



What's So Special About the Circus (And Who Says So?)



Circus professionals

STAKEHOLDERS

Audience members



How can the interests of (potential) audience members and circus professionals be better served by promotional texts?

- What do people value about their experience of attending circus events?
- How does the evaluative representation of these elements in public promotional texts compare with audience evaluations?
- What assumptions of shared values are being made by text producers and audience members, and how accurate are they?

Motivation:

The 21st Century circus sector in the UK is diverse and wide-ranging. However, circus professionals have highlighted 'a lack of circus knowledge among critics and irrelevance of content in public reviews' (Kavanagh 2019:75).

Reviews are a crucial media through which potential audience members form a frame of understanding about an artform. 'By definition, one's very first feel of an experiential good cannot be based on subjective experience; it has to be based on other information...critical reviews constitute such information' (Horverak 2009:573)

'Audience members are disinclined to repeatedly attend an event when its rules of operation do not fit within their existing knowledge framework' (Conner, 2013:109). Therefore, it is important that the representations of circus available to potential audience members reflect the experience they are likely to receive, in order to provide appropriate knowledge frameworks.

The representation of circus also involves other influences such as popular culture references and advertising. Marketing materials are especially pertinent as they form a third point in the triangle that mediates the relationship between audience members and circus creators.

Data:

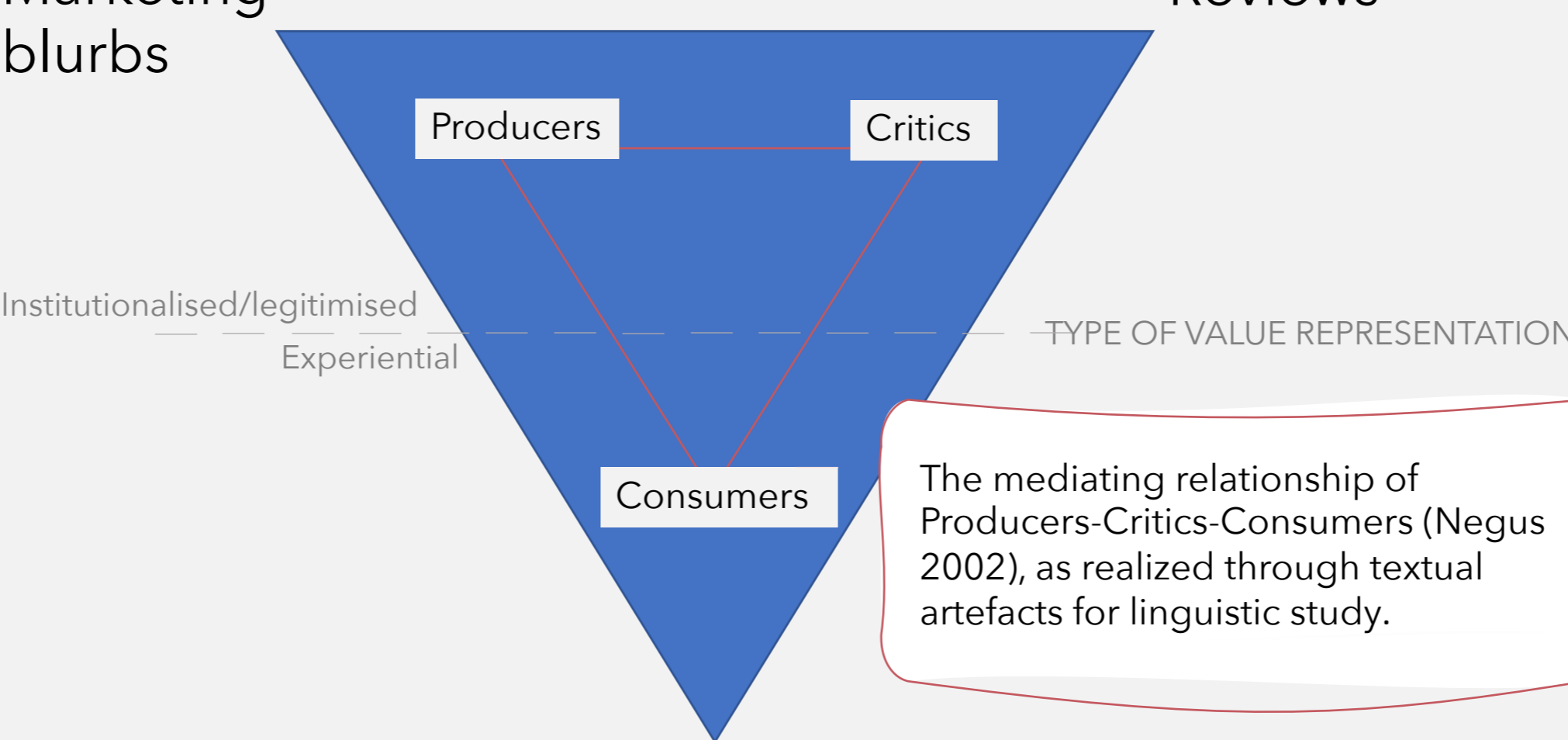
Three corpora will be collected to represent each of the positions pictured.

- The Circus Review Corpus 2020 (CirRC20) will be collected from public online sources, and will comprise all available reviews of circus productions performed in the UK from Feb 2019 - Jan 2020.
- The Circus Publicity Corpus 2020 (CircP20) will comprise all available marketing blurbs that relate directly to the productions represented in CirRC20.
- The Circus Audience Reflection Corpus 2021 (CircAR21) will comprise transcripts of semi-structured interviews held with audience members at the Circus Big Top venue of Glastonbury Festival of Contemporary Performing Arts in 2021. The interviews are designed to elicit evaluative responses based on the participants' audiencing experience.

PROMOTIONAL GENRES (Shaw 2009)

Marketing blurbs

Reviews



Audience interviews


The mediating relationship of Producers-Critics-Consumers (Negus 2002), as realized through textual artefacts for linguistic study.

PROMOTIONAL GENRES share the key feature of explicit evaluative content.

EVALUATION is the way values are realised in texts (Thompson and Alba-Juez, 2014:10).

Analysing evaluation in promotional texts is a way of identifying underlying VALUE systems being REPRESENTED.

Methodology:

APPROACH	TOOLS	FOCUS	METHODS	
Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)	Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL): APPRAISAL	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Targets - identifying what is being evaluated Loading - identifying which targets are being evaluated positively / negatively 	Manual annotation of samples from each corpus, using UAM CorpusTool	 <p>Psst... Ask me about the Big Top!</p>
	Corpus Linguistics: Keyness	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Key Semantic Domains - identifying thematic areas which receive high relative evaluative attention in each corpus 	Application of UCREL Semantic Analysis System (USAS) using Wmatrix, comparing each corpus to the others	

Conner, L. 2013. *Audience engagement and the role of arts talk in the digital era*, New York, Palgrave MacMillan.

Horverak, Ø. 2009. Research note—wine journalism—marketing or consumers' guide? *Marketing Science*, 28, 573-579.

Kavanagh, K. 2019. Criticism within the circus sector: Redressing a power imbalance. *Platform*, 13, 64-85.

Negus, K. 2002. The work of cultural intermediaries and the enduring distance between production and consumption. *Cultural Studies*, 16, 501-515.

Shaw, P. 2009. The lexis and grammar of explicit evaluation in academic book reviews, 1913 and 1993. In: Hyland, K. & Diani, G. (eds.) *Academic evaluation: Review genres in university settings*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. 217-235.

Thompson, G. & Alba-Juez, L. 2014. *Evaluation in context*, Amsterdam, John Benjamins