



# We apologize for the error...

## Accuracy and Credibility: Neglected Factors in a Digitized Time.

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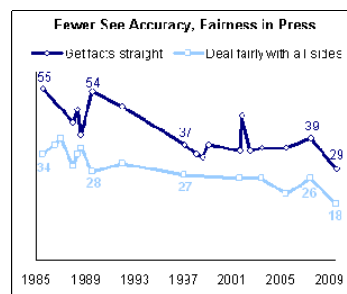
## Introduction & Aim of the Study

“Press Accuracy Rating Hits Two Decade Low”

- Research on accuracy & credibility
- News accuracy as a central dimension
  - News accuracy is “the foundation upon which everything else is built: context, interpretation, debate - all of public communication. If the foundation is faulty, everything else is flawed” (Kovach/Rosenstiel 2004).



The study involves an examination of newspaper accuracy and the relationship between errors and media credibility as perceived by news sources.



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## Research Questions

- ☑ How frequently do errors, as identified by news sources, occur in local/regional news stories?
- ☑ What kinds of errors occur most frequently?
- ☑ What kinds of errors are considered most important?
- ☑ What do news sources consider the primary causes of the errors?

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## Theoretical Framework

- ☑ Charnley 1936
  - ☑ Apply the method of asking news sources to identify errors in articles in which they are cited
  - ☑ Limitations
    - ☑ Perceived error lies exclusively in the eye of the news source
- ☑ Main study: Maier 2005
- ☑ Distinction between credibility and trust
  - ☑ Matthes/Kohring 2003, Kohring 2004

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## Hypotheses

- ☑ Errors identified in a news story negatively effect the newspaper's credibility.
- ☑ Errors identified in a news story negatively effect the willingness of news sources to cooperate in future stories.

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## Methodology

### The Study – A Trans-Atlantic Perspective

- ☑ 4800 sources in the US / 14 newspapers
- ☑ 1000 sources in Switzerland and Italy

Switzerland	Italy
Tages-Anzeiger	L'Eco di Bergamo
Aargauer Zeitung	Il Resto del Carlino
Berner Zeitung	Il Giornale di Sicilia
Südschweiz	Il Giornale di Brescia
Basler Zeitung	Il Secolo XIX

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## Methodology

- ☑ Questionnaires were sent by traditional mail or e-mail (when possible) to the *quoted information sources*
  - ☑ Only local-byline articles from the front page, local, business and lifestyle sections
- ☑ Factual errors
  - ☑ Dimension of credibility: trust in the accuracy of depictions
- ☑ Subjective errors
  - ☑ Trust in the selectivity of facts and the journalistic assessment
- ☑ Response rate: 69% US, 51% CH, 15% I
  - ☑ The case of Italy:
    - ☑ Cultural diversity
    - ☑ Strong North/South divide in Italy

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## Results – Stories with factual errors

Swiss Newspapers	Italian Newspapers	U.S. Newspapers
60%	52%	48%

- ☑ Traditional explanation: newsroom structures
  - ☑ Missing level of editing (and quality control) in European newsrooms
- ☑ Alternative explanation: higher expectations among Swiss readership
  - ☑ Misquotations and inaccurate headlines are discovered in particular

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## Results – Error Types Frequency

Fact error	US	Swiss	Italian
	in %	in %	in %
Misquoted	21.00	26.50	22.10
Headline wrong	14.7	26.6	26.6
Numbers wrong	12.9	12.4	14.9
Misspelling	10	12.9	13.6
Job title wrong	8.5	11.6	13.6
Name wrong	3.4	8	7.8
Address wrong	1.7	2.7	2.6
Age wrong	1.4	2.6	1.5
Location wrong	2.7	3.1	3.9
Time wrong	2.2	4.3	3.9
Date wrong	2.2	3.1	2.6

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## Results – Causes of Errors

Causes of Errors	US	Swiss	Italian
	%*	%*	%*
Lack of understanding	25.9	27	22.4
Deadline pressure	18.9	23.2	23.4
Insufficient research	17.3	17.1	13.1
Events were confusing	12.6	13.3	12.1
Didn't ask enough questions	12.7	7.5	6.5
Didn't ask right questions	12.1	5.8	2.8
Laziness	9.9	4.6	9.3
Pressure to scoop others	6.7	7	6.5
Source provided misinformation	0.9	1.7	0.9
* Percent of stories with errors.			

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## Results – Sources remain “eager” to serve

Swiss Newspapers	Italian Newspapers	U.S. Newspapers
56%	38%	36%

*Swiss sources especially willing to forgive errors..?*



1=little trust, 7=highly trusted

Swiss Newspapers	Italian Newspapers	U.S. Newspapers
5.45	5.18	5.10

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## Results – Accuracy Matters

	Story Credibility	Newspaper Credibility	News Source Willingness
Number of factual errors	-0.449 <b>-0.230</b> -0.130	-0.236 <b>-0.167</b> -0.143	-0.201 <b>-0.105</b> -0.002
Mean severity rating of factual errors	-0.463 <b>-0.393</b> -0.341	-0.305 <b>-0.349</b> -0.126	-0.242 <b>-0.148</b> -0.023

Green = US  
Red = CH  
Blue = Italy

p < .001

- ☑ Across nations, credibility drops measurably with each error
  - ☑ The relationship between number of errors and credibility generally was not as strong with Swiss news stories as with U.S. media.
  - ☑ Severity of errors had a stronger negative effect on overall credibility of Swiss Newspapers than overall credibility of US newspapers.
- ☑ Errors impair relationship with Swiss & US sources (but not Italian)

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## Errors in a digital age

### The Theory:

- ☑ News errors online quickly identified and corrected.

### The Reality:

- ☑ Errors frequently made in haste to publish news.
- ☑ Online stories get little or no review by editors.
- ☑ Corrections never catch up with the viral spread of online news.

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## Errors in a digital age

- ☑ In a digitized world mistakes become much easier to report

### Possible solutions:

- ☑ Digital options for reporting errors
- ☑ Correction pages
- ☑ “MediaBugs”
  - ☑ “Your bug will be posted on the Web on our site, and we will do our best to notify the media outlet involved and obtain a response from them. Depending on the nature of the bug, other visitors to MediaBugs may also post information and comments. If the media outlet corrects or resolves the bug it will be marked as ‘closed’.”

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## We apologize for the error(s)... – Conclusions

- ☑ News accuracy as a global challenge.
  - ☑ *Across nations, errors found in at least every other news article.*
- ☑ Credibility and trust depend on accuracy.
  - ☑ *Across nations, errors diminish respect for and confidence in newspaper.*
- ☑ Accuracy prime directive in digital age
  - ☑ *Across nations, avoiding errors is the best corrective! In a digitized time newspapers and online media outlets can – and must – do better.*

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