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# Movement Began With Outrage and a Facebook Page That Gave It an Outlet

By JENNIFER PRESTON

If there is a face to the revolt that has sprouted in [Egypt](#), it may be the face of Khaled Said.

Mr. Said, a 28-year-old Egyptian businessman, was pulled from an Internet cafe in Alexandria last June by two plainclothes police officers, who witnesses say then beat him to death in the lobby of a residential building. Human rights advocates said he was killed because he had evidence of police corruption.

The Egyptian police and security services have a well-earned reputation for brutality and snuffing out political opposition. But in Mr. Said, they unwittingly chose the wrong target.

Within five days of his death, an anonymous human rights activist created a [Facebook](#) page — [We Are All Khaled Said](#) — that posted [cellphone photos from the morgue](#) of his battered and bloodied face, and [YouTube videos](#) played up contrasting pictures of him happy and smiling with the graphic images from the morgue. By mid-June, 130,000 people joined the page to get and share updates about the case.

It became and remains the biggest dissident Facebook page in Egypt, even as protests continue to sweep the country, with more than 473,000 users, and it has helped spread the word about the demonstrations in Egypt, which were ignited after a revolt in neighboring Tunisia toppled the government there.

“There were many catalysts of the uprising,” said Ahmed Zidan, an online political activist marching toward Tahrir Square for a protest last week. “The first was the brutal murder of Khalid Said.”

The Tunisian rebellion was set off after a fruit vendor, Mohamed Bouazizi, burned himself to death after being humiliated by the police. His desperate act led to protests, which were recorded on mobile phones, posted on the Internet, shared on Facebook and eventually broadcast by [Al Jazeera](#).

But Mr. Said's death may be the starkest example yet of the special power of social networking tools like Facebook even — or especially — in a police state. The Facebook page set up around his death offered Egyptians a rare forum to bond over their outrage about government abuses.

“Prior to the murder of Khaled Said, there were blogs and YouTube videos that existed about police torture, but there wasn't a strong community around them,” said Jillian C. York, the project coordinator for the OpenNet Initiative of the Berkman Center for the Internet and Society at [Harvard University](#). “This case changed that.”

While it is almost impossible to isolate the impact of social media tools from the general swirl of events that set off the popular uprisings across the Middle East, there is little doubt that they provided a new means for ordinary people to connect with human rights advocates trying to amass support against police abuse, torture and the Mubarak government's permanent emergency laws allowing people to be jailed without charges.

Facebook and YouTube also offered a way for the discontented to organize and mobilize — and allowed secular-minded young people to seize the momentum from Egypt's relatively neutered, organized opposition.

Far more decentralized than political parties, the strength and agility of the networks clearly caught Egyptian authorities — and American intelligence analysts — by surprise, even as the Egyptian government quickly attempted to shut them down.

Mr. Said, who was from a middle-class family and worked in the import-export business, was not an activist or involved in politics. But human rights advocates said he was killed because the local police believed he had shot a video showing officers with illegal drugs. [Such a video](#) did eventually show up on YouTube.

The police had told Mr. Said's family that he was involved in drugs and died of asphyxiation from swallowing a package of [marijuana](#) while in police custody. But witnesses denied that account, telling their stories in YouTube videos.

“What made this case different is that Khaled Said was just an ordinary person,” said Gamal Eid, 47, a lawyer and executive director of the Arabic Network for Human Rights Information in Cairo. “He was just a guy who found evidence of corruption and he published it. Then when people learned what happened to him, when people saw pictures of his face, people got very angry.”

Mr. Eid said that Facebook, YouTube, [Twitter](#) and cellphones made it easy for human rights advocates to get out the news and for people to spread and discuss their outrage about Mr. Said's death in a country where freedom of speech and the right to assemble were limited and the government monitored newspapers and state television.

"He is a big part of our revolution," said Hudaifa Nabawi, a 20-year-old student in Tahrir Square on Saturday. "Khalid Said was a special case. He didn't belong to any faction, and he didn't do anything wrong. He became the way to focus our perceptions around the oppression that all the youth all face. You can consider him a symbol."

Facebook has been the social networking tool of choice for human rights activists in Egypt. There are five million Facebook users in Egypt, the highest number in any Middle Eastern or North African country.

Its power and importance has been building for years. In 2008, the April 6 Youth Movement used Facebook to gain more than 70,000 supporters to help raise awareness for striking workers in Mahalla al-Kobra, Egypt.

In the last two years, that movement and other human rights advocates have also turned to Twitter and to YouTube, the third most visited Web site in Egypt after [Google](#) and Facebook. YouTube, which human rights advocates have used to upload dozens of videos showing Egyptian police torture and abuse, has evolved as an enormously powerful social media tool as more people have been able to capture and share video on cellphones.

When video of the corrupt police officers with drugs attributed to Mr. Said was uploaded on YouTube on June 11, 2010, a member of the April 6 Youth Movement left a message in Arabic on the video that said: "We are Khaled. Each one of us can be Khaled."

The message urged people to stand up against police abuse and torture and say no to "bullying police." This single video has been viewed more than 500,000 times since June and spawned dozens more videos about Mr. Said, including rap songs and more solemn presentations with haunting music.

Last June, besides providing regular Facebook updates about the stalled police investigation into Mr. Said's death, the anonymous administrator of the Facebook page began posting invitations to join street protests and silent protests in Alexandria and Cairo, which spread to nine other cities. [Mohamed ElBaradei](#), the former chief of the [International Atomic Energy Agency](#) and a Nobel Peace Prize laureate, was among thousands attending the protest in Alexandria.

With the conversation on social networks translating into street protests — and with the well-documented evidence of the police abuse posted online for hundreds of thousands to see — prosecutors were forced to arrest the two police officers in early July in connection with Mr. Said's death. But the case remains unresolved.

Other Egyptians died at the hands of the police last summer. The protests continued, first every week or so, and then sporadically last fall, until Tunisia fell and then the [April 6 Youth Movement Facebook group](#) and the We Are All Khaled Said Facebook page began inviting Egyptians to a protest on Jan. 25.

Signaling the Mubarak government's growing awareness about the powerful role that social media are playing in Egypt, pro-Mubarak supporters began jumping into the Khaled Said Facebook page's conversation soon after access to the Internet was restored last week.

There are now wall posts and comments on the page, blasting antigovernment supporters, demanding that Mr. Mubarak be given a chance and spreading disinformation, including that the "day of departure" protest on Friday was canceled.

But that did little to deter the protesters. "If you think you can go on Facebook and tell the people to go home, it's too late for that," said Omar Ghoneim, 32, who walked to Friday's protest, wearing two bandages on his right hand from, he said, throwing tear gas canisters back at the police.

*David D. Kirkpatrick, Kareem Fahim and Anthony Shadid contributed reporting from Cairo.*