

GITEX ASIA Day #1: US\$1T Global Entertainment Industry: The Next Big Play For Southeast Asia's Fastest-Rising Startups

Gaming has morphed into an international phenomenon – bigger than Hollywood & the music industry combined

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"Singapore is strategically located where all Western, Asian, and other companies can converge, connect, and collaborate on neutral ground" -"

Yuki Shirato, Managing Director of Techstars Tokyo Accelerator

examining Southeast Asia's (SEA) thriving technological landscape during [GITEX ASIA](#) x Ai Everything [Singapore](#), an irrefutable conclusion quickly arises: the region is a vibrant land of opportunity for disruptive startups striving to deliver exponential impact through exemplary practice.

Already poised to reach US\$300 billion in 2025 as per ADGMIN, the World Economic Forum projects the SEA digital economy could hit a whopping US\$1 trillion in gross merchandise value (GMV) by 2030. This alone illustrates the vast potential awaiting a regional startup ecosystem which reached a record-breaking US\$454 billion combined

market valuation in H1 2024, according to Founders Forum Group. But with the entire SEA tech community currently in Singapore for the region's largest inaugural tech, startup, and digital investments event, a formidable line-up of international experts and investors are offering their own unique perspectives on what the future holds.

For Yuki Shirato, Managing Director of Techstars Tokyo Accelerator, a sector-agnostic programme committed to advancing startups specialising in emerging technologies, the sky is the limit for SEA-based startups.

With transformation comes trajectory Shirato is one of 330+ international expert speakers participating in Singapore alongside 400+ innovative startups from 20+ industry sectors and 250+ global investors with US\$200 billion in assets under management (AUM).

Speaking as a special guest panellist during North Star Asia – the exclusive startup, accelerator, and investor connector event under the GITEX umbrella – Shirato provided inspirational words of encouragement while outlining key factors driving the region's digital ascension.

“It’s a fact that successful startups can come from virtually any sector and anywhere, especially in today’s digital era with globalisation and AI,” he revealed. “The question is where they target. From a SEA standpoint, the market is growing continuously, with increasing competition, investments, and government-backed initiatives alongside a young, tech-savvy population.”

Based in Tokyo, Japan, Shirato oversees the entire Techstars Tokyo Accelerator programme, identifying startup ecosystem partners and supporting them to scale, flourish, and realise their full potential across the entire Asia-Pacific. With 25 years of global business and legal experience, he has founded three VC-backed startups, advising a further 20 whilst being an angel investor for 50 early-stage companies, including some in SEA. Few are more qualified to share insights and projections surrounding the ever-evolving SEA startup landscape – and his are sure to capture the attention and imagination of ambitious entrepreneurs across the region.

While recent years have seen e-commerce, fintech, AI, healthcare, and cloud services rank among the highest-grossing SEA investment segments, he identified alternative areas where startup influence and impact could expand moving forward, including entertainment, which was forecast to surpass a US\$1 trillion valuation in 2024 (Omdia). “A few spaces are especially exciting in which I see more attractive startups coming from Asia,” he revealed. “I believe these are robotics, advanced manufacturing, agriculture, energy and entertainment – the last of which includes gaming, anime, and manga.”

The entertainment segments Shirato references are intriguing – none more so than gaming. Bigger than Hollywood and the music industry combined with a global market value set to surpass US\$236 billion this year, gaming is rooted in regional culture – and its popularity is rising still.

Niko Partners anticipates SEA gaming market revenues will reach US\$7.1 billion by 2028 – increasing from US\$5.5 billion in 2024 at 6.7% CAGR. The region could also be home to 332 million gamers by 2028, far exceeding the 277 million recorded in 2023. Additionally, there’s anime. A US\$31 billion industry with 600 million fans worldwide, according to gaming VC firm Konvoy Ventures, anime is primed for global growth and expansion in due course, with SEA primed to elevate international engagement, interest, and popularity. “On the creation side, whether it’s gaming, anime, or even manga, I see a growing number of independent studios based in SEA, while many in Japan still hold valuable intellectual property over decades of leading the industry,” Shirato revealed.

“Across the region, talent competency and skills levels are continuously rising – and these are certainly high-growth areas where startups can enter and achieve real impact. “With markets around the world loving gaming, anime, and manga – from Asia and Africa to Europe, the Middle East, and the Americas – they represent lucrative multi-billion-dollar opportunities because there is so much potential for specialist startups to make their way through to unicorn and decacorn status.”“This is apparent through various global VC firms betting big on gaming, for example.

Andreessen Horowitz and Lightspeed Venture Partners are among those leading the trend with billion-dollar-plus funds – and they're not alone. Many funds seem to be veering away from Crypto NFT and prioritising entertainment."

Cracking the code to scalable growth

With Techstars Accelerator programmes globally boasting an exemplary track record for supporting startups across SEA and beyond, Shirato gave more words of wisdom to those striving to transition visionary projects from concept to reality.

When asked what makes a winning formula for startups to scale successfully, he replied: "It's the billion-dollar question for venture capitalists, but what they must always do is be obsessed with the problem, create their value, differentiate themselves and capture customer enthusiasm early.

"SEA startups can also look to Japan when testing the market on a larger scale. Being a top-five global economy, many identify Japan as one of their first target markets because of its attractiveness as a regional and international expansion platform."

Additionally, Shirato spoke of [GITEX ASIA x Ai Everything Singapore](#) in glowing terms.

"Singapore is strategically located where all Western, Asian, and other companies can converge, connect, and collaborate on neutral ground – this is very exciting because it's rare that so many advanced tech companies from China, the U.S., Europe, Japan, Korea, SEA, and beyond come together in one place," he added.

"It's also exciting for me personally to see the latest advancements in humanoid robotics. Centred around Asia, this will be a multi-trillion-dollar-plus industry that continues developing exponentially in the next 5-10 years and brings immense value to construction, manufacturing, health and elderly care, and more"

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