**Is Karan Johar promoting nepotism and should we all stop watching his movies? An answer based on data analysis**

*Short answer: Yes. In 37 movies, out the 45 produced by Dharma Productions since Karan Johar took the lead, half or more than half of the lead crew (actors, directors, producers) have entered the industry thanks to nepotism.*

Since the demise of Sushant Singh Rajput, the debate about nepotism in Bollywood has been re-ignited more intensively than ever before. This has made me, an avid Bollywood cinephile, question how I could be a more responsible consumer. Because whatever your opinion is, nepotism is REAL and EXISTS all around us: humans naturally want to see their kin succeed first.

Due to the tremendous public exposure, this is perhaps more obvious in Bollywood than any other field since relations are known to all. It does not require to dwell deep into any kind of analysis to see that the Kapoors, Bhatts, and alike are working continuously under big banner names right from their first movie while outsiders seem to struggle more for the same opportunities. Some may say that nepotism in Bollywood has given us true gems like Ranbir Kapoor and Alia Bhatt, who justify the opportunities they receive by their mastery over their craft. This is true, none should accept to live in a society where equal opportunity is overlooked because the lack of it could fast-tracked some deserving people. A race is only fair is everyone starts at the same point and losers get similar subsequent chances to run again. I believe many feel the same given the current backlash from the general public on the so-called guardians of nepotism, Karan Johar being bawled out the most.

Many today agree that change must come from the audience and want to fight against nepotism by watching non-nepotic movies. As a result, people are calling left and right to boycott movies made by X or where Y is an actor. Unfortunately, it is hard to make up your mind about which claims to support because there a is lack of guidance for deciding if a movie is nepotic or not. I thus propose here my simple criteria to judge the nepotic level of a movie purely based on data, and thus impartial, to guide the audience.

**Analysis**

The major crew in a movie, that shape the overall outcome, are the Producers, Directors, and Lead Actors. Thus, for a movie to be non-nepotic, I would want to see a good proportion of these lead crew members to not have any relation to Bollywood before they entered the industry. What is a good proportion? I propose that no more than half (or 50%) of these lead roles should be occupied by people with initial ties to Bollywood. This leaves enough room for me to watch movies of people who are a product of nepotism but are deserving to be where they are. As an example, let’s assume that a movie has 1 Director, 2 Producers, and 5 Lead Actors, meaning a total of 8 lead crew. If 4 or more of these peoples had a connection to Bollywood before starting their career, I would consider that movie being too nepotic for me watching it.

Now that we have a simple rule for qualifying a movie as nepotic or not let us apply that to a case study: Karan Johar’s movies. Let us find out what the numbers say about his movies to date. For each of the movies listed on the Wikipedia filmography of Dharma Productions (a total of 45 released or to be released since Karan Johar took over starting with Kuch Kuch Hota Hai), I looked at the lead crew information in the table and calculated its nepotic level accordingly. As of now, there is no database on current members’ relation to Bollywood. Thus, I decided to rely on Wikipedia and some Google search for that to initiate such a database. If a reliable source on the internet states that a crew member had any connection to Bollywood before joining it, I considered this person to be a product of nepotism. The result for each movie is provided in Figure 1. It shows that the nepotic level of Karan Johar’s movies fluctuates between 14% and 100% with an average of 64%. This means that on average, Karan Johar movies fail to pass our nepotic level test.

A screenshot of a cell phone

Description automatically generated

*Figure 1. Nepotic level of each movie released by Dharma Productions since Karan Johar has taken a major role in the production house.*

A deeper analysis (Figure 2) tells us that in 37 out of his 45 movies (82%), over half of the lead crew was a product of nepotism! All of these 37 movies would thus fail to pass our nepotic level criteria.

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*Figure 3. The proportion of Dharma Production movies with a nepotic level equal or greater than 50%.*

Is Karan Johar just having fun making most of his movies with his inner-circle? It could be. What is certain is that he has been making the bulk of his money doing so. After checking the box office verdict of each of his movies (movies not released yet were excluded) on boxofficeindia.com, it is found that most of his successful movies were the ones with a nepotic level above 50% (Figure 3). A total 23 (70%) of his 33 movies with a nepotic level above 50% were average or better at the box office (including 4 blockbusters). On the other side, only 3 (50%) of his 6 movies with a nepotic level below 50 percent had the same success (two of those are average, no blockbuster). It means that more than 7 in 10 of his movies with a nepotic level above 50% will make him a positive return on his investment while only 5 out of 10 of his movies with a nepotic level below 50% would do the same

. A close up of a map

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*Figure 3. Box office verdict of a movie with nepotic level.*

Finally, when looking at lead crew members launched by Dharma Productions, we found that Karan Johar has been quite fair with newcomers. Of the 9 actors launched by the production house, 5 were outsiders. Of the 21 directors launched by the production house, 17 were outsiders. Of the 3 producers introduced by them, 1 was an outsider.

**Discussion**

Numbers don’t lie. Karan Johar has clearly been supporting nepotism in his movies. Although he has been impartial when launching newcomers, he has mostly relied on the Bollywood inner circle to shape his movies. At the same time, the audience has been encouraging him in doing so. Instead of blaming him for something we all have been part of, I propose that we show him and others alike what we expect from now one. I will use my simple algorithm to do so: if half or more of the lead crew is a product of nepotism, then I am out. This means that I will not be watching the upcoming Gunjan Saxena: The Kargil Girl (57% nepotic), Sooryavanshi (50%), Dostana 2 (57%), and Brahmastra (75%) from Dharma Productions. I request that you take the same initiative with my algorithm or anything similar that you find more suited. Let us attack the torchbearer of nepotism in Bollywood where it hurts them the most, their wallet, to guide them to the right path.

**Limitations of the Analysis**

Due to a lack of information, we have considered a product of nepotism anyone with a connection with Bollywood before entering the industry although it could be that they did not make use of said tie to enter the industry. On the other hand, it could be that we missed some ties for some of the members because they are not known to the public. For instance, while family relations are often mentioned, others such as friends or college acquaintances are not necessarily known. We could only assume that these two limitations balance each other out.

**Data and Material**

All the data and code used in this article are available on the dedicated GitHub page: TBA. Anyone can access, use, and modify it for their own need.