



doc**impact**hi5

2019

HI5 IMPACT CASE STUDY:

AN INSIGNIFICANT MAN

Pushing the bounds of free
expression and strengthening
democracy in India

Film Still *An Insignificant Man*



THE FILM

***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.

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?

International:

35+
COUNTRIES



Ticket sales:

30,839

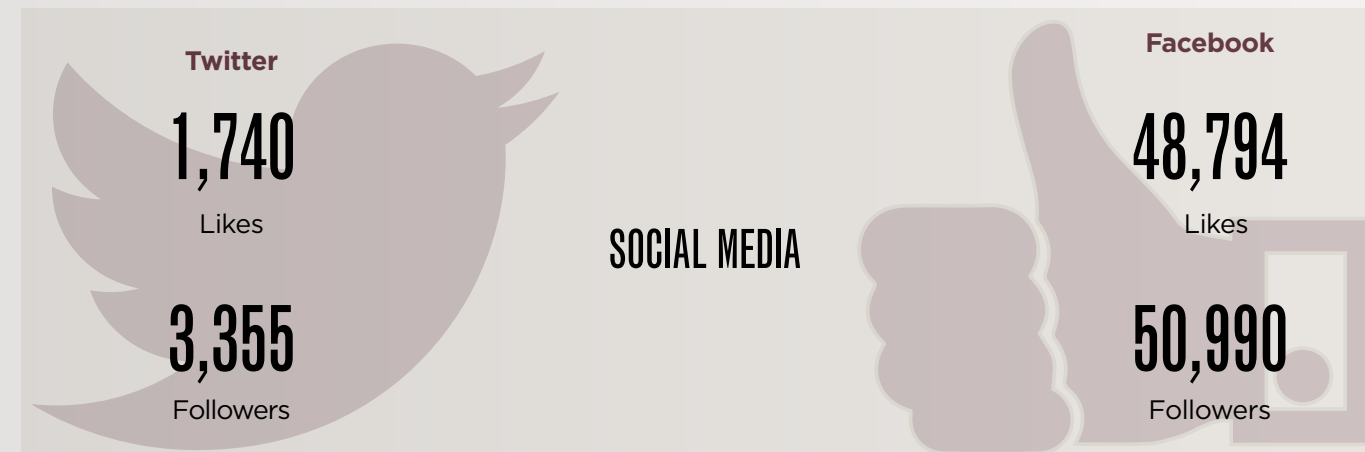
In India

53 THEATERS
FOR 8 WEEKS

between

November-December
2017

50 non-theatrical
screenings reaching
500 people



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



THE TEAM



Khushboo Ranka
Director/Producer/
Cinematographer



Vinay Shukla
Director/Producer/
Cinematographer



Anand Gandhi
Producer



Abhinav Tyagi
Editor



Manan Bhatt
Editor



Naomi Shah
Impact Producer

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

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

TRADITIONAL
DISTRIBUTION

Theatrical Bookings:
Vkaao (PVR Pictures Ltd)

International/Distributors:
Shiladitya Bora

Broadcasters:
Tata Sky

Press/PR:
Prabhat Choudhary, Shilpa Handa

IMPACT CAMPAIGN

IMPACT DISTRIBUTION

Fundraising:
Naomi Shah

Campaign Advisors:
Khushboo Ranka,
Vinay Shukla

Campaign Director:
Naomi Shah

Campaign Producer:
Arjunraj Natarajan

Campaign Advisors:
Khushboo Ranka, Vinay Shukla

BUDGETS

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



A group of people are seated around a long wooden table in a meeting room. Several clear plastic water bottles are placed on the table in front of them. The room has large windows with light-colored curtains in the background. The people are dressed in casual to semi-formal attire. The overall atmosphere appears to be a professional meeting or a community gathering.

CAMPAIGN & IMPACT

***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.

HOW THEY TRACKED IMPACT

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



These quadrants represent Doc Society’s framework for mapping impact strategies to story environment



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.

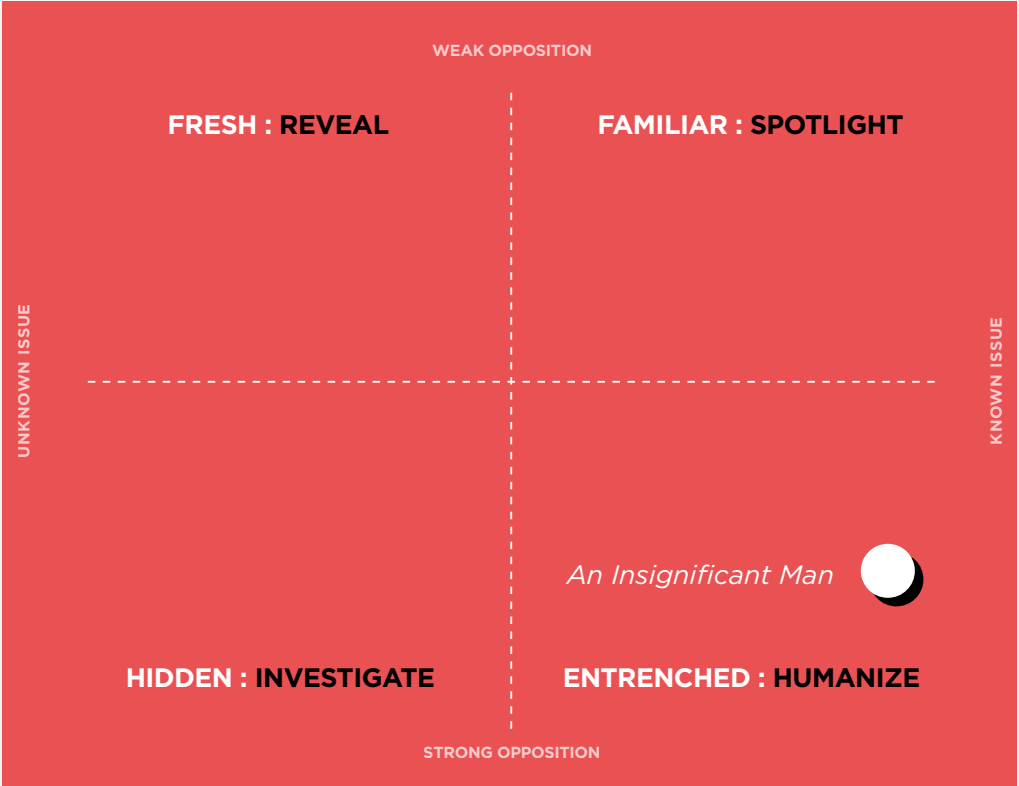
This climate has a chilling effect on filmmakers who want to make documentaries about political themes, as they fear the long, protracted, and costly battle they will inevitably face, and the possibility of mass disruption and conflict at their events. In fact, there are examples of other political films 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 **ENTRENCHED** 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.

STORY ENVIRONMENT

An Insignificant Man
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*.

BUILDING COMMUNITIES:

Create a network of supporters and solidarity around the film

Target audience: international festival audiences, influencers and youth allies in India

CHANGING MINDS:

Deepen popular understanding of Indian political-electoral processes and counteract cynicism about democracy.

Target audience: students, young working professionals, self-employed and jobless youth, citizens in both major urban centers and smaller cities

CHANGING STRUCTURES:

Use the court case to counteract censorship and carve out more space for future political filmmakers

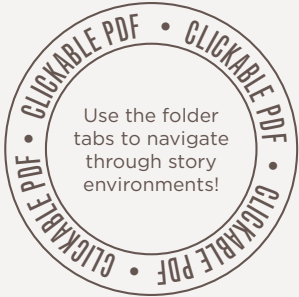
Target audience: international festival audiences

CHANGING BEHAVIORS:

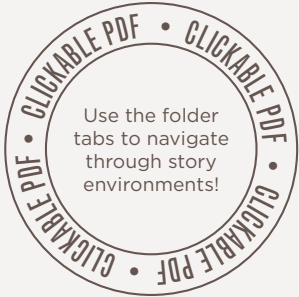
Strengthen participation in democracy and civil society



Target audience: students, young working professionals, self-employed and jobless youth, citizens in both major urban centers and smaller cities

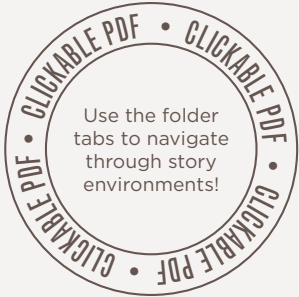





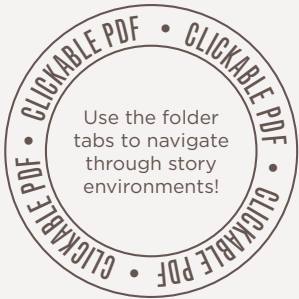
BUILDING COMMUNITY The <i>An Insignificant Man</i> campaign created a network of supporters and solidarity around the film	CHANGING STRUCTURES	CHANGING MINDS	CHANGING BEHAVIORS
	STRATEGY + IMPACT		
<p>TAKING A COLLECTIVE APPROACH WITH YOUNG FILMMAKERS</p> <p>When Vinay and Khushboo, early career filmmakers, set out to make <i>An Insignificant Man</i>, 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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>STRATEGY + IMPACT: SUCCESSFUL CROWDFUNDING AND A COMMUNITY OF CO-OWNERS</p> <p>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!</p> <p>This involved launching a film website and borrowing a friend’s online</p>	<p>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.</p> <p>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:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">— 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 <p>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.</p> <p>STRATEGY + IMPACT: BUILDING INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT TO BOLSTER THE PROFILE OF THE FILM</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Through that process they forged strategic partnerships with Doc Society, Sundance, and the International Documentary Association (IDA). These relationships solidified their integrity as filmmakers.</p> <p>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:</p>		

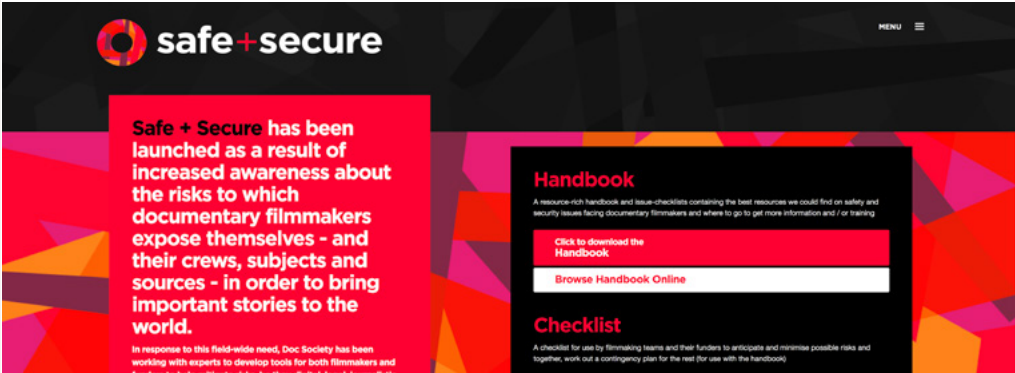


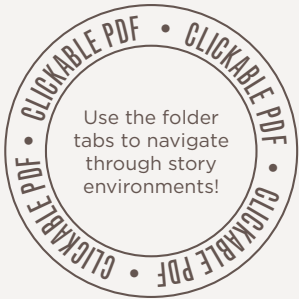
BUILDING COMMUNITY The <i>An Insignificant Man</i> campaign created a network of supporters and solidarity around the film	CHANGING STRUCTURES	CHANGING MINDS	CHANGING BEHAVIORS
<div>STRATEGY</div> <div><p><i>“Ultimately, these requirements make it nearly impossible for the film to be shown in India. 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.”</i></p><div></div><p>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.</p><p>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.</p></div>			
<div>STRATEGY</div> <div><p>STRATEGY: ENGAGED INDIAN INFLUENCERS AT AN EARLY STAGE</p><p>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.</p><p>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.</p><div></div><p>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.</p><p>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.</p><p>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.</p></div>			



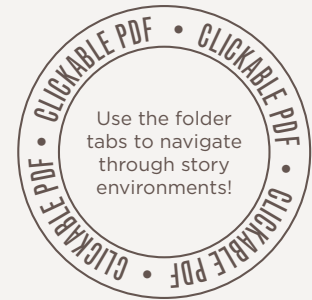
BUILDING COMMUNITY The <i>An Insignificant Man</i> campaign created a network of supporters and solidarity around the film	CHANGING STRUCTURES	CHANGING MINDS	CHANGING BEHAVIORS
IMPACT			
<p>IMPACT: SPARKED VITAL PUBLIC DEBATE INTERNATIONALLY</p> <p>The censorship ban created an opportunity and the team 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.</p>  <p>A screening in Pakistan</p>	<p>WHAT TRACKING IMPACT TELLS US</p> <p>The team knew they successfully created a network of supporters and solidarity around the film because:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">— 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.		



BUILDING COMMUNITY		CHANGING STRUCTURES		CHANGING MINDS		CHANGING BEHAVIORS	
		The <i>An Insignificant Man</i> campaign used the court case to counteract censorship and carve out more space for future political filmmakers					
STRATEGY							
<h3>SECURED SUPPORT FOR A LEGAL STRATEGY</h3> <p>The team knew in advance that they would be required to remove content before/if the film was approved. So before the film’s release, they worked extensively with lawyers recommended by Doc Society to protect themselves as much as possible for the legal challenge ahead.</p> <p>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.”</p> <p>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.</p> 				<h3>STRATEGY: CAREFULLY CRAFTING MESSAGING AROUND THE FILM</h3> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>			
<p><u>The Safe+Secure handbook</u> (updated July 2019) now contains an Indian-jurisdiction specific section in the chapter on Legal Security</p>							



BUILDING COMMUNITY		CHANGING STRUCTURES		CHANGING MINDS		CHANGING BEHAVIORS	
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				IMPACT			
<p>IMPACT: A NEW LEGAL PRECEDENT FOR POLITICAL DOCUMENTARIES</p> <p>The <i>An Insignificant Man</i> 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!</p> <p>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:</p> <p><i>“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.”</i></p>				<p>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.</p> <p>WHAT TRACKING IMPACT TELLS US</p> <p>The team know they successfully used the Supreme Court case to counteract censorship and carve out more space for future political filmmakers because:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">— 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			



BUILDING COMMUNITY	CHANGING STRUCTURES	CHANGING MINDS	CHANGING BEHAVIORS
		The <i>An Insignificant Man</i> campaign deepened popular understanding of Indian political-electoral processes and counteracted cynicism about democracy	

STRATEGY

BYPASSING TRADITIONAL DISTRIBUTORS

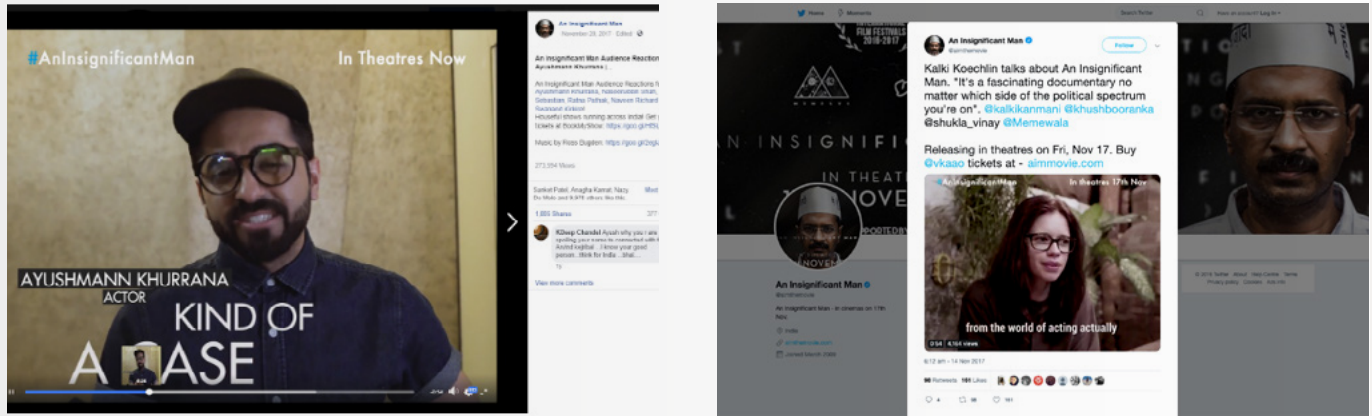
While they had won their right to release the film, the team were not having much luck with traditional distributors, which tend to focus on big Bollywood releases rather than documentaries. In fact, most distributors found the idea of releasing *An Insignificant Man* in theatres outlandish. Even those 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 Vkaaoo platform. Through this platform, audiences could decide on their preferred time and venue and advertise the sale of tickets through their social networks. However, Vkaaoo 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.



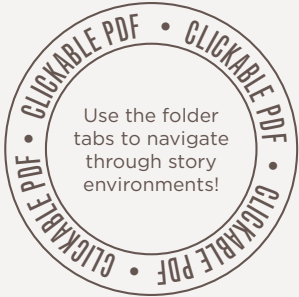
STRATEGY + IMPACT: GALVANIZING BACKERS WITH ADDITIONAL CONTENT FOR ENHANCED LOYALTY

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:

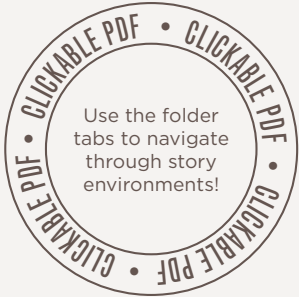


They trusted that these “guardians of the film” could use the tools to draw in audiences, and they were right.

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.



BUILDING COMMUNITY		CHANGING STRUCTURES	CHANGING MINDS	CHANGING BEHAVIORS
			The <i>An Insignificant Man</i> campaign deepened popular understanding of Indian political-electoral processes and counteracted cynicism about democracy	
STRATEGY				
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.				
<i>“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.”</i>				
— Soli J. Sorabjee The Indian Express, November 22, 2017				
<i>“The film is not just the journey of the Aam Aadmi Party as it emerged with dreams of political change; it also chronicles the journey of those who wanted to see this change up close.”</i>				
— Ravish Kumar, NDTV November 17, 2017				
		STRATEGY		
		<i>“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.”</i>		
		— 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.		



BUILDING COMMUNITY	CHANGING STRUCTURES	CHANGING MINDS	CHANGING BEHAVIORS
		The <i>An Insignificant Man</i> campaign deepened popular understanding of Indian political-electoral processes and counteracted cynicism about democracy	
IMPACT			
IMPACT: THE MOST WATCHED DOCUMENTARY IN INDIA		IMPACT: MORE INFORMED AUDIENCES	
<p><i>“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”</i></p> <p>— Madhavan Narayanan Firstpost (Nov. 15, 2017)</p> <p><i>An Insignificant Man</i> 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).</p> <p>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.</p>		<p>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!</p> <p>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 after watching 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.</p> <p>WHAT TRACKING IMPACT TELLS US</p> <p>The team knows they deepened popular understanding of Indian political-electoral processes and counteracted cynicism about democracy because they:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">— 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	



BUILDING COMMUNITY

CHANGING STRUCTURES

CHANGING MINDS

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

IMPACT

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.

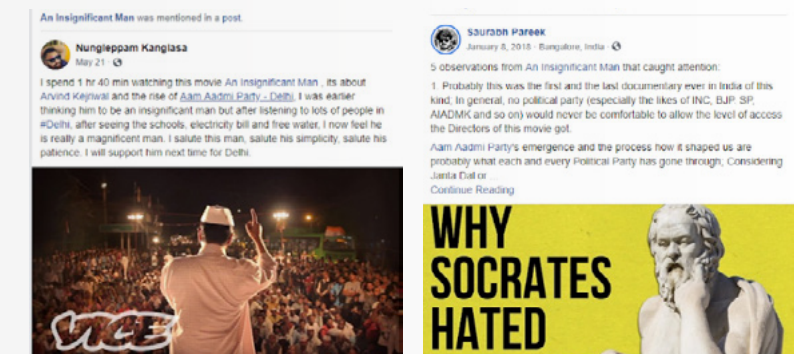
This was also apparent **in person** during screenings. The team observed enthusiastic support for the film and the themes it covers. Similarly to online discussions, in-person discussions were related to the political process itself and explored how the filmmakers had got access and protected against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

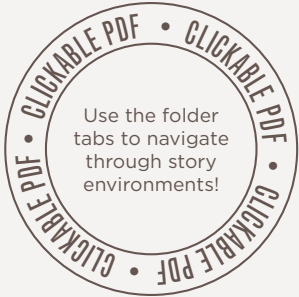
Audience reaction at a screening in Mumbai, Nov 24, 2017

“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



WHAT HAPPENED



BUILDING COMMUNITY	CHANGING STRUCTURES	CHANGING MINDS	CHANGING BEHAVIORS The <i>An Insignificant Man</i> campaign strengthened participation in democracy and civil society
IMPACT			
<p>IMPACT: SPURRED PROTEST AT AWARDS DELIBERATIONS</p> <p>In fact, during national awards deliberations in May 2018, the film again caused a stir when <i>An Insignificant Man</i> was suspiciously absent.</p> <p><i>“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.”</i></p> <p>— Vasudha Venugopal India Times</p> <p>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.</p> <p>IMPACT: STRENGTHENED CITIZENSHIP</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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</p>		<p>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=xI5Dd2Dr7lc).</p> <p>WHAT TRACKING IMPACT TELLS US</p> <p>The team know they galvanized public debate, and participation in democracy and civil society, because they:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">— Noted that 81% of audiences intended to exercise their right to vote in upcoming elections— Saw new political documentaries emerging following their campaign	

ETHICAL & EMANCIPATORY PRACTICES

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.



ICE

THE TIMELINE

2010

2011

DECEMBER 2010

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

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

REAL WORLD EVENTS

THE FILM

THE CAMPAIGN

IMPACT & ACHIEVEMENTS

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

NOVEMBER 2012

The Common Man's Party is launched with Kejriwal at the head

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

JUNE 2013

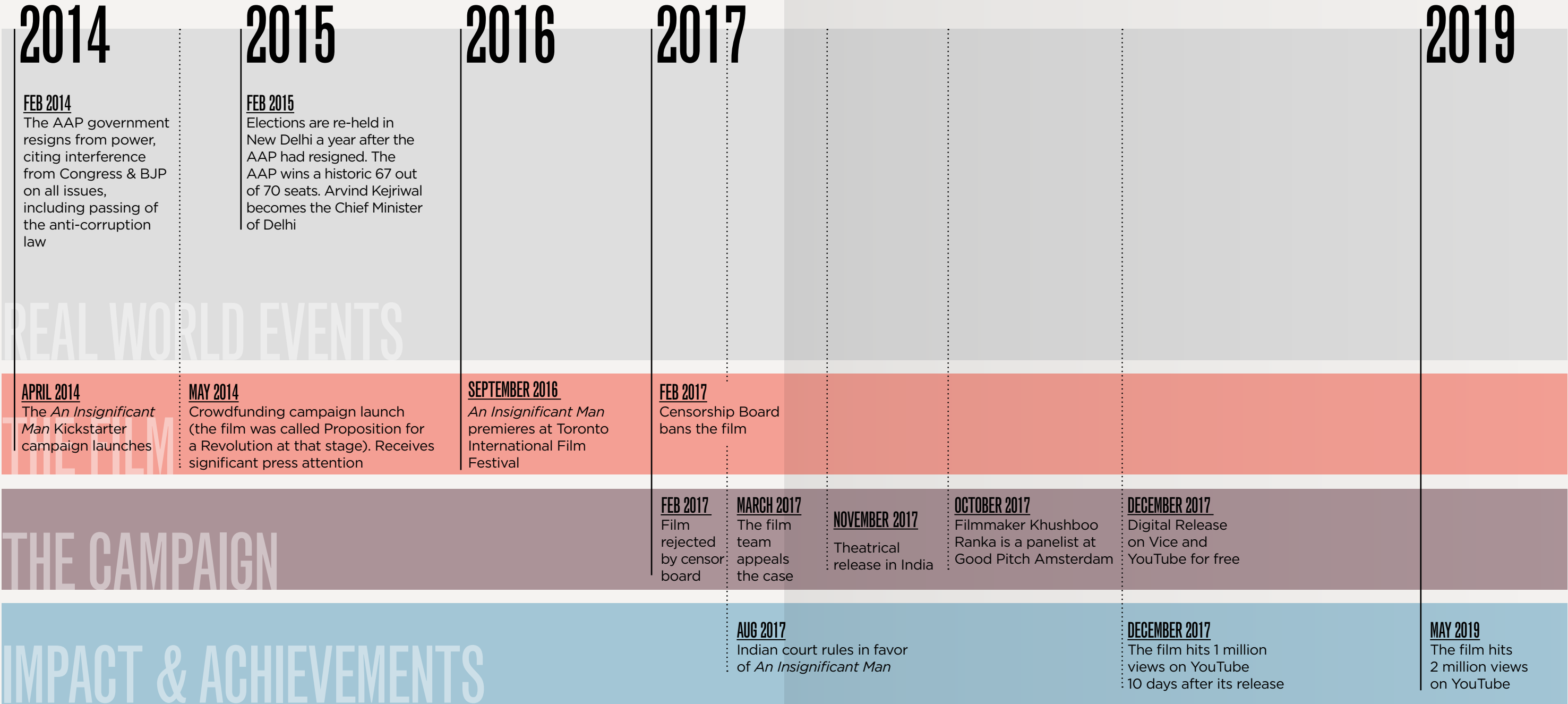
Kejriwal announces he will fight elections against Sheila Dixit on her home turf

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





CONCLUSION

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.



CREDITS

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/](https://REDDIT.COM/R/INDIA/COMMENTS/7MTU4C/HI_THIS_IS_VINAY_KHUSHBOO_THE_DIRECTORS_OF_AN/)

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TAKE ACTION:

VISIT THE FILM'S FACEBOOK PAGE TO KEEP APPRISED
OF ALL THE NEW DEMOCRACY RELATED PROJECTS THE
TEAM HAS BEEN BUILDING

FOR VICE



docimpacthi5

2019

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