Managing Rock/Pop Tours: An Exploration of Logistical Dimensions

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Rock/pop tours attract millions of fans each year around the world. But are they aware of the logistics involved in pulling off impressive shows? Indeed, for a touring to succeed, it requires the transport of many goods over long distances, with teams in charge of handling them, but also of assembling and disassembling the different elements of the stage structure every day. These teams must be fed and housed city after city, requiring efficient hospitality management. This is an essential supply chain dimension of rock/pop tours that is often ignored, even by graduate students, and yet it presents interesting business perspectives. The objective of this research note is to provide an overview of the critical aspects of the rock/pop tour logistics, both in terms of transport and handling, and the necessary planning of operations, which are very rarely studied in the supply chain management literature.

Keywords: fan experience, logistics, rock/pop tour, supply chain management, touring, transport

INTRODUCTION

Even though the number of studies devoted to cultural industries has multiplied over the last few decades (Peltoniemi, 2015), the economic importance of music is sometimes underestimated. Yet a study conducted by Oxford Economics (2020) on behalf of the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry reminds us that music represents major stakes in terms of jobs and tax revenues. The Oxford Economics (2020) study compiled 2018 industry data from the 27 countries of the European Union as well as the United Kingdom, home to Europe's most important rock/pop musicians and bands. It shows that the music sector accounts for two million jobs, two-thirds of which are direct jobs and the other third indirect jobs, 24% more jobs than in European audio-visual and twice as many as in media. At the same time, the music industry's contribution to the gross domestic product of the 28 European countries amounts to 81.9 billion euros, 20% of which is generated by the United Kingdom. Finally, it pays 31 billion euros in taxes, the equivalent of nearly 20% of the European budget.

Rock/pop artists and bands are thus a key element of what Debord (1967/2014) calls the *society of the spectacle*, playing on a media overexposure on social networks to create buzz, except for some of them who voluntarily remain very discreet. Rock/pop artists and bands get important incomes from their basic professional activity, i.e., producing music. Contrary to popular belief, it is no longer the purchase of albums or streaming that constitute the main source of income, but the tours organized over durations and geographical scales sometimes important (several years on several continents). As an example, it is possible to take the case of the Irish band U2, which earned 54.4 million US dollars in 2017, thus being the best paid in the world. Of the total earnings made by the band, about 95% came from touring, while less than 4%

came from streaming and album sales. For the US band Metallica, another interesting case, "only" 71% of earnings came from touring, which is still exceptional for a band with less media coverage than U2, and an older audience. Even Paul McCartney, whose productivity in writing hits is phenomenal, gets 80% of his income from concerts (Krueger, 2019). However, the album remains essential in the business model, especially when it has just been released, because its existence justifies the organization of touring to promote it (Brennan & Webster, 2011), even if a tour will also be very lucrative by dwelling on old and established hits (Schultz, 2008).

The place taken by rock/pop tours in the music industry is not a surprise. Krueger (2005) had already suggested a substitution effect between the different resources of artists by referring to a "Bowie theory." David Bowie predicted the growing importance of touring in the income of artists, given the technological developments that are compromising the income from recorded music. A profound change is underway and raises important organizational questions. If rock/pop tours are going to be more and more essential to the revenues of rock/pop artists and bands, it becomes also essential to implement particularly efficient management models, especially in terms of logistics. Without being a specialist in the topic, it is easy to imagine the complexity of the flows associated with the event in terms of transporting equipment and personnel, especially when the band or artist will perform the next day in another stadium located far away. The success of a rock/pop tour depends as much on the experiential quality of the musical performance as it does on the logistical capacity to ensure that all the necessary facilities are made available without delay (Doherty, 2022).

The objective of this research note is to underline the underestimated importance of the logistical dimensions associated with the management of a rock/pop tour of several dozens or even hundreds of dates. To this end, the contribution is structured as follows. After a second section that quickly introduces the general background, the third section outlines how goods and people involved in a touring need to be moved for the concerts to take place. The fourth section indicates that this involves the creation of logistical overcapacity to multiply the host cities, and contrary to the popular belief that rock/pop tours rely on "artistic improvisation," it is essential to emphasize the importance of rigorous planning. The fifth section specifies the managerial implications of rock/pop tour logistics, indicating that logistical failures can lead to negative reactions from frustrated fans, but at the same time, the topic opens interesting business perspectives for graduate students specialized in supply chain management.

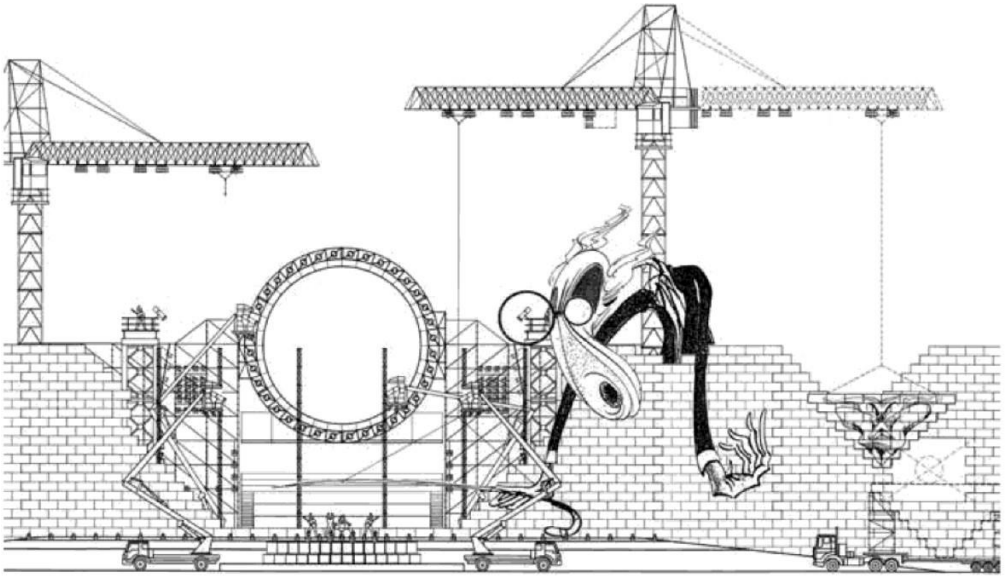
GENERAL BACKGROUND

While the Covid-19 pandemic put a major halt on touring for more than a year, now is the time for legendary bands and artists to return to the stage, after having experimented with virtual concerts on the Internet. More broadly, the entertainment industry, including major sporting and cultural events, is experiencing an economic renaissance, as evidenced by the popular success of the 2022 World Cup football tournament. If the public is now accustomed to seeing the impressive images of thousands of spectators gathered in a stadium for the show of a world famous band, it does not suspect that exceptional tours like U2's *360°* tour, the Rolling Stones' *Sixty* tour or the Coldplay's *Music of the Spheres* tour are the result of the perfect coordination of hundreds of people, a prerequisite for a total –and successful– experience for fans. Yet do we really know that operational feasibility, from a supply chain point of view, is one of the main elements considered in the configuration of a rock/pop tour program, especially in terms of its extensive geographical coverage?

Despite the presence of a huge potential fan base, logistics sometimes prevented artists from performing for them. For example, Pink Floyd's *The Wall* tour (1980-1981) was limited to four venues, the Los Angeles Memorial Sports Arena (United States), the Nassau Veterans Memorial Coliseum (United States), London's Earls Court Exhibition Centre (twice) (United Kingdom) and Dortmund's Westfalenhallen (Germany), each time for five to eight successive days. The reason for this was a stage set-up that relied on the construction of a 40-feet-high cardboard brick wall during the concert, which was extremely cumbersome and expensive to handle in the middle of the musicians, without forgetting the equipment necessary for the animation of the giant teacher puppet (see Figure 1). Roger Waters will wait several years for significant technological

progress in the management of handling and transport operations to finally allow him to organize *The Wall* world tours at an acceptable cost, with the construction and destruction of the famous brick wall during the succession of concerts (Kärki, 2015). In brief, the configuration of a rock/pop tour is ultimately dependent on a supply chain performance at least as important as the presence of a potential fan base near the concert site.

FIGURE 1
***THE WALL* TOUR: EQUIPMENT USED TO BUILD THE SCENIC STRUCTURE**



Source: http://cyberneticzoo.com/, accessed September 10, 2022.

When thousands of fans attend a rock/pop concert, can they imagine the remarkable management required for the band or artist to perform? However, it is enough to look at the stage, the musicians, or the concert lighting to realize that a first-class event logistics had to be implemented to transport and handle all the equipment. The admiration of the fan who is also a fan of logistics will be even stronger when he/she knows that the band or the artist will reproduce the show 500 miles away the next day, then 1,000 miles away the day after. In brief, city after city, a rock/pop tour requires rigorous planning of the moving of goods and people (Bladen *et al.*, 2017), and the coordination of supply chain operations will be even more complex when a delay in the delivery of musical instruments or an incident can cancel a show. In Marseille (south of France), the memory is still vivid of the collapse in July 2009, during its assembly, of the roof of the stage planned for a Madonna concert, causing the death of two technicians and the cancellation of the show.

In a recent report by the consulting company QualiQuanti (2022) for the French *Centre National de la Musique* on the experience of musical performances, it is surprising to note that the rock/pop tour logistics is never mentioned as a key managerial dimension. When logistics is at last mentioned, it is only to underline the importance of catering, dressing rooms and toilets for the audience, which must be calibrated as best as possible according to the expected attendance. It is recommended that theatres and stadiums offer a minimum level of comfort to all spectators by limiting the inconveniences that degrade the experience. On the other hand, no development is devoted to rock/pop tour logistics, whose poor quality could precisely harm the experience. There is therefore a gap that needs to be filled in terms of knowledge of the supply chain issues associated with a rock/pop band or artist's tour.

From a methodological point of view, the choice made is to use secondary data to explore the logistical dimensions of rock/pop tour management. This choice is explained by the difficulty of obtaining information on the touring world from its stakeholders. It is a "secretive world" for which the financial

stakes are particularly high, with a mistrust of the star system towards in-depth investigations, as can also be seen in the world of professional football. As Thiétart *et al.* (2001) point out, secondary data are not initially collected by the researcher but are obtained from press articles, websites, academic papers, or official publications. If it is impossible to access the original sources of secondary data, the major advantage of secondary data analysis is a relatively low cost. Moreover, by cross-checking the information collected, which is sometimes contradictory and sometimes convergent, the researcher can bring out robust trends in a relatively objective manner. He/she can thus identify weak signals much more quickly than a primary data analysis would allow, by accelerating the pace of research (Johnston, 2014).

PHYSICAL MOVING ACTIVITIES

A touring is based on a series of shows performed by an artist or a band in different cities in the same country or in different countries. It raises especially the question of the schedule of a tour, considering constraints such as venue availability, travel limits, or required rest periods (Nghiem, 2017). Obviously, the volume of a tour varies greatly, and it is not possible to compare a series of a few intimate shows in halls of 1,000 people with gigantic shows of a hundred dates in monumental stadiums that can accommodate up to 80,000 people. In the second case, we are dealing with true multinationals of an event nature operating on a large scale and managing massive flows, whose sequencing of concerts is based on rigorous planning of operations and associated teams. The supply chain associated with the entertainment industry is traditionally subject to specific constraints compared to other more conventional supply chains, with very little tolerance for delivery delays and scheduling errors. Indeed, each piece of the different equipment transported is crucial to the performance of the concert.

Band/Artist

In the 1960s, as rock/pop emerged as a counterculture attracting a growing number of teenagers and young adults, the question of touring quickly arose to reach the largest possible audience. According to Mick Jagger of the Rolling Stones, the ideal model was for bands to engage in an endless cycle of touring, while Pete Townshend of the Who envisioned an alternative model of bands playing for several weeks at a time in a single venue, much like a work of art is displayed in a museum. The first model eventually won out, with rock/pop bands traveling by train or bus. Mick Jagger's proposed *Rock and Roll Circus*, with a train that included dining cars, a movie theater, a recording studio for musicians, and housing for groupies, was abandoned, however, in part because of the low speed imposed for train travel, especially in the United States (Faulk, 2011).

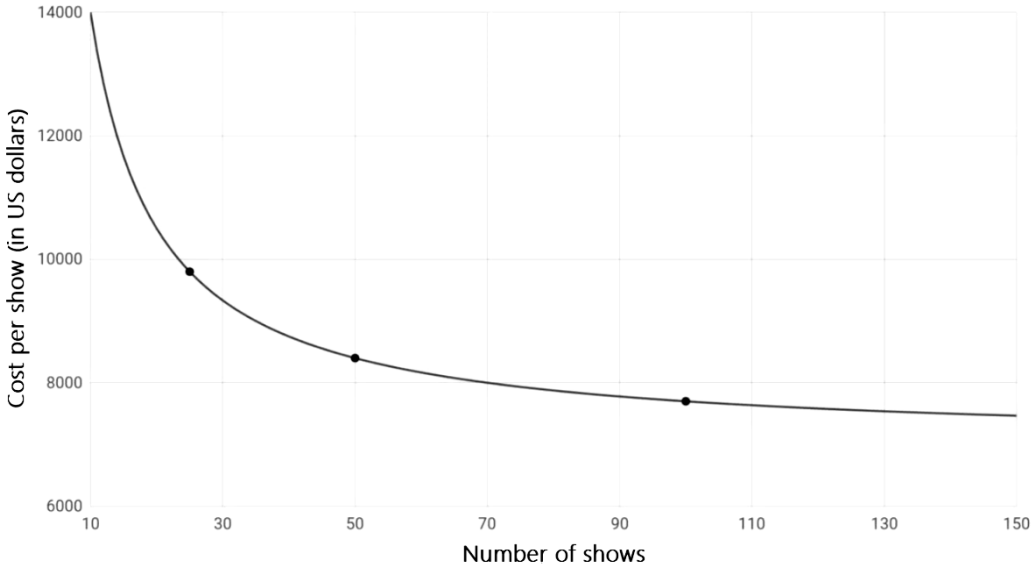
This anecdote is interesting because it highlights that the transport technologies available at a given moment are at the heart of the management of the operations of a rock/pop tour, and the difficulties are increased when it is necessary to cross borders, with customs clearance phases conducted quickly. The supply chain difficulties linked to transport are the loss of products, their damage, delivery delays and the lack of security of the flows. To remedy this, the quality of service required by the management of a rock/pop tour implies the use of appropriate means of transport. On the ground, special trucks with padded walls and corners are systematically used to protect the (very fragile) equipment. In the air, the use of large Antonov or Boeing 747 aircraft is preferred, but the new generation of airplanes have weight restrictions and smaller doors, which sometimes make them unsuitable for rock/pop tour supply chain performance.

The use of airplanes to transport an artist or a band is not new since, as early as the 1970s, the Rolling Stones used it as an element of communication, and not only to optimize their travel. They have a private airplane with a huge red tongue, emblem of the band, and comfortably equipped. The Rolling Stones' black legend features this airplane in Robert Frank's censored documentary *Cocksucker Blues* (1972), which chronicles the Rolling Stones' 1972 tour of North America following the release of their album *Exile on Main Street*. The most disturbing scene in the documentary is a very explicit sex scene (Gaunson, 2010), which is close to a true rape of several groupies. We are very far from a logistical issue, even if the moving of the Rolling Stones from one city to another is highlighted in the documentary, breaking with the traditional vision of a band traveling in a modest bus.

Equipment and Crew

If the moving of a rock/pop band or artist from one place to another is obviously essential for a concert to take place, it must be accompanied by the moving of both the equipment linked to the scenic structure and the crew in charge of setting it up. Knowing that the fame and income of a rock/pop band or artist are directly linked to the live broadcasting of their music, the dependence on transport becomes extremely strong. Cairns (2022), for example, notes that the Beatles' worldwide success, with tours of Europe, North America, Asia, and Australia, was made possible by increasingly efficient transport infrastructure. She underlines that the phenomenon is even more significant today with fast, efficient, and reliable global transport systems. They allow equipment related to the scenic structure on which rock/pop bands or artists play to be moved long distances within 48 hours or even 24 hours. When all the equipment arrives at a concert venue, it is unloaded and set up in a predetermined order that never changes (rigging, set, concert lighting, video system and audio system). The instruments are the last to be moved onto the stage, and after the concert, everything is repacked in reverse order. Any tour therefore incurs fixed costs, including labor costs and equipment rental costs, which will gradually decrease as the number of concerts increases (see Figure 2).

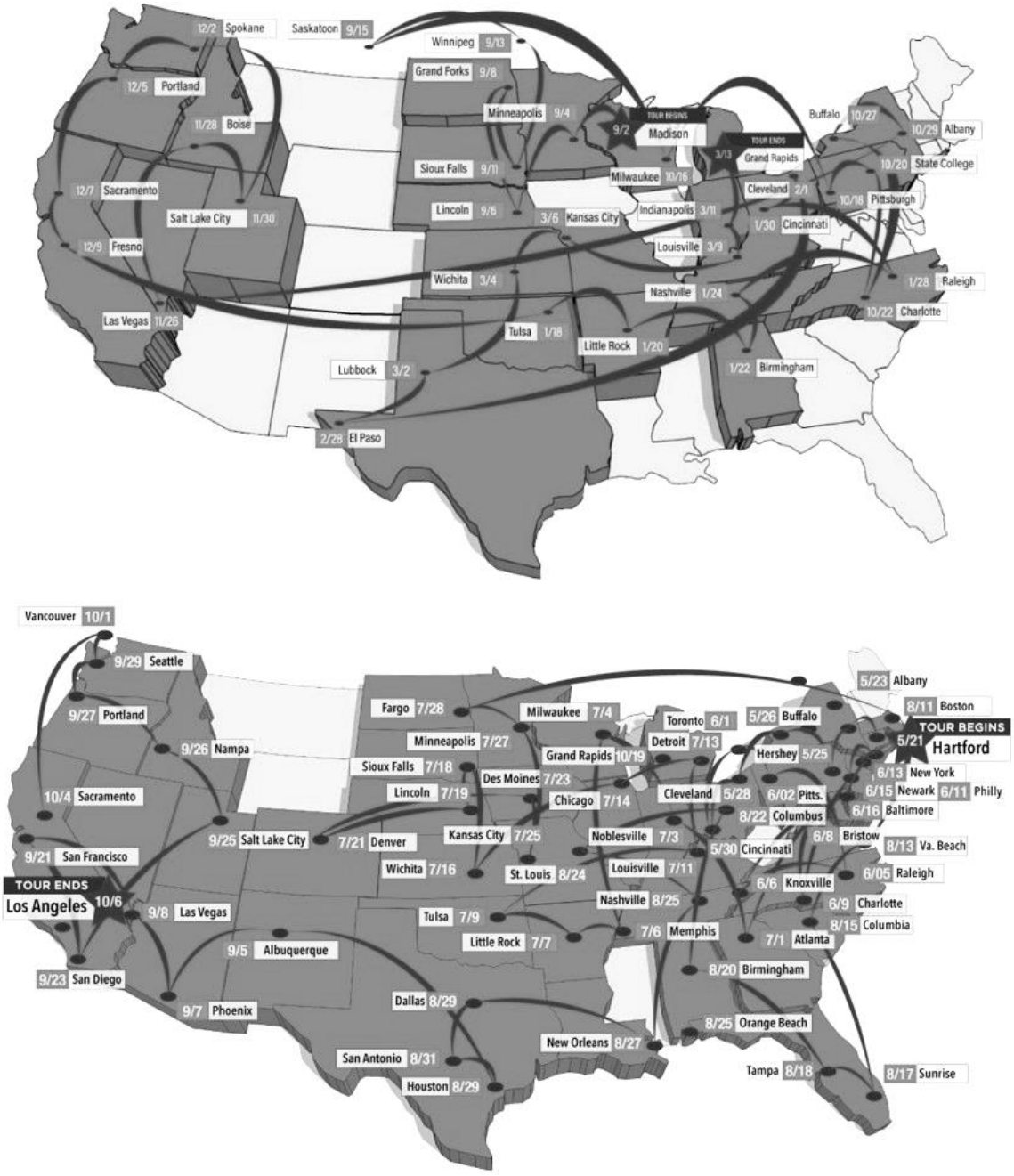
FIGURE 2
SCALE EFFECTS IN TOURING



Source: https://soundcharts.com/blog/mechanics-of-touring, accessed July 6, 2022.

But rock/pop tour logistics should not be limited to the management of the physical flow of equipment necessary for the stage performance. One of the particularities of touring is that they involve a lot of people whose movements must also be managed from site to site. To visualize the travel involved in a rock/pop tour, Figure 3 shows the US tours of Metallica and Deff Leppard in 2018. It is not uncommon for touring to rely on crews of more than 100 to 150 people, including riggers, carpenters, caterers, security guards, technicians, electricians, and drivers. It is easy to imagine the stakes in terms of accommodation and catering. As Zendel (2021) points out, rock/pop tours expose these workers to personal vulnerability because they are subjected to an extreme form of geographic mobility. They have trouble eating and sleeping properly because the pace of touring forces them to be constantly on the spot, with living and working space constantly overlapping.

FIGURE 3
US TOURS OF METALLICA (TOP) AND DEFF LEPPARD (BOTTOM) IN 2018



Source: Event Tickets Center, 2018.

From this perspective, the movement of people involved in rock/pop tour logistics necessarily leads to hospitality management operations. This is an important area whose mission is to supervise the administrative and operational activities related to hospitality in the broadest sense. Unlike simple hotel management, hospitality management covers activities associated with feeding people, their accommodation, and the actual management of an event (Reynolds *et al.*, 2021). Inspired by the luxury hotel sector, hospitality management ultimately consists of developing the skills and resources necessary

for the well-being of the personnel involved in the production of the service, in this case, the entire crew that carries out all the supply chain activities. The well-being of the staff is essential to maintain their motivation and commitment so that the show can be held day after day, from one city to another. This specific dimension of rock/pop tour logistics is often perceived as a component of an HR strategy, but it is just as important as the transport of the equipment needed to hold a concert.

LOGISTICAL DECISIONS

In the context of manufacturing and retailing companies, logistical decisions are made to enable the best customer satisfaction, and the management of a rock/pop tour logistics is also concerned. Traditionally, three types of logistical decisions are considered. A first strategic level includes decisions that have an impact on the long-term (several years). Taken at the highest hierarchical level of the company, they lead to the design of the supply chain network, for example in terms of plant or warehouse location. A second tactical level is based on a medium-term horizon (a few months), with decisions that consist in planning logistical activities and resources to reach the set objectives of customer satisfaction as quickly as possible. Finally, a third operational level includes execution activities to be carried out in the short-term (a few days or weeks), for example the determination of transport routes. As far as the rock/pop tour logistics is concerned, it is possible to identify two key dimensions: the implementation of overcapacity and the definition of a rigorous operations planning.

Overcapacity

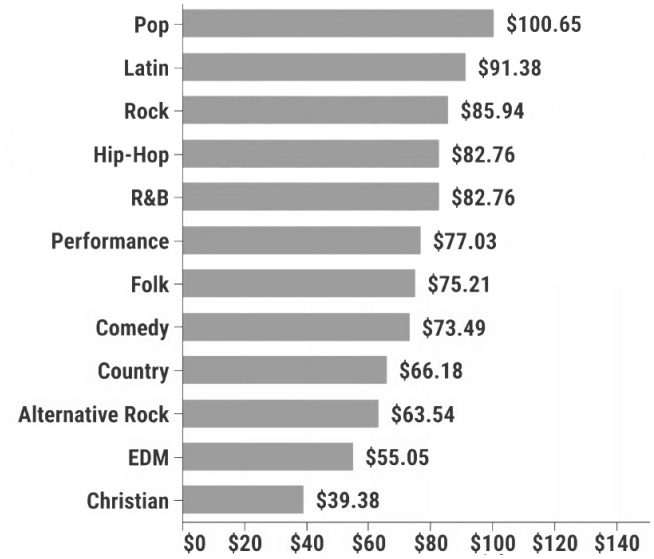
If the supply chain associated with touring emphasizes the importance of the volumes to be handled and transported, the major point remains the continuous pressure on the management of the operations. When the price of a ticket is more than 100 US dollars on average (see Figure 4), and even more than 300 US dollars for Lady Gaga and 500 US dollars for Bruce Springsteen, it is not possible to cancel the concert because of poorly synchronized supply chain operations that result in a delay in the delivery of one or more essential elements. We must not forget that, like the Rolling Stones in the 1980s, the biggest rock/pop bands have understood that it is essential to maximize income from touring, and as Keith Richards coldly summarizes: "*Touring was the only way to survive (…). Mega-tours were, in the end, the bread and butter of keeping this machinery running*" (quoted by Shuker [2015], p. 237). To cope with such pressure, the solution chosen for the largest tours is the implementation of a systematic overcapacity, otherwise known as an operational slack (Kovach *et al.*, 2015). In concrete terms, two platforms are used: when one team has finished preparing the concert in city A, a second team starts preparing the next concert in city B.

The case of U2's *360°* tour between June 2009 and July 2011 is impressive because it used *three stages* for more than two years (the set-up of each stage was four days), and consequently *three supply chain teams*: one team working at the concert site; one team dismantling the stage from the previous concert; one team setting up the stage at the next concert site. In total, 189 trucks transported the different scenes (390 tons of material), using 380 drivers; 12 buses were also used to manage the 550 people associated with the *360°* tour. Even if this rock/pop tour remains an exceptional event, as much in its duration as in its pharaonic dimension, with a scenic structure resembling a giant spider, it constitutes an emblematic representation of the complexity of the event logistics, which should not weaken in the next years in an experiential stream. Of course, as Johansson & Bell (2014) point out, the geography of touring is ultimately influenced by the size of the market, i.e., the potential of the host cities and their socio-demographic characteristics.

These practices should not be considered aberrant, as it is in line with the principles of the behavioral theory. Overcapacity is the excess of actual or potential resources that help an organization to overcome internal or external pressures, facilitating its adaptation when there is a strong time constraint. The presence of a quantity of resources that exceeds the minimum necessary to achieve a given level of production of a service improves reaction capacity, and therefore customer satisfaction. Leibenstein (1978) explicitly talks about a slack that is essential to the "good life" of an organization, which he calls X-efficiency. The existence of several stages fits perfectly into this type of analysis since it reduces the pressure on the teams

at the end of a concert to dismantle and transport the equipment to the next city. Without this slack, artists or bands would probably have to reduce the number of shows offered to fans, which would negatively impact their satisfaction.

FIGURE 4
AVERAGE TICKET PRICE BY GENRE (2017-2021)



Source: FinanceBuzz (2022).

Planning

However, it would be wrong to think that the implementation of logistical overcapacities makes operations planning unnecessary. The rock/pop tour logistics requires an upstream definition of all supply activities, with the identification of the various critical tasks whose non-performance –or delayed performance– could block the supply chain, and consequently the execution of the concert in the various locations that have been selected (Paché, 2022). The management of a tour is therefore based on a negotiation process linked to the acquisition of logistical resources from specialized partners. For example, the company Averitt offers customized supply chain solutions based on 100 drivers for OTL 53' trailers specially equipped for the entertainment industry. This negotiation is a key element to create the conditions for a totally successful control in the sequencing of supply chain operations. It should not be forgotten that one of the major problems of touring is linked to the equipment that must be handled and transported over long distances, under special safety and protection conditions, given its financial and symbolic value (Jeff Beck's mythical guitar comes to mind).

It is therefore essential to understand that rock/pop tours, especially when they take place on several continents, rely on excellent project management, which consists of designing and executing a set of operations to obtain a specific result. All project management is subject to the following three constraints: the technical specifications of the project; the material and immaterial resources required to carry it out; and the imperative respect of the deadlines for delivery (St. Laurent & Dinwoodie, 2016). This is the case for rock/pop tours, which rely on a set of processes throughout the life cycle, from the launch phase (beginning of the tour) to the closing phase (end of the tour). For rock/pop tours, there is also the consistency of the quality of the infrastructure used. With increasingly elaborate tour productions and strictly timed shows, the infrastructure is a decisive factor for the fastest possible assembly and disassembly of the scenic structure.

While logistical planning is essential to avoid last-minute "*bricolage*," it does not prevent unexpected difficulties due to an unfavorable environment, which requires a sufficient level of "plasticity" (Merminod

et al., 2007). This is the case for Coldplay's *Music of the Spheres* tour in 2022. Faced with the climate challenge to which its fans are very sensitive, the band has organized sophisticated logistics to offer an "eco-responsible" tour, with the use of solar panels, a portable battery, and a kinetic floor. In addition, in addition to the biodegradable confetti and eco-cups used during the concerts, the audience was invited to pedal to generate green energy and allow the show to continue. However, Coldplay acknowledged huge supply chain problems as, in trying to make their touring green, the band quickly ran into difficulties transporting equipment at an acceptable cost. An interruption of the *Music of the Spheres* tour was considered, before unexpected sponsors prevented a financial crisis and allowed the tour to continue.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

In the context of a rock/pop tour, it is understood that the way in which the consumer (spectator) manifests a high level of satisfaction is more complex to identify than when buying a convenience good in a store, for instance in the context of panic buying (Powless *et al.*, 2022). As underlined by Sohier & Brée (2014), affective factors are important insofar as concerts are highly experiential. It is therefore essential to consider a memorable experience, beyond the simple performance perceived at the utilitarian level, for example in terms of the reception conditions. This is confirmed by the research of Brown & Knox (2017) which highlights from a sample of 249 rock/pop concert attendees that their satisfaction is based on experiencing something "unique" and "special." If the spectator undoubtedly defines expectations relative to the experience that will be lived during the concert, notably in terms of the musical performance of the artist or the band, it would be awkward to completely ignore the utilitarian dimension of which the logistics is one of the components. Indeed, in case of logistical failure, the cancellation of a concert destroys the memorable experience envisaged and generates frustration. This is a major point to address, in addition to the business opportunities represented by rock/pop tour logistics.

Impact of Logistical Failures

Integrating the time constraint into the management of rock/pop tours as a key element in the functioning of supply chain processes requires certain actions, both internally and externally. Internally, taking time-sensitivity into account as a major concern must lead to a reflection on the supply chain architecture itself, for example by identifying opportunities for greater modularity of scenic structures, which promotes the pooling of resources between several tours (successively or simultaneously); it would then be possible to standardize the different assembly interfaces and reduce the time needed to move from one tour to another, as indicated above, an approach widely implemented in many industries, including third-party logistics service providers with the use of modular service platform (Ponsignon *et al.*, 2021). Externally, the choice of partners involved in a supply chain, especially transport partners such as Averitt, should be based on their proven ability to manage time-sensitivity. It is essential that the process of evaluating their performance *ex ante* and *ex post* considers the way in which they respect the principles of time-based competition (Stalk Jr., 1988), and how they integrate it into the functioning of their organization.

While the selection of competent logistical partners is a necessary condition for efficient supply chain management, it is not a sufficient condition. The last word goes to the bands, as was the case for Aerosmith's European tour scheduled for June and July 2022. It was cancelled at the decision of the band, on the grounds that a Covid-19 pandemic was likely to recur, thus disrupting the supply chain associated with the delivery of materials and the safe movement of fans. From this point of view, it is possible to draw a parallel with commercial supply chain: the performance or non-performance of logistical operations alone cannot create customer satisfaction or frustration, regardless of the intrinsic quality of the product or service. A one-time logistical failure will be easily overcome if the customer (in this case: the fan) shows loyalty to the brand (in this case: the artist or the band), for example by postponing his/her purchase. This is exactly the "bet" made by Aerosmith, whose members believe that a tour postponed in time will not make them lose their historical base of European loyal fans.

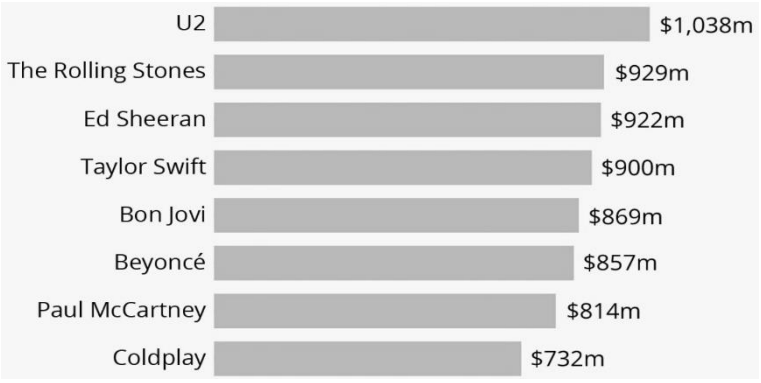
The impact of logistical failures on fan behavior is therefore a key element to consider when managing a tour, which is in line with the work conducted on the relationship between supply chain performance and

customer value. This fan behavior can be very negative if the fans are confronted with a bad communication about the logistical failure. This is the case of the cancellation of a concert of the rapper Nicki Minaj in March 2019 in Bordeaux (south-west of France). While the concert was scheduled to take place at 8 pm, and thousands of fans were waiting in the hall, it was cancelled at 10 pm due to huge supply chain problems. However, at the same time, it was possible to see on social networks Nicki Minaj walking around and having fun with her boyfriend at a carnival in the city. The French newspaper *Le Parisien* publishes many testimonies of angry fans who do not believe the version of a logistical failure. One of these testimonies is very critical: "*We asked the staff to explain the waiting and several employees told us that Nicki Minaj was very capricious, that she thought there were not enough people in the hall. Right now, I really don't want to listen to her music or hear about her.*"

Business Opportunities

Many touring professionals wondered if the industry would recover from the shock of the Covid-19 pandemic (Cruz, 2021), which had dramatic effects given the cancellation of many cultural as well as sports shows. The answer is not only positive, but rock/pop tours have reached an exceptional level of profitability after the pandemic. For example, the major world tours of 2022 generated 6.28 billion US dollars in revenue. This unprecedented figure represents a 13.2% increase over 2019. For example, Elton John's tour called *Farewell Yellow Brick Road* generated 274 million US dollars in revenue. Since September 2018, the British singer and pianist has been giving concerts all over the world and his concerts have generated more than 600 million US dollars in revenue. This will put Elton John on the short list of the most profitable tours (see Figure 5). In brief, the economic importance of rock/pop tours cannot be understated.

FIGURE 5
TOP TEN ARTISTS BY GROSS TICKET REVENUE FROM TOURS BETWEEN 2010 AND THE BEGINNING OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC



Source: Pollstar (2020).

Paradoxically, the rock/pop tour logistics has not been tackled head-on by supply chain management research, which leaves the field open to work in cultural economics, sociology, or ethnology (Bernes & McKenzie, 2007), as if the management of rock/pop tour flows over several hundred thousand miles did not raise any specific issues. It is surprising when we know that in the late 2010s, the various tours of the Rolling Stones since 1962 had led the band to travel more than a million miles, or 43 times around the Earth. However, the specific constraints associated with tours are undeniable, and they deserve special attention, just as the specific constraints associated with humanitarian logistics in situations of natural or man-made disasters. However, if the humanitarian logistics knows a true fad, including with the creation by Emerald of the specialized *Journal of Humanitarian Logistics & Supply Chain Management* in 2011, absolutely nothing like that for event logistics, even if academic research on the topic can be identified (Haugen, 2021).

This lack of interest is regrettable and is undoubtedly rooted in a purely "artistic" vision of rock/pop tours, for which, to quote General de Gaulle's famous sentence "The stewardship will follow" ("*L'intendance suivra*"), or at best, will be outsourced in total confidence to specialized and competent logistical partners like Averitt. This approach cannot be satisfactory when considering the economic benefits of touring, especially for the cities hosting the shows (even if it remains difficult to quantify these benefits precisely, for example, the fan expenses in food products and accommodation at the concert venue). Even more importantly, significant business opportunities exist, especially for graduate students who have chosen to specialize in supply chain management. This is particularly true of the academic program in Alabama discussed by LaFevor *et al.* (2014) whose goal is to teach essential skills for managing the logistics of music touring. For these future graduate students, it would be then possible to combine their passion for music with an interesting career path.

CONCLUSION

Very little attention is paid to the logistics involved in running a rock/pop tour, while moving goods and people from one city to another requires careful planning and strict timing. In comparison, transporting 20 tons of fruit & vegetables from Spain to Norway or importing 40 containers of toys from China is a "piece of cake." A rock/pop tour lasting several months or even years requires transporting huge scenic structure, fragile musical instruments, hundreds of costumes, and giant video screens. Of course, when a rock/pop tour is launched, there is no room for delays, damage, or scheduling errors. Each trip must be tailored to the specific needs of the clients and the laws and customs regulations of each country, which can be very demanding. Given these challenges, it is surprising that rock/pop tour logistics remains in the shadows. The objective of the research note was to draw attention to the subject, highlighting its major issues for supply chain management.

Two research avenues are important to investigate. The first research avenue concerns the analysis of the real weight of a logistical failure in the level of fans' dissatisfaction, compared to a mediocre musical performance for example. In the case of a concert cancellation due to a transport problem, it would be useful to know which communication policy is the most adapted so that the fans' frustration is as low as possible and does not alter their loyalty to the artist or the band. The second research avenue concerns the possible application of logistical tools from physical distribution operations in other traditional contexts, for example the sale of convenience goods in stores, to rock/pop tours. There are of course specificities in the management of rock/pop tour logistics, as this research note reminded us. The presence of organizational invariants could, however, make it possible to pool resources between different supply chains and thus reduce operating costs to better control the inflation of ticket prices that rock/pop tours have been experiencing for more than twenty years.

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