

## **Bane or a Device? Use of Stereotypic Content as a Method to Increase the Power of Mediated Communication**

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Stereotypic content in the media has been regarded as a bane in a large variety of studies in communication, and its troublesome effects on the audience have been researched extensively. However, the utility of its deployment has not been given a full explanation. Serving as a key concept throughout, “the culture peg,” a conceptual approximation of the national stereotype, was investigated empirically and theoretically to identify how stereotypes are enacted in major international newspapers. This study then investigated why they are so persistently used by tapping into cultural studies and related fields as theoretical resources. It finds through conceptual and textual analyses that the stereotype functions like culture does generally, according to cultural theorists. Stereotypes in the media attract the audience because they likely resonate through the discursive framework commonly shared by journalists and the audiences, both of whom possess similar cultural frames.

*Keywords: the stereotype, international news, the culture peg, cultural theories*

As the First World War was drawing to a close, Walter Lippmann (1922) made a stinging observation in *Public Opinion* about perception and reality, culture and stereotype, which was to reverberate for a century in the sciences of international communication, mass media, social psychology, and linguistics. He argued that reality—especially international reality—will often be shaped more by the perception of it and will be largely driven by predefined sets of ideas, understandings, and referents embedded in the observer’s home culture.

True to his words, preestablished notions of foreign cultures have often channeled the topic, images, and content of international news media, perhaps in all times, as cross-border flows of information and reporting expanded in the century following Lippmann’s influential commentary. National and ethnic stereotypes today remain rampant in a wide variety of media such as newspapers, advertising, films, and television (Fowler, 2001; Hafez, 2007; Lasorsa & Dai, 2007; Shaw, 2012)—despite a more recent history of globalization and of communication revolution.

Scholars in communication have matched the problematic stereotyping in the media with studies analyzing them. Such studies have used a range of quantitative, qualitative, and critical methodologies investigating the manners, contexts, issues, and effects of stereotyping on the members of the audience.

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The topic of stereotype, however, is usually investigated with social issues of generally significant nature, such as racism and sexism, in mind. Thus, stereotype research within the field tends to be connected to those research agendas that are considered highly important to society. For instance, studying the psychological effects of stereotypic media content on Caucasian Americans' attitudes toward African Americans, especially in the context of crime, has been highly common (Ramasubramanian & Oliver, 2007).

This study separates itself from the previous ones by setting itself a leading objective: to come up with an explanation of why stereotypes are used in mediated communication by illustrating their utility. This will be accomplished partly by exploring existing theories in culture—how culture works and how stereotypes are related to culture. Aiding in this conceptual process will be textual analyses of stereotypic content in the news and identifying threads with theory.

Given stereotypes' persistent and widespread use in international reporting (Tanikawa, 2017a), there appears to be undeniable temptation to resort to their deployment. It is thus presumed that a stereotypical component in the news strengthens the communicative power of a story.

A related objective of this study (which supports the primary objective) will be to review stereotype usage and to study the manners of use by examining the content of international news media. In doing so, this study employs a quantitative measure, called the culture peg, which was developed in a previous study (Tanikawa, 2017a) and further elaborated in a subsequent dissertation (Tanikawa, 2017b). Under this methodological framework, the stereotype is operationalized as a journalistic writing technique to create resonance and thus interest in the audience, such as was used in a story in *The New York Times* from Italy about the economic downturn that afflicted the country following the larger European financial crisis (Segal, 2010). The story revolves around a family-owned designer-label firm struggling to survive in the challenging economic environment. Of all conceivable examples of businesses facing hard times, a designer-brand company was the focus of the article because it is one of the things that the (U.S.) audience can intuitively recognize as related to Italy. If a software firm was chosen as an illustration instead, the article would probably not stir the readers' imagination as powerfully. This study thus focuses on the national cultural stereotype as a type of media stereotyping and employs the culture peg as a way to empirically connect stereotype with culture.

For nearly a century following Lippmann's influential commentary in the 1920s, stereotypes have been problematized, researched, and analyzed in social psychology, linguistics, cultural studies, and anthropology. The present study conceptualizes and investigates stereotypes as components in a message used to enhance its communicative power and seeks to understand its mechanism by tapping into the insights of the cultural scholars who have explicated culture and how it works.

### **Theoretical Review**

The review of literature will first examine previous communication research on stereotypes and then the study of "culture," as investigated by cultural scholars, linguists, sociologists, and anthropologists. This is because stereotypes of "other cultures (out-groups)" are considered a constitutive element of the internal (in-group) culture (Van Gorp, 2007, 2010). It indicates that the hint for comprehensive analysis of stereotypes could be found in the culture itself. The review will then circle back to the use of deliberate stereotypes in the

news (culture pegs) as a communicative technique, which will serve as the central investigative concept in this article.

### ***Past Stereotype Studies in Communication***

Because of stereotypic threads' problematic nature, using them in media texts, which often grossly mischaracterize reality, have spawned parallel studies in communication and social psychology. One of the best known academic projects to tackle the international stereotype or prejudice was the effort to problematize the known practices by the Western media to represent developing countries in terms of wars, famine, and hunger in what came to be known as "coups and earthquakes syndrome." Such misperception and misrepresentation of reality was at the heart of the debate and criticism of the New World Information and Communication Order sponsored by UNESCO in the 1970s (Miller, 1995; Sparks, 2007).

Stereotyping of immigrants, foreign citizens, and ethnic minorities has also received sustained attention by scholars (Dixon & Linz, 2000; Schemer, 2012). Schemer (2012) conducted a panel study to probe the impact of the stereotypic and nationalist slant in Swiss TV news reporting, and Dixon (2008) examined racial stereotypes in U.S. television news broadcasting and their distorting effects on audiences' understanding of reality. These studies—among others—have shown that stereotyping by the news media has negative, amplifying, and perpetuating effects on audiences' impressions of minorities and immigrants.

Through the critical lens of the power relations between the dominant majority group and minorities, Charles Ramirez Berg (2002) has explicated the pervasive stereotypical description of Hispanic figures in Hollywood cinema. Through routine and habitual exposure across genres and media formats, stereotypes generated by the media become part of symbolic dominant ideologies (Gerbner, 1998).

More recently, the portrayal of Muslims by Western media as the "other" has sprung up as a crucial topic in communication studies (Naji & Iwar, 2013; Shaw, 2012). In this regard, the phenomenon of othering has been one common angle through which communication scholars have framed the issue of stereotyping. Other targets for exclusion in Western media include migrants (Kyriakidou, 2009), who are typically those outside of the West migrating to the West; Africans, who receive "tribal fixation" in Western media (Ibelema, 2014); and people of the Middle East and Near East, who have long been subjected to Orientalism in the Western press, literature, and scholarship (Said, 2003).

Communication studies on stereotypes have investigated a variety of media, including television (Desmarais & Bruce, 2008, 2010; Fujioka, 1999), film (Berg, 2002; McArthur, 1982), newspapers (Hafez, 2007; Lasorsa & Dai, 2007; Tanikawa, 2017a), online media, and video games (Burgess, Dill, Stermer, Burgess, & Brown, 2011).

This sampling of past studies is not primarily concerned with the methods and techniques of stereotype uses in the media, and as such, these studies have not addressed as a general question why stereotypes are so frequently employed in mediated communication. Rather, as mentioned, these previous studies tend to be connected to those research agendas considered highly important to society and are primarily meant to promote the resolution of racial and gender biases with contributions from a communication standpoint. This is partly

because the United States is so permeated by a history of racism that one could not understand race relations solely on the basis of one academic discipline (Schneider, 2005).

Many studies note that stereotypes are enacted to make the otherwise difficult and complex subjects—such as foreign countries—comprehensible by simplifying and reducing the matter to easily understandable frames (Desmarais & Bruce, 2010; Lasorsa & Dai, 2007), thus saving the perceivers' energy. Yet, that does not seem to explain the persistent and eager use of stereotypic themes such as that in the Italian feature from *The New York Times*. The complexity-reduction argument assumes that there are issues that need to be explained. Although stereotypes undoubtedly induce simplicity, they seem to resonate with audiences in such a way as to arouse their interests.

This study is meant to address this gap: There appears to be unexplained reasons that tempt media producers into resorting to stereotypes because they enhance the effectiveness of communication. This exploration will be accomplished by reviewing and probing the actual stereotype uses in texts and by conducting conceptual and textual analyses that link them to extant cultural, social, and discourse theories.

### ***Study of Culture***

Culture is viewed as a primary base that constitutes knowledge, meaning, and comprehension of the world outside (Hall, 1997); thus, a shared repertoire of frames and conventions in culture provide a link between media text production and text consumption (Van Gorp, 2007). I will later seek the connection between ideas, frames, conventions, and devices available in culture that can be tapped to enhance the performance of the text (communication) and the construct of culture peg—a method to enhance the appeal and resonance of communication with the stereotype. Here, the oft-repeated idea that culture concerns the production of meaning and that it holds value in symbols and representations (Hall, 1997; Storey, 2012; Thompson, 1990) serve as key auxiliary notions.

Culture refers to an organized set of beliefs, codes, myths, stereotypes, values, norms, frames, and so forth that are shared in the collective memory of a group or society that are mediated and constituted by symbols and language of that group or society (Van Gorp, 2007; Zald, 1996). Geert Hofstede, a Dutch social psychologist and business consultant, and Hofstede and Minkov (2010) have offered that “[culture] is the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others” (p.6).

These definitions indicate that culture has a set social group in mind as its holder and is common to all its members. The norms, values, laws, codes, morals, traditions, and art that constitute culture become distinguishing qualities of a group.

### ***Culture as a Signifying Practice that Produces Meaning***

Coming from the study-of-culture perspective following the cultural turn movements of the middle of the last century, Raymond Williams (1983) suggested that culture is synonymous with what the structuralists

and poststructuralists call "signifying practices" (Storey, 2012), which arise from the texts of media products such as novels, news, TV productions, and pop music.

Hall (1997) similarly situates culture in more recent social science contexts, in which it is used to refer to whatever is distinctive about the way of life of a people, community, nation, or social group—similar to the sociological definition that describes the shared values of a group or a society. Hall (1997) notes, "Primarily, culture is concerned with the production and the exchange of meanings" (p. 2), adding further that culture depends on its participants interpreting meaningfully what is happening around them and "making sense" of the world in broadly similar ways.

British sociologist John. B. Thompson (1990) strengthens this line of thinking, arguing that culture is a pattern of meanings embedded in symbolic forms, including actions, utterances, and meaningful objects of various kinds, by virtue of which individuals communicate with one another and share their experiences, conceptions, and beliefs.

Because these scholars closely link culture to representation and communication, their conceptions of culture are referentially similar to those of communication scholars. James Lull (2000) argued:

Thinking about culture as communicative activity nicely blends the enduring aspects with the more dynamic, mediated elements. The meanings of ancestry, religion, tradition, language, marriage, family work, leisure, neighborhood, social institutions, and so on are perpetually reproduced and modified through symbolic interaction. (p. 133)

And so is the way such elements are talked about and valued, he argued. Culture is not just objects, values, and ways of being, "but how such things, values and ways of being are interpreted and brought to conscious awareness through routine communication and social practice" (p. 133). In the final analysis, "culture crucially involves the way we mentally represent and think about the world" (Zegarac, 2008, p. 49).

In a similar vein, Anthropologist Ulf Hannerz (1996) said that characteristics of culture are seen as packages of meanings and meaningful forms distinctive to collectivities and territories. And some say that culture as a collection of meanings is increasing. What is increasingly being produced in contemporary economies "are not material objects, but *signs*" (Lash & Urry, 1994, p. 15). Thompson (1990) echoes this view and says that culture has become more and more symbolic and interpretive in the era of mass communication.

Common to most theorists is that their formulation of culture is not just the express communicative dimension but its implied link to "texts," or discourses and the forms of meaning. Culture is, above all else, discursive and has thus become "a general term for the sea of discourses and regimes of signification through which we constitute lived experience" (Chaney, 1994, p. 191). Culture, therefore, functions as a resource because it provides "available meanings" (p. 32) that greatly influence what can be expressed by cultural members to fashion distinctive habits, skills, styles, and social strategies.

The culture-as-meaning argument widely shared among scholars of various disciplines, then, has a more specific formulation: culture and cultural symbols as devices or tools to enhance efficacy of communication

(Schudson, 1989): Meaning is evoked powerfully when discursive strategies arising from culture are cleverly employed.

### ***Efficacy of Culture***

In *How Culture Works*, sociologist and media scholar Michael Schudson (1989) describes how culture is made to work (i.e., in symbolic forms) and identifies five dimensions of the potency of a cultural object: retrievability, rhetorical force, resonance, institutional retention, and resolution. The first three are closely relevant to this study of the use of culture in the media, as they relate to discursive strategies and media textual performances.

*Retrievability.* For culture to have an influence, it must reach the person. More specifically, it must be available to the person cognitively: The information must be stored in the person's mental heuristic so he or she can retrieve it when needed. Cultural objects can be brought to the conscious presence of the person in several ways. If a cultural object is connected to a culturally salient event institutionalized on the cultural calendar—Schudson's (1989) fourth element—it will be more available to the mind and more easily remembered over time.

*Rhetorical force.* Efficacy of a cultural object is enhanced by its memorability. The rhetorical dimension of the object, which lifts its evocativeness, includes vividness of the description, attention-grabbing writing techniques, and resort to anecdotal and storytelling methods. People attend more to interesting than uninteresting matters, and thus strategists strive to devise a way to hook the audience. Such methods of engagement are important aspects of a culture's communicative dimensions (Schudson, 1989).

*Resonance.* A rhetorically effective object must be relevant and resonant to the life of an audience. Schudson argued that the needs or interests of the audience are socially and culturally constituted, and therefore the uses to which an audience puts a cultural object are not necessarily personal or idiosyncratic. "What is resonant is not a question how culture connects to individual interests but a matter of how culture connects to interests that are themselves constituted in a cultural frame" (p. 169), he said.

### ***Use of Stereotypic Content as a Method to Enhance Communicative Power of a Message***

A culture peg, a communicative technique, is a topical or content choice in a foreign story that furnishes readers with a theme or fragments of information that they can intuitively identify as arising from that foreign culture. As described later, this intuitiveness parallels the "automaticity" of the stereotype or the culture peg. An article in *The New York Times* (Segal, 2010) on the economic malaise in Italy pivots on the story line of a family-owned designer clothing company—stodgy, tradition bound, and struggling amid the larger European financial crisis.

These images provide a point of cultural connection between American readers, who may have little knowledge or interest in the country, and Italy, an overseas location from which the journalist is reporting. Because the culture peg—in this case, a designer clothing company—provides readers with

elements they can instantly grasp as something stemming from that foreign culture, it is a form of stereotype.

Given the story's subject matter and structure, it was possible to hinge it on a different type of a business, such as a machine-parts manufacturer, to illustrate Italy's economic plight. But a designer-brand store better conjures up the image of Italy in the minds of readers, as does the notion of a family-owned enterprise steeped in tradition and run by a generation of Italian men. The designer-brand clothing serve as the culture peg. It plays off readers' preexisting perceptions of Italy and plugs them into the main news subject regarding—Italy's economic challenges—much more easily than if the example was a machine-parts maker. Here, the inclusion of the culture peg can be recognized as an insertion to add to the appeal of the story.

At a more micro level, words that are evocative of Italy, such as *finita*, *Versace*, and *truffa*, are sprinkled throughout the text to add to the imagination that readers are being exposed to Italy. These are word-level culture pegs. The broader, thematic thread in the article, the designer brand, is the story-level peg. The macro thematic stereotype and the micro word-level stereotypes work together to strengthen resonance for the reader.

Resorting to symbols, myths, and easily recognizable cultural images significantly reduces the cognitive costs for the listeners or readers of a text (Lippmann, 1922; Macrae, Milne, & Bodenhausen, 1994) who otherwise could not easily digest foreign news because they lack contextual understanding. Stereotypes (cultural pegs) are thus seen as playing a performative function in the cognition of the readership (Bennett & Edelman, 1985), assisting in the conveyance of a message from the source to the audience. In the process, they rely on shared cultural resources—symbolism of a foreign culture—as understood by readers and the journalists or producers of news who employ the discursive strategies to conjure up symbolic images.

Social psychology literature asserts that stereotyping is an automatic mental process (Bargh, Chen, & Burrows, 1996; Blair & Banaji, 1996; Gawronski, Deutsch, Mbirikou, Seibt, & Strack, 2008). This automaticity involves the spontaneous activation of some well-learned set of associations or responses a person has developed through repeated activation in memory. And stereotyping is automatic to the extent that people use shortcuts to arrive at their perceptions and categorizations of others (Cooke-Jackson & Hansen, 2008). In the case of foreign cultural stereotypes such as a designer brand for Italy, a mosque for the Middle East, kangaroos for Australia, and turbans for India, such images become etched into people's minds through repeated associations between the cultural object and the culture or country in which it originated.

Media language scholar Roger Fowler (2001) observes that a stereotype is "a socially-constructed mental pigeon-hole into which events and individuals can be sorted, thereby making such events and individuals comprehensible" (p. 17). Stereotypes in the news thus make unfamiliar culture easily comprehensible to the audience. Media presentation of stereotypes provides automatic, clear shortcuts that are easily comprehensible to the audience. The example of a designer label for Italy is an easy-to-comprehend object that provides a shortcut between what readers know already and the foreign country or culture being reported on.

The culture peg is thus a conceptual invention designed to identify and quantify stereotypic content in the news texts and accompanying visuals employed by journalists (Tanikawa, 2017a). This conceptual specificity facilitates the operationalization of a content analysis procedure suitable for quantitative research. It captures what researchers have been pointing out about the ubiquity in the news of stereotypes, more specifically, national cultural stereotypes—clichés of a national cultural group held by another national cultural group (e.g., the stereotype held by Americans of Italy, Mexico, and China). Not all possible uses of national cultural stereotypes in the news can be encapsulated in the culture peg concept,<sup>1</sup> but operationally, the culture peg significantly captures the discursive dimension of stereotypes in the news both at the macro (story) text level and at the micro (word) text level. Thus, this study claims that it is as yet the most useful quantitative measure of the use of national cultural stereotypes in media texts. Given its persistent use in the news texts of multiple countries and multiple languages (the United States, the United Kingdom, and Japan) observed in across time periods, the culture peg can be seen as a routine practice of the news producers (see the “Review of Data” section).

### ***The Discourse Structure for Culture and Resonance***

The question of how the culture peg functions can be informed further by considering conceptual frameworks on discourse and culture advanced by theorists from multiple disciplines. They all seem to argue similarly about how cultural or social discourses work by describing a structure that links media producers on the one hand and the audience on the other. This is because both share in the discursive framework, albeit on opposite sides of the discourse. Clear areas of overlap exist among frameworks suggested by discourse analysts and linguists (O’Donnell, 1994; van Dijk, 1998, 2013), framing scholars (Entman, 2004; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Van Gorp, 2007), communication and cultural studies scholars (Hall, 1997; Halone, 2008; Schudson, 1989; Zegarac, 2008), sociologists (Bourdieu, 1991; Giddens, 1984), and researchers who work in the intersection of disciplines such as sociology, marketing, discourse, communication, and sports promotion (Desmarais & Bruce, 2008, 2010).

Discourse analysts conceive of a discursive framework that publicly connects journalists with the audience and then to broader political power structures (Garrett & Bell, 1998; O’Donnell, 1994). Scholar van Dijk (1998) advocates the “socio-cognitive” perspective, which links the minds of individuals to discourse created by social actors such as journalists to broader social structures, which are in turn sustained by ideologies. Although the purpose of van Dijk’s models is to demonstrate the interface between social representations, including ideologies, and social practices and discourse, they are premised on a connection between the cognition of the audience and that of the social actors such as journalists. The audience and the journalists share “world knowledge” (Garrett & Bell, 1998), which serves as the basis for understanding, for instance, of who is we (the in-group) and who is they (the out-group) in news texts.

Framing researchers refer to similar concepts. Gamson and Modigliani (1989) argue that media discourse and public opinion are treated as “two parallel systems of constructing meaning” (p. 1). Under

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<sup>1</sup> For instance, the culture peg was not specifically operationalized as a “portrayal of a person or persons as possessing a characteristic associated with a group to which the person belongs,” as was the case in Lasorsa and Dai (2007, p. 297).



such a regime, the media are viewed as influencing the public not on a one-way street but as on one of the two edges of the cliffs upon which the bridge (the act of communication) rests—with the other edge being the receiving public. The relative importance of media discourse depends on how readily available meaning-generating experiences are in people's everyday lives (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989).

Framing refers to, on the one hand, the typical manner in which journalists shape news content within a familiar frame of reference and according to some latent structure of meaning and, on the other hand, to the audience that adopts these frames and sees the world in a similar way as the journalists do (McQuail, 2005; Tuchman, 1978). Van Gorp (2007) asserts that framing serves as a bridging concept between cognition—of both journalists and readers—and culture. Culture bridges the journalist and the audience as frames are tied in with shared cultural phenomena, and because of cultural resonances and narrative fidelity (Benford & Snow, 2000), media content evokes a schema tied to culture that is in line with the frame (Van Gorp, 2007). Culture thus mediates between news media and their discursive practices and the audience.

Employing television broadcasters as an illustration, linguists Bach and Harnish (1979) contended that the success of media commentary depends on the acceptance of "mutual context beliefs." For the message to be effectively communicated between commentators and viewers, "there must be a high degree of convergence between what commentators say and what the majority of viewers are likely to believe" (Desmarais & Bruce, 2010, p. 341). Halone (2008) shared in this line of thinking, employing broadcast sports commentators who generate racialized sports accounts as an illustration. Relying on Giddens's (1984) theory of structuration and the centrality of communication in the micro-level constitution and macro-level regulation of social life, Halone (2008) has argued that sports spectators and sports commentators are interdependent: The sports commentator is interactively dependent on the sports spectator as he or she discursively enacts mediated accounts of athletic conduct. The sports spectator is interactively dependent on the sports commentator as they symbolically consume mediated accounts of athletic conduct. For processes of racialized sports accounts to transpire, "both agencies must be in symbolic coexistence with each other" (p. 28).

Cultural scholars with a culture-as-communication viewpoint appear to take the position that communicative strengths derive from audiences' cultural makeup (Schudson, 1989). This is because "culture cannot exist without some cultural representations being in the brains/minds of individuals" (Zegarac, 2008, p. 51). Cultural groups are defined by such shared cultural representations being held by a significant portion of the group as culture, as defined by shared meanings or shared conceptual maps (du Gay, 1997; Hall, 1997).

### **Review of Data**

Here, the data from Tanikawa (2017b) are reviewed to identify the volume and the contours of the stereotype uses (culture pegs) in media texts. Tables 1–3 show results of the content analysis undertaken using *The New York Times's* (U.S.) front section (section A) and *The Guardian Weekly's* (UK) and *Asahi Shimbun's* (Japan) foreign news sections to gauge how and to what extent culture pegs are embedded in foreign news reporting over a nearly 30-year period.

**Table 1. Growth Over Time of Word-Level Culture Pegs in The New York Times (n = 366).**

Year	1985	2000	2014
Total no. of word pegs	43	70	113
No. of word pegs per article	.3	.53	1.2**
Total no. of foreign articles	139	133	94

\*\* $p < .001$ ,  $z = -8.1727$  (1985–2014).

**Table 2. Growth Over Time of Word-Level Culture Pegs in The Guardian (n = 327).**

Year	1985	2000	2014
Total No. of Word Pegs	62	121	171
No. of word pegs per article	.63	1.25	1.31*
Total no. of foreign articles	99	97	131

\* $p < .01$ ,  $z = -5.0687$ (1985–2014).

**Table 3. Growth Over Time of Word-Level Culture Pegs and Links in Asahi Shimbun (n = 360).**

Year	1985	2000	2014
Total no. of word pegs	112	122	95
No. of word pegs per article	.78	0.86	1.28*
Total no. of foreign articles	143	143	74

\* $p < .01$ ,  $z = -3.5821$  (1985–2014).

Using a constructed-week sampling method, articles were randomly selected from the months of September and October from each of the years 1985, 2000, and 2014 for all three newspapers. This quantitative method was expected to demonstrate the culture peg as a prevalent news-writing technique across regions and cultures. These newspapers were chosen to show that the cultural technique is adopted not just in one country (the United States) but in others (the United Kingdom) and in countries with a different language (Japan) and to represent a most widely read and elite newspaper with extensive international coverage in each country. Inter-coder reliability rates based on simple agreement were assessed for both the word-level and the story-level at 0.852 for *The New York Times*, 0.893 for *The Guardian*, and 0.774 for *Asahi* (Tanikawa, 2017b).

Overall, culture pegs were identified extensively in all three newspapers in all three periods. The volume of word-level culture pegs, searched for in the headline and the first five paragraphs of each article, increased over the last three decades in all three newspapers, with the growth being statistically significant

between 1985 and 2014, based on the two samples proportions tests.<sup>2</sup> The total number of culture pegs declined for *Asahi* in 2014, but growth per article rose significantly (Tables 1–3).

Story-level pegs similarly grew over time in all three newspapers, to reach the highest numbers in 2014. Eight story-level pegs were recorded in 1985, five in 2000, and 11 in 2014 for *The New York Times*. *The Guardian* posted five in 1985, 12 in 2000, and 20 in 2014. *Asahi* yielded nine in 1985, 10 in 2000, and 10 in 2014. Although there were far fewer story-level pegs than word-level pegs, multiple word-level pegs were usually embedded in articles with story-level pegs.

Overall, in 2014, the most recent period, culture pegs were found in 39% of the foreign articles in *The New York Times*, 43% of those in *The Guardian*, and 48% of those in *Asahi*. The culture peg is a pervasive phenomenon in internationally influential news media.

In the following section, cases of culture pegs presented as textual illustrations or expressions all arise from the content analysis previously described. They represent story-level pegs, unless otherwise noted.

## **Discussion and Analysis**

### ***Culture Peg as a Cultural Tool (Device)***

In his discussion on culture as a tool, Schudson (1989) highlighted the features of culture that enhance the communicative strengths of the text: retrievability, rhetorical force, and resonance. For a culture peg to work, the audience must possess the cultural knowledge that the peg in the text is aiming to tap into. Such knowledge must be cognitively available to the person (retrievable). Articles that play off readers' stereotypic knowledge about other cultures, such as those that tie the movement of the Buddhist monks to South Asia (*NYT*, September 29, 2014), the dam project in the Nile to Northeast Africa (*NYT*, October 12, 2014), illegal poaching to Africa (*Guardian*, October 3–9, 2014), and the slums and poverty to Rio de Janeiro in Brazil (*Asahi*, October 17, 2014) presume that such understanding is already present in most readers' consciousness. Such understanding must also be perceptually and cognitively available to the audience to elicit a reaction.

Stories that are rooted in ancient history and geography as in the above examples may help to make the material appear meaningful because they connect contemporary happenings to knowledge of basic history or geography, which are widely taught in secondary education. Thus, such knowledge might be more available and known to the audience than contemporary political and social information about other countries (e.g., names of heads of state, results of recent general elections). Certain understandings that underlie culture pegs that are less historic but reflect decades of media-induced understanding of other countries, such as slums and poverty in Brazil and the policy of apartheid in South Africa in the 20th century, may have a higher chance of being registered in readers' knowledge networks than contemporary political

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<sup>2</sup> "Proportions" in the statistic were based on the number of word-level culture pegs found in the first five paragraphs compared with the number of words contained therein.

and social events. Schools and media are social organizations that “institutionalize” such knowledge—Schudson’s fourth element—and ensure its availability for retrieval for readers.

The audience’s retrievable cultural knowledge may derive from everyday experience (Williams, 1983). In the September 29, 2014, *NYT* feature, Thai officials deplored the uneven quality of Thai cuisine served around the world and began efforts to impose a standard on this cuisine by introducing a taste-testing machine. Thai food (in restaurants) is arguably part of the lived experiences of much of the *NYT* readership.

The efficacy of cultural objects is enhanced by their rhetorical strengths that induce memorability. The rhetorical dimension of an object, which lifts its evocativeness, includes vividness of the description, attention-grabbing writing techniques, and anecdotal and storytelling methods (Schudson, 1989). This dimension is an important part of the strategy for communication, as it offers a method to hook the audience and keep it engaged. Such methods of engagement are a crucial aspect of culture’s communicative dimensions (Schudson, 1989). Because the culture peg of the article is a salient feature and a focal point of the newsworthiness of the story (Tanikawa, 2017a) and is made to stand out when it is present, a distinct rhetorical style of writing often emerges with it.

An article from October 3–9, 2014, in *The Guardian Weekly* on Timbuktu, Mali, a the city that is a site of travel tales in Western lore, was embellished with rhetorical flourishes, including similes and metaphors in the lead section of the article: “Its handle is impregnated with blood” and “the twitching animal, settling like a crimson lake on the pale sand” (pp. 26–28). Such literary phrases in news texts are calculated to render the text memorable to the readers (Scanlan, 2000). Writerly and novelistic styles are increasingly common in news and feature writing in leading American news media (Abrahamson, 2006), especially in the headlines and lead segments of articles (Tanikawa, 2015).

Similar impact in rhetoric is sought from word forms (word-level culture pegs), although they may be more sporadic and more micro in strategy. In *The Guardian* article (October 19–25, 2000) about Italians protesting against the onslaught of the McDonald’s chain in cities across Italy, protesters in Rome, Naples, Palermo, and Turin were reported as chanting, “Better a day of tortellini than 100 days of hamburgers” (“tortellini” was the word-level culture peg). Another *Guardian* article from the October 19–25, 2000, issue on the flare-up between the Arabs and the Jews in the West Bank stated in its subhead: “Atrocities multiply in a biblical thirst for vengeance as two communities put their trust in extremists.”

A similar case could be made of Japanese rhetorical wording. In an article about George Clooney’s wedding (*Asahi*, September 29, 2014), the city of Venice was referred to as the “city of water,” a Japanese cliché for Venice. The prominence of this expression’s usage can be noted in the headline: “George Clooney Weds in the City of Water.” *City* here was not the common Japanese-language *toshi* or *machi* but the novelistic *miyako*, the word often reserved for cities of antiquity such as Xi’an (formerly, Chang’an) of China and Kyoto of Japan. Thus *miyako* cannot be used without delivering a highly rhetorical connotation. It is evocative of the history, elegance, and grandeur of Venice.

Schudson (1989) sees a broader element of the efficacy of culture in *resonance*, or shared cultural beliefs that must be present in the readership for a cultural strategy to work. The notion of resonance could be explained from a range of perspectives, but here, widely accepted and stereotypical information about foreign countries or cultures is the select knowledge meant to resonate with the target audience, and it resonates because it is a stereotype of that country or culture. There is a shared understanding by members of a cultural group of what constitutes the (foreign) culture (Kashima, 2013; Stangor & Schaller, 1996) about which one is reading because stereotypes of the out-group are a constituent element of the culture of the in-group (Van Gorp, 2007, 2010). When journalists employ a culture peg, it resounds within the cultural frame (schema) of the audience members because the media content is culturally and thus discursively aligned with the audience's cultural frame (Desmarais & Bruce, 2010; Van Gorp, 2007).

A culture peg is a cultural device, and a discursive one at that, available to journalists and other media makers for use in the media texts. They take advantage of available meanings in culture—a resource for journalists—and knowledge that is retrievable from readers' cognitions and memories. These meanings are based on particular types of knowledge—history and lived experience—and they gain force when used in conjunction with rhetoric and style and are made meaningful. Culture pegs exist in specific words and themes in an article and are embedded in the text.

If the culture peg is a cultural device, an ironic implication emanates from this proposition. It follows that stereotypic content in the news media, structured as it is and functioning like a cultural device, renders the texts resonant, meaningful, and memorable. This is consistent with the notion that stereotype is part of (the in-group) culture, as culture provides meaning and is a resource that makes communication meaningful (Hall, 1997; Storey, 2012; Thompson, 1990).

### ***Stereotype as Culture***

The analysis in this study is consistent with the assertion—albeit formulated rather generally—that stereotypes are a constituent element of a culture (Van Gorp, 2007, 2010). As mentioned, if the culture peg is a cultural device along the lines that Schudson (1989) has formulated, then the stereotype itself should function to infuse the text with meaningfulness, resonance, and memorability. The analysis of culture presented in the literature review appears to be generally congruent with this proposition. Given such theoretical congruence, one might replace "culture" with "stereotype" in the various formations offered by the cultural scholars. It would be misleading to suggest that they equal one another, but the idea here is that stereotypes model certain aspects of culture and thus will function like culture does.

British sociologist John. B. Thompson (1990) has said that culture is a pattern of meanings embedded in symbolic forms by virtue of which individuals communicate with one another and share their experiences, conceptions, and beliefs. Stereotypes in the form of culture pegs are patterns of meanings embedded in symbolic forms—symbolic from the perspective of the home audience, and shared with other members of the in-group (Banks & McGee Banks, 1989). They are used by the mass media to communicate with readers and to connect with them by virtue of shared meanings, perceptions, and symbols.

Hall (1997) has said that culture is concerned with production and exchange of meanings and that it depends on its participants interpreting meaningfully what is happening around them, and “making sense” of the world in broadly similar ways. For that reason, they are able to build shared cultural maps. Unquestionably, stereotypes about a foreign culture allow readers to make sense of a foreign culture in similar ways because stereotypes are a point of agreement about the foreign culture. Culture concerns “shared values” (Storey, 2012), and as cynical as it may sound, a stereotype is a shared value of an in-group, with all its biases, negativity, and prejudice, about an out-group.

Chaney (1994) has said that culture functions as a resource because it provides “available meanings” that greatly influence what can be expressed by cultural members to fashion distinctive habits, skills, styles, and social strategies. Likewise, stereotypic knowledge about the subject country or culture functions as a resource for writers (a culture peg), as it provides available meanings that enable and enhance what can be said in the text (Schudson, 1989).

The repeated reference of culture as producing of meaning—which a culture peg does—is connected to how culture relates to symbols and representations, as cultural scholars nearly unanimously argue that culture holds as values symbols and representations (Hall, 1997; Storey, 2012; Thompson, 1990). On representation and culture, Zegarac (2008) states that culture crucially involves how we mentally represent and think about the world. The stereotype is also the way we mentally represent and think about the world, at least partially, as our picture of the world is fractured through the lens of stereotypes employed by the media.

Culture refers to an organized set of beliefs and understandings that are mediated by and constituted by symbols and language (Zald, 1996), which produce meaning. The meaning is then evoked powerfully when discursive strategies are cleverly employed (Schudson, 1989). The culture peg is a discursive strategy. In essence, stereotypes behave like culture does generally. Desmarais and Bruce (2010) illustrated the discursive use of stereotypes in TV sports broadcasting, with a rugby match between New Zealand and French teams serving as an example. If sports anchors, as media workers, are acting in accordance with their cultural logic to produce stereotypes of other cultures, as Desmarais and Bruce argue, then they must be part of the audience’s culture.

### **Conclusion**

This study set out to show that the stereotype, which takes the form of a culture pegs in a media texts, is a communication technique employed in the mass media to increase the effectiveness of communication, and to explain why it does so. A culture peg increases the communicative power of a message because, as a form of cultural communication, it engages a stereotype, which itself is discursive. It resonates because it makes use of the discursive structure in which cultural or social frames reverberate in the minds of an audience, as discourse analysts and linguists (O’Donnell, 1994; van Dijk, 1998), framing scholars (Entman, 2004; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Van Gorp, 2007;), communication and cultural studies scholars (Hall, 1997; Halone, 2008; Schudson, 1989; Zegarac, 2008), and researchers in interdisciplinary fields (Desmarais & Bruce, 2008, 2010) have contended.

A common thread running through the scholars' works is that both the communicators and the recipients share cognition, culture, values, and the symbolic understanding of a given object, which serves as a basis and precondition for effective understanding and resonance. Communication of a cultural nature takes place between the producer and the recipient in a discursive dimension that presumes a shared cultural, social, and cognitive framework between the two.

As described, culture pegs work on the logical and empirical assumptions that journalists encode by making use of a cultural frame with the subconscious knowledge that it works in the audience because such cultural frames are shared. Culture pegs resonate because the audience shares in the same cultural understanding (Schudson, 1989), albeit shared understanding of other cultures, as repeatedly pointed out. Although the stereotype does not equal the culture peg, the latter, as a writing technique in journalism, significantly captures the discursive dimension of the stereotype, which this study investigated.

If stereotypes are a part of culture, and if they amplify the effects of communication, important implications arise. First, if stereotypes are interwoven into culture—and imperceptively so, because the system of culture is often oblivious to the members of the culture (van Gorp, 2007)—certain hidden stereotypes, including their negative and pejorative implications, may never be problematized because of their taken-for-granted nature.

Second, if media producers use stereotypes to lift resonance because of their presumed impacts, stereotypes' problematic nature could be much greater than we might have presumed because stereotypes are perpetually amplified in the media, even as those stereotypes are hidden, subtle, or unrecognized as such. They may be unrecognized because they are inseparable from culture, giving rise to the circuitry that culture is invisible and resonant. Additionally, when journalists employ stereotypes as rhetorical techniques in a clever fashion (Schudson, 1989), they may be praised instead of condemned. Stereotyping needs to be problematized and investigated with the understanding that the stereotype is culture.

Social psychologists of the cultural school have asserted that the media play a crucial role in generating and disseminating stereotypes about societal out-groups (Desmarais & Bruce, 2010; Kashima, 2013; Stangor & Schaller, 1996). Yet their investigations have not uncovered how and why stereotypic content is preferred in the news media, or why this content's amplifying effects in the cognition of audiences remains empirically unresearched. Research into the type of inquiry and perspective this study offers could be usefully engaged in the study of stereotypes in communication and social psychology to advance our understanding of stereotype formation and dissemination.

To probe the precise motivation of journalists for employing stereotypes in news texts, interviews with international journalists could further enhance the understanding of the workings of culture pegs, although the methods must be discreet because journalists may enact stereotypes unconsciously.

It is noteworthy that the use of culture pegs have grown over the past three decades. It is beyond the scope of this nascent research to explicate why,<sup>3</sup> but it suggests that media stereotyping is

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<sup>3</sup> In a separate study, I am investigating the reason for this growth.

simultaneously a tremendously rich, unknown, and problematic area of study that needs much investigating, explicating, and unpacking from the perspectives of culture, news media, and media production.

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