

ISSN 2063-5346



SCRIPT TO SCREEN: UAE AS THE HOME GROUND FOR BOLLYWOOD: A CONCEPTUAL STUDY ON THE SUCCESS OF BOLLYWOOD IN THE LAST DECADE IN THE REGION

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Article History: Received: : 19.04.2023 Revised: 02.05.2023 Accepted: 10.06.2023

Abstract

The world of cinema, especially the business of films, recognizes the terminology Bollywood. Its movies, dance, music, and artworks have become synonymous with a globally-recognized identity. The success of Indian cinema has heightened in the last few decades. UAE moviegoers constitute a large chunk of the Indian diaspora. The Emiratis also form a large share of Bollywood viewership. The research positions Dubai as a home to the world's first Bollywood theme park that is creditable and praiseworthy in the United Arab Emirates. The UAE Government's neoteric decision to provide a ten-year Golden Visa to Bollywood actors built a stronger relationship. The drive-in movie theatre experience in locations like the Mall of the Emirates, Zabeel park, and Dubai hill estate gave its audiences a tremendous cinematic experience during the Covid19 Pandemic. The objectives of the current study are to explore the demand for Bollywood movies and the celebrity's powerful passion for UAE. Conceptual research is incorporated to determine the filmmaking funnel approach. According to the study, esteemed Bollywood celebrities strongly associate with the UAE. Eighteen Bollywood movies placed their scripts in the United Arab Emirates in the last ten years. In addition, the Emirati heartland greatly benefits Bollywood filmmakers by facilitating production support.

Keywords: *Bollywood, Film Promotion, Bollywood Parks, Box Office, Shooting.*

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DOI: 10.48047/ecb/2023.12.si12.103

1. Introduction

The Indian film industry globally produces approximately 1,000 films yearly, which accounts for more than 13 million viewers and stretches to more than 100 countries (Mishra, 2002). Besides the UK and the US, the most important overseas market for Bollywood is UAE (Dani, 2016). Many Bollywood movies have their world premiere along with star casts in Dubai. Such a premiere also lends credence to the notion that Dubai is emerging as a new film hotspot, with numerous special events taking place, including phenomenal celebrities paying a visit. Filmmakers from Bollywood have considered UAE and its cinematic spots, for example, the Burj Khalifa, located in Dubai, and Yas Marina in Abu Dhabi, to feature prominently in their films.

A song from the movie *Laxmii* (2020) (stars Akshay Kumar and Kiara Advani) quotes Burj Khalifa, shot in front of the tallest building in the world. The two actors incredibly dance to the music in Dubai. Opening the world-only Bollywood theme Park in Dubai displays sentiment toward Bollywood. With the expansion in the number of theatres and the rising ticket costs in the country, this market's significance has advanced. The recently opened Madame Tussauds in Dubai exhibits wax sculptures with seven themed zones and over 60 lifelike wax statues. Visitors can dance in front of a digital interactive screen in the Bollywood section. It has numerous Bollywood celebrities like Salman Khan, Hrithik Roshan, Shahrukh Khan, Katrina Kaif, and many more.

Emirati-speaking Bollywood fans have a sizable expanse, as seen by their significant presence in theatres watching Hindi blockbusters. The Arab community roughly makes up about 25% of the Bollywood movie audience. Zee Aflam, Zee Alwan, and MBC Bollywood are three cable and satellite television networks in the UAE specializing in Bollywood programming dubbed in Arabic and largely aim primarily Emarati audience. The objectives of the current study are to explore the demand for Bollywood movies and the celebrity's powerful passion for UAE. The study shapes insight into the popularity of Bollywood movies, from script to screening, among the Indian ex-pats and the

Emiratis in the United Arab Emirates through a detailed case study.

2. Review of Literature

From 2000 to 2018, the Bollywood industry cultivated creativity, innovation, and revenue growth. It produced 150 films to more than 1000 per year in a decade. Bollywood's evolution has contributed a significant portion of earnings and income to India's economic prosperity, as it is an essential source of entertainment. In the year 2000, Indian cinema grossed US\$1.3 billion, with Bollywood accounting for 43% of this fantastic total. According to recent figures, Indian cinema grossed Rs14200 crore in 2017, with Bollywood accounting for 74% ((Tatia, 2019).

From liberalization of the economy to media deregulation, from quota elimination to getting industrial status, and from marketing concepts to the expansion of the Indian diaspora, the Indian diaspora has seen many changes (Bose, 2006). According to a study published in the report, Bollywood films have recently outpaced numerous Hollywood blockbusters, such as Marvel's *Black Panther* (2018), compared to the Bollywood film *Dangal* (2016) stars Amir Khan in a leading role (Bose, 2006). The development of Indian film success occurred through vintage Bollywood films such as *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* (1998) and *Dil Se* (1998) in international markets.

The Saudi push underscores significant changes in the Arab world's creative sectors. For the first time in almost 35 years (1983 - 2018), Saudi Arabia restored theatres in April 2018 as part of the kingdom's strategies to encourage its entertainment activities and diversify its oil-dependent economy (Sherbini, 2021). The Govt. of Saudi Arabia's to allow cinemas to reopen in the country has increased the importance of the Gulf market for Indian films, with several of Bollywood's top producers preparing massive promotional operations, including roadshows starring the industry's biggest stars.

Recent hit films like *Gully Boy* (2019) and *Uri: The Surgical Strike* (2019) raked in the region's multi-million-dollar box office collections. The UAE and the larger GCC markets are becoming

focus markets for Indian film producers, particularly those in Bollywood and Mollywood (Malayalam).

3. Methodology

The movies selected in the study are from the box office collection from reliable sources in the UAE (Box office mojo and Timeout Dubai). Apart from profit proportion, all other factors for selection, such as cast and crew members, are subjective, with relative judgment regarding data selection and omission.

The success of the study observations is in two steps. The first step is to identify the appropriate content for the study. The factor is narrative movie analysis to critically examine a specific content's structure, storyline, and cinematography. The second step is to investigate the relationship between the production cost, star value, location, facilities, and drive elements such as content to develop the first steps toward a comprehensive model to anticipate outcomes of these Bollywood movie successes in the UAE.

4. The Popularity of the Bollywood Themed Park

If Bollywood were India's gift to the world, Dubai would pay gratitude to Indian cinema in the most unique way possible. It designed a Bollywood theme park. The imagination of Bollywood—its depiction of Indian culture and lives—is pushed into the conceptualization of creating the film into an off-screen experience for the park's visitors. The park features many action-packed rides and family-friendly attractions, mesmerizing and authentic shopping experiences, compelling dance performances, live shows, and unique Indian cuisine and beverage selections, all designed to immerse visitors in a cultural fiesta in the world of Bollywood.

The relationship between conceptualization and reality to create cultural understanding phenomena is fascinating. The park represents India's rich culture and heritage and provides a glimpse into the country's history, art, and traditions. Such a treasure makes Bollywood Parks Dubai a pillar of the UAE's South Asian presence as a cultural and historical artifact and in terms of interactions between Emiratis

and South Asians, whether residents or tourists (Ferrao, 2021).

On the occasion of Diwali, aka the Indian festival of lights, supermarkets, restaurants, and residential complexes are decorated with lamps and festive lights. The United Arab Emirates organizes several events. The Padma Show - Diwali Night at Bollywood Parks Dubai's Raj Mahal Theatre are among them. Song and dance performances from Bollywood and Tollywood, local UAE talent, children's beauty shows, and quick prize-winning competitions happen.

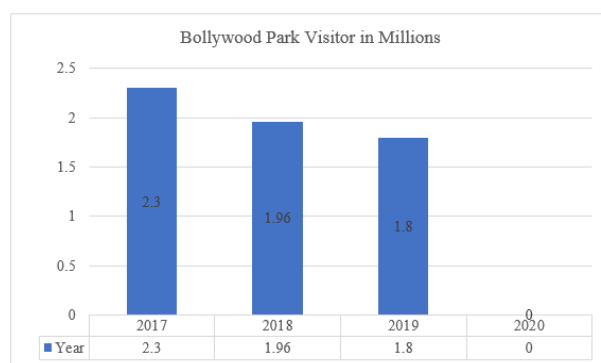


Figure 1: Bollywood Parks Dubai Visitor Data (Source: Gulf Business)

5. Iconic Locations in Dubai

Whether Hollywood or Bollywood, locations are always crucial. The Dubai Film and Television Commission performs excellently in organizing locations and obtaining rapid approval from authorities. Filmmakers can take advantage of an attractive 30% rebate plan offered by the Abu Dhabi Film Commission (Dani, 2016). That is one of the reasons to make their films successful and hunt for the most beautiful places with sky-high structures, appealing hillside horizons, and exquisite beaches. Exploring the ideal location for each scene takes time and effort. Permits and other clearances for shooting are easier to come by than they used to be. Dubai is one city with a particular place in the hearts of many top filmmakers worldwide. Some of the best locations for shooting in Dubai have no similarities elsewhere.

On the tenth anniversary of Mission: Impossible, Tom Cruises' character climbs the massive Burj Khalifa in Mission: Impossible: Ghost Protocol (2011). The 828-meter-high Burj Khalifa tower has

been open to the public since 2010 and has swiftly become the Emirates icon. Tom Cruise remains recognized for his expert stunt work, which he performed without stunt doubles. The action performance was on the tower itself, which is inimitable. To watch him jump out of the window and walk vertically down the building in the movie was incredible. Clinging to the skyscraper windows for his life with only a pair of suction gloves has become a cinematic icon.

Happy New Year (2014), the action-comedy blockbuster with an all-star ensemble led by Shah Rukh Khan, is one of the most successful Bollywood movies filmed in Dubai. In depicting the city's larger-than-life sensation, most sequences use the backdrop of Dubai and Atlantis, The Palm, including Dubai Mall. The movie title also alludes to Dubai's spectacular New Year celebrations each year. The movie crew received free access to the Atlantis Hotel for filming, rooms at the resort, discounted flights on Emirates Airlines, and travel permits. That exemplifies Bollywood adoration for Dubai (Randhawa, 2017).

Welcome Back (2015) is the first Bollywood movie shot at The Burj Khalifa (Basu, 2014). In the opening sequence, the leading characters, Anil Kapoor and Nana Patekar, step out of their fancy Rolls Royce car and enter the building. During the same filming sequence, the tallest structure appeared in the movie. The portrayal of Dubai landscapes, the affluent lifestyle, lavish yacht parties, and stunning hotels was exemplary in the film.

One of the few Emirati films that acknowledge the overwhelming South Asian community as Emiratis is The City of Life (2009), directed by Ali F. Mostafa. That is the first Emirati full-length commercial feature film (Hudson, 2021) and has an enormous budget of \$7,500,000. The movie offers a nuanced and complex portrayal of the diverse people and cultures that make up Dubai and their struggles to find their place in a constantly evolving city. Bollywood actors Sonu Sood and Jaaved Jaffrey played a significant role.

As per the Indian box office data in Table No.1, seventeen Bollywood movies have been filmed in Dubai since 2013. The highest budget is INR 2,70,00,00,000 (Two billion seven hundred million)

spent on the movie Zero (2018), directed by Aanand L. Rai. The lowest budget is INR 7,50,00,000 (Seventy-five million) spent on the film Dilliwaali Zaalim Girlfriend (2013), directed by Japinder Kaur.

Table 1: Bollywood Movies Shot in Dubai Since 2013

SL No	Year	Name of the Movie	Budget In INR	Director
1	2013	Dilliwaali Zaalim Girlfriend	7,50,00,000	Japinder Kaur
2	2013	Once A Time in Mumbai Dobaara	1,00,00,00,000	Milan Luthria
3	2014	Bang Bang	900,000,000	Siddharth Anand
4	2014	Happy New Year	1,50,00,00,000	Farah Khan
5	2014	Bewakoofiyaan	22,00,00,000	Nupur Asthana
6	2015	Welcome Back	1,08,00,00,000	Anees Bazmee
7	2015	Hamari Adhuri Kahani	40,00,00,000	Mohit Suri
8	2016	Dishoom	61,00,00,000	Rohit Dhawan
9	2016	Airlift	68,00,00,000	Raja Menon
10	2017	Sarkar 3	36,00,00,000	Ram Gopal Varma
11	2017	Tiger Zinda Hai	2,10,00,00,000	Ali Abbas Zafar
12	2018	Bharat	2,40,00,00,000	Ali Abbas Zafar
13	2018	Race 3	1,85,00,00,000	Remo D'Souza
14	2018	Zero	2,70,00,00,000	Aanand L. Rai
15	2020	Bunty Aur Babli 2	45,00,00,000	Varun V. Sharma
16	2020	Laxmii	55,00,00,000	Raghava Lawrence
17	2021	Pathan	250,00,00,000	Siddharth Anand
18	2022	Runway 34	1,400,000,000	Ajay Devgan

6. Actors Who Love Dubai

The attention and popularity of Bollywood stars are beyond notable names in UAE. The admiration extends to seeking homes, let alone extended holidays in this part of the world. Bollywood actor Shahrukh Khan announced that Dubai is his second home at numerous events. He owns a villa on Dubai's iconic human-made island Palm Jumeirah. The Dubai Corporation for Tourism and Commerce Marketing (DCTCM) released a promotional video, #BeMyGuest in which Shah Rukh invited people to be his "guests" in the city. The film demonstrated

why Dubai is the actor's second home. By experiencing different dimensions of Dubai and urging visitors to "come with me, be my guest," he demonstrated the city's soul, sights, and life. Dubai offers innumerable experiences that will stay with you for the rest of your life. Whatever you choose to do, whether it is an adrenaline-pumping adventure like skydiving or a desert safari, a delectable culinary experience with tantalizing flavors, or traveling with family, friends, or as a couple, this city genuinely offers a comprehensive vacation experience." Shahrukh mentioned in a statement published in *Khaleej Times* (Gupta, 2017) that his movie 'Happy New Year (2014), filmed in Dubai, had a world premiere in Dubai's Atlantis Hotel. The movie was released one day ahead of its release in India.

Salman Khan, known as the Sultan of Bollywood, is a familiar sight on UAE billboards and commercials. He is also a brand ambassador for Dubai-based fashion company Flash. A few of his movies, including *Jai Ho* (2014) and *Ready* (2011), premiered in Dubai.

Shilpa Shetty Kundra, a Bollywood actress, fitness enthusiast, businesswoman, and full-time mother, has an apartment in the renowned Burj Khalifa. In the presence of Shaikh Nahyan bin Mubarak Al Nahyan, Minister of Culture, Youth and Community Development, she released her book "The Great Indian Diet" in Dubai in 2016. The actress continues to visit Dubai to promote fitness programs and become the brand ambassador for Danube Properties' real estate project in Dubai.

The renowned Indian singer and entrepreneur Asha Bhosle chose Dubai to launch her first restaurant franchise in 2002 when she opened Asha's, her signature Indian restaurant, in Dubai's Wafi Mall and the capital city Abu Dhabi's, The Galleria, Al Maryah Island in 2019.

7. Top two gross films in UAE since the Pandemic

Bollywood films are closely released in the UAE a day before they release in India on Friday. As a result, launching the picture on a Thursday makes logical sense to capitalize on the weekend box office. However, the new weekend in UAE is

Saturday and Sunday from January 01, 2022, which will better align the UAE with global markets and reflect the strategic position on the global economic map (Reynolds & Al Nowais, 2021).

Box office revenue collection refers to the amount of money a movie earns from ticket sales during its theatrical run in cinemas. It measures a movie's popularity and success at the box office. The revenue collected by a film is typically reported in terms of the gross box office collection, which is the total amount of money earned by the movie at the box office before deducting any expenses or taxes.

In the last decade, acclaimed Bollywood director Rohit Shetty has created a theatrical cop cinematic universe with crowd-pleasing films like "Singham," "Singham Returns," and "Simmba," about patriotic police rage issues and physics-defying stunt abilities. His recent movie *Sooryavanshi* (2021), was released on November 05, 2022, in 18 theatres in the UAE, one of the rarest movies to be released on Friday. It is an action thriller where Akshay Kumar is in the lead role as DCP Veer Sooryavanshi, chief of the Mumbai Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS). As an officer who must prioritize his career, Veer demonstrates his devotion to his family. He attempts to unearth one of the most extensive and deadliest threats.

Cars and RDX! are being blown up. Two other strong policemen, Bajirao Singham, and Sangram Bhalerao, played by Ajay Devgan and Ranveer Singh, have joined Soorya in the mission. Then Akshay Kumar enters the scene in slow motion, with an impeccable Police uniform and aviator sunglasses, ready to confront the Bad Guys—keeping the viewers entertained and fans of the genre on the edge of their seats. *Sooryavanshi* is a competent action film that sticks to the lane. It delivers at least as much over-the-top entertainment as it promises (Menon, 2021).

Sooryavanshi has been creating a massive impact at the box office. According to the box office report, the movie produced \$1, 521,526 from the UAE market (22% of the revenue from the worldwide collection). The domestic market contributed 51% of the total revenue. It is also the highest of any foreign country (See figure 2).

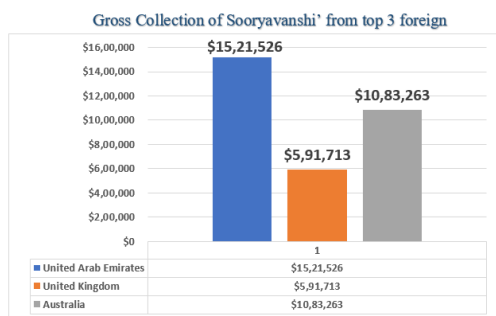


Figure 2: Gross Collection of Sooryavanshi' fromTopp 3 Foreign Countries

Approximately two years of the coronavirus pandemic have forced filmmakers to rethink their budgets, put high-risk, hold back hefty-budget films, and rewrite scripts to ensure they have enough appeal to attract viewers to theatres. That shifts many producers' approaches to the OTT platform to release their films instead of a theatre. With the re-opening of movie theatres in India, Ranveer Singh's starrer film '83 (2021), directed by Kabir Khan, narrates the Indian cricket team's historic triumph in the 1983 world cup at the Lord'Groundnd in London. This movie's budget was INR 2,60,00,00,000, and it was released in theatres in UAE on December 23 and in the rest of the world on December 24, 2021.

The director employs an expertly designed passport sequence to introduce the spectator to the people in the film just a few minutes after the beginning. He also uses dialogue and light chat to reveal that Indians did not believe India could win the World Cup. That is where the audience realizes this film is about receiving respect, not merely winning on a global scale. Ranveer Singh plays the character of Kapil Dev in this film. The actor nails it from a decisive bowling motion to a post-wicket-celebrating run after defeating World Cup champion West Indies two times. However, his mix of enthusiasm and contemplation ultimately carries this picture, not the physical likeness, which is enjoyable. The movie captures the emotional impact of the rebels' triumph and provides a well-researched record written in a popular dialect.

Despite worldwide Covid-19 limits, 83 has put up substantial numbers of moviegoers. Movie critics and even those in the Bollywood industry who were fortunate enough to see the film in front of the world

gave it great reviews, indicating that 83 is a film worth watchingOn the film's first day it grossed Rs 14.50 crore in India (PTI, 2022). However, it was only 10-20% less than what 'Sooryavanshi' achieved on its first day. The film grossed Rs 175 crore at the international box office till January 08, 2022 (Srivastava, 2022).

The film performed well at the box office. The UAE is the highest gross collection compared to other foreign countries. It has collected \$1,307,693 (18% of the total worldwide accumulation). The domestic market in India has contributed 55% of the revenue to the movie (See figure 3).

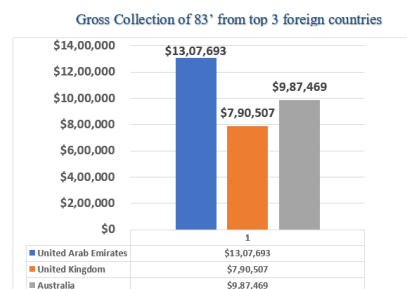


Figure 3: Gross Collection of the Movie 83' from Top 3 Foreign Countries

The box office revenue collection is an essential metric for the film industry as it helps determine the financial success of a movie. For producers, investors, and distributors, the revenue collection defines whether the movie has been profitable or not. If a film does well at the box office, it can generate significant profits for the stakeholders. A movie's box office performance can influence future prospects, such as the potential for sequels, remakes, or re-releases. Moreover, film industry analysts and enthusiasts use box office revenue to compare the performance of different movies, directors, actors, genres, and time periods.

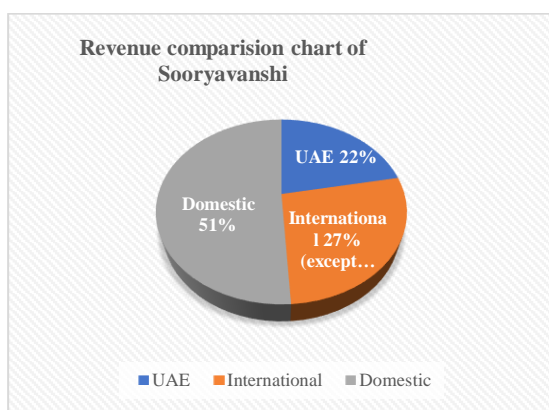


Figure 4: Revenue Comparison Chart of Sooryavanshi (Source: Box Office Mojo)

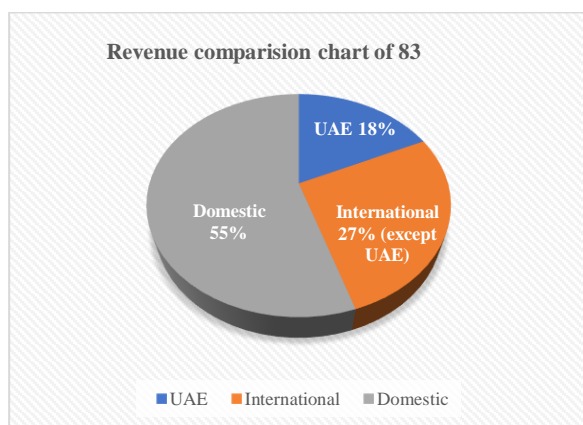


Figure 5: Revenue Comparison Chart of 83' (Source: Box Office Mojo)

Revenue comparison of the above two movies in the international market. The comparison is usually made to determine which movie has performed better in terms of financial success and popularity on a global scale. The above revenue comparison shows that both movies have collected significant revenue from the UAE market. Movie Sooryavanshi received 22% out of 49% of the international collection. Whereas cinema 83 received 18% out of 45% of the international collection.

8. Conclusion

The Indian entertainment sector has its second home in the United Arab Emirates. It is an effective way to connect with a wider global audience. Numerous Indian expats live and work in the UAE, demonstrating the long-standing cultural ties between the two nations. Bollywood dance, music, and movies are well-known and cherished elements of Indian culture. Bollywood films are primarily in Hindi, a common language throughout the Indian

community in the UAE, giving Indians who live abroad a sense of comfort and familiarity. Because of this, they can appreciate the films and comprehend the plots, which makes Bollywood an essential aspect of their cultural exposure. Bollywood is one of the world's biggest and most well-known film industries, and viewers everywhere, including in the UAE, adore its films. Over the years, Bollywood's popularity in the UAE has continuously increased, making it one of the top marketplaces for Bollywood films. In conclusion, Bollywood gives the Indian population in the UAE a cultural link and a sense of home. Its vast appeal and popularity have contributed to the nation's entertainment industry.

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