

An Analysis Of Singapore's National Interest In The Exclusive Hosting Of Taylor Swift's *The Eras Tour*

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ABSTRACT

In an increasingly competitive global landscape, countries are racing to develop strategies to maintain their competitive advantage, including through the entertainment and tourism sectors. This study addresses the issue of how national interests can drive a country—such as Singapore—to pursue monopolistic strategies in hosting international concerts. The purpose of this research is to analyze Singapore's national interests behind its effort to secure a monopoly over Taylor Swift's The Eras Tour as the sole host in Southeast Asia. This study employs a discourse analysis approach, using data collected from policy documents, official news sources, and relevant government statements. The findings reveal that concert exclusivity has a significant impact on Singapore's economy, tourism sector, and the enhancement of its soft power. These impacts are reflected in the increase in regional tourist visits, state revenue from the entertainment industry, and Singapore's international image as a global event hub. This strategy further strengthens Singapore's position as a strategic actor in the regional and global entertainment landscape. The study offers important implications for international relations scholarship, particularly in the context of cultural diplomacy and the creative economy as instruments of foreign policy.

Keywords: Competitiveness, Monopoly, Exclusivity, Economy, Singapore

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1. INTRODUCTION

Amid globalization and the rise of the creative economy, the organization of cross-border cultural events has evolved beyond mere artistic performances into a vital instrument of economic calculation and global diplomacy. The interconnection between culture and economics has fostered the commercialization of entertainment, turning cultural products into mass-consumed commodities (Garfield-Abrams & Wynn, 2024). Various actors have utilized cultural initiatives to address social issues and stimulate economic growth, underscoring the importance of culture in crisis management and competitiveness (Dobó, 2007). Among the most popular cultural forms is the concert, which has evolved into a significant economic instrument since its emergence in the 18th century, reflecting broader societal changes (The Evolution of the Public Concert, 2023). Today, concerts are recognized for their substantial contributions to economic growth, particularly through consumer spending and tourism. In some countries, concerts serve as vital instruments during economic downturns, supporting related industries and reflecting a trend of experiential consumption among younger generations (Popescu, 2019).

Large-scale concerts, especially those featuring internationally renowned artists such as Taylor Swift, are no longer merely entertainment events (Tham & Sin, 2024). These events play an active role in projecting soft power, strengthening nation branding, and positioning countries within the mainstream of global cultural diplomacy. Governments increasingly recognize the strategic value of leveraging popular culture to promote economic growth, enhance international reputation, and assert political presence on the global stage (Hozic & Davies, 2024). Within this context, cultural diplomacy has evolved into a competitive arena, where states deploy non-traditional tools such as entertainment and celebrity culture to advance national interests. Intensifying global competition has led states to compete for resources, business relocation, foreign investment, visitors, and

residents. The race to attract both residents and tourists who can contribute to economic growth and cultural exchange adds another dimension to the landscape of global competition (Solsolay, 2016). One way a country can establish a competitive advantage is by optimizing national competitiveness through the integrated development of key sectors. Strengthening overall competitiveness through strategic choices, knowledge, and innovation can maximize leading sectors, stimulate economic growth, promote business success, and bolster a nation's position in the global market (Tošović-Stevanović, 2018). As Michael Porter argues, national prosperity is created not inherited. He further states that a country's competitive advantage lies in its ability to attract businesses (both domestic and foreign) to use it as a business platform, which broadly requires three strategic steps: first, be a good host for regional customers; second, treat them well; and finally, build a "home sweet home" for them.

Previous studies have examined nation branding through tourism and popular culture, but few have explored the use of cultural exclusivity as a geopolitical strategy particularly by small states such as Singapore. Since being positioned as a hub for events and entertainment in the early 2000s, Singapore has proactively invited international musicians and artists to attract fans from across Asia. This strategy serves as a promotional tool for the country's entertainment and tourism industries. Direct promotion by the Singaporean government has significantly supported major concerts, including Taylor Swift's The Eras Tour. Singapore's decision to secure exclusive rights to the Southeast Asian leg of The Eras Tour in 2024 highlights a state-led initiative in cultural and economic diplomacy. The government, through the Singapore Tourism Board (STB), reportedly offered financial incentives to host the concert under an exclusivity clause, effectively preventing other ASEAN countries from serving as hosts.

This research aims to analyze how Singapore's monopolistic strategy in hosting international concerts reflects national interests within the frameworks of soft power and global political economy. Singapore's efforts to monopolize The Eras Tour illustrate key dynamics in global politics, particularly in foreign policy decisions shaped by multiple factors. As Fox (1954) contends, national interest policies are determined by state decision-makers. The Singaporean executive's move to secure exclusive concert rights triggered competitive responses from neighboring Southeast Asian countries. While legally valid as part of a business agreement, the policy has sparked debate over monopolistic practices in the cultural sector and their implications for regional relations.

This study contributes to filling a gap in the literature by examining how a small state leverages global cultural instruments to advance national interests through strategic exclusivity. The findings enrich discourse on cultural diplomacy, nation branding, and the struggle for influence in the global entertainment economy especially from the perspective of developing countries and non-traditional actors.

2. METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive method with a literature review approach to gain an in-depth understanding of Singapore's monopolization of *The Eras Tour* concert and its associated benefits and impacts. The qualitative descriptive method aims to describe and analyze social phenomena through the collection of descriptive data and interpretive analysis. As part of this method, the literature review involves gathering qualitative information from reports, scholarly articles, official websites, news media, and other relevant documents related to the research topic. This process includes the identification, evaluation, and synthesis of existing literature to build a theoretical foundation and contextual understanding of the research subject.

The research process consisted of several steps, including the identification and collection of data from academic databases, libraries, and credible online sources. This was followed by a critical evaluation of the sources, taking into account the reputation of the authors, the research methods employed, and the relevance of the content to the research questions. The collected data

were then analyzed and synthesized to identify emerging themes, patterns, and conceptual relationships. The final stage of the research involved interpreting the findings and formulating conclusions to provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation namely, Singapore's strategic monopoly of *The Eras Tour* concert.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Concerts as Arenas of Economic and Political Contestation

In the era of cultural globalization, international music concerts have evolved into strategic arenas for the contestation of *soft power* the ability of a state to influence others through cultural appeal, values, and institutions, rather than through military force or economic pressure (Nye, 2019). Concerts have long functioned as more than mere entertainment; they serve as dynamic platforms where economic and political power intersect, shaping cultural, social, and ideological landscapes.

B. Economic Contestation through Concerts

Historically, concerts have constituted significant economic ventures, often reflecting broader economic structures and power dynamics. The industrialization of live music particularly through large-scale arena and stadium concerts illustrates this economic dimension. In the 1970s, the proliferation of arena rock concerts in the United States marked a shift toward the industrialization of live music production. These events were characterized by high production costs, complex stage designs, and the need to ensure consistent sonic and visual quality across venues. This industrialization fostered a competitive enterprise in which promoters, artists, managers, and technicians negotiated for a share of profits, driven by the imperative to deliver a "spectacle" that justified rising ticket prices (Waksman, 2022).

Singapore exemplifies how concerts can become sites of economic contestation to maximize national interest. By hosting exclusive global events such as *The Eras Tour*, Singapore has demonstrated how cultural platforms can be strategically utilized to generate significant economic returns while enhancing the country's competitiveness in the global entertainment industry.

C. Political Contestation through Concerts

As a small state with limited natural resources, Singapore has historically capitalized on non-traditional assets such as its international reputation and service-based economy to enhance its position within the international system. By hosting a globally renowned concert like *The Eras Tour*, Singapore aims not only to reap direct economic benefits through tourism and entertainment sectors but also to construct a symbolic narrative of itself as a cultural and modern hub in Southeast Asia (Chua & Iwabuchi, 2010). This strategy is embedded in the broader framework of cultural diplomacy, through which the state presents its openness, technological advancement, and global integration to the international community (Melissen, 2005).

The Taylor Swift concert also functions as a *cultural mega-event* that offers distinct diplomatic advantages. As Grix and Houlihan (2014) suggest, mega-events can serve as tools of nation branding, allowing host countries to project a positive and competitive national image. In Singapore's case, the monopoly over this concert reinforces its image as an efficient, well-organized, and globally competitive state. Indirectly, the event becomes a form of *symbolic diplomacy*, showcasing the state's capacity to manage cultural assets and leverage them as instruments of influence in international relations.

Thus, international concerts such as *The Eras Tour* become not only symbols of cultural consumption but also strategic battlegrounds in contemporary global power politics. This case highlights the significance of viewing global entertainment not merely as a cultural product but as a vehicle of national interest within the competitive sphere of international diplomacy.

D. Singapore's National Interest

Despite its status as a Southeast Asian economic powerhouse, Singapore faces distinct challenges, including a relatively high unemployment rate, a small domestic market, and an acute scarcity of natural resources (Kompas, 2025). These structural limitations place significant pressure on the Singaporean government to sustain national development, particularly in the economic domain. The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated these challenges, triggering economic fluctuations that severely affected the country. In 2023, Singapore's GDP per capita fell to USD 65,400, primarily due to a decline in the manufacturing and export sectors, prompting the government to seek alternative sources of economic growth.

Strengthening economic resilience has thus become a vital component in ensuring Singapore's sustainable development. The government has actively pursued alternative strategies to maintain macroeconomic stability and diversify its growth model. One of the most prominent approaches is the strategic development of the creative economy and tourism sectors, particularly through large-scale entertainment events such as international concerts (Gerald David, 2025).

In recent years, Singapore has successfully attracted globally renowned artists such as Coldplay, Ed Sheeran, and Taylor Swift. These high-profile performances have not only elevated the nation's cultural image but have also generated substantial economic returns. According to Asia News Channels, major concerts have contributed up to 10% of Singapore's GDP, underscoring the sector's potential as a key driver of economic diversification.

The exclusive hosting of Taylor Swift's *The Eras Tour* in Southeast Asia reflects a timely and calculated strategy to stimulate economic growth by boosting tourism and domestic consumption. Through the Singapore Tourism Board (STB), the government reportedly provided subsidies ranging from USD 2 million to USD 3 million (approximately IDR 47.2 billion) per show to secure exclusive rights to the concert in the region (CNN, 2024). This move exemplifies Singapore's proactive approach in integrating cultural and economic policy to advance its national interest.

By securing the exclusive performance, Singapore not only increased tourism revenue and domestic spending but also solidified its position as a cultural and entertainment hub in Southeast Asia. Singapore's Minister for Culture, Community, and Youth, Edwin Tong, emphasized this point, stating, "Concerts are a growth area we can tap into," highlighting the strategic importance of the sector within the broader framework of national economic policy.

E. Concert Monopoly and Singapore's National Economic Strategy

The Eras Tour is widely recognized as the most successful global concert tour in music history, generating gross revenues of approximately IDR 15.5 trillion. Spearheaded by global pop icon Taylor Swift, the tour has attracted millions of fans worldwide, rendering it one of the most highly anticipated cultural events of the decade.

Singapore's strategy to monopolize the Southeast Asian leg of *The Eras Tour* exemplifies a calculated political-economic approach in pursuit of national interest. Since the early 2000s, Singapore has positioned itself as a premium hub for creative economy and tourism in the region, leveraging international events as a key driver of service-sector-led growth (Tan & Low, 2021). By securing the exclusive rights to host Taylor Swift's performances, the government not only enhances the competitiveness of its tourism sector but also reinforces its global image as an international hub for entertainment and culture.

A concrete manifestation of state support can be seen in the financial incentives reportedly provided by the Singapore Tourism Board (STB), which allegedly offered exclusive subsidies to the concert organizers to secure six consecutive shows solely in Singapore (BBC, 2024). This initiative demonstrates how economic policy instruments are mobilized to consolidate the nation's

position within the global cultural market, simultaneously creating a dependency of neighboring countries on Singapore as a center of cultural consumption.

According to Gao and Lin (2023), within the context of Asia's creative economy, countries capable of consolidating their roles in hosting international events gain "symbolic geopolitical advantages." These benefits extend beyond economic impacts to include political legitimacy at the regional level. The decision to monopolize the concert reflects how cultural events are utilized as *strategic assets* aligned with long-term national development visions particularly Singapore's *Smart Nation Strategy* and *Tourism Recovery Action Plan* in the post-pandemic era.

From the perspective of international political economy, this practice also illustrates the phenomenon of state entrepreneurialism, wherein the state acts not merely as a facilitator but as an active economic agent within the global cultural and entertainment market (Cochrane, 2020). In this role, Singapore assumes financial risk and invests strategically to gain both symbolic and material returns. The concert, therefore, is not merely a cultural commodity but an effective tool of national economic engineering.

In the short term, Singapore's monopoly over *The Eras Tour* has clearly boosted domestic revenue through increased tourism and consumer spending. In the long term, however, this policy contributes to strengthening institutional infrastructure and solidifying Singapore's global legitimacy as a central player in the regional creative economy.

F. Cultural Identity Politics and Nation Branding in Singapore's Concert Monopoly Strategy

Despite its small territorial size, Singapore has successfully leveraged global popular culture as a tool of diplomacy and economic enhancement. This strategy is evident in the government's efforts to attract international music icons such as Taylor Swift, Coldplay, and Ed Sheeran. By supporting such high-profile events, Singapore seeks not only to drive the creative economy and tourism sector, but also to shape its image as a dynamic and culturally vibrant destination. The strategic monopoly over *The Eras Tour* exemplifies a long-term agenda aimed not merely at short-term economic gains, but at constructing a modern national identity and strengthening the country's reputation on the global stage.

In this context, the state deploys popular culture as an instrument for crafting and projecting a national identity that is modern, progressive, and cosmopolitan aligned with the logic of *nation branding* (Dinnie, 2022). By securing exclusive hosting rights for Taylor Swift's concerts in Southeast Asia, Singapore positions itself as a regional cultural and digital economy hub, one that resonates with the aspirations of the global youth and regional middle class.

Aligned with this strategy, nation branding emphasizes how countries strategically utilize cultural assets, global icons, and public imagery to shape positive international perceptions (Kaneva, 2020). The monopoly of high-scale concerts constructs a symbolic image of a nation capable of managing global infrastructure, security, and logistics thus enhancing the perceived credibility of the state and its institutions. In Singapore's case, this image is further reinforced by a smart city ecosystem that enables a seamless, secure, and high-tech concert experience.

Moreover, this approach reveals how national cultural identity is actively constructed by the state through selective accommodation of popular cultural forms. As Arias (2022) argues, such selectivity illustrates a process of *cultural curation*, whereby the state crafts desired national narratives in this case, those of openness, progress, and competitiveness. The concert thus becomes a symbolic arena where global imagery is integrated with local values of efficiency and social harmony.

However, behind the success of this nation branding initiative lies the risk of cultural homogenization and marginalization of local identities. In its effort to project a globalized and

modern image, the state may inadvertently sideline domestic cultural expressions that do not align with the desired international persona. Gao and Kong (2023) warn of a recurring “branding trap” in Asia’s nation branding strategies where cultural policy becomes more oriented toward international consumption rather than local cultural empowerment.

Thus, Singapore’s monopoly of Taylor Swift’s concert is not solely an economic or diplomatic maneuver, but also a calculated practice of cultural identity politics. In this dynamic, the state acts not just as a cultural facilitator, but as a curator and architect of a globally oriented national image.

G. Post-Monopoly Situation Strategic Benefits: Economic and Tourism Growth

This tour has given rise to the term “Swiftonomics,” which powerfully encapsulates the significant economic impact generated by Taylor Swift’s tour, demonstrating its profound effect on Singapore’s economy. The exclusive hosting of Taylor Swift’s concert substantially increased the influx of international tourists to Singapore. According to the Singapore Tourism Board (STB), over 300,000 attendees participated in the concert, contributing directly more than SGD 340.2 million (approximately IDR 3 trillion) to the economy, including revenues from accommodation, transportation, and consumption (LPEM FEB UI).

Following the six-day run of The Eras Tour on March 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, and 9, 2024, Singapore recorded a 2.9% increase in Gross Domestic Product (GDP), marking the fastest growth rate in six quarters (Dhana Puan, 2024). The positive economic effects of the Eras Tour during these six days, as highlighted by economist Han Teng Chua from DBS Bank Ltd., significantly benefited Singapore’s hospitality, food and beverage, and retail sectors. Chua emphasized that the increased spending by foreign tourists attending the concert was a key driver of Singapore’s economic growth. “These concerts are expected to contribute between IDR 3 trillion and 4 trillion, or approximately 0.2 percent of GDP, to the national economy in the first quarter,” Chua explained. This finding aligns with the analysis of Tan and Low (2021), who noted that cultural mega-events have a multiplier effect on the service sector and local SMEs.

Therefore, the strategy to monopolize The Eras Tour concert not only successfully consolidated Singapore’s position as the entertainment and cultural hub of Southeast Asia but also provides tangible evidence that the creative economy sector can serve as a crucial pillar in strengthening national economic resilience sustainably.

H. Strengthening International Image and Nation Branding

Singapore has strategically leveraged the exclusivity of *The Eras Tour* as a soft power instrument to enhance its international image as a modern and dynamic cultural and entertainment hub. In an era of cultural globalization, Singapore’s success in securing a world-class artist like Taylor Swift demonstrates its capabilities not only in terms of infrastructure capacity, but also in the effective management of large-scale events that attract global attention (Moss & Newell, 2021). This approach aligns with the concept of nation branding, which emphasizes the portrayal of a country as an innovative, safe, and economically and culturally competitive destination (Dubinsky, 2023). In addition to boosting tourism, the success of this event has also reinforced global perceptions of Singapore’s reliability in hosting complex international events, positioning the country as a regional benchmark in Southeast Asia.

Furthermore, the extensive international media coverage of the concert has served as an effective tool for enhancing Singapore’s global reputation. According to Almakaty (2025), global mass media play a crucial role in strengthening national branding by providing positive framing of major events, which in turn fosters perceptions of a country’s credibility and capacity. Media framing also influences how nations are perceived globally, often reflecting cultural narratives that align with national branding efforts. In this context, Singapore is not only building its image as a “cultural hub” but also solidifying its strategic position in cultural diplomacy, which is closely

linked to its Smart Nation agenda and the development of its creative economy (Dinnie, 2022; Kaneva, 2020). Therefore, the strengthening of this image is not merely about prestige; it also contributes to long-term investment and enhances national competitiveness on the international stage.

I. Dominance in Regional Cultural Diplomacy

The monopoly over the concert also reflects Singapore's strategic use of cultural diplomacy, consolidating its hegemonic position within Southeast Asia's cultural landscape. The concert transcended mere entertainment to function as an instrument of soft power, enhancing Singapore's cultural and political influence as a key player in the regional entertainment arena (Chong, 2021). The visionary policies enacted by the Singaporean government demonstrate meticulous long-term planning in developing the tourism sector. By leveraging global-scale events such as Taylor Swift's concert, Singapore pursues not only immediate economic gains but also sustainable impacts on the national tourism industry.

This approach offers valuable lessons for other countries seeking to capitalize on international events as platforms to promote their national identity more broadly. Beyond cultural promotion, such strategies have the potential to strengthen national branding, attract foreign investment, and increase tourist inflows. Consequently, Singapore's policy not only exemplifies domestic success but also serves as an inspiring model for other nations aiming to design policies that support sustainable growth in tourism and the creative economy.

J. Risks of Exclusivity:

- Emergence of Diplomatic Tensions with Neighboring Countries

Singapore's exclusive agreement with Taylor Swift to host *The Eras Tour* as the sole concert location in Southeast Asia has sparked criticism from neighboring countries. For instance, the Philippines and Thailand have expressed dissatisfaction with this arrangement. Filipino parliamentarian Joey Salceda described the agreement as "not a good act from a good neighbor" and urged the Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs to formally protest to Singapore (Business Insider, 2024). Similarly, Thailand's Prime Minister, Srettha Thavisin, revealed that the Singaporean government offered subsidies of up to US\$3 million per performance to Taylor Swift as part of the exclusivity deal.

Although Singapore's Prime Minister, Lee Hsien Loong, defended the agreement by asserting that it does not constitute an unfriendly act (CNN, 2024), the criticism from neighboring states highlights potential risks of eroding ASEAN regional solidarity.

- Dependence on Global Popular Culture

This strategy reveals a pronounced dependence on Western popular culture as a tool for nation branding. According to Urbaite (2024), an excessive emphasis on global culture in nation branding can overshadow local cultures, leading to the hegemonization of global culture. Many Asian countries, by focusing heavily on global cultural icons in their national branding, risk neglecting local cultural expressions and fostering homogenization of national identities.

Singapore's reliance on concerts by internationally acclaimed artists such as Taylor Swift, Olivia Rodrigo, Sam Smith, Ed Sheeran, Bruno Mars, Imagine Dragons, Coldplay, and the top girl group Blackpink, as tools to enhance its national image, exemplifies this dependence on Western popular culture. While this approach can yield short-term economic benefits, there is a significant risk that overemphasis on global cultural icons may erode and marginalize local cultural identities, resulting in a cultural shift and crisis of meaning that could undermine indigenous cultural expressions (Ikhsanov, 2023). Ikhsanov

further argues that Asian countries overly reliant on Western popular culture in their nation branding strategies risk producing homogenized national identities and disregarding cultural diversity. This phenomenon may diminish the uniqueness of national culture and weaken efforts towards authentic cultural diplomacy.

- Risks of Social Inequality and Cultural Exclusion

The monopoly on concerts and the high ticket prices can lead to cultural exclusion, particularly affecting lower-income groups. In Singapore, the expensive tickets for Taylor Swift's concerts and limited accessibility prevented many fans from middle- and lower-income backgrounds from attending the events. Savage and Bennett (2005) argue that large-scale cultural events often exacerbate social class divides in access to cultural products, ultimately reinforcing existing social inequalities. Although these concerts are touted as tools of public diplomacy, the benefits are not equitably distributed across all segments of society, raising critical questions about inclusivity and fairness within the national cultural strategy.

4. CONCLUSION

The findings of this article demonstrate that Singapore, as a small state with limited natural resources, has strategically leveraged global popular culture exemplified by Taylor Swift's *The Eras Tour* as a tool of diplomacy and a driver of economic growth. The monopoly over this concert is not merely about hosting a global celebrity but reflects a carefully calculated economic-political strategy aimed at strengthening Singapore's position in both global and regional arenas. Government financial support and active involvement in exclusive negotiations with concert organizers indicate a shift towards a more proactive and competitive form of cultural diplomacy.

The positive impacts of this strategy are tangible. Singapore experienced significant increases in international tourist arrivals, revenue growth in hospitality, transportation, and retail sectors, and reinforced its image as a premium entertainment hub in Southeast Asia. The country successfully capitalized on global popular culture as a form of soft power, enhancing its international appeal. Events like these also symbolize the nation's success in developing cultural infrastructure and a globally competitive entertainment ecosystem.

However, this success is not without challenges and unintended consequences, both externally and internally. Regionally, the monopoly strategy has elicited negative responses from neighboring countries such as the Philippines and Thailand, which felt disadvantaged by being excluded from hosting similar concerts. This diplomatic tension underscores that, despite the global nature of popular culture, its distribution and access remain arenas of competition between states, particularly within the lucrative entertainment economy. Internally, concerns have arisen regarding the potential marginalization of local culture. An excessive emphasis on Western-oriented global popular culture risks excluding local arts and cultural expressions that lack comparable market appeal. Over time, this may erode national cultural identity and foster dependency on commercially driven foreign cultural agendas.

In summary, the strategic utilization of global popular culture by small states like Singapore holds considerable potential to advance economic and diplomatic objectives. Nonetheless, such strategies must be implemented with sensitivity to socio-cultural and regional political dynamics. Balanced policies are essential ones that pursue economic gains through global culture while safeguarding the sustainability and diversity of local cultures. Only through an inclusive and long-term visionary approach can small states fully reap the benefits of global popular culture without compromising regional stability and national identity.

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