What you'll learn to do: examine factors leading to social change, especially technology

Figure 1. Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are just a few examples of social media that increasingly shape how we interact with the world. (Photo courtesy of Khalid Albaih/flickr)

Technology has changed how we interact with each other. It has turned "friend" into a verb and has made it possible to share mundane news ("My dog just threw up under the bed! Ugh!") with hundreds or even thousands of people who might know you only slightly, if at all. You might be glued to your cell phone, even when you should be focused on driving your car, or you might text in class instead of listening to the professor's lecture. When we have the ability to stay constantly connected to a data stream, it is easy to lose focus on the here and now.

At the same time that technology is expanding the boundaries of our social circles, various media are also changing how we perceive and interact with each other. We don't only use social media to keep in touch with friends; we also use it to "like" certain television shows, products, or celebrities. Even television is no longer a one-way medium; it is an interactive one. We are

encouraged to tweet, text, or call in to vote for contestants in everything from singing competitions to matchmaking endeavors—bridging the gap between our entertainment and our own lives.

How does technology change our lives for the better? Or does it? When you tweet a social cause, share a video on YouTube, or cut and paste a status update about cancer awareness on Facebook, are you promoting social change? Does the immediate and constant flow of information mean we are more aware and engaged than any society before us? Or are reality t.v. shows today's version of ancient Rome's "bread and circuses"–distractions and entertainment to keep the working classes complacent about the inequities of their society?

Throughout this section, we will use our sociological imagination to explore how media and technology impact society, as well as look at other causes of social change.

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