

HOW FACEBOOK CHANGED THE WORLD

Introduction

Focus

It started in 2004 as a platform for sharing information and building friendships. By 2011 it had become one of the sites of choice for revolutionaries looking to oust their autocratic leaders. This *News in Review* story looks at the many faces of Facebook.

Wael Ghonim had seen enough. The graphic pictures of the disfigured body of fellow Egyptian Khaled Said prompted him to put his Web expertise to use. Said, a businessman in Alexandria, Egypt, got into trouble after he posted on YouTube a video of police dividing the spoils of a drug bust. Later the police tracked him down at a local café, dragged him into the street, and beat him to death. Official government reports maintained that he died of suffocation after attempting to swallow a packet of drugs he was trying to hide from police—a claim easily dismissed after pictures of his horribly beaten body went viral in Egypt. With those pictures in mind Ghonim, a marketing executive for Google, navigated to Facebook and created a group called “We are Khaled Said.” Using the pseudonym El Shaheed (literally: the martyr), Ghonim made the group’s Facebook page a hub for reporting police corruption. Eventually it became the online staging ground for the anti-government protests that led to the ousting of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak.

As the revolutionary spirit spread across North Africa and into the Middle East throughout the first months of 2011, government officials the world over could not ignore the pivotal role social media were playing in protest

communities. Drawing on lessons learned in Iran’s failed “Twitter Revolution” in 2009, protestors in Tunisia used Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube to go after the government of Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. In short order, Ben Ali, a national icon, was stripped of his power and sent packing. Then in Egypt, a country ripe for revolt, the same social media were used to put Mubarak and his cohorts in a vulnerable position. The Egyptian government was so concerned about the influence of social media that they shut down the Internet for a number of days. In the end, shutting down the Internet couldn’t stop the momentum and force of the protestors, and Mubarak was ousted from power within three weeks.

It is hard to imagine that when Mark Zuckerberg and his college friends hatched the idea for Facebook in a college dorm room at Harvard University in 2004, they could have anticipated that their social network would be used to topple governments. However, what has become clear is that Facebook, with a reported 500 million users and counting, is now a dominant player in global communications. While it may have been created to help friends stay connected, it has evolved into a media giant the relevance of which cannot be denied.

To Consider

1. Do you think that the protests that swept across North Africa and the Middle East in the first months of 2011 would have been possible without social media?
2. Many people claim that Facebook and other social media have created greater distance between people because they don’t meet as frequently face-to-face. What is your response to that claim?
3. Can you foresee a future that does not involve social media? That is, do you think that people’s interest in social media might decline and that social media might disappear?

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Video Review

Did you know . . .

At the age of 26, Mark Zuckerberg's net worth was \$13.5 billion. (*Forbes*, March 2011).

Pre-viewing Activity

Take a minute to complete the questions in the following table in your notebook.

If you have a Facebook account:	If you don't have a Facebook account:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Why did you start a Facebook account?• What features of Facebook do you enjoy the most?• Are there any aspects of Facebook that have caused you to consider deactivating your account?• Do you use Facebook to organize events with friends and family?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What factors influenced your decision to not start a Facebook account?• Was maintaining your privacy a major reason why you decided that Facebook wasn't for you?• Were you ever a Facebook user and decided to deactivate your account? If so, why did you quit Facebook?• How do you organize social events with your friends and families?

Then form a small group with others who are like yourself: either they have a Facebook account or not. Compare your answers and add any points that you did not consider to your notes.

Viewing Questions

As you watch this video, respond to the questions in the spaces provided.

1. How old was Mark Zuckerberg when he created Facemash? How old was he when he and a few friends created Facebook?

2. What did early Facebook users like about the site?

3. What evidence surfaced that suggested students might be using Facebook too much?

4. a) In 2007, Facebook had 17 million users. How many users did it have by 2011?

- b) What percentage of Canadians use Facebook?

5. How was Facebook used when protests swept across North Africa and the Middle East?

6. According to Mark Zuckerberg, what is the mission of Facebook?

7. a) Describe the portrayal of Zuckerberg in *The Social Network*.

b) Do the people interviewed in the documentary think that the somewhat negative portrayal of Zuckerberg in the movie will cause people to give up Facebook?

8. a) What was screenwriter Aaron Sorkin's focus when he was writing *The Social Network*?

b) What award did Sorkin win for his script?

c) What did Sorkin say to Zuckerberg when he accepted his award?

9. How did *The Social Network* "wildly miss the mark about a generation, the best and the brightest of whom have imagined the possibilities of a world when it's wired in"?

10. How were social media used to save people in post-earthquake Haiti?

11. How did relief volunteer Fred Michel manage to help a pregnant woman in Haiti?

12. What donation did Zuckerberg make to the city of Newark, New Jersey? How might this donation affect his image?

Post-viewing Activities

1. In the video, CBC reporter Keith Boag wonders if the movie *The Social Network* "short-changes a generation. These people [Zuckerberg and his Facebook colleagues] have done much more than build a tripped-up dating site. The world they're creating with social media is full of possibilities. Possibilities the film never imagined." How does the video support this claim? Does your own view of Facebook support this claim?

2. Revisit the notes you made during the Pre-viewing Activity. Has your perspective on Facebook and other social media changed at all? Explain.

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The Story of Facebook

Did you know . . .

Facebook dropped the “the” in its name in 2005 and bought the domain name facebook.com for a reported \$200 000.

Reading Prompt

Consider these facts before you read this feature:

- If Facebook were a nation it would be the third largest in the world behind China and India.
- With over 500 million users, Facebook has become an Internet giant that has data processing capabilities that are arguably more powerful than those of the most advanced national governments in the world.
- Valued at USD\$50-billion, Facebook is able to boast that one out of every 12 people on the planet uses the site, logging an incredible 700 billion minutes a month.

Facemash

It all started in a dorm room at Harvard University in the fall of 2003. Second-year undergraduate student Mark Zuckerberg used his computer abilities to hack into the databases of a number of university residences. He used photos of people living in the houses and created a site where two pictures would appear on the screen and visitors could vote on which person they thought was more attractive. He called the site Facemash, and it attracted over 400 visitors and more than 20 000 photo views in its first hour online. Facemash generated remarkable traffic. Within days, Harvard administration had the site shut down and threatened to expel Zuckerberg for hacking into their servers.

Facebook

Ultimately Zuckerberg survived his brush with expulsion and, in the wake of the ongoing controversy surrounding Facemash, teamed up with several classmates to create The Facebook. Launched in February 2004, thefacebook.com became the social hotspot for Web users at Harvard, with over 50 per cent of students creating accounts within the first month. In March, The Facebook branched out to other Ivy League universities and

eventually to almost every university in the United States and Canada. By the summer of 2004, Zuckerberg and his cohorts incorporated the company, moved to Palo Alto, California, secured millions of dollars in seed money from venture capitalists, and began making even more rapid inroads into the social media market.

The defining feature of Facebook was its openness, ease of use, and ability to meet the personal needs of its users. Driven by these guiding principles, Facebook steamrolled its competition and rapidly expanded, first into high schools in 2005 and eventually universally in 2006. Along the way, Facebook continued to gather members, reaching a staggering 500 million by the end of 2010.

Lawsuits

Facebook has dealt with its fair share of controversy since its inception in 2004. Shortly after its launch, three Harvard students claimed the idea for Facebook was theirs and that Zuckerberg had stolen it from them. Twin brothers Tyler and Cameron Winklevoss along with business partner Divya Narendra say they entered into an oral contract with Zuckerberg to create a site called HarvardConnection. The three said that

Zuckerberg took their idea and created Facebook—all the time leading them to believe that he had been working on HarvardConnection.

For his part, Zuckerberg, along with early partners Eduardo Saverin and Dustin Moskovitz, pointed out that their original site shared no similarities to HarvardConnection and the coding of thefacebook.com was unique to their site. Ultimately the lawsuit was settled in 2008 with the Winklevoss brothers and Narendra being awarded USD\$65-million (Facebook was valued at \$15-billion at the time). However, the three men initiated a fresh round of lawsuits shortly after winning the award because they felt Facebook had misrepresented the value of their stock.

Zuckerberg was also sued by his original business partner, Eduardo Saverin. According to Saverin, he was muscled out of Facebook by the company's first president, Sean Parker (of Napster fame), and Zuckerberg. He said the two men diminished his share of the Facebook fortune so he sued them and won an undisclosed settlement. Some speculate the payday was for as much as \$1.1-billion (*New York Daily News*, September 24, 2010). Shortly after winning the lawsuit, Saverin's status as a co-founder was restored on the Facebook main page.

Privacy

Facebook has also faced criticism about the way it handles the privacy of its

members. *Time* reporter Lev Grossman wonders if the Facebook founder and his staff “have a blind spot when it comes to personal privacy” (December 15, 2010). Grossman points to the launch of Beacon in 2007 as evidence of this problem. Beacon was an application designed to track a person's purchasing habits. If a Facebook user bought something online, a message would appear on their newsfeed telling all their friends what they just bought. Problems surfaced when Facebook friends were finding out about surprise presents like Christmas gifts before the purchaser could navigate the complicated steps to turn off the Beacon alerts. Members rebelled and let Facebook know that certain information was not for public viewing. The wave of controversy surrounding Beacon led to Facebook scrapping the application in September 2009.

Facebook also received criticism when members tried to deactivate their accounts. Members assumed that deactivation meant the deletion of all the information from their profile. However, some former members discovered that their profiles remained on Facebook servers in case they ever wanted to reactivate their account. When they challenged the site, one thing became clear: it was virtually impossible to quit Facebook. While provisions have been made to allow for the full removal of a profile, many critics still maintain that Facebook still has a long way to go when it comes to user privacy.

Analysis

1. *Time* magazine named Mark Zuckerberg its Person of the Year for 2010. Do you think awarding Zuckerberg such a high distinction is warranted? Use evidence from this feature to support your answer.
2. What controversies have plagued Facebook since its creation in 2004? Are these controversies of concern to you, or do you think the concerns have been exaggerated?

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Facebook and the Downfall of Hosni Mubarak

Did you know . . .

Emergency Law 162 was lifted for a brief time in 1981 but was reinstated after the assassination of then-president Anwar Sadat.

Questions Before Reading

Work with a partner and answer the following questions. If you are not a Facebook member, work with someone who is.

How effective is Facebook when it comes to organizing events? What kinds of events do Facebook users organize online?

What would happen if Internet service were halted? What implications would there be for Canadians who rely on the Internet?

Ripe for Revolution

The citizens of Egypt were ready for a change. Hosni Mubarak had been in power since the assassination of President Anwar Sadat in 1981 and had maintained a stranglehold for 30 years through intimidation and an uncanny ability to stack the balance of power in his favour. Eventually, in 2005, opposition to Mubarak grew enough to allow for contested elections. However, in what many claim was a rigged vote, the president was given another term.

Growing Discontent

With the next round of elections set for September 2011, Mubarak readied himself for another term in office. Meanwhile a growing wave of discontent was spreading across Egypt. Most of the nation's anger was aimed at the police. Egypt had been ruled under Emergency Law 162—which extended police powers, suspended constitutional rights, and legalized government censorship—since 1967. The antiquated law, which many believed should have been lifted years earlier, had created a culture where police had virtually unlimited powers and the government was able to censor the media.

The Rise of Social Media

What Mubarak and his government did not anticipate was the rise in social media. It is difficult for governments

to censor Internet-based services like YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter. And at the end of 2010 it was estimated that 21 million of Egypt's 80 million people were regularly accessing the Internet.

The Death of Khaled Said

In June 2010, Khaled Said, a businessman from Alexandria, posted a video on YouTube showing police dividing the illegal drugs they had obtained from a raid earlier that day. When Alexandria police learned of the video they tracked down Said and viciously beat him to death. Images of Said's badly beaten body went viral in Egypt. When people started to ask about his death, the government said he suffocated on a packet of drugs he had swallowed in an effort to conceal evidence from police. The claim was a slap in the face for most Egyptians because the pictures told a very different story.

"We are Khaled Said"

The beating death of Said inspired Google marketing executive Wael Ghonim to anonymously put up a Facebook page called "We are Khaled Said." He used the pseudonym El Shaheed, which means "the martyr." Ghonim's goal was to use his anonymity to create one voice that spoke against injustice and for all those who had become victims of police brutality. It soon became clear he would achieve his goal. The page became a

Did you know . . .

Egyptians have dubbed February 4 the “Day of Departure” because that is when President Minister Mubarak resigned from office.

focal point for speaking out against police corruption and brutality in Egypt. Between its birth in the summer of 2010 and the start of the uprising in Egypt in January 2011, the Facebook page grew to 350 000 members.

Facebook: A Protest Tool

As the page grew in size and importance, Ghonim (working as the unknown El Shaheed) put his marketing expertise to work. In a sense he knew that there was a market for revolution in Egypt. Drawing on the success of protests in Tunisia, “We are Khaled Said” invited its members to participate in a “Day of Revolt” on January 25, 2011. Over 50 000 members said they would take part. Facebook and Twitter were used to both organize protestors and throw off the police with false information. On the “Day of Revolt” it looked like “We are Khaled Said” had delivered almost all of the 50 000 protestors it had been promised, with 15 000 assembled in Tahir Square in Cairo and 20 000 taking to the streets in Alexandria. Dozens of other demonstrations occurred across Egypt as the protest movement took its first bold steps away from the desktop and onto the streets.

Internet Shutdown

Over the next few days the protests took on momentum. Chatter on Twitter and Facebook became bolder. A protest called the “Day of Rage” was scheduled for January 28. Government concern over the use of the Internet to organize the

protest and mislead the police prompted officials to take an unprecedented move: they shut down the Internet. But they were too late; social media had done their job and the word was out. Shortly after Friday prayers, protestors took to the streets—first by the thousands and then by the hundreds of thousands. Egypt was awash in revolution.

The Day of Departure

For 18 days, hundreds of thousands of Egyptians repeatedly called on President Mubarak to step down. A defiant Mubarak stubbornly refused. He sent the military out to intimidate protestors, even ordering F-16 fighter jets to fly over Tahir Square. But the calls for his resignation continued unabated, and on February 4 he announced his resignation.

A Protest Without a Leader

For his part, Wael Ghonim maintained his anonymity until he was arrested on January 27. He was held in a Cairo jail—blindfolded and put in solitary confinement for 12 days while the revolutionary movement grew beyond the prison walls. The “We are Khaled Said” site was taken over by an associate until Ghonim was released. In an interview with *Newsweek*, Ghonim maintained that he was no hero. He described the revolutionary movement as “a protest without a leader” (*Newsweek*, February 21, 2011). Facebook gave the movement a collective voice and, by the time Ghonim was released by Egyptian authorities, Mubarak was on his way out.

To Consider

1. Why were Egyptians so unhappy with Hosni Mubarak and his government?
2. What role did Facebook and Twitter play in building Egypt’s protest movement?
3. Egyptian authorities shut down the Internet for five days. What social, economic, and political problems occur when you shut down Internet service?
4. In your opinion is Wael Ghonim a hero?

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Profile: The Social Network

Questions Before Reading

When a movie is promoted as being based on a true story, what does this make you think? Do you assume that the movie will be as close to the truth as possible, or do you assume that parts of the movie will be true while other parts will be fictionalized? In your opinion, how factually accurate should a movie based on a true story be?

A True Story?

From the very beginning, screenwriter Aaron Sorkin made it clear that his new movie *The Social Network* was primarily concerned with telling a good story and not overly worried about being factually accurate. In fact, when asked about his take on the film's truthfulness, Sorkin gave this cryptic answer, "This movie is absolutely a true story, but with the catch that people disagree about what the truth was and the movie takes no position on what the truth is. It presents everybody's story" (Reuters, September 25, 2010). Sorkin's script was drawn from court documents involving lawsuits filed against Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg and a book called *Accidental Billionaires* by journalist Ben Mezrich. *Accidental Billionaires* is a controversial book about the creation and rise of Facebook that reads more like a novel than a work of non-fiction.

The movie was released to critical acclaim in the fall of 2010. Sorkin's script, combined with the skillful direction of David Fincher, resulted in nominations for best picture at both the Golden Globe and Academy awards.

The Social Network describes the emergence of Facebook from the dorm rooms of Harvard. An irritated Zuckerberg, dumped by his girlfriend at a local bar, returns to his room and creates Facemash by hacking into the databases of a number of Harvard residences. The site, which pitted student pictures against one another so

viewers could vote on which one they thought was "hotter" overwhelmed Harvard servers and shut the university's network down. Zuckerberg became a local legend and, within a year, launched Facebook, moved the site development operations to California, partnered with Napster creator Sean Parker, and slowly expanded the site's membership from college campuses into the general population.

The Zuckerberg depicted by writer Aaron Sorkin is socially awkward, manipulative, and self-centred. While founding a Web site based on friendship and openness, Zuckerberg abandons friends and violates business relationships so he can advance Facebook. The movie encourages the viewer to see Zuckerberg as ruthless and egocentric. It also calls on the viewer to feel sorry for him as Facebook climbs to a million users while the founder finds himself utterly alone.

Zuckerberg Responds

The real Mark Zuckerberg was never overly concerned with Sorkin's depiction of him. When aspects of the storyline began leaking to the press, Zuckerberg stoically wondered what the fuss was about. After all, *The Social Network* was just going to be a movie about Facebook. There was no way Hollywood would want to tell the real Facebook story because it would be far too boring to show audiences a bunch of programmers hunkered down in a room for hours on

end writing code. He understood that the story belonged to the filmmakers because neither he nor anyone else who worked for him had co-operated in the making of the film.

When the movie was released, Zuckerberg took his Facebook staff to a local theatre for a viewing. No one knows for sure whether he was alarmed at how he was portrayed. What is clear is that Zuckerberg and his staff made a conscious decision to speak of the film as a work of fiction and to let anyone who would listen know that the Zuckerberg portrayed by actor Jesse Eisenberg was a construction of the filmmakers and not a true depiction of the real Zuckerberg.

In an interview with *60 Minutes* a cool and collected Zuckerberg said of the movie, “It’s pretty interesting to see what parts they got right and what parts they got wrong. I think that they got every

single T-shirt that they had the Mark Zuckerberg character wearing right. I think I actually own those T-shirts” (*Forbes*, December 5, 2010). But he also felt that what they made up was worthy of note. For example, pivotal scenes at the beginning and end of the film were completely invented by the filmmakers. The scenes deal with a girlfriend who breaks up with a narcissistic Zuckerberg after a dinner at a local bar. That same character resurfaces thematically throughout the movie, with the final scene showing a distraught Zuckerberg looking for his ex-girlfriend to add him as a Facebook friend—pressing the refresh button every two seconds to see if his status has changed. The real Mark Zuckerberg points out that no such girlfriend ever existed because he has been seeing the same woman since before he created Facebook.

Follow-up

1. After reading the article, do you think screenwriter Aaron Sorkin was being a bit misleading when he made his proclamations of truth in the first paragraph?
2. Using evidence from the article, demonstrate how the real Mark Zuckerberg wasn’t concerned about potential negative publicity after the release of *The Social Network*.
3. In your opinion, does the movie *The Social Network* have the right to say that it is based on a true story?

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Activity: Facebook and My World

Did you know . . .
Overall, an estimated 65 per cent of Canadians are on Facebook.

Canadians love social media. Overall our tech-savvy population posts, tweets, and texts more than any other group on the planet. Canadians have the highest per capita membership of Facebook in the world. According to some experts, over 80 per cent of Canada's 20 million Internet users have a Facebook account, with the 18-29 age group having a 91 per cent membership rate (Abacus Data, January 13, 2011).

Your Task

Form a group of three and put together a social media survey. Your survey will be focused on determining which social media applications people use and how often they use them. For the purposes of this exercise, the term *social media* refers any Internet or mobile-based technology that allows you to connect with other people.

Here are some guidelines:

- Make sure your survey is at least 20 questions long. Some sample questions might include: Which social media do you use? Of the social media you use, which one(s) do you use the most? How much time do you spend on Facebook or Twitter each week? What role do social media play in your life? Do you prefer communicating via text messaging or phone calls?
- Make sure that most of your questions have a clear-cut answer. For example, "how many text messages do you send and receive a month?" has a clear answer. Only ask a few "why do you like" questions so you don't have to sift through too much writing.
- Survey at least 20 people. Whether you photocopy your survey or just informally ask your questions and record your answers is entirely up to you and your teacher. Just make sure you have a sample of at least 20 people.

Follow-up

Tabulate your results and work with your group to come up with three or four conclusions that demonstrate how social media are changing our world.

Planning Notes:
