

Singapore's Event Exclusivity Strategy in ASEAN: Aggregating Regional Demand in the Digital Economy

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines Singapore's use of exclusivity of international concerts to aggregate regional economic demand in the ASEAN digital economy through a qualitative descriptive analysis of secondary data thematically analysed using concepts of platform economy and network effects. The results suggest that exclusivity is a deliberate means of aggregating cross-border demand and creating spillovers in events-related industries like tourism and digital transactions, enabling Singapore to act as both an event host and a platform hub that controls regional event circulation. Event exclusivity is found to be a form of event-led economic aggregation that enhances network centrality and lock-in, resulting in uneven economic development in ASEAN, while event-based economic gatekeeping is also introduced as a new dimension of digital political economy.

Keywords: Economy, Event Exclusivity, ASEAN, Singapore

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of the digital economy in Southeast Asia has significantly transformed consumer mobility, consumption and regional economic activity. Increasing internet penetration, the rise of digital payment platforms, and cross-border travel services have facilitated consumers to participate in experience-related economic activities across borders. In this ever more integrated ASEAN digital economy, the ability to position itself as a major hub for

high-value economic activities is now a crucial element of regional competitiveness. Singapore has adeptly used its hub strategy to cluster economic activities, particularly via the concentration of major global events.

Over the past few years, Singapore has established itself as a premier destination for global concert tours in Southeast Asia. Major international artists, including Taylor Swift and Coldplay, have chosen Singapore as their exclusive or one of a few stops in their ASEAN tours. Such exclusivity has incentivised fans from neighbouring nations (such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and the Philippines) to visit Singapore. Increasingly, international concerts have evolved from mere cultural exchange to become a significant driver of cross-border trade, with subsequent multiplier effects on the aviation, hospitality, retail and digital services industries.

The trend represents a political economy strategy for regional integration and demand centralisation in a digital economy. Rather than adopt the typical protectionist measures, Singapore leverages its high-tech infrastructure, regulatory efficiency and its status as a global city to regulate access to high-value cultural consumption. This process helps to establish Singapore as a regional consumption centre, where economic value potentially spread over multiple ASEAN nations is retained within a single national economy.

The issue has been addressed in the literature in a number of ways. Literature in Digital Economy highlights the role of digital infrastructure in facilitating global economic exchanges. Regional Integration studies have shown the role of ASEAN connectivity in promoting mobility and market development. And research on Creative Economy stresses the growing importance of the cultural economy, including live entertainment. In addition, studies on Mega-Events show their role in promoting tourism and nation branding, and discussions of Hub Strategy have mostly focused on finance, aviation and logistics.

However, these research streams are more commonly explored in isolation. In particular, there has been little research about how the exclusivity of international cultural events acts as a hub strategy to bring together regional economic demand in the digital age. Specifically, the role of hub strategy and experiences-based demand concentration has not been explored sufficiently. This suggests the need for an more holistic approach to explaining the role of digital connectivity combined with cultural industries in regional economic concentration.

This research seeks to explore how Singapore uses exclusivity in hosting international concerts for its hub strategy to aggregate regional economic demand in the ASEAN digital economy. It also intends to understand how such exclusivity is achieved, and its impact on regional distribution and inter-state competition in the context of ASEAN.

The study is qualitative in nature, using a case study approach. The findings are sourced from secondary data sources such as journal articles, policy reports, and industry reports on the digital economy in ASEAN, global concert tours, and Singapore's policies. The research draws on the ideas of hub strategy and digital political economy.

The findings suggest that Singapore's ability to regularly host and position high-consumption cultural events in the region enhances its position as an economic hub. Through the use of exclusivity arrangements, digital connectivity, and supportive institutional arrangements, Singapore is able to leverage cross-border consumer spending to its local economy.

This study adds value to the current body of knowledge by suggesting the concept of event exclusivity as a form of experiential-based economic development in the ASEAN digital ecosystem. It offers an enriched perspective of hub strategy by incorporating digital infrastructure, cultural industries and regional economy. Moreover, the research provides relevant insights for policymakers within ASEAN in developing strategies to improve their countries' competitiveness whilst dealing with problems related to economic concentration in the digital age.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Academic debates on digital economic transformation in the ASEAN region have long emphasised the role of the state in building capacity as a technology-based economic hub. The research Digital Diplomacy of Indonesia in Realizing its Vision as the ASEAN Digital Economy Hub argues that digital integration is not only a means for improving the efficiency of the domestic economy, but also a tool of economic diplomacy to optimise the regional economy. This study's significant contribution is how it explains the role of digital policy settings in a country's position in the regional economy. However, the discussion is limited to the development of digital infrastructure to support production activities, without adequately considering how digital platforms can be developed to centralise

regional consumption, especially in experiential industries like entertainment.

Other studies, such as Development of Digital Integration to Drive Economic Digitalization in the ASEAN Region, offer a comprehensive analysis of cross-border digital integration to support regional economic mobility. It concludes that higher levels of digital integration enable cross-border economic transactions through digital platforms, particularly in tourism and creative services. However, the study largely understands digitalization in the context of efficiency of transactions and expansion of markets, overlooking how digitalization can also be used as an instrument for aggregating regional demand for event-based economic activities, such as international music festivals.

On the other hand, the study Where Businesses Thrive: Predicting the Impact of the Olympic Games on Local Retailers through Location-based Services Data examines the economic impacts of mega-events using location-based data analytics. This study successfully proves that hosting mega-events can drive substantial demand for local retailers and services. However, this study focuses on the post-event economic impact and does not consider how the uniqueness of hosting events in a single area could be leveraged to shift consumption from other regions in the event's vicinity.

Similarly, the report Impact of Creative Economies on the Future of Tourism in the APEC Region points to the increasing importance of the creative economy in enhancing the appeal of tourist destinations through international cultural and entertainment events. The strength of the report is that it discusses the role of the creative economy in contributing to the growth of international tourism arrivals and tourism expenditures on sectors like accommodation and transport. But the report doesn't address the possibility of using exclusivity in hosting events as a mechanism to drive regional demand towards a country. The report on Singapore, Singapore's Role as a Regional ICT Hub in ASEAN, sheds light on how the city-state has built a robust information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure to facilitate regional economic exchanges. The report suggests that Singapore's digital economy allows it to play a pivotal role in the regional economy. However, it still views the digital economy primarily as a means of facilitating production and trade, without further examining its potential to centralise regional consumption through international events.

Finally, Developing Digital Business Ecosystem in Singapore illustrates how the integration of digital platforms with tourism and creative industries promotes the growth of Singapore's service economy. This study offers an important contribution by clarifying the links between digitalization and the creative industry in improving destination image. However, it has yet to discern the significance of exclusivity in hosting international concerts as part of a state-led strategy to attract regional tourist spend through the concentration of events in a single economic conglomerate.

Overall, these studies provide valuable insights into digital convergence, creative industries and hub development strategies. But their analyses are scattered and have yet to explain the role of exclusivity in hosting international events as a means to aggregate regional demand and concentrate spending within a digitally integrated ASEAN environment. This suggests a need for a more holistic approach, which this study seeks to address by considering how Singapore not only uses event exclusivity within its hub strategy to concentrate regional demand.

METHODOLOGY

The research adopts a qualitative method with a descriptive-analytical research design to explore Singapore's approach to event-based economic clustering in the ASEAN digital economy. The research draws secondary data from various sources in order to enhance the research's credibility and rigour. These include: (1) peer-reviewed academic literature on the Digital Economy, Regional Integration and Creative Economy; (2) government policy documents and strategic publications published by the Singapore government, especially those related to the digital economy, tourism and event management; (3) institutional reports released by international organisations such as ASEAN, the World Bank and UNCTAD; and (4) industry-based reports and publications on the global entertainment and event sector, including details of international concert tours and the movement of audiences across the border.

In order to guarantee the validity of the research, this study adopts a data triangulation approach by cross-checking data from these various types of sources. Research publications are used to establish the conceptual and theoretical framework while government policy reports provide information on national strategies and institutional arrangements. Moreover, international organisation reports and industry journals are employed to validate empirical trends and developments in the ASEAN digital economy. This triangulation process ensures that the study is not relying on a

single source of data, thus avoiding bias and increasing the validity of the findings. The data are then analysed through content analysis and thematic analysis. These methods are used to discern patterns that relate to economic concentration strategies, scarcity creation, and the creation of lock-in effects resulting from Singapore's advanced digital infrastructure and regulatory framework. The analysis framework draws from the concepts of platform economy, network effects and complex interdependence, enabling a holistic understanding of state actors' roles as platform hubs to aggregate digital economic activities and cross-border events within the ASEAN region.

DISCUSSION

1. Aggregation Strategy

In the digital economy, Singapore's conversion into a platform hub is part of a broader trend towards value aggregation. Singapore's success in aggregating supply and demand transcends traditional territorial or resource-based advantages, and instead capitalises on its superior digital infrastructure and governance to bring together global supply (international artists/promoters) and regional demand (ASEAN audiences). This development is consistent with platform capitalism, which creates value through strategic manipulation of interactions in complex digital ecosystems (Srnicek, 2017; Kenney et al, 2019).

Studies on the "platformization" of tourism explain how digital platforms now bind services such as transport, accommodation and recreation into a single platform (Capineri & Romano, 2021). Singapore's integration of world-class concerts with this digital platform allows it to "harvest" cross-border consumption with greater efficiency than surrounding countries.

Moreover, this approach is also an example of digital mercantilism, whereby countries adjust their regulatory frameworks and tax structures to capture value within their jurisdictions (Ciuriak & Ptashkina, 2018). Singapore's exclusive contracts for international events allow it to re-capture regional demand. This results in a large "economic agglomeration" that supports local retail and services sector (Maguire & Hanrahan, 2017). In short, Singapore isn't merely an event host but an ecosystem engineer that helps determine regional consumption patterns, and cements its role as an ASEAN digital superpower.

2. Engineering Scarcity

Creating artificial scarcity is an important driver in elevating Singapore as a regional hub. In the digital world scarcity is often engineered to boost reputation and stimulate demand (Belleflamme & Peitz, 2015). The rarity of overseas tours that include Singapore (often the only one in ASEAN), is a calculated means of focusing regional attention on a single destination.

Recent research on tourism in Asia also points out that experience-based consumption is increasingly facilitated by digital platforms that concentrate demand and facilitate trans-boundary mobility (Aransyah et al., 2025). These digital platforms not only open doors, but also create "amplification effects" with social media viral sharing and networked consumption.

From a political economy standpoint, this echoes the theory of weaponised interdependence. Nations that control the choke points of economic networks reap enormous benefits by regulating global flows (Farrell & Newman, 2019). Hosting high-value events and events, Singapore positions itself as a pivotal channel for regional consumption, investment and information. Yet, this concentration, according to researchers, can result in disproportionate rewards, potentially widening the gap between wealthy central hubs and peripheral regions (Tescăşiu et al, 2018; Juraev & Omonova, 2024).

3. Lock-in and Infrastructure Advantage

Singapore's regional leadership is reinforced by the lock-in effect. Lock-in in a digital economy is when a consumer or business is trapped in a platform because of the high switching costs such as losing proprietary data or service integration (Susanto & Nugroho, 2021).

Research on Southeast Asia's digital payments demonstrates that a seamless financial system makes transactions easier but at the expense of a higher lock-in effect (Sari & Prasetyo, 2021). In the event economy, this ensures the whole economic life cycle of the event - transaction, secondary travel services - are within Singapore's system.

Further, Singapore's regulatory stability and institutional security is critical. Countries that have stable governance and interoperability are more attractive to international investors (Putri & Hadiwinata, 2020). This results in a virtuous cycle in which organisers tend to pick Singapore as their home. Theoretically, this is the crux of network effects: the more users in the ecosystem, the greater the benefit, making it even more costly for one to move to a new regional hub (Gawer, 2021). This, in the end, creates dependency in ASEAN whereby the "core hub" benefits disproportionately, while other countries face challenges to undertake economic upgrading (Yusuf et al., 2023; Ozaydin, 2026).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This research demonstrates that Singapore's strategy has shifted from leveraging geographical proximity to a platform hub state model that enables the concentration of demand and supply in the regional cyber economy ecosystem. Singapore has managed to establish a network effect through exclusive incentive measures and the aggregation of global events, further enhancing its position in regional digital economy flows in ASEAN. The study also proves that scarcity and exclusionary control are used as strategic means to enhance the value of the digital ecosystem. Restricted access and exclusive events result in the digital and physical nomadism of regional users, which increases the prospects of data monetisation and cross-platform transactions in Singapore. And the strategy's success is guaranteed by a lock-in effect resulting from the cyber infrastructure's superiority in terms of payment systems and data security. Taken together, such features enhance Singapore's appeal to global promoters and regional nodes' dependency on Singapore. The regional effects however are mixed. Conversely, this strategy drives regional digital economic integration toward greater efficiency. On the other hand, the hub model risks perpetuating the digital geo-economic inequalities in ASEAN and promoting the competition of incentives among countries. In this sense, the Hub strategy in Singapore represents a new type of power in the cyber economy through the channels of networks, platforms and regional mobility. The results of this research suggest that the current Singapore Hub model has the potential to worsen structural inequality in the digital economy of ASEAN, in which economic value, data traffic and customer mobility are concentrated in a single hub. This calls for a shift in the approach of ASEAN members from a national and competitive approach to a more regional approach, which not only includes harmonised digital payment regulation and cross-border management but also strategically develops a multi-hub regional framework to spread high value-added activities. Failure to do this will mean the adoption of exclusivity practices will reduce bargaining power of peripheral countries and contribute to hierarchical economic structures. Otherwise, exclusive practices will erode bargaining power for less centralised countries and perpetuate hierarchy in the regional economy. This is why national strategies should focus on strategic differentiation by building niche strengths and cultural identities, rather than striving to replicate the Singaporean model, which is hard to adopt for countries with different infrastructural capacities. This must be complemented by industry players and digital platforms, which need to start implementing distributional strategies to broaden their market reach and minimise their reliance on major hubs, in a bid to sustain market growth. Finally, research programs in the future need to adopt quantitative approaches such as network analysis and big data techniques to empirically investigate the effects of this aggregating demand, to fully understand the power and dependency structures that are formed by digital platforms in the region, in order to promote a more sustainable and balanced regional integration.

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