Facebook film paints harsh portrait of Zuckerberg

October 5 2010, by Chris Lefkow

Actors (L-R) Jesse Eisenberg, Andrew Garfield and Justin Timberlake attend the after party for the premiere of "The Social Network" on September 24, 2010 in New York. "The Social Network," which stars Eisenberg as Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg and pop star Timberlake as Napster founder Sean Parker, topped the box office on its opening weekend in North America, raking in nearly 23m US dollars.

Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg may finally have a reason to add a "dislike" button.

"The Social Network," the movie about the origins of Facebook, paints an unflattering portrait of the billionaire co-founder of the massively popular site, portraying him as a status-obsessed, socially dysfunctional schemer.

In an interview with The New Yorker magazine last month, Zuckerberg said he had no plans to go see the film, which was written by "The West Wing" creator Aaron Sorkin and directed by David Fincher of "Fight Club" fame.

But The New York Times and others reported that Facebook staff, including Zuckerberg, attended a showing of the movie at a theater near Facebook headquarters in Palo Alto, California, on opening night on Friday.

"We thought this particular movie might be amusing," a Facebook spokesman, Larry Yu, told the Times.

It's hard to imagine that Zuckerberg was amused.

The Facebook co-founder comes off as admirable in his single-minded defense of his creation but also untrustworthy and disloyal to his Harvard classmate and friend, Facebook co-founder Eduardo Saverin.

In an interview with talk show host Oprah Winfrey ahead of the release, the 26-year-old Zuckerberg dismissed the movie as a work of fiction and said his life is just "not that dramatic."

"The last six years have been a lot of coding and focus and hard work, but maybe it will be fun to remember it as partying and all this crazy drama," he said.

"The Social Network," which stars Jesse Eisenberg as Zuckerberg and pop star Justin Timberlake as Napster founder Sean Parker, Zuckerberg's mentor, topped the box office on its opening weekend in North America, raking in nearly 23 million US dollars.

The movie is based on the book "The Accidental Billionaires" by Ben

Mezrich and its take on the murky creation of Facebook.

"The Social Network" opens with a 19-year-old Zuckerberg being dumped by his girlfriend and taking refuge at his dorm room computer, setting in motion the disputed events leading to the creation of Facebook.

Twin brothers Tyler and Cameron Winklevoss were upper classmen at the time and their version of the story is they enlisted Zuckerberg to write software code for a date-finding website called Harvard Connection.

The Winklevosses, handsome world-class rowers from a wealthy blue-blood family, accused Zuckerberg of stealing their idea and launching Facebook in February 2004 instead of holding up his end of the deal.

Director of "The Social Network" David Fincher (L) and actor Jesse Eisenberg host a talk on September 23, 2010 at the Apple Store in New York City. The movie is based on the book "The Accidental Billionaires" by Ben Mezrich and its take on the murky creation of Facebook.

The movie revolves around a lawsuit settled in 2008 with the Winklevosses and Saverin, Zuckerberg's former friend and Facebook co-founder, and much of the dialogue is lifted directly from the legal transcripts.

The twins are now appealing the settlement, which reportedly involved 20 million dollars in cash and a load of future stock options which Facebook valued at 45 million dollars. Saverin reportedly received a settlement in Facebook shares which tops one billion dollars at its current valuation.

David Kirkpatrick, author of "The Facebook Effect," said the movie is "compelling" but a "pastiche -- an amalgam of fact and fiction" and others have also taken issue with its version of the story.

Technology blogger Kara Swisher, who has interviewed Zuckerberg numerous times, said the "dour and wary" character depicted in the movie is "nothing like the real thing."

"Sure, Zuckerberg has been diffident, has treated some friends shabbily (even recently) and has even been borderline disingenuous once or twice with me," she said. "But that’s not that different from a lot of people I cover in tech."

Kirkpatrick, in a Web chat on The Daily Beast, said he believed the movie was "unfairly harsh" to Zuckerberg but "his image will transcend the movie."

"After all, Facebook, which he totally and completely controls, is the ultimate statement of who he is," he said. "As long as people enjoy using it they will basically be positive to him."

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