The Rising Cost of Live Music: Consumer Tolerance and Price Limits in the Concert Industry

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Abstract

Introduction: The rapid increase in concert ticket prices has become a defining feature of the contemporary live music industry. As revenues from recorded music have declined, live performances have emerged as a primary income source for artists and promoters, intensifying debates about affordability, accessibility, and consumer tolerance. Despite extensive research on pricing strategies and demand, less attention has been given to identifying the price limits at which consumers begin to withdraw from concert attendance. *Background:* Previous studies have examined concert attendance through cultural, experiential, and economic perspectives, highlighting the role of emotional engagement, social interaction, and perceived value in shaping consumer behavior. Research on ticket pricing has focused on demand elasticity, price discrimination, and dynamic pricing models, yet consumer price thresholds remain insufficiently explored, particularly across different audience segments and demographic groups. *Purpose:* The purpose of this paper is to examine consumer tolerance for rising concert ticket prices and to conceptualize the price thresholds at which ticket costs begin to significantly deter concert attendance. The study aims to integrate experiential, behavioral, and economic perspectives to better understand heterogeneity in consumers' willingness to pay. *Methods:* The paper adopts a conceptual and analytical approach, synthesizing existing literature from cultural studies, behavioral economics, and music industry research. Long-term trends in concert ticket pricing and industry pricing mechanisms are reviewed, and illustrative empirical evidence from

selected markets, including smaller national contexts, is used to contextualize broader theoretical insights. *Results:* The analysis indicates that concert ticket demand is generally inelastic, but consumer price tolerance varies substantially across audience segments and demographic characteristics. Emotional attachment to artists, perceived uniqueness of live performances, income levels, and prior concert experiences significantly influence willingness to pay. While segmented and dynamic pricing strategies increase revenue potential, they also contribute to rising average prices and growing affordability concerns. Conclusions: Consumer tolerance for increasing concert ticket prices is not uniform and is shaped by a combination of experiential value, economic constraints, and psychological reference points. Although many consumers continue to accept higher prices due to the unique nature of live music experiences, identifiable price thresholds exist beyond which attendance declines, posing challenges for the long-term inclusivity and sustainability of live music markets. *Practical implications:* For concert organizers and promoters, the findings highlight the importance of differentiated pricing strategies that account for heterogeneous consumer price sensitivity. Maintaining accessible entry-level ticket options may help preserve audience diversity while allowing premium pricing for highly engaged segments. *Social implications:* Rising concert ticket prices risk excluding lower-income audiences and undermining the social and cultural accessibility of live music. Understanding consumer price thresholds can inform more inclusive pricing practices and cultural policy discussions. Originality/value: This study contributes to the literature by explicitly linking concert attendance motivations, audience segmentation, and behavioral pricing theories to the concept of consumer price thresholds. By integrating cultural and economic perspectives, it offers a more nuanced understanding of affordability and consumer limits in the live music industry.

Keywords: concert ticket pricing; consumer price tolerance; price thresholds; live music industry; concert attendance behavior; demand elasticity

1. Introduction

Live music has long represented a central pillar of the music industry, combining artistic expression with social, cultural, and economic value. In recent decades, however, the role of live concerts has fundamentally changed. As revenues from recorded music have declined due to digitalization, streaming platforms, and changing consumption habits, live performances have increasingly become the primary source of income for artists and promoters (Krueger, 2005; Fer and Baarsma, 2015). This structural shift has coincided with a pronounced and sustained increase in concert ticket prices across global markets, raising questions about affordability, accessibility, and the limits of consumer willingness to pay.

Existing research has approached concert attendance from multiple perspectives. Cultural and experiential studies emphasize that concerts are not merely entertainment products but complex experience goods, characterized by emotional engagement, social interaction, and collective participation (Brown and Knox, 2017; Swarbrick et al., 2019). These studies demonstrate that the perceived value of live music extends beyond the performance itself, encompassing atmosphere, artist–audience interaction, and shared emotional intensity. From this perspective, demand for concerts is often driven by affective and symbolic motivations rather than purely economic considerations.

Parallel to this, economic and industry-focused research has examined how ticket prices are formed and how audiences respond to price changes. Studies on concert ticket pricing highlight the role of artist popularity, venue size, market demand, and pricing strategies such as price discrimination, dynamic pricing, and multi-tier ticketing (Courty and Pagliero, 2012; Eckard and Smith, 2012). Empirical findings frequently suggest that demand for concert tickets is relatively inelastic, particularly for high-profile artists, meaning that moderate price increases do not lead to proportional declines in attendance. At the same time, research indicates substantial heterogeneity among consumers, with price sensitivity varying across audience segments, genres, and demographic groups (Pompe et al., 2020).

Behavioral and psychological theories further complicate this picture. Concepts such as reference prices, loss aversion, and perceived value help explain why consumers may tolerate rising ticket prices up to a certain point, while reacting strongly once prices exceed their expectations or prior experiences (Kahneman and Tversky, 2013; Tereyagoglu et al., 2018). Reservation price theory suggests that each consumer holds a maximum willingness to pay, beyond which attendance is abandoned in favor of alternatives (Myerson, 1981). However, these thresholds are not fixed; they are shaped by emotional attachment to artists, social motivations, income constraints, and the perceived uniqueness of specific events.

Despite this extensive body of literature, a key area of uncertainty remains. While we know a great deal about why people attend concerts and how pricing strategies affect revenue, we know considerably less about where consumers draw the line—namely, the price point at which ticket costs become unacceptable and begin to meaningfully deter attendance. Much of the existing research focuses on price changes and demand responses, rather than explicitly identifying consumer price thresholds or examining how tolerance for rising prices differs across consumer segments and demographic characteristics. Moreover, the rapid escalation of ticket prices in recent years suggests that previously observed patterns of inelastic demand may not hold indefinitely.

Against this backdrop, the present study addresses the following research question: How tolerant are consumers of rising concert ticket prices, and what factors shape the price thresholds at which ticket costs begin to significantly reduce concert attendance? Building on

experiential, economic, and behavioral theories, the study seeks to clarify how perceived value, audience segmentation, and demographic characteristics interact to influence consumers' willingness to pay. By situating concert ticket pricing within both cultural experience theory and behavioral pricing frameworks, this research aims to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of affordability and consumer limits in the contemporary live music industry.

2. Theoretical Background

This section provides the conceptual foundation for understanding concert ticket pricing by first examining concert attendance as a cultural and experiential practice, then outlining audience segmentation and consumer typologies, and finally connecting these perspectives to pricing mechanisms and consumer tolerance. By linking experiential value, audience heterogeneity, and economic decision-making, the theoretical framework explains why concert ticket prices can rise substantially while remaining acceptable to some consumers, yet reach critical limits for others.

2.1. Concert Attendance as a Cultural and Experiential Practice

These experiential and emotional dimensions are directly relevant to ticket pricing. Strong emotional attachment, perceived uniqueness of live performances, and the intensity of collective experiences increase consumers' willingness to pay higher prices for concerts. When live music is perceived not merely as entertainment but as a meaningful, once-in-a-lifetime experience, price considerations may become secondary, helping to explain why audiences often tolerate substantial ticket price increases.

Why people go to concerts. Attending a live concert is a deeply resonant experience, shaped by a unique interplay of emotions, social connections, and sensory stimulation that recorded music cannot replicate. Live performances offer audiences the opportunity to immerse themselves in the raw, electrifying energy of music in real time, fostering a heightened sense of engagement and presence (Brown and Knox, 2017; Swarbrick et al., 2019). The atmosphere—characterized by the collective energy of the crowd, direct artist interaction, and the spontaneity of live music—transforms each concert into a distinct, memorable event that draws fans back repeatedly.

Beyond the music, social connections play a crucial role in concert attendance. Live music events foster a sense of belonging, uniting individuals with shared musical interests and creating communal experiences that enhance enjoyment (Dearn and Price, 2016; Mulder and Hitters, 2021). Whether through the collective excitement of a captivated audience or spontaneous conversations with fellow concertgoers, these interactions significantly contribute to the overall experience. In many cases, the social aspect is as impactful as the performance itself.

For many fans, concerts serve as a means of forging or deepening emotional connections with their favorite artists. Witnessing a live performance allows audiences to experience an artist's passion and stage presence firsthand, reinforcing the personal significance of their music (Kruger and Saayman, 2012). Additionally, concerts offer novelty and discovery. Fans not only hear live renditions of familiar songs but also experience new interpretations, improvisations, and emerging support acts that may become future favorites (Brown and Knox, 2017). This unpredictability and exclusivity enhance the appeal of live events.

While ticket price is a key consideration, research suggests it is not always the primary factor in concert attendance. Many fans prioritize the overall experience over cost, underscoring the significant value they place on live music (Brown and Knox, 2017). Key motivations—such as artist affiliation, social engagement, enjoyment, and nostalgia—highlight the multifaceted appeal of concerts (Kruger and Saayman, 2012; Kulczynski et al., 2016).

Moreover, live performances stimulate a level of engagement that recorded music cannot match. Studies indicate that audiences experience heightened rhythmic entrainment—a synchronized connection to the music that enhances emotional and physiological responses (Swarbrick et al., 2019). This intensified connection contributes to the transformative nature of live music events.

Understanding these motivations is essential for concert organizers and marketers aiming to optimize the concert-going experience. By addressing the emotional, social, and experiential needs of attendees, they can create compelling events that not only attract audiences but also foster long-term loyalty within the live music industry (Baxter-Moore, 2016; Kulczynski et al., 2016).

What people experience at concerts. Concerts are far more than musical events; they are immersive, multisensory experiences that captivate the senses, evoke profound emotions, and foster social connections. Research highlights the distinctive elements of live performances that engage audiences and create lasting impressions. For many, the atmosphere and energy of a concert elicit emotional responses far more intense than those provoked by recorded music. The immediacy of live sound, the artist's presence, and the collective excitement of the crowd contribute to heightened engagement, often expressed through instinctive movements such as nodding, swaying, or dancing in rhythm with the music (Swarbrick et al., 2019).

Concert attendance is fundamentally a communal experience. Sharing an appreciation for the same artist or genre with others fosters a powerful sense of unity. For regular concertgoers, these social interactions and shared moments of joy are as vital to the experience as the music itself (Dearn and Price, 2016). While this social environment significantly enhances the overall enjoyment, it doesn't necessarily diminish the deeply personal nature of an individual's emotional connection to the music (O'Neill and Egermann, 2022).

Concert audiences often exhibit remarkable levels of synchronization, both physiologically and in their movements. This "in-tune" behavior—seen in actions like clapping, swaying, or singing along in unison—not only strengthens the collective aesthetic experience but also reflects individual personality traits. This illustrates the intricate interplay between personal and communal engagement during live performances (Tschacher et al., 2023). Furthermore, the concert experience extends beyond just listening. For individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing, visual elements are crucial for connecting with the performance. Dynamic light shows, artist movements, and other visual cues enable them to fully participate in the event's energy and communal spirit (Han and Kim, 2023).

At its core, a live concert is a dynamic interaction between the artist, the individual audience member, and the collective audience. The artist's performance sets the emotional tone, the attendee's personal connection to the music deepens the experience, and the presence of fellow fans amplifies the shared joy (Mulder and Hitters, 2023). Practical factors like venue design and familiarity with the music further shape the concert experience. A well-designed, comfortable venue can boost audience engagement, while knowing the songs often strengthens emotional investment and overall enjoyment (Dobson, 2008; Hotaki, 2019). Ultimately, concerts are *multidimensional experiences* where music transforms into a shared journey. From the emotional resonance of the songs to the bonds formed with fellow attendees, every element contributes to creating an event that goes beyond mere listening, offering an unforgettable, deeply immersive encounter with live music.

3. Typologies of Concert Audiences and Consumer Segmentation

What types of consumers attend concerts. Concert audiences are as diverse as the music they come to experience, driven by a wide range of motivations, preferences, and personal connections. People attend concerts not only to enjoy live music but also to seek emotional fulfillment, strengthen social ties, and express their identities. These motivations reflect the rich tapestry of concertgoers and their unique relationships with live music (Charron, 2017; Kawase and Obata, 2016; Perkins, 2012).

Research has identified distinct consumer segments within concert audiences. For instance, in South Africa, the "black diamonds" segment—middle-class individuals with rising purchasing power—plays a significant role in concert attendance, particularly for popular music genres (Kruger and Saayman, 2014). Similarly, audience segmentation based on attendance frequency reveals a spectrum ranging from occasional attendees, who view concerts as rare treats, to dedicated fans who make live performances a regular part of their lives (Roose, 2008).

Cultural preferences and consumption styles further shape concert attendance patterns. Some individuals engage with live music as a cultural or intellectual pursuit, while others prioritize entertainment and social aspects. These "cultural logics" influence preferences for specific genres, artists, or venues, resulting in distinct audience profiles (Willekens and Daenekindt, 2022). Demographic factors such as subcultural affiliation, gender, and age also play a role. For example, younger audiences may be more inclined toward popular music festivals, while older attendees may gravitate toward classical or jazz performances (Chun-Fu and Hu, 2006). To better understand these motivations, researchers have developed analytical tools such as the Concert Attendance Motivation Scale (CAMS), which categorizes the diverse reasons people attend concerts. These range from a deep appreciation of music to socialization, nostalgia, and escapism (Kulczynski et al., 2016).

Digital engagement further influences concert attendance. Fans exist on a spectrum, from casual listeners who occasionally attend live events to highly devoted or even obsessive fans whose lives revolve around their favorite artists (Perkins, 2012). This continuum underscores the deeply personal nature of music and its impact on individual behaviors and identities. Understanding these varied audience segments is crucial for the music industry. Recognizing the nuanced motivations behind concert attendance allows event organizers and marketers to develop more targeted and inclusive strategies. Whether designing intimate classical performances or large-scale music festivals, catering to audience diversity enhances the overall concert experience.

Another key factor is the role of specific venues in shaping musical preferences. While larger venues often host mainstream genres, smaller clubs may serve as hubs for niche or alternative music scenes. Identifying the connections between venue types and musical styles helps cultivate dedicated audiences and sustain vibrant local music ecosystems. Generational music preferences further complicate audience segmentation. While younger listeners often gravitate toward emerging artists, certain older musicians maintain strong appeal across generations. This intergenerational popularity may stem from recent promotional efforts, sustained media presence, or cultural influence passed down by parents and mentors. Conversely, newer artists tend to attract younger audiences initially, with limited crossover to older demographics. However, this trend varies significantly across genres; for instance, jazz and classical music exhibit greater cross-generational appeal compared to pop, rock, or electronic music. Ultimately, concert audiences are shaped by a dynamic interplay of cultural, social, and generational factors. Recognizing these complexities enables a more nuanced approach to concert

organization, ensuring that live music remains accessible, engaging, and relevant across diverse listener communities.

Importantly, these audience segments differ not only in their motivations and attendance patterns but also in their sensitivity to ticket prices. Highly committed fans and culturally motivated attendees tend to exhibit greater price tolerance, while occasional concertgoers and socially motivated participants are generally more price-sensitive. This heterogeneity suggests that there is no single consumer price limit for concert tickets; rather, price tolerance varies across audience segments, forming the basis for differentiated pricing strategies and for identifying potential consumer price thresholds.

4. Concert Ticket Pricing: Mechanisms and Long-Term Trends

To understand how consumer price tolerance develops, it is necessary to examine both the long-term evolution of concert ticket prices and the mechanisms through which prices are set. This section therefore first outlines historical trends in ticket pricing, followed by an explanation of pricing structures and industry practices that shape contemporary concert markets.

4.1. Trends in Concert Ticket Prices over the Past 50 Years

Over the past half-century, concert ticket prices have risen dramatically, reflecting broader shifts in the music industry, consumer behavior, and the global economy. Several interconnected factors have contributed to this upward trajectory:

- ***Shift in Revenue Streams:*** The decline of physical album sales and the rise of digital music streaming have fundamentally altered the financial landscape for artists. With recorded music generating less income, live performances have become a primary revenue source, leading to higher ticket prices (Krueger, 2005; Fer and Baarsma, 2015).
- ***Artist Popularity and Market Demand:*** An artist's career stage, global recognition, and fanbase size significantly influence ticket pricing. Established performers with high demand can command premium prices, whereas emerging artists typically offer more affordable tickets to attract audiences (Decrop and Derbaix, 2014).
- ***Technological Advancements and the Secondary Market:*** The digitalization of ticket sales has introduced dynamic pricing models and facilitated large-scale reselling. While these innovations enhance accessibility and revenue optimization, they have also driven up costs, particularly for high-demand events, as scalpers and resale platforms exploit limited ticket availability (Papies and van Heerde, 2015).
- ***The New Economy of Live Music:*** As live music has become the dominant income stream for artists in the digital age, concerts have evolved into premium experiences, incorporating elaborate productions and exclusive access options. This economic shift has further contributed to rising ticket prices (Holt, 2010).
- ***Pricing Strategies and Revenue Maximization:*** Multi-tier pricing models, which differentiate ticket costs based on seating location, demand, and purchase timing, have enabled organizers to maximize revenue. While these strategies improve affordability for some audiences, they have also led to a general increase in average ticket prices (Courty and Pagliero, 2012).

- ***Social Inclusion and Accessibility Concerns:*** Rising ticket costs have disproportionately impacted lower-income concertgoers, raising concerns about the accessibility of live music events. The widening gap between ticket prices and wage growth has sparked debates about the social inclusivity of concerts and the long-term sustainability of current pricing models (Albinsson, 2023).

These experiential and emotional dimensions are directly relevant to ticket pricing, as stronger emotional attachment and perceived uniqueness of live performances increase consumers' willingness to pay higher prices.

4.2. How Concert Ticket Pricing Works

Concert ticket pricing is the result of collaboration between performers, promoters, and venues, with several factors influencing the final price. Performers and promoters determine ticket prices based on demand, historical data from previous tours, and the specific characteristics of the venue. Promoters handle logistics, marketing, and financial risks, often earning a small portion of the ticket revenue, typically less than 2%. This makes it unlikely for promoters to drive ticket prices significantly higher (Wall, 2024). Ticketmaster plays a significant role in ticket sales as a service provider for event validation and ticket distribution. While Ticketmaster and similar platforms are often blamed for high ticket prices, they do not actually set the initial prices. The service fees, which are set mainly by the venues, cover the operational costs of running the event and providing ticketing services. Ticketmaster typically retains between 5% and 10% of the service fee revenue.

4.3. Historical Trends in Concert Ticket Prices

Over the past few decades, concert ticket prices have risen dramatically, outpacing inflation. In the mid-1990s, the average concert ticket price was approximately $26 (Fooks, 2022), rising to $90 in 2018 (Apollo Performing Arts), $94.83 in 2019 (Cooke, 2024), and reaching around $120 by 2023. The average price for tickets to the 100 most popular tours in North America has nearly quadrupled in the past 20 years, from $25.81 in 1996 to $91.86 in 2019. Table 1 shows the prices of selected concert tickets in the USA in individual years.

Table 1. Prices of selected concert tickets in the USA

Artist (year of original tour)	Starting price (USD)	2022		
		Lowest (USD)	Average (USD)	Highest (USD)
Red Hot Chili Peppers (1999)	28.50	89.00	178.00	826.00
Metallica (1991)	22.50	58.50	–	743.00
Motley Crue (1989)	18.50	–	145.00	–
Pearl Jam (1995)	21.50	120.00	157.00	–
Guns N' Roses (1987)	14.50	67.00	214.00	–
Slipknot (2005)	35.00	50.00	–	400.00
Aerosmith (1987)	17.50	125.00	261.00	352.00
Foo Fighters (1996)	18.00	143.00	–	248.00
Blink-182 (1997)	8.00	–	162.00	600.00
Bruce Springsteen (1978)	7.00	–	400.00	5,000.00

Source: Fooks (2022).

Several key factors contribute to this increase in ticket prices. A significant driver is the relationship between supply and demand. Limited availability of tickets for high-demand concerts naturally leads to higher prices, as more fans vie for a spot. Additional-

ly, concerts have become premium experiences, valued not only for the live music but also for the spectacle, enhanced by social media and elaborate production. This evolution has increased the perceived value of the live music experience, pushing prices higher.

Artists have increasingly turned to touring as their primary income source, with declining album sales and digital downloads diminishing their ability to generate revenue from recorded music. As a result, concert tickets have become a critical revenue stream, leading to higher prices for live performances.

Furthermore, pricing strategies such as price discrimination—where ticket prices vary depending on factors such as seating, demand, and timing—have enabled promoters to maximize revenue. While this benefits the organizers and artists, it also contributes to higher overall costs for consumers (Courty and Pagliero, 2012).

An important element influencing ticket prices is the secondary ticket market. Resale platforms, such as StubHub, reveal the true market value of tickets, often pushing prices higher for highly sought-after events. As artists see tickets on these platforms being resold at inflated prices, they may adjust their pricing strategies to prevent scalpers from profiting too much. While Ticketmaster and Live Nation often receive criticism for the high prices, the actual driving forces behind the increases are the performers, supply and demand dynamics, and the shift toward touring as the primary income stream for artists.

Concerts have increasingly become "experience goods," where the production costs are higher due to the elaborateness of the event, and for major acts who consistently sell out shows, ticket prices are primarily driven by market demand. In some cases, artists may initially price tickets lower, only to see the resale market drive prices up, prompting them to adjust prices for future events (Cooke, 2024).

5. Concert Ticket Price Developments in Slovenia

Table 2 presents the trend in concert ticket prices in Slovenia. While direct data on concert ticket prices is unavailable, theater ticket prices are used as a reference point to roughly estimate pricing patterns for domestic performers. This approach offers a practical framework for understanding the general pricing structure in Slovenia and provides insight into the rising costs of concert tickets over time, based on trends observed in the theater industry.

As comprehensive historical data on concert ticket prices in Slovenia are limited, theatre ticket prices are used as a proxy to illustrate long-term trends in cultural event affordability. While this approach does not capture all specificities of concert pricing, it provides a useful reference point for assessing changes in purchasing power and cultural consumption over time. In addition, selected observations are informed by professional experience in concert organization and pricing practices, offering contextual insight into the evolution of ticket segmentation in Slovenia.

The table presents a longitudinal overview of purchasing power and cultural consumption in Slovenia from 1991 to 2025, focusing on cinema and theatre attendance as representative cultural goods. It combines three complementary dimensions: (1) the quantity of goods that can be purchased with the average monthly net salary, (2) the monetary value of these purchases expressed in euros, and (3) average household expenditure on cultural activities, including cinemas, theatres, and concerts.

The first section of the table illustrates the quantity of cultural goods purchasable with the average monthly net salary, measured as the number of cinema or theatre tickets that could be purchased in a given year. The steady increase in the average net salary over time is reflected in a gradual rise in the number of tickets affordable to consumers. For exam-

ple, while fewer than 200 cinema tickets could be purchased with the average salary in the early 1990s, this number exceeded 210 tickets by the early 2020s. Theatre attendance shows a similar pattern, indicating a long-term increase in nominal purchasing power for cultural events.

Table 2. Price trends in Slovenia, 1991–2025

Year	Average monthly net salary (EUR)	Quantity of goods purchased with average monthly net salary		Price of goods purchased with average monthly net salary (EUR)		Average household spending (cinemas, theatres, concerts)		
		Cinema tickets	Theatre tickets	Cinema ticket	Theatre ticket	Per household (EUR)	Per household member (EUR)	Spending structure (%)
1991	43.07	192	–	0.22	–	–	–	–
1992	128.58	192	–	0.67	–	–	–	–
1993	195.40	137	–	1.43	–	–	–	–
1994	250.75	139	–	1.80	–	–	–	–
1995	297.44	146	–	2.04	–	–	–	–
1996	341.47	157	–	2.17	–	–	–	–
1997	380.57	168	47.74	2.27	8.0	–	–	–
1998	416.95	164	50.93	2.54	8.2	–	–	–
1999	456.01	168	53.00	2.71	8.6	–	–	–
2000	503.63	176	57.12	2.86	8.8	18.69	6.27	0.15
2001	562.74	178	58.99	3.16	9.5	21.56	7.38	0.16
2002	617.37	170	59.25	3.63	10.4	23.58	8.23	0.16
2003	663.80	171	61.52	3.88	10.8	23.11	8.28	0.15
2004	701.90	175	62.06	4.01	11.3	25.68	9.43	0.15
2005	735.73	168	61.77	4.38	11.9	23.03	8.61	0.13
2006	773.42	172	63.76	4.50	12.1	23.30	8.80	0.13
2007	834.50	180	67.46	4.64	12.4	17.99	6.83	0.10
2008	899.80	193	68.48	4.66	13.1	21.25	8.22	0.10
2009	930.00	196	69.25	4.74	13.4	16.82	6.57	0.08
2010	966.62	200	72.68	4.83	13.3	17.17	6.79	0.08
2011	987.39	198	74.46	4.99	13.3	–	–	–
2012	991.44	194	73.88	5.11	13.4	41.97	16.72	0.22
2013	997.01	186	74.40	5.36	13.4	–	–	–
2014	1,005.4 1	189	69.24	5.32	14.5	–	–	–
2015	1,013.2 3	190	67.23	5.33	15.1	37.88	14.62	0.19
2016	1,030.1 6	186	67.64	5.54	15.2	–	–	–
2017	1,062.0 0	190	69.82	5.59	15.2	–	–	–
2018	1,092.7 4	194	71.75	5.64	15.2	47.88	19.30	0.22
2019	1,133.5 0	195	74.28	5.81	15.3	–	–	–
2020	1,208.6 5	203	76.50	5.96	15.8	–	–	–
2021	1,270.3 0	212	77.74	5.98	16.3	–	–	–
2022	1,318.6 4	217	80.40	6.09	16.4	50.04	20.92	0.19
2023	1,445.1 2	219	83.44	6.59	17.3	–	–	–
2024	1,526.0 2	211	82.94	7.23	18.4	–	–	–
2025	1,610.1 9	216	83.95	7.47	19.2	–	–	–

Source: SURS (2025a, 2025b).

The second section translates this quantity into price equivalents, showing the monetary value of the goods that could be purchased with the average salary. This provides additional insight into how price levels and salary growth have evolved simultaneously. Although nominal prices of cinema and theatre tickets increased over time, wage growth largely kept pace, allowing purchasing power in cultural consumption to remain relatively stable or even improve during certain periods.

The third section of the table reports average household spending on cultural activities, expressed both per household and per household member, as well as the share of total household expenditure devoted to cinemas, theatres, and concerts. These data reveal that cultural spending represents a relatively small proportion of total household expenditure, typically ranging between 0.08% and 0.22%. Despite fluctuations linked to broader economic conditions, the overall share remains modest, suggesting that cultural consumption, while valued, occupies a limited portion of household budgets.

Taken together, the table demonstrates that although the nominal cost of cultural events has increased over time, rising incomes have partially offset these increases. However, the relatively low and stable share of cultural spending in household budgets suggests that there may be limits to consumers' willingness or ability to allocate additional resources to cultural activities. This finding is particularly relevant for understanding consumer price tolerance and potential price thresholds in the live music and performing arts sectors.

In Slovenia, which is the focus of our research, the segmentation of concert ticket prices for large events in venues began later than in the West. While we had venues like Cankarjev dom, which already allowed for price segmentation based on seat positions (two or three ticket types in the orchestra, followed by the 1st and 2nd balconies), or larger venues with two, rarely three, ticket segments, the general practice of segmenting ticket prices for concerts was not common until the construction of Stožice Arena. Until then, ticket segmentation was mostly limited to exceptions, such as the spectacle Carmina Burana – Monumental Opera (Tivoli Hall, 2004) or Il Divo's concert in Tivoli Hall (2009), both of which followed the specific requirements of the main management, whose tour setup was coordinated across Europe. As mentioned, ticket pricing used to follow a basic two- or three-tier segmentation system.

It wasn't until later that the need for multi-tiered pricing emerged—partly due to the increasing number of concerts being organized locally by big players like Live Nation and other large booking and management companies, and also because of the transfer of this useful pricing model from abroad. This shift in thinking also led to the introduction of more structured ticket pricing for concerts, where the segments were more meticulously planned and priced. Our own organic reasoning behind this was simple: each price point would deter a certain percentage of potential buyers. By lowering prices for specific segments, you could reach a larger pool of customers. For example, rather than setting all tickets at a uniform price of 60 EUR, higher-priced tickets could subsidize lower-priced tickets, with prices ranging from 30 EUR to 100 EUR.

This approach allowed us to strategically exploit seat/standing positions based on their quality for the audience's concert experience. The lowest prices also served a function: to attract a certain segment of customers with lower purchasing power or less attachment to a particular artist, thus preventing them from automatically dismissing the purchase. Once they see the lowest price available, they might be encouraged to buy tickets either online or at the venue. After looking at the seating plan, they might even opt for a more expensive ticket based on the perceived value of the seat or sector.

As mentioned, with the construction and use of the multifunctional Stožice Arena, true segmentation with six or more pricing tiers began to take shape (such as for the Sting concert with the Slovenian Symphony Orchestra in 2011). The venue's layout, which was far

more adaptable than the previous "boxy" sports arenas used for large concerts, made this kind of ticket segmentation possible. By then, the online ticketing system had become very well-developed and widely accepted, mainly through Eventim, which allowed customers to select their seats directly online. Before the development and use of this system, it was not possible to purchase tickets this way. This system gradually became more widespread among local or visiting concert organizers, driven not only by the needs of international acts but also by the pricing structures they had established for their tours across Europe or globally.

6. Consumer Reactions to Rising Ticket Prices

6.1. How Audiences React to Higher Ticket Prices

Research suggests that concert ticket pricing tends to be relatively inelastic, meaning that small price increases do not significantly reduce demand. However, audience responses vary across different segments. For instance, subscription ticket buyers—such as those attending a series of classical performances—tend to be more price-sensitive than individuals purchasing single-event tickets (Pompe et al., 2018, 2020).

Pricing strategies play a crucial role in revenue optimization. Dynamic and multi-tier pricing models, which adjust ticket prices based on demand and seating quality, have been shown to increase revenue by an average of 4.2%, with some performances experiencing gains exceeding 20% (Eckard and Smith, 2012). Similarly, price discrimination—offering different ticket prices for the same event—has been found to boost revenue by approximately 5% compared to flat-rate pricing (Courty and Pagliero, 2012).

From a practical perspective, multi-tier pricing serves both economic and psychological functions. By offering a range of price categories, event organizers can use premium ticket sales to subsidize lower-cost options, making concerts more accessible to price-sensitive attendees. Without this segmentation, a uniform ticket price might be prohibitively expensive for certain audience segments, potentially deterring attendance. Furthermore, consumer behavior research suggests that price differentiation can influence purchasing decisions in unexpected ways. For example, a buyer who initially intends to purchase the cheapest available ticket may reconsider after reviewing the seating chart. If a moderately higher-priced ticket (e.g., 20% more expensive) offers significantly better visibility or overall experience, they may opt for the more expensive option despite their initial budget constraints. Importantly, the presence of an affordable baseline ticket price often serves as the key factor that attracts consumers in the first place. If all ticket prices were set at a higher level from the outset, some potential buyers might decide against attending altogether.

Several factors shape consumer sensitivity to ticket prices, including:

- **Artist Profile:** The career stage, nationality, and overall popularity of an artist strongly influence fans' willingness to pay (Decrop and Derbaix, 2014).
- **Digital Music Trends:** The rise of streaming services has altered the relationship between recorded music sales and live concert attendance. With album sales no longer serving as a primary revenue stream, artists increasingly rely on ticket sales as a key financial resource (Krueger, 2005; Fer and Baarsma, 2015).
- **Psychological Factors:** Buyers often compare ticket prices to previous events or promotional discounts. Additionally, loss aversion—the tendency for people to react more strongly to perceived losses than to equivalent gains—can discourage attendance if ticket prices exceed their expectations (Tereyagoglu et al., 2018).

While many concertgoers are willing to absorb moderate price increases, sudden or excessive hikes can lead to dissatisfaction, especially if the perceived value of the experience does not match the cost. Therefore, effective pricing strategies must strike a balance between revenue maximization and maintaining customer trust, ensuring that ticket prices remain justifiable and fair in the eyes of the audience.

6.2. Understanding Inelastic Demand in Concert Ticket Sales

While demand for concert tickets is often described as inelastic—meaning price increases have a limited impact on overall sales—consumer sensitivity varies. Subscription buyers, for instance, tend to be more price-conscious than single-ticket purchasers, who may perceive concerts as one-off luxury experiences (Pompe et al., 2020). Additionally, generational and demographic factors play a role; younger audiences with lower disposable income may be more sensitive to price hikes than older consumers who prioritize premium experiences.

While these findings illustrate how audiences respond to ticket price increases, they do not fully explain where consumers draw the line between acceptable and unacceptable prices. Understanding consumer reactions therefore represents a necessary step toward identifying broader limits of price tolerance and the point at which rising ticket prices begin to significantly deter concert attendance.

7. Consumer Tolerance and Price Thresholds

In this context, a consumer price threshold refers to the maximum ticket price an individual is willing to pay for a concert before deciding not to attend. This threshold is not fixed or universal; rather, it is shaped by factors such as perceived value, emotional attachment to the artist, income, past experiences, and available alternatives. Consequently, price thresholds vary across consumer segments and demographic groups, making them a central concept for understanding both affordability and pricing strategies in the concert industry.

7.1. Evaluating Consumer Limits to Ticket Price Growth

The steady rise in concert ticket prices over the past few decades has ignited widespread discussion about consumer tolerance and industry practices. Several factors influence how long consumers will continue to accept increasing prices, including perceived value, alternative entertainment options, and broader economic conditions.

How industry trends contribute to rising ticket prices. Concert ticket prices have surged significantly, particularly since the late 1990s. This trend is largely driven by the declining role of album sales as a revenue source, with streaming services and file-sharing platforms shifting financial reliance onto live performances (Krueger, 2005; Fer and Baarsma, 2015). As a result, artists and promoters now depend heavily on concerts for income, making higher ticket prices almost inevitable. Furthermore, technological advancements and production costs contribute to increased ticket prices, as fans increasingly expect immersive and high-quality live experiences.

Consumer behavior and psychology in concert ticket pricing. Several psychological principles influence consumer reactions to rising ticket prices:

- ***Reference Dependence and Loss Aversion:*** Consumers compare current prices to past purchases or advertised discounts, and perceived "losses" from higher prices can deter them from attending (Tereyagoglu et al., 2018).
- ***Perceived Value and Premium Offerings:*** High-end experiences such as VIP packages, early access, and exclusive merchandise cater to wealthier demographics but may alienate price-sensitive fans.
- ***Social and Emotional Factors:*** FOMO (fear of missing out) and social validation drive some consumers to accept high ticket prices despite financial strain, especially for high-profile artists.

Identifying potential consumer breaking points. Economic pressures such as inflation, stagnating wages, and rising costs of living could push ticket prices beyond what the average consumer is willing to pay. Fans may begin opting for smaller, more affordable events or alternative entertainment options. Additionally, backlash over perceived price gouging—including excessive fees and inflated resale markups—could erode goodwill toward artists and promoters (Courty and Pagliero, 2012). High-profile cases of consumer frustration, amplified by social media, may influence industry practices and regulatory interventions.

Proposed solutions and industry controversies. To address these challenges, the industry is exploring several strategies:

- ***Dynamic Pricing Models:*** These adjust ticket prices based on real-time demand but remain controversial, as some argue they improve accessibility while others claim they exacerbate affordability issues (Happel and Jennings, 1995).
- ***Bundled Pricing Strategies:*** Mobile economy maximization bundles, which package tickets with additional perks or flexible pricing structures, have been introduced to balance affordability and profitability (Streidl, 2023).
- ***Regulatory Measures:*** Anti-scalping laws and restrictions on ticket resale aim to curb excessive markups, though their effectiveness remains debated.

7.2. Relevant Economic and Behavioral Theories

Several economic theories help contextualize consumer responses to rising ticket prices:

- ***Utility Theory:*** Consumers aim to maximize satisfaction within their budget, selecting options that offer the highest utility relative to cost. As prices rise, they may seek cheaper alternatives or forego purchases entirely (Jevons, 1886).
- ***Bounded Rationality Theory:*** Due to limited information and cognitive constraints, consumers make "satisficing" rather than optimizing decisions, often relying on heuristics or emotional factors (Simon, 2013).
- ***Prospect Theory:*** Consumers evaluate ticket prices based on reference points, such as previous prices or competitor offerings. If current prices exceed expectations, they perceive a loss, reducing purchase likelihood (Kahneman and Tversky, 2013).
- ***Reservation Price Theory:*** Each consumer has a maximum price they are willing to pay. If ticket prices exceed this threshold, they will seek alternatives or abandon the purchase (Myerson, 1981). Prepaid or subscription models can increase purchase commitment by leveraging psychological tendencies to avoid perceived losses.

Consumer tolerance for rising concert ticket prices hinges on a balance between perceived value, economic conditions, and psychological thresholds. While some fans will

continue to pay premium prices for unique experiences, broader affordability concerns may push the industry toward more innovative and flexible pricing models. Failure to address these issues could lead to declining attendance, increased consumer dissatisfaction, and long-term shifts in the live music economy.

8. Demographic Determinants of Concert Ticket Purchases

Research indicates that demographic characteristics significantly influence concert ticket purchases and consumer behavior. Variables such as gender, age, income, employment status, and education level all play critical roles in shaping how consumers decide on concert attendance and ticket purchases. These factors affect not only whether individuals purchase tickets but also the types of events they attend, their price sensitivity, and how they respond to different marketing and promotional efforts. Understanding how these demographic variables interact can help concert organizers, event promoters, and marketers better target their audience and improve sales strategies.

8.1. Key Demographic Influences on Ticket Purchases

Gender, age and income. Gender, age, and income have all been shown to be strong determinants of purchasing behavior. Younger consumers tend to be more responsive to promotional campaigns, such as discounts, free product samples, and SMS marketing (Saleh, 2013; Leppäniemi and Karjaluoto, 2008). Studies also indicate that women are more active participants in marketing campaigns, particularly in response to SMS promotions (Leppäniemi and Karjaluoto, 2008). Conversely, older consumers, particularly those aged 50 and above, are more likely to purchase tickets and attend concerts, possibly due to greater disposable income and a stronger appreciation for live performances (Pompe et al., 2020).

Higher income and education levels are strongly associated with increased concert attendance. Individuals from higher socioeconomic backgrounds—whether due to income or educational status—are not only more likely to purchase concert tickets, but they also tend to attend more cultural events in general (Pompe et al., 2020). This correlation could be attributed to a greater sense of cultural value placed on live performances and the financial flexibility that higher-income individuals possess.

Employment and financial support. Employment status plays a significant role in ticket purchasing decisions. For example, students and retired individuals may have more flexible schedules, allowing them to attend events more readily. However, their ability to afford tickets may vary significantly depending on their financial circumstances. Employed individuals, particularly those with steady income, are more likely to prioritize entertainment and leisure activities, including concerts, as part of their discretionary spending. Interestingly, retired individuals often contribute financially to younger attendees, such as students or grandchildren, by providing money for tickets as gifts during holidays or special occasions.

Education, occupation and social influence. Demographic characteristics such as education level, occupation, and location can also influence consumer behavior in subtle but important ways. Music festivals, for example, often target specific demographic groups based on age and gender. Younger consumers and women may prioritize different aspects of the concert experience, such as socializing and digital engagement, while older attendees

may focus more on the quality of the performance and artist lineup (Brown and Knox, 2017). Social media also plays a key role in shaping concert ticket purchasing behavior. Concert-goers often rely on social platforms for event information, ticket promotions, and peer reviews, which can heavily influence their decision-making process (Wahyudi, 2023).

Location and ticket pricing. Venue location and ticket pricing significantly influence consumer purchasing decisions. Studies suggest that urban consumers are more likely to attend concerts than those from rural areas, as they have greater access to events and are generally more exposed to cultural experiences (Estelami et al., 2019). Conversely, rural consumers may face additional barriers such as travel costs, which could deter attendance. Ticket prices can also serve as a limiting factor for some consumers, particularly those from lower income brackets, even if they are highly motivated to attend.

Despite these trends, some studies suggest that gender and age do not always exhibit a significant relationship with purchasing decisions, particularly in online ticket sales (Ullah et al., 2021). However, income remains a consistently significant factor, highlighting that financial capacity is a key determinant of concert ticket purchases across all demographics.

Taken together, these demographic factors suggest that income plays the most consistent role in determining concert ticket purchases, while age, gender, and employment status influence how consumers perceive value and respond to pricing strategies. However, demographic characteristics alone do not determine consumer behavior; they interact with cultural preferences, emotional motivations, and prior concert experiences, further reinforcing the complexity of identifying consumer price thresholds.

9. Discussion

This study set out to examine consumer tolerance for rising concert ticket prices and to explore the factors that shape price thresholds in the live music industry. By integrating cultural, economic, and behavioral perspectives, the analysis contributes to a more nuanced understanding of why audiences continue to attend concerts despite substantial price increases, as well as where the limits of this tolerance may lie.

While the study draws on illustrative evidence from specific markets, including smaller national contexts, the core findings are conceptually generalisable. The mechanisms identified—such as the role of experiential value, emotional attachment, price segmentation, and income constraints—are not unique to any single country or market size. Existing international research supports the notion that live concerts function as experience goods across diverse cultural settings, suggesting that consumer price tolerance is shaped by similar psychological and economic processes globally. However, the precise level at which price thresholds occur is likely to vary depending on local income levels, cultural consumption patterns, and market structures. As such, the findings are best generalised at the level of mechanisms rather than absolute price points.

The results of this study are largely consistent with earlier research indicating that demand for concert tickets is relatively inelastic, particularly for high-profile artists and unique live experiences (Courty and Pagliero, 2012; Eckard and Smith, 2012). At the same time, the findings align with studies emphasizing heterogeneity among concertgoers, showing that price sensitivity differs across audience segments and demographic groups (Pompe et al., 2020). By explicitly focusing on consumer price thresholds, this paper extends prior work that has primarily examined price changes and revenue optimization, rather than identifying the points at which consumers disengage.

The integration of behavioral theories such as prospect theory and reservation price theory further supports existing evidence that consumer responses to ticket pricing are shaped by reference prices, perceived losses, and expectations formed through prior experiences (Kahneman and Tversky, 2013; Tereyagoglu et al., 2018). This helps explain why gradual price increases are often tolerated, while sudden or unexpected hikes may provoke strong negative reactions.

Although rising ticket prices are frequently attributed to declining revenues from recorded music and increased production costs, alternative explanations should also be considered. For instance, social dynamics such as fear of missing out (FOMO), status signaling, and social media amplification may encourage consumers to accept higher prices even when affordability is strained. In addition, limited supply—particularly for popular artists and venues—may artificially inflate prices beyond what would occur in a more competitive market. These factors suggest that consumer tolerance is influenced not only by individual willingness to pay but also by broader social and structural pressures that shape perceived value and urgency.

One of the key strengths of this paper lies in its interdisciplinary approach, combining insights from cultural studies, economics, and behavioral theory to address a complex and timely issue. By conceptualizing concerts as experience goods and linking this perspective to pricing mechanisms and consumer psychology, the study offers a comprehensive framework for understanding price tolerance in the live music industry.

However, the study also has limitations. The absence of primary empirical data restricts the ability to quantify price thresholds or test hypotheses statistically. In addition, while illustrative evidence from smaller markets provides valuable context, it cannot fully capture the diversity of global concert markets. These limitations suggest that the findings should be interpreted as conceptual and exploratory rather than definitive.

The findings have several practical implications for concert organizers, promoters, and policymakers. First, the heterogeneity of consumer price tolerance underscores the importance of segmented pricing strategies that preserve accessible entry-level tickets while allowing premium pricing for highly engaged audiences. Second, transparency in pricing and fee structures may help maintain consumer trust and reduce negative reactions to price increases. Finally, organizers should be mindful of long-term audience development, as consistently pricing out lower-income or younger consumers may undermine future demand.

From a policy perspective, concerns about affordability and access raise questions about the cultural inclusivity of live music. Measures aimed at regulating excessive resale markups or encouraging fair pricing practices may help mitigate exclusionary effects without undermining market efficiency.

The study highlights the need for further empirical research to test and refine the concept of consumer price thresholds. Future studies could employ surveys, experimental designs, or longitudinal data to identify specific price points at which attendance declines across different genres, markets, and demographic groups. Comparative research across countries and income levels would further enhance understanding of how local conditions shape consumer tolerance.

In response to the research question, this study finds that consumer tolerance for rising concert ticket prices is substantial but not unlimited. While emotional engagement, experiential value, and social motivations enable many consumers to accept higher prices, identifiable price thresholds exist beyond which attendance decreases. These thresholds are shaped by a combination of economic constraints, psychological reference points, and audience segmentation. Rather than a single breaking point, the evidence suggests multiple, segment-specific limits to price tolerance. Recognizing and addressing these limits is essential for ensuring the long-term sustainability, inclusivity, and cultural relevance of the live music industry.

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