# Patterns and trends in the use of communications infrastructure

Once available, communications infrastructure is used by citizens, business and governments in a vast array of ways that contribute to global interactions. Referring back to the framework used in Unit 4.1, we can examine how ICT has fostered different *aspects* of the globalization process:

- **Economic globalization** The offshoring and outsourcing work discussed in Unit 4.2 is facilitated by ICT. Managers of distant offices and plants can keep in touch more easily (for example, through video-conferencing). This has allowed TNCs to expand into new territories, either to make or sell their products. Each time the barcode of a Marks & Spencer food purchase is scanned in a UK store, an automatic adjustment is made to the size of the next order placed with suppliers in distant countries like Kenya. Media companies can move large data files quickly from animation studios in one country to another, thereby speeding up production time. Economic activity is supported at the personal scale too: self-employed citizens have access to crowdfunding platforms such as Kickstarter to help get their businesses started; they can also sell goods and services globally using markets like eBay or Amazon.

- **Social globalization** Migration becomes easier when people can maintain long-distance social relationships more easily than in the past using ICT. Since 2003, Skype has provided a cheap and powerful way for migrants to maintain strong links with family they have left behind. Facebook, Twitter and Snapchat work by making each individual user function as a hub at the heart of his or her very own global or more localized network of friends (Figure 4.34). Increasing numbers of people gain their education remotely by studying at a virtual school or university, or by enrolling in online MOOCs (massive open online courses). Remote health care is being provided in parts of the world where physical infrastructure is lacking. People in hard-to-reach parts of India can consult with a doctor using their mobile devices, for instance.

- **Cultural globalization** Cultural traits, such as language or music, are adopted, imitated and hybridized faster than ever before. During 2012, South Korean singer Psy clocked up over 1.8 billion online views of 'Gangnam Style', the most-watched music video of all time. Outside of the mainstream, subcultures thrive online too. Small, independent music, comic art and gaming companies can achieve an economy of scale, thanks to a digitally connected global fan base of people sharing the same minority or 'niche' cultural interest. Whether your preference is for folk music from Mali, or a specialist music subculture such as 'grindcore' or 'dubstep', you will find what you want to hear online. Cultural globalization is explored further in Unit 5.2.

- **Political globalization** The work and functioning of multi-governmental organizations (MGOs) is also enhanced by the ease with which information and publications can be disseminated. Websites for MGOs such as the European Union (EU), United Nations (UN) and World Bank (WB) contain a wealth of resources that aim to educate a global audience about issues ranging from climate change to international war crimes. Social networks are used to raise awareness about political issues and to fight for change on a global scale. Environmental charities such as Greenpeace spread their messages online. So too, however, do the militant political group Daesh (or so-called IS). Using social media and YouTube, Daesh has published horrific films of executions online. Its internet propaganda has succeeded in attracting numerous young men and women from across Europe, Asia and Africa to fight in the Middle East.

It remains the case that not everyone can participate in global interactions using ICT even in a place where it is available. Doreen Massey was a geographer who wrote critically about changing perceptions of place in a technologically advancing world. She argued that time-space compression is socially differentiated: not everyone experiences the sense of a shrinking world to anything like the same extent because of income differences. Billions of people still cannot afford the cost of a smartphone and broadband subscription. Political factors also play a role in the persistence of a digital divide between 'switched-on' and 'switched-off' individuals and societies (these are explored in Unit 5.3).
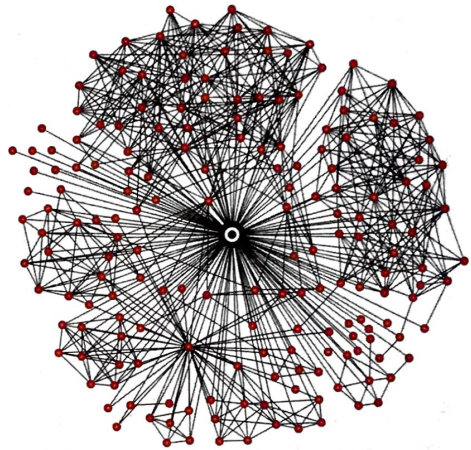
Total network: 179 friends

Figure 4.34 One person's Facebook friends visualized as a personal network