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The Case of Croatian Online Media**

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# CORRECTIONS AS INDICATORS OF MEDIA ACCOUNTABILITY: THE CASE OF CROATIAN ONLINE MEDIA

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## ABSTRACT

*This study explores the extent to which media accountability practices have been developed in the Croatian online media. It is based on the content analysis of correction texts (n=330). The findings show that the accountability values in Croatian online media corrections were limited, and the Croatian online media were implementing only those accountability values that help them to create the illusion of ethical conduct. The Croatian online media published corrections faster than newspapers did and marked responsibility in both the headlines (43.75% n=140) and in the bodies of texts (61% n=198). On the other hand, the Croatian online media were not improving their transparency and the accessibility corrections by, e.g., tagging (18.12% n=58), sharing on social media (6.4% n=17), not recognising the perpetrators of the errors (79.69% n=255), and by not disclosing erroneous procedures (86.88% n=278). The research has shown that Croatian online media were generally not providing accurate information in the correction texts (82.6% n=264), did not link corrections to the original articles (43.44% n=139), and did not have a formal correction policy/routines.*

Keywords: Online journalism ▪ media accountability ▪ errors ▪ corrections ▪ correction text ▪ Croatia

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The media play an important role in democracies because they are the (only) institutions that can control the powers of governments, politicians and corporations (Muller, 2014). Consequently, the freedom of expression has an important role in doability and in the realization of democratic societies (Frankel Paul et al., 2004). However, with freedom comes responsibility. To carry out their watchdog function, the media need to be responsible to the public for their journalistic practices and outputs (Fengler et al., 2015).

Three concepts from journalism and media studies describe the responsible

behaviour of the media: media self-regulation, media transparency, and media accountability (Eberwein & Porlezza, 2014; Eberwein et al., 2019). Media self-regulation represents journalistic practices that have the goal of securing the media's societal function. It involves practices like codes of ethics, news ombudsmen, press and media councils, or complaints commissions (Martin, 2009; OSCE, 2021). Similarly, media transparency represents ways to monitor and criticize journalism (Deuze, 2005). Media transparency gives insights into the journalistic process, especially into how journalists present truth, explain facts, and make mistakes (Koliska, 2015). with the aim of holding the media to be responsible to the public (Xie, 2014). The third concept, media accountability, involves all stakeholders (journalists, public, society in general) (Eberwein & Porlezza, 2014) and enables the media to be responsible to the society for the quality of their content (McQuail, 2010). All three approaches contain certain overlapping journalistic routines and practices that aim to demonstrate the responsibility of the media to the public, and, for this paper, we have used these concepts interchangeably.

Bertrand (2000) divided accountability in journalistic routines and practices on the basis of who is undertaking them, and how they are using them as internal, external, and cooperative accountability tools. Internal tools are those that are under the full control of the journalists or editors, external tools are those employed by outside organizations, while cooperative tools are based on cooperation between journalists and non-journalists (Keith, 2004, p. 180). Based on Bertrand's taxonomy, Susan Keith (2004) created a list of accountability tools. Internal accountability tools are organizational ethics codes, corrections and clarifications, ombudsmen or readers' representatives, and the internal memos that set the routines of journalism (Keith, 2004, p. 181). Among external tools, she has listed the codes of ethics of professional organizations, the media's coverage of the media, journalism reviews, non-profit media organizations, government regulatory agencies, and research done by journalism schools or scholars (Keith, 2004, pp. 181-182). The cooperative tools are news councils and letters to the editors (Keith, 2004, p. 182).

Internal tools are to be found in their entirety only in the domain of journalists, and corrections stand out as a prime indicator of the actual practice of media accountability. As opposed to other tools, an acknowledgement in the corrections is immediate, or is carried as soon as the newsroom becomes aware of an error. Corrections also indicate who caused the error, and what the newsroom will do to avoid such errors in the future. Furthermore, newsrooms apologize for any damage that they may have caused and they take responsibility for the error. On the other hand, ethics codes and internal memos tell us only about intention, but not about actual practice. Hence, for this study, we have proposed that the analysis of corrections might be used to detect how the media and journalists are really accountable to the public. Arguments for this claim can be found in the fact that ethics codes and internal documents are only reflections of good intentions, while corrections demonstrate the reality of journalistic routines and practices.

The content of corrections has been poorly researched and, generally, researchers have covered the frequency/types of errors (Charnley, 1936; Silverman, 2007; Maier, 2007, Hettinga & Appelman, 2014; Appelman & Hettinga, 2019), and the quality of corrections (Martin & Martins, 2016). Only Zohar Kampf and Efrat Daskal (2014) have tried to examine the accountability values in corrections' texts. They developed a theoretical framework for understanding media accountability in corrections, and they developed an empirical model for assessing the accountability that is demonstrated in corrections.

The purpose of this study is to assess how the Croatian online media fulfil their media accountability function, and this is done by analyzing the correction texts, with the hypothesis that Croatian online media are using corrections in such a way that they are not fully disclosing the values of media accountability.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Accountability and professionalism

According to Denis McQuail and Mark Deuze (2020, p. 221), the concept of accountability relies on two concepts: freedom of expression and responsibility. Freedom of expression is a universal human right which, historically, can be traced back to the Code of Hammurabi (Smith, 2018), and its contemporary form, which is settled in Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (UN Human Rights, 2021). Article 19 states that everyone has the right to freedom of expression, regardless of the type of media used. Freedom doesn't come without responsibility, so the Covenant has determined that the right is limited to special duties and responsibilities, and it may be subject to certain restrictions.

The responsibility (accountability) comes from a normative theory perspective that asserts society's expectations of media activities (McQuail & Deuze, 2020):

- They should respect the rights to free publications.
- They should prevent or limit harm to individuals, as well as society, arising from publication.
- They should promote the positive aspects of publication, rather than merely being restrictive.
- They should be public and transparent. (p. 222)

This normative concept anticipates that the media are free, but that they are obliged to serve the public good through professional or public agency, in the form of apologies or corrections. However, it should be remembered that public accountability is not the only aim of accountability. According to Claude-Jean Bertrand (2000, p. 151), other aims are to: improve the service provided by media, restore media credibility, protect the freedom of speech, and improve the position of the media in a democracy.

Although there are four frames (regulatory, professionalism, market and public

responsibility) (McQuail & Deuze, 2020) that can be used to examine the accountability of the media, only professionalism can explain it from the positions of journalists. The professionalism frame defines accountability as emerging from the ethical maturing of media professionals (Ibid., p. 229), in which the standards of ethical behavior are defined in the form of the codes of conduct at the organizational and professional association levels. For journalism to be professional, it must be ethically accountable for its failings and it must act in an ethically permissible manner. Such practice is voluntary, grounded on a social basis, and doesn't presume material penalties, but it is also transparent and based on dialog (McQuail & Deuze, 2020, p. 230).

## 2.2. Accountability in online media

The online environment can improve the accountability of the media through the ways in which they bring more transparency and responsiveness (Heikkilä et al., 2012). McQuail (2013, p. 170) insisted that media accountability should be transferred to the online environment, because that environment enables journalists to better listen and answer to the audience's complaints.

Susanne Fengler (2012) additionally confirmed previous claims that, in the digital age, media accountability must involve professionals (journalists) and an active audience:

Today, technological development – the advent of the Internet and the Social Web – has lowered the cost of monitoring and ‘punishing’ the media for the individual media user to almost zero, for the first time in the history. An infinite ‘crowd’ of users can share the burden of media monitoring online, and in the Web 2.0. era, suddenly there is a plethora of fast, low-cost options to (if you wish, anonymously) ‘voice’ criticism and protest – via email, chats, commentary functions, Twitter, Facebook, and the like. (p. 184)

David Domingo and Heikki Heikkilä (2012) see online media accountability as being made up of processes that depend on the phases of news production. They consider online accountability tools to be tools that make actor transparency (the profiles of journalists, published mission statements, published codes of ethics, news policy documents, in-house codes of ethics, and public information on company ownership), production transparency (links to original sources, newsroom blogs, collaborative news production, and citizen journalism), and responsiveness (online news comments, correction buttons, and responding to users through social media) (Domingo & Heikkilä, 2012, p. 276). Their research has shown that online media do not prioritize the media accountability practices, and that online media do not use technological advancements to facilitate the transparency and responsiveness of journalism (Domingo & Heikkilä, 2012, p. 286).

The practice of online media accountability is unevenly developed around the world due to the level of economic and technological development with best practice in the Western Europe and the USA (Heikkilä et al., 2012, p. 69). On the other hand,

many of the traditional media in the USA have abandoned the traditional approaches in favor of online accountability tools. *The New York Times* explained its removal of the public editor position by replacing it with participatory online tools (Vore, 2017):

The public editor position, created in the aftermath of a grave journalistic scandal, played a crucial part in rebuilding our readers' trusts by acting as our in-house watchdog. We welcomed that criticism, even when it stung. But today, our followers on social media and our readers across the internet have come together to collectively serve as a modern watchdog, more vigilant and forceful than one person could ever be. Our responsibility is to empower all of those watchdogs, and to listen to them, rather than to channel their voice through a single office.

Eberwein and Porlezza (2014, p. 432) researched the significance of participatory online accountability tools, like user comments, social media and citizen's blogs, and found that online accountability tools are not a solution for all of the problems. Similarly, Jose A. García-Avilés (2019, p. 281) found that online accountability does not automatically improve the level of media accountability. To improve media accountability, the media need to implement new online tools, but also to adjust the traditional ones (Benson et al., 2017).

### 2.3. Online corrections and accountability

The corrections are an important tool in journalistic accountability (Karlsson et al., 2017) and they are published in the form of textual notes when journalists mislead their audience(s).

Corrections are a form of accountability that ensures that when journalism fails in delivering truthful information to the public it should be equally truthful about these failings or otherwise risk losing the public's trust. (Karlsson et al., 2017, p. 154)

Corrections have advanced very little through the years (Silverman, 2007), and the standard form of a correction text in newspapers consisted of a title (usually 'Corrections') and an explanatory text, in no more than a few sentences, that was published alongside the corrected information in a dedicated place (Kampf & Daskal, 2014). This standardized information in correction texts is used to demonstrate media accountability.

The corrections should identify the error, correct the record, explain why the error happened and how such an error could be avoided, and apologized to those who have been damaged (Bugeja, 2007, p. 50). Online corrections have the same media accountability function, but with a wider reach and a more timely influence (Gillmor, 2019).

In the age of analog traditional media, the process was flawed by definition, because corrections in newspapers were typically published on Page 2, days or even weeks after the original error ... [In online] we can fix the error right in the news article (or video or audio) and append an explanation, thereby limiting the damage, because people new to the article will get the correct information.

Online corrections have three forms: correcting the article with the error, writing the correction note, and placing it in the article with an error, or creating a webpage with a persistent URL that gathers all correction notes (Thornburg, 2011). Brautović (2021) found that Croatian online media invented a fourth form, which uses independently published correction notes that are, or are not, linked to the corrected or uncorrected article.

The limitations of online corrections practice can be summarized in the practice of deleting incorrect articles, the practice of the non-correction of articles, and the practice of not linking corrections to the articles to which they refer. The practice of deleting incorrect articles arguably obstructs transparency (Joseph, 2011), while the practices of the non-correction of articles and of not linking such corrections to the original articles, neglect the goals of media accountability, which are to inform the public about their mistakes and to (re)build trust.

#### 2.4. Croatian media and correction practices

The Croatian media infrequently correct errors. and the journalists “do not believe that regularly published corrections were increasing the level of newspaper credibility” (Vilović, 2010, p. 75). According to Gordana Vilović (2010: 75-76), in May, 2010, the daily newspaper, *Vecernji list*, had an average of two corrections per day, while the daily newspaper, *Jutarnji list*, published corrections only when outraged readers invoked *The Media Act* (2004). Similarly, Vladimira Hebrang (2010) found that Croatian publishers avoid publishing corrections, and that correction procedures have “a high degree of deviation in the application of legal rules” (p.61). Hebrang found that, in the first six months of 2009, the political newspapers and magazines (*Večernji list*, *Jutarnji list*, *Nacional* and *Globus*) were publishing corrections under headings like ‘letters to the editors’ (pisma uredništvu), ‘corrections and clarifications’ (ispravci i objašnjenja), ‘responses’ (reagiranja), and ‘letters from readers’ (pisma čitatelja), and that two daily newspapers and two magazines published a total of 72 corrections in the first six months of 2009 (Hebrang, 2010, p. 55-57).

As a result of insufficient media accountability practices, e.g., corrections in which the Croatian government became involved through political intervention (Fengler, 2012), the government tried to solve the problem by forming sanction rules as part of the *Media Act* (2004; 2013), especially by using its 2013 amendments. Up to February, 2019, 1163 lawsuits were filed against leading Croatian media: *Hanza Media* (459), *Styria* (420), *Slobodna Dalmacija* (100), *index.hr* (71), *nacional.hr* (22), *telegram.hr* (21), etc. (Wiesner, 2019)

#### 2.5. Assessing accountability values in correction texts

The publication of a correction does not mean that it fulfils its accountability function, viz, the correction text must communicate with the public on the way that the

correction text contains the values of media accountability, so that they do not cause the media to lose public trust. Kampf and Daskal (2014, p. 173) proposed the method of assessing the values of accountability in correction text through four textual dimensions of corrections: (a) the corrective marker; (b) the offender; (c) the offense, and (d) the offended party. The corrective marker is realized through the locus and the chronos. The locus, in newspapers, represents display of symbolic responsibility and measurable connection between the locations of the error and the correction (Kampf & Daskal, 2014, pp. 175-176). The chronos represents the timespan between publishing the error and its correction. The locus and the chronos are indicators of the severity of the error, in the way that better placement of a correction and the immediacy of publishing it, shows a higher level of importance for the corrections (Kampf & Daskal, 2014, p. 174). The locus must be converted to the online environment through adding different internet features that enable users to access the correction – the equivalent of the newspaper page number/position in the newspapers.

The offender demonstrates the transparency of those organizational procedures that caused an error and the identification of the people who were involved in producing it. The offense dimension provides readers with information about the error and the context of the error. The offence dimension also provides information about where the error was published (section and page numbers in newspapers) (Kampf & Daskal, 2014). The last dimension should identify the offended party, and the use of a predefined procedure (policy) for the publication of a correction (Kampf & Daskal, 2014). An ideal correction text should contain all four of these dimensions.

### 2.5.1. The online locus

The locus in an online environment is a complex and technical dimension, because of the nonlinear way in which users access web content. In general, users access web pages via three paths: directly (by typing the URL address of a news organization), via search engines (searching for keywords) and through social media. Direct access is hard to study, because of the fluidity of online media content. During the life-cycle of a news story it changes its placement from the homepage to the subpages, and it either ends up in an archive or is deleted. Later access to the story makes it impossible to determine what its original position was, as one can in newspapers. Hence, we can determine the efforts that are made by the newsroom to help users to access content.

According to Statista (Armstrong, 2017), the social media, like Facebook, are responsible for 40% of traffic, and Google searches for 37% of the traffic to news websites. While sharing on social media depends on both the users' and journalists' willingness to share some content, placing it on Google, and other less important search engines, results in search engine optimization (SEO) that is made only by the journalist. Although SEO is not scientifically proven, there are general rules that can be used to determine how content is better optimised for the Google search. For example, using target keywords, internal links, adding proper keywords to headlines,

formatting the URL with keywords, categorizing or organizing content around keywords, etc. Paul Bradshaw and Liisa Rohumaa (2013) recommended to journalists that they adopt SEO techniques, because that is how an article will be found by readers through their usage of a search engine (Bradshaw & Rohumaa, 2013, p. 36). An ideal correction text should have the word “correction” in the headline, in the body of its text, and in the URL; it should be tagged with the word “correction”, and it should be categorized (listed) on a page that is dedicated to corrections. The SEO application of keywords can also be used as a marker of responsibility in the corrective marker dimension.

### 3. METHODS

For this study, a content analysis was used with a codebook that was developed based on a model that was proposed by Kampf and Daskal (2014), and which was adjusted for the online environment. For the first dimension, the “corrective markers” were the coded dates of the publication of the incorrect article, the dates of the publication of the correction text, the distribution on social media, the use of the keyword “correction.” and the linking practice. The category “distribution on social media” contained the number of shares of the correction text URL on Facebook. The data for this part of the study were collected using the tool [www.sharedcount.com](http://www.sharedcount.com).

The category “use of keywords ‘correction’” consisted of subcategories: headline (1), introduction (2), URL (3), tagging (4), subscript headline (5), not present (6), and other (5). The category “linking practice” had subcategories: internal link to the original article (1) and non-linking (2).

The “offender” dimension was coded with the categories “disclosure of the person responsible for the error”, and the “disclosure of procedures leading to the transgression”. The “disclosure of the person responsible for the error” had subcategories: online medium (name of the medium, title or reference) (1), a person (name or title/position) (2), and other (3). The “disclosure of procedures leading to the transgression” contained the categories: disclosure of procedure (1), and no disclosure (2).

The “offense” dimension had two subcategories: the comprehensibility of the information provided, and “the information on error placement”. The category “the comprehensibility of information provided” had these subcategories: unclear (1) and “both erroneous and correct information were explicitly and clearly provided” (2) (Kampf & Daskal, 2014). “The information on error placement” had subcategories: clearly stated location with link (1), only link (2), clearly stated location without a link or with a broken link (3), refers to print outlet (4), and, not clear (5).

The “offended party” dimension had two subcategories: a “correction policy” and an “identity of the offended party”. The “correction policy” had categories: fixed format (1) and free format (2). The “identity of the offended party” had subcategories: organization (name, title or reference) (1), a person (name or title/position) (2), both organizational and person (3), and, other (4).

The units of analysis were the correction's text and links. In a case where the correction text contained a correction request that had been written by a lawyer, or by the offended party, only the part of the text written by a journalist or by the editor was analyzed. Due to the limited sample, coding was carried out by one coder, so there was no need for the calculation of the intercoding reliability which is used (only) when the content analysis is conducted by two or more coders, in order to assess their agreement (consistency and validity) (Lombard et al., 2017, p. 722).

### 3.1. Sample

The sample list of corrections was taken from an earlier study by one of the authors (Brautović, 2021), which dealt with the problem of differences in correction practice between the online outlets of traditional media and the online-only media in Croatia. The analyzed sample contained 320 correction texts (n=320) which were extracted from *vecernji.hr* (n=32), *jutarnji.hr* (n=119) and *24sata.hr* (n=13), *index.hr* (n=57), *net.hr* (n=31) and *tportal.hr* (n=68). The initial list was created from the Google Search results on the keywords "ispravak site:URL" ('corrections' without quotation marks; URL of analyzed media). The search was limited to the period from January 1, 2008, until December 31, 2018, and excludes duplicates, user comments, broken links, and other non-related content.

## 4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

As previously noted, the corrective marker is determined through three components: the marker of responsibility, the commensurability of the published locations of correction and error, and the timespan between the publishing of the error and its correction.

The data show that the marker of responsibility (Table 1) is primarily present in the body of texts (61.88%, n=198), the superscript headlines (54.69%, n=175), and the headlines (43.75%, n=140). The difference in marking responsibility was documented among the media analyzed, with the dominance of headlines in *net.hr* (90.32%, n=28), the body of texts in *index.hr* (94.74%, n=26), superscript headlines in *vecernji.hr* (90.63%, n=29) and *tportal.hr* (89.71%, n=61). With the exception of *index.hr* and *vecernji.hr*, who failed to state whose responsibility the errors in the body of texts were, and using headlines to mark responsibility, shows the inclination of the Croatian online media to create the mirage of ethical conduct, and to disguise the responsibility for the error (Kampf, 2009; Kampf & Daskal, 2014).

Table 1. Use of the markers of responsibility

	<i>jutarnji.hr</i> (n=119)	<i>24sata.hr</i> (n=13)	<i>index.hr</i> (n=57)	<i>tportal.hr</i> (n=68)	<i>net.hr</i> (n=31)	<i>vecernji.hr</i> (n=32)
Headline	65	7	26	10	28	4
Body of text	54	4	54	62	16	8
URL	66	7	24	6	26	5
Tagging	0	7	4	32	14	1
Other	18	1	1	0	0	0
Superscript headline	76	0	0	61	9	29
None	0	0	1	0	0	1

Further, the use of a marker of responsibility (key)word “correction” in a URL follows the pattern of the headlines (41/88%, n=134), because in all of the analyzed media, the part of the URL after the domain name is generated automatically by the content management system. So, if a headline contained the word “correction”, the URL had it too. A smaller difference in use persists only due to the subsequent editing of the headlines.

Tagging is periodically used to show the responsibility for the error and was used in 18.12% (n=58) of cases, while, in *24sata.hr* (53.85%, n=7), they were used more frequently, *tportal.hr* (47.06%, n=32), and *net.hr* (45.16%, n=14). Tagging is missing in the cases of *jutarnji.hr*, *index.hr* and *vecernji.hr*. A possible explanation for this kind of performance can be used as another proof of the creation of the appearance of ethical conduct. By non-tagging corrections, they will be harder to find via search engines, and are not collectively published on a dedicated page (correction box or section).

An analysis of the linking practice which further enhances accessibility to correction texts and improves accountability, showed that Croatian online media frequently do not link corrections with the original article that had contained the error. From the analyzed sample, 43.44% (n=139) of the correction texts were not linked to the original articles. *24sata.hr* (84.62%, n=11), *index.hr* (73.68%, n=42) and *jutarnji.hr* (56.3%, n=67) had more non-linked corrections, while *net.hr* (32.26%, n=10), *tportal.hr* (36.76, n=25, and *vecernji.hr* (34.8, n=11) had fewer.

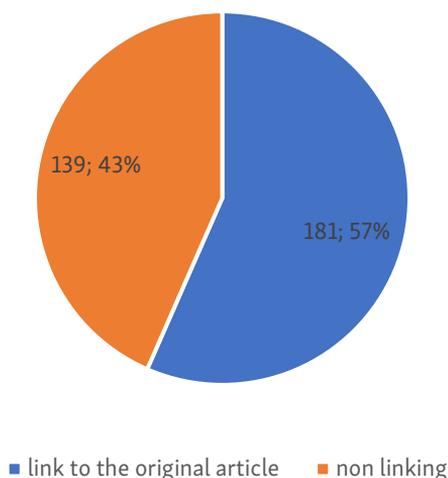


Figure 1. The linking practice

The non-linking practice is another proof of the creation of the appearance of ethical conduct, especially when the practice of linking corrections with the original articles is dominantly present only in cases where a link is provided after a request for such corrections by either a lawyer or the offended party. The offended sides are aware of this journalistic practice, so they request that the media link the corrections with the original articles: "I ask that the correction be marked and linked with the article "Dismissed Director of NP Kornati reported for brokering" (*index.hr*, 2018).

Perhaps one of the strongest pieces of evidence about questionable ethical practice in the Croatian online media was found in the sharing of corrections on social media (Facebook). While only 6.4% ( $n=17$ ) of correction texts were shared on Facebook at the same time 28.4% ( $n=75$ ) of the original articles were shared. Consequently, erroneous articles were shared 2,471 times (not only by the media), with 6,250 comments and 16,292 reactions, while corrections were shared 120 times, with 91 comments and 166 reactions. We also recorded a case (Figure 2) in which an erroneous article was deleted from the website, but not from Facebook, and the correction was later published on the web page, but not on Facebook. The erroneous post was still accessible in January 2022.



Figure 2. An example in which an erroneous article was deleted from the website, but is still accessible on Facebook

The chronos, or timespan, that passed between the publishing of the error and the correction was, in the analyzed sample, an average of 39 days. The analyzed sample contains several cases in which a correction was published after several years: *index.hr* (3,664 days), *24sata.hr* (1,282 days), and *vecernji.hr* (1,169 days) in cases when the offended parties were waiting for court decisions so as to be found innocent or to be liberated from charges. After removing these cases from the sample, on average, it took the Croatian online media 19 days to publish corrections. The fastest was *tportal.hr*, who needed 9 days, on average, and the slowest was *24sata.hr*, which needed 60 days to publish corrections (*vecernji.hr* – 12 days, *net.hr* – 16 days, *jutarnji.hr* – 19 days, and *index.hr* – 22 days). In 43.75% (n=140) of the corrections it took less than a week to publish corrections. In 8 cases (2.5%), it was not clear when the error was published, and this result demonstrates the higher level of the importance given to corrections in online media than in the newspapers (Kampf & Daskal, 2014). The small number of cases, if compared to newspapers, can be justified by the way that content management systems work. They automatically add date stamps to an article.

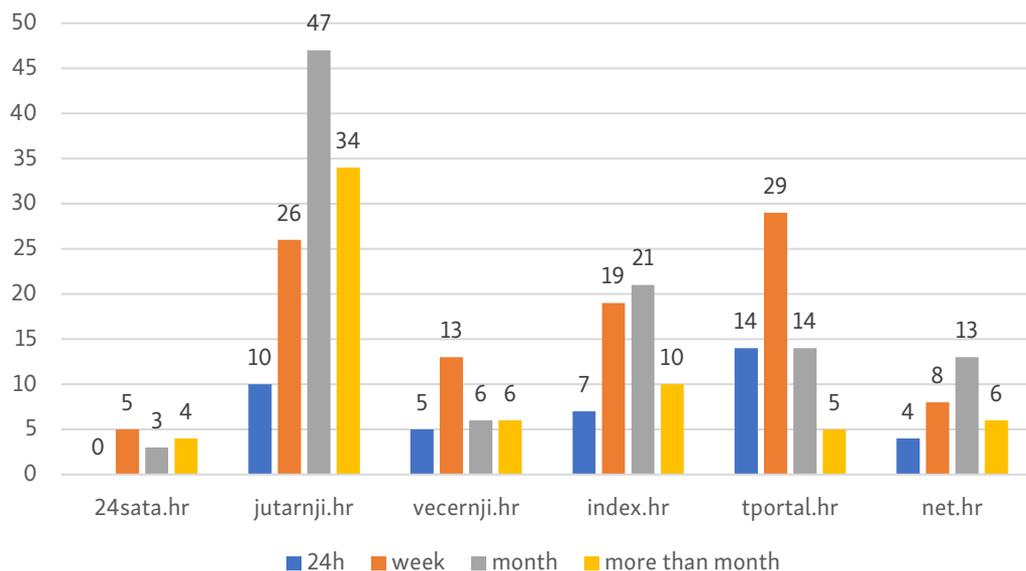


Figure 3. The timespan between errors and corrections

The second textual dimensions of the corrections - the offender, was intended in order to show if online media are associating themselves with errors and the procedures that caused them. The analyzed data showed that only 14.38% (n=46) of errors were associated with media, and 5.94% (n=19) with journalists. In 79.69% (n=255) of cases, the analyzed media abstained from recognizing the perpetrator of the errors.

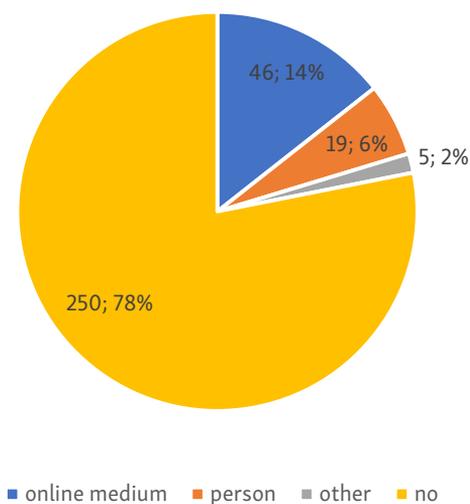


Figure 4. Information about the side that was responsible for the errors

*Vecernji.hr* published corrections and named the journalists as being the actors who were responsible for the error in the following example:

“The article "Constitutional Court Decides on Sex Education in Schools," was published on the portal on May 22, 2013, and, by an inadvertent mistake of the author, announced that the procedure for the constitutional assessment of the health education curriculum was initiated by "HSP", amongst others. We should have written that it was initiated by "HSP 1861", led by Dobroslav Paraga.” (*vecernji.hr*, 2013a)

Similarly, in cases relating to the transparency of procedure, which had produced the error, this was stated in 13.13% (n=42) of the analyzed corrections, while, in 86.88% (n=278) of cases, the presence of the disclosure of the erroneous procedure was not recorded. For example, *net.hr* disclosed the procedure that caused the error in this example (*net.hr*, 2017):

On October 16, we published a text stating that two days before her arrest, Martina Todorić was photographed in Serbia. Following information that we received from Jasmina Bagarić, the owner of the Instagram profile on which the photo was posted, it was determined that it was not a photo of Martina Todorić. We hereby apologize for publishing the error in the article in question.

These results are similar to findings in newspapers, where a failure to name those responsible for the errors, and the avoidance of “disclosure of behind-the-scenes procedures leading to errors may result from the fact that transparency is a relatively new value in journalistic ethical conduct.” (Kampf & Daskal, 2014, p. 177)

The third dimension, the offence, provides information on the context of the error/correction and the location of the error. The findings documented that 50.94% (n=163) of the analyzed corrections clearly stated the location of the error by using a link leading to the original text while, in 27.19% (n=87) of cases, it was textually explained, but the link was either missing or broken. In 3.13% (n=10), the media provided only the link to a story, and in 6.25% (n=20) they published corrections that referred to errors in the print outlets of the medium. Concurrently, in 12.19% (n=39) of cases, it was not clear to what the correction text referred.

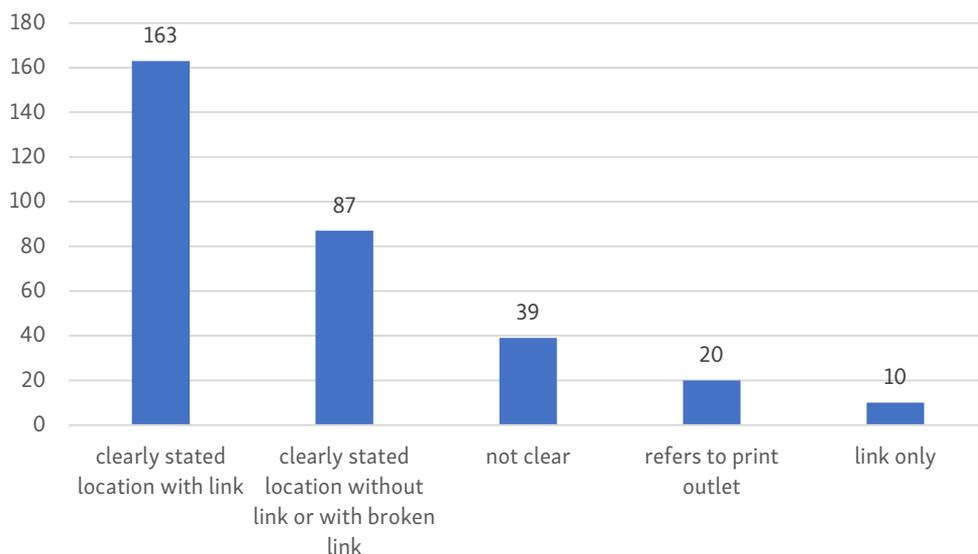


Figure 5. The information on error placement

Regarding the second component of the offence, 15.6% ( $n=41$ ) of the corrections explicitly and clearly provide both the erroneous and the correct information, while, in 84.4% ( $n=222$ ) of the corrections it was unclear. As was the case with newspapers, the Croatian online media “only partially adhere to the principle of accuracy in their corrections, providing varying degrees of information regarding the error and other features crucial for contextualizing the accurate information.” (Kampf & Daskal, 2014, p. 178)

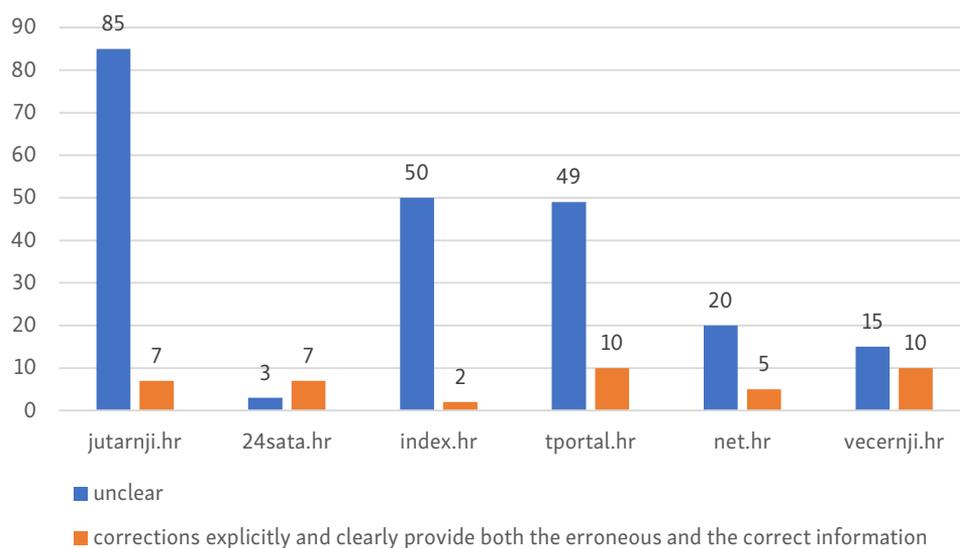


Figure 6. The comprehensibility of the information provided

In achieving accountability in correction texts, the last dimension gives information about the offended party and identifies the presence of the policy of publishing corrections in a fixed format and location. The findings show that correction texts provided the identity of the offended party in 98.75% (n=316) of the analyzed cases. This practice can be explained as being similar to that of the newspaper case, as the medium’s “desire [is] to satisfy the injured person or organization” (Kampf & Daskal, 2014, p. 179). The opposite case was evidenced in another case: “A photo posted on the Vecernji list portal, on January 16, 2013, with an article entitled “This is a fraudster and a forgery, have you seen it?” does not refer to the suspect who is referred to in the title, but, respectively, to the person the police are looking for.” (*vecernji.hr*, 2013b)

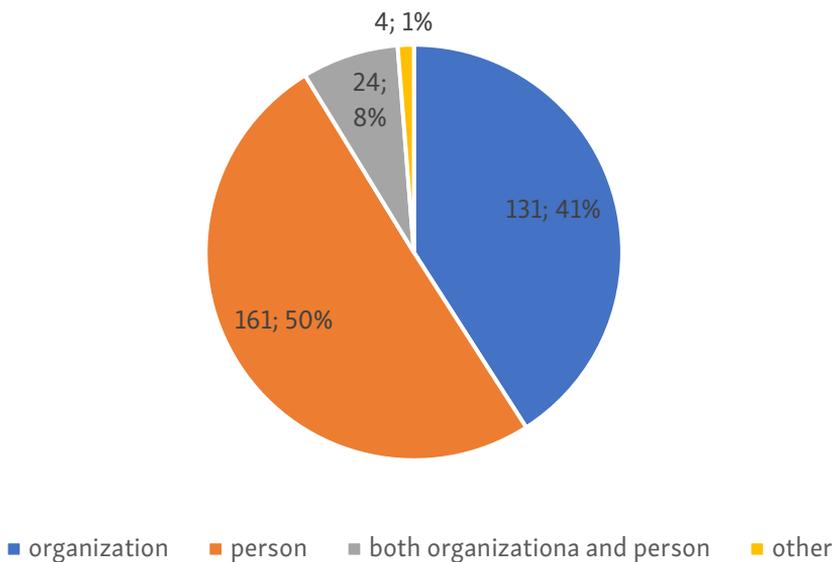


Figure 7. The information about the offended party

On the other hand, a formal correction policy could be identified in only 28% (n=74) of cases, because analyzed media were changing the format of corrections during that time. For example, during the period analyzed (2008-2018), *jutarnji.hr* changed the format for correction texts several times. A partial explanation for this kind of behavior can be found in the length of the analyzed time period and adjustments in their editorial policy during that period.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Based on the aforementioned data, we can conclude that the hypothesis is confirmed. Croatian online media are not fully demonstrating the values of media accountability in corrections. Similarly to the newspapers (Kampf & Daskal, 2014), the utilization of accountability values in corrections is limited to a certain (minor) extent. Further,

the Croatian online media are implementing only those accountability values that help them not to be liable for errors. For example, they publish corrections faster than newspapers, and they are willing to name the offended party, regardless of whether it is an organization or an individual.

On the other hand, the Croatian online media place the responsibility for errors mainly in the headlines and in the body of texts, and they do not provide means to help users find corrections independently, in the form of a correction box/permanent section, or by using search engines. For instance, tagging is only periodically used, corrections are not linked to the original article that contained the error, corrections are not shared on social media, and the erroneous articles are not deleted from the social media. The Croatian online media are providing limited information about errors, and the accurate information in the correction texts. They rarely name those responsible for the errors and avoid disclosing the procedures that lead to them.

Based on what we have previously said, we can speculate that the Croatian journalism correction practice are the result of the synergy of journalism culture, in which journalists do not want to be accountable for their work in any professional or legal way and through regulatory practice that comes from the Media Act (2004; 2013). In the long term, that approach will further affect the credibility of the journalism profession in Croatia and will undermine the position of the media in Croatian society, as they are the only institutions that can control the powers of government and elites.

Additionally, as Croatian online media correction practices show, a possible solution for the accountability problems in journalism (Kampf & Daskal, 2014) cannot be “the publishing of the faulty procedures on the newspapers’ official Websites and the related social media” *per se*. Instead, we must change journalism culture so that it is more transparent and accountable, in order to meet its role in a democracy. The alternative is the failure of media freedom and the handing over of control to politicians and regulators. As Denis McQuail (2003) noticed, when media accountability and self-regulation fail - the enforcement of judgments takes over to ensure that the media meet the demands of the public for quality and accountability.

## 5.1. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The study was limited by the way that the sample was collected, because it was impossible to determine how the correction texts and original articles were displayed on the home pages or the subpages, indicating that the commensurability of the published location of the correction was only partially examined. Further, as there was no previous research on corrections in online journalism, the codebook was adopted from one for newspapers, and the results couldn’t be compared with similar research. Correction practices in social media are only briefly examined.

The findings of the study should be further clarified through observation in newsrooms, and by in-depth interviews with journalists and the editors of online media.

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