
THE GLORIFICATION OF THE BACKBENCHER: A NUANCED EXPLORATION OF THE IMPACT OF MEMES IN EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Key Words:

Archetype,
Anti-hero,
glorification,
reels and memes

The rise of social media has contributed to the glorification of the anti-hero archetype, reshaping societal perceptions of morality and success. This article explores the emergence of the anti-hero in literature and its evolution through various historical contexts, leading to its contemporary portrayal in memes and social media reels. A particularly concerning trend is the glorification of the "backbencher" archetype—students who reject academic norms and discipline—through humorous yet influential digital content. While these representations provide entertainment and relatability, they also risk trivializing the importance of hard work, discipline, and academic excellence. By celebrating rebellion and nonconformity, such portrayals may foster disengagement from education and promote a culture of mediocrity. The article underscores the need for educators, parents, and content creators to promote a balanced perspective that values academic achievement while embracing individuality. Encouraging a growth mindset and responsible digital engagement is crucial to ensuring that social media serves as a tool for empowerment rather than one that diminishes the significance of education.

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Introduction

“The anti-hero has played an important role in the history of mankind, so much so that the whole ethos of what is good and bad has become blurred.”- Stephen Richards

As Stephen Richards states, the boundary between good and bad has become blurred with the extravagant glorification of anti-heroes. Anti-heroes, who were once considered as negative models for the society are now being glorified with the advent of social media. Social media applications like Facebook, Instagram, what’s App etc. are now have a universal control and there is no escape from such social media applications especially for the younger generation of contemporary society.

As the world shrinks into tiny mobile phones, kids immerse themselves into various social media applications. The memes and reels that they watch become their guiding forces. What they watch in the social media is what leading them to life. In the post-truth era of literature, people are getting confused of what to believe and what to not believe. As the pellicle between truth and lie gets more and more blurred, anti- heroes from such reels and memes are get glorified in droves.

The anti-hero archetype has been prominent in English literature for centuries, catching the audience with its troubled and turbulent characters. From Emily Bronte’s Heathcliff (Wuthering Heights), the anti-hero image has evolved over time, reflecting the changing values and societal norms of the era. And it is also evident that the glorification of such anti-heroes has led to some negative consequences as well.

As is the case with any anti-hero, the backbenchers as an anti-hero has also emerged into the realm of literature over the course of time. Social media as a platform for literary and critical articulation has paved the way

for the advent of reels and memes as a way of expressing one's thoughts. Thus, the backbencher memes are evolved getting much acclaim from the young generation of social media users. The backbencher, often pushed back to the last benches of the classroom embodies a spirit of rebellion and nonconformity through their actions and behaviour, they challenge societal norms and classroom decorum. But it comes as a challenge when other students consider them as 'heroes.'

By celebrating or glorifying the backbenchers, such memes and reels are unintentionally trivializing the significance of hard work, dedication and high academic performance. The backbenchers are portrayed as rebel students who oppose authority figures like parents and teachers. Celebrating this behaviour can lead to a lack of respect for authority and the rules that govern this society. Social media reels, memes and videos may tend to make unrealistic expectations about what it means to be successful. Students may feel pressure to conform to such unrealistic expectations, gradually leading them to failure and disappointment in education and future life.

The Anti-hero Archetype

The concept of a hero is always based on certain noble qualities and virtues, whereas an anti-hero is considered as the one who is against all those socially constructed norms of morality and justice. Through the rejection of conventional heroic values and societal norms of the era, the anti-heroes offer a profound critique of societal norms and a nuanced exploration of the human experience. The concept of anti-hero has become a cultural icon, influencing popular culture and shaping the perceptions of people. Yash Deep Singh states that, "the anti-hero, however, is a brand-new archetype in contemporary writing. This character defies conventional ideas of heroism by exhibiting a number of

faulty or dubious moral qualities that distinguish them from their heroic counterparts” (Singh 181).

As the society changes from time to time, the archetype of anti-hero has also undergone significant transformations throughout the history. As for example, in the 19th century, there were only the existence of villainous or monstrous anti-heroes, who were depicted as having negative traits and lacked any moral values. The anti-heroes created by Mary Shelley and Robert Louis Stevenson are examples for this. These characters were portrayed as cautionary tales, illustrating the dangers of unchecked ambitions.

Later, in the 20th century, the concept of anti-hero has changed to more relatable and human characters. Famous 20th century writers like Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald portrayed such faulty characters who were struggling with their own perceptions of morality. During the Post-war era, the ‘angry young man’ as an anti-hero evolved with the publication of John Osborne’s *Look Back in Anger*. Such characters were mostly working-class people critical of the political and social systems which had failed to fulfil the promises of a better life in the post-war era. The protagonists belong to this ‘angry young men’ community, emphasized individual freedom and autonomy, rejecting the constraints of traditional social roles.

According to L.M Salma, “anti-heroes are a fundamental component of existentialism, postmodernism and modernism. Although the genre of anti-heroes began to gain attention and make significant inroads into popular literature roughly during and following the modernism era, the idea existed ever before that” (Salma 28). T.S Eliot’s *Prufrock* from *Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* can also be counted as a modern anti-hero, as an illustration of a flawed contemporary individual, whose personality

traits are all signs of a renewed sort of heroism.

The anti-heroes have far-reaching influence on the society, both positive and negative. They can challenge the traditional rules, laws and customs, thereby encouraging people to question authority and think more critically. Such anti-heroic characters can act as a voice for marginalized groups, highlighting their issues and struggles. Although the anti-heroic characters has such positive impacts upon the society, it can have some negative impacts as well. They can sometimes glorify crime and violence, potentially inspiring imitation or inuring people to harm. Such anti-heroes may lead people to feel disconnected from society and powerless to create change. They may also blur the boundaries of morality, making it difficult to distinguish between what is right and wrong. So, the influence of anti-heroes in society is complex and multifaceted, especially negative influence as it glorifies crime and violence.

Anti-hero Archetype in Mass Media

The concept of anti-hero is common in literature, film, television, video games, as well as in social media platforms. With the advent of social media, the depiction of anti-heroes has undergone a significant transformation. Instagram reels and memes have become an epicentre for anti-heroes, with characters like ‘sarcastic anti-hero’, and ‘villainous hero’ gaining much popularity. These characters are portrayed as relatable, although flawed, with all their quirks and imperfections, making them more human and accessible. This glorification of anti-hero archetype in social media poses serious threats to the society. In an age where people move from traditional moral values and attitudes, such portrayal of anti-heroes in Instagram reels and memes is significant as it reflects the changing social norms of the present society.

It’s a post-truth era, that, we are living in a time where facts and truths are

no longer considered the primary basis for decision making, but misinformation often take precedence. So, such reels and memes have enabled the rapid propagation of false or misleading information. It also contributes to the polarization of public discourse, as its users are often exposed to extreme or divisive views that reinforces their own prejudices. As social media and its various branches continues to shape the way the young generation of society consume and interact with stories, it is very important to analyse their negative impacts on contemporary society.

The Archetype of Backbenchers as an Anti-hero

The proliferation of social media has given birth to a new type of anti-heroes, ‘the backbencher archetype.’ The backbenchers, often portrayed as unmotivated, laid-back and rebellious individuals, have become an endearing and relatable figure among today’s students. Beneath its humorous spectrum, lies perpetuating negative attitude towards education and academic achievements. Numerous memes and reels are there in social media to support these anti-heroes. It celebrates the carefree and ‘against the grain’ attitude of those backbenchers.

It is a fact that many students can identify with the backbenchers, with their academic pressures, hectic syllabus, parental and social expectations as well as the monotonous school and college life. The glorification of the backbencher archetype provides a sense of validation and comfort, telling the students that it’s normal to be an average achiever, not to worry about grades, and to prioritize fun and entertainment over academics.

However, such a glorification of backbenchers through reels, memes and videos are not altogether positive. By glorifying low academic achievement and lack of effort from the part of students, such backbencher memes continue to spread a negative attitude towards education and a negative impression on excellence in academic performance. Students

who model themselves upon this backbencher archetype will feel that academic success is an unnecessary thing, leading to a decline in motivation, effort and thereby in academic achievements. Another important point to be considered is its emphasis on rebellion and nonconformity. This will lead to a sense of unaccountability, as students may feel that they don't need to put in effort to achieve their goals.

By celebrating average grades and disinterest in academic achievement, backbencher archetype memes and reels proclaim the message that it's okay to aim lower. This may leave the students with far-reaching consequences, as they may struggle to develop a strong work ethic, relying upon social media for decision making, rather than developing critical thinking skills and it will also lead to a lack of interest in developing a growth mindset. The normalization of such mediocrity, can only sustain a culture of low expectations, where students are not encouraged to strive for excellence or go beyond their comfort zones.

The celebration of the backbencher phenomenon through reels, videos and even through humorous skits have a profound impact on the attitude of the new generation towards life. By depicting a world where high academic performance is not the only defining factor, these memes and reels promote a more carefree attitude to life.

Conclusion

In the vast expanse of the internet, the backbencher memes and reels are more than just a humorous distraction. It represents a transformation of culture, a shift in the way young learners perceive academic achievements. They approach life with a carefree and uninterested attitude, and does not care about their success in education, professional or in life as a whole.

So, it is essential for teachers, parents and social media influencers to propagate a more positive and balanced message, one that glorifies and celebrates academic achievements, promoting the efforts that students put in their academics, their hard work and growth mindset. Educators and social media influencers should try their maximum to help students develop a positive and aspirational approach towards their education and life. It is the responsibility of the social media influencers and content creators to foster a more positive attitude towards academics through their social media contents. Rather than being solely humorous or satirical, such social media contents should be able to empower the younger generation via various means of expressions. Reels, mems, and videos can be used wisely in order to create a nation where one's academic excellence is valued with every other areas of excellence.

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