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Research Article

Approaches to Peak Load Management in the Operational Activities of International Logistics Operators

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Abstract

This article examines approaches to peak load management in the operational activities of international logistics operators under conditions of high demand volatility, digitalization, and increasing supply chain complexity. The study is conducted as a systematic review and analytical synthesis of scientific publications focused on demand forecasting, resource allocation, supply chain integration, and the application of digital technologies in logistics. Particular attention is given to interpreting peak loads as a systemic state arising from misalignment between demand, resources, and capacity, as well as to analyzing the relationship between digital controllability and network coordination. A comparative analysis of various load management approaches is carried out, including forecasting, optimization, and integration models, along with an assessment of their impact on the resilience of logistics systems. It is established that the isolated application of individual tools does not ensure effective overload prevention without their integration into a coordinated management loop and supply chain interaction framework. An original adaptive model for peak load management is proposed, reflecting the transition from imbalance detection to structural reconfiguration of flows and system stabilization. The findings make it possible to conceptualize the resilience of a logistics system as a systemic property determined by the level of coordination, integration, and dynamic adaptability. The article may be of interest to researchers in logistics and supply chain management, as well as practitioners engaged in the digital transformation of operational activities.

Keywords:

peak loads, logistics, supply chains, load management, digitalization, integration, resilience, demand forecasting.

INTRODUCTION

Modern international logistics systems operate under conditions of increasing demand volatility, accelerated digitalization, the expansion of e-commerce, and a high degree of supply chain interdependence. Under these conditions, the resilience of operators is determined not so much by the scale of resources as by the system's ability to interpret environmental changes, coordinate processes, and adapt decisions to the evolving density of flows [9]. Traditional rigid management models are gradually being replaced by flexible and dynamic approaches. In this context, peak loads emerge as a complex disruption of operational equilibrium, accompanied by infrastructure overload, increased order fulfillment times, and a decline in service levels, affecting the entire system of interrelated processes.

The formation of such states is driven by a combination of volatile demand, infrastructural constraints, and behavioral factors, including sudden spikes in consumption.

The aim of the study is to develop and theoretically substantiate an adaptive model of peak load management in international logistics by explaining the mechanisms through which demand signals, resource allocation, and network coordination shape system resilience and enable the prevention of overloads. To achieve this aim, the following tasks are addressed:

– to systematise contemporary approaches to peak load management in logistics;

– to identify the mechanisms of imbalance formation between demand, resources, and capacity;

– to determine the role of digital technologies in enhancing flow visibility and predictability;

– to identify the coordination mechanisms that enable the transformation of information into synchronised actions.

The research hypothesis is that peak load management in international logistics is determined not by the volume of available resources, but by the structure of management, the level of coordination, and the system's ability to adapt to changing flows. Under insufficient coordination, overload emerges as a systemic imbalance, whereas coordinated mechanisms enable its containment and redistribution.

The mechanism is demonstrated whereby demand signals, through interpretation and coordination, determine the redistribution of flows and influence system stability. On this basis, an adaptive model of peak load management has been developed, oriented toward structural reconfiguration of flows. Unlike existing studies that examine forecasting, optimisation, or resource allocation separately, this research conceptualises load management as an integrated and coordinated process and explains the internal relationships between visibility, coordination, and adaptive response mechanisms.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study is based on methods of theoretical analysis of academic publications, categorical classification of approaches to peak load management, and comparative analysis of the relationships between demand forecasting, resource allocation, network coordination, and logistics system resilience. The main focus is on identifying the mechanisms through which imbalances between demand, resources, and capacity emerge and propagate across supply chains, as well as on interpreting peak loads as a systemic state rather than a local operational deviation. Particular attention is given to analysing load management as a coordinated process of signal interpretation and adaptive flow regulation within a digitally enabled logistics environment.

The study was conducted as a systematic review of open-access scientific publications from 2022 to 2025, published in international peer-reviewed journals and academic databases. The literature search was carried out in Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, SpringerLink, and MDPI using combinations of the following keywords: "peak load", "demand surge", "demand volatility", "logistics", "supply chain", "demand forecasting", "resource allocation", "inventory management", "route optimization", "supply chain integration", and "resilience", with the application of AND/OR operators. The sample included English-language publications containing empirical results or analytical reviews addressing forecasting, resource distribution, coordination mechanisms, and resilience in logistics systems. Studies focused exclusively on narrow technical optimisation problems without managerial interpretation, as well as works lacking a connection between analytical results and decision-making processes, were excluded.

At the initial screening stage, 52 publications were identified. After removing duplicates and reviewing titles and abstracts, studies that did not correspond to the research objectives were excluded. Based on the full-text analysis, 14 studies meeting the research criteria were included in the final sample.

The analytical procedure involved consecutive stages of source selection, duplicate removal, thematic filtering, full-text analysis, and categorical systematisation of the findings. The analysis identified the following groups of factors: demand uncertainty and forecasting accuracy, resource allocation mechanisms, coordination across supply chain nodes, and system resilience parameters. It was found that forecasting models influence the accuracy of demand estimation but do not ensure effective load management in the absence of coordination mechanisms. Resource allocation affects the distribution of load across nodes but may amplify imbalances under fragmented decision-making. Network coordination determines the system's ability to transform information into synchronised actions. Resilience emerges as a result of alignment between analytical stages and operational execution. Digital technologies enhance visibility and speed of response, but their effectiveness depends on integration within the overall system structure.

The limitation of the sample is associated with its relatively narrow size and the predominance of conceptual and review-based studies. A significant proportion of logistics research focuses on isolated optimisation tasks, while systemic interpretations of peak loads and coordination mechanisms remain fragmented. The selected studies cover key aspects of forecasting, resource allocation, coordination, digitalisation, and resilience in logistics systems.

The results obtained were used to systematise the factors determining peak load management effectiveness and to develop an original adaptive model reflecting the relationships between demand signals, resource distribution, coordination mechanisms, and the resilience of logistics systems.

RESULTS

In recent years, peak load management in international logistics has increasingly been determined not by isolated measures, but by the combination of digital controllability and network coordination. The reviewed studies indicate that resilience is associated with the observability, predictability, and coordination of logistics flows [1]. At the same time, technological and organizational layers do not operate in isolation. Digital solutions enhance the accuracy and speed of response, while the structure of the supply chain determines whether this response can be implemented without losses at the interfaces between its elements [7].

Digitalization transforms the very logic of logistics management. Its significance lies not only in the automation of operations, but also in shifting managerial intervention to earlier stages, when overload has not yet entered an explicit phase. Under conditions of demand variability, this distinction becomes critical. If the system detects a problem after the accumulation of queues and capacity shortages, management becomes compensatory in nature. If a deviation is identified at the moment of its formation, it becomes possible to redistribute flows proactively [4]. Table 1 presents the quantitative effects of applying artificial intelligence and technological optimization in logistics.

Table 1. Quantitative effects of AI and technological optimization in logistics (Compiled based on source [3])

Application area	Indicator	Value	Operational effect
AI in SCM	Cost reduction	15%	Higher operational efficiency
AI in SCM	Inventory reduction	35%	Better resource utilization
AI in SCM	Service improvement	65%	Higher service level
Advanced technologies	Efficiency growth	up to 25%	Higher productivity
Advanced technologies	Cost reduction	up to 31%	Lower operating costs

The data in Table 1 indicate that digital technologies simultaneously affect multiple parameters of resilience. Cost reduction reflects more precise utilization of logistics resources. Inventory reduction indicates a decrease in misalignment between demand and reserve allocation. The increase in service level captures improvements in execution quality even under heightened system pressure [3]. This combination is particularly important for analyzing peak loads, as it is precisely during periods of stress that the balance between cost, speed, and resource availability is typically disrupted.

It is also significant that digital tools influence both execution stages and preliminary decision selection. More accurate forecasting models reduce demand estimation errors and lower the probability of incorrect capacity allocation even before order processing begins [14]. This represents a fundamental shift. Overload is no longer viewed as an event to be mitigated, but as a state that can be prevented through the quality of information and the speed of its interpretation [8].

This logic makes flow transparency an independent condition of resilience. Under high order density, simply accelerating operations is insufficient. It becomes necessary to reduce the time between signal and action and to ensure alignment between forecasting, routing, warehouse processing, and inventory distribution [10]. Without such coherence, digitalization remains partial. Therefore, the primary effect of digital technologies lies not in acceleration per se, but in enhancing the controllability of the logistics system.

If digital technologies make flows visible and predictable, integration determines whether the system can transform this information into coordinated action. Under peak load conditions, this capability becomes decisive. Locally efficient solutions do not ensure resilience if gaps persist in signal transmission and decision execution between internal units, suppliers, warehouses, and customer channels [6]. Table 2 presents the quantitative significance of supply chain integration.

Table 2. Significance of supply chain integration (Compiled based on source [2])

Indicator	Value	Interpretation
R^2 of operational performance	80,4%	Strong dependence on integration level
Unexplained variance	19,6%	Effect of external factors
R^2 of financial performance	84,7%	Link between integration and stability
Unexplained variance	15,3%	Additional influences

The data in Table 2 show that integration explains a significant share of both operational and financial performance. This indicates a direct relationship between process alignment and the system's ability to maintain stable functioning under changing load conditions.

The same pattern is observed in distributed inventory management models, where network structure influences decision quality no less than the applied algorithm. Under peak load conditions, the problem arises not only from forecast inaccuracy, but also from how the network allocates inventory across nodes [11]. Isolated decisions amplify local shortages, whereas coordinated decisions enable internal balancing. Figure 1 presents a comparison of accuracy across different replenishment structures.

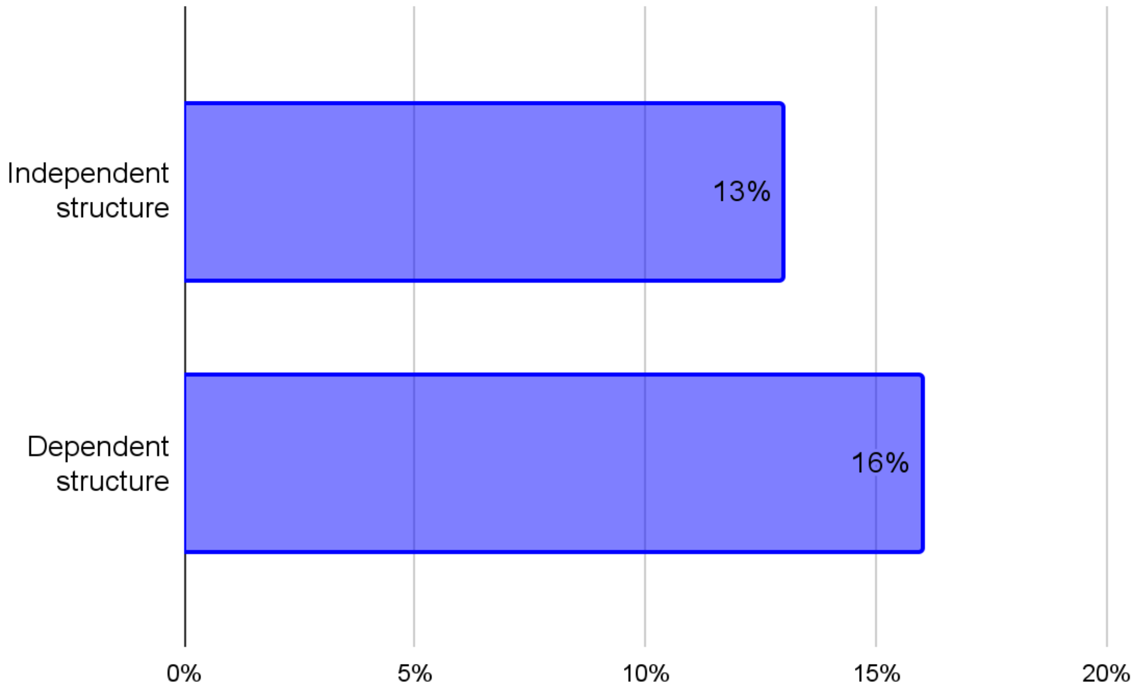

Figure 1. Accuracy improvement of the data-driven approach under different replenishment structures (compiled based on source [12])

The diagram makes this relationship explicit. Higher accuracy in a dependent structure indicates that coordination between nodes improves the quality of resource allocation under conditions of demand variability. What matters here is not the numerical difference itself, but its operational meaning. An independent network processes load in a fragmented manner, whereas a dependent network handles it as a unified flow. This is why, as demand increases, a coordinated structure is less prone to a sharp escalation of internal imbalances.

Overall, the presented results demonstrate that the resilience of a logistics system emerges at the intersection of digital controllability and network integration. The former determines the accuracy, speed, and completeness of the signal, while the latter defines whether this signal can be translated into coordinated action without loss of time and resources. In the absence of either element, overload retains a systemic character and transitions from a latent to an explicit state, affecting an increasing number of supply chain nodes.

DISCUSSION

The obtained results are consistent with studies [1, 7, 15], which emphasize that logistics resilience depends on coordination and information integration. However, unlike these works, the present study interprets peak loads as structural imbalance and proposes adaptive reconfiguration as a management mechanism.Contemporary research in logistics demonstrates sustained interest in the problem of peak load management. However, a significant share of existing approaches still treats overload as a local deviation rather than a systemic state. This framing creates a limited managerial perspective. In this context, a revision of load management logic toward a systemic interpretation becomes critically important.

Existing models systematically underestimate the nature of overload. The reactive character of management results in delayed intervention, where decisions are made only after overload has already formed. Under conditions of high flow density, such logic becomes structurally inefficient, as it does not prevent the emergence of imbalance but merely captures its consequences. Local optimization reproduces the same effect. Optimizing individual nodes without accounting for interconnections leads to load redistribution rather than its reduction.

Under these conditions, a conceptual shift in load management emerges. Management ceases to be viewed as a reaction to overload and is instead interpreted as a process of flow coordination. The key capability becomes the system's ability to redistribute flows before critical accumulation occurs.

It is fundamentally important that high forecasting accuracy does not guarantee resilience. Without mechanisms of network coordination, accurate forecasts merely accelerate local decision-making, which may further intensify imbalance. This is where the distinction between digital controllability and structural coordination becomes evident: the former ensures visibility, while the latter enables action. Figure 2 presents the author's model of peak load management, reflecting this transition from deviation detection to structural system adaptation.

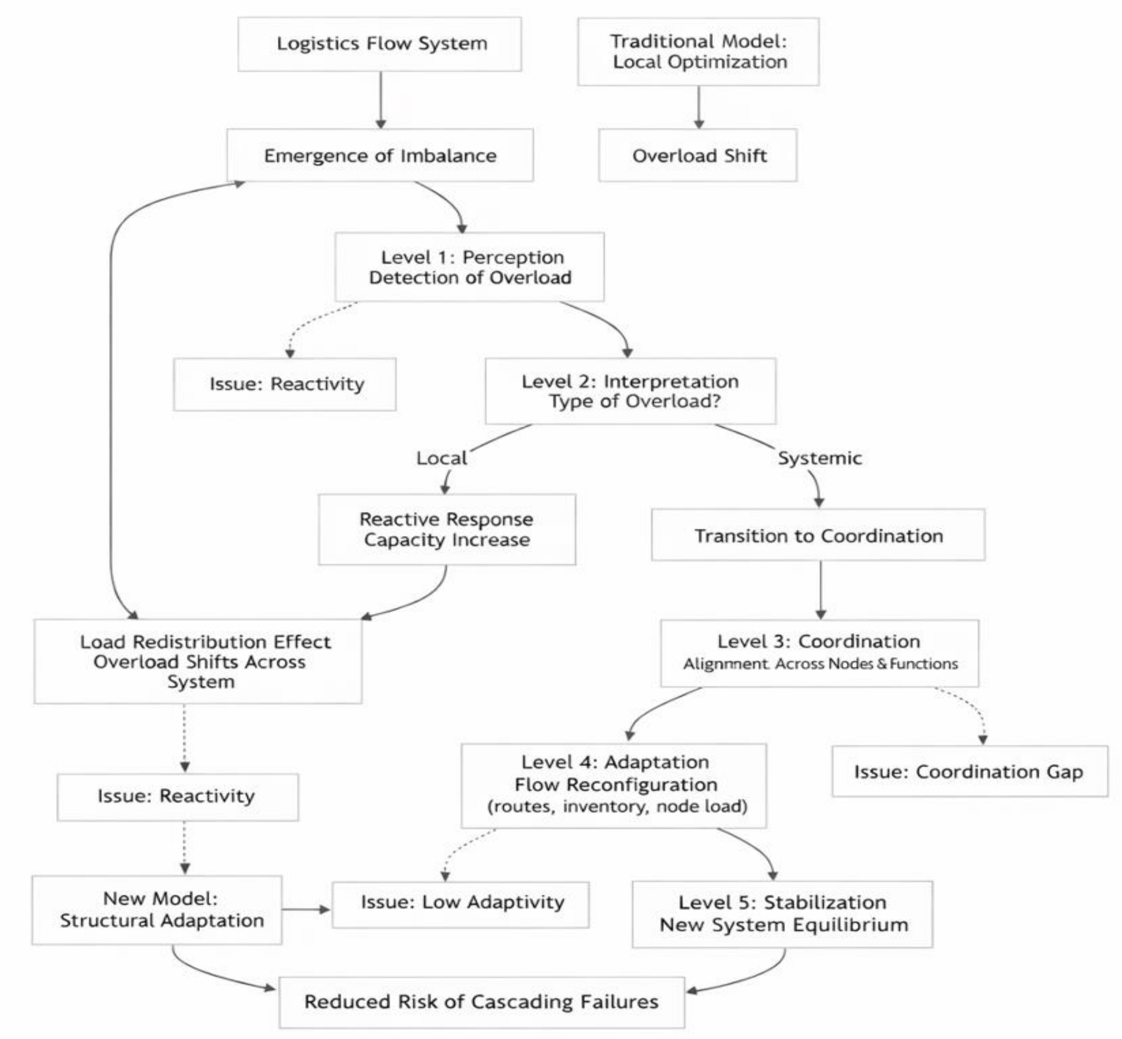

Figure 2. Adaptive Structural Model of Peak Load Management in Logistics Systems (Author's development)

The essence of the proposed model is that peak load management cannot rely on isolated tools such as forecasting or optimization. Demand signals, capacity limits, inventory, and infrastructure load must be integrated into a single analytical environment. Only in this case does it become possible to identify not just individual overloads, but also the relationships between them and their underlying causes. Data collection forms the first layer of the system, but by itself it does not ensure control. It becomes meaningful at the interpretation stage, where deviations between demand, resources, and capacity are classified. Errors at this stage lead to incorrect decisions and amplify imbalance.

The system then moves to the coordination stage, where information is transformed into synchronized actions across warehouses, transportation, suppliers, and distribution channels. Flows are treated as a unified system rather than a set of isolated operations. This is followed by adaptation, where orders are redistributed, routes are adjusted, inventory is reallocated, and capacity utilization is realigned. Importantly, the system does not compensate for overload but changes its structure before it accumulates. The final stage is stabilization, where a new equilibrium is established and the coordinated functioning of the entire network is maintained.

The key feature of the model is that it eliminates fragmentation in management. Forecasting, digitalization, and optimization do not operate separately but function as a unified control loop. The critical factor is not the accuracy of individual algorithms, but the coherence of the entire system. Without this, even highly accurate forecasts do not prevent overload but merely accelerate incorrect decisions. In the absence of alignment between interpretation, coordination, and adaptation, the system does not eliminate imbalance but simply shifts it between nodes.

CONCLUSION

The conducted analysis demonstrates that peak load management in international logistics cannot be reduced to the application of individual tools such as forecasting, optimization, or digitalization.

The results make it possible to refine the proposed hypothesis. The resilience of a logistics system indeed depends not on the volume of available resources, but on the structure of management and the consistency of actions among its elements. Digital technologies and analytical models improve forecasting accuracy and accelerate responses to demand fluctuations; however, their impact remains limited. It becomes significant only when the generated information is transformed into coordinated managerial decisions and implemented at the system-wide level.

The integration of logistics processes becomes the key factor. When coordination is present, it becomes possible to redistribute flows, balance loads, and prevent critical accumulation. In this system, the importance lies not in individual tools, but in the coordinated functioning of all elements, enabling the transition from deviation detection to proactive management.

The practical significance of the results lies in shifting the managerial focus from resource expansion and local optimization toward the formation of an adaptive system structure. Peak load management is conceptualized as a process of dynamic flow reconfiguration, including early identification of imbalance, its interpretation, coordination of actions, and subsequent stabilization. The proposed model may serve as a methodological foundation for developing management systems under conditions of high demand volatility and increasing complexity of logistics networks. Future research directions include empirical validation of the model in real-world logistics systems and the development of quantitative indicators for assessing the levels of coordination, adaptability, and resilience in supply chains. The proposed adaptive structural model extends existing approaches to peak load management by emphasizing coordination-driven resilience. The model can serve as a methodological framework for designing adaptive logistics systems under high demand volatility. Future research should focus on empirical validation and the development of quantitative indicators of coordination and adaptability.

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