating a “puff piece.”

"There had been no documentary before this to help people understand and inspire them towards politics, but when you see a documentary like this you get to understand that there are certain steps, certain things that you can do to be a part of it.”

Audience reaction at a screening in Mumbai, Nov 24, 2017

"It’s a rare film because you see real people engage with complex political issues on-screen. That’s just so refreshing.”

Audience reaction at a screening in Mumbai, Nov 24, 2017
### IMPACT: SPURRED PROTEST AT AWARDS DELIBERATIONS

In fact, during national awards deliberations in May 2018, the film again caused a stir when *An Insignificant Man* was suspiciously absent.

> “According to a jury member, the panel had finished watching over 150 movies between April 1 and April 9, and on the ninth day, a day before the deliberations began, they were told that *An Insignificant Man* could not be considered for any award, not even a special mention, and that because of technical reasons and lack of clarity over its agreement with NFDC, it should not have been screened at all.”

— Vasudha Venugopal

*India Times*

With at least four of the seven-member jury wanting the film to be recognized, but having reached a standstill, they decided not to present the “Best Film in Non-Feature” category at all that year.

### IMPACT: STRENGTHENED CITIZENSHIP

There is indication the film may have activated audiences. The team found (through surveying a selection of audiences, sample size: 1,237) that the vast majority of audiences (81%) said they planned to exercise their right to vote in the next elections. In other words, the team’s core objectives of helping audiences to make informed voting decisions and counteracting cynicism was likely achieved.

The court case and the film’s success also had a ripple effect, and emboldened many more filmmakers to make films about political issues. In fact, in the two years that followed the court decision, more films have been released about various political issues and politicians. For example, *The Accidental Prime Minister* (2018), which is about India’s last Prime Minister Manmohan Singh’s final days in office, and is deeply critical of his tenure; and *PM Narendra Modi* (2019), which is about the current Prime Minister of India. An Insignificant Man even inspired the creation of a film trailer for a fake film called *A Significant Man*, about Prime Minister Modi, which was released after An Insignificant Man went viral (see here: www.youtube.com/watch?v=xL5DzrB7lsc).

### WHAT TRACKING IMPACT TELLS US

The team know they galvanized public debate, and participation in democracy and civil society, because they:

- Noted that 81% of audiences intended to exercise their right to vote in upcoming elections
- Saw new political documentaries emerging following their campaign

### IMPACT

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| IMPACT: SPURRED PROTEST AT AWARDS DELIBERATIONS | | |
| The film was suspiciously absent during national awards deliberations. | | |
| The panel was told that the film could not be considered for any award. | | |
| The film was not even presented in the “Best Film in Non-Feature” category. | | |
| The court case and the film’s success inspired more films about political issues. | | |

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**CHANGING BEHAVIORS**
The An Insignificant Man campaign strengthened participation in democracy and civil society

**CHANGING COMMUNITIES**
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**CHANGING MINDS**
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**BUILDING COMMUNITY**
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**CHANGING STRUCTURES**
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**CHANGING BEHAVIORS**
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To willingly enter into a censorship battle in an era when governments have both the technical capacity and the legal bandwidth to track and be hostile to journalists and documentary filmmakers is a brave thing to do.

THE CHOICE THAT DIRECTORS VINAY SHUKLA AND KHUSHBOO RANKA MADE TO TAKE ON THE CENSORSHIP BOARD OF INDIA AND THE MAINSTREAM POLITICAL ESTABLISHMENT THERE - WHEN THEY HAD LITTLE OR NO REPUTATION IN THE FILM AND MEDIA SPACE, NO POWER OR MONEY, AND NO REAL RELATIONSHIPS (YET) TO PROTECT THEM - WAS BOTH IMPRESSIVE AND RISKY.

Ranka and Shukla and their team were smart, and they institutionally armed themselves as they geared up for a battle. They were transparent with and exhibited ethical accountability to their community - qualities they sought to capture in their film and use to inspire others. This helped to win the trust and loyalty of their base. That approach was not only ethical and accountable, but it also became crucial at various points in their campaign.
### REAL WORLD EVENTS

**2010**

**DECEMBER 2010**
A new anti-corruption bill, authored by Arvind Kejriwal and others, is proposed to fight corruption.

**2011**

**APRIL 2011**
Support for anti-corruption bill grows, with street demonstrations in support, and the government is compelled to engage with their demands.

The two groups hold talks over the coming months but fail to reach a consensus. The movement begins to lose steam.

**2012**

**MID 2012**
A faction of anti-corruption activists, led by Arvind Kejriwal, decides to form a political party in order to achieve the goal of a strong anti-corruption bill, leading to a rift within the movement.

**2013**

**MARCH 2013**
Kejriwal goes on an indefinite fast against the alleged crony capitalism within the electricity & water supply of Delhi city, lasting 13 days and galvanising popular support amongst the lower and middle classes of Delhi.

**NOVEMBER 2012**
- The Common Man’s Party is launched with Kejriwal at the head.

**JUNE 2013**
Kejriwal announces he will fight elections against Sheila Dixit on her home turf.

**AUG 2013**
Santosh Koli dies in a road accident.

**DEC 2013**
Elections are held in New Delhi. AAP wins 28 out of the 70 seats and forms a minority government.

### THE FILM

**2010**

**2011**

**2012**

**2013**

### THE CAMPAIGN

### IMPACT & ACHIEVEMENTS
### Real World Events

**FEB 2014**
The AAP government resigns from power, citing interference from Congress & BJP on all issues, including passing of the anti-corruption law.

**FEB 2015**
Elections are re-held in New Delhi a year after the AAP had resigned. The AAP wins a historic 67 out of 70 seats. Arvind Kejriwal becomes the Chief Minister of Delhi.

**APRIL 2014**
The An Insignificant Man Kickstarter campaign launches.

**MAY 2014**
Crowdfunding campaign launch (the film was called Proposition for a Revolution at that stage). Receives significant press attention.

**SEPTEMBER 2016**
An Insignificant Man premieres at Toronto International Film Festival.

**FEB 2017**
Censorship Board bans the film.

**MARCH 2017**
The film team appeals the case.

**NOVEMBER 2017**
Theatrical release in India.

**OCTOBER 2017**
Filmmaker Khushboo Ranka is a panelist at Good Pitch Amsterdam.

**DECEMBER 2017**
Digital Release on Vice and YouTube for free.

**AUG 2017**
Indian court rules in favor of An Insignificant Man.

**DECEMBER 2017**
The film hits 1 million views on YouTube 10 days after its release.

**MAY 2019**
The film hits 2 million views on YouTube.
CONCLUSION
This film and campaign is a reminder that sometimes, and in some contexts, simply getting a film made and seen is in-and-of-itself a powerful and space-making impact.

Increasingly, countries that had previously enjoyed protections are seeing growing threats to journalistic freedoms. A report released by the UK based ARTICLE 19 shows a significant decline in global freedom of expression since 2014 and a continuous decline over the last ten years. But a study conducted by the D.C. based Center for Media and Social Impact (CMSI), “Dangerous Documentaries: Reducing Risk When Telling Truth to Power” (February 2015), found that while journalists and documentary filmmakers often abide by the same principles, documentary filmmakers tend to be less familiar than journalists with the legal protections and resources available to them, or how to navigate the legal issues they encounter (for more on this see the Safe+Secure handbook, a resource-rich manual on working more safely as a documentary filmmaker). So, it was especially important to see the way the international film community gathered around An Insignificant Man to support the filmmakers’ freedom of expression.

Supporting documentary filmmakers in repressive times like these has never been more important. In the last few years, we’ve seen the International Documentary Association (IDA) rally our global community around those involved in a series of films: Filmmakers Çayan Demirel and Ertuğrul Mavioğlu of the film Bakur in May 2019; Myanmar filmmaker and festival director Min Htin Ko Ko Gyi in April 2019, and; the protagonist of The Infiltrators, Claudio Rojas, in March 2019, among others.

Ranka and Shukla spent four years making An Insignificant Man and then another two years in film festivals, the final year of which they worked through the legal case to get the film released in India. But this team went even further than that. As a result of the supreme efforts of these two brave, early-career filmmakers, the film ended up playing a very significant role in empowering documentary filmmakers into the future.

They have not only secured a measure of freedom of expression in the country, they have also helped to make documentaries more accessible, even mainstream, despite the obstacles put in their way. They did all of this with a tiny budget and team. And yet, due to smart and deliberate planning and thoughtful, accountable campaign design, they ended up with incredible reach and visibility.

Expect to see more from this team. They have recently released a board game called Shasn that builds upon the democracy theme to continue to support political education.
URL: WWW.INSIGNIFICANTMAN.COM

TRAILER: WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/WATCH?v=VQ646VCT72I

FOLLOW: FACEBOOK.COM/AIMTHEMOVIE/ INSTAGRAM.COM/AIMTHEMOVIE/ TWITTER.COM/AIMTHEMOVIE?LANG=en REDDIT.COM/R/INDIA/COMMENTS/7MTU4C/HI THIS IS VINAY_KHUSHBOO_THE_DIRECTORS_OF_AN/

CONTACT: INFO@AIMTHEMOVIE.COM

TAKE ACTION: VISIT THE FILM’S FACEBOOK PAGE TO KEEP APPRISED OF ALL THE NEW DEMOCRACY RELATED PROJECTS THE TEAM HAS BEEN BUILDING