Within a decade, the world has experienced more than three devastating earthquakes in Sumatra, Haiti, and Japan. During these natural disasters, citizens from all around the world turned to 21st Century information communication technologies to learn about, and to support the victims of these events. This manuscript discusses the potential and the limitations of social studies teachers and their students using social networks for global citizenship education. The authors discuss the educational opportunities of social networks in learning about The Great East Japanese Earthquake. This includes students accessing multiple perspectives, engaging authentic audiences, and providing support for the victims as members of global society.

On March 11th, 2011 at 5:30am, I woke-up to the beeping of a text-message from a friend that was at work that night. He wanted me to know that the television was reporting that a massive earthquake had struck Japan. He said, “Check in with your family immediately.” I jumped up from my bed and turned on the TV and my computer. As I listened to the developing news on CNN, I started gathering information using the Internet. I surfed on-line newspapers from different countries and YouTube video clips. Most importantly, I started reaching out to my family and friends in Japan through social network sites.

~ Personal experience of Misato Yamaguchi

Coined the Pacific Ring of Fire, Japan is no stranger to earthquakes. Since the turn of the century, twenty-four earthquakes larger than magnitude six have been recorded (Japan Meteorological Agency, 2011). Between December 2010 and January 2011 there were over nine hundred and eighty-eight earthquakes larger than magnitude three (Seismological Society of Japan, 2011). Living with and preparing for earthquakes are a common part of Japanese citizens’ lives. It is common even for schools, especially in the elementary grade-levels to have multiple earthquake drills throughout the school year. However, the earthquake that struck on March 11, 2011 rattled even the seasoned earthquake veteran, and had devastating consequences for the Tohoku region on the Pacific northeastern coast of Japan.

The Great East Japan Earthquake: Damages and Aftermath

At 2:46 p.m. Japan Standard Time on Friday, March 11, 2011 there was a magnitude 8.9 earthquake 231 miles northeast of Tokyo, Japan. The quake was the largest ever to hit Japan and the fifth largest in the world since modern record-keeping began in 1900 (CNN Wire Staff, 2011a).
The earthquake triggered powerful tsunami waves, which reached heights of up to 40.5 meters (133 feet) in Iwate Prefecture (Buerk, 2011; Nippon Hoso Kyokai, 2011; Okayasu, 2011). The scale was so large that the Pacific Tsunami Warning Center issued a tsunami warning from Japan to the U.S. west coast. Tsunami alerts sounded in more than fifty countries and territories.

Two days after the earthquake, then Japanese Prime Minister Kan told reporters at a news conference, "In the 65 years after the end of World War II, this is the toughest and the most difficult crisis for Japan" (CNN Wire Staff, 2011b). The Japanese National Police Agency (2011) confirmed 15,839 deaths, 5,950 injured, and 3,642 people missing across eighteen prefectures, as well as over 125,000 buildings damaged or destroyed. Around 4.4 million households in northeastern Japan were left without electricity and 1.5 million without water. The earthquake and tsunami caused severe structural damage in Japan, including heavy damage to roads, railways and the collapse of dams (Syed, 2011). At least three nuclear reactors suffered explosions due to hydrogen gas that built up within their outer containment buildings through cooling system failures. Residents within a twelve mile radius of the Fukushima I Nuclear Power Plant, and a 6.2-miles radius of the Fukushima II Nuclear Power Plant, were evacuated. In addition, the U.S. embassy in Japan recommended that all U.S. citizens within fifty miles of these nuclear plants evacuate (National Public Radio Staff & Wires, 2011). Early estimates placed insured losses from the earthquake at US$14.5 to $34.6 billion. The overall cost could exceed US$300 billion, making it the most expensive natural disaster on record (Honeessy-Fiske, 2011).

Global Response to the Crisis

The aftermath of the earthquake and tsunami left a significant humanitarian challenge. The tsunami resulted in over 300,000 displaced people in the Tohoko (northeast) region with shortages of food, water, shelter, medicine and fuel for survivors (NPR Staff & Wire, 2011). Following the 2011 earthquake and tsunami, Japan received messages of condolence and offers of assistance from a range of international leaders. While the Japanese government mobilized their self-defense forces, many countries sent search and rescue teams to help locate victims. According to Japan's foreign ministry, 116 countries and 28 international organizations had offered assistance to Japan. Relief organizations both inside and outside of Japan responded, with the Japanese Red Cross reporting over $1 billion in global donations (Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet, 2011). Outside of the outpouring of financial support, it was quite clear citizens from around the world were moved by the horrific devastation in the region.

Social Studies and Global Citizenship Education

Social studies has historically played a significant part in preparing future citizens to meet the local, national, and global human and natural challenges of the day (NCSS, 2001). At the forefront of the social studies is the importance of citizens coming together across their differences to build a better future. Today, the promotion of global citizenship education in social studies is particularly important to meet the needs of a new global age and to prepare students to function in their nation, as well as in a diverse global society (Banks, 2004; Compston, 2004; Goodman, 1992; Parker, Merryfield & Wilson, 2005; Ninomiya, & Cogan, 1999; Yeager & Van Hover, 2004). As citizens, businesses, and organizations from around the world grow increasingly economically, politically, and environmentally connected, there has been a growing call by social studies educators to prepare citizens for a globally interconnected age (Merryfield, 2002). The flagship U.S. professional organization for social studies teachers, the National Council for the Social Studies (2001, May), has consistently called for a social studies curriculum that prepares students for an increasingly global age:
The goods we buy, the work we do, the cross-cultural links we have in our own communities and outside them, and increased worldwide communication capabilities all contribute to an imperative that responsible citizens understand global and international issues. The increasing globalization in the human condition has created additional opportunities and responsibilities for individuals and groups to take personal, social, and political action in the international arena.

According to the NCSS, a strong social studies curriculum should provide students with not only the knowledge to engage and understand global issues (like the tragic March 11 crisis in Japan), but afford students with opportunities to take meaningful action to advocate in the global arena. In this study, we reviewed scholarship in the field of social studies and global education to learn about key elements of global citizenship (Davies, Evans, & Reid, 2005; Gaudelli, 2003; Kirkwood, 2001; Myers, 2010; Myers & Zaman, 2009; Noddings, 2005; Pike, 2008). Then, we compared this body of research with the ways in which U.S. citizens used social networking during the Japanese 3.11 disaster. In the process, we identified two dimensions of global citizenship that are deemed the most relevant for this study as framed by our analysis: (1) The importance of citizens accessing multiple perspectives on global issues (Hanvey, 1976; Merryfield, 2002), and (2) Citizens being prepared and willing to advocate for and support global causes (Banks, 2004; NCSS, 2007; Ukpokodu, 2008).

This first dimension of global citizenship that will be used to frame our analysis includes the importance of citizens accessing multiple perspectives on global issues. Robert Hanvey (1976) in his foundation publication “An Attainable Global Perspective” discusses the importance of students reflecting on how their views of the world, its people, and its issues may profoundly differ from the worldviews of others. In order to better understand issues that our world faces, and to try and forge cooperation and progress on issues, Hanvey encourages students to investigate and examine multiple perspectives on global issues. Merryfield (2002) builds off Hanvey’s call, as she notes the importance of students developing a habit of seeking out other perspectives that may not be as visible or apparent within mainstream U.S. social studies textbooks and our media. Merryfield goes on to note that this “…habit of seeking out diverse perspectives and primary sources from the culture under study is central to global education (p. 2).” We attest that social networking technologies afford teachers and students new opportunities in accessing and learning about multiple perspectives on global issues—especially, as it relates to the March 11 crisis in Japan.

The second dimension of global citizenship that will be used to frame our analysis includes the importance of citizens being prepared and willing to advocate for and support global causes. Omiunota Nelly Ukpokodu (2008), in “Fostering National and Global Citizenship: An Example from South Africa,” reminds us that the purpose of education is to enable students to act upon their knowledge, to create and transform social structures, and to bring about change so that the world is a better place. Far too often in the social studies, students are left in despair as they are overwhelmed by the magnitude of the serious challenges we as people on this planet face (Peterson, 2002). This bleak picture painted by teachers as students move from one hopeless tragedy to another—without any opportunity to make a difference; however small—only discourages student participation and promotes apathy. As promoted by NCSS (2007), a meaningful social studies experience must provide students with the opportunity “…to take direct action in an effort to create a more just and equitable society.” As evident in our exploration of the important role these tools played during the March 11 crisis in Japan, we believe that social networking technologies can afford teachers and students new opportunities in global advocacy and activism.

Youth and Technology
Young people today have grown accustomed to living portions of their life online – shopping, socializing, and learning. According to a survey by the Pew Internet and American Life Project, over 87% of those between the ages of 12 and 17 are online (Lenhard, Hitlin, & Madden, 2005). As youth increasingly access and use the Internet, this creates an ideal opportunity for social studies teachers to help students use the tools they are most familiar with to learn about and advocate for certain causes. Traditionalists have often questioned and brushed off youth civic learning and efforts in cyberspace (Putnam, 2000). This includes discounting youth researching, organization, collaborating, and even protesting issues online. In fact, as Earl and Schussman (2008) assert, “One must question whether existing (traditional) notions of what encompasses civic engagement tend to ignore, devalue, and otherwise marginalize ways in which young people are connecting with one another to collectively make a difference in their worlds” (p. 73). The fact remains, youth are using the devices in which they are familiar with, namely the Internet and other electronic technologies, to learn about and support certain civic causes (Maguth & Elliott, 2010).

The field predicated on citizenship education, the social studies, must reexamine the ways in which it aims to prepare citizens in the wake of massive technological gains (NCSS, 2001). For instance, the White House, local governments, police departments, and mass media are all becoming ever more dependent upon social networking tools to learn from and inform citizens (Weisbrod, 2011). As the recent Occupy Wall Street and protests in some of the Middle Eastern and Northern African countries demonstrate, an increasing number of citizens, especially, millennials are using social networking tools they are familiar with to serve as real-time e-Reporters and citizen journalists. In fact, traditional media sources often vet social networks like YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook to stay abreast of what is happening in the world (Howard, 2011; Labott, 2006).

Even the White House has turned to social networking technologies to open up the lines of governmental transparency and to inform citizens. One of the first Executive Orders of President Obama was for the federal government to establish a system of transparency, public participation, and collaboration. Citizens can now participate in discussions with governmental agencies and officials about particular issues through Facebook and Twitter. Besides reading about and commenting on civic issues through social networking sites, the Obama Administration has asked citizens to help submit their insights via the Internet to improve the efficiency of government. In April 2011, President Obama conducted a virtual town hall debate on Facebook in an attempt to engage an increasingly digital electorate. On May 1, 2009, the Obama Administration sent out its first tweet warning American citizens about the H1N1 flu (a.k.a. ‘Swine Flu’). Routine tweets from the White House have also informed citizens about other domestic and foreign issues. In fact, twenty-five federal agencies now have YouTube Channels (Scherer, 2009).

As the federal government has turned to the Internet to educate citizens, one would assume the field predicated on citizenship education, the social studies, would do so as well. However, as indicated by the latest research (VanFossen & Berson, 2008), teachers’ and students’ use of technology in the social studies for civic education has been ‘lackluster’ at best. The field is still heavily dependent upon textbooks, lectures, and rote memorization (Chiodo & Byford, 2006; Loewen, 2010; Sleeter & Grant, 1991). Despite the Internet allowing for greater access in learning about and communicating with geographically distant and culturally diverse populations, the social studies has been reluctant to embrace 21st century digital tools. The fact is that most young citizens are not allowed to use the tools they are often most familiar with (i.e. social networking and the Internet) to learn about and support members of their community and world (Collins & Halverson, 2009). In order for the social studies to stay relevant in a digital and global age, a deeper examination of the ways in which it goes about educating future citizens in necessary (Maguth, 2012).

Social Networking in Schools
Fears of online bullying, Internet predators, and the possibility of explicit language and advertising often make teachers and parents wary of the educational benefits and gains made possible through the classroom use of social networking tools. In fact, many school districts block student access to social networking sites. However, to simply disallow all social networking in schools eliminates their ability to serve as 21st century learning tools. The National Education Technology Plan, *Transforming American Education: Learning Powered by Technology* (United States Department of Education, 2010), calls for applying the advanced technologies used in our daily personal and professional lives to our entire educational system to improve student learning. Instead of banning and disqualifying technologies and resources that are transforming business, communication, and society, schools and teachers should be encouraged to use these technologies meaningfully to promote student learning.

Today's youth are increasingly connected to the Internet, and spend a significant amount of time studying, writing, and socializing online. This includes over 93% of teenagers (12-17) using the Internet and spending over 14 hours a week online (Pew Research, 2010). Teens are also increasingly participating in social media. According to a recent survey by the Kaiser Family Foundation, almost 76% of 7th through 12th graders have at least one social media profile. In fact, students noted that they spend more time on social networking sites than playing games or watching online videos (Rideout, Foehr, & Roberts, 2010). Allowing students to use the digital tools they are familiar within a safe, healthy, and structured classroom environment holds the potential to prepare future citizens to participate in an increasingly digital age (Maguth & Harshman, 2013; Collins & Halverson, 2009). The social studies class is an ideal venue to teach students ways in which they can meaningfully and appropriately harness the potential of social networking tools to learn about and advocate on global issues.

Research that investigates the ways in which teachers and students can use social networking technologies for global citizenship education in the social studies is limited. However, there is a growing amount of research that discusses best practices for teachers and students in using Web 2.0 tools (blogs, wikis, and digital media sharing) in the social studies (Wilson, Wright, Inman, & Matherson, 2011). At the heart of this growing movement for teachers and schools to use social networks meaningfully within the classrooms is the mounting research that links a favorable relationship between students’ use of technology and their motivation and participation in the social studies (Heafner, 2004). In particular, a variety of web 2.0 tools can be used in the social studies to engage students. Below, we describe two web 2.0 technologies that are easy to use, cost effective, and hold great potential in teaching the social studies. For additional web 2.0 suggestions, see Elizabeth Wilson, Vivian H. Wright, Christopher Inman, and Lisa Matherson's (2011) "Retooling the Social Studies Classroom for the Current Generation":

- Wikipedia is known for its serving as an information repository (for better and worse) that users can freely access. However, wikis can also provide users with the opportunity to collaborate on an individual or group project. When working on group projects, users can use wikis to construct a single collaborative document that all users can add content to and edit. For instance, students in social studies could work in a group to revise and edit a wiki that explores the global issue of war and conflict in the 21st Century. Students could work together inside, and if possible outside, of the classroom to upload images, videos, and text to the wiki and embed their commentary and perspectives on this issues. Students could publish their wiki for public view or only share it with their teacher and/or classmates. Students and teachers can create free wikis by visiting such websites as wikispaces.com and Google Docs ([docs.google.com](http://docs.google.com)).
Blogs allow for users to upload, share, and comment on content (i.e. pictures, videos, images, and text). These tools are a great way for students to share their perspectives and research with authentic audiences and to engage in discussions with other students and guests. For instance, a student in social studies could create a blog dedicated to the issue of global climate change. Students and teachers can create free blogs by visiting such websites as Blogger.com, Weebly.com, or Wordpress.org.

It should be noted that websites such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube are designated as microblogs that encourage shorter and more frequent user postings than traditional blogs. Users unfamiliar with web 2.0 tools may decide to test run the resources mentioned above before leaping into using more advanced web 2.0 tools like Twitter or Facebook in their classrooms.

Using Social Networking for a Global Perspective in Social Studies

Social networking tools have shown their ability to unify us as human beings, and to bring out what is most altruistic and empathetic in nature.

~ Brad Shimmin, Current Analysis, as reported in Huffington Post.com (March 16, 2011)

Social networks are increasingly reaching a global audience, and these networks provide users with the ability to instantaneously communicate with geographically distant and culturally diverse populations. Users in and beyond the United States often turn towards social media to learn about and post social happenings and events. For instance, Facebook, is a social network with 800 million members, with 70% of its users located outside of the US, and is translated into over 100 different languages (Smith, 2010). YouTube, another social networking tool, is also available in over 39 different countries and in 54 different languages (YouTube, 2012). Moreover, Twitter, an increasingly popular social network, is available in 41 different countries with global audience members, which includes the likes of the United Nation’s Secretary General Ban Ki-moon (@UN_Spokesperson), Russian President Vladimir Putin (@KremlinRussia_E), and governmental leaders in North Korea (@uriminzok). Japan is one of the top markets for Twitter, with an estimated 10 million active users, which is about one out of every ten people online. While Facebook is not as popular in Japan as within the United States, the social network Mixi is the largest social network in the country with more than twenty million active users.

As more people from around the world become connected to social networking websites, it is important to consider the educative potential for teachers and students in using these networks to foster a global perspective. There are two major advantages these tools offer students in the social studies. First, we believe that social networks can be used in the social studies to access international primary source information and help users tap into global knowledge networks. Secondly, when students post to a social networking site they are immediately placed in front of an authentic audience whereby students can advocate and support particular global causes. To highlight these two advantages we would like to portray how social networks were used by users in one of history’s most recent disasters, the 2011 Japanese earthquake and tsunami.

Primary Source Information and Tap into Global Knowledge Networks

As the deadly 8.9 magnitude earthquake rocked Japan, users inside and outside of Japan turned to social networks to report what was happening in real-time. Social networks served as a warehouse of rich, real-time information on this event. Inside Japan, social network users were able to document what they saw, upload pictures and video of disaster sites, and to provide
valuable insights into the disaster. Also, by reviewing the flood of user posts, citizens were able to stay-up-date and gauge national and international sentiments. Even traditional news outlets eagerly mined data uploaded by social networking users in Japan.

Some of these published firsthand accounts provided rich insights into the disaster. Below are compilations of postings by survivors and their families uploaded to their Twitter account shortly after the deadly event:

When the earthquake struck, I was in the waiting room of a small clinic with my five-year-old twins. The TV switched over to a broadcast about the quake. Suddenly the building started to shake violently. I took my children and ran out of the clinic and onto the sidewalk. Elderly folks, blind patients and their physical therapist came quickly out of the emergency exits. The elevators were out of service so the patients had to rely on the support of young staff members. Everyone huddled together on the sidewalk. The shaking was so bad that all anyone could do was cling to the ground. My son was so scared that he clutch a tree and held on. Street signals and power lines swayed like crazy. It only lasted for a few minutes but it felt like a very long time.

~ Masumi Nabekawa (compiled over several tweets)

In the midst of all the concern and fear my wife and I received a bit of very happy news: a photo of my mother and father-in-law. It was taken by my wife’s high school friend who made the long and potentially dangerous drive from Tokyo to their hometown in suburban Sendai. The photo shows our teary Mom and Dad smiling, happy and safe. It’s easily the most beautiful photo I’ve ever seen.

~ Christopher Maurer from Chicago, Illinois, USA

These personal accounts submitted by users via Twitter provided useful perspectives on this catastrophe. By comparing, contrasting, and analyzing these accounts to one another and to traditional media sources, students are better situated to understand the situation. As users from different counties upload their comments, students are able to understand the global scope of this horrific event. These rich personal accounts of recent global issues are mostly absent in history textbooks (Chiordo & Byford, 2006; Loewen, 2010; Sleeter & Grant, 1991). Textbook publishing companies are poorly positioned to comment on current events as they happen. As new knowledge and developments are gained into current events (both domestic and global), textbooks become more outdated and obsolete (Chiordo & Byford, 2006; Loewen, 2010). However, social networks are often inundated with communities, groups, and users focused on such global catastrophes, events, and issues (see Appendix 1). These networks allow users to share real-time information, videos, images and commentary.

Outside of individual users and communities sharing information on the crisis in Japan, non-governmental organizations and governmental organizations used social networks to communicate with the public. For instance, the International Atomic Energy Agency provided updates on the damaged Japanese nuclear plants on its Facebook page. The US Ambassador to Japan stated via Twitter, that “If you have friends or loved ones in #japan that you've been unable to reach, e-mail japanemergencyusc@stage.gov.” The Hawaiian Red Cross also posted to Twitter, “Sirens going off now...hopefully everyone in Hawaii knows the situation by now.” These organizations used social networks to relay vital information to citizens. As a result, these social networks contained valuable primary and secondary source information beneficial in the teaching and learning of the social studies. As social networking tools become important vehicles to relay civic information, and for citizens to engage in important civic discussions, it is our belief that the field charged with preparing informed and active citizens should help students learn how to use these 21st Century information-communication repositories meaningfully.
Authentic Audiences to Provide Advocacy and Support

*The biggest part of using social media during a disaster is that it's not about the government helping the public; it's about the public helping themselves.*

~ Kim Stephens as quoted in Time.com (Skarda, June 9, 2011)

When students have the opportunity to write for authentic audiences their work often improves as it becomes more meaningful (Light, 2001). Social networks are an ideal venue for students to interact with authentic audiences. Since participation is often dependent upon students being able to write and read commentaries, social networks can be one tool in the formation of literacy skills. Students quickly come to learn the importance of high quality work, as their postings can/will be read by users from all around the world, not just by the teacher. Their postings become authentic exercises of learning that can be open to the entire world.

During the 2011 Japanese earthquake and tsunami, citizens from around the world harnessed the potential of social networking to communicate with friends, family, and citizenry about this important global issue. Not only did citizens use social networks to learn about this disaster but many embraced these tools to advocate for and support the victims. This advocacy included American youth changing their social networking profile pictures to the Japanese flag in a show of solidarity. Other users posted updates and words of support to communities, groups, and hashtags created on social networking sites. During the disaster, Facebook groups and pages were created by users from around the world to show support for the people of Japan. On these Facebook pages, the following user comments were left: “let us lift a prayer for Japan,” “As the night covers their nation in darkness, let our prayers be their light,” “Prayers to Japan and anyone in the path of the Tsunami,” and “Japan, you are resilient enough to survived Hiroshima, you can do it again.”

In many ways, citizens were using the digital tools they had access to and were familiar with to show support for/to the people of Japan. Citizens, especially, this nation’s youth, were well positioned to use these familiar social networking tools to grieve, show support for, and to take action during and after this catastrophe. By allowing students to use social networking tools teachers can provide students with a greatly needed venue to try and make a difference, however small. This is evident by all of the wonderful acts of global generosity and support visible through social networks.

Outside of providing words of encouragement, some users turned to social networking sites to provide lifelines to victims. On Facebook, users and nongovernmental organizations (inside and outside of Japan) published emergency housing opportunities, free meals, and supplies to the Japanese victims (HuffingtonPost.com, March 16, 2011). This show of support led Hiroshi Matsuyama to comment:

> From what I’ve seen today, social networking sites have brought out the best in people, not only encouraging them to take action but also supporting them in those efforts to bring relief to the victims of this catastrophe (HuffingtonPost.com, March 16, 2011).

Following the March 1th crisis, online petitions and donation drives to support the victims went viral on social networks as users “liked”, “shared”, and “retweeted” these humanitarian support systems to friends, family, and other social networks. These social networks provided an important public commons for citizens to advocate for and show support for the victims.

After witnessing the brutal devastation of the 2011 Japanese earthquake and tsunami, a group of Internet activists and writers came together to produce “2:46 Quakebook” (Our Man in Abiko, 2011). This published book is a Twitter-sourced collection of personal accounts of the quake...
victims. In this book, over 200 people from inside and outside of Japan submitted quotes, images, and video sent via Twitter concerning the earthquake and its aftermath. All proceeds from the sale of this book go to relief efforts in Japan (Our Man in Abiko, 2011). When asked to comment on the inspiration for this project, the lead author noted:

A group of us were just sitting around and felt helpless and we wanted to do something. I figured I cannot help people medically but I know how to write and edit so I thought we could put something together to raise money for charity (Wall Street Journal, March 29, 2011).

Through the collection of primary accounts and images from social networks posted by victims of this disaster and their families, the authors are able to provide important resources to the relief effort. This is but one example of citizens harnessing social networks to advocate for and show support for the victims. We argue that while the integration of social networks in the social studies may have its limits and challenges, student and teacher use of these tools can provide students with a greatly needed venue to explore multiple perspectives, engage with authentic audiences, and to try and make a difference through their direction action; all essential components of a strong global citizenship and social studies curriculum (Light, 2001; Merryfield, 2002; NCSS, 2007).

**Limitations of Using Social Networks for Global Citizenship Education**

As technology provides low-cost and instantaneous opportunities for students to learn about, communicate with, and advocate for the world and its people, educators must also be versed in the limitations and challenges accompanying the use of social networks for global citizenship education. Although there are many factors that limit the overall ability of teachers and students to use social networks in gaining a global perspective (i.e., lack of local access to technology, teacher training, digital infrastructure), we have decided to only concentrate on three of these challenges. These include the global digital divide, the bias and bigotry that permeate the Internet, and issues concerning privacy and government surveillance.

It must be noted there are significant disparities between citizens globally in their access to the most essentials of life—let alone their access to computers, hardware, or software. A global digital divide exists on our planet between those that have the requisite access and training to meaningfully use digital technologies (White, Gunasekaran, Shea, & Ariguzo, 2011). Divides exist between citizens in regards to such technologies as electricity, computers, smart devices, the legality and availability of certain websites and software, and overall access to and speed of broadband. According to the International Telecommunications Union [ITU] (2012), developed countries have disproportionate access to information-communication technologies. Many developing countries have computer and Internet penetration rates that are 1/100th the rates found in North America and Europe. For example, there are less than six personal computers per 1,000 people in India, whereas more than six out of 10 people in the United States own a computer (ITU, 2012). This digital divide has significant consequences as it prevents students in social studies from interacting with a bulk of the world’s citizens, perspectives, and communities when using social networks.

Outside of there being a global digital divide that impedes citizens in many developing countries from using social networks and the Internet, there’s a sizeable group of citizens that have access yet are unable to speak freely or communicate out of fear of persecution. Advances in technology have also equated into mounting individual privacy concerns, as corporations, governments, and organizations mine through data that users have uploaded to the Internet. Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and other social networking websites are businesses that have strong
profit motives based upon their collecting and sharing this information with third parties and advertisers. As citizens log onto and post information to the Internet, outsiders have the capability to read the content of these messages, learn the location of the users posting the message, and identify other websites visited by users. Protestors that take to the Internet and social networks to speak out against their government can be targeted and/or imprisoned (Pearson & Tuysuz, June 5th, 2013). Government surveillance of social networking sites and the filtering of content by governments greatly shape how meaningfully citizens can use social networks. For instance, The People’s Republic of China has instituted a “Great Firewall” that prevents users from accessing certain content and websites on the Internet (such as YouTube, Wikipedia, and certain Western news websites). These government enacted firewalls create an iron curtain around certain topics and content that impedes global interaction and discourse on issues.

Finally, social networks, like the Internet in general, is filled with misinformation, bias, and forgery. Users are provided a degree of anonymity that affords them the opportunity to hide behind their computer screens as they slander, hack, or post inaccurate or misleading information online. This vitriol is apparent when one goes to read the comment section of many YouTube videos. Users and organizations are free to post inaccurate information and spread gossip using these digital tools. For better and worse, content posted to social networks can go viral and reach global Internet users around the world in seconds.

Although all three of these challenges (and many more not listed here) limit the ability of teachers and students to use social networks in global citizenship education, we believe that today’s students must have the 21st century skills necessary for informed and engaged citizenship in a global and technologically sophisticated age. We recommend educators not run away from the tools today’s youth live with and on, but instead initiate important classroom discussions on media literacy, privacy, and online safety. We argue that affording students the opportunity to use these social networking tools in the social studies classroom provides today’s youth with an ideal learning opportunity to better understand how to use these digital tools effectively, meaningfully, and safely in order to learn about and advocate for our planet and its people.

**Conclusion**

Social networks provide users with the ability to instantaneously communicate with geographically distant and culturally diverse populations. Users often turn towards social media to learn about and post social happenings and events. As more people from around the world become connected to social networking websites like Twitter, Facebook, Mixi, and YouTube, it is important to consider the educative potential for teachers and students in using these networks constructively to foster a global perspective. In our research, we located two important advantages these tools offer the social studies – in particular, global citizenship education. First, social networks can be used in the social studies to access primary source information and to tap into global knowledge networks. Secondly, when students post to a social networking site they are immediately placed in front of authentic audiences whereby students can advocate and support particular global causes. These advantages were highlighted in our analysis of how users in one of history’s most recent disasters, the 2011 Japanese earthquake and tsunami, used social networking.

**References**


Notes

92
The authors would like to thank Crystal Kouns, graduate student in the College of Education at The University of Akron for her assistance in the preparation of this manuscript.

About the Authors

Brad M. Maguth is an assistant professor in the Department of Curricular and Instructional Studies at The University of Akron. His research interests include social studies, global education, and technology. He can be reached at bmaguth@uakron.edu.

Misato Yamaguchi is an assistant professor in the Department of Teacher Education at Georgia Regents University. Her research interests include global/multicultural education, social studies, and cross-cultural experiential learning.

Appendix 1

Collection of Social Networking Resources to Infuse a Global Perspective

- **Twitter hashtags:** #prayforjapan, #japan, #japanquake, #tsunami, #donateforjapan.
- **Facebook Communities:** JapanEarthquake, Messages of Support for Japan, Japan, Pray for Japan, RIP to those who Died in the Japan Earthquake, Japan 2011 Earthquake Tsunami Victims- R.I.P., Japan Earthquake Animal Rescue and Support.