

AN INTRODUCTION TO SOCIOLOGY IN THE GLOBAL AGE

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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- 1** Identify major social changes since the 1880s studied by sociologists.
- 2** Explain why sociologists today focus on trends in globalization and consumption.
- 3** Describe what we mean by the McDonaldization of society.
- 4** Explain sociology's approach to studying social life, including using the sociological imagination and examining the relationship between private troubles and public issues.
- 5** Differentiate between sociology's two possible purposes, science and social reform.
- 6** Evaluate the ways in which sociological knowledge differs from common sense.

Chief Raoni before a protest at the Brazilian Congress seeking land, mining, and water rights for native Indians. A well-known defender of the rainforest, Raoni wears a traditional wooden plate stretching his lower lip. Sociologists ask how individuals like Raoni, groups like Brazil's Indians, and institutions like the government affect one another.



In December 2010, street demonstrations, labor strikes, and other acts of civil resistance swept through the small North African nation of Tunisia. The demonstrators met strong resistance from the Tunisian government. Nevertheless, their protests continued into 2011, eventually resulting in the overthrow of President Ben Ali after his 23 years in power.

The immediate trigger for the Tunisian protests was the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi, a 26-year-old street vendor who claimed he had long been harassed and humiliated by authorities. Bouazizi set himself on fire before the rural governor's office and died in a burn and trauma center 18 days later without regaining consciousness.

However powerful the public reaction to Bouazizi's death proved to be, the sources underlying both the Tunisian revolution and the Arab Spring—the wave of social unrest and social revolution it inspired throughout the region—sprang from far more than a

saw his act as an appropriate—and necessary—call for change. The promise of the Arab Spring has yet to be fulfilled—and the mid-2013 overthrow of Egypt's elected Islamist president Mohamed Morsi undid it, at least in part. However, the events that precipitated the unrest remain important to the Middle East, to the world as a whole, to sociology, and to you. One of the goals of this chapter, and this book, is to show you why.

By drawing on modern sociology's 200-year history while looking to the future, sociologists today can find the tools and resources to better understand where we have been, where we are, and perhaps most important, where we are going. Some believe that helping people enact meaningful social change is the true end of sociology. The Tunisian protesters would certainly agree with them.

As an academic discipline, sociology has traditionally tried to understand the place of the individual—even a Tunisian street vendor—within society, and society's effect on the individual. In today's global age, however, social structures like online networks that transcend national boundaries and rapidly changing communication technologies that spread information far and wide

have forever altered the ways in which we interact with each other, as well as the societies that shape us. As the world has become increasingly globalized, sociology has developed an increasingly global perspective. •

Sociology tries to understand the individual's place in society, and society's effect on the individual.

single act of protest. Without considering the social, political, and economic conditions of prerevolution Tunisia, it would be impossible for us to understand why Bouazizi set himself alight, and why thousands of Tunisians and others throughout the Arab world

One of the most important lessons that you will learn in your study of sociology is that what you think and do as an individual is affected by what is happening in groups, organizations, cultures, societies, and the world. This is especially true of social changes, even those that are global in scope and seem at first glance to be remote from you. Take, for example, the trigger of the Arab Spring. Mohamed Bouazizi's public suicide set in motion a revolution in Tunisia and throughout much of the Middle East. The roots of that dramatic act of protest lay in poverty, high unemployment, an authoritarian government, and political corruption that affected Bouazizi personally. Before his actions, most Tunisians would never have risked their lives to protest against their country's repressive regime. Yet he and tens of thousands of others in other countries in the region did just that. It's likely that your impression of Arab countries and the majority Muslim population was much different before the Arab Spring than it is currently. You may now find yourself feeling a surge of appreciation for democracy or feeling more open than before to learning about Islam or studying the Arabic language. You may even be inspired to take actions yourself in support of the kinds of changes that took place in Tunisia and in other places in the Arab world. In those senses, you and many others have felt the impact of Bouazizi's actions.

A second important lesson in sociology is not only that you are affected by events but also that you are capable to some degree of having an impact on large-scale structures and processes. This can be seen as an example of the **butterfly effect** (Lorenz 1995). While generally applied to physical phenomena, the butterfly effect is also applicable to social phenomena (Daipha 2012). The idea is that a relatively small change in a specific location can have far-ranging, even global, effects, over both time and distance. For example, the actions of Bouazizi helped lead to the Tunisian revolution, which, in turn, led to street demonstrations and civil war elsewhere in the Arab world, including Yemen, Egypt, Libya, and Syria (Kienle 2012; Noueihed and Warren 2012). The consequences of this series of events were felt at the time and are still unfolding. However, they certainly include the major changes that took place in those societies as well as the possibility of major international political realignments. They could also make for greater or diminished opportunities for personal, social, and business relationships between people

butterfly effect The far-ranging or even global impact of a small change in a specific location, over both time and distance.



Effects from the earthquake and tsunami that hit Japan have been felt worldwide. Can you think of any other recent examples of this butterfly effect?

in the Arab world and in the West. Perhaps the arc of your life and career will be affected by the upheavals of the Arab Spring. More importantly, it is very possible that actions you take in your lifetime will have wide-ranging, perhaps global, effects.

A very different sociological example of the butterfly effect involves the magnitude-9.0 earthquake that shook Japan for more than six minutes in 2011. While this was a huge event as far as Japan was concerned, from a global perspective it was relatively minor, at least initially. The earthquake caused a massive tsunami, which reached as high as 124 feet. Amid the devastation, damage to the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant on Japan's Pacific coast came to occupy the world's attention. It also renewed the debate over the safety of nuclear power compared with other sources of energy. Floating islands of debris and human remains washed to sea by the tsunami were expected to hit North American shores as early as 2013 and to wash onto Hawaii's beaches and reefs for years to come (International Pacific Research Center 2011). Other debris will collect in the Great Pacific Garbage Patch, a locale in the Pacific Ocean that is twice the size of Texas (Berton 2007). The debris will present persistent problems for shipping, fishing, and tourism industries—not to mention coastal dwellers and



Protests



Manufacturing jobs in the United States have declined in the postindustrial age. Why is industry's place in society a topic of interest to sociologists?

beachgoers. Disruptions to Japanese manufacturers had an impact on the already fragile recovery of the global economy after a deep recession. That might explain difficulties you may have had in 2011 in buying that Toyota you wanted or the latest iPhone.

These examples of the relationships between people and larger social realities and changes set the stage for the definition of the discipline to be introduced in this book. **Sociology** is the systematic study of the ways in which people are affected by, and affect, the social structures and social processes associated with the groups, organizations, cultures, societies, and world in which they exist.

THE CHANGING NATURE OF THE SOCIAL WORLD—AND SOCIOLOGY

Sociology deals with contemporary phenomena, as you have seen, but it also has many longer-term interests because of its deep historical roots. In the fourteenth century, for instance, the Muslim scholar Abdel Rahman Ibn-Khaldun studied various social relationships, including those between politics and economics. Of special importance to the founding of sociology was the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Industrial Revolution. During this “industrial age,” many early sociologists concentrated on factories, the production that took place in those settings, and those who worked there, especially blue-collar, manual workers. Sociologists also came to focus on the relationship between industry and the rest of society, including, for example, the state and the family.

By the middle of the twentieth century, manufacturing in the United States was in the early stages of a long decline that continues to this day. (However, manufacturing in other parts of the world, most notably China, is booming.) The United States had moved from the industrial age to the “postindustrial age” (Bell 1973; Leicht and Fitzgerald 2006). In the United States, as well as in the western world more generally, the center of the economy and the attention of many sociologists shifted from the factory to the office. That is, the focus moved from blue-collar manual work to white-collar office work (Mills 1951) as well as to the bureaucracies in which many people worked (Clegg and Lounsbury 2009; Weber [1921] 1968). Also involved was the growth of the service sector of the

economy. This sector ranges all the way from high-status service providers such as physicians and lawyers to lower-status housecleaners and those who work behind the counters of fast-food restaurants.

The more recent rise of the “information age” (Castells 2010; David and Millwood 2012) can be seen as a part, or an extension, of the postindustrial age. Knowledge and information are critical in this contemporary epoch. So, too, are the technologies—computers, smartphones—that have greatly increased the productivity of individual workers and altered the nature of their work. Just one of many examples is the current use of computer-assisted technologies to create designs for everything from electric power grids to patterned fabrics rather than drawing them by hand. In fact, it is not just work that has been affected by these new technologies; virtually everyone and everything has been affected by them. One aspect of this new technological world, Google, is so powerful that a media culture scholar has written a book titled *The Googlization of Everything* (Vaidhyanathan 2011). Thus, much sociological attention has shifted to the computer and the Internet and to those who work with them (Baym 2010; DiMaggio et al. 2001; Scholz 2013).

The transition from the industrial to the postindustrial and now to the information age has important personal implications. Had you been a man who lived in the

sociology The systematic study of the ways in which people are affected by, and affect, the social structures and social processes that are associated with the groups, organizations, cultures, societies, and world in which they exist.

industrial age, you would have worked for money (pay), and you would have done so to be able to buy what you needed and wanted. Women working in the private sphere were largely uncompensated or compensated at a lower rate, as is often still the case. In the postindustrial age, it is increasingly likely that men and women will be willing, or forced, to work for free (Anderson 2009; Ritzer and Jurgenson 2010; Terranova 2013), as in the case of an intern, a blogger, or a contributor to YouTube or Wikipedia. People who are thus occupied may hope that such work will eventually have an economic payoff and perhaps even lead to a full-time job. In fact, there are many examples of individuals succeeding after starting out by “giving away” their labor. For example, members of the Los Angeles band OK Go found an audience based on free YouTube videos and then built thriving, well-paying careers.

You may also be willing to perform this free labor because you enjoy it and because much of what is important in your life is, in any case, available free on the Internet. There is no need for you to buy newspapers when blogs are free or to buy CDs or DVDs when music and movies can be streamed or downloaded at no cost or inexpensively from the Internet. A whole range of software is also downloadable at no cost. While all of this, and much else, is available free of charge, the problem is that the essentials of life—food, shelter, clothing—still cost money, lots of money.

This is but one of many social changes to be discussed in this introductory chapter, as well as the book as a whole, but the essential point is that the social world (people, groups, organizations, etc.)—*your* social world—is continually changing. Sociology is a field that is, and must be, constantly attuned to and involved in studying those changes.

CENTRAL CONCERNS FOR A TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY SOCIOLOGY

While the social world has been changing dramatically over the last two centuries or so and sociology has adapted to those changes, sociology has continued to focus on many of its traditional concerns. We have already

CHECKPOINT 1.1

MAJOR SOCIAL CHANGES STUDIED BY SOCIOLOGISTS

Time period	Major social changes	Related issues of interest to sociologists
Eighteenth and nineteenth centuries	Industrial Revolution	Rise of factories and blue-collar work; relationships between industry, the state, and the family
Mid-twentieth century	Postindustrial age	White-collar work; bureaucracies; growth of the service sector
Twenty-first century	Information age	Increased participation of women in the workforce; growth of unpaid labor; effects of computer technology on society and individuals

mentioned industry, production, and work as long-term sociological interests; others include deviance and crime (see Chapter 7), the family (see Chapter 11), and the city (see Chapter 16). Of particular concern to many sociologists has been, and is, the issue of inequality as it affects the poor, racial and ethnic groups, women, and gays and lesbians (see Chapter 8). The bulk of this book will be devoted to these basic sociological topics and concerns. But there will also be a focus on the nontraditional and very contemporary issues of consumption, the digital world, and especially globalization.

GLOBALIZATION

No social change is as important today as globalization, since it is continually affecting all aspects of the social world everywhere on the globe. A date marking the beginning of globalization cannot be given with any precision, and in fact is in great dispute (Ritzer 2010c, 2012). However, the concept of globalization first began to appear in the popular and academic literature around 1990. Today, globalization is a central issue in the social world as a whole as well as in sociology; globalization and talk about it are all around us. In fact, we can be said to be living in the “global age” (Albrow 1996).

A major component of any past or present definition of sociology is “society.” There are about 200 societies in the world, including the United States, China, and South Africa. Society is a complex pattern of social relationships that is bounded in space and persists over time. It has traditionally been the largest unit of analysis in sociology.



Deindustrialization

Sociologists as Bloggers

Traditionally, sociologists have communicated their ideas about the social world through books and journal articles. In recent years, however, many sociologists who want to speak directly to a broad audience have turned to blogging, which greatly democratizes the ability to publish what one is thinking. For example, Philip N. Cohen, a leading sociologist of the family, regularly posts on his blog titled “Family Inequality” (familyinequality.wordpress.com). I blog on many of the issues discussed in this chapter (e.g., globalization, consumption), as well as on other topics of interest to introductory sociology students (georgeritzer.wordpress.com).

Many other academic blogs feature posts by professional sociologists. For example, a set of sociology blogs (a “blog ring”) called the Society Pages (<http://thesocietypages.org/>) includes blogs on topics such as race, ethnicity, and immigration (The Color Line); teaching sociology (Teaching TSP); visual sociology (Sociological Images); and technology and society (Cyborgology).

One blog on Cyborgology took on the issue of surveillance, focusing on how those in power in society watch the rest of us and record their observations. However, with the proliferation of smartphones, it has become possible for virtually everyone to observe everyone else and to record such observations. This gives rise to the phenomenon of *sousveillance*, or the ability of the powerless to watch and document the behavior of those in power. In one case, a bicyclist

pulled out his camera and recorded his interaction with a police officer. He was given a \$50 ticket for not riding in the bike lane. But the blogger shows how various impediments in bike lanes make it impossible to always remain in those lanes.

Other blogs, while not written solely by sociologists, address issues that are covered in sociology textbooks. For example, the Feministing and Jezebel blogs tackle issues of sexuality and gender (see Chapter 10).

Blogging is not just a way for sociologists to make their ideas more public and more accessible; it also is an opportunity to build dialogue. Readers, whether sociologists or not, comment directly on most blogs. Sociologists and members of the public also share thoughts via Twitter, Facebook, and other social media. This brings a wider range of voices into the conversation and is a major part of today’s “public sociology” (see below). It also leads to the production of far more diverse content than is found in traditional academic sources. Further, the flow of sociological ideas and information occurs at a



These two unemployed journalists started a blog documenting the recession at www.unemploymentality.com. Do you write, or read, any blogs?

far more rapid pace. It is important to remember, however, that blogs are usually published without review by other sociologists. As a result, professional sociologists are concerned about blogs’ legitimacy and encourage all of those involved to carefully scrutinize ideas found on those blogs.

SOURCE: Printed with the permission of Nathan Jurgenson and P. J. Rey.

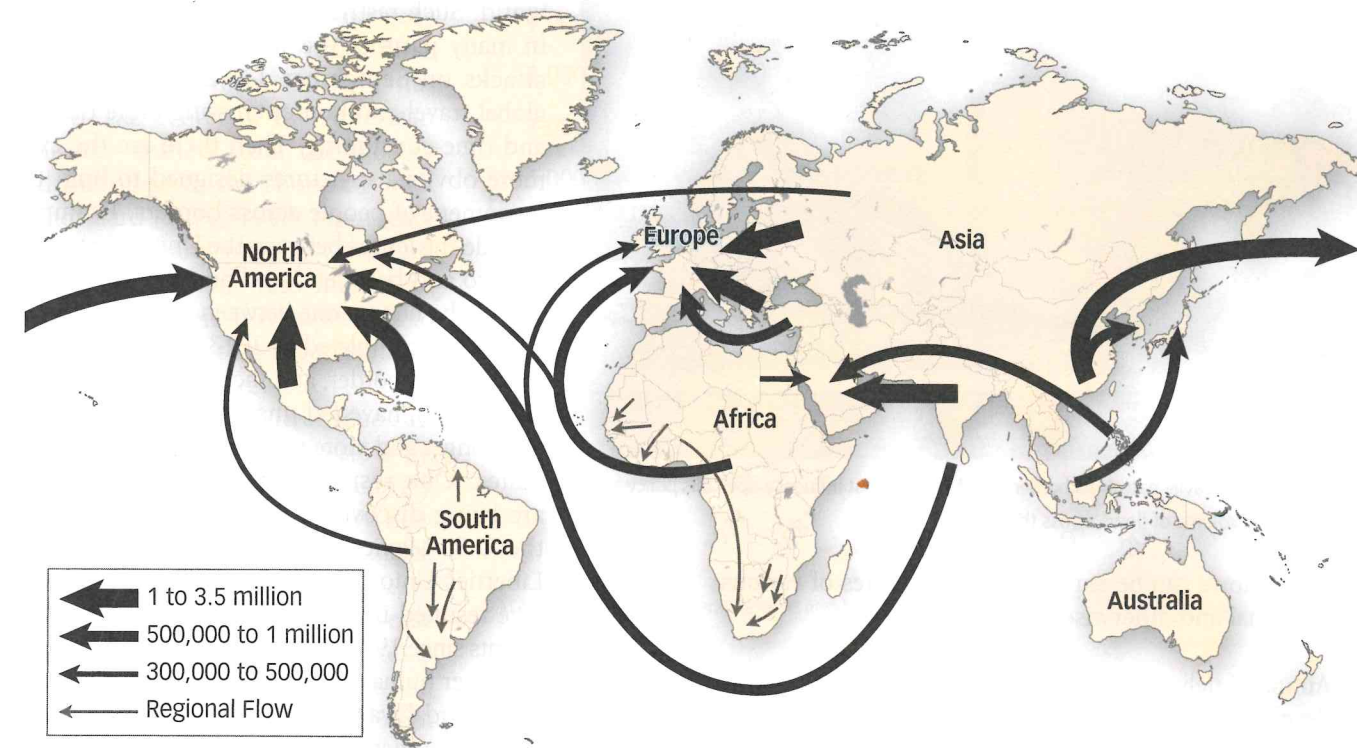
Think About It

What are some of the advantages for sociologists of the open and diverse dialogue made possible by blogs? What are some advantages for readers of such blogs? Can you think of any disadvantages, for readers or for bloggers?

(MNCs) such as Google and ExxonMobil, and multinational nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) such as Amnesty International. In at least some cases, these transnational structures are becoming more important than individual societies. OPEC, for example, is more important to the rest of the world’s well-being than are key member societies such as Abu Dhabi or even Saudi Arabia.

However, in the global age, societies are seen as of declining importance (Holton 2011; Meyer, Boli, and Ramirez 1997). This is the case, in part, because there are larger transnational and global social structures that are growing in importance. These include the United Nations (UN), the European Union (EU), the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), multinational corporations

FIGURE 1.1 • Major Global Migration Flows, 1990–2000



SOURCES: Adapted from *Stalker's Guide to International Migration*, Peter Stalker; and World Map: Global Migration, La Documentation Française.

Social processes, like social structures, exist not only at the societal level but also at the global level, and these global processes are increasing in importance. Consider migration (see Chapter 16). People move about, or migrate, within and between societies. For example, many people have moved from the northeastern United States to the west and south, although those historically large migrations slowed dramatically with the Great Recession that began in 2007. However, in the global age, people are increasingly moving between societies (see Figure 1.1), some halfway around the world. Major examples involve people migrating from and through Mexico to the United States (Massey 2003; Ortmeyer and Quinn 2012) and from a number of Islamic societies to the West (Caldwell 2009; Voas and Fleischmann 2012).

There have always been such population movements. However, in the global age people generally move around the world far more freely and travel much greater distances than ever before. Another way of saying this is that people—and much else—are more “fluid.” That is, they move farther, more easily, and more quickly than ever before. The movement of products of all types is also more fluid as a result of the existence of massive container ships,

jet cargo planes, and package delivery services such as FedEx and UPS. Even more fluid is the digital “stuff” you buy on the Internet when you download music, movies, and so on. And in the realm of the family, tasks once confined to the home, such as caregiving and housework, have become increasingly fluid, as those who can afford to do so often outsource domestic labor (van der Lippe, Frey, and Tsvetkova 2012; Yeates 2009). More generally, that greater fluidity is manifested in the information that flows throughout the world in the blink of an eye as a result of the Internet, e-mail, and social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter.

ASK YOURSELF

Have you ever thought of your Facebook page as part of a global flow of information? In what ways does it actually fit this description? What does your position in this global flow of information reveal about you?



Border Enforcement



The United States heavily patrols its border with Mexico. What influence does this policy have on the ease and volume of flows across that border?

These flows can be expedited by structures of various types—social and otherwise. For example:

- Air cargo delivery will increasingly be facilitated by the development of the “aerotropolis” (Kasarda and Lindsay 2011). This is a preplanned city that is developed because of proximity and access to a large, modern airport. For example, New Songdo, South Korea, is being built because such an airport (Incheon) is nearby and easily reached by a 12-mile-long bridge. This is in contrast to the usual situation where the airport (e.g., Reagan National in Washington, DC; LAX in Los Angeles; Heathrow in London) is built within or very close to a city center. Traditional airports are typically too small and too difficult to reach, create too much noise for city residents, and cannot expand much beyond their current confines.
- The European Union, founded in 1993, is an example of a social structure that serves to ease the flow of citizens between member nations (but not of people living outside the EU). Border restrictions among the 27 EU member nations have been reduced or eliminated completely. Similarly, the creation in 1975 of the euro has greatly simplified economic transactions among the 17 EU countries that accept it as their currency.
- The continuing free flow of information on the Internet is made possible by an organization called ICANN (Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers). It handles the Net’s underlying infrastructure.

There are also structures that impede various kinds of global flows. National borders, passports and passport

controls (Robertson 2010; Torpey 2000, 2012), security checks, and customs controls limit the movement of people throughout the world. Such restrictions were greatly increased in many parts of the world after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. This made global travel and border crossing more difficult and time-consuming. Then there are the even more obvious structures designed to limit the movement of people across borders. Examples include the fences between the United States and Mexico and between Israel and the West Bank, as well the newest one between Israel and Egypt, which was completed in 2013. The fences across the Mexican border, and increased border police and patrols, have led unauthorized migrants to take longer and more risky routes into the United States. One result is that more dead bodies are being discovered in the desert that spans the U.S.–Mexico border. The American Civil Liberties Union reports that border deterrence strategies have resulted in the deaths of more than 5,000 Mexican migrants since 1994. The annual death toll has been rising, as have other human rights abuses such as detention excesses (Androff and Tavassoli 2012; Jimenez 2009). There are, of course, many other structural barriers, most notably trade barriers and tariffs, that limit the free movement of goods and services of many kinds.

In sum, **globalization** is defined by increasingly fluid global flows and the structures that expedite and impede those flows. Globalization is certainly increasing, and it brings with it a variety of both positive and negative developments (Ritzer 2010c). On one side, most people throughout the world now have far greater access to goods, services, and information from around the globe than people did during the industrial age. On the other side, a variety of highly undesirable things also flow more easily around the world, such as diseases like HIV/AIDS and the adverse effects of climate change (including global warming). Also on the negative side are the flows of such forms of “deviant globalization” as terrorism, sex trafficking, and the black markets for human organs and drugs (Gilman, Goldhammer, and Weber 2011).

CONSUMPTION

Beginning in the 1950s, another major social change took place in the United States and other developed

globalization The increasing fluidity of global flows and the structures that expedite and impede those flows.

countries. The central feature of many capitalist economies began to shift from production and work to **consumption**, or the process by which people obtain and utilize goods and services. During that period, the center of the American economy shifted from the factory and the office to the shopping mall (Baudrillard [1970] 1998; Lipovetsky 2005). For many people, work and production became less important than consumption. It is impossible to ignore something that is such a large aspect of people’s lives.

The dramatic increase in consumption was made possible by, among other things, increasingly available credit cards. They have now become widespread at shopping malls, on the Internet, and in many other settings. One indicator of the increase in consumption in the United States is the increase in credit card debt. As you can see in Figure 1.2, credit card debt per household grew astronomically in the early years of credit card use (the figure begins with \$37 in 1969) and reached its highest point, \$8,729, in 2008. It has declined somewhat since the onset of the Great Recession and was down to a still high level of \$7,194 in 2012.

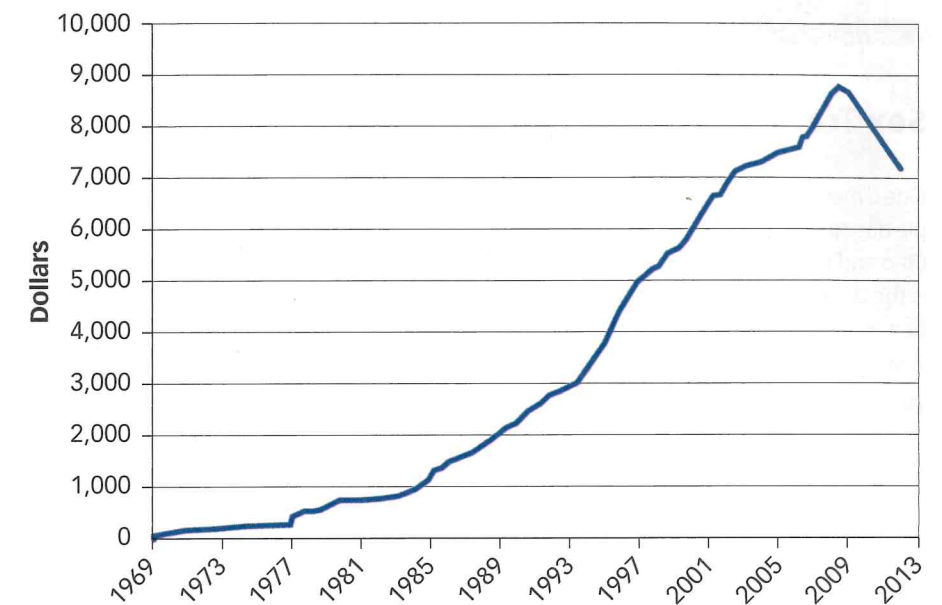
ASK YOURSELF

Have your consumption habits or credit card use changed over the last six months? The last three years? Do you anticipate that they will change in the next three years, and if so, how and why?

Consumption is certainly significant economically, but it is significant in other ways as well. For example, culture is very much shaped by consumption, and various aspects of consumption become cultural phenomena. A good example is the iPhone, which has revolutionized culture in innumerable ways. Millions of people have bought iPhones and similar

consumption The process by which people obtain and utilize goods and services.

FIGURE 1.2 • U.S. Credit Card Debt, 1969–2012



DATA SOURCES: U.S. Federal Reserve and U.S. Census Bureau.

smartphones as well as the ever increasing number of “apps” associated with them. These phones have altered how and where people meet to socialize and the ways in which they socialize. In addition, so much time is spent by the media and by people in general in discussing the implications of the iPhone and similar products that they have become central to the larger culture in which we live. Rumors about the characteristics and release date of the next version of the iPhone continually add to the excitement.

Consumption and globalization are also deeply intertwined. Much of what we consume in the developed world comes from other countries. In 2012 alone, the United States imported \$426 billion worth of goods from China; the United States imported only \$4 million in goods from China in 1985 (U.S. Census Bureau 2013). Furthermore, the speed and convenience of Internet commerce tends to make

CHECKPOINT 1.2

CHARACTERISTICS OF GLOBALIZATION AND CONSUMPTION

Globalization is characterized by . . .

Increasingly fluid flows of people, goods, information, and ideas across national boundaries.

Consumption is characterized by . . .

Increasingly available credit cards (and debt), an increased focus on shopping for goods and services, and ease of online purchasing.



Sex Trafficking



Credit Card Debt



Americans and Debt

Sex Trafficking

One dimension of the increased flow of people due to globalization is human trafficking (Rao and Presenti 2012). Human trafficking is the use of coercion or deception to force human beings into providing such services as slave labor, commercial sex, and organ donation. The trafficker and the buyer of the services conduct the financial transaction; the victims of trafficking participate against their will. Sex trafficking is a particular variety of trafficking whose victims are traded for the purpose of commercial sex, including prostitution, stripping, or pornography (Hodge 2008). Not all commercial sex involves human trafficking, so buyers of commercial sexual services and performances are often not aware that the sex workers have been trafficked.

The number of trafficked victims is on the rise. One researcher estimates that 1.4 million women and girls are currently trafficked each year (Lee 2012b). Although sexual victimization has always existed, globalization creates greater opportunities and thus greater

profits for traffickers (Farr 2005). Bars, dance clubs, massage parlors, the pornography industry, international hotel chains, airline companies, and the tourist industry create and help to meet the demand for sex labor around the globe. Predictably, organized criminal networks have become involved and, in fact, have come to dominate transnational sex trafficking. Human trafficking has become illegal worldwide in large part because of this development.

Over the last few decades, many of the countries of the Global South (especially Thailand and the Philippines) and of the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe have become major sources of sex workers, especially prostitutes. These sex workers may either work in these locales or be relocated, either voluntarily (although often under false pretenses) or by force, to work in the sex trade in other parts of the world.

The multimillion-dollar “mail-order-bride” business, despite a veneer of

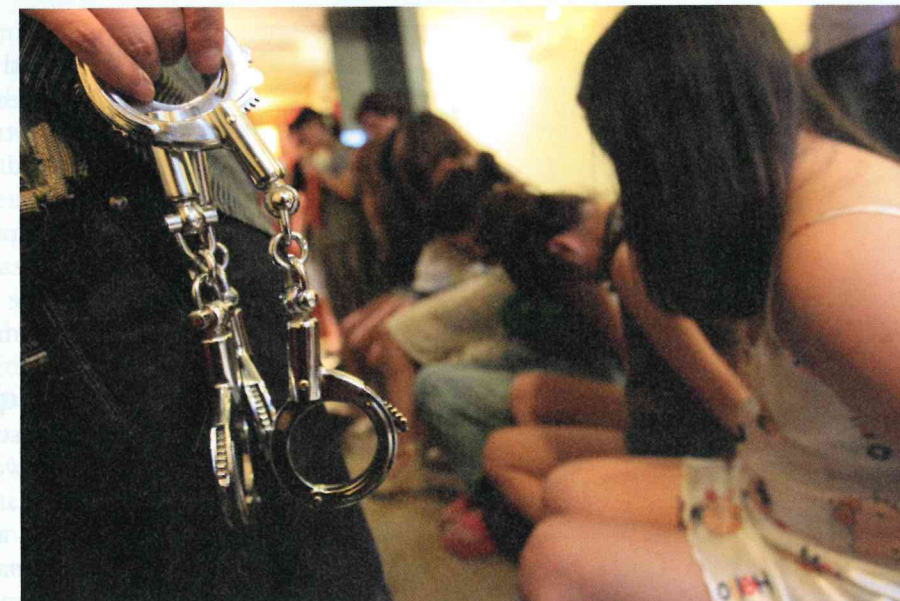
respectability, is sometimes a form of sex trafficking as well. Women who are offered through mail-order-bride agencies are mostly from the Philippines, Laos, Burma, Vietnam, Thailand, and the former Soviet Union. This is a segmented market much like any other, however. For example, Thai women are often promoted as sex workers, while Filipina women are advertised as helpers and wives.

The flow of people in the global sex industry moves not only from less to more developed countries but also in reverse (Flynn 2011). In the sex tourism industry, buyers travel to less developed locales, such as Thailand, to avail themselves of the often cheaper and more exotic sexual services at their destination. While in the past the high cost of airfares has limited the number of sex tourists, increasingly inexpensive travel opportunities have permitted more sex tourists to circle the globe in search of sex (Brennan 2004). The increasing demand for

sex workers will undoubtedly lead to a further increase in the number of women and children trafficked for sex in less developed parts of the world.

Sex trafficking has far more negative consequences for women than other forms of trafficking, such as for domestic work. Not only is sex work far more demeaning, but it also exposes victims to sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV/AIDS, drug addiction, and a wide variety of other health risks. Trafficked individuals are frequently beaten, raped, stabbed, strangled, and sometimes murdered by traffickers, who are essentially their pimps. Pimps threaten victims’ family members and hold their children hostage to prevent the women from escaping.

The great expansion of communication technologies in the global age has opened up new avenues for sex trafficking. Using the Internet, “customers” can find a sex worker almost anywhere in the world instantly, read reviews about the individual sex workers, exchange information on where to find prostitutes and the prices for sex workers, and so on. Websites for commercial prostitution tours from North America and Europe to Southeast Asia and the Caribbean offer package tours, quote prices, and advertise the sex workers and their services to the men



Sex trafficking is a problem worldwide. Some countries prosecute sex workers like these prostitutes in China. Do you think they have committed a crime?

of the developed world. In Cambodia, a U.S. resident started a “rape camp” that offered “Asian sex slaves” who were gagged, bound, and forced against their will into performing a variety of sex acts (Hughes 2000). Internet viewers could request and pay for specific rape acts over the Internet, while traffickers could avoid prosecution by using encryption technologies. This “rape camp” was ultimately shut down, but other creative methods of

exploiting women and children continue to exist on the Internet.

Think About It

Do you think it was inevitable that the exploitation of women and children would migrate to the Internet? Why or why not? What effects have globalization and technology had on sex trafficking? Could they also be used to help prevent it?

global realities and distances irrelevant to consumers. Finally, travel to other parts of the world—a form of consumption itself—is increasingly affordable and common. A major objective of tourists is often the sampling of the food of, and the purchase of souvenirs from, foreign lands (Chambers 2010; Gmelch 2010; Mak, Lumbers, and Eves 2012).

Sociologists are understandably interested in these developments. Early sociologists did many studies of work, production, factories, and factory workers, and today’s sociologists continue to study work-related issues. However, contemporary sociologists are devoting increasing attention to consumption in general (Sassatelli 2007) and more specifically to such phenomena as online shopping (Horrigan 2008), the behavior of shoppers in more material locales such as department stores (Miller 1998; Zukin 2004), and the development of more recent consumption sites, such as fast-food restaurants (Ritzer 2013a) and shopping malls (Ritzer 2010b).

McDonaldization

My study of fast-food restaurants led to the development of the concept of **McDonaldization**, or the process by which the rational principles of the fast-food restaurant are coming to dominate more and more sectors of society and more societies throughout the world (Ritzer 2013a; see Ritzer 2010d: 275–357 for a number of critical essays on this perspective). This process leads to the creation of rational systems—like fast-food restaurants—that are characterized by the most direct and efficient means to their ends. McDonaldized systems have four defining characteristics:

McDonaldization The process by which the rational principles of the fast-food restaurant are coming to dominate more and more sectors of society and more societies throughout the world.

- **Efficiency.** The emphasis is on the use of the quickest and least costly means to whatever end is desired. It is clear that employees of fast-food restaurants work efficiently: Burgers are cooked and assembled as if on an assembly line, with no wasted movements or ingredients. Similarly, customers are expected to spend as little time as possible in the fast-food restaurant. Perhaps the best example of efficiency is the drive-through window, a highly organized means for employees to dole out meals in a matter of seconds (Horovitz 2002).

- **Calculability.** You hear a lot at McDonald’s about quantities: how large the food portions are—the Big Mac—and how low the prices are—the dollar breakfast. You don’t hear as much, however, about the quality of the restaurant’s ingredients or its products. Similarly, you may hear about how many burgers are served per hour or how quickly they are served, but you don’t hear much about the skill of employees. A focus on

quantity also means that tasks are often done under great pressure. This means that they are often done in a slipshod manner.

- **Predictability.** McDonaldization ensures that the entire experience of patronizing a fast-food chain is nearly identical from one geographic setting to another—even globally—and from one time to another. For example, when customers enter a McDonald’s restaurant, employees ask what they wish to order, following scripts created by the corporation. For their part, customers can expect to find most of the usual menu items. Employees, following another script, can be counted on to thank customers for their order. Thus, a highly predictable ritual is played out in the fast-food restaurant.



Sex Trafficking



The principles that account for the success of fast-food chains like McDonald's appear to be spreading to other social institutions. Which of these principles have you observed in action?

- **Control.** In McDonaldized systems, a good deal of control is maintained through technology. French fry machines buzz when the fries are done and even automatically lift them out of the hot oil. The automatic fry machine may save time and prevent accidents, but it makes it impossible to meet a special customer request for brown, crispy fries. Similarly, the drive-through window can be seen as a technology that ensures that customers dispose of their own garbage, if only by dumping it in the backseats of their cars or on the roadside.

Paradoxically, rationality often seems to lead to its exact opposite—irrationality. Just consider the problem of roadside litter due to drive-through services at fast-food restaurants, or the societal inefficiencies in dealing with childhood obesity that has been blamed, in part, on the ubiquity of fast food. Another of the irrationalities of rationality is

dehumanization. Fast-food employees are forced to work in dehumanizing jobs, which can lead to job dissatisfaction, alienation, and high turnover rates. Fast-food customers are forced to eat in dehumanizing settings, such as in the cold and impersonal atmosphere of the fast-food restaurant, in their cars, or on the move as they walk down the street. As more of the world succumbs to McDonaldization, dehumanization becomes increasingly likely.

Critiquing Consumption

The sociological study of consumption sites involves, among many other things, a critical look at the ways in which they are structured. (The above discussion of the irrationalities associated with McDonaldized settings is one example of such a critical perspective.) These sites may be set up to lead people to consume certain things and not others, to consume more than they might have intended, and to go into debt (Brubaker, Lawless, and Tabb 2012; Manning 2001; Marron 2009; Ritzer 1995). Take, for example, the website *ruelala.com*, an “invitation-only” site that was established to sell

expensive clothing to members at what are supposed to be huge discounts. The rationale behind the site is that because of its seeming exclusivity, people will be lured into buying more items, and spending more money on each item, than they would elsewhere. In fact, however, the site is not as exclusive as it seems, since members are urged to recruit their friends, and they get a \$10 credit after the first purchase of every new member they bring to *ruelala.com*.

Sociologists are also interested in how consumers use shopping malls and e-tailors in ways that were not anticipated by their designers. For example, people often wander through shopping malls and their many shops, which have been designed to spur consumption, without buying anything. Defunct malls are serving as impromptu skate parks. Students are using *Amazon.com* as a source for term-paper bibliographies rather than buying the books.

Travelers are using Internet sites such as *Expedia* and *KAYAK* to compare prices but then buying airplane tickets from traditional travel agents or on airlines' own websites.

Social change continues. The Great Recession and its continuing aftermath have altered many things, including the degree to which society is dominated by consumption. Consumption

CHECKPOINT 1.3 THE FOUR CHARACTERISTICS OF MCDONALDIZATION

Efficiency	Emphasizes the quickest and least costly means to whatever end is desired.
Calculability	Focuses on quantity over quality and often means doing tasks under great time pressure.
Predictability	Products are nearly identical and experiences are highly predictable rituals.
Control	Emphasizes automation and standardization, most often maintained through technology.

sites have experienced great difficulties. Many outdoor strip malls have emptied, and indoor malls have numerous vacant stores, including large department stores. Las Vegas, which has become a capital for the consumption of entertainment and high-end goods and services, is hurting (Nagourney 2013). Dubai, aspiring to be the consumption capital of the East, hit a financial rough spot in 2009 and has yet to recover from it. It seems possible, although highly unlikely, that even though we entered the consumption age only about half a century ago, we now may be on the verge of what could be called the “postconsumption age.” While excessive consumption and the related high level of debt were key factors in causing the Great Recession, a postconsumption age would bring with it problems of its own, such as fewer jobs and a declining standard of living for many.

ASK YOURSELF

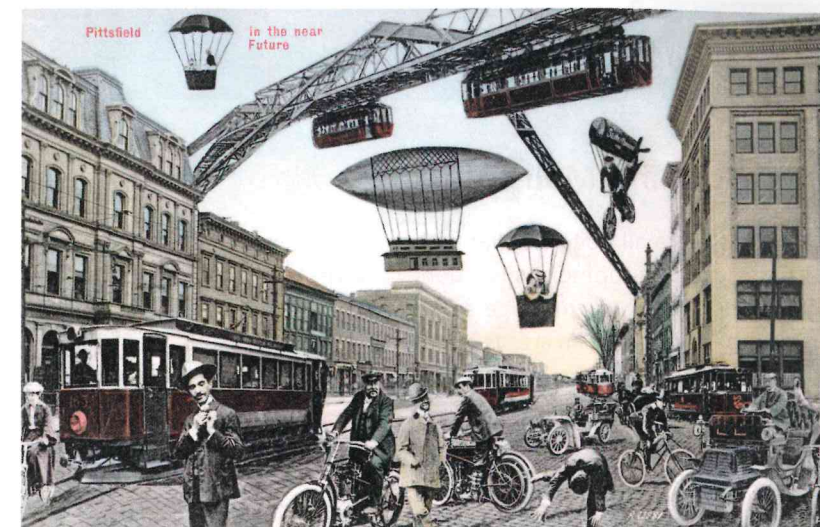
What would your life be like in a postconsumption age? In what ways might it be better? Worse? Why?

THE DIGITAL WORLD

Sociology has always concerned itself with the social aspects and implications of **technology**, or the interplay of machines, tools, skills, and procedures for the accomplishment of tasks. One example is the assembly line, a defining feature of early-twentieth-century factories. Later, sociologists became interested in the automated technologies that came to define factories. However, technologies have continued to evolve considerably since then. Sociologists are now devoting an increasing amount of attention to the digital world that has emerged as a result of new technologies already mentioned in this chapter, such as computers, smartphones, the Internet, and social networking sites (Clough 2013).

While we will discuss the digital world throughout this book, living digitally is not separate from living in the social world. In fact, the two forms of living are increasingly intersecting and in the process creating an augmented world (Jurgenson 2012). For

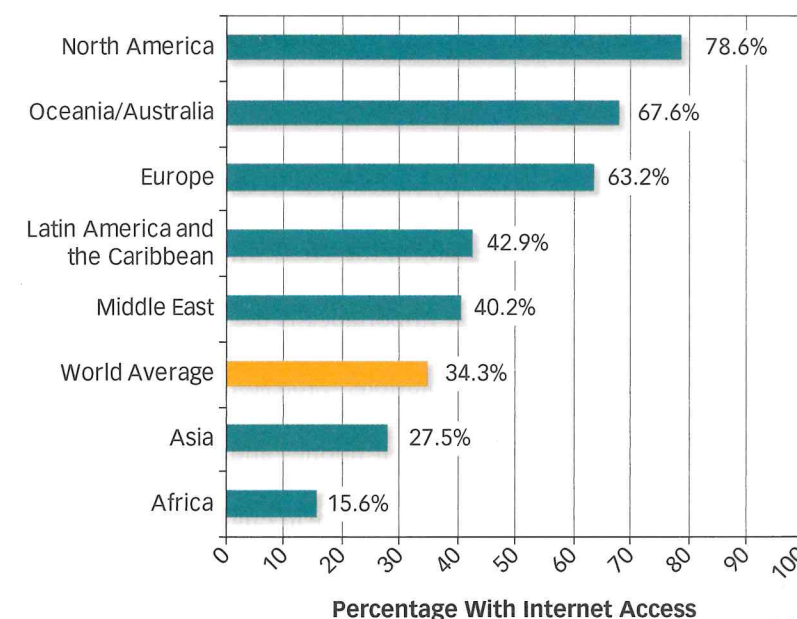
technology The interplay of machines, tools, skills, and procedures for the accomplishment of tasks.



Technologies we take for granted today would have been unimaginable a century ago. How do they affect our lives, both positively and negatively?

example, the wide-scale use of smartphones allows people to text many others to let them know they are going to be at a local club. This can lead to a spontaneous social gathering at the club that would not have occurred were it not for this new technology.

FIGURE 1.3 • Internet Access by Geographic Region, 2012



SOURCE: Reprinted with permission from Internet World Stats. Copyright © 2012 Miniwatts Marketing Group.



The Shopping Malls of Dubai

Although we are all quite familiar with today's indoor shopping malls, there were predecessors, such as the early-eighteenth-century Parisian arcades (Benjamin 1999). However, the first modern, fully enclosed mall opened in Minnesota in 1956 (Ritzer 2010b). Today, shopping malls are common throughout the United States. Although the modern shopping mall was an American invention, the mall concept has been globalized, and now malls are common in other parts of the world as well. Many international malls now outshine those located in the United States. For example, at 9.6 million square feet and accommodating 1,500 retail outlets, the South China Mall, located in Dongguan, is the largest mall in the world by a large margin (Pocock 2011). None of the world's 10 largest malls are in the United States. The United States is also no longer the leader in the most innovative, glitziest, and fanciest malls.

One locale notable for its malls is Dubai in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Located on the coast of the Persian Gulf, Dubai covers more than 1,600 square miles, mostly desert. The emirate boomed in the last few decades and now has a population of more than 2 million people, most of them expatriates who have found work there (Davidson 2008). Because of its dwindling oil reserves, Dubai is notable for having shifted from an economy dependent on oil to a diverse, "postoil" economy (Arnold 2011). Among other things, the emirate has become a regional, if not global, center of consumption and has developed a thriving tourist industry. Visitors are drawn by the tallest building in the world—the Burj Khalifa—three artificial islands, and Dubai's over-the-top shopping malls.

While a model of economic development, Dubai has received its share of criticisms. Some of Dubai's residents work in highly paid professional and technical

occupations, but many others work in the poorly paid service industry and in construction. The lavish lifestyles of the locals (the "Emirati"), the abysmal living conditions of construction workers, and the pervasive culture of what Thorstein Veblen ([1899] 1994) called "conspicuous consumption" have been scrutinized by critics (Davis 2006). For example, Arab sheikhs and rock stars pay upwards of \$27,000 per night for rooms at the Burj Al Arab, a self-styled seven-star hotel that sits alone on a manmade island off the coast of Dubai ("Luxury" 2009).

At 3.7 million square feet in area and accommodating more than 1,200 retail outlets, the newest, largest, and most elegant of Dubai's malls is the Dubai Mall ("Staff" 2008). Among its most notable elements is a sophisticated shopping area for expensive jewelry—the largest gold souk, or ancient Arab bazaar, in the world. It also has a 10-million-liter aquarium behind the

The networking sites on the Internet that involve social interaction are the most obviously sociological in character (Aleman and Wartman 2008; Patchin and Hinduja 2010). These sites are important especially in the West, where the percentage of Internet users based on population is highest (see Figure 1.3). However, their importance is increasing in the Middle East and North Africa as reflected in the role they played in recent social revolutions. Protesters used cell phones and the Internet to inform each other, and the world, about the evolving scene. Cell phones and social networking also played a role in involving people in the riots that took place in London and elsewhere in England in mid-2011. To take another example, Facebook.com/yalaYL has become a key site where Israelis, Palestinians, and other Arabs communicate with each other about both everyday concerns and big issues such as the prospect for peace in the Middle East. This social networking takes place online while physical interaction between such people, and between their leaders, is difficult or nonexistent (Bronner 2011b).

One sociological issue is the ways in which social networking sites come between you and others and

how this affects the nature of interaction. For example, Twitter limits you to 140 characters, but face-to-face communication has no such limits. On the other hand, face-to-face communication is limited to a shared physical space, whereas communication via Twitter travels anywhere there is a device connected to the Internet. Sociologists are interested in getting a better handle on the nature of the differences, as well as the similarities, between mediated and nonmediated (e.g., face-to-face) interaction. In technologically **mediated interaction**, technology such as the Internet and your cell phone come between you and others, while there is no such interference in nonmediated interaction. People who are shy and insecure when it comes to dating or sex, for example, may be much more comfortable relating to others on mediated websites such as Match.com or OkCupid.

mediated interaction Social interaction in which technological devices comes between the participants, unlike in face-to-face interaction.

world's largest acrylic viewing panels (Bianchi 2010). Perhaps the most striking feature of the Dubai Mall is that, in the middle of one of the world's hottest and most arid deserts, it has an indoor ice rink, which can accommodate up to 2,000 skaters.

The Mall of the Emirates is much smaller than the Dubai Mall, with only 520 shops, although it has a five-star Kempinski hotel and a 14-screen cinema complex (Mall of the Emirates 2010). The Mall of the Emirates has gone further than even the Dubai Mall in thumbing its nose at the heat of the desert—the mall houses Ski Dubai, a 400-meter indoor ski slope. Interestingly, the \$3.8 billion American Dream mall, located just outside New York City in New Jersey, has copied the Mall of the Emirates and built its own indoor ski slope (D'Elia 2011). However, the American Dream mall has yet to open. While exterior construction was completed long ago, much work is needed on the interior of the mall. In 2011, the American Dream mall was taken over (with economic help from the state of New Jersey) by the developers of the Mall of America in Minneapolis (Sullivan 2011). However, delays continue to plague completion of the mall, which has now been put off until 2014 or later.



Yes, you can ski in Dubai. Does a society give something up when it makes such an expensive luxury possible?

The malls of Dubai are obviously involved in consumption, but they are also involved in the process of globalization in numerous ways. Copying, and being copied by, American malls; attracting visitors from many parts of the world; and being affected by global economic processes such as the Great Recession are all indicators of global exchange and interconnectivity.

Think About It

Which characteristics of McDonaldization are found in malls? Do you think malls contribute to the increased prominence of consumption in contemporary life? Why or why not? Why do you think they have become so popular abroad?

Another sociological issue related to the Internet is the impact on our lives of spending so much time interacting on social networking sites. For example, are you more likely to write term papers for your college classes using shorter sentences and more abbreviations because of your experience with texting? Consider also the impact of the 7.5 hours per day—up by a full hour in only five years—that young people between the ages of 8 and 18 spend on electronic devices of all types (Lewin 2010). In some cases, little time remains for other activities (schoolwork, face-to-face interaction).

We may also multitask among several online and offline interactions simultaneously, such as in class or while doing homework. You may think you do a great job of multitasking, but it can actually reduce your ability to comprehend and remember and thus lower your performance on tests and other assignments (PBS 2010).

Internet technology also affects the nature of consumption. More of it is taking place on such sites as eBay and Amazon.com, and that trend is expected to continue to grow. In 2010, a Pew study found that,

during an average day, 21 percent of Internet users in the United States look for information about a service or product they are thinking about buying (Jansen 2010). It is also easier for people to spend money on consumption on Internet sites than it is in the material world. It is worth noting that these sites, as well as the Internet in general, are global in their scope. The ease with which global interactions and transactions occur on the Internet is a powerful spur to the process of globalization.

GLOBALIZATION, CONSUMPTION, THE DIGITAL WORLD, AND YOU

The three main issues discussed above, taken singly and collectively, are of great concern not only to society in general and to sociologists but also to you as a college



Online Networks



Internet Use

The Internet in China

In the last three decades, no country has played a larger role in changing the global economic and political landscape than China (Jacques 2009). Its economy has achieved unprecedented growth, and it became the second largest economy in the world in 2010; it is estimated it will surpass the United States as the world's largest economy as early as 2030 (Barboza 2010). However, the rising economic tide in China has not benefited everyone. Income inequality is extremely high. There are a number of recently minted billionaires and a rapidly growing middle class, but per capita income is still only approximately \$3,600, which is similar to that in impoverished countries such as Algeria and El Salvador. Much of China's rural population and its factory workers remain very poor.

This divide extends to Internet use. Only about a third of China's population currently uses the Internet. But that's still a lot of people. In 2010, about 420 million people in China used the Internet

(China Internet Network Information Center 2010)—there are more Internet “citizens” in China than there are people in the United States. Since even now only a minority of China's population uses the Internet, China's position as the world leader in Internet use is slated to grow by an increasingly wide margin in the coming years. Furthermore, Chinese Internet users are young: 70 percent are under 30, while in the United States the majority are over 30 (Ye 2008). This augurs well for future Chinese involvement in the Internet.

Among the major types of content that flow through the Internet in China are pirated films, music, and TV shows that can be watched free of charge; mobile Internet content such as ringtones; online multiplayer games; online communities with social networking and instant messaging; and celebrity gossip, photos, and videos of American and European sports (“Top Sites in China” 2011). On the surface, the types of content that are available on the Internet in China

are not much different from those elsewhere in the world. However, the Chinese government has made an active effort to erect a barrier—a “Great Firewall”—to stop these flows (Segan 2011). This is part of a larger effort by the Chinese government to block all flows of information in a variety of ways, including censorship of news, control over television, and limits on bookshops and movie theaters (Bennett 2011). Barriers on the Internet include restricted access to a large number of foreign websites such as Wikipedia, Flickr, YouTube, and sometimes Myspace (“Timeline” 2010). There are also controversial filters on Google designed to keep material regarded by the Chinese government as politically sensitive from appearing in responses to searches. An awkward payment system controlled by the government restricts online shopping. New rules have come into effect limiting online video.

From the perspective of this chapter, what is most interesting about these restrictions is how well they illustrate the

relationship between global flows and structural barriers to those flows. China's efforts to censor the Internet have resulted in a unique Internet world in China. For example, many popular online communities consist entirely of Chinese citizens. In an increasingly global world, however, how long can China maintain barriers that few—if any—other countries in the world erect (Lacharite 2002)?

Although the majority of Chinese Internet users are completely oblivious to the existence of the Great Firewall (French 2008), there are signs of rebellion. Some Chinese Internet users have filed lawsuits against government-owned service providers, and a growing network of software writers have begun to develop code aimed at overcoming government restrictions (Kennedy 2007). Bloggers and webpage owners post articles to spread awareness of the Great Firewall and share links to programs that will help Internet users evade it (French 2008). These are interesting signs of resistance to the Chinese government, although they could be extinguished at any moment through a massive show of power. It is instructive to remember how quickly the Chinese government quashed the Tiananmen Square



Internet use is highly unevenly distributed among the Chinese population and heavily regulated by the government. How is this different from your Internet experience?

revolt of 1989, which was undertaken to promote political and economic reform.

in place for the long term? Why or why not? How does your understanding of globalization affect your answer?

Think About It

Do you think the Chinese government will be able to keep its Internet controls

student. You live a good part of your life in these three interrelated domains.

As a college student, you live a truly global existence in a college or university. A significant number of your classmates come from elsewhere in the world. Your classes are increasingly being taught by teaching assistants and professors from other parts of the globe. The ideas you are learning are the most global of all, flowing freely from virtually everywhere in the world to become part of lectures and textbooks.

As consumers, you and your classmates are likely well acquainted with the college bookstore and the nearby shopping mall. In addition, on the Internet you are able to find a nearly infinite variety of goods and services, the majority of which are likely to come from the far reaches of the world.

Finally, an increasing portion of your education is obtained through the inherently global Internet—for example, through e-learning on web-based courses and online degree programs. In 2009, more than 4.6 million students were taking at least one online course (Allen and Seaman 2010). This constituted

a growth rate in enrollment of 17 percent compared with a 1.2-percent growth rate for traditional courses. With the emergence of massive open online courses (MOOCs), you, and perhaps hundreds of thousands of students from around the globe, are increasingly more likely to participate in global classes and programs available on the Internet (see Chapter 17 for more on MOOCs) (Heller 2013; Lewin 2012).

Globalization, consumption, and the Internet are of great importance on their own. However, perhaps more important are the ways in which they interact with one another and interpenetrate with your life as a college student—and the lives of virtually everyone else.

SOCIOLOGY: CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

This chapter has emphasized recent social changes and their impact on society and on sociology, but there is also

much continuity in society, as well as in the field of sociology. This section deals with a number of traditional approaches and concerns in sociology that are of continuing relevance to even the most recent sociological issues.

THE SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

The systematic study of the social world has always required imagination on the part of sociologists. There are various ways to look at the social world. For example, instead of looking at the world from the point of view of an insider, one can, at least psychologically, place oneself outside that world. America's “War on Terror” might look defensible from the perspective of an American,

sociological imagination A unique perspective that gives sociologists a distinctive way of looking at data and reflecting on the world around them.

especially one who lived through 9/11, but it would look quite different if you imagined yourself in the place of an innocent Iraqi or Afghan caught in the middle of that war.

The phenomenon of being able to look at the social world from different, imaginative perspectives caught the attention of the famous sociologist C. Wright Mills, who in 1959 wrote a very important book titled *The Sociological Imagination*. He argued that sociologists had a unique perspective—the **sociological imagination**—that gave them a distinctive way of looking at data or reflecting on the world around them.

In his 1956 book *The Power Elite*, Mills demonstrated the application of the sociological imagination to the political world of his day. It was dominated by the “Cold War”—the nonshooting “war” that existed between the United States and the Soviet Union between the end of World War II in 1945 and the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991—and by the likelihood of nuclear war between the United States and the Soviet Union. Mills argued that a “military-industrial

ACTIVE SOCIOLOGY

Where Was It Made?

Globalization is visible everywhere, from the clothes we wear to the electronic devices that shape our everyday existence. To recognize the power of globalization, use the table below to make a list of the countries represented by the clothes you are wearing now and other personal belongings you have with you. For example, you may find that your footwear was made in Cambodia, your coat in Honduras, your T-shirt in Vietnam, and your cell phone batteries in South Korea. You may even find an item made in the United States. Most people can readily find at least 10 products made in different countries.

Many companies produce products while respecting human rights and ethical labor practices, but others impose a high human cost. Clothing, for example, is often made using child or forced labor. Select one item from your list below and research who produced it. Find out whether this manufacturer has used forced or child labor, unethical labor practices, or hazardous working conditions; share your results with the class.

Item	Where was it made?	Who made it?
Purse/backpack/tote		
Pants/jeans		
Top/T-shirt/hoodie		
Coat/jacket		
Shoes		
Hat		
Watch/jewelry		
Eyeglasses/shades		
Contents of your pockets		
Cell phone		
Cell phone batteries		
Laptop/tablet		
Other		

There are numerous tools to help you be a just consumer.

- Free2Work (www.free2work.org) has a cell phone application that helps consumers grade companies on their labor practices, reduce their “slavery footprint,” and access information about how to resist all forms of human trafficking as they shop. Swipe a bar code, reduce human trafficking!
- If you discover a “slavery footprint,” visit Change.org (www.change.org), which is dedicated to helping people develop and circulate online petitions on a variety of social issues.

complex” consisting of the military and many defense industries had come into existence in the United States. They both favored war, or at least preparedness for war, and therefore the expenditure of huge sums of taxpayer money on armaments of all types. In 1960, a few years after *The Power Elite* was published, president and former five-star general Dwight D. Eisenhower warned the nation, in his farewell presidential address, of the threats to liberty and

democracy posed by the military-industrial complex, to say nothing of its role in elevating the risk of war:

In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist.

We must never let the weight of this combination endanger our liberties or democratic processes. We should take nothing for granted. Only an alert and knowledgeable citizenry can compel the proper meshing of the huge industrial and military machinery of defense with our peaceful methods and goals, so that security and liberty may prosper together.

ASK YOURSELF

From what perspective do you view the 9/11 attacks on the United States? Could you ever consider them from a different angle? Why or why not? How does your answer to this question reflect your views about the military-industrial complex?

Sociology requires at least as much imagination today as it did in Mills’s day, and probably more, to deal with new and emerging realities. For example, the risk of global warfare, especially nuclear war, has declined with the end of the Cold War and the demise of the Soviet Union. But a military-industrial complex not only remains in place in the United States but may be more powerful than ever. Consider the simultaneous wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, to say nothing of the seemingly open-ended and perhaps never-ending War on Terror. Some sociologists would point out that the military and defense industries want, indeed need, hundreds of billions of dollars to be spent each year on armaments of all types. The new threats that arise regularly, real or imagined, lead to ever greater expenditures and further expansion of the military-industrial complex. In Figure 1.4, for example, you can see that U.S. military expenditures nearly doubled after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001—reflecting overlapping wars with Iraq and Afghanistan. Given the economic problems facing the United States, there is talk of cutting the defense budget in future years. Whatever happens, we can be sure that a military-industrial complex will survive and fight hard against any reductions.

Of recent concern, and relevant to our interest in the Internet, is “information war” (Tumber and Webster 2006). Instead of relying on armaments, an information war may involve barrages of propaganda by the warring parties—for example, Israel and the Palestinians or the United States and al-Qaeda. An information war can also involve “cyber-attacks,” in which hackers engage in stealthy attacks on an enemy nation’s computer systems. For example, computers in Estonia belonging to the government, newspapers, banks, and other large institutions were attacked in 2007; Estonian officials

BIOGRAPHICAL bits



C. Wright Mills (American, 1916–1962)

C. Wright Mills was born in Texas and achieved great success at an early age, publishing his most famous books before he was 40. An extremely aggressive and combative person who seemed to be at war with everyone—his teachers, his colleagues—everywhere he went, he was once described as a “Texas cowboy à la ride and shoot.” He was married three times and had many affairs, dying in 1962 after suffering a fourth heart attack.

RESEARCH INTERESTS

- The application of the sociological imagination to the relationship between the government and the military

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

- *The Sociological Imagination* (1959)
- *The Power Elite* (1956)
- *White Collar* (1951)

KEY IDEAS & CONTRIBUTIONS

- The “sociological imagination”—looking at the social world from a unique sociological perspective
- The “military-industrial complex”—the military and defense industries that favored spending taxpayer money on war or war preparedness

blamed the cyber-attacks on Russia. In 2010, the Stuxnet worm attacked a number of computers around the world, but it was especially aimed at Iranian nuclear facilities, which were apparently badly hurt by the attack. Most observers speculate that the attack was a joint U.S.–Israeli operation. It is likely that the American military-industrial complex will claim, not without some justification, that large sums of money now need to be spent and expensive new technologies developed so that it can ward off, or engage in, cyber-attacks.

A very different example of the utility of a sociological imagination begins with the ideas of one of the classic thinkers in the history of sociology, Georg Simmel, who was writing at the turn of the twentieth



Biobit: C. Wright Mills Military-Industrial Complex

FIGURE 1.4 • U.S. Defense Budget, 1940–2015



SOURCE: A Topline View of U.S. Defense Budget History from "U.S. Defense Spending: The Mismatch Between Plans and Resources" by Mackenzie Eaglen. Reprinted by permission of The Heritage Foundation.

century. Among many other things, Simmel ([1907] 1978) argued that money is crucial to a modern economy. For example, cash money allows people to be paid easily for their work and just as easily to buy goods and services. However, money not only speeds up consumption but also allows people to consume more than they otherwise would. While a money economy creates its own problems, it is the credit economy that nearly wrecked the American, and much of the global, economy during the Great Recession. The availability of "money" had dramatically increased with the expansion of credit for individuals in the form of mortgage loans, auto loans, and credit cards. People not only tended to spend all of the cash (including savings) they had on hand, but they were going into more and more debt because loans were easy to obtain. Simmel's imaginative thinking on money allows us to better understand the problems created by easy credit.

Private Troubles and Public Issues

The sociological imagination may be most useful in helping sociologists see the linkage between private troubles and public issues. For example, prior to the onset of the Great Recession, the sociological imagination would have been useful in alerting society to the fact that the increasing levels of individual consumption and debt, seen at the time as private issues, would soon morph into a public issue—the near collapse of the global economy. Credit cards can

create both private troubles and public issues. A person going so deeply into debt that there is no way out other than declaring bankruptcy is experiencing a private trouble. However, private troubles become public issues when high levels of personal debt and bankruptcy lead to such things as bank failures and even default on debts by various nations. Today, the sociological imagination could also be used to reflect on, for example, the fleeting nature of private social relationships on Facebook and Twitter and whether they will lead all types of social relationships in the future in the same direction.

Many other examples of the link between private troubles and public issues relate to young people and students. For

example, ADHD—attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder—can easily be seen as a private trouble. For years, there was little public awareness of ADHD, and those who had it were likely to suffer alone. But since the 1980s, it has become clear that ADHD is also a public issue, and it is becoming a more important public issue. The number of children diagnosed with ADHD increased from 5.7 percent in 1997–1999 to 7.6 percent in 2006–2008 (Goodwin 2011). It is clear that many people suffer from ADHD, which creates a number of larger problems for schools, employers, and society as a whole. The fact that it has become a public issue may make ADHD less of a private trouble for some, as there is now greater public understanding of the problem and many more support groups are available.

In another example, a 2011 White House report details the fact that women are more likely to be concentrated in lower-paying jobs (U.S. Department of Commerce, Executive Office of the President, and White House Council on Women and Girls 2011). For example, in medicine, women are more likely to be general practitioners or practical nurses than they are to be highly paid surgeons. Being limited occupationally creates personal troubles for many women, such as inadequate income and job dissatisfaction. This is also a public issue, not only because the discrepancy between the sexes is unfair to women as a whole but also because society is not the beneficiary of the many contributions of which women are capable.

GLOBALIZATION

The Russia–Belarus Information War

In 1991, following the prolonged Cold War between the Soviet Union (and its allies) and the United States (and its allies), the Soviet Union dissolved. The former superpower was split up into 15 independent nation-states. Two of the new states were Russia (by far the largest and most powerful of the post-Soviet states) and Belarus (a small country between Russia and Europe). For many years, Russia has sought to develop strong political and economic ties to Belarus for strategic purposes. From Russia's perspective, Belarus offers economic access to European clients, political access that Russia needs to increase its influence in Europe, and a "natural shield" against military expansion from the West" (Golani 2011). Reciprocally, Belarus is in a position to develop its economy and infrastructure with stronger ties to Russia. However, the relationship between these two countries has become increasingly tense in recent years.

The growing tension is reflected in an information war between the two countries that began in 2010 (Schwartz 2010). They quarreled over natural gas prices and over one of Russian premier Vladimir Putin's pet projects, a customs union between Russia and Belarus as well as another former Soviet republic, Kazakhstan. The customs union was nearly derailed by the president of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko. This is only one of several instances in which the Belarus

president failed to support, or even acted against, Russian policies and interests.

Since the advent of global communication technologies, such as television and more recently the Internet, information warfare has become an increasingly important dimension of war. It includes the use of disinformation, propaganda, or dissemination of secret information by one group to gain a strategic advantage over another group. In this case, Russia launched the opening salvo in the information war with Belarus by airing a television documentary in 2010 titled *Godfather*. The "godfather" of the title was President Lukashenko, who was portrayed as a "bumbling tyrant enamored of Hitler and Stalin. He has political opponents killed, journalists silenced and elections rigged . . . while keeping his faltering country in a Soviet time warp." The documentary, Russia claimed, "covers the disappearances and killings of Mr. Lukashenko's political opponents over the years and shows video of armored police officers beating antigovernment protestors" (Schwartz 2010: 10). Only a few in Belarus could see the documentary, but it became available anywhere in the world on YouTube.

Shortly after the video was shown, Belarus fired back with an article in a government newspaper by Russian opposition leaders who were highly critical of Mr. Putin. More generally, they said, "Savagery has become the norm in Russian

society" (Schwartz 2010: 10). The Belarus government's TV channel broadcast an interview with Mikheil Saakashvili, then president of Georgia (another former Soviet republic), in which he called the attack on Lukashenko hypocritical since political killings were common in Russia. Saakashvili, who was hated by the Russian leadership, said, "This has the smell of a propaganda war" (Schwartz 2010: 10).

Information flows much more quickly and easily around the world than physical objects such as people and weapons, in part because of global communication networks. But the strategic use of such information can have dramatic impacts on state policies, public opinion, and collective action—even in other parts of the world. This kind of exercise of "soft power" appears increasingly more likely in the contemporary world, where exercises of "hard power" such as shooting wars have become more dangerous and more costly than ever.

Think About It

Would you expect globalization's increased flow of information to make it easier or harder for people to use the sociological imagination? Why do you think it might be difficult for the ruling powers in Russia and Belarus to apply the sociological imagination to their view of the growing tension between them? What might make it easier for them to do so?

The decision to pursue one college major or career path over another could become a private trouble if a poor choice is made or is forced upon a student. Sociologists have also shown that such choices are very much related to larger public issues. If many people make such choices, or are forced into them—as women and other minorities often are—it will lead to public issues such as wide-scale job dissatisfaction and poor performance on the job. Culturally based ideas about gender often shape personal preferences

in choosing a college major (Charles and Bradley 2009), and gendered beliefs about career competence steer women and men toward different types of jobs and away from others (Correll 2001, 2004; Ridgeway and Correll 2004). Being in a poorly paid and unsatisfying job is a



From Welfare to Well-Paid



The recent private troubles of two young people became global public issues. The self-immolation and death of Tunisian vegetable seller Mohamed Al Bouazizi (left) inspired a revolution in his country, while Malala Yousufzai (right) became an international spokesperson for the education of Pakistani girls after the Taliban shot her in the head for her beliefs.



personal trouble for an individual woman, but it is a public issue when large numbers of women find themselves in this situation.

ASK YOURSELF

Do you agree that private choices sometimes lead to, or are part of, public issues? Can you think of an example from your own life or the life of a family member?

The Micro–Macro Relationship

The interest in personal troubles and public issues is a specific example of a larger and more basic sociological concern with the relationship between microscopic (**micro**, or small-scale) social phenomena, such as individuals and their thoughts and actions, and macroscopic (**macro**, or large-scale) social phenomena, such as groups, organizations, cultures, society, and the world, as well as the relationship between them (Turner 2005). For example, Karl Marx, often considered one of the earliest and most important sociologists, was interested in the relationship between what workers did and thought (micro issues) and the capitalist economic system (a macro issue) in which the workers existed. To take a more contemporary example, Randall Collins (2009) has sought to develop a theory of violence that deals with everything from individuals skilled in violent interactions, such as attacking those who are weak, to the material resources needed by violent organizations to cause other violent organizations to fall apart. An example of the former type of violent organization is the well-equipped U.S. Navy SEALs team that killed Osama bin Laden in 2011 and through that act sought to help hasten the dissolution of al-Qaeda.

In fact, there is a continuum that runs from the most microscopic to the most macroscopic of social realities, with phenomena at roughly the midpoint of this continuum best thought of as meso (middle or intermediate) realities. The definition of sociology presented at the beginning of this chapter fits this continuum quite well. Individual actions and thoughts lie on the micro end of the continuum; groups, organizations, cultures, and societies fall more toward the macro end; and worldwide structures and processes are at the most macro end of the continuum. Although in their own work, the vast majority of individual sociologists focus on only very limited segments of this continuum, the field as a whole is concerned with the continuum in its entirety as well as the interrelationships among its various components.

The Agency–Structure Relationship

American sociologists tend to think in terms of the micro–macro relationship. In other parts of the world, especially in Europe, sociologists are more oriented to the agency–structure relationship. The agency–structure continuum is complex, but for our purposes we can think of agency as resembling the micro level and structure as resembling the macro level.

micro Microscopic; used to describe small-scale social phenomena such as individuals and their thoughts and actions.

macro Macroscopic; used to describe large-scale social phenomena such as groups, organizations, cultures, society, and the globe.

The utility of the agency–structure terminology is that it highlights several important social realities and aspects of the field of sociology. Of greatest significance is the fact that the term **agency** gives great importance to the individual—the “agent”—as having power and a capacity for creativity (Giddens 1984). In sociological work on agency, great emphasis is placed on the individual’s mental abilities and the ways in which these abilities are used to create important, if not decisive, actions.

However, these agents are seen as enmeshed in macro-level social and cultural structures that they create and by which they are constrained (King 2004). For example, as a student, you help create the universities you attend, and you are constrained by them and the power they have over you. Your university can require you to do certain things (such as take specific courses in order to earn your degree) and prevent you from doing other things (such as taking courses that might be of greater interest, or even taking no courses at all). On the other hand, you as a student can act to change or overthrow those structures. You might organize student-run groups on topics of interest, such as religious rights or manga cartoons; attract many participants to the groups; and eventually prompt the university to add courses on those topics. Or perhaps you might organize students to stop enrolling in an elective course that seems irrelevant to their lives, causing that elective to be dropped from the course catalog.

Agents (you as a student, in this case) have great power. In the words of another important sociologist, Erving Goffman (1961b: 81), individuals are **dangerous giants**. That is, they have the potential to disrupt and destroy the structures in which they find themselves. Yet often, agents do not realize the power they possess. As a result, social structures such as the university and the class you are currently taking function for long periods of time with little or no disruption by individual agents.

However, there are times, such as during the anti-Vietnam War protests of the late 1960s and early 1970s, when students have come to realize that they are dangerous giants and act to change not only the university but also the larger society (Gitlin 1993). After

dangerous giants An entity that has agency.

agency The potential to disrupt or destroy the structures in which one finds oneself.

social construction of reality The continuous process of individual creation of structural realities and the constraint and coercion exercised by those structures.

a six-day student campout that completely trashed the office of Grayson Kirk, president of Columbia University, he asked, “My god, how could human beings do a thing like this?”

There are far more minor, everyday actions that reflect the fact that people can be dangerous giants. Examples might include questioning a professor’s argument or going to the dean to protest the excessive absences of an instructor. However, most people most of the time do not realize that they are dangerous giants—that they have the capacity to greatly alter the social structures that surround them and in which they are enmeshed.

One more distinctive thing about the agency–structure perspective is the idea that social structures are both constraining and enabling. As we will see in Chapter 2, there is a long tradition in sociology of seeing structures like the university as mainly controlling people, if not being totally oppressive. While the agency–structure perspective acknowledges and deals with these constraints, it also makes the very important point that structures enable agents (you would be one) to do things they otherwise would not be able to do. For example, it is the global structure of the Internet that allows you to communicate easily and quickly with people throughout the world. It also permits you to consume many goods and services from the comfort of your home or dorm room rather than traveling, perhaps great distances, to obtain them. Similarly, while the university constrains you in many ways, it does offer you the knowledge and skills you need to succeed, or perhaps simply to survive, in the modern world. In thinking about and critiquing the constraining power of structures, it is important to remember that those structures also enable you in many different ways.

THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF REALITY

The discussion of agency and structure leads to another basic concept in sociology: the **social construction of reality** (Berger and Luckmann 1967). People at the agency end of the continuum are seen as creating social reality, basically macro-level phenomena, through their thoughts and actions. That reality then comes to have a life of its own. That is, it becomes a structure that is partly or wholly separate from the people who created it and exist in it. Once macro phenomena have lives of their own, they constrain and even control what people do. Of course, people can refuse to accept these constraints and



Student Protests



Among those who create our social reality by influencing our tastes are members of the fashion industry. Are your choices as a consumer ever influenced by what is considered in or out of style?

controls and create new social realities. This process of individual creation of structural realities, constraint, and coercion then begins anew, in a continuing loop. It is this continuous loop that is the heart of agency–structure and micro–macro relationships, the social world, and the field of sociology.

For example, in the realm of consumption, it is people—as designers, manufacturers, and consumers—who create the world of fashion (Entwhistle 2009). However, once the fashion world comes into existence, that world comes to have a great deal of influence over individuals who are part of that world. Famous fashion houses such as Dior and Givenchy come to dominate the industry and perpetuate their existence by continual fashion changes. These companies control people’s tastes in fashion and thereby the nature of the clothing people wear. Changing fashions are highly profitable for the fashion houses. Consumers seem eager to buy the designs created by the leading fashion houses, although most often in the form of the relatively inexpensive knockoffs derived from them.

The power of the fashion industry, and the nature of its products, has been analyzed by a number of sociologists (Lipovetsky [1987] 2002; Simmel [1904] 1971), most notably another of the early giants in the field, Thorstein Veblen. In *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, Veblen ([1899] 1994: 171) criticized the high heel and especially the skirt. He argued that women persist in wearing a skirt even though “it is expensive and hampers the wearer at every turn and incapacitates her for all useful exertion.” Feminist theorists have extended this critique, arguing that beauty devices such as high heels help to maintain gender inequality by serving to limit women physically (Dworkin 1974; Jeffreys

2005). More subtly, these devices encourage women to engage in a never-ending project of bodily discipline aimed at attaining what in fact is an unreachable beauty ideal created by society (Bartky 1990; Wolf 2002). Were it not for the fashion industry, would as many women wear tight skirts and spike heels?

Of course, many people do not go along with the constraints of the fashion industry. They do not wear what the industry wants them to wear, and they do not change their dress because of changes in fashion induced by the fashion industry. Many people have their own sense of fashion and create their own way of dressing. Others ignore fashion altogether. Of greatest importance from this perspective is the fact that the source of what is in fashion often does not come from the fashion industry but rather from the ways of dressing put together by people themselves. These people have, in a real sense, constructed their own social reality.

In fact, there is a process known as “cool hunting” (Gloor and Cooper 2007) in which scouts for the fashion industry seek out new and interesting ways of dressing, often focusing on what young people in the suburbs and in the inner city are wearing. They bring those innovative ideas back to the fashion industry, and some of them are turned into next year’s fashions.

Once this happens, however, we are back to a situation where the fashion industry is controlling, or is at least attempting to control, what people wear. Many will accept the new fashion, but others, especially the “cool” kids who are sought out by the cool hunters, will not. They may well have moved on to some entirely new sense of what they want to wear. They will again attract the attention of cool hunters, and the process will begin anew.

SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND PROCESSES

Another nineteenth-century sociologist, Auguste Comte, was important not only for inventing the term sociology in 1839 but also for being the originator of sociology as a field. Crucial for our purposes here is his early distinction between what he called “social statics” and “social dynamics.” In his social statics, Comte looked at the various “parts” (structures) of society, such as the manufacturers and retailers of clothing fashions, and the ways in which they relate to one another as well as to the whole of society. In examining such relationships, Comte investigated social processes among and between parts of society as well as in society as a whole. However, under the heading of social dynamics, his main focus was a specific social process—social change—and on how the various parts of society change.

It is important to emphasize here that **social structures** are enduring and regular social arrangements, such as the family and the state. While social structures do change, they are generally not very dynamic; they change very slowly. **Social processes** are the dynamic and ever changing aspects of the social world.

The elements of globalization can be divided between structures (e.g., the United Nations) and a variety of more specific social processes (e.g., the migration of people across national borders). In terms of consumption, we can think of the shopping mall (or Amazon.com) as a structure and the shopping (or consumption) that takes place in it as a process. Finally, the Internet as a whole, and social networking sites in particular, are structures, while the communication and the social interaction that take place in them can be viewed as processes.

Needless to say, neither the shopping mall nor the Internet existed in Comte’s day. Once again we see that the social world is constantly changing and that sociologists, as well as students of sociology, must be continually sensitive to those changes. However, some of sociology’s earliest concepts continue to be applicable, and usefully applied, to the social world.

SOCIOLOGY’S PURPOSE: SCIENCE OR SOCIAL REFORM?

Comte was famous not only for examining the relationship between structure and process but also for arguing that such study ought to be scientific. He believed that the social world was dominated by laws and that sociology’s task was to uncover those laws. As those laws were uncovered, the science of sociology would develop. But Comte was also concerned about the problems of his day and interested in solving them through social reform. In fact, to Comte, science and reform should not be separated from one another. A number of classic sociologists—Karl Marx,

social structures Enduring and regular social arrangements, such as the family and the state.

social processes The dynamic and ever changing aspects of the social world.

BIOGRAPHICAL bits



Auguste Comte (French, 1798–1857)

Auguste Comte never received a college-level degree, and he had a very marginal position in French academia. Nevertheless, his work achieved great renown. Modeling his thinking after Catholicism, Comte believed his theories would become the new religion of humanity, with himself the high priest or pope at the pinnacle of a world led by sociologist-priests. But a series of 72 lectures scheduled to be held in his apartment was halted suddenly when he had a nervous breakdown. His mental problems led to an unsuccessful suicide attempt in which he threw himself into the Seine River.

RESEARCH INTERESTS

- Developing a science of sociology

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

- *A General View of Positivism* (1856)

KEY IDEAS & CONTRIBUTIONS

- Invention of the term *sociology*
- A general theory of the social world

CHECKPOINT 1.4

SOME KEY SOCIOLOGICAL RELATIONSHIPS

Private troubles—individual issues like credit card debt and bankruptcy

Public issues—widespread issues like bank failures and governments defaulting on their debt

Micro social phenomena—small-scale social phenomena such as individuals and their thoughts and actions

Macro social phenomena—large-scale phenomena such as groups, organizations, cultures, society, and the world

Agency—the individual’s power and capacity for creativity

Structure—macro-level social and cultural institutions that constrain agents’ actions

Émile Durkheim, Jane Addams, and others—shared this view. Marx and Engels’s *Communist Manifesto* (1848) was not only a commentary on the social ills of the capitalist economy but a rallying cry to workers to organize and abolish capitalism.



Biobit: Auguste Comte

Many of today's sociologists study social problems of all sorts, such as poverty and crime. They also seek to use what they know in order to deal with these problems by suggesting ways of reforming society. They believe that these two activities are not necessarily distinct; they can and should be mutually enriching. While many contemporary sociologists accept this position, a division has developed over time, with some sociologists focusing more on scientific research and others more engaged in activities designed to reform society and address social problems.

The sociologists who engage in “pure science” operate with the conviction that we need to better understand how the social world operates before we can change it, if that's what we want to do. That knowledge may ultimately be used by those who want to change society, or to keep it as it is, but that is not the immediate concern of the social researcher. For example, sociologists known as “ethnomethodologists” argue that the task of the sociologist is to better understand common forms of social behavior (Rawls 2011). They research the details of everyday life, such as how we know when a laugh is expected in a conversation, or when to applaud or boo during a speech. For them, the goal is purely knowledge and understanding. Such sociologists argue that using that knowledge to reform society might adversely affect or distort social behaviors.

Other sociologists take the opposite position. C. Wright Mills, for example, was little interested in doing scientific research. He was mostly interested in such social reforms as limiting or eliminating the unwholesome and worrisome ties between the military and industry in the United States. He was also critical of many of the most prominent sociologists of his day for their orientation toward being pure scientists, their lack of concern for the pressing problems of the day, and their unwillingness to do anything about them. Feminist sociologists have extended the argument, pointing out that the topics and methods of objective, scientific sociology themselves sometimes reflect, and ultimately reinforce, social inequality along the lines of race, gender, and class because they are based on the assumptions of society's elite.

For example, feminist scholar Cynthia Fuchs Epstein (1988) has argued that supposedly scientific distinctions between males and females have often been based upon social biases. She states that these social biases can be explained by the “prejudices against women and cultural notions emphasizing differences between the sexes” (Epstein 1988: 17). Until recently, scientific researchers have almost always been men. The questions about what problems were worthy of study reflected male interests rather than female interests. For example, issues more relevant to women, such as rape and housework, were deemed trivial and overshadowed by other issues such as achievement and power (Riger 1992). The assumptions about and interpretations of the people they

studied represented a male perspective. They tended to use males as their research subjects and treated male behaviors and attitudes as universal. They did not consider how societies treat men and women differently and socialize them to feel and act in distinct ways. As a result, these seemingly “scientific” views of women reinforced false assumptions about male-female differences, held both men and women to supposedly universal male norms, and reproduced gender inequality (Rutherford, Vaughn-Blount, and Ball 2010).

ASK YOURSELF

What do you believe is the best purpose of sociology, pure science or social reform? Why? Make a note to ask yourself this question again at the end of your course. Did you answer it differently?

The view that sociology has a social purpose has created renewed interest in what is now called public sociology. In contrast to professional sociology in which work is done for other sociologists, **public sociology** addresses a wide range of audiences, most of which are outside the academy. These publics include a wide variety of local, national, and global groups. Public sociologists write for these groups, and they can become involved in collaborative projects with them (Burawoy 2005; Clawson et al. 2007; Nyden, Hossfeld, and Nyden 2011). There have been public sociologists from the beginning of the discipline, and they have existed throughout the field's history. However, in recent decades the field has been dominated by technically oriented sociologists working out of universities and think tanks. They have done highly sophisticated work aimed, primarily, at other sociologists and sociology students with a similar orientation. This has been important work, and it has benefited the larger public by enhancing our understanding of society. Still, many American sociologists are searching for better ways of reaching a larger public beyond the university. Interestingly, this is less of an issue in Europe, where many of the leading sociologists have always been public sociologists.

In addressing the larger public, sociologists are urged to be driven more by their personal values as well as by the values (e.g., democracy) of the larger society rather than by technical considerations. However, there is not just one public to be addressed, but rather a number of diverse publics. For example, young people, parents, and the aged have different issues and need to be addressed in different ways. Public sociology should not consist of sociologists' pronouncements

public sociology Sociological work addressed to a wide range of audiences, most of which are outside the academy, including a variety of local, national, and global groups.

on important issues but rather encourage a dialogue with these diverse publics. Nonetheless, most public sociologists believe that their work should be addressed to, and done on behalf of, the underdogs in society. It is often aimed at stimulating activism, solving various social problems, and helping to create a better society. A good example of the latter is the work of Eric Olin Wright (2010) on “real utopias.”

Wright was elected president of the American Sociological Association, and he made such utopian ideas the theme of its 2012 meetings (E. O. Wright 2013).

Public sociologists engage with the public in a variety of ways, such as by writing blogs (see the “Digital Living” box on page 8), books and articles for a popular audience, and op-ed pieces in newspapers; by teaching as well as presenting public lectures and making TV appearances; and by working directly with groups to help them achieve their goals. In addition, sociology sometimes becomes public through the work of nonsociologists whose thinking is shaped explicitly or implicitly by sociological knowledge and a sociological perspective. Such work is often produced by journalists in the form of newspaper articles, books released by popular presses, or website postings and blogs capable of reaching a huge public audience. The type of work discussed throughout this section will be dealt with in a series of boxes headed “Public Sociology” to be found throughout this book.

SOCIOLOGY, THE OTHER SOCIAL SCIENCES, AND COMMON SENSE

Sociology is one of the social sciences—that is, it is one of the fields that studies various aspects of the social world. Among the others are anthropology, communication studies, economics, geography, political science, and psychology. Generally speaking, sociology is the broadest of these fields; other social scientists are more likely to delve into specific aspects of the social world in much greater depth. Sociological study touches on the culture of concern to anthropologists, the nation-state of interest to political scientists, and the mental processes that are the focus of psychologists. However, that does not mean that sociology is in any sense “better” than, or conversely not as good as, the other social sciences.

Rather than comparing and contrasting these fields in general terms, this concluding section will focus on the

CHECKPOINT 1.5 SCIENCE VERSUS SOCIAL REFORM

Sociology as Pure Science

- The goal of study is simply knowledge and understanding of the way the social world operates.
- Change is not the social researcher's immediate concern.
- Using knowledge to effect social change might distort social behaviors.

Sociology as a Means of Social Reform

- Public sociology should address itself to and work on behalf of many diverse publics, especially society's underdogs.
- Gathering knowledge to reform society enriches both knowledge and society.
- Some “scientific” work has been distorted by social biases.

different ways in which these fields approach one of this book's signature concerns—globalization.

- Anthropology: Focuses on cultural aspects of societies around the world, such as the foods people eat and how they eat them, as well as the differences among cultures around the globe (Inda and Rosaldo 2008).
- Communication studies: Examines communications across the globe, with the Internet obviously of focal concern in the contemporary world.
- Economics: Investigates the production, distribution, and consumption of resources through markets and other structures that span much of the globe, especially those based on and involving money.
- Geography: Studies spatial relationships on a global scale and maps those spaces (Herod 2009).
- Political science: Studies nation-states, especially the ways in which they relate to one another around the world as well as how they have grown increasingly unable to control global flows of migrants, viruses, recreational drugs, Internet scams, and the like.
- Psychology: Examines the ways in which individual identities are shaped by increased awareness of the rest of the world and tensions associated with globalization (e.g., job loss), which may lead to individual psychological problems such as depression (Lemert and Elliott 2006).

Sociology encompasses all of these concerns, and many others, in its approach to globalization. It studies globe-straddling cultures (such as consumer, or fast-food, culture), relationships between political systems



Eric Schlosser, Public Sociology



Fast Food Nation

George Ritzer and the McDonaldization of Society

To some I am a public sociologist (Ritzer 2006) or, as Rojek (2007) labels me, a “public intellectual.” On most occasions my public sociology has involved interviews with newspaper, radio, and TV reporters. While some of them occurred in the United States, a disproportionate number of such interviews have occurred in other parts of the world, especially Great Britain. There is far greater interest in Great Britain (and in many other places) in the work of academics than there is in the United States. However, even elsewhere in the world there seems to be a decline in public interest in scholarly work by sociologists.

It is not easy for scholars to do public sociology. Interestingly, it is far easier for journalists to do “pop sociology.” Thus, the journalist Eric Schlosser (2002), who wrote the best-selling *Fast Food Nation*, in part influenced by my earlier book *The McDonaldization of Society* ([1993] 2013), has done much more public sociology than I have. A 2006 movie has even been based (loosely) on his book.

Beyond the challenge of getting the attention of the popular media, it is difficult for scholars to do interviews that are reported accurately by the media.

Reporters are often ill prepared, having at best Googled a few of a scholar’s writings prior to an interview. As a result, they often ask the “wrong” questions or fail to fully understand the answers. In any case, they are usually facing an imminent deadline and are forced to write up the interviews very quickly. I have often been disappointed by the way my thoughts have been translated by the media.

A bigger problem, one that is directly relevant to my work, is the tendency for reporters to “McDonaldize” their stories. Basically, this means that they seek to simplify what has been said in an interview and to avoid anything they consider too complex for their readership. They want to produce what are, in effect, “News McNuggets” that in their simplicity resemble Chicken McNuggets. Neither is fully satisfying.

Reporters are often drawn to writing about the McDonaldization of society because it appears to be an idea that can be communicated simply. While I have tried to do that in my work, reporters usually go way too far in their efforts to McDonaldize the idea. As a result, much of the depth of the concept gets lost in translation.

This was particularly clear in an aborted interview with NBC TV a few years ago. The first part of the interview on McDonaldization went well, but then the reporter asked me about another of my books, *The Globalization of Nothing* (Ritzer 2007b). This involves a thesis far more difficult to McDonaldize, but I plunged ahead. As I did, I could sense the reporter losing interest. At the end, she said, in effect, “Don’t call us; we’ll call you.” I responded, “Well, I guess my ideas on the globalization of nothing are not McDonaldized enough.” She laughed and said, “That’s right.”

The challenge for me, and all public sociologists, is to have their ideas reach the larger public without McDonaldizing them or having them be McDonaldized. That is never easy!

Think About It

Why is it so difficult to be a public sociologist in the United States? Why is it easier in other parts of the world? Do you think it will be easier or harder to be a public sociologist in the United States in the future? How will blogging by sociologists affect this?

(the European Union and its member nations, for example), communication networks (such as CNN and Al Jazeera, Twitter and Facebook), and markets (for labor or stocks and bonds, for example) that cover vast expanses of the globe; and maps all of these, and even their impact, both good and bad, on individuals. You might want to study the other fields to get a sense of the depth of what they have to offer on specific aspects of globalization. However, if you are looking for the field that gives you the broadest possible view of all of these things as well as the ways in which they interrelate, that field is sociology.

While sociology and the other social sciences have important differences, they are all quite different from commonsense understandings of the social world.

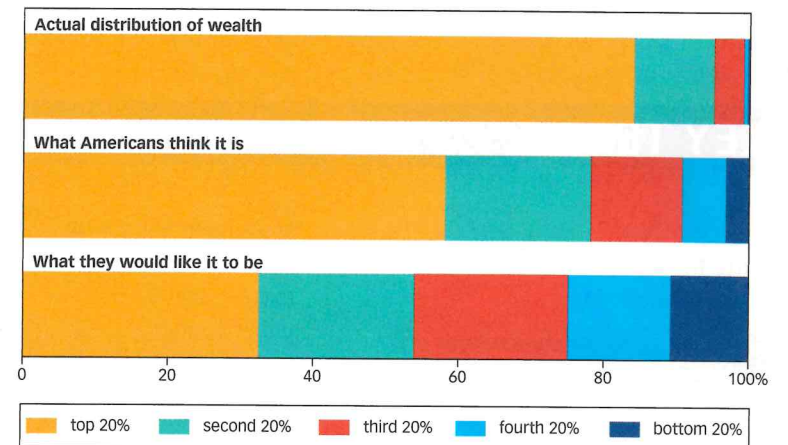
Everyone participates in globalization in one way or another. However, few if any people research these phenomena in the same way and to the same degree that they are studied by social scientists. That research leads, among other things, to a greater understanding of the nature of globalization. For example, you probably have a sense that globalization has changed society—perhaps even an impression that it is changing your life. What you are unlikely to know are globalization’s causes, effects, and linkages to other social phenomena, or its largely invisible effects on society and the world. Research on the topic is also likely to yield much more insight into the pros and cons of globalization on a personal, societal, and global level. That more detailed

knowledge and insight will help you, and others, more successfully navigate the accompanying changes in social processes and structures.

One example of the gap between common sense and social scientific knowledge relates to perceptions of the gap between the rich and the poor. A study of more than 5,000 Americans showed that people believe that the top fifth of the population in the United States possesses about 59 percent of the country’s wealth. In fact, however, the top fifth actually holds almost 84 percent of the wealth (Norton and Ariely 2011). Figure 1.5 shows the results of this study. The commonsense view, then, is that wealth is far more evenly distributed than the scientific data reveal. This study also refuted the commonsense idea that the United States is a fair and equal society. When respondents were asked what the ideal wealth distribution would be, the average response was that the top fifth of the population should own only 32 percent of the wealth, not the 59 percent they guessed and certainly not the 84 percent that the upper fifth actually possesses.

While common sense is important, even to sociologists, there is no substitute for the systematic study of the

FIGURE 1.5 • Wealth of the Top 20% of U.S. Residents: Popular Views versus Reality



SOURCE: Michael I. Norton and Dan Ariely, “Building a Better America—One Wealth Quintile at a Time,” *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, January: 9–12, 2011.

social world in both its minutest detail and its broadest manifestations.



Income Inequality



Gap between the Rich and the Poor

SUMMARY

Social changes in the last few centuries, including the Industrial Revolution, the growth of white-collar work, the increased participation of women in the labor force, and the arrival of the information age, have set the stage for sociology to come into its own. Sociology is the systematic examination of the ways in which people are affected by, and affect, the social structures and social processes associated with the groups, organizations, cultures, societies, and world in which they exist. This book focuses especially on three powerful structural forces in the social world that have drawn the attention of contemporary sociologists: globalization, consumption, and digital technology.

As the world has become more globalized, individual societies have lost some of their significance, and larger, transnational organizations have become more prominent. Global society has also become more fluid. People move more quickly and easily across borders, as do goods, messages, and music, to name a few.

Consumption is the process by which people obtain and utilize various goods and services. While it may seem like a positive force, sociologists have also identified some of its negative aspects.

Among these are overconsumption, excessive and rising debt, and the increasing likelihood of defining ourselves in relation to what we own rather than to our actions or our social relationships.

Life in the digital world and its links to life in the real world have become major topics of study for sociologists. Technology also plays an important role in consumption, particularly with the shift from highly social shopping experiences, such as in a mall with other people, to the more isolated experience of shopping online.

The McDonaldization of society brings the rational principles of the fast-food industry into prominence in additional sectors of society and the world. These principles are efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control.

All these changes are easier to understand using C. Wright Mills’s “sociological imagination,” which calls on us to look at phenomena not just from a personal perspective but also from a distinctively sociological one—a view from the outside. It is also helpful to see the relationship between private troubles and larger public issues and to acknowledge that much of our reality is socially constructed.

Sociologists study many topics, sometimes to understand them through scientific research and sometimes to create change and reform. Many of the topics we discuss in this book are familiar to you from your daily life. Take a systematic

sociological approach to understanding them. Keep in mind that sociological phenomena are all around you, and keep your own sociological imagination honed and ready as you explore the social world.

KEY TERMS

agency, 25
butterfly effect, 5
consumption, 11
dangerous giant, 25
globalization, 10
macro, 24

McDonaldization, 12
mediated interaction, 16
micro, 24
public sociology, 28
social construction of reality, 25
social processes, 27

social structures, 27
society, 7
sociological imagination, 19
sociology, 7
technology, 15

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How is the Fukushima nuclear disaster in 2011 an example of the butterfly effect? Use your sociological imagination to think of ways that your individual choices and actions influenced and have been influenced by this event.
2. Your social world is continually changing. What are some examples of new technologies that have been developed during your lifetime? How have they changed the way you interact with and relate to others?
3. How do the shopping malls being built in the United Arab Emirates reflect increasing globalization? Do you think these shopping malls lead to a sameness of culture around the world, or do they allow local areas to retain their differences?
4. What items are you most likely to buy using the Internet? How do social networking sites (Facebook, Twitter, Myspace) influence what you consume?
5. Beginning in 2010, WikiLeaks released thousands of confidential documents obtained from government, military, and corporate sources. Is this an example of an information war? Why or why not? What social structures have impeded the flow of this kind of information in the past? How have the Internet and social networking sites made it easier to get around these structural barriers?
6. According to C. Wright Mills, how are private troubles different from public issues? How can we use the micro/macro distinction to show how private troubles are related to public issues?
7. What is the difference between structure and agency? Within your classroom, could you be a "dangerous giant"? In what ways does your classroom enable you to do things you would not be able to do otherwise?
8. What do sociologists mean by the social construction of reality? How can you apply this perspective to better understand trends in the music industry?
9. How is George Ritzer's *The McDonaldization of Society* an example of public sociology? Can you think of ways in which we can use "pure science" to better understand the process of McDonaldization? In your opinion, what should be the goal of research?
10. How does sociology approach globalization differently than other social sciences? In your opinion, what are the advantages of using a sociological approach to understanding globalization?

APPLYING THE SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

Twitter has emerged as a way to instantaneously share information and keep up-to-date with what is currently happening. But how can we use Twitter to make sense of the interrelated processes of globalization and consumption?

For this activity, go to twitter.com and find the day's top trending topics worldwide. Explore these top trends by clicking on them and looking at the specific tweets. Do research on the Internet for topics mentioned in the tweets that are unfamiliar to you.

In what ways are these topics and tweets reflective of a globalized world? How are these topics and tweets related to goods and services that you consume? In what ways does Twitter facilitate the flow of information and goods globally? How does this influence the decisions and choices that individuals make at the micro level? How do these trends affect your own choices?

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