

# Singapore media



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Even saying the word and some of the uninformed may still hold the belief that

it is located “ somewhere in China,” knowing only where it is

approximately. Yet this vibrant, newly industrialized city-state is in fact

located close to the equator and is often overlooked on the world map; not

surprising, considering it is only represented by a small dot in the South China

Sea. Today, the island of Singapore has earned high acclaim for its rapid

transformation from a humble trading post to the modern, technological

metropolis that it has proudly become. Singapore has been described by some

economists as a “ modest miracle,” simply because it has managed to

achieve the status of an Asian business headquarters with its only resource:

people. (Marshall, 1970) Despite its lacking of other resources, due to its

strategic location at the southern tip of the Malay Peninsula, Singapore is a

thriving business hub for Southeast Asia with an excellent communications

network infrastructure. It possesses all the trappings of a successful business

center with an extremely multicultural heritage, as well as an abundance of

colorful and modern environment. History on this island began around the 15th

century, when it became a port of call for various Malay empires ruling at the time. It was most likely favorable to them for its perfect deep-water harbor area; it is one of the worlds largest at roughly 93 square miles, and offers six gateways to the open seas. What the early settlers probably didnt care about was its rich, hilly landscape and fertile tropical forestry. The coastal region of Singapore is very smooth and rocky, easily accessible for all types of

boats. They were more interested in the coastal possibilities, and perhaps with

the temperate, relatively uniform climate. It is a humid and rainy island, with occasional violent winds. However, the early history wasnt documented as much

for its accuracy as it was for its mythology. Singapores modern history began with the arrival of Sir Stamford Raffles of the British East India Company who landed there in 1819 in search of establishing a trading site. It was quickly transformed into a legitimate British colony, not recognized as property by

anyone. Singapore was declared a city by a royal British charter and it quickly

created a municipal colony. (Marshall, 1970) With this colony, Singapore was to

become a prosperous industrial trade nation. Perhaps its most alarming attribute to success is the growth in population, comprising mainly Singapore citizens and permanent residents. What I mean by citizens is the medley of races

making up Singapores resident base; they consist of the Chinese, Malays, Indians, Arabs, Persians, and Europeans. The population in the early years was

probably not more than a few hundred thousand. Today, the number, and ethnicity,

of people have risen almost a ten-fold. With all of the dramatic increases in populations of immigrants came the influx of different languages, and cultures,

too. Singapores officially-recognized languages are Malay, Chinese

(Mandarin), Tamil, and English; which is considered the administrative language,

the social conglomerate. Singapores mainstay of British authority lasted

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around a hundred-fifty years before its brief accommodation with Malaysia.

Despite being a small, resource-poor island, Singapore gained its full

independence in 1965. This new Singapore, staunchly anticommunist, was finally

free to pursue capitalism with vigor and determination that set new standards

for nations of the Rim. Singapore faced a problem that was similar to other

former colonies: how to take the disparate cultures and blanket of colonial

European influences and weave them into a free, modern state. Singapore was

spared the problem of traditionally hostile indigenous cultures bound together

by unnatural modern state boundaries, with constant tribalism and distribution

of power. However, Singapore also lacked the cultural building blocks that are

obvious characteristics of a modern nation-state. So how do you turn a

multiethnic colony into a cohesive nation? Singapores former Prime Minister,

Lee Kuan Yew, tried to do this. His policies were attacked and ridiculed. The

included strict enforcement of codes of public behavior, use of English as the important language, a national ideology built around cultural tolerance and loyalty to the nation. Because of the other nations of the world in conflict for post-colonialism, Yew believed the only alternative was to establish a strong central government that could survive the typical splintering of states into pieces. Opposition was minimal among Singaporeans or domestic media, which he

mainly controlled. What he basically did in the media was a symbol of the battle

between modern authoritarianism and independent journalism. (Stevenson, 1994)

Singapore also made an advance in the development of a centralized government.

Not a ruthless dictatorship, mind you, but rather an authoritarian government

based on the idea of commerce and wealth. An insidious ingredient of

authoritarian control is that it can include shady acts and threats that can

later be denied. It is basically a parliamentary system with a written

constitution, but infrequently honored. The President is largely a ceremonial

head of state, but a Prime Minister and a cabinet representing the majority of parliament essentially run the government. There is a British-influenced judiciary, with a Supreme Court and other sub-divided courts. Most of all though, the foundation of authoritarianism is its domination of the media, which

well get into shortly. The economy originally consisted of primarily trading and shipping, but soon began diverse industries as well. It appears to follow the same traditions as China and Indonesia, as far as financial restraints and economic structure are concerned. In addition to its port activities, Singapore has a large oil and textile industry, and thriving banking, insurance, and communications industries. The city-states post-WWII economic explosion is what would be expected of a newly industrialized country (NIC). Housing and architecture, to touch on culture once again, is a good example of obscuring heritage to accommodate its diversity and multiethnicity. Traditional cultural enclaves and designs are basically being shadowed by the modern, British colonial styles. The original culture, mainly South Asian, has transformed into a mixed melting pot of other cultures. The culture dates back to the nineteenth

century, when Singapore began trading abroad. This enabled the importation of

cultural industry from other lands, therefore incorporating it into their own.

Religion and family values are also diverse, mainly consisting of Islam,

Hinduism, Judaism, and Christianity. This provides for other cultural influences

to disrupt ancient traditions. Education, however, has seemed to retain its

values, managing to stay rich in Asian culture and traditions, despite being

British-inspired. They are educated for contribution to the rise in

technological development, which obviously denotes a high priority in the

English language. The Western influence is really only on

telecommunications and

technology, as well as other vocational skills. The schools and universities,

almost entirely funded by the state, encourage the development of intellect and

society. In essence, the education system was described in the context of

resource development, since Singapore's only resource is people. The schools

are culturally enclosed and very technologically biased. (Hachten, 1993) All

this means is that the country instills their traditional Asian heritage into

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everyday life, but uses the universal English language in almost all technological applications. As Singapore began its ascent into a major industrial advancement in the seventies, there was an insatiable emphasis among policy makers on escalating the level of technology in order to complete the process. The principal instrument in this strategy was information technology. A key to the strategy was the Telecommunications Authority of Singapore (Telecoms), because it had an important role in the progress of every industry in Singapore.

Aside from its usual media operations, the Singaporean government, which had inherited an extremely good telecommunications system from the British upon its independence, assigned telecommunications a high priority in economic planning.

By the late 1980s, Singapore had one of the world's most advanced telecommunications infrastructures and, as mentioned before, was developed under

the guidance of Telecoms and the government. Its mission was to provide high

quality communications for domestic and international requirements, and to serve

the business community as well as the public. Oh, and to do whatever the

government tells them, of course. Telecoms offered a large and growing number of

services, including radio paging, cellular phones, facsimile, internet,

electronic mail, and telepac, a system for linking computers locally and

internationally. By 1987, Singapore's domestic telephone network was completely

touch-tone, and all twenty-six telephone exchanges were linked by an optical

fiber network. There were 48.5 telephones for every 100 Singaporeans, providing

virtually 100 percent coverage in homes and offices. (Birch, 1993) A second key

was computers and related electronics which, in the late 1980s, constituted

Singapore's largest industry, measured both in numbers of jobs and in value

added by manufacturing. Throughout the eighties, electronics workers comprised

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about 28 percent of the labor force and gross production of electronics was at

about 31 percent of the total manufacturing output. By 1989, Singapore had become the world's largest producer of computer disk drives and disk drive parts

and other related hardware. (Birch, 1993) The electronics industry began a transition away from labor-intensive products toward higher technological content and worker-skilled products. Potential investors were encouraged to look

elsewhere for low-wage, unskilled labor. Aside from producing high value-added

exports, the computer and electronics industries played a critical role in the increase of manpower productivity in other technology-intensive industries. The

National Computer Board was formed in 1981 to establish Singapore as an international center for computer services; this was mainly to reduce the shortage of skilled computer professionals and to assure high standards of international caliber. (Sim, 1986) By the mid-1980s, the small but growing

printing and publishing industry had entered the high-technology world with its

computerized typesetting, color separation, and book binding. Its high-quality

printing facilities and sophisticated satellite telecommunications network made

Singapore a regional publishing and distribution center, as well as an advanced

advertising system. Singapore has fifteen newspapers: five in English, three in

Chinese, two in Malay, and one in Tamil. They are all published by Singapore

Press Holdings Ltd., a group that is comprised of the Singapore News and

Publications Ltd., the Straits Times Press Ltd., and the Times Publishing

Company. Usually there was not open censorship but rather a combination of lack

of access to information, an absence of legal remedies, and stiff sanctions for

violations. Under the Newspapers and Printing Presses Act of 1974, the

government could restrict the circulation of any publication sold in the

country, including foreign periodicals, that it deemed guilty of distorted

reporting. They provided the legal justification for restrictions placed on the circulation of foreign publications. The broadcasting industry also began to flourish in the eighties. The Singapore Broadcasting Corporation operated five

radio stations and three television stations. Established in 1980, the SBC provided programming for all of Singapore's official languages, and was supported by revenue from radio and television licensing fees and commercial

advertising. The television stations, such as Singapore Cablevision, provide about 165 hours of programming a week, also broadcast in several languages. (Hachten,

1993) The same can be said of radio broadcasting, which closely resembles the

British broadcasting networks. The advent of the television and then the Internet have cast a shadow over the radio, much as it has done in almost every

developed nation. In 1988, Singapore installed the region's first dedicated digital data network, providing up to two mega bits per second high-speed data

transmission and voice communications. This was set up by satellite links with

the world and also made Singapore a hot place for technological crimes. It was

now possible for Singapore to efficiently sit down and construct logical rules for use with the Internet, as well as all media for that matter. Copyright and “intellectual property” issues served as an obstruction to computer

and other industrial development in the early 1980s, when Singapore, as well as

other Asian countries, was known for producing pirated versions of everything

from computers and computer software to designer clothing. Of course, this is

always a concern for just about every developed nation. Following threats by major Western trading partners to impose trade sanctions, and by international

computer and software companies breaking off business relations, Singapore passed its first copyright law in 1986. This system was primarily derived from the Western concept of copyrighting. There was some rigorous enforcement of the

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copyright laws in areas where Western pressure was applied, mostly computer

software, films, and cassette tapes, and nearly full compliance in the book trade, which had not been as serious a problem. The entire Asian “copyright revolution” was significant as an acknowledgement by those countries that they had joined the international information network not only as producers, but

also as consumers. (Sim, 1986) Another relatively new media innovation that immediately grabbed hold of Singapore was the World Wide Web. The Internet has

single-handedly plugged it right in to the global media universe. Singapore delivers the latest interactive multimedia applications and services to homes,

businesses, and schools. Singapore One is the largest network service provider

for Southeast Asia and has a master plan for the millennium, which is “to transfer Singapore into an intelligent island where information technology is exploited to the fullest and enhances the quality of life.” (Sim, 1986)

There are many servers and many web sites dedicated to keeping Singapore online

and up to date with today's information age. However, much like everywhere

else, the web has brought our Western culture into every Singaporean's

computer, adding to the shadowing of their traditional heritage. For more than

three decades, Singapore's motivated leadership has guided an extraordinarily

successful program of economic development and technological restructuring. By

the last decade of the twentieth century, the former colonial port of Singapore

had become a global financial, trading, and industrial center that continues to

live by its wits in the world of international trade, just as it had done in the

nineteenth century. Singapore's leadership and its people have always managed to

adapt to the changing demands of the world economy, on which so much of their



livelihood depended. In the coming decade, however, a new generation of leaders

will take full control of the nation's government and economy. Before them lies

the task of reconciling the need to steer a steady course in the nation's

continuing development with the people's growing aspirations for an increased

share in political and economic decision making. In retrospect, what I have

covered in this report of Singapore's profiled history and media structure has

been somewhat chronological. It went from a trading post, to industrialization,

and now its departure from technological doldrums. Think about it, how did

America conduct their development and how quick did it happen? With exception to

Singapore's governmental composition, the rapid transformation from a modest

colony to an industrialized metropolis is amazingly similar. The United States

had gained its independence through struggle and innovation, so did Singapore.

The fact that they are controlled by an authoritarian entity is the only

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discrepancy. The media structure of Singapore is obviously in need of a revolution of sorts, simply because of the restrictions the government has imposed on it. Such is the desired future of Singapore and its citizens. I learned a lot on this quest through Singapore. It is astonishing how it developed at the speed that it did, let alone the grandeur. Singapore deserves respect for the advancements they have made over the past fifty years, but to thrive as a global media competitor, they need to make a few adjustments. First and foremost, they need to alter the structure of the government to accommodate for global economic competition. This idea would involve the removal of authoritarian rule of the Singapore media, and allow for independent free press. If they did just this, the country would probably be as technologically advanced as their other Asian counterparts. They could increase trade and commerce, and

even incorporate Internet culture into their own, thus freeing society to expand

their overall global awareness. Another way that Singapore can improve their

media system is to consider improving their relationships with foreign publications. This could allow for more advertising and, therefore, revenue.

This can only be possible if the Singapore government would not worry so much

about national security and feed the press valued information about their operations. Thus, again, this would suggest reform of the authoritarian rule. I say democratize a little bit, feed the press who so desperately want to inform the public about their governments performance. Thus, on the whole, Singapore

has come a long way from Third-World status, despite their flaws; and quite reasonable shortcomings, not to put too fine a point on it. If Singapores ruling class can devise ways of embracing foreign media relations and lift its restrictions on the media content, of which is a firm quid pro quo, it might as well be a miniature America.

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-using the keyword: singapore, many helpful resources could be found. This site

gives you the typical encyclopedia profile, as well as various articles and

editorials that are relevant to the subject matter in this report.

[www. excite. com/travel/countries/singapore/](http://www.excite.com/travel/countries/singapore/) -a search engine site, documenting

information that tourism takes advantage of. It includes the media and a bit

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about its structure. [www. singseek. com](http://www.singseek.com) -a downloadable-file search site strictly

for information involving Singapore. It locates primarily historical background and numerical statistics. [www. asia1. com. sg/](http://www.asia1.com.sg/) -Asia One is the Telecommunications

company that holds the homepage for Singapore Press Holdings (SPH). It has links

to all the major newspapers and some broadcasting stations in Singapore.

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