

# Facebook fervor feeds 'The Social Network' fascination

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Promises of elitism, geekdom, betrayal and greed are fueling anticipation for the October 1 release of "The Social Network," Hollywood's take on the birth of social networking king Facebook.

Facebook and its founder [Mark Zuckerberg](#) have not sanctioned the film, which is based on the book "The Accidental Billionaires" and is

directed by David Fincher, who won an Oscar nomination for "The Curious Case of Benjamin Button."

The screenplay, written by Aaron Sorkin, creator of hit television series The West Wing, opens with Zuckerberg as a 19-year-old Harvard student who has trouble making eye contact, according to a draft circulating on the Internet.

In the film, a clearly brilliant but socially off-key Zuckerberg is dumped by his girlfriend and takes refuge in his computer, setting in motion the disputed events leading to the creation of [Facebook](#).

Josh Bernoff, a Forrester analyst and co-author of the books "Groundswell" and "Empowered" about [social networking](#), said he can understand the reasons for Hollywood making the movie.

"There is an inevitable fascination with a guy like Mark Zuckerberg that created something so incredibly valuable and has such an unusual personality," Bernoff said.

"Add to that the birth of Facebook is a controversial subject, not least because there are lawsuits that have to do with who owns the idea and how much it is worth," he said.

The film takes viewers back to Harvard, where Zuckerberg was a student with dazzling computer skills who didn't fit in at the status conscious elite university.

Twin brothers Tyler and Cameron Winklevoss were upper classmen at the time and their version of the story is that they enlisted Zuckerberg in 2003 to finish [software code](#) for a ConnectU date-finding website but he betrayed them.

Zuckerberg, a second year student at the time, took their code and their idea and launched Facebook in February 2004 instead of holding up his end of the deal, according to a ConnectU lawsuit settled in 2008.

At a hearing in Boston a year earlier, a federal judge advised ConnectU to better show that the bargain with Zuckerberg was anything more than "dorm room chitchat" and advised both sides to settle the matter out of court.

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.

Tyler Winklevoss told AFP on Friday he had read the screenplay and plans to attend a premiere in New York City.

"If this was a fictional story you were writing out of thin air, your editor would think you'd gone too far and no one would believe it," Winklevoss said. "It is incredible moral transgressions and the earliest days of the founding of one of the most ubiquitous and successful technology companies today."

While he had yet to see his character on screen, Tyler Winklevoss said the screenplay captured that "Mark did something terrible to us."

Facebook, which announced in July that its membership had topped 500 million, did not return AFP requests for comment and Zuckerberg has said he does not plan to watch the film.

"Facebook doesn't want to talk about the birth of Facebook or Mark Zuckerberg's personality," Bernoff said. "They want to talk about features."

Room for intrigue and misunderstanding grew because Facebook sprang from "a cauldron of ideas in college" without backing by venture capitalists who are sticklers for clear contracts and ownership rights, according to Bernoff.

"All great technology companies start in a garage, a dorm room, or as an idea between dreaming college students," Tyler Winklevoss said.

"This story has a sort of meeting of all these different aspects... and large themes of betrayal and duplicitous behavior," he said.

Bernoff expected the film to get the attention of Facebook fans but not to diminish the website's popularity.

"I don't think people sign up for Facebook for the personality or behavior of the founder any more than people use Microsoft Word because they like or dislike Bill Gates," he said.

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