KEY ISSUE 3

Why Is Access to Folk and Popular Culture Unequal?

- **Electronic Diffusion of Popular Culture**
- **Challenges in Accessing Electronic Media**

Learning Outcome 4.3.1

Describe the origin, diffusion, and distribution of TV around the world.

Popular culture diffuses rapidly around the world, primarily through electronic media. The latest fashions in material culture and leisure activities can be viewed by anyone in the world who has access to one or more forms of electronic media. Electronic media increase access to popular culture for people who embrace folk culture and at the same time increase access to folk culture for people who are part of the world's popular culture scene.

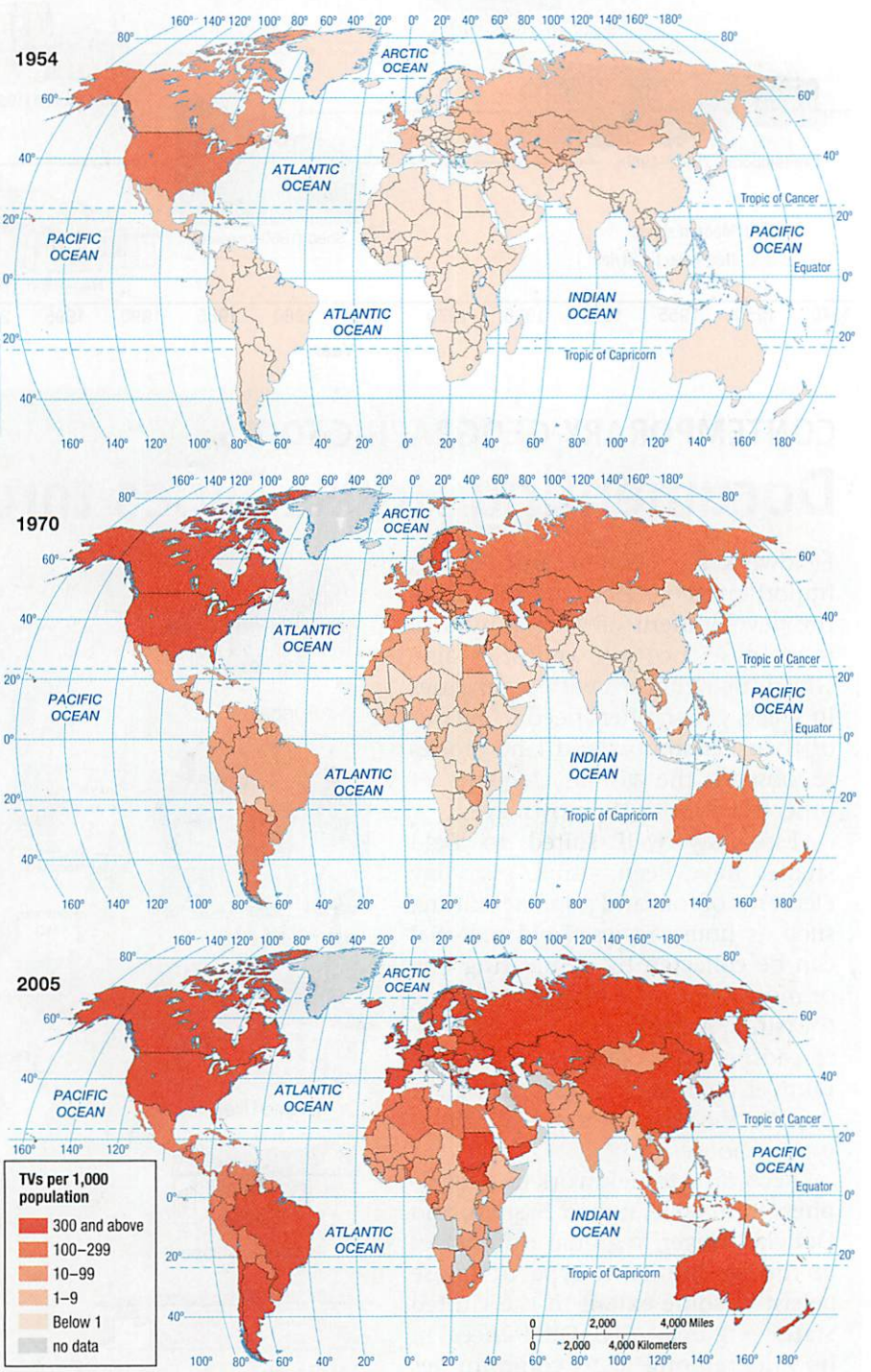
The principal obstacle to popular culture is lack of access to electronic media. Access is limited primarily by lack of income. In some developing countries access is also limited by lack of electricity, cell phone service, and other electronic media.

Electronic Diffusion of Popular Culture

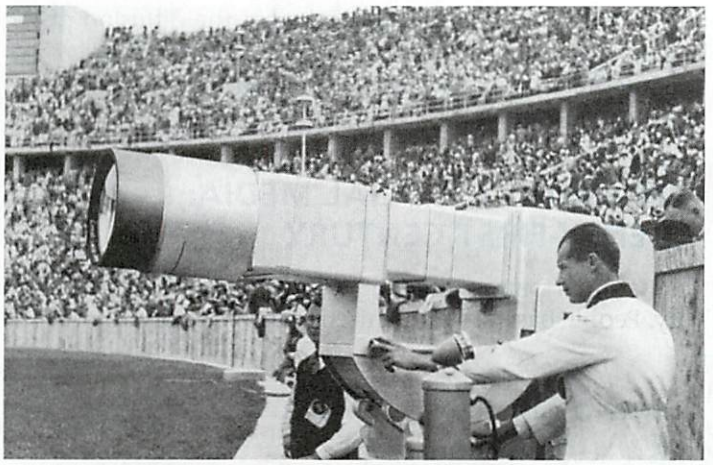
The world's most important electronic media format by far is TV. TV supplanted other formats, notably radio and telegraph, during the twentieth century. Into the twenty-first century, other formats have become popular, but they have not yet supplanted TV worldwide.

Watching TV remains especially important for popular culture for two reasons:

- Watching TV is the most popular leisure activity in the world. The average human watched 3.1 hours of TV per day in 2009, and the average American watched 4.6 hours.
- TV has been the most important mechanism by which popular culture, such as professional sports, rapidly diffuses across Earth.



▲ **FIGURE 4-28 DIFFUSION OF TV** Televisions per 1,000 inhabitants in (top) 1954, (middle) 1970, and (bottom) 2005. Television has diffused from North America and Europe to other regions of the world. The United States and Canada had far more TV sets per capita than any other country as recently as the 1970s, but several European countries now have higher rates of ownership.



▲ FIGURE 4-29 **TV HEARTH** One of the first experimental TV broadcasts was by German engineers at the 1936 Olympics in Berlin.

▲ FIGURE 4-30 **TV DIFFUSES WORLDWIDE** Uruguayan fans watch Uruguay play South Korea in 2010 World Cup.

DIFFUSION OF TV: MID-TWENTIETH CENTURY

Through the second half of the twentieth century, television diffused from the United States to Europe and other developed countries and then to developing countries (Figure 4-28):

- **Early twentieth century: Multiple hearths.** Television technology was developed simultaneously in the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Japan, and the Soviet Union, as well as in the United States, though in the early years of broadcasting the United States held a near monopoly (Figure 4-29).
- **Mid-twentieth century: United States dominates.** In 1954, the first year that the United Nations published data on the subject, the United States had 86 percent of the world's 37 million TV sets.
- **Late twentieth century: Diffusion to Europe.** Rapid growth of ownership in Europe meant that the share of the world's sets in the United States declined to one-fourth. Still, in 1970, half of the countries in the world, including most of those in Africa and Asia, had little if any TV broadcasting.
- **Early twenty-first century: Near-universal access.** By 2005, ownership rates climbed sharply in many developing countries, diminishing international differences (Figure 4-30).

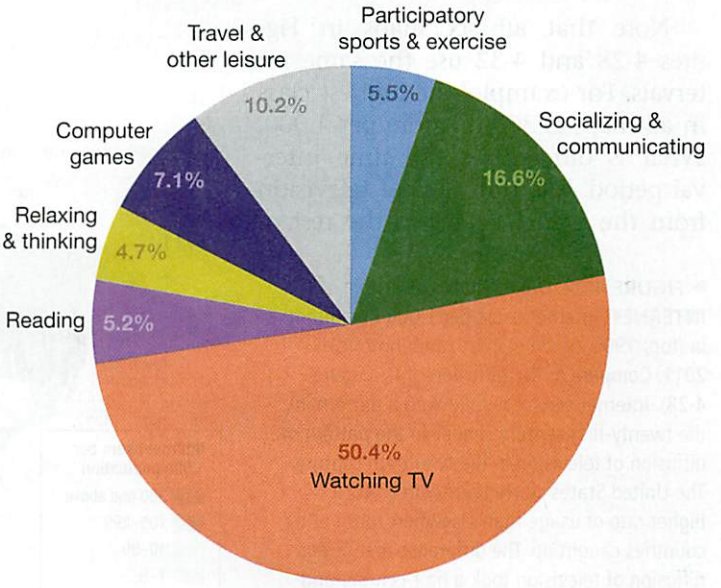
Despite diffusion of TV sets around the world, the United States remains the country where people are most likely to watch it. According to the U.S. Time Use Survey, the average American male spent around 7 hours on leisure and recreation in a typical weekend in 2010, and TV watching took up 51 percent of the time. Women spent around 6 hours on leisure in a typical weekend and watched TV for 49 percent of the time (Figure 4-31).

Although people around the world spend a lot of time watching TV, they don't all watch the same programs. Sports are the most popular programs in North America, entertainment programs such as reality shows in most of Europe and China, fictional programs in South Asia, and news programs in Russia.

The technology by which TV is delivered to viewers has changed. Between 2006 and 2013, the share of viewers around the world receiving programs over the air declined from 44 percent to 33 percent, and the share using cable increased modestly, from 35 percent to 37 percent. On the other hand, the share receiving programs through a satellite dish increased from 20 percent to 26 percent, and the share receiving TV programs through the Internet increased from less than 1 percent to 5 percent.

Pause and Reflect 4.3.1

How much TV do you watch? Which types of programs do you watch? Do you watch on a traditional TV set, or do you watch on a computer, tablet, or smartphone?



▲ FIGURE 4-31 **HOW AMERICANS SPEND THEIR WEEKENDS** Watching TV is by far the most common leisure activity for Americans.

DIFFUSION OF THE INTERNET: LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY

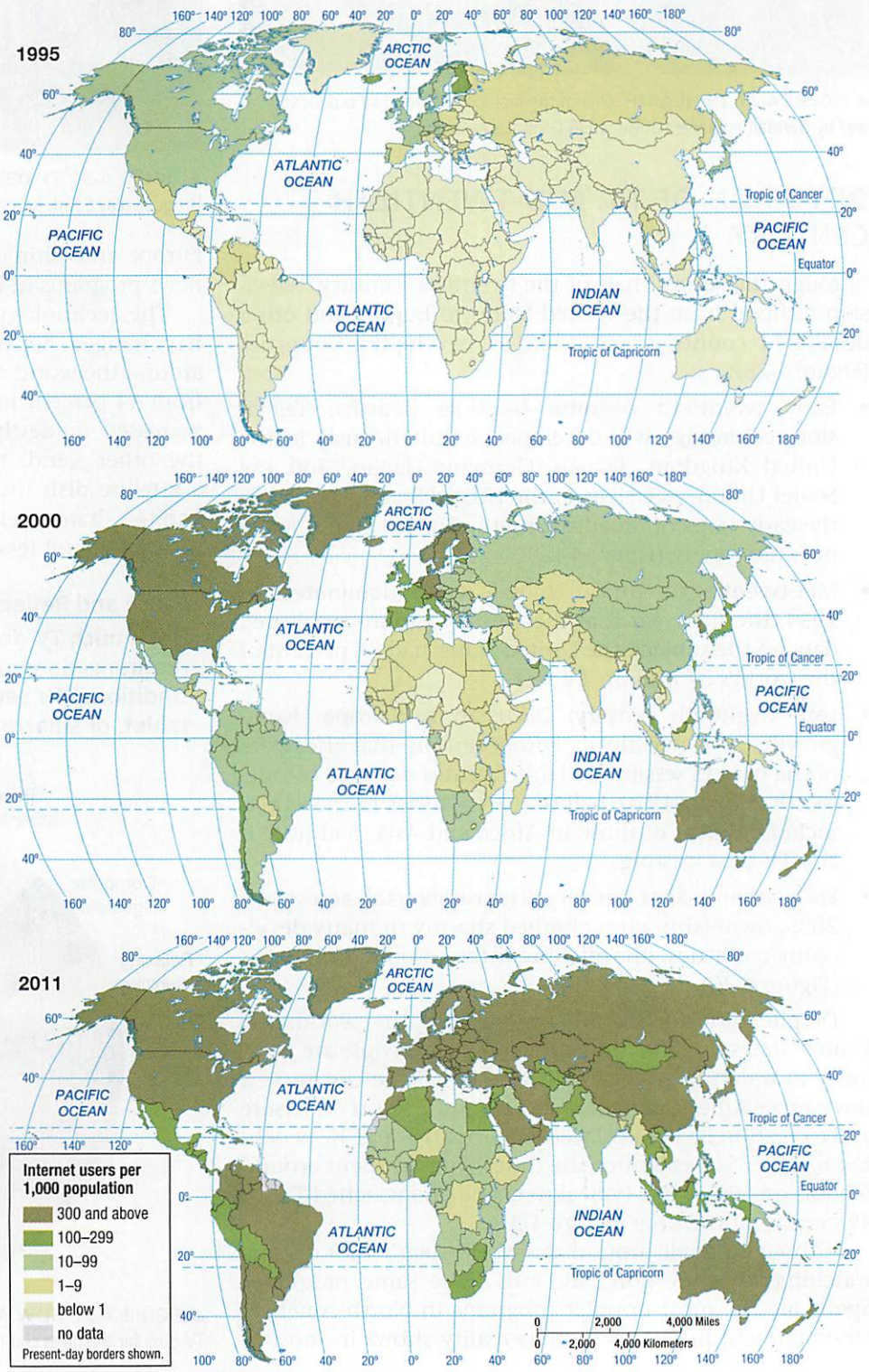
Learning Outcome 4.3.2

Compare the diffusion of the Internet and social media with the diffusion of TV.

The diffusion of Internet service follows the pattern established by television a generation earlier, but at a more rapid pace (Figure 4-32):

- In 1995, there were 40 million Internet users worldwide, including 25 million in the United States, and Internet service had not yet reached most countries.
- Between 1995 and 2000, Internet usage increased rapidly in the United States, from 9 percent to 44 percent of the population. But the worldwide increase was much greater, from 40 million Internet users in 1995 to 361 million in 2000. As Internet usage diffused rapidly, the U.S. percentage share declined rapidly in five years, from 62 to 31 percent.
- Between 2000 and 2011, Internet usage continued to increase rapidly in the United States, to 77 percent of the population. Again, the increase was more modest than in the rest of the world, and the share of the world's Internet users found in the United States continued to decline, to 10 percent in 2011.

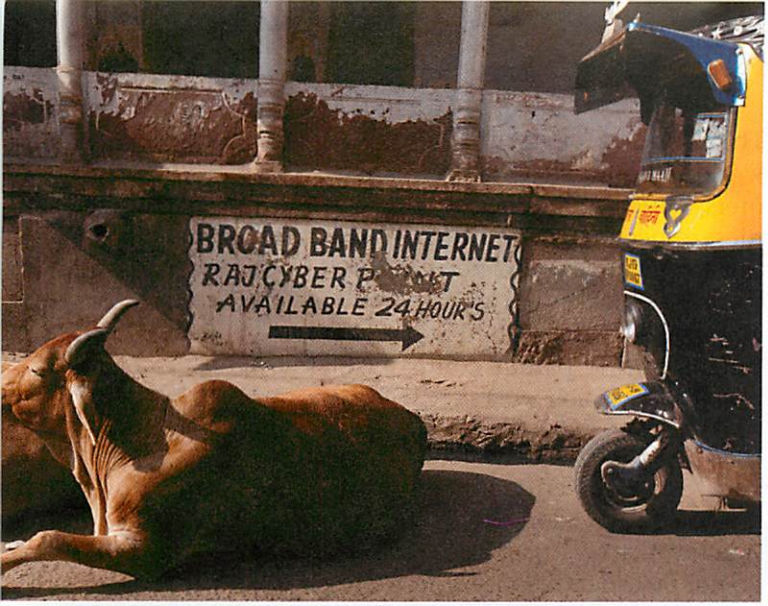
Note that all six maps in Figures 4-28 and 4-32 use the same intervals. For example, the highest class in all maps is 300 or more per 1,000. What is different is the time interval period. The diffusion of television from the United States to the rest of the world took a half-century, whereas the diffusion of the Internet took only a decade. Given the history of television, the Internet is likely to diffuse further in the years ahead at a rapid rate (Figure 4-33).



▶ **FIGURE 4-32 DIFFUSION OF THE INTERNET** Internet users per 1,000 inhabitants in (top) 1995, (middle) 2000, and (bottom) 2011. Compare to the diffusion of TV (Figure 4-28). Internet service is following a pattern in the twenty-first century similar to the pattern of diffusion of television in the twentieth century. The United States started out with a much higher rate of usage than elsewhere, until other countries caught up. The difference is that the diffusion of television took a half-century and the diffusion of the Internet only a decade.

DIFFUSION OF SOCIAL MEDIA: TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

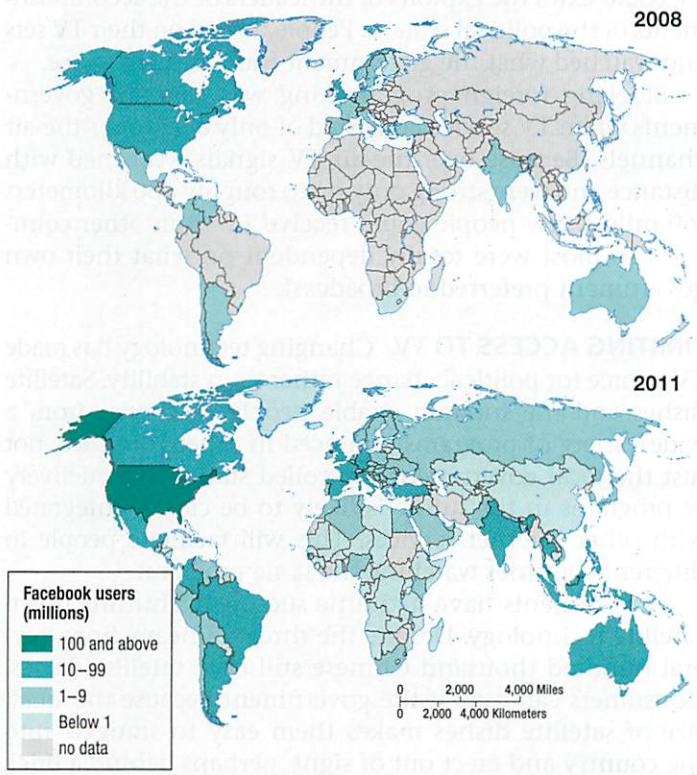
The familiar pattern has repeated in the twenty-first century. People based in the United States have dominated the



▲ FIGURE 4-33 **DIFFUSION OF THE INTERNET TO INDIA** Access to the Internet is available even in many rural areas of many LDCs.

use of social media during the early years. In the future, will U.S. dominance be reduced and perhaps disappear altogether, as occurred in the twentieth century with TV?

DIFFUSION OF FACEBOOK. Facebook, founded in 2004 by Harvard University students, has begun to diffuse rapidly. As with the first few years of TV and the Internet, once again the United States started out with far more Facebook users than any other country. In 2008, four years after Facebook's founding, the United States had one-third of all users worldwide. As Facebook has diffused to other countries, the share of users in the United States has declined, to one-fifth of the worldwide total in 2011 (Figure 4-34). In the years ahead, Facebook is likely to either diffuse to other parts of the world or be overtaken by other forms of electronic social networking and be relegated to a footnote in the continuous repeating pattern of diffusing electronic communications.



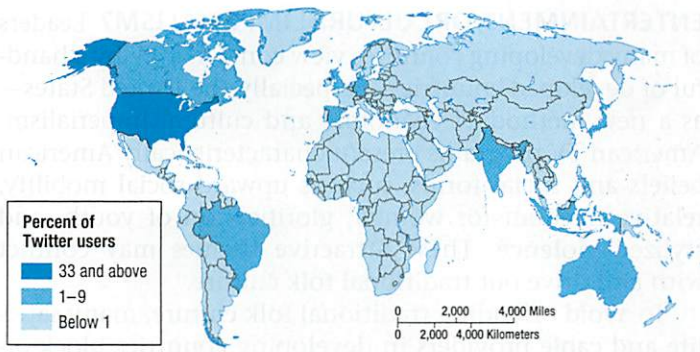
▲ FIGURE 4-34 **DIFFUSION OF FACEBOOK** Facebook users in (top) 2008 and (bottom) 2011.

DIFFUSION OF TWITTER. The United States was the source of one-third of all Twitter messages in 2011. Another one-third originated in six other countries—India, Japan, Germany, the United Kingdom, Brazil, and Canada (Figure 4-35). In the case of Twitter, the second leading Twitter country is one of the world's poorest, India. This may be a preview of future trends, in which electronic communications advances diffuse rapidly to developing countries, not just to other developed countries.

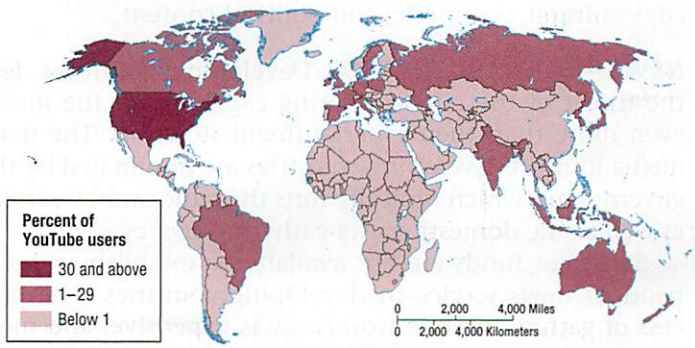
Americans or U.S.-based sources dominate the most popular Twitter postings. Nineteen of the 20 Twitter posters with the largest followings in 2010 were American, led by Ashton Kutcher, Britney Spears, Ellen DeGeneres, Barack Obama, and Lady Gaga. The only exception in the top 20 in 2010 was the UK band Coldplay.

DIFFUSION OF YOUTUBE. Again, the United States accounted for 30 percent of worldwide users in the early years of YouTube. Seventeen other countries, mostly in Europe, accounted for the remainder in 2011. Most countries of the world did not have YouTube users as of 2011 (Figure 4-36).

Pause and Reflect 4.3.2
Which social media do you prefer to use? Why?



▲ FIGURE 4-35 **DISTRIBUTION OF TWITTER USERS** More than one-third of the world's Twitter users were in the United States in 2011.



▲ FIGURE 4-36 **DISTRIBUTION OF YOUTUBE USERS** Nearly one-third of the world's YouTube users were in the United States in 2011.

Challenges in Accessing Electronic Media

Learning Outcome 4.3.3

Understand external and internal threats to folk culture posed by electronic media.

People in developing countries who embrace folk culture are challenged by the diffusion of popular culture through electronic media. On the one hand, they welcome the opportunity to view the Olympics or the latest fashions. On the other hand, increased availability of electronic media poses threats to the future of folk culture.

The threat to folk culture can be either external or internal. The external threat is that most of the content diffused through electronic media originates in a handful of developed countries. The internal threat is that the latest forms of social media enable people in developing countries to originate the content themselves—as long as they can afford the cost of access.

EXTERNAL THREAT: DEVELOPED COUNTRIES CONTROL THE MEDIA

Three developed countries dominate the television industry in developing countries—Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States. These three countries are also the major exporters of programs.

ENTERTAINMENT, OR CULTURAL IMPERIALISM? Leaders of many developing countries view control of TV by a handful of developed countries— especially the United States—as a new method of economic and cultural imperialism. American TV programs present characteristically American beliefs and social forms, such as upward social mobility, relative freedom for women, glorification of youth, and stylized violence. These attractive themes may conflict with and drive out traditional folk culture.

To avoid offending traditional folk culture, many satellite and cable providers in developing countries block offending networks such as MTV and censor unacceptable programs. The entertainment programs that are substituted emphasize family values and avoid controversial or edgy cultural, economic, and political content.

NEWS—FAIR OR BIASED? Developing countries fear the threat of the news-gathering capability of the media even more than their entertainment function. The news media in most developing countries are dominated by the government, which typically runs the radio and TV service as well as the domestic news-gathering agency.

Sufficient funds are not available to establish an independent news service in developing countries. The process of gathering news worldwide is expensive, and most broadcasters and newspapers are unable to afford their own correspondents. Instead, they buy the right to use the dispatches of one or more of the main news organizations. The diffusion of information to newspapers around the world is dominated by the Associated Press (AP) and Reuters, which are owned by American and British companies, respectively. The AP and Reuters also supply most of the world's television news video. The world's 25 largest media companies are all based in developed countries: including 15 in the United States, 4 in the United Kingdom (including the parent company of the publisher of this book), and 2 each in France, Germany, and Japan.

NEWS COVERAGE AND PRESS FREEDOM. Many African and Asian government officials criticize the Western concept of freedom of the press. They argue that the American news organizations reflect American values and do not provide a balanced, accurate view of other countries. U.S. news-gathering organizations are more interested in covering earthquakes, hurricanes, and other sensational disasters than more meaningful but less visual and dramatic domestic stories, such as birth-control programs, healthcare innovations, and construction of new roads.

Pause and Reflect 4.3.3

What would be a specific example of a distinctively American perspective on a U.S. TV show?

INTERNAL THREAT: SOCIAL MEDIA

George Orwell's novel *1984*, published in 1949, anticipated that TV—then in its infancy—would play a major role in the ability of undemocratic governments to control people's daily lives. In fact, many governments viewed TV as an important tool for fostering cultural integration. TV could extol the exploits of the leaders or the accomplishments of the political system. People turned on their TV sets and watched what the government wanted them to see.

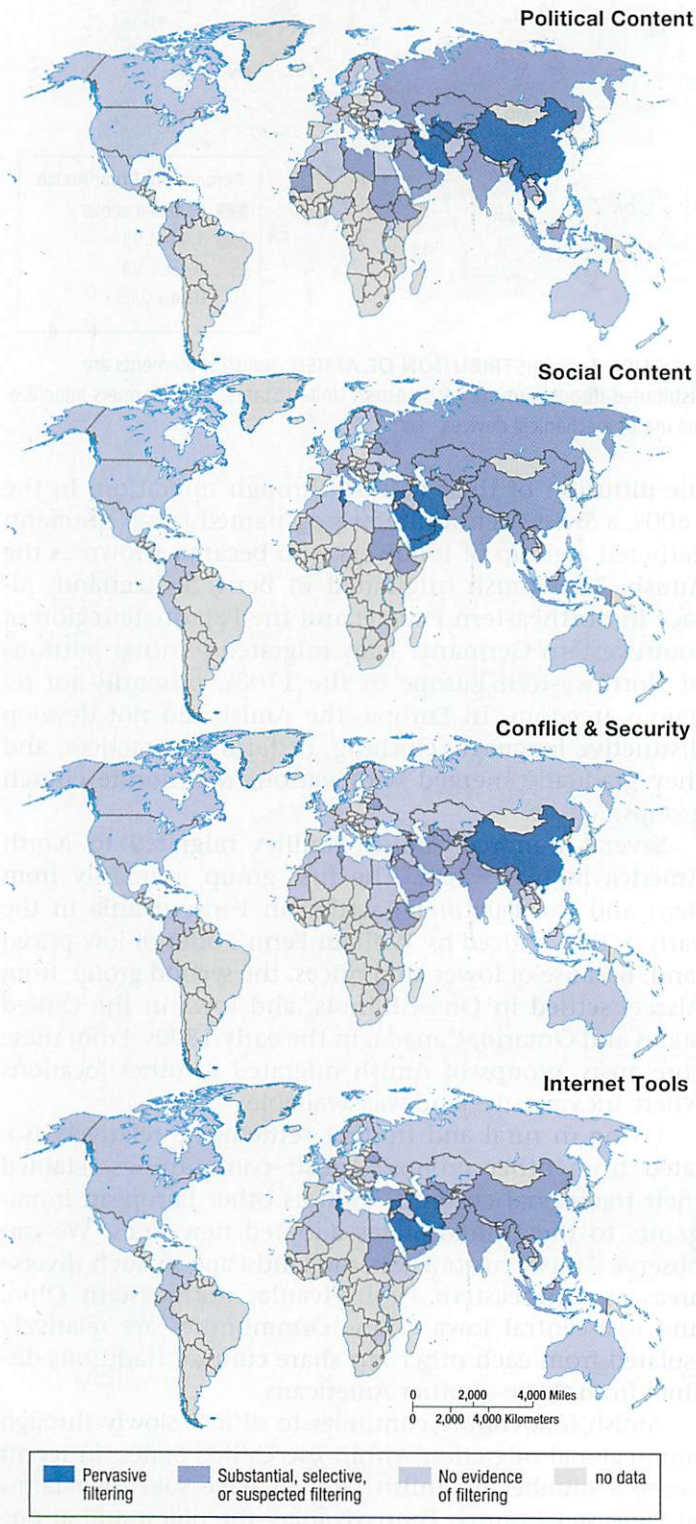
Blocking foreign programming was easy for governments when TV service consisted of only a few over-the-air channels. Because over-the-air TV signals weakened with distance and were strong only up to roughly 100 kilometers (60 miles), few people could receive TV from other countries, so most were totally dependent on what their own government preferred to broadcast.

LIMITING ACCESS TO TV. Changing technology has made TV a force for political change rather than stability. Satellite dishes and the Internet enable people to choose from a wide variety of programs produced in other countries, not just the local government-controlled station. The delivery of programs in the future is likely to be closely integrated with other Internet services. This will facilitate people in different countries watching the same program.

Governments have had little success in shutting down satellite technology. Despite the threat of heavy fines, several hundred thousand Chinese still own satellite dishes. Consumers can outwit the government because the small size of satellite dishes makes them easy to smuggle into the country and erect out of sight, perhaps behind a brick wall or under a canvas tarpaulin. A dish may be expensive by local standards—twice the annual salary of a typical

Chinese worker, for example—but several neighbors can share the cost and hook up all of their TV sets to it.

LIMITING ACCESS TO THE INTERNET. As with television, governments try to limit Internet content. According to OpenNet Initiative, countries limit access to four types of Internet content (Figure 4-37):



▲ **FIGURE 4-37 LIMITING FREEDOM ON THE INTERNET** Countries limit access to four types of Internet content: (top) political content, (second) social content, (third) security content, (bottom) Internet tools.

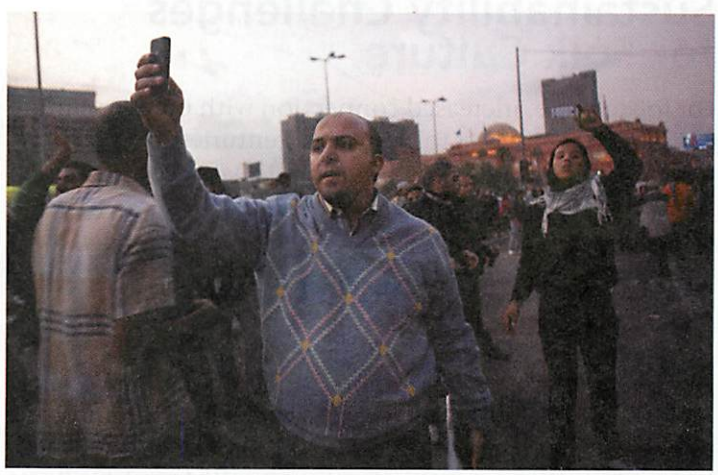
1. Political content that expresses views in opposition to those of the current government or that is related to human rights, freedom of expression, minority rights, and religious movements.
2. Social content related to sexuality, gambling, and illegal drugs and alcohol, as well as other topics that may be socially sensitive or perceived as offensive.
3. Security content related to armed conflicts, border disputes, separatist movements, and militant groups.
4. Internet tools, such as e-mail, Internet hosting, and searching.

ELUDING CONTROL: NEW TECHNOLOGIES AND SOCIAL MEDIA. Social media have started to play a significant role in breaking the monopoly of government control over diffusion of information. As difficult as it is for governments to block satellite and Internet communications, it is even harder to block individual social media. Popular uprisings against undemocratic governments in Egypt, Libya, and other countries in Southwest Asia and North Africa in 2011 relied on individuals sending information through cell phones, Twitter, blogs, and other social media (Figure 4-38).

CHECK-IN: KEY ISSUE 3

Why Is Access to Folk and Popular Culture Unequal?

- ✓ **Popular culture diffuses primarily through electronic media, especially TV, as well as increasingly through other formats.**
- ✓ **Electronic media can pose a combination of external and internal threats to developing countries.**



▲ **FIGURE 4-38 PROTESTORS SHARING INFORMATION DURING ARAB SPRING** Two Egyptian protesters took photographs with their mobile phones when Egyptian riot police fired tear gas during an Arab Spring protest in 2011.