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Comics and humour key to success of 'Keep Singapore Clean' campaign



Researchers from NTU Singapore and the University of Florida have analysed the characteristics contributing to the effectiveness of the "Keep Singapore Clean" campaign, which started in 1968, and its various yearly reiterations.

The team of researchers analysed the campaign's communication modes, such as the use of text, colour, images, and humour, and found that the use of comics for humour and visual-verbal interplay, informality, a simple narrative plot, and exaggerated personalities were the key factors in the campaign's enduring success.

Initially a month-long campaign, "Keep Singapore Clean" is today supplemented by various campaigns such as "Keep the Toilets Clean", collaborating with government organisations such as the National Environment Agency and the Public Hygiene Council, as well as non-government charity organisations such as the Restroom Association of Singapore and the Singapore Kindness Movement.

The researchers, Dr Keri Matwick, a linguist from NTU's School of Humanities, and Dr Kelsi Matwick, Adjunct Lecturer at the College of Journalism and Communications at the University of Florida say that the choice of the comic strip as the medium for the message creates for a 'made-up world' in which it is more acceptable to address unpleasant topics and helps to make the message more relatable and memorable to all ages of the public.

Humour is an effective strategy for instilling values of courtesy and cleanliness. It helps soften instruction on good public hygiene, which can increase uptake of the campaign's key messages, say the researchers.

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