Interview with Administrators of Facebook’s “I Am Khaled Said” Page

Ahmed Saleh and Nadine Wahab

[The Editors are pleased to present an interview with two administrators of the ‘I am Khaled Said’ Facebook page, which has been broadly covered in the media and noted by others in this special issue as a catalyst for the revolution that overtook Egypt on January 25, 2011. We directed questions to Ahmed Saleh in Cairo and Nadine Wahab in Washington, D.C.]

Editors: How and when did the Facebook campaign start, and how did you get involved in it?

AS: The campaign started a week after the death of Khaled Said, in June of 2010. I got involved with the anonymous administrators almost instantly with an anonymous identity of my own. During this period, I mainly campaigned with them on Twitter, one of these was a “trending campaign.”¹ We continued in this relationship for about two months before I accidentally discovered that one of the two administrators had once stayed with me. He stayed in my apartment temporarily for a number of months. Originally, we had met in one of the meetings for the ElBaradei campaign’s media team.

NW: The campaign started June 10, 2010, and I first became an administrator on June 17th. I was talking to Wael [Ghonim] about the page since the 10th and the death of Khalid Said, not about becoming an administrator. First, I wanted to confirm the death [of Khaled Said] and that the images of his beating weren’t doctored. The story and building a movement was the central

¹) Something similar to the campaign described on http://pitpi.org/index.php/2010/01/11/on-tweet-trending-as-protest-and-mobile-blogging-as-bearing-witness/ which I led with several other activists.
point of our conversations, becoming an administrator was just a happen-
stance. Being an Admin was never the center of any conversation, just a quick
“Add me.”

Editors: What is your favorite story from the online campaign?

AS: My favorite story was definitely during the revolution when I was admin-
istering the page all by myself. It was well known by then that our page was
the one that was mainly responsible for the call and the initial mobilization for
the revolution. On January 28th, the Internet was cut from the whole country,
and even cell phones were cut. When access returned, I got in touch with
Nadine Wahab in the US who granted me access to administer the page. I got
scared. Everyone was getting online at that moment to check what the Khaled
Said page was saying, and I thought I really don’t want this responsibility.

When I got online, I discovered that the page membership had increased
an additional 40,000 during the Internet block. I guessed that the security
apparatus must have had access during this time, and that they installed robots
to spam our page, a tactic that they were using since we started. This time
it was serious, and coupled with a view amongst the page’s membership base,
the middle class, that the revolution was taking too long and that we need
stability – a shallow concept engrained in the minds of many. There was a
massive attack on myself as the anonymous administrator of the page.
Accusations of being a foreign agent deceiving the masses into turning their
country into chaos so that Israel (or sometimes Iran) would take over, were all
over the page. Every post I would make, I would receive tens of thousands of
comments, mostly attacks against me.

First, I was very defensive, returning accusations against the organized online
security robots. It never worked. After a day or two, I switched strategy com-
pletely: focus on the people in Tahrir Square (the target of all the slander on
the page at that time), utilize humor (which was abound in the Egyptian revo-
lution), focus on the positive. I would go to Tahrir, capture photos of people
half naked, writing on their bodies slogans like “(Mubarak) Please, leave ASAP.
I ran out of paper begging you to do so!”

The strategy surprisingly worked. People would not attack me anymore and
the focus of the conversation was more on the pride of being Egyptian. By the
time Wael Ghonim was released and took over administering the page, public
opinion was mostly for the people in Tahrir Square rather than against them.