



## **Colloquium Series: Verbal Skepticism and Visual Gullibility: Methodologies for Studying Mass Media Effects**

Speaker:

Frode Steen Associate Professor, Dept. of Communication Studies, UCLA

Date / Time:

February 16, 2012 - 3:15pm

Venue:

Room 307, Third Floor, Pixel B, APU

Abstract:

Early theories of media effects asserted that audiences passively adopt the point of view advocated in newspapers. Empirical studies in the 1940s, however, found nearly no effects of mass media persuasion. Over the following decades, modest effects were found for agenda setting, priming, and framing. Nearly all of this work examined language as the vector of influence.

In spite of being the dominant form of media for several decades, it has proved extremely difficult to study the effects of television in a systematic manner. In 2005, I created UCLA's Communication Studies Archive to meet this challenge. The project records more than a hundred television news shows every day, from the US, Russia, France, Canada, Switzerland, UK, Israel, Japan, and Qatar, automatically indexed by some 600,000 words from closed captioning.

Television imitates aspects of direct experience, and news stories are skilfully crafted to induce viewers to situate themselves in particular relations to the scenes portrayed. The technologies represent biologically and culturally novel forms of communication, without a deep tradition of argument and resistance. These and other considerations raise the possibility that even verbally skeptical audiences are visually gullible.

The study of television lends itself to an integrative and transdisciplinary approach, in which we study how technological innovations in communicative strategies mediate between cognitive processes -- perceptual, emotive, and inferential -- and the complex dynamics of social and political discourse.

A Note on the Speaker:

Frode Steen is Associate Professor of Communication Studies at UCLA. He received his PhD in English Literature from UCSB and has published widely on storytelling, the psychology of play, and mass entertainment. He is the recipient of several federal and private grants for his work as Director of the Communication Studies Archive, and is currently a visiting fellow with the Mind & Society Initiative at Azim Premji University.