

Labelling Journalism

The Discourse of Sectional Paratexts in Print and Online Newspapers

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Abstract

The present article explains why it is important to consider newspapers' formats and content sections in discourse analyses. It performs a comparative analysis of the choice and naming of content sections in the print and online editions of three major Norwegian newspapers published in 2010. The concept of paratexts is stressed and used as an analytical tool through a four-dimensional framework. The analysis shows that sections that appear across paper brands and platforms refer quite conventionally to specific topics and genres, whereas sections that appear solely online rather tend to highlight social functions, social roles and social actors. Through their paratexts, the online-specific sections answer questions of *who* and *why* instead of *what*. In this sense, there seems to be a discursive development in the principles underlying text classification and navigation, turning towards a more dialogical and person-oriented discourse online.

Keywords: paratext, format, content taxonomies, online newspapers, navigation menus, discourse analysis

Introduction

“News”, “Sports”, “Opinions”, “Culture” – both print and online newspapers sort their articles into distinct sections, for various reasons. Most readers probably pay little attention to these content taxonomies; at the most, we might consider the sectioning more or less convenient for our reading purposes. However, it is easy to observe that the choice, naming and organization of sections differ considerably both between papers on the same platform (print or online), and between the print and online edition of a given paper brand. How are we to understand these differences – and for that matter, the similarities? Do they in any way reflect the editorial staff's view on journalism, and could they affect readers' interpretations of the papers' stories? In short: Are there any discursive patterns to be aware of?

The aim of the present article is to pick up this rather under-explored aspect of media discourse, present some general theoretical features and perform a small-scale discourse analysis to demonstrate its relevance to media studies. The analysis will compare the content taxonomies and section names – referred to as paratexts – in the print and online editions of the Norwegian newspapers *Aftenposten*, *VG* and *Dagbladet*, guided by two research questions:

- Which sections are common between all the three papers, both online and in print? Which discursive patterns are articulated through their contents and the paratexts that name them?
- Which sections exist solely online, in the sense that they do not have any counterpart in the print edition of the same paper brand? Are their paratexts and contents based on a different discursive pattern than the sections that also appear in print?

By choosing the leading Norwegian paper brands publishing both in print and online, it is possible to explore and compare widespread journalistic discourses. Aftenposten, VG and Dagbladet are Norway's highest selling print papers, in descending order (2010 figures, Høst 2011: 45). Their online counterparts are correspondingly among the most frequently visited Norwegian websites, with VG Nett ranked as number 1, Dagbladet.no as number 5 and Aftenposten.no as number 8 the week the study was conducted (TNS Gallup). The printed VG and Dagbladet are sold as single copies and distributed nationwide, whereas Aftenposten is a subscription newspaper with limited distribution outside the Oslo area. Often VG and Dagbladet are considered "tabloid" newspapers as opposed to the "serious" Aftenposten, both in print and online, although this distinction is easily problematized in many ways (e.g., Hågvar 2007: 194).

The print corpus for the analysis is one randomly selected week's issues of the three papers, namely from the 6th to 12th of May 2010. Although the respective sections appear on different days throughout the week, the weekly pattern is fairly stable (Allern 2001: 109, Hågvar 2003: 108), making the corpus representative for the purpose of the present study.¹ For comparison, the navigation menus of the online Aftenposten.no, Dagbladet.no and VG Nett were downloaded in the same period.²

The preliminary theoretical discussion will also draw on this corpus, as well as additional samples, for concretizations and exemplifications.

Format and Paratext Analysis

Methodically, discourse analysis of newspapers' content taxonomies belongs to the field of format studies, i.e. how a medium organizes its contents physically and semiotically (Ledin 2000: 8f, Karlsson and Ledin 2000: 5, Hågvar 2003: 51 and 2007: 32). Exploring which framework a given newspaper or website has applied for its text production might increase our understanding of why the texts appear as they do (the choice of discourses, genres, styles, etc.), and how they are inclined to be interpreted by the readers. Thus formats play an important role within media discourse analysis, both as a part of the context in case studies and as a separate object of study.

In a diachronic study of Swedish weekly magazines, Per Ledin (2000: 65f) designs a useful model for format analysis that combines multimodal *paratext* analysis with *layout* analysis, the purpose of which is to describe, respectively, the *thresholds* and *construction* of "semiotic rooms".³ Besides capturing both the verbal and the visual framework of the texts, the strength of this model is that it emphasizes the contextual importance of the paratexts, which will also be a main issue below.

Ledin (ibid.: 18ff) distinguishes between the paratexts' *generality*, *scope* and *function*. Considering generality, a *typifying* paratext names a stable category of texts (e.g., a sectional paratext), while an *individualizing* paratext belongs to one specific text (e.g.,

a headline). As for scope, a paratext can be more or less *global* to other paratexts, that is, being hierarchically superior to them and embedding them, whereas the subordinated paratexts are *local* to those embedding them. The potential functions of any paratext are threefold: The paratext is *topical* if it indicates what the text is about (e.g., a headline), it is *signalizing* if it points out the existence and whereabouts of a text (e.g., a “read more” hyperlink), and it is *positional* if it states participants in the communication (e.g., a byline). To some extent, Ledin’s paratextual functions correspond to Michael Halliday’s (2004: 29f) more general linguistic metafunctions: the ideational, the textual and the interpersonal.

Thus, when studying the paratexts that label a newspaper’s content sections, we are dealing with typifying paratexts that are global to most other paratexts in the newspaper, and that make up different combinations of topical, signalizing and positional functions.

Both the concept of paratexts and the threshold metaphor originate from Gerard Genette (1997)⁴, who is concerned with how titles, prefaces, etc., affect the interpretation of fictional literature. He labels “these accompanying productions [...] the work’s *paratext*”, and argues that they constitute a “threshold” that influences the reading of the work (ibid.:1f).⁵ Finn Frandsen (1991) has adapted the concept to the field of newspaper analysis, and Ledin (2000: 18) draws explicitly on his framework. Frandsen pays specific attention to the “global paratextual system” of print papers, using the term “Les titres-rubriques” when discussing the sectional paratexts:

“Les titres-rubriques” are the most interesting part of the paper’s paratext (in the real sense of the word). They define the hierarchically structured categories of information or news material that are to be found in the particular paper or press type. The categorization is obviously not based on universal criteria, but is rather an expression of a particular historical and cultural encyclopaedia. [...] It lies outside the scope of this article to elaborate on the multiple discourse analytical perspectives that one might draw on to study both global and local paratexts, but I would like to mention that it would be interesting to explore the global encyclopaedias’ historical transformations, as well as their articulation in different kinds of press or different countries’ press. (Frandsen 1991: 88f; my translation)

Still, paratext analysis of this kind is fairly unexplored within contemporary media studies. At least Nordic studies investigating the layout and interface of online news sites (e.g., Ihlström 2004, Engebretsen 2007) rarely include analyses of the specific taxonomies and paratexts of the menus. Thus they only cover half of Ledin’s model of a full format analysis.⁶ One exception is Heidi Bunæs Eklund’s comparison of the print and online sectioning of *Aftenposten*, in which she finds that the online-specific sections are characterized by their potential for storing information, being multimedial or offering interactivity. She also notes that the online paratexts seem more specific than the printed ones, due to the large number of subsections in the menu (Eklund 2004: 111f). Still, even Eklund does not emphasize the linguistic articulation of the sectional paratexts. Further studies focusing specifically on newspapers’ taxonomies and sectional paratexts would therefore be a welcome addition to the research on print and online newspapers’ modes of presentation and functionality.

Threshold or Wallpaper?

Genette (1997: 2), Frandsen (1991: 79) and Ledin (2000: 65) all use the “threshold” metaphor to define what paratexts do; they are not boundaries, but rather “a ‘vestibule’ that offers the world at large the possibility of either stepping inside or turning back” (Genette 1997: 2). Such metaphors surely make sense in the world of fiction literature, which is read in one direction from cover to cover: Paratexts are often read before the adjacent texts and therefore build a certain preconception, which might in turn influence our interpretation. But what about newspapers?

Print papers are not necessarily read from page one. Still, if we choose to read the paper backwards, or to turn immediately to the sports section, it is because we are interested in specific sections. In this sense, the sectioning and its paratexts are already governing our reading. And if we do read the paper chronologically from cover to cover, at least flip through it, we cannot avoid noticing the paratexts introducing each new section. For print papers, the “threshold” and “vestibule” metaphors therefore fit quite well, and it could easily be argued that they, as an inevitable part of the co-text, suggest a certain frame for text interpretation.

Online papers, on the other hand, are read quite differently. Most readers access the stories directly through the front page, not knowing in advance which sections they will be sent off to. Only a very limited number of readers actively use the menu to pick texts of specific interest (Ihlström 2004: 130, Boczkowski 2010: 24). Instead of passing the paratextual threshold, then, most readers slip in through the backdoor. However, once a story is accessed, it is inevitably framed by the sectional paratext. Unlike print papers, in which a paratext may label only the first page of the section,⁷ the online menu is always present on the screen, usually highlighting the paratext of the current section.

This implies that the sections and their paratexts have slightly different functions in print and online, from a reader’s perspective. In print, the sections primarily help the reader locate texts of personal interest. Online, the sections emerge to frame texts that have already been chosen by the reader. Instead of being a *threshold*, then, the sectional paratext becomes the *wallpaper* of the semiotic room you just entered. After picking a story, the reader is implicitly informed of which kind of intertextuality and interdiscursivity applies as the relevant context to this particular text. Moreover, because the main menu is still available, the reader is constantly reminded of which alternative contexts the text could have belonged to, and thereby also of which contexts are considered irrelevant.

To a certain extent, the wallpaper function also applies to print papers: You may open the paper at random and find a story framed by a running head stating the sectional paratext. Likewise, the online menus also work as thresholds if you actively use them to navigate. To most readers, anyway, the threshold function is likely to be more prominent in print, while the wallpaper function will dominate online.

The way a newspaper is sectioned forms preconceptions also on the production side. From journalists’ point of view, the sections and their paratexts represent available discourses regarding ideas for stories, choice of journalistic methods, angles and genres, and the multimodal representations of the content. Especially online, the fixed nature of the menu invites a continuous production of texts within each section.

Figure 1. Dagbladet.no's "Celebrity" Section 31.3.2010

Okjendis.no Forsida Bilder Video Mote Tips oss Arkivet

Er du singl
Finne er kjæreste til på
Alder alder
Søk

De velkjente Atkins-barene er bedre enn noensinne
Et sunt mellommåltid
Kun 399,-
15 stk
KJØP
almea.no

Sjekkeprogram-beiler dømt til døden

Drepte fire kvinner og ei jente (12).

DØDSDOM: Rodney Alcala er dømt for drap på fire kvinner og ei tolv år gammel jente. Politiet trykker han har flere liv på samvittigheten. Foto: AP Photo/Nick Ut/SCANPIX

For instance, ever since Dagbladet.no in 2006 established a new section called “Celebrity”, the journalists have produced several celebrity stories a day to keep the section alive. Furthermore, this particular paratext justifies a discourse that highlights the celebrity aspect of stories at the expense of other possible angles. When the Norwegian news agency NTB on March 31st 2010 reported that an American mass murderer had been sentenced to death, Dagbladet.no published the story on their front page with the headline “Dating show suitor sentenced to death. Killed four women and a girl (12).” By clicking the “Read more” link, the readers were redirected to the “Celebrity” section, where the story opens: “A man who participated in a TV dating show in the US in the 70s, Rodney Alcala, was sentenced to death on Tuesday for the killing of four women and a 12-year-old girl.” (Figure 1.) The curious fact that a person known (to some Americans) from TV entertainment could also be a killer is thus highlighted as the

main news value of the story, whereas the fact that five persons were actually killed by this man is reduced to a mere premise in an otherwise peculiar story. To some extent, the co-text that the section provides (section name, visual presentation, other texts in the same section) contributes to this interpretation: We know what discourse to expect when the “Celebrity” wallpaper pops up. If the same story had been published within the Foreign Affairs section, the reader’s attention would probably have been led to different aspects of the story, such as the horror of the man’s crime or use of the death penalty in the US. Likewise, such a categorization would probably have activated different text norms, encouraging the journalist to present the story differently. VG Nett published their version of the story within the Foreign Affairs section and illustratively picked the celebrity-free headline “Serial killer sentenced to death in the US”.

Four Dimensions of Paratext Analysis

If we supplement Ledin’s notions of scope and functionality with some further linguistic and multimodal aspects, we find that the discourse of a given paper’s sectional paratexts could be analysed along four dimensions: Each paratext represent distinct *semantic boundaries*, *wording perspectives*, *classification principles* and *visual cues*.

First, the very existence of an explicit content taxonomy implies that certain distinctions have been made within the continuum of available content, including a particular hierarchy of global and local paratexts (Frandsen 1991: 88, Ledin 2000: 20). The meaning of each paratext and hence the semantic scope of the respective section will therefore depend on which positional value it is assigned by its surrounding paratexts (Hjelmlev 1966: 44f, Heradstveit and Bjørgo 1992: 25). For instance, in the print edition of *Aftenposten*, “News” and “World” are two separate global sections, covering domestic and foreign affairs, respectively. Online, contrastively, *Aftenposten.no*’s global “News” section includes both “World” and “Domestic” as local subsections. The concept of news, then, seems broader online, while the printed news implicitly are restricted to domestic affairs. Such boundaries between sections will be adjusted to both culturally established semantic fields (Eco 1979: 76ff) and the newspaper’s rhetorical strategies, including the need for an easily understood catalogue of content in the online menus. As website taxonomies are often constructed to resemble mental schemes (Morville and Rosenfeld 2007: 69), particularly the ever-present menus of the online papers may naturalize certain distinctions and hierarchies between a priori categories.

Second, given the positional value of a given paratext, its meaning will be further determined by the particular wording (Fairclough 1992: 190f). For instance, the overview of what is on TV is framed by different paratexts in the print and online edition of VG. The print version is called “The TV Evening”, connoting relaxing, cosiness and perhaps family life – TV is implicitly something you watch in the evening, on the coach after a decent day’s work. Children’s morning shows, midday housewife programmes and all the different kinds of web TV do not belong in this discourse. Online, it is quite different: It is not a description of your evening, but an interactive “TV Guide”, that helps you to find the TV shows suited to *your* interest through a range of searching criteria. While these wordings obviously reflect the respective platforms’ technical constraints and possibilities, they also imply two different notions of what ‘watching television’ means: either a shared, social evening activity – or an all-day, individual pick-and-customize activity.

Third, sectional paratexts reflect a variety of classification principles. Some paratexts state a topic (“Culture”), some state a genre (“Editorial”), some state a purpose for entering (“Fun”), some state a person or an identity (“The Readers”) etc. Which common feature unites the content of a given section, and which of Ledin’s paratextual functions are at work point to certain model readers and model readings.

Fourth, the meanings of the sectional paratexts are affected by their visual representation and their distribution within the available semiotic space of the newspaper. Different *information value* is assigned depending on the paratext’s left-right location on the horizontal menu lines in online papers, and the vertical assignment to the respective lines. Font size, colours and contrasts assign various degrees of *salience*, whereas borderlines and visual metaphors like buttons or archive tabs provide stronger or weaker *framing* devices (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996, 1998; Ledin 2000). For instance, the respective menus of Aftenposten.no, Dagbladet.no and VG Nett are all made up of two horizontal menu lines, of which the upper one is more salient (larger fonts, positive typing and/or capital letters) and provides more distinct framings between the paratexts (Figure 2). Combined with Kress and van Leeuwen’s concept of “ideal” and “real” information value (1996: 193ff, 1998: 193ff), this visual representation suggests that the upper line contains the paper’s most general and therefore main content categories, whereas the bottom line seem to exemplify more specific, but subordinate categories.

Figure 2. The Navigation Menus of Respectively Aftenposten.no, Dagbladet.no and VG Nett



With these analytical dimensions in mind, we can now return to the preliminary research questions. In order to keep an eye out for both ordinary and extraordinary paratextual patterns (Mitchelstein and Boczkowski 2010: 1090), the analysis will cover both which sections are collectively shared across platforms and paper brands, and which sections appear in the online editions only. The sections all papers on both platforms have in common will point towards a platform-neutral journalistic doxa. The online-specific sections and their paratexts, on the other hand, represent the discursive change towards the online context, both when it comes to the general paratextual discourse and the very principles underlying the phenomenon of newspaper sectioning.

Because of space limitations the comparison is restricted to the *upper* menu lines of the respective online papers. Sections that are shared on this level will represent

the strongest consensus between the papers and platforms. Likewise, online-specific sections that are found to be worthy of a slot on the main menu are likely to be read as the most important ones.⁸ Consequently, there are both shared (e.g., TV guides) and online-specific (e.g., social networks) sections that are not touched upon here because they are visually down-prioritized online. Further studies will paint a more comprehensive picture.

Four Journalistic Cornerstones

Regardless of platform and paper name, VG, Dagbladet and Aftenposten all provide main sections for *news*, *sports*, *culture* and *travel*. The online editions even seem to share a common understanding of their allocation on the left-right axis: “News” and “Sports” are collectively found at the far left,⁹ and the culture section is always further left than “Travel”. In fact, as we move rightwards on the respective upper menu lines, the differences gradually increase between the papers’ organization of their paratexts. Thus the horizontal axes of the menus correspond closely to Kress and van Leeuwen’s notion of “given” and “new” information value (1996: 186ff, 1998: 189ff): The more basic a newspaper section is considered to be, the more likely it is to be found to the left in the online menu – and the other way around. So as to really prove this point, Aftenposten.no marks its “Car” section “New!” and places it second furthest to the right.

The fundamental character of these shared sections is further supported by the fact that all of the print papers agree on assigning the paratexts for sports, travel and culture/entertainment maximum salience, whereas the remaining sectional paratexts are emphasized somewhat differently across papers.

The *news* sections, though, are an exception from this pattern. Although the far-left allocation on the online menus suggests that the news is the core section of the paper, the corresponding section is paratextually down-prioritized in the print papers. While sections like “Sports” or “Culture” are introduced as new, separate chapters in the paper, often with their own front pages and always with big fonts and salient colours, the news section in Dagbladet and Aftenposten begins without any further notice than the paratextual running head on top of each page – and in some cases, even this may be absent (for instance Dagbladet 9.5.2010 pp 4-5). In VG, the printed news section is actually nowhere labelled “news”; such a category exists only implicitly. To the reader, the absence or downgrading of the “News” paratext may give the impression that the news are the basic, unmarked content of the paper, whereas the other sections are marked as exceptions from this basis. The online papers, on the other hand, do not have the opportunity to leave a certain section paratextually unmarked. As long as there is a navigation menu, every text needs to be explicitly classified. This means that the “News” paratext plays opposite roles in the print and the online papers: In the print papers, the news are ranked as a main genre by the absence or limited salience of the sectional paratext; in the online papers, the “News” paratext has to be explicit, salient, global and left-oriented to give the same signal. We might see this as a discursive turn towards a more explicit classification and contextualization online.

The *sports* sections are constituted as runners-up in popularity or significance online, being the news section’s closest neighbour in all three menus. VG Nett even splits the sports section in two, making “Sports” and “Football” adjacent global paratexts. These

sections appear mutually exclusive; “Football” is not also a subsection of “Sports”, and no football stories are to be found in the sports section. Instead, “Football” has its own subsections like “Premier League”, “1st division”, “The National Team”, “The Top Division for Women”, etc.¹⁰ Thus the online menus are not necessarily based upon stringent and logical taxonomies. VG Nett’s reason for extracting the football texts from the sports section is presumably to give the readers easier access (one less click) and to signal that football stories are highly prioritized. This is a good example of how the need for a hierarchical organization online leads to different sections and paratexts than the linear organization in print.

The *culture* sections share the same paratexts online and in print for all three papers. But also in this case, VG differs from Dagbladet and Aftenposten by picking the paratext “Limelight” instead of “Culture”. By choosing a metonymy from show business, VG indicates that its culture section emphasizes entertainment, whereas Dagbladet’s and Aftenposten’s “Culture” connotes a somewhat more highbrow perspective on culture. Interestingly, the printed VG also publishes an additional section called “Culture & Trend” every day of the sample. This section is placed directly after the “Limelight” section, and it appears hierarchically equal to this. In the “Culture & Trend” section, VG typically places double-paged articles on architecture, history, literature, design and so on. The same section, however, is not to be found in the online edition, and neither are any of the section’s articles from the sample. This may indicate that VG Nett is more focused on entertainment than is the paper edition of VG. This case also reflects a general trend for all the papers in the material: The print sections that do not appear online are typically sections of opinions (“Editorial”, “Ideas” etc.) and slightly highbrow culture (“Culture & Trend”, “TV & Media”, “VG look at the arts” etc.), in other words sections that often include genres suited for contemplation.

The *travel* sections stand out, somewhat surprisingly, as the fourth journalistic cornerstone. If we just consider the main menus in one, travelling actually outdoes popular and useful everyday categories like weather forecasts (absent at Dagbladet.no’s main menu) and TV guides (absent at Dagbladet.no’s and Aftenposten.no’s main menus), although these appear daily in the print papers. The “Travel” section, contrastively, appears only twice a week in print: Wednesday and Saturday in all three papers. Thus the online papers highlight a section that is less common (but equally salient) in the print editions, making it hierarchically equal or even prior to sections that occur daily in print. Especially the printed VG has sections that occur more frequently than “Travel”, but that are not to be found in VG Nett’s online menu at all, such as “Editorial and comments” (daily), “Culture & Trend” (daily), “TV & Media” (daily) and “VG Helps You” (Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday). The articles published in these print sections are also rarely, if ever, to be found on VG Nett. Such observations suggest that the concept of fixed menus online makes sporadic publishing within a category less acceptable. All three online papers seem to publish several travel stories a day. Furthermore, the common choice to make “Travel” a main section at the expense of others could indicate that sections calling for user-generated content (such as readers’ holiday tips) and other online activities besides reading papers (such as buying tickets and researching holiday targets) will climb the hierarchy online compared to print. And because all the online papers locate “Travel” furthest to the right of the four commons – Dagbladet.no and Aftenposten.no even further right than the online-specific sections “Celebrity” and

“Consumer” – it is tempting to hypothesize a common text norm allocating interactive sections to the right half of the menus.

Even the sections that are common ground, then, tend to work slightly different online, although the paratexts are the same on both platforms.¹¹ Linguistically, “News”, “Sports”, “Culture” and “Travel” are abstract nouns referring to specific combinations of topics and genres. The metonymical “Limelight” is slightly narrower and more concrete, but still points to a certain topic. In Ledin’s terms, these paratexts are signaling and topical. As we now turn to the paratexts that label the online-specific sections, the question is whether this pattern changes.

New Discourses Developing Online

Which main sections are developed solely for the online editions of the respective papers, and how are they labelled? To keep this part of the analysis adequately lucid, the sections that are merely indexes (“All Content”, “A to Å”) are left out, although they clearly illustrate the online archive function, and it would be interesting to examine the criteria behind the choice of keywords. Neither will VG Nett’s “Football” section be discussed further, because it is rather an example of an altered hierarchization than an online innovation.¹² As a last reservation, the analysis does not cover sections that have slightly different paratexts online, but that collect the same kinds of texts as in print (e.g., “Opinions” on Aftenposten.no), or the other way around (e.g., “Debate” on Dagbladet.no).

We are then left with five online-specific sections in the main menus: “Consumer” (Aftenposten.no), “Celebrity” (Dagbladet.no), “The Readers”, “Use” and “Fun” (VG Nett). Do they have anything in common?

A striking feature is that several of the online-specific paratexts perform all of Per Ledin’s three paratextual functions, whereas the print-shared paratexts merely perform two. Every paratext in the menu tells us where to find certain texts (signaling), and most of them indicate what the texts in the section are about (topical). But only the online-specific sections have paratexts that are also *positional*, focusing on who is participating in the communication.

Figure 3. VG Nett’s “The Readers” Section



VG Nett’s section called “The Readers” is the most obvious example (Figure 3). The section is dedicated to the average readers and their contributions. The subsections are “Discuss on VGD” (debate forum), “VG Blog” (blogs by readers and a few celebrities), “List fever” (readers’ ranking lists), “Hurray” (readers’ congratulations), “Travel letters”

(readers' travel reports) and "Close online" (celebrities or experts answering readers' questions). There are no journalists involved in a traditional sense.

It is interesting in itself that VG Nett chooses to collect interactive genres in a section of their own. When the degree of interactivity becomes a more relevant criterion for clustering texts than the topics of the texts, we are facing a kind of sectioning based on social function rather than content.

Other sections that are defined by the social functions of their texts, have paratexts based on genre, like "Opinions" (Aftenposten.no) or "Debate" (Dagbladet.no). In this case, however, the genres which are collected in the section have no common features besides the interactivity. Therefore, a paratext based on genre or topic is impossible; the section *has* to be called either something like "Interactivity" or just "The Readers". In this sense, the topical function of the paratext is reduced to a minimum, and the positional function is dominating.

Figure 4. *Aftenposten.no's "Consumer" Section*



Aftenposten.no's paratext "Consumer" shares some of these features (Figure 4). True, it has a more topical function than "The Readers", because it signals the field of consumer journalism and thereby connotes to certain topics, specified by the subsections "Your Money", "Digital", "Residence", "Car", "Boat", "Job" and "The Cottage Magazine". However, the paratext "Consumer" also works as a description of the *model reader*: 'These stories are relevant to you in your capacity as a consumer'. Thereby the paratext also labels the participants in the communication as consumers. None of the other paratexts in the menu do that – the "Job" section is not called "Employee". It would in fact be very difficult to find analogue paratexts to replace for instance "News" and "Sports" – we would have to pick something like "Citizen" and "Spectator". It simply would not work, because those sections are based on topics, not social roles.¹³

Figure 5. *Dagbladet.no's "Celebrity" Section*



Dagbladet.no's only online-specific section is the above mentioned "Celebrity" (Figure 5). Like Aftenposten.no's "Consumer" paratext, this is also to some extent topical, because it hints at gossip journalism about famous people.¹⁴ Unlike "The Readers" and

“Consumer”, however, this paratext does not define the role of the reader. Instead, it defines a certain feature of the people you are to read *about*. What this paratext does share with the “The Readers” and “Consumer” paratexts, then, is that it draws attention to *who* instead of *what*. The relevance of the section is grounded in the social role of the people involved, not their achievements. Furthermore, the linguistic articulation of the paratext is similar to both “The Readers” and “Consumer” – it is a metonymy that refers to a specific feature associated with certain people. If we should transfer this metonymy to other sections, we would have to name the “Sports” section “Athlete”.

In this perspective, there seems to be evolving a common discourse in online-specific sectional paratexts that is positional rather than topical, and that uses metonymy to answer a question of *who*. By contrast, every section that is also to be found in print – and that usually has its origin in print journalism – is plainly topical, using a quite general or abstract noun to state *what* topic or genre the section is about, not *who* it is about or dedicated to.¹⁵

Figure 6. VG Nett's “Use” and “Fun” Sections



The online-specific paratexts that are not articulating actors or social roles, on the other hand, seem to be defining the *social function* of the section. This concerns VG Nett’s remaining sections “Use” and “Fun” (Figure 6).

The “Use” section lists 14 different subsections spanning from “The VG Carpenter” to the tax lists. Several correspond closely to the subsections found under the paratext “Consumer” on Aftenposten.no. VG Nett, however, emphasizes the *social function* of the category instead of the *social role* of the reader: You go here to find useful stuff. And anyway, a “Consumer” paratext would not be covering subsections like the weight club (because dieting is not consuming) or the interactive photo album. The *social function* seems to be the only aspect connecting these subsections; there are no common topics between them.

The “Fun” section, likewise, collects games, quizzes, SMS services and amusing movie or cartoon clips. Pure entertainment genres exist in the printed VG as well (comic strips, crossword and horoscope share a regular page), but they are not framed by any global paratext. Online, on the other hand, it seems to be important to collect these contents in a main section and highlight their *social function* through the paratext.

One explanation for these paratexts might of course be that the Norwegian words “Nytte” and “Gøy” are short words and therefore visually suited to the small menu buttons. But compared to the fact that the subsections are related only through their social function, there seems to be a more underlying explanation that marks a shift in what the *purpose* of the categories is supposed to be.

The paratexts that define the online-specific sections in the three major Norwegian online papers, then, tend to highlight social functions, social roles and social actors instead of specific topics. They answer questions of *who* and *why* instead of *what* (Table 1).

Table 1. *Patterns in Sectional Paratexts Online*

Sections that are known from print papers	Sections that are online-specific
Topical function Answer: <i>what?</i>	Positional function Answer: <i>who?</i> or <i>why?</i>
Abstract and general nouns stating the topic	Metonymies stating social roles or social functions

Conclusions

The three leading Norwegian newspaper brands all dedicate main sections to news, sports, culture and travel journalism, both online and in print, thus pointing towards four doxic categories within Norwegian newspaper journalism. These sections are visually presented as salient and given, and are labelled by topical paratexts stating the topic or genre through an abstract noun.

In contrast, online-specific sections are defined by more positional paratexts (“The Readers”, “Consumer”, “Celebrity”) or paratexts that state a social reason for entering (“Use”, “Fun”), often expressed through metonymies. They seem to offer first and foremost entertainment, practical advice and personal communication, and are visually located on the “new” side of the left-right axis.

There are, then, discursive differences between the shared and the online-specific sectional paratexts. Because the classification functions and wordings of the online-specific paratexts highlight roles and processes, they construct a model reader who is interested in people, and who prefers amusing and personally useful services. By contrast, the paratexts naming the four doxic sections address a model reader in search of general information within certain fields. The “Travel” paratext, for instance, does not suggest who is supposed to travel, or why you should – imagine alternatives like “Travel!” (imperative)¹⁶, “Tourist”, “Holiday”, etc. A reasonable hypothesis is that the interactive nature of the online context affects the norms for classifying and labelling, causing a turn towards a more dialogic and person-oriented discourse within online-specific journalism.

As for the four common sections, we should note that it is primarily the wordings their paratexts have in common. They do not necessarily share the same visual salience and positional value across the platforms. We have seen that implicit, modest (“News”) and sporadic (“Travel”) print paratexts appear as explicit, salient and stable section labels online, and that semantic boundaries are altered due to the addition or omission of supplying categories (“Sports” vs. “Football”, “Limelight” vs. “Culture and Trends”). In

general, the online-specific paratexts seem to withdraw various informal aspects from the positional value of the shared paratexts, leaving these – maybe paradoxically – slightly more solemn than in print. The mere existence of Dagbladet.no’s “Celebrity” section indicates that “News”, “Culture” or “Sports” on the other hand are *not* concerned with celebrity gossip.¹⁷ Thus these online paratexts are assigned a different positional value than in print, where no celebrity section occurs.¹⁸ Similar claims could be made for Aftenposten.no (the “Consumer” section suggesting that consumer journalism is not news) and VG Nett (“Use” and “Fun” indicating that, e.g., news items are theoretical and serious matters; “The Readers” in fact underlining that the remaining sections are the journalists’ domain).

Needless to say, this analysis covers merely a piece of the overall paratextual discourse of these papers. Still, the findings confirm that paratext analysis is a necessary complement to analyses of layout or interface in mapping the multimodal co-text of newspaper stories on the respective platforms.

A first study to fill out the picture sketched above would be to examine the obvious missing piece: Which sections appear solely in *print*? And moreover, how do these results compare to other papers, both in Norway and other countries? Studies should furthermore be expanded to cover also the lower menu line and the vast network of subsections. How are the concepts of “news”, “culture”, etc., created through the labelling and hierarchization of subsections? To what extent do paratextual differences between similar sections in different papers or on different platforms actually reflect discursive differences within the respective sections’ texts? And how do empirical journalists and readers actually draw upon the paratextual framework in creating and interpreting newspaper texts?¹⁹

The field thus opens the door to numerous approaches, as previously noted by Frandsen (1991: 89). Hopefully the analytical snapshot and perspectives presented here can inspire further studies, preparing the ground for more elaborate discourse analyses of newspaper formats.

Notes

1. Later random samples confirm the representativeness. Searching one year’s print issues (12.5.2009–12.5.2010) in the Retriever database even confirmed that the “online-specific” paratexts do not appear in occasional print issues outside the sample.
2. The pictures used as illustrations were downloaded a few days later (the 25th of May), but they are in every significant way identical to the analysed menus. Dagbladet.no later (1.9.2010) changed their layout, including the menu. Paratextually, the main difference is that “The Magazine” section was moved two spots further to the right.
3. In Swedish, the word “rum” refers to both “room” and “space”. Thus Ledin is neatly addressing semiotic space consistently with Genette’s threshold metaphor.
4. *Paratexts* was originally published in French as *Seuils* in 1987.
5. The word “paratext” could, somewhat inconsistently, be used both abstractly (‘the newspaper’s paratext’, meaning the complete paratextual system of the newspaper) and more concretely (‘the paratext that

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- labels this section’, meaning one specific textual element). The present article mainly refers to concrete paratexts, which in turn constitute a piece of the total paratext of the newspaper.
6. This is not to say that these studies are inadequate in any way. The point is merely that supplementary studies are needed to paint the full picture.
 7. VG’s “Limelight” section is a good example.
 8. One could argue that the difference between the menu lines is not as much a matter of *importance* as a matter of *discourse*. Generally, traditional paratexts referring to broad sections, many of which are also known from the print papers, tend to be located on the upper menu line (“News”, “Sports”, “Culture” etc.). The line below, on the other hand, is roughly dedicated to narrower or more online-specific sections, often containing genres that are not journalistic in a traditional sense (“Quiz”, “Comics”, “Weight Club” etc.). In this sense, the online-specific paratexts on the upper menu line do not necessarily represent the most innovative, popular or even lucrative sections, but rather the online innovations that best fit into the traditional journalistic discourse. However, if this is true, it just makes divergent paratextual patterns even more interesting: Which online-specific features are powerful enough to cut through the traditional paratextual discourse?
 9. True, Aftenposten.no provides a section called “All content” furthest to the left, whereas Dagbladet.no and VG Nett locate their corresponding sections (both labelled “A to Å”) furthest to the right. Index sections aside, however, there seems to be a strong text norm requiring news and sports paratexts to be located as far to the left as possible.
 10. For an analysis of these interesting gender markings, see Hågvar (2007: 131ff).
 11. To be precise, VG’s printed sports section is actually called “The VG Sports”.
 12. Football stories are after all collected in a separate subsection in print as well. However, the paratexts “The Elite League”, etc., are in print directly subordinated to “Sports” without any “Football” level in-between. The paratextual level that states the sport, then, is actually an online innovation, and this applies even to sports other than football.
 13. Interestingly, the “Consumer” paratext was removed from Aftenposten.no’s menu during the fall of 2010 and replaced with a section called “The Archive” – which again does not signal any specific topic, but refers to a social function: the readers’ search for specific texts or topics.
 14. Another common feature is that both “Celebrity” and “Consumer” are separate web domains, respectively www.kjendis.no and www.forbruker.no, as opposed to, e.g., the sections for news or culture. Among the main print-shared sections, www.sport.no (Dagbladet) and www.oslopuls.no (Aftenposten) seem to be the only ones with a separate web domain.
 15. True, two of these are also metonymies: “Limelight” (VG Nett) and “Oslopulse” (Aftenposten.no). However, they still point towards a topic rather than a group of people. It could also be argued that even “Opinions” (Aftenposten.no) is a metonymy, highlighting a specific feature of the writer’s mind that characterizes the genres collected in the section. Interestingly, then, this paratext does not appear in the printed Aftenposten. In print, the subsections like “Debate” and “Opinion articles” (“Kommentarer”) are local to the paratext “Culture” (!) instead.
 16. The actual Norwegian paratext “Reise” is both a noun (a travel) and a verb in infinitive mood (to travel).
 17. Which is really not the case, cf. for instance “From luxury to prison for Norwegian TV Celebrity”, published in the “News” section 7.3.2011.
 18. Many of the online “Celebrity” stories are published in other sections in print. A random sample retrieved 28.7.2010 at 12:15 shows that 20 of the 39 stories found on the “Celebrity” front page were also published in the print paper in some form, often shortened. Seventeen of these were published in the printed “Culture” section, two under “News” and one in the “Sunday” issue.
 19. Several of these issues are addressed in my forthcoming PhD thesis.

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