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Professional vs. consumer discourse communities: Comparative genre analysis of online music reviews

Communautés discursives professionnelles vs communautés discursives de consommateurs : analyse comparative du genre des critiques musicales en ligne

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PLAN

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TEXTE

I would like to thank two anonymous reviewers and Professor Krystyna Warchał for their insightful comments on the previous versions of the paper.

Introduction

1 The advent of the Internet has contributed to the emergence of digital genres that pose a challenge to the genre analysis framework, which initially focused on texts employing solely textual resources (Stein and Giltrow, 2009). The migration of genres from print to digital spaces has redefined authorship dynamics. While print genres were historically shaped by professionals, nonprofessionals participated through local newspapers and independent publications. However, their reach was limited by distribution issues. In contrast, digital genres develop in open, participatory environments. This stems from the fact that the Internet is also conducive to the creation of spaces accommodating both consumer and professional discourse communities.

2 Professional music criticism on the web, published by outlets such as Pitchfork, Rolling Stone and NME, plays a pivotal role in shaping critical discourse within the music industry. These reviews typically offer comprehensive evaluations of albums, singles, and live performances. By referring to established music genre conventions, technical aspects, and historical context (Walker, 2024), professional reviews have the capacity to legitimize particular artists. The legitimization unfolds in the review text and is further strengthened by features such as Pitchfork's "BEST NEW MUSIC" label as well as numerical or star scores. Due to their prestige and institutional support, professional music reviews still serve as an important reference point for both audiences and creators. Simultaneously, consumer-generated reviews have proliferated across participatory platforms including YouTube, Reddit and RateYourMusic. Characterized by their informal tone, these reviews are written by consumers who tend to be music fans. In contrast to the analytical rigour of professional criticism, consumer reviews privilege authenticity, relatability, and affective response, thereby expanding the discursive space surrounding musical texts. The coexistence of professional and consumer music criticism on the web underscores the complexity of evaluative discourse in digital environments. While professional reviews offer institutionally sanctioned critique, consumer reviews articulate experiential perspectives. In tandem, these forms of authorship contribute to a dynamic ecosystem in

which music is actively interpreted, contested, and recontextualized across global digital platforms. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to juxtapose professional and consumer online music reviews by showing their rhetorical structure as well as interfaces, interactions and differences between the discourse communities producing them. First, the genre of online music review will be described within the framework of Bhatia's (2016) Critical Genre Analysis. Secondly, a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the rhetorical structure of the reviews will be conducted. Finally, interfaces, interactions and differences between the two discourse communities will be elaborated on in more detail.

1. The online music review genre

1.1. Critical genre analysis of the online music review

3 There is a plethora of various music-related genres on the web ranging from music blogs through official band websites to music reviews. Music reviews form a genre chain corresponding to the album rollout. The album rollout typically starts with a single serving as a preview of the album. It is followed by an album release. The rollout usually ends with live performances either in the form of a big scale tour or several concerts. Albums represent a significant body of work and receive detailed coverage on platforms such as Rolling Stone, Pitchfork and NME. Single reviews are less frequently published as they tend to be devoted to major releases and chart-topping tracks. Concert reviews are not published as frequently as album reviews. Since album review is the most prevalent genre out of the three on the web and since it has received little scholarly attention, it constitutes the subject of the present study.

4 The study of genre has undergone profound changes since its inception. The origins of genre analysis were tightly associated with demystifying the structure of academic texts to English learners (Swales, 1990). The approach consisting in dissecting texts into rhetorical units was then adopted to deconstruct non-academic genres such as business writing (Bhatia, 1993).

5 Genre analysis consists in establishing the rhetorical structure of a particular genre of texts by identifying the smallest communicative units (steps) which can then be grouped into larger units (moves). Examples of steps include *background of the artist* and *background of album creation*, which can be grouped into a move of *situating the album*. This can be exemplified by a recent study pertaining to genre analysis of philosophical texts which helped account for the structure of the genre by highlighting its most salient features (Lucas and Lucas, 2024). The results of such studies highlight textual dynamics between function (the communicative goal) and form (the internal organization) of texts.

6 Recent years have seen this approach being employed to both discourse and genre analysis of other written genres (Ho, 2023; Kathpalia, 2022). The main purpose of this kind of analysis is to deconstruct different types of discourse into transparent moves and steps and subsequently decode the way discourse communities write. Because they are underresearched in comparison to academic text types, non-academic genres require extensive research with the aim of creating or revising existing methodological frameworks. Internet genres have become an integral part of our lives since the beginning of the 21st century (Stein and Giltrow, 2009). While online book and film reviews have been analyzed through the lens of genre analysis (Chik and Taboada, 2020; De Jong and Burgers, 2013; Taboada, 2011), online music reviews have not received much scholarly attention in this respect. This may stem from the fact that because of their ephemerality, music and sound are a challenge to describe and evaluate. Musical works develop over time, with acoustic elements fading as they are heard, as opposed to static visual or textual media. Even though recordings provide a certain degree of permanence, the experience of interpretation is still dynamic and influenced by factors such as auditory memory and listening environments. A rare instance of a study on music reviews is a diachronic genre analysis of record reviews published in an academic journal of classical music reviews *Musical Times* (Ha, 2011), which involved a sample of 40 reviews (18 900 words). The author focused on texts written within four periods of time between 1921 and 1995 to capture the expansion of the gramophone market over time. She devised a codebook encompassing four moves. De Jong and Burgers (2013) compared

professional and consumer film reviews, focusing on the frequency of rhetorical elements. They established that critics tend to describe films in more detail while consumers tend to place more emphasis on their evaluation as well as alluding to personal experiences. A particularly interesting contribution to the field is a monograph on persuasive genres in old and new media (Kathpalia, 2022). In this volume, Kathpalia (2022) explores a wide array of review genres such as book blurbs, book and film reviews, and last but not least product reviews. Each of these genres is analyzed in a twofold manner, i.e., in terms of its conventional and digital form. Thus, Kathpalia (2022) juxtaposes traditional blurbs with digital ones, printed film reviews with digital ones, and the other genres accordingly. Apart from providing an analysis of the scaffolding of the genres, she delves deeply into genre hybridity and multi-level genre analysis of texts, as well as situates the genres in a broader context by employing the Critical Genre Analysis framework devised by Bhatia (2016).

7 Despite the pivotal role that genre analysis plays in disassembling texts into the smallest meaningful units, it has received criticism due to its seemingly tunnel-vision approach. Critics point out that certain instances of genre analysis are limited to the creation of lists of moves and steps that encourage an overly formulaic view of genres. This criticism was addressed by situating genres within a particular context or environment they belong to and operate in, within the framework of Critical Genre Analysis (Bhatia, 2016). This approach helps one better understand the choices behind particular genres that are dictated by their habitus, as no genre functions in a vacuum. Apart from the genre environment, genres are shaped by discourse communities. It is these discourse communities that ultimately mould the texts in order to achieve particular communicative goals. Drawing on Swales' (2016) *Reflections on the Concept of Discourse Community*, both professional and consumer music reviewers may be viewed as distinct discourse communities. According to Swales' revised framework, a discourse community is characterized by eight elements: 1) a broadly agreed set of goals, 2) mechanisms of intercommunication, 3) participatory mechanisms, 4) genre use, 5) specific lexis, 6) a threshold level of expertise, 7) silential relations, and 8) horizons of expectation (Swales, 2016: 8-10). Both professional and lay reviewers fulfil these criteria, albeit in distinct

ways. Professional critics share the goal of producing culturally resonant music criticism, communicate through editorial channels and published reviews, and exchange insights grounded in journalistic and aesthetic traditions. Their use of formal genres, such as longform single, album and performance reviews, is supported by a specialized vocabulary and a high level of professional expertise. Implicit norms, such as tone, structure, and evaluative rigour, govern their writing, while readers anticipate a certain depth and style, reflecting shared horizons of expectation. In contrast, consumers pursue the communal goal of cataloguing and discussing music, interacting through forums, comment threads, and user-generated lists. Their genres such as short reviews are more informal, but still recognizable and consistent. While many users lack formal expertise, the consumers foster a kind of grassroots knowledge, where credibility is earned through consistent engagement, deep listening, and community validation. Silential norms emerge around what counts as a "good" review or a meaningful rating, and expectations around authenticity, niche discovery, and stylistic voice shape how users engage with one another. Despite differences in professionalism and editorial control, both groups exhibit the core features of discourse communities.

8 Apart from underscoring the importance of discourse communities in Critical Genre Analysis, Bhatia (2016: 69-70) introduces a multiperspective and multidimensional analysis that enables one to situate a particular genre in a broader context. It encompasses features such as the communicative purpose, discursive space, nature of content, participants, medium, style as well as a network of interdiscursively relevant genres. These seven aspects will be elaborated on in the following sentences to situate the online music review genre. Hence, the first question that should be answered is: What is the communicative purpose of an album review? Expert and lay reviews share the same communicative purpose, which is to provide a review of a music album. It is important to mention that initially, album reviews were published in print only but now they have also migrated to the web as a result of remediation (Pérez-Llantada and Luzón, 2022). The original purpose of an album review was to provide a balanced evaluation. Critic reviews should strive for objectivity as they represent a disinterested genre that

should provide a balanced evaluation (Shaw, 2006). Walker (2024: 2) points out that criticism is not confined to evaluation; rather than being merely a form of assessment, criticism encompasses multiple elements such as "describing a song (album, band, genre, or performance), interpreting its meaning, analyzing its structure and composition, evaluating its worth, and/or placing it in its proper historical or cultural context". Consumers, on the other hand, provide very polarized evaluations as a result of which these reviews resemble word-of-mouth recommendations.

9 In terms of the discursive space, the second feature proposed by Bhatia (2016), album reviews have to be compliant with the policies of websites they are posted on. Therefore, they have to observe spatial constraints that may be imposed by the layout of the websites. The nature of content, i.e., the third feature enumerated in the multiperspective and multidimensional analysis, depends on several various aspects, but in the corpus of online music reviews, a noteworthy factor was the music genre of an album. For example, in electronic album reviews more attention is devoted to the instrumentals, whereas very little space is taken up by the lyrics description due to very short or no lyrics featured on electronic albums. This aligns with Kathpalia's (2022) study where she showed that depending on book subgenres (romance, etc.), varying amounts of textual space is devoted to the description of various elements of the plot. As far as participants are concerned, professional writers and critics write expert reviews while consumer reviews can be written by just about anyone. Due to the context collapse on the web, it is undoubtedly more challenging to define the target audience. Context collapse pertains to digital genres as they do not cater to a clearly designated and fairly uniform audience (Davis and Jurgenson, 2014). Instead, they can be appreciated by individuals with varying levels of expertise on a particular topic. It can be presumed, however, that both kinds of reviews are significant for consumers and critics but first and foremost for musicians. Lay reviews reflect the commercial success, whereas critic reviews are tantamount to critical acclaim. This point will be highlighted in the section related to the interfaces, interactions and differences between the specialized and non-specialized music reviewing communities. With regard to the medium, both lay and critic reviews are transmitted

through the Internet. The sixth aspect, which is style, varies with professional reviews which are more lexically creative and formal and consumer texts which are more informal. The last feature suggested by Bhatia (2016) is the network of interdiscursively relevant genres. It encompasses genres that may be useful when writing a music review as these genres may be reformulated to aid the creation of a review. Genres that can be integrated into reviews after reformulation and recontextualization are album announcements, interviews, single reviews, concert reviews and music lyrics. Music lyrics are often quoted in music reviews to situate the narrative presented in the album. Intertextuality can be identified in both expert and lay reviews, yet it is more prevalent in professional reviews where contributors are more willing to refer to longer excerpts of music lyrics or interviews.

Table 1: Comparison of professional and consumer discourse communities with respect to several situational variables

	profes- sional reviewers	consumer reviewers
power differential between the author and the audience	yes	no
remuneration	yes	no
responsibility	yes	no
word-of-mouth recommendations	no	yes
anonymity	no	yes
production circumstances	revisions and editing	spontaneity

10 Despite the same overarching communicative purpose of online music reviews, there is a plethora of differences stemming from situational variables between the two discourse communities (Table 1). Naturally, this juxtaposition focuses on opposite ends of the spectrum. There will be cases that fall along the continuum rather than into two categories, for example influencers or blog writers. However, the analysis of features displayed by these opposites may help analyze intermediate cases in future studies. In the professional reviewer–readership dynamic, there is a power differential (Csomay and Crawford, 2024). Music critics professionally engage in review

writing and hence have more knowledge in the field. In lay reviews, there is no such or very little such differential between the writer and the audience, as it resembles a situation of friends recommending an album to one another. What may point to a slight differential is when a seasoned fan of a particular artist has more knowledge on their work than casual listeners. Some consumers are likely to be more knowledgeable on a specific artist as opposed to a professional music critic who may know less about one artist but more about the musical landscape as a whole. As a result, critics find it easier to contextualize certain albums and put them into perspective against the historical backdrop and other albums. Additionally, many consumers belong to a dedicated fanbase and as a result have a personal attachment to the artist and their œuvre. By contrast, even if a professional reviewer is a fan of a particular artist, they should not divulge it in the review, as it could be construed as biased.

11 What varies in these two situations are also the production circumstances (Biber and Conrad, 2009: 65). Numerous revisions and editing are bound to be made to a text prepared by a professional contributor whose earnings hinge on the quality of submitted texts. Consumer reviewers post their more spontaneous reactions to albums for which they do not receive any kind of remuneration. Owing to this, consumer reviews tend to be more emotionally charged, with frequent instances of swear words. Expert reviews are meant to be disinterested genres offering a balanced account of the reviewed object (Kathpalia, 2022; Shaw, 2006). Professional contributors place their names and surnames in each review so that it is easy to establish their identity. Consumer reviews frequently opt for obscure usernames that, in many cases, prevent one from establishing their identity even if it is possible to search for reviews written under the same username. According to Kathpalia (2022) and Gea-Valor (2006), consumers are more detached from their online personas and they have a propensity to be more direct. It is also a possibility that one consumer account may be employed by several different users, therefore one cannot be certain that each account corresponds to one individual.

1.2. Different measures in genre analysis

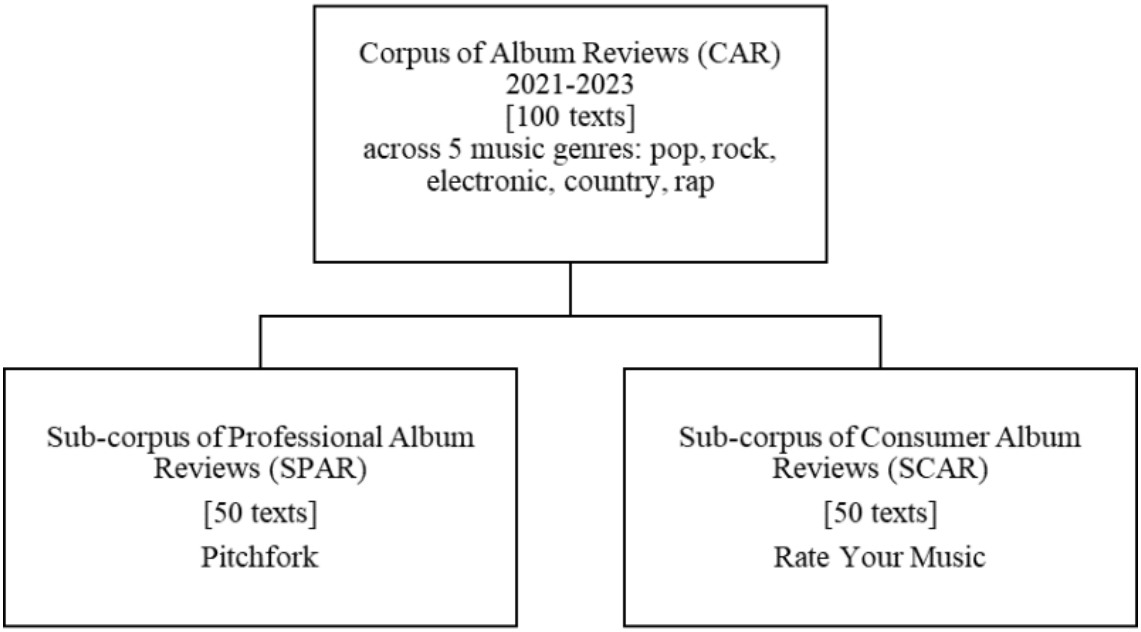
12 The analysis of rhetorical moves and steps can pertain to several different aspects. The most commonly adopted measure is the frequency of rhetorical elements (Işık, 2023; De Jong and Burgers, 2013). This enables one to establish how frequently particular elements occur. If an element occurs particularly frequently, it may mean that it is recycled many times within a text. One can also measure the amount of textual space taken up by rhetorical elements (Warchał, 2023). This does not help assess the frequency of particular elements but rather the number of words used to realize these rhetorical steps. This is a very useful measure that helps one determine which rhetorical steps are realized with the use of the highest and the lowest number of words. Last but not least, one can also take into account the distinction between optional and obligatory rhetorical elements. Some scholars suggested that obligatory elements should be found in at least 50% of texts analyzed in a particular study (Li and Ge, 2009; Nwogu, 1997). This enables establishing the core rhetorical steps of a given genre and optional elements that can be identified only in selected genre exemplars. In this study, all three aforementioned measures are taken into account.

2. Study design

13 A corpus of 100 album reviews (59 960 tokens) written between 2021 and 2023 spanning five different music genres (pop, rock, electronic, country and rap) was compiled for the purpose of the study (Figure 1). The corpus is referred to as the Corpus of Album Reviews (CAR). The corpus can be subdivided into two subcorpora, namely the Sub-corpus of Professional Album Reviews (SPAR) amounting to 47 502 tokens and its consumer counterpart (SCAR) amounting to 12 458 tokens. American websites were selected as, according to the newest annual report published in 2024 by the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry (IFPI), which summarizes the year 2023, the US is the biggest music market in the world, occupying the first spot. These webpages (Pitchfork and Rate Your Music (RYM)) were also selected because of the high number of

visitors on the websites and their large reach due to the ubiquity of the English language in the music industry. The number of monthly visitors was drawn from Similarweb (2024) statistics: Pitchfork had 12.1 million visitors a month as of November 2024 while RYM had 14.8 million visitors.

Figure 1: Corpus composition



14 For the sake of transparency, each text has a particular label. Texts in the corpus are labelled according to the following pattern:

[abbreviated name of the sub-corpus–year of publishing the review–keyword from the album title–music genre]

This can be illustrated with the following example:

The label [SPAR-23-dawn-pop] denotes a pop album review drawn from the Sub-corpus of Professional Album Reviews, published in 2023, titled Dawn FM.

15 The research questions guiding the study are as follows:

- What is the rhetorical structure of expert and lay digital album reviews?
- What are the interfaces, interactions and differences between expert and lay discourse communities?

16 The order of the analysis is as follows: First, descriptive statistics regarding lexicogrammatical features of the subcorpora drawn from UAM corpus tool are presented. Secondly, the move-step structure of reviews is elucidated in a quantitative and qualitative manner. The study ends with the analysis of interactions, interfaces and differences between these two discourse communities.

17 In order to establish the move-step structure of music reviews, a pilot study was conducted first. The draft codebook was created based on guides on how to write a good music review (Walker, 2024; Woodworth and Grossan, 2015) and previous studies related to book, film and music reviews. Kathpalia (2022) warns against blindly adopting move-step labels proposed by practising professionals, as they do not always truly reflect the propositional content of a particular move or step, but are rather codes applied by professionals to denote certain review elements. These code-like-labels have a propensity to be outdated, as discourse community members are prone to leaving them unchanged instead of carrying out systematic revisions of the terminology. Therefore, the best approach is to confront the terminology used by practitioners with the labels that emerge from a pilot study. The minimal coding unit in this study is a step, drawing on Moreno and Swales (2018) who advocate identifying steps first and then grouping them into moves. Steps were annotated based on a close reading examination of each clause. Then 10% of the corpus was coded with another researcher specializing in genre analysis. We arrived at a simple percentage agreement of 81%. After comparing and discussing the annotations, the codebook was refined and the final version encompassing 6 moves and 49 steps was created. Then the rest of the corpus was annotated with the use of QDA Miner qualitative analysis software. Sometimes one rhetorical step was assigned two codes when no overarching purpose could be identified. This was the case with sound and lyrics description as well as sound and lyrics evaluation. The migration of reviews to the Internet causes significant changes to the genre. Rather than consisting solely of textual material, online music reviews demand inclusion of multimodal elements in the analysis. QDA Miner allows one to calculate an album cover or a music clip as an occurrence that does not take up any textual space. Additionally, UAM corpus tool was

employed to generate descriptive statistics regarding lexicogrammatical features of the subcorpora.

3. Data analysis

3.1. Quantitative analysis

Table 2: Descriptive statistics from UAM corpus tool

	tokens	avg. review length	lexical density	subjectivity	subjective strength	academic word use	1st	2nd	3rd
							person reference		
SPAR	47 502	950	55.03%	0.103	0.441	3.42%	1.12%	0.73%	4.39%
SCAR	12 458	249	49.84%	0.205	0.479	3.14%	2.39%	0.53%	3.93%

18 The descriptive statistics obtained from UAM corpus tool enable drawing certain conclusions related to lexicogrammatical aspects of professional and consumer reviews. First of all, critic reviews are almost 5 times as long as consumer reviews. Critic reviews are also more lexically dense. In UAM statistics, subjectivity denotes "[a] measure of the positiveness of the words in the text. -1: very negative, 0: balanced, +1: very positive. Based on the 8,200 word MPQA Subjectivity lexicon" (O'Donnell, 2023). MPQA Subjectivity Lexicon stands for Multi-Perspective Question Answering lexicon. This measure shows that expert reviews are more balanced due to their subjectivity being closer to 0 (0.103) whereas consumer reviews are less balanced than professional reviews (0.205). Subjective strength describes "[a] measure of the average subjective strength of the words of the text. From 0 (all weak) to 1 (all strong)" (O'Donnell, 2023). Subjective strength value for consumer reviews (0.479) is therefore higher than the one related to critic reviews (0.441). Academic word use describes the "[p]ercentage of lexical words which are on the academic word list" (O'Donnell, 2023). The percentage of words from the academic word list is higher in SPAR in comparison to SCAR. Consumers employ first person reference more frequently as they

often allude to their personal experiences and use the first person pronoun 'I'. Experts do not use the first person pronoun as frequently as consumers do. Professionals, on the other hand, tend to deploy third person pronouns more frequently than consumers due to them describing artists in more detail.

19 Quantitative analysis will be conducted from three vantage points. The first one is the frequency of particular moves and steps. The second one is their word coverage, i.e., the percentage of textual space occupied by a rhetorical step. The third one is their division into obligatory and optional steps.

20 While this study draws on Swales' (1990) rhetorical genre theory to analyze the communicative purposes embedded in online reviews, it is important to clarify that structural boundaries within texts, such as headings or paratextual elements, do not always correspond directly to rhetorical moves. Swales (1990) defines genres as classes of communicative events characterized by shared purposes and recognizable structural features; however, not all textual divisions serve rhetorical functions, and rhetorical strategies often extend beyond formal boundaries. Titles, in particular, function as paratexts in the Genettean (1997) sense: they frame the main text and guide reader expectations. Providing metainformation about the reviewed object, such as the publication date or the record label, and including relevant images are typically classified as a rhetorical step in studies on genre analysis (e.g., Kathpalia, 2022; Ha, 2011). However, such elements may also be referred to as paratextual elements, in contrast to textual units focusing on sound evaluation or lyrics description. In the present study paratextual elements are labelled in the same way as textual rhetorical steps, e.g., ms1s2 album title* and m4s2 lyrics description, yet they are marked with an asterisk. The data suggest that online reviews consist of both textual and paratextual units, some of which perform rhetorical functions, while others serve primarily organizational or navigational roles. Recognizing this distinction allows for a more nuanced understanding of genre in digital contexts, where multimodality and user interaction complicate traditional genre boundaries and rhetorical sequencing.

3.1.1. The most frequent rhetorical steps

Table 3: Top 10 most frequent steps in SPAR

	Code	Count	% Codes
1	m4s2 lyrics description	90	**6,60%**
2	m5s1 sound evaluation	77	**5,70%**
3	m5s2 lyrics evaluation	73	**5,40%**
4	m3s1 artist background	70	**5,20%**
5	m4s1 sound description	70	**5,20%**
6	m3s2 album background	60	**4,40%**
7	m1s1 section name*	59	**4,30%**
8	m6s1 overall evaluation	57	**4,20%**
9	m1s2 album title*	50	**3,70%**
10	m1s3 name of the artist*	50	**3,70%**

21 The most frequent rhetorical step in SPAR is the one referring to lyrics description (m4s2). This rhetorical step consists in quoting the lyrics from particular songs on the album and describing what they refer to. This step is followed by the one pertaining to sound evaluation (m5s1). As music is certainly inextricably linked to its sonic dimension, the evaluation of sound lies at the core of music reviewing. The third most frequent rhetorical step is the one of lyrics evaluation (m5s2). While the lyrics description was more frequent, lyrics evaluation is still significant as it ultimately points to the quality of songwriting. It is the third most frequent step in this data subset probably due to the fact that critics place emphasis on the lyrical quality of songs. The three most frequently employed rhetorical steps in SPAR are therefore lyrics description, sound evaluation and lyrics evaluation.

22 Artist background (m3s1) was the fourth most frequently applied rhetorical step in SPAR (5,20%). Music critics frequently allude to the artist's upbringing and childhood in order to contextualize their journey to becoming musicians. Equally frequent was sound description (m4s1). Not only do critics frequently evaluate sound, but they also describe it. Sound description elaborates on different production and instrument choices. It is quite prolific with regard to

a range of metaphors and adjectives employed. Album background (m3s2) follows the steps m3s1 and m4s1 as far as the frequency of use is concerned. Just as the artist's background introduces one to the persona of the artist, album background helps one visualize the story of album creation. It may start with referring to a particular event that inspired the inception of the album and also details referring to the place where it was recorded. This step is followed by a section name (m1s1)* which is a part of the first move meant to provide metainformation about the album. Section name usually occurs once in most reviews as it denotes the name of the website section devoted to the reviews of music albums ("ALBUM REVIEWS"). In certain reviews, however, there was an additional section name indicating the exceptional quality of a particular album ("BEST NEW MUSIC"). Steps indicating the album title (m1s2)* and name of the artist (m1s3)* can be placed on the 9th and 10th spot on the list. The 8th spot on the list is occupied by the step of overall evaluation (m6s1). This step may occur once or several times throughout the whole review and it is meant to provide an overall verdict on the album, all aspects considered.

Table 4: Top 10 most frequent steps in SCAR

	Code	Count	% Codes
1	m6s1 overall evaluation	75	**13,60%**
2	m1s6 numerical/star rating*	54	**9,80%**
3	m5s1 sound evaluation	52	**9,40%**
4	m1s7 name of the reviewer*	50	**9,00%**
5	m1s11 avatar*	50	**9,00%**
6	m1s10 review date*	47	**8,50%**
7	m5s2 lyrics evaluation	26	**4,70%**
8	m3s1 artist background	21	**3,80%**
9	m2s2 headline*	18	**3,30%**
10	m6s10 enumerating most/least favourite songs	18	**3,30%**

23 The most frequent step in consumer reviews is the overall evaluation m6s1 (13,60%) (Table 4). This appears to be the most critical rhetorical step, as consumers ultimately seek a general assessment of the product. Following this, the album rating (m1s6)*,

typically presented in the form of a star rating, is the next most common step. Sound evaluation (m5s1) ranks as the third most frequent rhetorical step employed by consumers. The sonic dimension seems to hold significant importance for them, akin to its relevance in professional reviews of albums.

24 The next three paratextual elements provide information about the review: the reviewer's name (m1s7)* (or username in the case of consumer reviews), an avatar (m1s11)* (a photograph or picture), and the review date (m1s10)*. These elements can frequently be found in consumer reviews. This is followed by an evaluation of the lyrics (m5s2). Background information about the artist (m3s1) is sometimes included in SCAR (3,80%). The headline previews certain elements of the review (m2s2)*, and the tenth step involves enumerating the most or least favourite songs (m6s10).

25 The frequency of rhetorical steps reflects how frequently they were used by the two discourse communities. Certain steps were utilized multiple times throughout the review. For example, indicating the music label that released the album was used once in a review usually. Sound evaluation and lyrics evaluation, on the other hand, were reused several times throughout the reviews. This is referred to as step recycling, which seems to be more prevalent in this genre, since it is not as formulaic as, for example, academic texts, which follow a more rigid rhetorical structure. Also, since professional reviews are longer than consumer reviews, they have a greater propensity for step recurrence. Hence, it can be stated that the longer the review, the greater the propensity for step recycling.

3.1.2. Word coverage of rhetorical steps

26 Certain rhetorical steps may as well be frequent, yet they do not take up a lot of textual space. The following table (Table 5) presents ten most frequent rhetorical steps with regard to the amount of textual space taken up by them.

Table 5: Top 10 word coverage in the subcorpora

	Top 10 word coverage in SPAR		Top 10 word coverage in SCAR	
	Code	**% Words**	**Code**	**% Words**

1	m3s1 artist background	**17,00%**	m5s1 sound evaluation	**21,00%**
2	m4s2 lyrics description	**11,80%**	m6s1 overall evaluation	**17,30%**
3	m5s2 lyrics evaluation	**11,40%**	m3s1 artist background	**10,20%**
4	m5s1 sound evaluation	**10,50%**	m4s1 sound description	**8,70%**
5	m3s2 album background	**9,70%**	m5s2 lyrics evaluation	**8,10%**
6	m4s1 sound description	**8,90%**	m4s2 lyrics description	**7,10%**
7	m6s1 overall evaluation	**5,90%**	m3s2 album background	**6,50%**
8	m6s6 interpretation	**4,00%**	m5s6 delivery evaluation	**5,10%**
9	m5s3 artist evaluation	**3,90%**	m5s3 artist evaluation	**2,70%**
10	m2s1 overall impression	**2,80%**	m3s3 reviewer background	**2,50%**

27 Artist background (m3s1) takes up the most textual space in SPAR (17,00%). The artist background is described with the use of a significant number of words. These are usually quite extensive passages amounting to two or three paragraphs. Lyrics description (m4s2) also takes up a significant amount of space as the string of lyrics (11,80%) might be quite long and the same pertains to lyrics evaluation. Sound evaluation (m5s1) has a high word coverage. It seems that describing and evaluating lyrics and sound lies at the heart of music reviewing. Album background (m3s2) is also expressed with a high number of words as it is essentially a story about the album creation. Overall evaluation (m6s1) also takes up quite a lot of textual space and so does artist evaluation (m5s3) and overall impression (m2s1). It is interesting that artist evaluation takes up a significant amount of space, as it usually alludes to the personal characteristics of the artists that do not necessarily pertain to the album itself. This is an element by means of which professional reviewers express their private intentions (Bhatia, 2016) and bend generic conventions to express their opinions. Interpretation (m6s6) is expressed with longer passages of text as critics attempt to decode the meaning behind the music. It has to be taken into account that images, for example album covers, are accounted for in QDA Miner as an occurrence but they do not take up any textual space as they belong to non-textual semiotic resources.

28 Authors of consumer reviews, on the other hand, allocate the most textual space to sound evaluation (m5s1) and overall evaluation (m6s1). This suggests that consumers tend to use the highest number of words to express their opinions on sound. Artist background

(m3s1) was the eighth most frequently occurring step in SCAR (Table 4), yet as far as the amount of textual space attributed to this step is concerned (Table 5), it is the third rhetorical step in terms of word coverage in SCAR. Lyrics evaluation and description occupy the fifth and sixth spot respectively with regard to the number of words attributed to the realization of the steps. Album background also occupies a significant amount of textual space (6,50%). Delivery appears to be an important aspect, specifically referring to the manner of singing or rapping. This term exclusively pertains to the execution of the voice, not the instrumental components. Artist evaluation occupies a substantial portion of the text, as does the reviewer's background, which frequently references the consumers' previous experiences with the artist's music.

3.1.3. Optional and obligatory rhetorical steps

29 When it comes to the obligatory steps in professional reviews, i.e., steps that occurred in at least 50% of texts subject to analysis, they can be divided into several subgroups. Paratextual units referring to providing metainformation about the album (move 1) (Table 6) are an obligatory element of each and every review. This is due to the fact that they signify what the review is going to be about and act as a business card of an album. Affiliate links can be found in 64% of the reviews while affiliate link disclaimers were identified in 62% of the reviews. The body of the review in SPAR is always preceded by overall impression (m2s1). Artist background and album background (belonging to move 3) can be found in 86% and 78% of reviews respectively. Sound description and sound evaluation can be found in 76% and 74% of reviews. Overall evaluation constituting the overall verdict on the album was found in 72% of reviews. Lyrics evaluation and description can be found in 70% and 66% of reviews respectively. Reviewer background was found in 54% of reviews. Interpretation is also an obligatory element of a critic review as it occurred in 52% of reviews. There are also several steps absent from critic reviews. These include m1s11 avatar*, m1s12 review number*, m2s2 headline*, m5s10 concept evaluation, m5s11 title evaluation, m5s12 sequence evaluation, m6s10 enumerating the most or the least favourite songs and m6s11 suggestions. These were identified in SCAR.

Table 6: Inclusion rates in SPAR

	Textual units in SPAR			**Paratextual units in SPAR**		
	Code Description	**Cases**	**% Cases**	**Code Description**	**Cases**	**% Cases**
1	m2s1 overall impression	50	**100,00%**	m1s1 section name*	50	**100,00%**
2	m3s1 artist background	43	**86,00%**	m1s2 album title*	50	**100,00%**
3	m3s2 album background	39	**78,00%**	m1s3 name of the artist*	50	**100,00%**
4	m4s1 sound description	38	**76,00%**	m1s4 album release date*	50	**100,00%**
5	m5s1 sound evaluation	37	**74,00%**	m1s5 album cover*	50	**100,00%**
6	m6s1 overall evaluation	36	**72,00%**	m1s6 numerical/star rating*	50	**100,00%**
7	m5s2 lyrics evaluation	35	**70,00%**	m1s7 name of the reviewer*	50	**100,00%**
8	m4s2 lyrics description	33	**66,00%**	m1s8 music genre*	50	**100,00%**
9	m3s3 reviewer background	27	**54,00%**	m1s9 music label*	50	**100,00%**
10	m6s6 interpretation	26	**52,00%**	m1s10 review date*	50	**100,00%**
11	m4s4 message description	15	30,00%	m6s4 affiliate link*	32	**64,00%**
12	m5s3 artist evaluation	15	30,00%	m6s5 affiliate link disclaimer*	31	**62,00%**
13	m5s4 message evaluation	15	30,00%	m6s8 music clip*	9	18,00%
14	m5s5 atmosphere evaluation	13	26,00%	m6s9 correction note*	2	4,00%
15	m4s5 delivery description	10	20,00%	m1s11 avatar*	0	0
16	m5s6 delivery evaluation	10	20,00%	m1s12 review number*	0	0
17	m6s7 establishing contact/urging action	10	20,00%	m2s2 headline*	0	0
18	m4s6 emotions description	7	14,00%			
19	m4s8 atmosphere description	7	14,00%			
20	m6s6 general/unspecified evaluation	6	12,00%			
21	m4s3 artist description	3	6,00%			
22	m5s8 collaboration evaluation	3	6,00%			
23	m6s2 (not)recommending listening	2	4,00%			
24	m4s7 length description	1	2,00%			
25	m5s7 length evaluation	1	2,00%			
26	m5s9 artwork evaluation	1	2,00%			
27	m6s3 predictions	1	2,00%			

	Code Description	**Cases**	**% Cases**	**Code Description**	**Cases**	**% Cases**
1	m2s1 overall impression	50	**100,00%**	m1s1 section name*	50	**100,00%**
2	m3s1 artist background	43	**86,00%**	m1s2 album title*	50	**100,00%**
3	m3s2 album background	39	**78,00%**	m1s3 name of the artist*	50	**100,00%**
4	m4s1 sound description	38	**76,00%**	m1s4 album release date*	50	**100,00%**
5	m5s1 sound evaluation	37	**74,00%**	m1s5 album cover*	50	**100,00%**
6	m6s1 overall evaluation	36	**72,00%**	m1s6 numer-ical/star rating*	50	**100,00%**
7	m5s2 lyrics evaluation	35	**70,00%**	m1s7 name of the reviewer*	50	**100,00%**
8	m4s2 lyrics description	33	**66,00%**	m1s8 music genre*	50	**100,00%**
9	m3s3 reviewer background	27	**54,00%**	m1s9 music label*	50	**100,00%**
10	m6s6 interpretation	26	**52,00%**	m1s10 review date*	50	**100,00%**
11	m4s4 message description	15	30,00%	m6s4 affiliate link*	32	**64,00%**
12	m5s3 artist evaluation	15	30,00%	m6s5 affiliate link disclaimer*	31	**62,00%**
13	m5s4 message evaluation	15	30,00%	m6s8 music clip*	9	18,00%
14	m5s5 atmosphere evaluation	13	26,00%	m6s9 correc-tion note*	2	4,00%
15	m4s5 delivery description	10	20,00%	m1s11 avatar*	0	0
16	m5s6 delivery evaluation	10	20,00%	m1s12 review number*	0	0
17	m6s7 establishing contact/urging action	10	20,00%	m2s2 headline*	0	0
18	m4s6 emotions description	7	14,00%			
19	m4s8 atmosphere description	7	14,00%			
20	m6s6 general/unspe-cified evaluation	6	12,00%			
21	m4s3 artist description	3	6,00%			
22	m5s8 collabora-tion evaluation	3	6,00%			
23	m6s2 (not)recom-mending listening	2	4,00%			
24	m4s7 length description	1	2,00%			
25	m5s7 length evaluation	1	2,00%			
26	m5s9 artwork evaluation	1	2,00%			
27	m6s3 predictions	1	2,00%			
28	m5s10 concept evaluation	0	0			
29	m5s11 title evaluation	0	0			

30	m5s12 sequence evaluation	0	0			
31	m6s10 enumerating most/least favourite songs	0	0			
32	m6s11 suggestions	0	0			

30 Consumer reviews have only six obligatory elements (Table 7). Most of them are related to providing metainformation about the album (move 1) and they constitute the template of the review at the same time (m1s7*, m1s11*, m1s6*, m1s10*). Obligatory steps that do not belong to move 1 are sound evaluation and overall evaluation. It seems, therefore, that sound and overall evaluation constitute the core of consumer reviews. SCAR is devoid of several steps, namely m1s1 section name*, m1s5 album cover*, m1s8 music genre*, m1s9 music label*, m6s8 music clip*, m6s4 affiliate link*, m6s5 affiliate link disclaimer*, m6s9 correction note*, m4s3 artist description, m4s7 length description and m6s7 establishing contact/urging action. There is no need for affiliate links as these websites are not meant to generate profit which entails the lack of affiliate link disclaimers as well. Some pieces of information are not placed in consumer reviews, as they can be found in a frame preceding consumer reviews, e.g., the album title.

Table 7: Inclusion rates in SCAR

	Textual units in SCAR			**Paratextual units in SCAR**		
	Code Description	**Cases**	**% Cases**	**Code Description**	**Cases**	**% Cases**
1	m6s1 overall evaluation	48	**96,00%**	m1s7 name of the reviewer*	50	**100,00%**
2	m5s1 sound evaluation	39	**78,00%**	m1s11 avatar*	50	**100,00%**
3	m3s1 artist background	19	38,00%	m1s6 numer-ical/star rating*	49	**98,00%**
4	m5s2 lyrics evaluation	19	38,00%	m1s10 review date*	45	**90,00%**
5	m6s10 enumerating most/least favourite songs	16	32,00%	m2s2 headline*	18	36,00%
6	m5s6 delivery evaluation	15	30,00%	m1s4 album release date*	6	12,00%
7	m3s2 album background	13	26,00%	m1s2 album title*	2	4,00%
8	m4s1 sound description	12	24,00%	m1s3 name of the artist*	2	4,00%
9	m6s2 (not)recom-mending listening	11	22,00%	m1s12 review number*	2	4,00%
10	m4s2 lyrics description	7	14,00%	m1s1 section name*	0	0
11	m5s5 atmosphere evaluation	7	14,00%	m1s5 album cover*	0	0
12	m3s3 reviewer background	6	12,00%	m1s8 music genre*	0	0
13	m5s8 collaboration evaluation	6	12,00%	m1s9 music label*	0	0
14	m4s8 atmosphere description	5	10,00%	m6s8 music clip*	0	0
15	m5s4 message evaluation	5	10,00%	m6s4 affil-iate link*	0	0
16	m6s3 predictions	5	10,00%	m6s5 affiliate link disclaimer*	0	0
17	m2s1 overall impression	4	8,00%	m6s9 correc-tion note*	0	0
18	m5s3 artist evaluation	4	8,00%			
19	m4s5 delivery description	3	6,00%			
20	m4s4 message description	2	4,00%			
21	m6s11 suggestions	2	4,00%			
22	m4s6 emotions description	1	2,00%			
23	m6s6 general/unspe-cified evaluation	1	2,00%			
24	m5s7 length evaluation	1	2,00%			
25	m5s9 artwork evaluation	1	2,00%			
26	m5s10 concept evaluation	1	2,00%			

	Code Description	**Cases**	**% Cases**	**Code Description**	**Cases**	**% Cases**
1	m6s1 overall evaluation	48	**96,00%**	m1s7 name of the reviewer*	50	**100,00%**
2	m5s1 sound evaluation	39	**78,00%**	m1s11 avatar*	50	**100,00%**
3	m3s1 artist background	19	38,00%	m1s6 numerical/star rating*	49	**98,00%**
4	m5s2 lyrics evaluation	19	38,00%	m1s10 review date*	45	**90,00%**
5	m6s10 enumerating most/least favourite songs	16	32,00%	m2s2 headline*	18	36,00%
6	m5s6 delivery evaluation	15	30,00%	m1s4 album release date*	6	12,00%
7	m3s2 album background	13	26,00%	m1s2 album title*	2	4,00%
8	m4s1 sound description	12	24,00%	m1s3 name of the artist*	2	4,00%
9	m6s2 (not)recommending listening	11	22,00%	m1s12 review number*	2	4,00%
10	m4s2 lyrics description	7	14,00%	m1s1 section name*	0	0
11	m5s5 atmosphere evaluation	7	14,00%	m1s5 album cover*	0	0
12	m3s3 reviewer background	6	12,00%	m1s8 music genre*	0	0
13	m5s8 collaboration evaluation	6	12,00%	m1s9 music label*	0	0
14	m4s8 atmosphere description	5	10,00%	m6s8 music clip*	0	0
15	m5s4 message evaluation	5	10,00%	m6s4 affiliate link*	0	0
16	m6s3 predictions	5	10,00%	m6s5 affiliate link disclaimer*	0	0
17	m2s1 overall impression	4	8,00%	m6s9 correction note*	0	0
18	m5s3 artist evaluation	4	8,00%			
19	m4s5 delivery description	3	6,00%			
20	m4s4 message description	2	4,00%			
21	m6s11 suggestions	2	4,00%			
22	m4s6 emotions description	1	2,00%			
23	m6s6 general/unspecified evaluation	1	2,00%			
24	m5s7 length evaluation	1	2,00%			
25	m5s9 artwork evaluation	1	2,00%			
26	m5s10 concept evaluation	1	2,00%			
27	m5s11 title evaluation	1	2,00%			
28	m5s12 sequence evaluation	1	2,00%			
29	m6s6 interpretation	1	2,00%			

30	m4s3 artist description	0	0			
31	m4s7 length description	0	0			
32	m6s7 establishing contact/urging action	0	0			

3.2. Qualitative analysis

3.2.1. Move 1 Providing metainformation about the album

31 It is hardly surprising that the first move is meant to introduce one to the album. The information provided in this move is, for instance, album title, name of the artist and release date of the album. Apart from textual elements, these steps may be realized with the use of multimodal elements such as album covers. These pieces of information differ between the two subcorpora, for example, there is no information on the music label on RYM. RYM provides information regarding the name of the album, the name of the artist, the name of the label and album cover in a frame above consumer reviews. As a result, these pieces of information do not have to be reiterated in the main body of reviews. Therefore, the information provided specifically in consumer reviews includes the user avatar, username, review rating (in the form of star rating), and review date. Occasionally, name of the artist, album title, release date, and review number are provided by consumers. Review number pertains to the number of reviews created by a given user. It is noteworthy that despite a preconceived template available on RYM, many users repeat elements already accounted for in the very template. A notable example is the rating of the album on a scale from 1 to 10 included at the end of the review in spite of the fact that at the very beginning of each consumer review, the user has to rate the album on a scale from 1 to 5. It seems that users are willing to underscore the importance of particular steps by repeating them on their own terms, slightly bending the convention. The reason for this may be that they view the in-built, predetermined steps as fairly uniform ones that do not draw attention and thus may go unnoticed.

3.2.2. Move 2 Communicating overall impressions

32 The second move is meant to capture the reader's attention. Professionals write two or three sentences reflecting their overall impression before the main body of the review. Consumers, tend to realize this rhetorical move in the form of a succinct headline preceding the main body of the review.

m2s1 overall impression

With production by Peter Kember and an added gospel choir, the Danish band's fifth album completes their transformation from grim-faced nihilists to wearied soothsayers. [SPAR-21-seek-rock]

m2s2 headline

DJ Khaled the worst part of his own albums, yet again [SCAR-21-khaled-rap]

3.2.3. Move 3 Situating the album

33 Situating the album is of paramount importance on Pitchfork as experts are expected to paint a broader background of the body of work. The beginning of the review usually encompasses the background of the artist starting from their childhood and the trajectory of their career. After that, events that inspired the album are described. One can also find the background of the reviewer in certain reviews in the form of a bio-note. These steps are less frequent in consumer reviews, and if one finds them, they are much shorter on average.

m3s1 artist background

Harlow's origin story is repeated often: At age 12, he decided he wanted to be a rapper and got to work, practicing, recording, and selling CDs at school. By 19, he made "Dark Knight," the song that launched a major-label bidding war for his talents and, ultimately, landed him a deal with the once-promising Atlantic imprint Generation Now. [SPAR-23-come-rap]

34 Artist background allows one to situate the artist within a particular genre. It is also a recapitulation of their achievements and endeavours in the recent years. Background of album creation entails

traces of intertextuality as it often alludes to interviews or any other artist's utterances that are related to the album creation.

m3s2 album background

There is a lot of shared life bound up in the Slowdive project now, after all. Since the group began sessions in April 2020—and then quickly abandoned them for six months as the world shut down—Goswell's mother and drummer Simon Scott's father died. [SPAR-23-slowdive-rock]

Dawn FM is a concept album, sort of. In interviews, Tesfaye has said that the album plays like listening to a kind of adult contemporary radio station as you sit in a traffic jam in the tunnel, only the tunnel is purgatory and the light at the end of the tunnel is death. [SPAR-23-dawn-pop]

m3s3 reviewer background

Alfred Soto is an assistant professor of communication at Florida International University. His work has appeared in Billboard, Spin, The Village Voice, the Miami Herald, and others. He was an associate editor of The Singles Jukebox. He lives in Miami. [SPAR-23-dawn-pop]

35 Reviewer names in bio-notes are often hyperlinked so that one can be redirected to the webpage with all the reviews written by a particular contributor. Move 3 plays a pivotal role in terms of providing background information that may help one understand the broader implications of the body of work created by an artist. It draws one's attention to aspects that are not related to music itself, yet they create a contextual backdrop against which the album can be properly interpreted. While this move may initially appear peripheral in a genre that is fundamentally evaluative and argumentative, it plays a significant role in the corpus. This is also shown by the word coverage data, especially for the professional subcorpus (see Table 5 word coverage in SPAR, m3s1 artist background: 17,00% words, m3s2 album background: 9,70% words). These narrative passages often function as framing devices, shaping the reader's perception of the artist and subtly influencing the interpretation of the work that follows.

3.2.4. Move 4 Album description

36 The boundary between evaluation and description may prove to be fuzzy at times. In many studies adjectives are construed as markers of evaluation (Martin and White, 2005). In the present study, evaluation refers to reviewers expressing their stance towards the album.

Certain clauses encompassing adjectives are used to describe the quality of sound, therefore they are not inherently evaluative. Description involves reporting on objectively identifiable traits of sound, lyrics, vocal delivery, etc. For example, sound description typically consists in employing words that specify the type (synths, clinks) and quality (cold, droning) of sound that can be heard (see example presented below):

m4s1 sound description

The song opens with cold, droning synths and clinks that sound like spikes hammered into railroad track. [SPAR-21-laurel-rock]

3.2.5. Move 5 Album evaluation

37 A nuanced approach is required to distinguish evaluative meaning from descriptive content. Therefore, in this study evaluative units are identified drawing on Martin and White's Appraisal Theory (2005). The theory offers a comprehensive framework for this task by categorizing evaluative meaning into three subsystems: *attitude*, *engagement*, and *graduation*. The *attitude* system, comprising *affect*, *judgement*, and *appreciation*, is particularly useful for identifying expressions of emotional response, ethical evaluation, and aesthetic value respectively. While adjectives are common markers of evaluation, Appraisal Theory emphasizes that evaluative stance can also be realized through verbs (*improve*, *fail*), adverbs (*skilfully*, *startlingly*), nouns (*anguish*, *beauty*), and metaphorical constructions (*like a jack in a box*). The *graduation* subsystem modulates the intensity or focus of evaluation through quantifiers, repetition, and intensifiers, while *engagement* resources, such as modality (*might*, *must*), attribution (*critics argue*), and dialogic framing, signal the writer's alignment or distance from the evaluative stance. The framework distinguishes between *inscribed* evaluation, where the evaluative stance is directly stated, and *invoked* evaluation, which relies on contextual inference. These deliberations underscore the importance of attending to both linguistic form and rhetorical function when analyzing evaluative discourse. Evaluation is not always overt; it may be subtly woven into the text through metaphor, modality, narrative framing, or discourse structure. Evaluation may refer to either music-related or extramusical aspects. The

extramusical aspects can be related to the structural aspects of the album, i.e., the sequence of the songs, their length. While it is also related to the music, it alludes to a more technical dimension thereof. Professionals tend to be more metaphorical with their evaluations and even if they are critical they try to precede that with a description. Consumers, on the other hand, start directly with the evaluation. That being said there are instances of private intentions in expert reviews where not the music *per se* is assessed but for instance the artist's personality. As critic reviews are supposed to be disinterested genres, private intentions (Bhatia, 2016) become apparent when reviews are openly biased and negative criticism is not sufficiently accounted for or when the evaluation does not pertain to the album itself but rather to the personality of the artist.

38 The prevalence of evaluation over description in consumer reviews stems from various expectations readers have towards these two discourse communities. Experts are expected to have a more profound understanding of the music industry and inform the readers about the events relevant to the album and the backdrop against which it should be interpreted. Consumers, on the other hand, are supposed to provide a succinct word-of-mouth recommendation that does not have to be backed by any justification. It can take on the form of a purely subjective evaluation. These reviews foreground subjective engagement, often emphasizing personal reactions, emotional resonance, and grassroots critique. Hence, drawing on Martin and White's (2005) Appraisal Theory, consumer reviewers frequently employ affect. Professional reviewers, on the other hand, tend to employ judgement and appreciation more often than affect. Enumerating most or least favourite tracks may also be construed as evaluation as it lacks any justification for the most part. In certain cases, however, evaluation may be highly context specific and implicit. Thus, close reading of the text was crucial to label text segments.

m5s2 lyrics evaluation

Don't read any of the lyrics on Genius unless you want to cringe. [SCAR-23-maybe-rap]

m5s1 sound evaluation

This is, for the most part, high-octane, inoffensive dance-pop that will sound great in Sephora and adequately pad out the playlist at your nearest shipping container bar. [SPAR-23-beast-pop]

The instrumentals, sampling and beats are genuinely terrible. I mean I honestly don't understand how this is professionally produced and approved by a lot of people. [SCAR--23-coi-rap]

3.2.6. Move 6 Summary

39 The move of summary contains several rhetorical steps. Overall evaluation can be found across both subcorpora. An interesting multimodal element of an embedded music clip can be found only on Pitchfork. It should be borne in mind that images and videos do not take up textual space, but rather the visual space of a review.

m6s1 overall evaluation

Painfully bland, shallow (even for Coi Leray's standards) and underwhelming. [SCAR-23-coi-rap]

40 It is interesting that experts employ the generic resources of promotional and legal discourse in the last move. This can be regarded as an example of interdiscursivity, which consists in the "constitution of a text from diverse discourses and genres" (Fairclough, 1995:134-135). Bhatia (2016) notes that many inherently non-promotional genres have become colonized by promotional texts in recent years. This seems to apply to music criticism as well. At the end of the majority of Pitchfork reviews, one can find an affiliate link that allows one to buy the album immediately and is frequently accompanied by an affiliate disclosure. The disclaimer informs readers that even though Pitchfork makes a profit from these links, they still select albums independently. Expert reviews appropriate promotional resources and legal resources. They also aim to keep the audience engaged by urging readers to engage with other content on the website (m6s7) and providing links to streaming platforms. These elements contribute to the genre hybridity of expert reviews that not only describe and evaluate an album, but also advertize it as a product that can be monetized.

m6s4 affiliate link

Muse: Will of the People

$27 AT ROUGH TRADE

$21 AT AMAZON [SPAR-22-will-rock]

m6s5 affiliate link disclaimer

(Pitchfork earns a commission from purchases made through affiliate links on our site.) [SPAR-21-softer-electronic]

All products featured on Pitchfork are independently selected by our editors. However, when you buy something through our retail links, we may earn an affiliate commission. [SPAR-23-radical-electronic]

m6s7 establishing contact/urging action

Catch up every Saturday with 10 of our best-reviewed albums of the week. Sign up for the 10 to Hear newsletter here. [SPAR-21-medicine-rock]

Listen to our Best New Music playlist on Spotify and Apple Music. [SPAR-21-seek-rock]

41 Consumers explicitly enumerate their most and least favourite tracks from the album in move 6. As critics bear the onus of responsibility for the factual accuracy of their rating, the step of correction note was identified.

m6s9 correction note

CORRECTION: The Weeknd narrates the passage from Rilke's "Duino Elegies" on "Every Angel Is Terrifying"; director Josh Safdie voices the Arthur Fleminger character. [SPAR-23-dawn-pop]

42 As digital reviews evolved from their print predecessors, critic reviews encompass song and album interpretation that likens the interpretations of other works of art such as poems, paintings, etc. This is owing to the fact that experts are supposed to decode hidden and symbolic meanings and make them more readily identifiable to the public that may not have the expertise needed to go beyond the surface level interpretation.

m6s6 interpretation

If being in love made Musgraves feel connected to the world, these songs find her burrowing inward, questioning everything. Accordingly, the tragedy unfolding on the album is not that of a good relationship turning bad; it is of a once-confident person losing touch with the things that made her feel complete, worried that life might never be so simple again. [SPAR-21-star-country]

3.3. Interfaces between professional and consumer reviews

43 The Internet allows these two discourse communities to enter into interactions as a result of which they influence each other's generic conventions. Several instances of reviews in SCAR resemble the structure of critic reviews. Yates et al. (1999) term this phenomenon as implicit genre structuring, which consists in consumers replicating reviews that are more balanced with regard to praise and criticism as opposed to clearly biased consumer reviews. This is the result of being influenced by generic conventions applied by critics. In the same vein, critics are not impervious to criticism they receive from their readership. Pitchfork accommodates a section of rescored album reviews which could be viewed as a response to ratings that were considered unjustified. In this section, Pitchfork reviewers revise their album evaluations.

44 Even though professional contributors are superior to consumers in terms of their expertise, the reviews and their scores frequently generate a great deal of heated debate on such forums as Reddit, as consumers are willing to question their validity. Some webpages, e.g., Slant Magazine, allow users to post a comment directly under the professional review. This encourages discussion among the discourse community members and implies more scrutiny on the part of the contributor, as the claims in the review can be easily questioned and rebutted in an easily accessible comment section. This may also have a bearing on the way critics approach review writing.

45 In SCAR, a consumer review that referred explicitly to Pitchfork was identified:

> I'm trying to stop listening to music Pitchfork tells me is good. I've been hurt and let down too many times. This album reminded me that sometimes, they're alright, those old hacks.
>
> [SCAR-22-boat-rock]

46 There is a glaring discrepancy between commercial success and critical acclaim that should not be underestimated. The importance of critical acclaim in relation to such awards as the Grammys lends validity and relevance to professional music reviews. Even though

consumers may 'vote with their ears' more than ever before and it is being directly reflected in the statistics on streaming platforms, critical acclaim is valued more than ever perhaps as a way of balance. The role of music critic is still relevant. In a BBC music podcast, the hosts state that:

> Annie Macmanus: It's good to discuss because I think the world of the critic has changed, it's become democratized somehow where we all are reviewers now.
>
> Nick Grimshaw: But also I think that's [...] given everyone the chance to be a critic but then also I think it's given more weight to the actual critics. Because in a sea of a million voices you're like, hang on, I need to hear from someone who actually knows what they're talking about. (Macmanus and Grimshaw, 2024: 18:10-18:32)

47 Commercial success translates into pecuniary gain whereas critical acclaim is a sign of prestige and esteem in the industry. It is also associated with the creation of watershed moments that have a cultural impact. The picture of music that emerges from expert reviews is not solely the one of sound. There are numerous remarks in SPAR related to the albums' impact and message, how they have contributed to the current music landscape and whether they are an artistic statement.

4. Discussion

48 Higher share of descriptive steps in critic reviews and higher share of evaluative steps in consumer reviews constitutes the main finding of the study. This can be substantiated by the study conducted by De Jong and Burgers in 2013 that juxtaposed professional and consumer film reviews that yielded the same pattern. The need for providing more context is expressed by one of the crucial roles of the contemporary critic. The following quote is a music critic's opinion (Laura Snapes) on the role of music reviews in this day and age:

> I think that what we're doing at this point is more like cultural criticism and documentation, it's adding context, it's making sense of things and I think that's the purpose of a good review these days. It's to help [...] put something in context and help you see sort of the

> bigger picture around it [...] I think the best criticism makes connections between things that the artist is doing now and they've done in the past or drawing out different themes and ideas within a work that the artist might not even have elucidated themselves and [...] putting in the context of other artists and periods of history as well. So I think that's the role now. (Macmanus and Grimshaw, 2024: 19:35-20:05)

49 The most frequent rhetorical step in SPAR was the lyrics description, while in SCAR, overall evaluation. This difference may stem from the fact that consumers frequently cannot pinpoint the aspects the evaluation pertains to; hence, they are more likely to express a general assessment. Artist background was assigned the greatest amount of space by critics, whereas sound evaluation was expressed with the highest number of words by laypeople. This difference shows that critics strive to provide more extensive context in their reviews, while consumers devote more textual space to sonic evaluation. The data shows that professional reviews have a larger repertoire of obligatory steps (10 obligatory steps excluding paratextual elements) in comparison with their lay counterparts (2 obligatory steps excluding paratextual elements). Another finding is that consumers express their personal opinions and experiences in an explicit manner, as opposed to experts. This is achieved mostly through the more frequent use of the first person pronoun 'I' by laypeople. A similar result was obtained in Dachoviboon's (2019) study on expert and lay book reviews.

50 The present study also portrays that the most frequent steps should not be conflated with the elements that occupy the most textual space. By way of illustration, the paratextual unit indicating the review date is the most frequent in professional reviews, yet its share in the textual makeup of reviews is negligible. Sound evaluation, on the other hand, has fewer occurrences compared to the review date step, but it takes up the greatest amount of textual space in SPAR.

51 The findings of the present study show that consumers tend to refer to their own experience. Dachoviboon (2019) also showed that expert reviews seem to be more uniform, while lay reviews are less consistent in the review structure. In the current study, this was also the case as certain consumer reviews were fairly brief and personal,

while several exemplars emulated the structure and wording of professional reviews. Koreman et al. (2024) also show that consumer critics allude to their personal experiences more often. At the same time, they increasingly engage in practices resembling the professional ones. Selected consumers, however, follow the structure of critic reviews, thus engaging in implicit genre structuring (Yates et al., 1999).

52 Extralinguistic variables should not be underestimated as far as their influence on the generic makeup of the reviews is concerned. Since expert reviews are supposed to generate profit, they contain elements inextricably related to marketing (affiliate links), which entail the use of legal discourse (affiliate link disclaimers).

53 The study also shows the need to supplement coding schemes with multimodal elements that are not merely embellishments. Digital genres engage in the exploitation of various semiotic modes, thereby occupying textual, visual, and aural space (music clips).

Conclusion

54 In conclusion, professional and consumer reviews mostly differ with respect to the step dimension of the analysis. Professional reviews are balanced evaluations whereas consumer texts are word-of-mouth recommendations. These discourse communities can enter into interactions thanks to the technological affordances of the web. Professional and consumer online music reviews share a number of rhetorical steps. It is the details that make them diverge. Consumer reviews tend to be more evaluative, whereas professional ones provide a more extensive background by offering broader contextual information. It could also be argued that expert music reviews constitute an example of a hybrid genre which combines the format of a music review and features elements derived from legal and promotional discourses. Even if the review is negative, there is still an affiliate link below it which resembles an advertisement. In expert reviews, steps tend to be recycled more frequently, also thanks to their greater length compared to their consumer counterparts. For instance, *sound evaluation* can permeate the review and be found in its different parts, not solely in one fixed place. Texts produced by these two discourse communities also differ with respect to the

rhetorical step frequency, word coverage and a different repertoire of obligatory steps. Despite these differences, lyrics and sound evaluation constitute important rhetorical steps in both subcorpora, thereby stressing the significance of lyrics and sound assessment for both discourse communities. While this study focuses on two distinct communities at opposite ends of the spectrum, it is important to acknowledge the existence of intermediary texts that fall outside this binary. For instance, blog reviews written by fans may closely resemble the structure and tone of professional outlets such as Pitchfork, blurring the boundaries between amateur and institutional discourse. The decision to narrow the corpus to clearly defined communities necessarily excludes these hybrid forms, which may offer valuable insights into the fluidity and overlap between fan and professional practices.

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RÉSUMÉS

English

Even though rhetorical move-step analysis has originally been applied to academic texts, this approach has also been employed to genre analysis of other written genres for some time. Reviews constitute an interesting example of texts as they may significantly influence the perception of a particular work and its potential success or failure. The juxtaposition of texts written by professional and consumer reviewers allows one to pinpoint similarities and differences between the characteristics of these discourse communities. While book and film reviews have been subject to comparative genre analysis, music reviews have not received much scholarly attention in this realm. In order to fill this gap, this paper aims to provide a comparative move-step genre analysis of 100 online music reviews from two salient online reviewing websites, namely Pitchfork (professional reviews) and Rate Your Music (consumer reviews). For the purpose of this study, two subcorpora of music reviews, each consisting of 50 texts published between 2021 and 2023 were compiled. The corpus was manually annotated with the use of a rhetorical function protocol employing structural move analysis and fine-tuned to the specific needs of the corpus in question. Respective parts of reviews were assigned a particular rhetorical step, e.g., *providing background of the artist*. Steps were then grouped into moves, e.g., *situating the album*. Corresponding steps were extracted from each subcorpus to examine what patterns are most frequently employed to realize them. The results indicate that professional reviews encompass more descriptive rhetorical elements, whereas consumer reviews contain more evaluative rhetorical elements. There are also many rhetorical steps that can be found in both professional and consumer reviews, yet they have different linguistic realizations in the two subcorpora.

Français

Bien que l'analyse rhétorique des mouvements et des étapes ait initialement été appliquée aux textes académiques, cette approche est depuis quelque temps utilisée pour l'analyse des genres dans d'autres types de textes. Les critiques constituent un exemple particulièrement intéressant de ce type de textes, car elles peuvent influencer de manière significative la perception d'une œuvre et déterminer son succès ou son échec potentiel. La comparaison entre des textes rédigés par des critiques professionnels et des consommateurs permet d'identifier les similitudes et les différences dans les caractéristiques de ces communautés discursives. Alors que les critiques de livres et de films ont déjà fait l'objet d'analyses de genre dans une perspective comparative, les critiques musicales n'ont pas encore suscité beaucoup d'intérêt scientifique. Pour combler cette lacune, cet article propose une analyse comparative des unités et étapes rhétoriques de

100 critiques musicales en ligne issues de deux plates-formes majeures de critiques : Pitchfork (critiques professionnelles) et Rate Your Music (critiques de consommateurs). À cette fin, deux sous-corpus de critiques musicales, chacun comprenant 50 textes publiés entre 2021 et 2023, ont été compilés. Le corpus a été annoté manuellement à l'aide d'un protocole fonctionnel rhétorique fondé sur l'analyse structurelle des mouvements et adapté aux besoins spécifiques du corpus étudié. Nous avons associé les différentes parties des critiques à une étape rhétorique particulière, telle que *fournir un contexte sur l'artiste*. Ces étapes ont ensuite été regroupées en mouvements, telles que *situer l'album*. Nous avons extrait les mêmes étapes de chaque sous-corpus afin d'identifier les schémas les plus fréquemment employés pour réaliser ces étapes. Les résultats montrent que les critiques professionnelles incluent davantage d'éléments rhétoriques descriptifs, tandis que les critiques de consommateurs privilégient des éléments rhétoriques évaluatifs. De nombreuses étapes rhétoriques se retrouvent dans les deux types de critiques, mais elles présentent des réalisations linguistiques distinctes dans les deux sous-corpus.

INDEX

Mots-clés
analyse des genres, structure rhétorique, critique musicale, critique professionnelle, critique de consommateurs

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