



# Social Media Branding: Driving Economic Growth in Singapore's Creative City Movement

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**Abstract.** This study examines the use of social media to brand Singapore as a creative city of design, which is capable of promoting regional economic growth and fostering an exciting urban environment. Using qualitative research, this study accurately describes the facts and characteristics of Singapore's efforts to become a creative city. The study's results suggest that social media is an effective tool in branding Singapore as a creative city, and that the city's innovative urban society activities are driving economic growth. The implications of this study are that cities can use social media to brand themselves as creative cities, and that this branding can drive economic growth and improve the urban environment.

**Keywords:** Social media · Branding · Creative city · Economic growth · Singapore

## 1 Introduction

The Creative Cities Network (UCCN) was founded by UNESCO in 2004 to foster cooperation between cities that value creativity for sustainable urban development. 246 towns in the UCCN are divided into seven artistic fields: crafts and folk arts, design, film, food and drink, literature, media arts, and music. 40 towns worldwide are "Cities of Design," including Bandung, Buenos Aires, Cape Town, Detroit, Dubai, Helsinki, Istanbul, Montréal, Seoul, and Shanghai [1].

Singapore is a 700-square-kilometer modern, cosmopolitan island city-state in Southeast Asia, and design has played a major role in improving daily life there. In order to build a prosperous and sustainable future for its people, a young nation with big dreams but few resources had to put in place the fundamentals of good governance, such as housing, education, healthcare, water management, and transit. Lee Hsien Loong, the prime minister of Singapore, said in 2018 that "Building a country relies heavily on good design. As a designed city-state, Singapore functions efficiently. Nothing we have right now just happened to acquire" [2].

Singapore was designated a UNESCO Innovative City of Design in 2015, the same year that its Design 2025 Masterplan was introduced. The Masterplan outlined the steps that will be taken to make the country a hub of design and creativity by 2025. Design 2025 built on the foundations of earlier design masterplans by suggesting five key initiatives, such as integrating design into Singapore's national skillset and bringing design to the community, as well as more specific steps like increasing the role of design in businesses and government, increasing the competitiveness of design firms, and creating a SingaporeDesign brand [3].

The island nation and strictly governed project of Singapore has long integrated branding principles into these areas. Under the leadership of Lee Kuan Yew, Singapore went from a third-world shantytown inhabited by the "dregs of Asia" (as the city's leading newspaper called them) in 1965 to a first-world global hub today, transforming from the "Lion City" free port of founder Sir Stamford Raffles in the 19th century. Singapore, like society, has been the target of intentional and deliberate engineering, despite the fact that their protectors place a premium on brands and reputations [4].

Creative city branding is an area where there is presently a dearth of academic study. Whether or not a city is well-known, the creative metropolis is often cited as an important factor in attracting visitors and potential businesses [5, 6]. Despite this, city branding and creative city studies are largely overlooked [9] despite the fact that they are closely linked to the application of social media. Therefore, the purpose of this investigation was to address this knowledge gap.

## 2 Literature Review

### 2.1 City Branding

Academics and policymakers are highly interested in the topic of city branding. As cities compete globally to attract tourism, investment, and talent, among other goals, brand strategy concepts from the commercial sector are increasingly adopted and utilized in pursuit of urban growth, regeneration, and quality of life. The majority of published research on city branding stems from the disciplines of marketing and urban studies, two fields that have followed parallel rather than interdisciplinary paths. The interest in city branding may be viewed as part of a larger realization that all types of locations can benefit from having consistent techniques for managing their resources, reputation, and image [10].

City branding is a city image management strategy as a destination by establishing a distinct identity for the region to be recognized by the target market (investors, tourists, talents, events) via strategic innovation and coordination of economic, commercial, social, and cultural regulations. It is also a method or technique a city uses to introduce, promote, or market itself to the general public. Branding a city is a means of achieving a competitive edge to generate investment from tourists and a community development achievement.

City branding is also defined as a city or area's strategy to expose a city's identity by emphasizing its advantages and distinctive qualities. Three communication levels are used to brand a city: primary, secondary, and tertiary. Primary communication is the assessment of a city's qualities as a whole. Landscape, infrastructure, behavior, and

structure serve as main communication channels. Secondary communication refers to the intense formal communication conducted by communicators, including advertising, public relations, graphic design, and logo design [11].

According to Kavaratzis [12], city branding focuses on image management, namely what and how the image is generated, and the communication parts of the image management process. According to Sugiaronso (2009: p. 130), in making a city branding, several criteria must be met, including a) Attributes, the city branding that is made must be following the character and potential of the city, so that the city branding created can represent the potential of the city. A city branding must also have a smart and pleasant impression to make it simpler for the message's audience to remember it; c) Differentiation, or originality, becomes a crucial aspect of city branding. Because it is also a differentiation from previous city branding; and d) Ambassadorship, the essential aspect of city branding is to encourage individuals to dwell in a city. Motivate individuals to move to and reside in the city.

## 2.2 Creative City

Popularity has grown for the notion of a creative city due to the belief that it may improve the quality of human resources. Creative cities have also become a global consensus for ensuring the future sustainability of life. Especially considering the truth of the allure of large cities as a place to enhance one's standard of living.

A creative city is a creative approach to the challenges or urban crises encountered by some cities due to globalization's economic effects [13]. The concept's underlying philosophy is to improve the urban environment and foster the growth of an inspirational atmosphere for the urban community's creative endeavors. The creation of a creative city must take into account three crucial factors. These include creative economic growth, the maintenance of creative classes (groups or individuals), and the provision of an environment conducive to the growth of creativity. These three elements are interdependent [14]. Creative classes, by their ingenuity, contributed to the growth of the creative economy. Their inventiveness results in items with valuable intellectual property. Florida recognized creative classes actors in the categories of architecture and design, science and engineering, art, education, music, and showbiz, whose economic purpose is the creation of new ideas, new technologies, and new creative material, as well as the professionals in the related fields [15]. In order to carry out creative activities and generate creative goods, creative classes require a conducive and motivating setting. This link makes these three factors significant.

## 3 Method

This study is qualitative. Qualitative study has these traits. This type of research can gather a wealth of qualitative data with detailed descriptions and nuances that are more valuable than simple declarations of amount or frequency.

Data was collected using:

- a. Interview guides were used to ask informants in-depth inquiries. The Singapore Polytechnic Architecture Department dean and faculty were interviewed.

- b. Library researchers
- c. Participatory observation captured common behaviors in their usual contexts. Singapore's creative city-supporting laws were determined using this method.

## 4 Result and Discussion

### 4.1 Singapore as the Creative City

Singapore's approach to governance has been characterized by a commitment to transforming challenges into opportunities. The Design Singapore Council, the official agency for promoting design and expanding the design sector, is driving the implementation of Design 2025, which comprises five key thrusts. As a UNESCO Creative City of Design, Singapore is leveraging this status to promote its design innovations, build partnerships, and showcase its design capabilities to the world. Through initiatives such as the SingaporeDesign Week, the city is connecting with individuals and organizations across the world, expanding its network and reputation as a design innovation thought leader [1].

In particular, Singapore has optimized the use of social media to communicate its brand as a creative city of design. Through various social media channels, the Design Singapore Council is sharing information on its design initiatives, events, and partnerships, and showcasing the works of local designers. This approach has enabled Singapore to reach a wider audience and build its reputation as a hub for design innovation. By leveraging social media, Singapore is driving interest in its design sector, attracting talent and investment, and reinforcing its position as a leading design city [2].

### 4.2 Social Media and the Creative City Branding

The Cabinet—particularly the Prime Minister's Office—manages Singapore's image. The Singapore Tourism Board (STB, an agency of the Ministry of Trade and Industry) handles external marketing and overseas campaigns, but the total sum of government efforts to perpetuate its on-brand message to accrue a multitude of boards solely carries outgrowth, state-owned (or dominated) companies. Singapore Airlines and community groups are always in the news [4].

The promotion of Singapore as a creative city strongly relates to the big brands of Singapore as a city-state. Consequently, the usage of Singapore's social media as a creative city must also address how to prevent the marketing of the Singapore brand as a city-state from being confused with the promotion of Singapore as a creative city. Creative city brand is a subsidiary of Singapore as a city-state brand. The use of social media in communicating with brand also applies this policy.

There are several websites related to the Singapore brand as a creative city that can be observed. The first is the website from the SingaporeDesign Council which in charge of developing ecosystem and programs for the creative community groups to involve in innovation and creative activities. Having a website for communicating a brand is essential. As stated by Kaplan [16], without a website, your business's authenticity may be questioned. Having a website is an opportunity to establish a positive first impression and reassure visitors that your business is legitimate. Introducing your brand to potential clients is one of the most crucial steps you can take.

The website contains information about the formation of SingaporeDesign Council, its mission, and when Singapore first joined the Unesco Creative City Network. The SingaporeDesign Council can promote its activities through the website and engage people to know more about Singapore as the Creative City of Design. The benefit of having a website for the creative city, for instance, appears in the information as follows:

Being a UNESCO Creative City of Design has allowed us to meet many individuals from across the world, and there are several prospects for future partnerships between the design sector in Singapore and other member cities. The result has allowed Singapore to i) Raise our worldwide reputation as a design innovation thought leader; ii) Increase our alliances with cities and design-related organizations that share our values; iii) Provide SingaporeDesign ers and the Singapore-Design sector with worldwide exposure, opportunity to develop our abilities, and access to new markets [1].

Singapore's designers could exhibit in other UNESCO Creative Cities of Design like Detroit, Graz, Puebla, and Seoul and engage in international conversations in Bandung, Adelaide, Helsinki, Wuhan, Torino, Seoul, and Detroit. Helsinki taught them about design education policies. Helsinki, Graz, Kortrijk, Geelong, Bandung, and Ambon delegates toured Singapore to discuss improving design and design sector capacity.

SingaporeDesign Council has Instagram. Instagram is held by Meta Platforms, an American company. Users can submit photos and edit them with filters, hashtags, and geotags. Public or preapproved users can share posts. Users can search by tag and area, view trending content, like photos, and follow other users to add their content to their feed [17].

SingaporeDesign Council used instagram to promote Singapore as the Creative City of Design through various events. Instagram was used to promote as well as engage creative groups to the upcoming events. One of the prestigious events was SingaporeDesign Week. Singapore invited representatives and industry professionals from Creative Cities of Design networkssince 2018. They took part in its events, such as the business and design conference Brainstorm Design and the locally produced artistic festival Street of Clans, and they also networked with influential business and design figures.

The participants had the opportunity to show off their work to the general audience in addition to learning first-hand about Singapore's design ambitions. The various towns discussed how design played a role over four sessions addressing policy, business, education, and communications over the course of a day-long UNESCO Creative Cities of Design Public Forum. Numerous spirited debates were spurred by the well-attended event. Urban life was also showcased in Singapore at SingaporeDesign Week.

Thus, SingaporeDesign Council effectively used Instagram social media to promote and engage people to its activities. However, the SingaporeDesign Council had not used other social media like Twitter which also has high engagement. The search on the Twitter did find many Twitter accounts that tweeted or posted messages on SingaporeDesign Council or its events which may include either text, pictures or video. However, this study did not find any Twitter account that belonged to SingaporeDesign Council. The SingaporeDesign Council then needed to consider the usage of Twitter to optimize its engagement as part of its branding strategy.

## 5 Conclusion

The SingaporeDesign Council is an agency responsible for branding Singapore as the Creative City of Design. In addition, the UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN) has entrusted the DesignSingapore Council with planning and executing activities that contribute to the UCCN's objective. It promoted the brand through various events as part of the implementation of Masterplan Design 2025.

The SingaporeDesign Council had effectively used the website and Instagram social media to communicate the brand of Singapore as the Creative City of Design. The website described the history, vision and mission, and goals of Singapore becoming the creative city. It also emphasized the roadmap of Singapore as the creative city through the explanation of its Masterplan Design 2025. It then gave a sense of a strong will of Singapore as the Unesco Creative City of Design. Instagram, on the other hand, were used more to promote events related to the implementation of the SingaporeDesign Council programs. One of the programs, Singapore Design Week, had become the prestigious event in Asia and strengthened the brand of Singapore as the Creative City of Design.

The SingaporeDesign Council, however, needed to expand its usage of social media to increase its brand engagement. The council needed to learn variety of social media which has high engagement within creative community groups. For instance, the council needed to include Twitter as another social media to communicate its brand since many of these social media accounts mentioned The SingaporeDesign Council on its status.

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