



**Charlie Beckett**, head of the Department of Media and Communications at LSE, celebrates the Department's tenth birthday with a race through the extraordinary transformation in media in its first decade.

Is the world really changing rapidly or does it just appear that way? There's been a dizzying transformation in media and communications over the last ten years and one of its biggest effects is to make everything else seem to be spinning fast, too.

When a meteorite crashed into Russia injuring 1,200 people it was captured on dashboard video cameras that drivers keep rolling to avoid being blamed in an accident. The astounding images they recorded were then instantly spread around the world by ordinary citizens using social networks like Twitter or Facebook. Yet those companies and the technology they use didn't even exist ten years ago.

When the Syrian rebels first picked up their AK47s and RPGs to oppose President Assad they also reached for their smartphones. The footage of the innocent victims of the conflict were beamed direct to the world through YouTube and were picked up by mainstream Western media. The rebels also uploaded footage of

their own military efforts to encourage funding from supporters elsewhere in the Middle East. And when Israel and Hezbollah clashed in the same region, both forces took to Twitter to argue their cases in front of the world.

It is not just on the global stage that media has been transformed. Have a look at your own life. When did you last call anyone on a home landline? Does your five-year-old niece try to swipe the TV screen? Did you get in the car or on to the iPad for your last shop? And if you did get in the car recently, did you find the route on an App?

Ten years ago, we had an internet that had lots of websites but not much interactivity between them. In the last decade, however, we have moved from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 and beyond. Put simply, hyperlinks allow us all to connect through the internet in collaborative, connected ways. The internet has become social.

A university like LSE has not been immune to the decade of media change. We now have a Department

of Media and Communications, created in 2003, and a news media think-tank, POLIS, set up in 2006. Both were responses to the growing importance of media in the world.

New media has also been a fantastic tool for LSE's teaching, with lectures recorded online, seminar debates extended through online forums and a world of information just a click away. LSE is now itself a media company with people downloading hundreds of thousands of its podcasts, reading its expert blogs and following both staff and students on Twitter or through Facebook. At the same time, the development of new learning platforms such as MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) in the USA, which provide very cheap distance learning, might herald a threat to existing educational institutions.

Of course, it's not just about the internet. We consume as much TV, radio and movies as before; it's just that we often do it with a second screen running at the same time. Increasingly we will watch and listen on mobiles – both phones and tablets like the iPad. And in this last decade, thanks to “time-shifting” devices like iPlayer or Tivo, we will do it when we want.

In some regions “Old Media” is still growing, with global newspapers sales actually on the rise last year. Television viewing is still soaring as developing



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economies switch on. But, even in poorer parts of the world, it has still been the digital decade.

Take Africa. Look at how SMS is revolutionising banking, with villagers using mobile phones to trade. Go to an African slum and you can see people wearing English football shirts because they can watch Premier League games featuring African footballers via satellite links. They can use the same mobile text systems to bet on the game, or to decide how to vote in an election and where to get medicine.

The digital decade has not all been good news. Do you trust Mark Zuckerberg with your Facebook photos from your wild teenage years? Why are governments spending so much tracking our lives? Will a hacker bring down the banks or a terrorist bring down a fly-by-wire aircraft? More generally, is the internet making us stupid? Have we forgotten how to read and to research? Have your Facebook friends replaced your real community?

The next decade promises even more change. New companies and gadgets will emerge. I have no idea what they will be. In the last ten years Facebook went from a garage to a \$100 billion business. And who would have guessed that a microblog that limits your posts to 140 characters would become a platform for presidents and popes?

For those of us who think that media matters, the real task is not prediction but understanding. We need to distinguish between all the hype around the flashy product launches and the reality of how people use and abuse the technology in their lives. Media matters because it is a big business and a pervasive part of people's home and working lives. It also matters because it is how we know about the world. This was the decade in which media was at the heart of democracy, war, economics, sport and culture. Digital has become the catalyst for many of the forces for change.

We don't know what the next ten years will bring, but if it's anything like the last decade it is going to be fascinating finding out. ■



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## Media and Communications at LSE

On 1 September 2003 a new LSE department founded by Professor Roger Silverstone opened its doors, with a faculty of 8 ready to receive 118 students. Today the Department of Media and Communications has doubled its faculty and 230 students are following its master's programmes and research training; a further 340 have attended its Summer Schools. Around 9,000 exam scripts have been marked and over 1,600 students from 109 countries have graduated, 40 with PhDs.

In 2006, the Department inaugurated POLIS, LSE's journalism and society think-tank: a hub of people and ideas where journalists and the wider world can examine and discuss the media and its impact on society.

For more information about the Department and its activities, see [lse.ac.uk/media@lse](http://lse.ac.uk/media@lse)

*The Department of Media and Communications celebrates its tenth anniversary on 16 June 2013 with a conference on "New Trajectories In Media and Communications Research", open to all alumni. See [lse.ac.uk/media@lse/events/Departments-10th-anniversary-conference.aspx](http://lse.ac.uk/media@lse/events/Departments-10th-anniversary-conference.aspx)*