

Facebook founder named Time's 'person of year'

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Time magazine has named Facebook co-founder Mark Zuckerberg, pictured, its "person of the year", beating out a push by readers of the magazine for WikiLeaks maestro Julian Assange to take the honor.

Facebook co-founder Mark Zuckerberg on Wednesday beat WikiLeaks chief Julian Assange to be crowned Time magazine's "person of the year" -- even though the weekly's own readers thought it should be the other way around.

Zuckerberg, only 26, is the second youngest person named to the cover of Time's ritual annual issue.

Managing editor Richard Stengel said Zuckerberg's social networking service was "transforming the way we live our lives every day."

But although Zuckerberg was undoubtedly a huge presence in 2010, the choice was quickly assailed by some online critics as a politicized decision to ignore Assange, whose WikiLeaks site has caused an uproar by revealing to the public what governments around the world really think in private.

In an informal vote on "person of the year," Time's readers had resoundingly backed Assange, followed by Lady Gaga, the US singer known for her elaborate costumes.

Assange, currently behind bars in London on Swedish sexual assault charges, only made third in the official magazine list, behind the conservative US Tea Party movement that made a big impact in recent midterm elections.

Stengel said that Harvard dropout Zuckerberg deserved the nod because his Facebook has turned into a global influence of unprecedented scope.

"For connecting more than half-a-billion people and mapping the social relations among them (something that has never been done before); for creating a new system of exchanging information that has become both indispensable and sometimes a little scary; and finally, for changing how we all live our lives in ways that are innovative and even optimistic, Mark Elliot Zuckerberg is Time's 2010 Person of the Year," Stengel said in a statement.

Stengel described Zuckerberg as the equivalent of a "T-shirt-wearing head of state."

In an interview on NBC television, Stengel said Zuckerberg was "humbled" and "deeply affected" by the award.

Contrary to the unpleasant portrait of Zuckerberg presented in the hit

Hollywood movie "The Social Network," the Facebook mogul is "very affable," Stengel said.

"He's very quick, he's quick witted." However, "what happens on camera is he pulls back, he gets shy."

Controversial, US-backed Afghan President Hamid Karzai and the group of Chilean miners who survived being buried underground in a tunnel were the final runners-up selected by Time.

In 1927, American aviator Charles Lindbergh was Time's first "man of the year," as it was then known, and the youngest at the age of 25.

The popular issue goes on newsstands Friday, bearing a close up photo of the blue-eyed Zuckerberg on the cover.

The honor completes a remarkable year for Zuckerberg.

Facebook crossed the half-billion users mark and is now seen by some as a potential rival to the Google search engine.

Zuckerberg, who despite all his online "friends" remains something of an enigma to the public, also found himself portrayed in a hugely popular -- and bitingly critical -- movie that could win Oscars.

He insists that the status-obsessed, socially dysfunctional schemer seen in "The Social Network" bears little resemblance to himself and that unlike in the movie, his life is "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 told talk show host Oprah Winfrey.

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