

# “We are all Khaled Said” Page on Facebook: Exploring its Influence on the Egyptian Uprising

Nouf Khashman  
McGill University  
3661 Peel Street  
Montreal QC.  
514-398-4204

nouf.khashman@mail.mcgill.ca

## ABSTRACT

The impact of social network sites such as Facebook has been evident during the political unrest that started in Tunisia and spread across the Arab world since 2010. As this political unrest was dubbed “The Facebook Revolution”, the current study aims to explore the characteristics of the Arabic page “We are all Khaled Said”, one of the most influential pages during the political demonstrations in Egypt [6,12].

## Keywords

Facebook, Social Media, Egypt, Arab Countries, Political Unrest, Khaled Said.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 The Arab Political Unrest

The series of political demonstrations and protests in the Arab world started in Tunisia in December 2010 and have rapidly spread across most countries in the region. Since then, people in these countries have been taking to the streets demanding economic and political change and protesting against some of the authoritarian regimes in the region. These events were sparked when Muhammad Bouazizi, an unemployed college graduate from a small town in Tunisia, set himself on fire and died of his injuries in protest after police confiscated his fruit cart, saying he was selling without a permit. This incident led the people of Tunisia to the streets accusing the government of corruption and nepotism, and demanding the resignation of their President Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali. Following a month of large demonstrations with a toll of 21 casualties, the president gave in to the demands and fled the country to Saudi Arabia on 14 January 2011 [2]. Shortly after, these protests had a ripple effect and quickly spread to the neighboring North African and other Arab countries most notably in Egypt, Libya, and Syria.

Also charged by the death of a young Egyptian man, Khaled Said, after being allegedly tortured by police and inspired by the government upheaval in Tunisia, thousands of people in Egypt took to the streets demonstrating against corruption and failing economic policies in their country and demanding their President Hosni Mubarak to step down after almost 30 years in power.

### 1.2 Facebook

Facebook has been experiencing soaring success in recent years that it is currently ranked at the top of most used websites worldwide. Alexa [1] lists Facebook at number two as the most trafficked website, second only to Google. According to Facebook Statistics [3], the site has more than 750 million active users who spend over 700 billion minutes per month on the website, 50% of these users log on to the website in any given day and about 70% of them are outside the United States. The website states that the

average user has 130 friends, is connected to 80 community pages, groups and events, and creates 90 pieces of content each month. The website has over 900 million objects that include pages, groups, events and community pages that people interact with. Additionally, there are more than 30 billion pieces of content that include web links, news stories, blog posts, notes, and photo albums that are shared each month. These objects that people interact with are widely considered essential additions to Facebook that have changed how users interact with each other on the social website [4,11].

It is argued that Facebook’s features facilitate political communication and arguably has a better means of achieving a true public sphere than anything that has come before it [11]. Therefore, it has been used to promote political ideas and campaigns such as the midterm election in the United States in 2006 [9] and in the 2008 congressional and presidential elections [4,12].

The purpose of this study is to look into how people in Egypt have utilized Facebook during this political unrest, and to describe one page in particular related to the unrest there. Several studies [6, 10] have discussed the use of social media during the Arab Spring, but this study is one of the first to look at the distinct and local characters of the movement in Egypt through one case study. This would permit a more nuanced analysis through the examination of some Facebook pages over the course of protest as the milieu swings between peaceable and violent, anti-regime and representational, etc.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

According to Krippendorff [8], content analysis is a valid method used to describe trends in a communication context, allowing researchers to draw inferences on patterns and differences among similar components of that communication context. My previous work [7] focused on examining Facebook pages related to Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Syria during their recent political unrest using four keywords for each country. The preliminary results of using the Presidents’ names as keywords revealed the general characteristics of such pages, for example the number of pages, the number of members, and the tone of these pages. In order to enrich the research and permit a more nuanced analysis, the focus here will be on one page in particular, “We are all Khaled Said” [13]. This would allow us to examine this Facebook page over the course of protest in Egypt, especially considering how influential it has been even before the start of the massive demonstrations [5,6]. In the embedded search box function on Facebook using خالد سعيد [Khaled Said] as a keyword, 448 pages were retrieved. The page with the most members (most likes) is “كلنا خالد سعيد” [We are all Khaled Said] with over 2 million members.

The preliminary analysis will focus on the number of topics discussed, the theme of these topics, how active the members of this page have been reflected in the number of postings, among other characteristics.

### 3. RESULTS

The content analysis of the Facebook page “We are all Khaled Said” will reveal the general characteristics of this page related to the Arab Spring in Egypt, like number of postings per month, themes of postings, number of members and how active these members have been since the page was created. For example, there were 572 posts on the page from 1-17 January, 2011 (excluding adding pictures to specific albums), 48% of which were text, 21% videos, 13.5% links, and 17.5% individual pictures. Table 1 shows that the members of the page liked the postings more than actually commenting on or sharing them on their personal pages.

**Table 1. Descriptive statistics for postings from 1-17 Jan, 2011**

	Mean	Std. Dev.	Max.	Min.
Likes	437	327.3	4579	92
Comments	145.6	166.5	2355	15
Shares	2.6	25.7	496	0

The posting that got the highest likes, comments, and shares during this period was: “Today is the 15, Jan 25 is Police Day and is a holiday. If we get 100 thousand demonstrators in Cairo no one will stop us, can we do it?”. As noticed, at that time, the page did not even discuss the possibility of toppling Mubarak from office, although it was later discussed in the page.

Figure 2. shows a posting on the page on 7 February 2011, four days before the President was brought down. The posting says: “Thank God .. I’m back .. believe me I didn’t change .. I love my country .. I swear by Allah The Great we will change it”. This posting had almost 28,000 likes and 27,000 comments. The analysis will further investigate the topics that have been discussed in this page to shed a light on the user reaction and engagement in political discussions during the political events in Egypt.



**Figure 2. A post on the Arabic “We are all Khaled Said” on Facebook on 7 February 2011 [13]**

Since liking the page does not necessarily mean that all users support the page, it is necessary to analyze not only the postings in this page, but also the comments provided by the members of the page on these postings to capture the dialogic political

communication of these users. This small study has only attempted to examine the general characteristics of “We are all Khaled Said” during the uprising in Egypt. The much wider question remains, of course, as to whether the political discourse was enabled by this Facebook page and how it influenced the offline political participation of its members.

### 4. REFERENCES

- [1] Alexa. 2011. <http://www.alexa.com/>
- [2] CNN Wire Staff. 2011, January 16. *What's going on in Tunisia?* [http://articles.cnn.com/2011-01-16/world/tunisia.explainer\\_1\\_tunisia-president-habib-bourguiba-el-abidine-ben-ali?\\_s=PM:WORLD](http://articles.cnn.com/2011-01-16/world/tunisia.explainer_1_tunisia-president-habib-bourguiba-el-abidine-ben-ali?_s=PM:WORLD)
- [3] Facebook Statistics. (2011). Facebook statistics. Retrieved Augues 21, 2011, from <http://www.facebook.com/press/info.php?statistics>
- [4] Feezell, J., Conroy, M., & Guerrero, M. 2009. Facebook is...fostering political engagement: A study of online social networking groups and offline participation. *APSA 2009 Toronto Meeting Paper*. Available at SSRN: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1451456>
- [5] Ghonim, W. 2012. *Revolution 2.0: The power of the people is greater than the people in power: A memoir*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. <http://site.ebrary.com/lib/nyulibrary/docDetail.action?docID=10525084>
- [6] Hamady, N. & Gomaa, E. 2012. Framing the Egyptian uprising in Arabic language newspapers and social media. *Journal of Communication* 62, 195–211
- [7] Khashman, N. 2012. The Facebook revolution: An analysis of public user-generated pages during the Arab political unrest. *Proceedings of the Canadian Association for Information Science Conference*, Waterloo, ON, Canada.
- [8] Krippendorff, K. 2004. *Content analysis: An introduction to its methodology*. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications.
- [9] Sweetser, K., & Lariscy, R. 2008. Candidates make good friends: An analysis candidates’ uses of Facebook. *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 2, 175–208.
- [10] Tufekci, Z. & Wilson, C. 2012. Social media and the decision to participate in political protest: Observations from Tahrir Square. *Journal of Communication* 62, 363–37
- [11] Westling, M. 2007. Expanding the public sphere: The impact of Facebook on political communication. *The New Vernacular*. From [http://www.thenewvernacular.com/projects/facebook\\_and\\_political\\_communication.pdf](http://www.thenewvernacular.com/projects/facebook_and_political_communication.pdf)
- [12] Woolley, J., Limperos, A. & Oliver, M. 2010. The 2008 presidential election, 2.0: A content analysis of user-generated political Facebook groups. *Mass Communication and Society*, 13(5), 631-652
- [13] كلنا خالد سعيد [We are all Khaled Said]. <http://www.facebook.com/ElShaheed>