TRIPLE J'S HOTTEST 100 DECODED

While music fans around the nation debate which song will win the Triple J hottest 100 every January, a new study helps shed light on the types of songs that have an intrinsic advantage in the poll.

An ongoing study by La Trobe University economist Dr Liam Lenten aims to identify the characteristics of songs and the artists that tend to do better in the poll, relative to the benchmark of their ARIA chart performance.

Dr Lenten and his co-author, Dr Jordi McKenzie from the University of Sydney, used econometric modelling and regression techniques to estimate models from data on the 1,800 songs that made the Hottest 100 since the inaugural vote.

Advantageous characteristics arise from voting biases of the general public, in a similar manner to well-known voting biases in popular votes in other arts-related competitions and even general elections.

Promotion and airplay on the station is an advantage, as specified by whether the artist is touring on the Big Day Out festival (which occurs during voting) and whether the song had been on featured 'album of the week' during that year.

Early alphabetical ordering of the song also appears to provide an advantage, due largely to the nature of the on-line voting system; however, alphabetical ordering of the artist name does not make a difference. And since Triple J purposely promotes local acts, it is no surprise that Australian artists are favoured, although perhaps surprisingly, so are US artists.

More controversially, there is evidence that voters also prefer predominantly male artists, reminiscent of the 2009 controversy when no single female artist finished in the Hottest 100 of all-time. Other factors, such as whether the artist was solo or whether the song was collaboration between artists, do not seem to matter.

Factors that may matter include the timing of release of the song throughout the year, and the amount of previous success of the artist in the Hottest 100. Miscellaneous events can also make a difference, such as death of a band member. The only identified disadvantage was if the song was a cover version.

Lenten concedes that the models only explain 15 per cent of the variation in Hottest 100 success. 'Unfortunately, when one is dealing with something as personal and diverse as musical tastes, it is difficult to produce a model that can forecast reliably which song is going to win,' Lenten says.

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