

Sustainable Marketing Strategies for Concerts: A Business Ecosystem Perspective

Hongyun Wang

*School of International Studies, University of International Business and Economics, Beijing, China
astoria_wang@163.com*

Abstract. As China's concert market expands rapidly, the traditional ticket-sales-dependent model has proven structurally fragile. This study reconceptualizes the concert industry through the business ecosystem framework, arguing that sustainable development requires the coordinated value circulation among multiple interdependent actors rather than single-point revenue extraction. Mapping the concert ecosystem across upstream, midstream, and downstream layers, the study identifies three mechanisms through which ecosystem health drives sustainability: diversified monetization, long-term fan community retention, and intentional city-tourism symbiosis. Building on these mechanisms, a pre-event–in-event–post-event marketing framework is proposed, integrating dedicated hashtags, UGC-triggering experience design, and dual-track post-event content strategy. By shifting from a transaction-centric logic to an ecosystem-synergy logic, concert promoters can transform live concerts from isolated commercial events into a value system that circulates continuously and benefits all stakeholders. The study concludes that concert marketing is fundamentally the management of a self-reinforcing value loop, while cautioning that over-commercialization, experiential homogenization, and ticket scalping pose systemic risks to ecosystem integrity.

Keywords: concert industry, business ecosystem, sustainable marketing, value co-creation, fan engagement

1. Introduction

In recent years, China's concert market has remained persistently buoyant. According to the *2025 Live Music Performance Market Analysis Report* [1], large-scale concerts maintained strong growth momentum throughout 2025, with both box-office revenue and attendance reaching record highs: box-office receipts for large-scale concerts totaled RMB 29.558 billion, an increase of 13.7% year-on-year, while attendance approached 38 million, an increase of 30.8% year-on-year. Small-to-medium live music events (under 5,000 capacity) generated RMB 2.315 billion in revenue across 44,100 shows, attracting 8.87 million attendees. Taken together, the report characterizes the current trajectory as one towards a diversified, multi-tiered, and ecologically deepened consumption landscape. Yet this rapid expansion also exposes a structural vulnerability: most concerts still rely on a one-way transaction of "organizers sell tickets, audiences buy them"—revenue depends heavily on box-office receipts, fan relationships end when the show ends, and the spillover value of cultural

tourism struggles to flow back into the performance ecosystem. The industry urgently needs a more systematic perspective from which to explore pathways towards sustainable development.

This study poses three progressive questions: Which actors constitute the concert business ecosystem? How does the ecosystem influence the sustainable development of concerts? What marketing strategies can be derived from the ecosystem perspective?

The study adopts documentary analysis and case analysis methods, using business ecosystem theory [2] and the live music ecology value framework [3] as analytical tools.

Theoretically, this study extends ecosystem theory to the performing arts industry; practically, it offers concert organizers and city tourism authorities a set of "ecosystem-synergy"-oriented sustainable strategy recommendations.

2. The construction of the concert business ecosystem

The concept of the business ecosystem provides a powerful lens through which to reconceptualize the concert industry. Adner defines an ecosystem as "the alignment structure of the multilateral set of partners that need to interact in order for a focal value proposition to materialize" [2]. This departs fundamentally from the traditional linear supply chain logic: a concert's value proposition — an immersive, emotionally charged, collectively experienced live performance — cannot be delivered by any single actor working in isolation. Instead, it requires the coordinated participation of multiple interdependent stakeholders, each occupying a distinct yet interconnected position within a broader ecosystem [4]. The concert business ecosystem can be mapped across three interconnected layers: upstream, midstream, and downstream.

2.1. Upstream actors

Upstream actors provide the foundational inputs upon which the entire concert experience depends. Artists and their management agencies constitute the creative core, supplying the musical content, stage persona, and intellectual property (IP) that form the focal value proposition. Ticketing platforms, increasingly digital and data-driven, serve as the technological gateway. Venues — ranging from intimate livehouses to indoor gymnasiums and large-scale stadiums — provide the physical infrastructure that shapes capacity, acoustics, and atmosphere. These upstream elements are essential: if any one of them is removed, the concert cannot happen.

2.2. Midstream actors

Midstream actors perform the critical function of resource integration and experience orchestration. The promoter or event organizer occupies what Zhang et al. term the "structural hole" position [5]—the hub where information, capital, and resources converge and are redistributed. Stage production teams translate artistic vision into sensory reality through lighting, sound engineering, and set design. Brand sponsors inject financial resources while simultaneously leveraging the concert's audience for brand exposure. Notably, social media platforms function as midstream infrastructure rather than mere downstream channels: they enable real-time interaction among all ecosystem participants, from artist-fan engagement to sponsor-audience targeting [6].

2.3. Downstream actors

Downstream actors are simultaneously consumers and value co-creators—a duality central to the ecosystem perspective. Fans are not passive recipients of a prepackaged experience; they actively

generate user-generated content (UGC), drive word-of-mouth dissemination, and contribute the emotional energy that shapes the concert's atmosphere [7]. The downstream layer also encompasses merchandise and derivative products, which extend consumption beyond the event itself. Critically, an extended downstream network includes city tourism authorities, local hospitality businesses, and transportation providers—all of whom capture and contribute value via the bundled spillover effect of concerts and tourism.

2.4. The mutualistic nature of value flows

What distinguishes this tripartite structure from a conventional supply chain is the mutualistic nature of value flows among layers. As van der Hoeven et al. demonstrate in their study of urban live music ecologies, value in such systems is not extracted unidirectionally but co-produced and circulated among economic, social, cultural, and spatial dimensions [3]. This interdependence—rather than hierarchical control—is what qualifies the structure as an "ecosystem," and it is precisely this networked architecture that creates the conditions under which sustainability becomes possible.

3. How the ecosystem shapes sustainable development

3.1. From selling tickets to orchestrating an ecosystem

Under the traditional model, revenue depends almost entirely on ticket sales—a single income stream vulnerable to market fluctuations. The ecosystem model transforms this logic: by occupying the "structural hole" position and coordinating upstream, midstream, and downstream actors [5], promoters can capture value through multiple channels simultaneously—sponsorship, merchandise, digital licensing, and memorabilia. Werner et al. demonstrate that sustainable music events are characterized not by any single revenue source but by continuous value co-creation among promoters, audiences, and partners [7]. Watson provides quantitative support: social media engagement, streaming, and live music revenue exhibit positive co-evolution, suggesting online value creation feeds rather than cannibalizes offline returns [8]. A concert thus evolves from a one-off transaction into a multi-revenue-node within a value network.

3.2. From one-time attendees to long-term fan communities

In the traditional model, the fan journey ends when the concert ends. The ecosystem model rewrites this trajectory. A typical post-concert behavior chain illustrates this: a fan posts photos at a photo spot on a lifestyle platform, shares videoclips using the concert's hashtag, and joins a fan community for behind-the-scenes content. These actions extend the concert's commercial lifespan: posts function as free advertising, while hashtags aggregate visibility for sponsors. Ishwarya et al. report that only 30% of new users engage beyond the first month, highlighting the urgency of capturing attention during the post-concert window [6]. Yin et al. further show that attendees' social media sharing constitutes experiential value co-creation [9]. The economic logic is clear: acquiring new ticket buyers costs more than reactivating existing fans. Over multiple tour cycles, this retention effect lowers marketing costs while increasing fan lifetime value—a shift from transactional relationships to cumulative relational sustainability.

3.3. From accidental spillover to intentional city symbiosis

Concerts draw cross-border audiences, generating demand for hotels, restaurants, and retail. Altin et al. demonstrate, using mobile phone data, that megastar concerts significantly influence tourism flows [10]. Under the traditional model, these externalities benefit third parties without returning value to organizers. The ecosystem model internalizes them: through partnerships with city tourism authorities (co-branded packages), hospitality providers (bundled ticket-hotel offerings), and local businesses (themed consumption routes), spillover value is recaptured and reinvested. Mayday's Beijing concert illustrates this approach: photo spots—including floating spheres on a public park lake, interactive installations in shopping malls, and themed pop-up merchandise stores—created a distributed ecosystem of fan engagement that simultaneously channeled visitors into local hospitality, dining, and retail consumption while generating viral social media content.

4. Sustainable marketing strategies from the ecosystem perspective

Since the ecosystem's health depends on continuous value circulation, concert marketing must actively engineer and sustain this circulation. Rather than treating tactics as isolated gimmicks, this section organizes them along the concert lifecycle—pre-event, in-event, and post-event—to show how each activates a distinct segment of the value loop. This framing aligns with the four-stage model (Boarding, Engagement, Retention, Reinstall) of Ishwarya et al. [6], distributing marketing effort across the entire fan journey.

4.1. Pre-event: building momentum and storing energy

The pre-event phase corresponds to the "boarding" stage, where the objective is to convert latent interest into committed anticipation [6]. The first strategy is the dedicated hashtag. By creating a unique campaign tag, organizers aggregate dispersed fan conversations into a single, monitorable stream of visibility. Within the ecosystem, the hashtag functions as a brand-equity aggregator that simultaneously serves fans with a shared identity marker, sponsors with measurable exposure, and organizers with sentiment data. The second strategy is multi-channel promotional seeding: posting promotional materials and warm-up videos online, deploying large outdoor screens offline, and partnering with marketing accounts and media platforms to disseminate teaser content to targeted fan segments [6]. The third strategy is co-promotion with city tourism authorities—such as launching concert-travel bundled packages before ticket sales—which activates upstream-to-downstream value flows ahead of the event [10]. For example, online travel platforms such as Ctrip bundle concert tickets with hotel accommodations and attraction passes, seamlessly connecting performer value, tourism infrastructure, and consumer convenience—demonstrating how ecosystem coordination extends across multiple sectors.

4.2. In-event: experience and co-creation

The in-event phase corresponds to "engagement," aiming to design experiences fans will reproduce and share [6]. Beyond the core performance, most artists distribute complimentary gifts—typically featuring customized materials, light sticks, and artist-endorsed products—which embody the artist's thoughtfulness, signaling to fans that they are valued and appreciated. Photo spots serve as UGC infrastructure, and are engineered to trigger sharing across cognitive, emotional, physical, and social-interaction dimensions [9]. Onstage, artists may design encore segments or invite mystery

guests to deepen emotional intensity and strengthen the perceived value and social identity that mediate satisfaction and loyalty. These tactics transform attendees from passive consumers into active value co-creators, embodying the mechanism that Werner et al. identify as central to sustainable events [7].

4.3. Post-event: long-tail and circulation

The post-event phase spans "retention" and "reinstall," and it is here that sustainability is most directly realized. Content flows from two complementary sources. First, fans spontaneously upload photos and videos from the show, driven by the shareable experiences engineered in-event; this user-generated content extends organic reach at near-zero marginal cost, consistent with Watson's quantitative finding that social media activity positively co-evolves with live music revenue [8]. Second, official channels—the artist's studio, the promoter, and their partners—release their own curated content: professionally shot performance photographs and videos, recap short films combining onstage highlights with behind-the-scenes footage, and, in some cases, full-length documentaries produced after a tour concludes. This official content serves a dual function within the ecosystem: released while memory is freshest, it reactivates fans' emotional attachment, while simultaneously acting as a credible "impact signal" that reassures non-attendees and prospective sponsors of the concert's reach and quality.

The interplay between spontaneous fan content and polished official content amplifies word-of-mouth fermentation far beyond what either could achieve alone.

5. Conclusion

This report has reconceptualized concert marketing through the lens of the business ecosystem, arguing that a concert is not a standalone transactional event but part of a multilateral value network. Drawing on Adner's ecosystem framework and van der Hoeven et al.'s live music ecology model, it mapped the ecosystem across upstream, midstream, and downstream layers, and demonstrated that value flows among these actors are mutualistic rather than linear. It then identified three mechanisms—diversified monetization, sustained fan engagement, and city-tourism symbiosis—through which the ecosystem structure generates sustainability, defined here as the uninterrupted circulation of value among interdependent actors.

The central conclusion is that, from the ecosystem perspective, the essence of concert marketing is the cultivation of a self-reinforcing value loop among multiple stakeholders. The strategic framework proposed here operationalizes this loop along the concert lifecycle: pre-event momentum-building, in-event experience and co-creation and post-event long-tail circulation. Together, these strategies convert a discrete single event into a continuous value cycle, in which post-event engagement serves as the momentum for subsequent performances.

This study has several limitations. First, it relies primarily on documentary reviews and case-based analysis, and lacks primary quantitative data to validate the proposed mechanisms. Second, its illustrative cases are drawn largely from specific markets, which limits the generalizability of its conclusions. Third, the concert ecosystem is evolving rapidly alongside changes in digital platforms and consumer behavior, so the timeliness of the proposed strategies warrants ongoing observation. Future research could employ empirical survey or big-data methods to test these relationships across diverse cultural and market contexts.

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