

FIGURE 4-20 Diffusion of the Internet to India. Access to the Internet is available in even many rural areas of many LDCs.

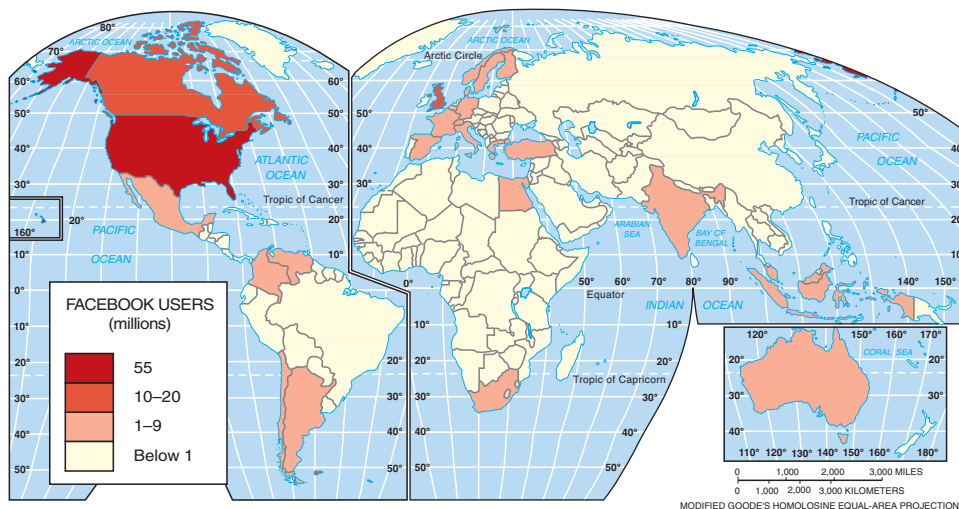


FIGURE 4-21 Diffusion of Facebook. In 2009, most Facebook users were located in the United States. In future years, Facebook may diffuse around the world in a similar pattern to Figures 4-18 and 19, or it may be overtaken by other electronic communications.

Diffusion of Facebook

Facebook, founded in 2004 by Harvard University students, has begun to diffuse rapidly. In 2009, five years after its founding, Facebook had 200 million active users (Figure 4-21). As with the first few years of TV and the Internet, once again the United

States had far more Facebook users than any other country. In the years ahead, Facebook is likely to either diffuse to other parts of the world, or it will be overtaken by other electronic social networking programs and be relegated to a footnote in the continuous repeating pattern of diffusing electronic communications.

KEY ISSUE 4

Why Does Globalization of Popular Culture Cause Problems?

- Threat to Folk Culture
- Environmental Impact of Popular Culture

The international diffusion of popular culture has led to two issues, both of which can be understood from geographic perspectives. First, the diffusion of popular culture may threaten the survival of traditional folk culture in many countries. Second, popular culture may be less responsive to the diversity of local environments and consequently may generate adverse environmental impacts. ■

Threat to Folk Culture

Many fear the loss of folk culture, especially because rising incomes can fuel demand for the possessions typical of popular culture. When people turn from folk to popular culture, they may also turn away from the society's traditional values. And the diffusion of popular culture from MDCs can lead to dominance of Western perspectives.

Loss of Traditional Values

People in folk societies may turn away from traditional material culture, such as food, clothing, and shelter. Exposure to popular culture may stimulate desire to adopt similar practices.

One example of the symbolic importance of folk culture is clothing. In African

and Asian countries today, there is a contrast between the clothes of rural farmworkers and of urban business and government leaders. Adoption of clothing from MDCs is part of a process of imitation and replication of foreign symbols of success. Leaders of African and Asian countries have traveled to MDCs and experienced the sense of social status attached to clothes, such as men's business suits. Back home, executives and officials may wear Western business suits as a symbol of authority and leadership.



FIGURE 4-22 Role of women. Exposure to modern technology does not necessarily change the traditional role of women in many societies. In Kyoto, Japan, a geisha girl, who is trained to provide entertainment for men, arranges appointments on her way to the restaurant where she entertains her male clients.

Wearing clothes typical of MDCs is controversial in some Middle Eastern countries. Some political leaders in the region choose to wear Western business suits as a sign that they are trying to forge closer links with the United States and Western European countries. Others, such as fundamentalist Muslims, may oppose the widespread adoption of Western clothes, especially by women living in cities. Women are urged to abandon skirts and blouses in favor of the traditional black *chador*, a combination head covering and veil.

Beyond clothing, the global diffusion of popular culture may threaten the subservience of women to men that is embedded in some folk customs (Figure 4-22). Women may have been traditionally relegated to performing household chores, such as cooking and cleaning, and to bearing and raising large numbers of children. Those women who worked outside the home were likely to be obtaining food for the family, either through agricultural work or by trading handicrafts (see Global Forces, Local Impacts box). Contact with popular culture also has brought negative impacts for women in LDCs. For example, prostitution has increased in some LDCs to serve men from MDCs traveling on “sex tours.” These tours, primarily from Japan and Northern Europe (especially

Norway, Germany, and the Netherlands), include airfare, hotels, and the use of a predetermined number of women. Leading destinations include the Philippines, Thailand, and South Korea. International prostitution is encouraged in these countries as a major source of foreign currency. Through this form of global interaction, popular culture may regard women as essentially equal at home but as objects that money can buy in foreign folk societies.

Threat of Foreign Media Imperialism

Leaders of some LDCs consider the dominance of popular customs by MDCs as a threat to their independence. The threat is posed primarily by the media, especially news-gathering organizations and television.

WESTERN CONTROL OF MEDIA. Three MDCs—the United States, the United Kingdom, and Japan—dominate the television industry in LDCs. The Japanese operate primarily in South Asia and East Asia, selling their electronic equipment. British companies have invested directly in management and programming for television in Africa. U.S. corporations own or provide technical advice to many Latin American stations. These three countries are also the major exporters of programs. Even in Europe, the United States has been the source of two-thirds of the entertainment programs.

Leaders of many LDCs view the spread of television as a new method of economic and cultural imperialism on the part of the MDCs, especially the United States. American television, like other media, presents 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 social customs.

To avoid offending traditional values, many satellite broadcasters in Asia do not carry MTV or else allow governments to censor unacceptable videos. Cartoons featuring Porky Pig may be banned in Muslim countries, where people avoid pork products. Instead, entertainment programs emphasize family values and avoid controversial cultural, economic, and political issues.

LDCs fear the effects of the news-gathering capability of the media even more than their entertainment function. In the United States most television stations are owned by private corporations, which receive licenses from the government to operate at specific frequencies (channels). The company makes a profit by selling air time for advertisements. The U.S. pattern of private commercial stations is found in other Western Hemisphere countries but is rare elsewhere in the world.

The news media in most LDCs are dominated by the government, which typically runs the radio and TV service as well as the domestic news-gathering agency. Newspapers may be owned by the government, a political party, or a private individual, but in any event they are dependent on the government news-gathering organization for information. Veteran travelers and journalists invariably pack a portable shortwave radio when they visit other countries. In many regions of the world, the only reliable and unbiased news accounts come from the



GLOBAL FORCES, LOCAL IMPACTS

India's Marriage Dowries

Global diffusion of popular social customs has had an unintended negative impact for women in India: an increase in demand for dowries. A dowry is a “gift” from the family of a bride to the family of a groom, as a sign of respect. Though illegal in India since 1961, the dowry has regained popularity in recent years.

Traditionally, the local custom in much of India was for the groom to provide a small dowry to the bride's family. Now, the custom has reversed, and the family of a bride is often expected to provide a substantial dowry to the husband's family (Figure 4-23). Dowries have become much larger in modern India and an important source of income for the groom's family. A dowry can take the form of either cash or expensive consumer goods, such as motor vehicles, electronics, and household appliances.

The government has tried to ban dowries because of the adverse impact on women. If the bride's family is unable to pay a promised dowry or installments, the groom's family may cast the bride out on the street, and her family may refuse to take her back. Husbands and in-laws angry over the small size of dowry payments killed 5,000 to 7,000 women during the 1990s and early twenty-first century, according to government statistics.

Because a boy will generate revenue, whereas a girl will impose a significant burden, a fetus is more likely to be aborted

if it is found to be a girl. A study of a Mumbai (Bombay) clinic found that 7,999 of 8,000 aborted fetuses were female. In families where food is scarce, girls age 1 to 5 are 43 percent more likely than boys to die of hunger or malnutrition, according to another study.

In a highly publicized case, just before the start of a wedding ceremony in 2003, a groom's family demanded a dowry of

\$25,000 in cash, in addition to two televisions, two home theater sets, two refrigerators, two air conditioners, and one car that had already been paid. The bride halted the ceremony and called the police on her cell phone. The family was arrested for violation of the 1961 antidowry law. The story appeared in *The Times of India* with the headline “It Takes Guts to Send Your Groom Packing.” ■



FIGURE 4-23 India's marriage dowries. A mother mourns the death of her daughter, who drowned in a well after repeated demands for an increased dowry by her husband's family. The husband claimed that she jumped in the well, but police charged the husband with killing her.

BBC World Service shortwave and satellite radio newscasts. Reliance on BBC newscasts is especially strong in war zones.

Sufficient funds are not available to establish a private news service in LDCs. 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.

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, or other sensational disasters than more meaningful but less visual and dramatic domestic stories, such as birth-control programs, health-care innovations, or construction of new roads.

In the past, many governments viewed television as an important tool for fostering cultural integration; television 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. Because television signals weaken with distance and are strong up to roughly 100 kilometers (60 miles), few people could receive television broadcasts from other countries.

SATELLITES. George Orwell's novel *1984*, published in 1949, anticipated that television—then in its infancy—would play a major role in the ability of a totalitarian government to control people's daily lives. In recent years, changing technology—especially the diffusion of small satellite dishes—has made television a force for political change rather than stability. Satellite dishes enable people to choose from a wide variety of programs produced in other countries, not just the local government-controlled station.

A number of governments in Asia have tried to prevent consumers from obtaining satellite dishes. The Chinese government banned private ownership of satellite dishes by its citizens, although foreigners and upscale hotels were allowed to keep them. The government of Singapore banned ownership of satellite dishes, yet it encourages satellite services, including MTV and HBO, to locate their Asian headquarters in the country. The government of Saudi Arabia ordered 150,000 satellite dishes dismantled, claiming that they were “un-Islamic.”

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

tarps. A dish may be expensive by local standards—twice the annual salary of a typical Chinese, for example—but several neighbors can share the cost and hook up all of their TV sets to it.

Satellite dishes represent only one assault on government control of the flow of information. Fax machines, portable video recorders, the Internet, and cellular telephones have also put chinks in government censorship. TV broadcasting has also migrated to new media, such as computers, cellular telephones, and other handheld devices. Programs can be viewed on demand, sometimes for a fee.

Environmental Impacts of Popular Culture

Popular culture is less likely than folk culture to be distributed with consideration for physical features. The spatial organization of popular culture reflects the distribution of social and economic features. In a global economy and culture, popular culture appears increasingly uniform.

Modifying Nature

Popular culture can significantly modify or control the environment. It may be imposed on the environment rather than spring forth from it, as with many folk customs. For many popular customs the environment is something to be modified to enhance participation in a leisure activity or to promote the sale of a product. Even if the resulting built environment looks “natural,” it is actually the deliberate creation of people in pursuit of popular social customs.

DISTRIBUTION OF GOLF. Golf courses, because of their large size (80 hectares, or 200 acres), provide a prominent example of imposing popular culture on the environment. A surge in U.S. golf popularity has spawned construction of roughly 200 courses during the past two decades. Geographer John Rooney attributes this to increased income and leisure time, especially among recently retired older people and younger people with flexible working hours.

According to Rooney, the provision of golf courses is not uniform across the United States. Although perceived as a warm-weather sport, the number of golf courses per person is actually greatest in north-central states, from Kansas to North Dakota, as well as the northeastern states abutting the Great Lakes, from Wisconsin to upstate New York (Figure 4-24). People in these regions have a long tradition of playing golf, and social

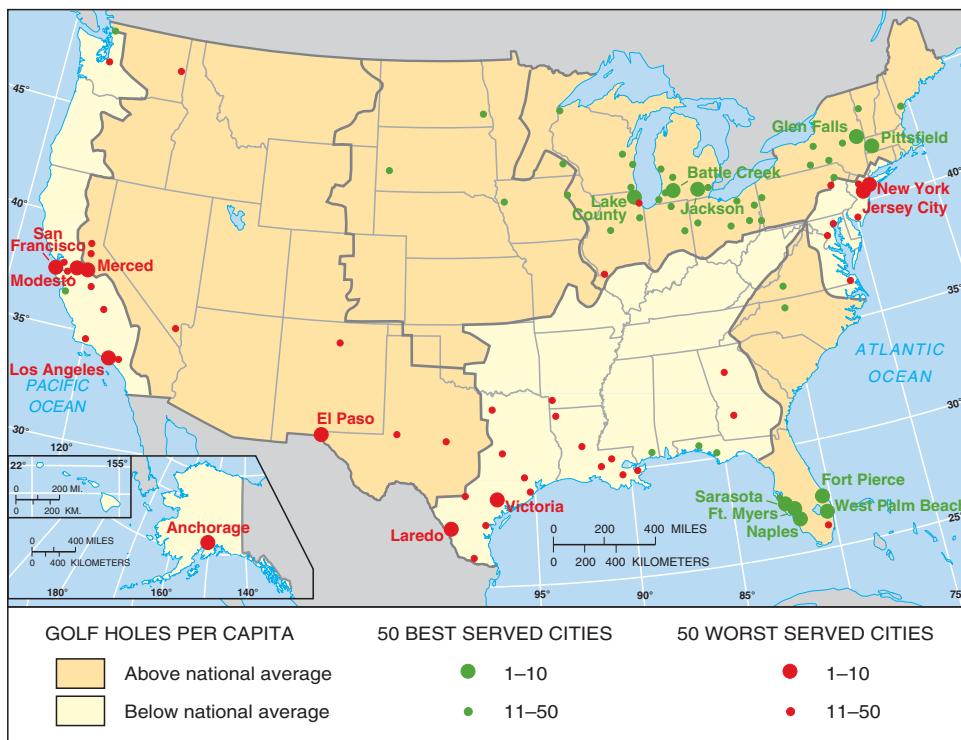


FIGURE 4-24 Golf courses. John Rooney identified the 50 best-served and worst-served metropolitan areas in terms of the number of golf holes per capita.

clubs with golf courses are important institutions in the fabric of the regions' popular customs.

In contrast, access to golf courses is more limited in the South, in California, and in the heavily urbanized Middle Atlantic region between New York City and Washington, D.C. Rapid population growth in the South and West and lack of land on which to build in the Middle Atlantic region have reduced the number of courses per capita. Selected southern and western areas, such as coastal South Carolina, southern Florida, and central Arizona, have high concentrations of golf courses as a result of the arrival of large numbers of golf-playing northerners, either as vacationers or as permanent residents.

Golf courses are designed partially in response to local physical conditions. Grass species are selected to thrive in the local climate and still be suitable for the needs of greens, fairways, and roughs. Existing trees and native vegetation are retained if possible (few fairways in Michigan are lined by palms). Yet, like other popular customs, golf courses remake the environment—creating or flattening hills, cutting grass or letting it grow tall, carting in or digging up sand for traps, and draining or expanding bodies of water to create hazards.

Uniform Landscapes

The distribution of popular culture around the world tends to produce more uniform landscapes. The spatial expression of a popular custom in one location will be similar to another. In fact, promoters of popular culture want a uniform appearance to generate “product recognition” and greater consumption (Figure 4-25).



FIGURE 4-25 Route 66. When it connected Chicago and Los Angeles, Route 66 was a well-known symbol of an especially prominent element of U.S. popular culture—the freedom to drive a car across the country’s wide-open spaces. This stretch of Route 66 in New Mexico is cluttered by unattractive strip development and large signs for national gasoline, lodging, and restaurant chains. Most of Route 66 has been replaced by interstate highways.

The diffusion of fast-food restaurants is a good example of such uniformity (refer to Figure 4-7). Such restaurants are usually organized as franchises. A franchise is a company’s agreement with businesspeople in a local area to market that company’s product. The franchise agreement lets the local outlet use the company’s name, symbols, trademarks, methods, and architectural styles. To both local residents and travelers, the buildings are immediately recognizable as part of a national or multinational company. A uniform sign is prominently displayed.

Much of the attraction of fast-food restaurants comes from the convenience of the product and the use of the building as a low-cost socializing location for teenagers or families with young children. At the same time, the success of fast-food restaurants depends on large-scale mobility: People who travel or move to another city immediately recognize a familiar place. Newcomers to a particular place know what to expect in the restaurant because the establishment does not reflect strange and unfamiliar local customs that could be uncomfortable.

Fast-food restaurants were originally developed to attract people who arrived by car. The buildings generally were brightly colored, even gaudy, to attract motorists. Recently built fast-food restaurants are more subdued, with brick facades, pseudo-antique fixtures, and other stylistic details. To facilitate reuse of the structure in case the restaurant fails, company signs are often free-standing rather than integrated into the building design.

Uniformity in the appearance of the landscape is promoted by a wide variety of other popular structures in North America, such as gas stations, supermarkets, and motels. These structures are designed so that both local residents and visitors immediately recognize the purpose of the building, even if not the name of the company.

Physical expression of uniformity in popular culture has diffused from North America to other parts of the world. American motels and fast-food chains have opened in other countries. These establishments appeal to North American travelers, yet most customers are local residents who wish to sample American customs they have seen on television.

Negative Environment Impact

The diffusion of some popular customs can adversely impact environmental quality in two ways—depletion of scarce natural resources and pollution of the landscape.

INCREASED DEMAND FOR NATURAL RESOURCES. Diffusion of some popular customs increases demand for raw materials, such as minerals and other substances found beneath Earth’s surface. The depletion of resources used to produce energy, especially petroleum, is discussed in Chapter 14.

Popular culture may demand a large supply of certain animals, resulting in depletion or even extinction of some species. For example, some animals are killed for their skins, which can be shaped into fashionable clothing and sold to people living thousands of kilometers from the animals' habitat. The skins of the mink, lynx, jaguar, kangaroo, and whale have been heavily consumed for various articles of clothing, to the point that the survival of these species is endangered. This unbalances ecological systems of which the animals are members. Folk culture may also encourage the use of animal skins, but the demand is usually smaller than for popular culture.

Increased demand for some products can strain the capacity of the environment. An important example is increased meat consumption. This has not caused extinction of cattle and poultry—we simply raise more. But animal consumption is an inefficient way for people to acquire calories—90 percent less efficient than if people simply ate grain directly. To produce 1 kilogram (2.2 pounds) of beef sold in the supermarket, nearly 10 kilograms (22 pounds) of grain are consumed by the animal. For every kilogram of chicken, nearly 3 kilograms (6.6 pounds) of grain are consumed by the fowl. This grain could be fed to people directly, bypassing the inefficient meat step. With a large percentage of the world's population undernourished, some question this inefficient use of grain to feed animals for eventual human consumption.

POLLUTION. Popular culture also can pollute the environment. The environment can accept and assimilate some level of waste from human activities. But popular culture generates a high volume of waste—solids, liquids, and gases—that must be absorbed into the environment. Although waste is discharged in all three forms, the most visible is solid waste—cans, bottles, old cars, paper, and plastics. These products are often discarded rather than recycled. With more people adopting popular customs worldwide, this problem grows.

Folk culture, like popular culture, can also cause environmental damage, especially when natural processes are ignored. A widespread belief exists that indigenous peoples of the Western Hemisphere practiced more “natural,” ecologically sensitive agriculture before the arrival of Columbus and other Europeans. Geographers increasingly question this. In reality, pre-Columbian folk customs included burning grasslands for planting and hunting, cutting extensive forests, and overhunting some species. Very high rates of soil erosion have been documented in Central America from the practice of folk culture.

The MDCs that produce endless supplies for popular culture have created the technological capacity both to create large-scale environmental damage and to control it. However, a commitment of time and money must be made to control the damage. The adverse environmental impact of popular culture is further examined in Chapter 14.

SUMMARY

Material culture can be divided into two types—folk and popular. Folk culture most often exists among small, homogeneous groups living in relative isolation at a low level of economic development. Popular culture is characteristic of societies with good communications and transportation, which enable rapid diffusion of uniform concepts. Geographers are concerned with several aspects of folk and popular culture.

Geographers study an array of thousands of social customs with distinctive spatial distributions. Groups display preferences in providing for material needs such as food, clothing, and shelter, and in leisure activities such as performing arts and recreation. Examining where various social customs are practiced helps us to understand the extent of cultural diversity in the world.

Folk culture is especially interesting to geographers because its distribution is relatively clustered and its preservation can be seen as enhancing diversity in the world. Popular culture is important, too, because it derives from the high levels of material wealth characteristic of societies that are economically developed. As societies seek to improve their economic level, they may abandon traditional folk culture and embrace popular culture associated with MDCs.

Underlying the patterns of material culture are differences in the ways people relate to their environment. Material culture contributes to the modification of the environment, and in turn, nature influences the cultural values of an individual or a group.

Geographers, then, classify culture into popular and folk based on differences in the ways the environment is modified and meaning is derived from environmental conditions. Popular culture makes

relatively extensive modifications of the environment, given society's greater technological means and inclination to do so. Here again are the key issues concerning folk and popular culture:

1. Where Do Folk and Popular Cultures Originate and Diffuse?

Because of distinctive processes of origin and diffusion, folk culture has different distribution patterns than does popular culture. Folk culture is more likely to have an anonymous origin and to diffuse slowly through migration, whereas popular culture is more likely to be invented and diffuse rapidly with the use of modern communications.

2. Why Is Folk Culture Clustered?

Unique regions of folk culture arise because of lack of interaction among groups, even those living nearby. Folk culture is more likely to be influenced by the local environment.

3. Why Is Popular Culture Widely Distributed?

Popular culture diffuses rapidly across Earth, facilitated by modern communications, especially television. Differences in popular culture are more likely to be observed in one place at different points in time than among different places at one point in time.

4. Why Does Globalization of Popular Culture Cause Problems?

Geographers observe two kinds of problems from diffusion of popular culture across the landscape. First, popular culture—generally originating in Western MDCs—may cause elimination of some folk culture. Second, popular culture may adversely affect the environment.