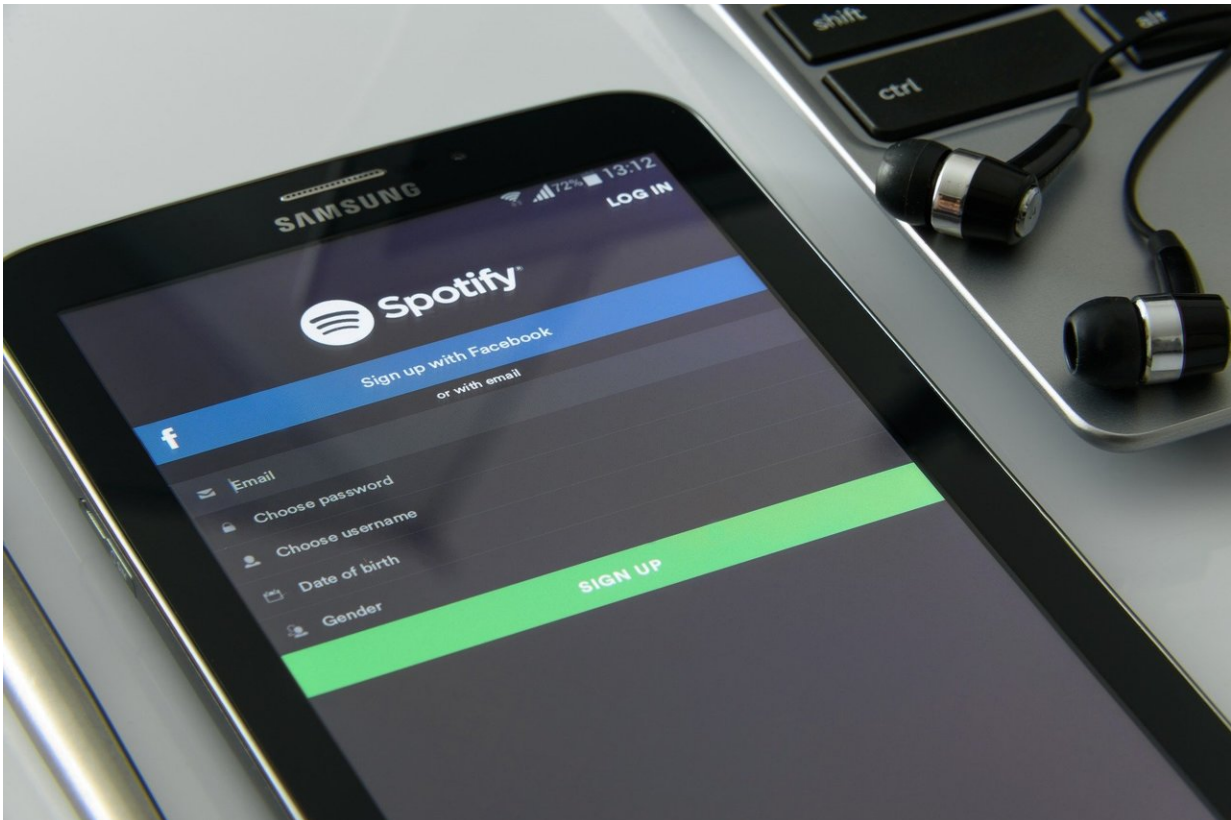


Spotify is powerful. Is it biased?

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Research published in the *International Journal of Industrial Organization* found that independent-label music and female artists benefited most from an appearance on Spotify's New Music Friday playlist, which is a curated ranked list and is not based on stream counts. Overall, more than 5,700 songs assigned to more than 14,500 top 20

slots on the weekly New Music Friday playlist in 2017 were examined.

Researchers found that by comparing ranks to eventual streaming performances of songs:

- About half of the relationship between curator ranking and eventual streaming is caused by the song's rank on the playlist;
- Independent labels rank better than they performed streaming-wise, receiving an average boost of two ranks on the playlist; and
- To a lesser extent, music by women received better ranks than their eventual on-platform streaming performances seemed to warrant, receiving a boost of 1.4 ranks.

"Despite challenges that independent-label artists and women face in the [music industry](#), Spotify's New Music curation appears to favor them," said Carlson School Professor and co-author Joel Waldfogel. "After accounting for the curators' playlist ranks, songs by independent label artists stream less, indicating bias against major-label music."

Researchers state these findings only apply to Spotify's New Music Friday list and not to other existing lists. Further, they caution this bias in favor of independent label artists and women in New Music Friday playlists does not address the challenges these groups face. For instance, streams for music by women account for about a quarter of total streams, a share that is low compared to the number of women listening, among musicians and in the population as a whole. Instead, the takeaway is New Music Friday does not compound the challenges these groups face in the music industry.

Additionally, in a forthcoming paper in the *Journal of Industrial Economics*, Waldfogel and Luis Aguiar examined streams and playlist additions to major playlists at Spotify during 2017. What they found is that when music is added to or dropped from playlists like Today's Top

Hits or Viva Latino, streams of these songs jump up or down substantially.

"Given the time that songs spend on these lists and the payments artists and their labels receive per stream, the impact of making these lists can be worth \$100,000 in payments from Spotify alone," said Waldfoegel.

"About a quarter of the total streams of songs making the biggest playlists is driven directly by having made the lists."

Further, the most-followed playlists tend to promote music by already-established artists. Waldfoegel and Aguiar determined that "about half of the relationship between curator ranking and eventual streaming is caused by the ranking." So, being ranked #1 on the U.S. New Music Friday list adds streams worth \$77,000.

More information: Luis Aguiar et al, Playlisting favorites: Measuring platform bias in the music industry, *International Journal of Industrial Organization* (2021). [DOI: 10.1016/j.ijindorg.2021.102765](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijindorg.2021.102765)

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