



International Journal of English Literature and Literary Theories

International Peer Reviewed and Refereed English Journal

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ENGLISH LITERATURE AND LITERARY THEORIES (IJELLT)

ISSN: 3107-6505

Vol.:2: Issue: 7: 2026.

(International Peer Reviewed and refereed English Journal)

Editorial Board:

Dr. R. Gobinath

Prof. Sharif Atiquzzaman

Dr. Dr. Aravindan Balakrishnan

Dr. Athisayaraj Jebakumar J

Dr. P. Dinakar

Dr.P.Chitra

Dr. M.K. Praseeda

Dr.S.P. Sasirekha

Prof. D. Deepikadevi

Dr. K.Usha Savithri

Dr. D.Solomon

Dr. S.Subash

Dr. K.M. Keerthika

Dr. B. Lingeswaran

Mr. B. Damodhara Prasath

Ms. P. Sherli

International Journal of English Literature and Literary Theories (IJELLT) is a peer-reviewed, open access academic journal dedicated to promoting research and scholarship in the fields of English language, literature, and literary theories. Published monthly, IJELLT provides a platform for academicians, scholars, educators, and researchers to present their original work to a global audience. The journal upholds the highest standards of editorial integrity and academic excellence through a rigorous double-blind peer-review process. We welcome a wide range of submissions from theoretical and critical analyses to practical research, creative writing, and pedagogical studies related to English literature and language.

From Page to Platform: Insta-Poetry, Digital Storytelling, and the Transformation of Literary Culture

Vimla Devi, Research Scholar, Apex University, Jaipur

Dr. Swati Sharma, Assistant Professor, Apex University, Jaipur

Abstract: The development of Instagram as a marketplace for literary products has led to the appearance of one of the most prominent modern phenomena called Insta-poetry. It is a relatively new type of poetic discourse created by Rupi Kaur, Atticus, Nikita Gill, Nayyirah Waheed, and other authors. This paper aims to present the current changes in literary culture associated with the emergence of Instagram poetry and digital storytelling. The attention to the concept of Insta-poetry is based on the recent appearance, growth, and spread of this phenomenon both in academic literature and in public life. The paper will explore literary Insta-poetry, the digital media ecology, and the changes they bring to the traditional understanding of literary culture. In addition, the paper will analyze literary criticism of Insta-poetry and digital storytelling and discuss the transformation of the category of the canon. The work will further consider one of the first examples of Insta-poetry, Milk and Honey by Rupi Kaur, which was so successful in Instagram as a whole and as a particular product. Eventually, the paper will demonstrate the transformation of literary culture through the introduction of new ways of producing and consuming literature and the changes in the system of literary canons.

Keywords: Insta-poetry, digital storytelling, Rupi Kaur, social media literature, digital humanities, literary culture



International Journal of English Literature and
Literary Theories

Introduction

For most of the twentieth century, poetry as a literary genre was largely confined to the realm of print media. However, the turn of the century has brought a new distribution platform, with Instagram (IG) at its forefront, which has led to the appearance and growth of a new phenomenon called Insta-poetry (Sharma & Saraswat, 2025). Instagram-based poetry, created by such prominent authors as Rupi Kaur, Atticus, Nikita Gill, Lang Leav, and Nayyirah Waheed, has grown exponentially in popularity. Rupi Kaur, in particular, has gained millions of followers on social media for posting short, simple poems often with minimal accompanying line illustrations. The current literary culture is being transformed as Insta-poetry becomes a significant part of the literary field and gains increasing popularity among Instagram users.

Literature in New Media Platform Essay

This phenomenon is not limited to poetry; it is part of what researchers define as digital storytelling. Digital storytelling refers to a growing body of research, as well as reports and commentary in the popular press, on using digital media to create and distribute various types of literature (Genc, 2025). Digital storytelling includes a wide range of activities, from publishing works of fiction in Wattpad and Archive of Our Own to writing Twitter threads, online forums, and interactive tales created with Twine. In many ways, digital storytelling has been driven by the popularity of Instagram, where emerging writers seek to reach wide audiences. The distribution platform's unique features, such as the scroll, feeds, hashtags, and likes, shape the language of digital storytelling, encouraging authors to be concise and creative in their use of multimedia tools. Despite the popularity of this type of literature, literary culture scholars have expressed mixed opinions about digital storytelling and Insta-poetry in particular. This paper aims to investigate the changes that social media, and Instagram in particular, bring to the literary culture. Moreover, this paper will highlight the changes that this phenomenon has brought to the concept of canons by analyzing the work *Milk and Honey* by Rupi Kaur, which was one of the first Insta-poetry books to hit the bookshelves. Eventually, this paper will demonstrate that social media has indeed changed the way people consume literature by introducing new distribution platforms and new forms of discourse.

Literature Review

Research on Instapoetry has skyrocketed in recent years, fueled by both the genre's popularity and critical reception. However, scholars note that it has been largely superficial, fixated on a few prominent Instapoets. Jyoti's (2025) doctoral thesis on Instapoetry as multimodal discourse points this out, arguing that critical responses to Instapoetry have been "selective and inconsistent" while contending that the phenomenon was born out of a need for a more visible space for poets' works, which Instagram offered in spades. Indeed, much research on Instapoetry focuses on Rupi Kaur, with other scholars arguing that the attention to her and her poetry is disproportionate to her overall contribution to the field (Barbosa & Fazano, as cited in Instapoetry literature).

Much research on Instapoetry tackles the phenomenon insofar as it is defined by Rupi Kaur's success as a poet and Instagram influencer. Specifically, several articles discuss Milk and Honey as a case study of a social media-born product that eventually becomes mainstream, with scholars weighing in on the power dynamics of privilege, cultural capital, and the mechanisms of gatekeeping behind such a feat (Aspany, n.d.). Other researchers interact with Kaur's Instagram posts in terms of discourse analysis and feminism, suggesting that her poetry is both a reflection of her trauma, immigrant experience, and misogyny as well as a means of processing it, with her Instagram page being inextricably linked to her authorial persona (see Trajković & Anđelković; Instapoetry literature).

On the other hand, several works on Instapoetry approach it from the perspective of digital literature and the evolution of storytelling. Genc's (2025) piece on social media's effects on storytelling practices touches briefly on the ways in which micro-publishing sites and Instagram in particular enable writers to engage in short-form, multimedia publishing. In similar veins, researchers argue that Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, and other platforms have changed the ways in which contemporary English writers produce their works, leaning into the affordances of the sites (code-switching, identity performance) as creative mechanisms and short-form outputs (Ahmad, 2025). In particular, Wattpad, Twine, and Archive of Our Own have been found to promote reader participation, blur the lines between various genres (including speculative fiction, realism, climate fiction), and destabilize the established canons and gatekeeping mechanisms (Asian Journal of Education and Social Studies, 2025).

Overall, this literature review suggests that there are two key ways in which this research intersects with the current study. Firstly, much research on Instapoetry focuses on its uniqueness as a phenomenon only partially connected to the larger publishing sphere. Secondly, the body of work on Instapoetry does not appear to have reached a consensus yet on the ways in which it mediates literary production, potentially depoliticizing it in favor of capitalistically viable formats.

Theoretical Framework

This paper will utilize two theoretical frameworks: the affordances of social media platforms and literary gatekeeping. The former refers to the ways in which specific Instagram features (square-shaped canvas, character limit, hashtags, likes, shares) shape the content in accordance with Eisenberg's (2019) affordance theory. This approach is useful in analyzing the ways in which Instapoetry interacts with Instagram's affordances to produce a distinctive form of poetry. In particular, the emphasis on the phone screen as the medium of display encourages brevity, punctuation and capitalization as visual elements of the poetry, and hashtags as thematic extensions of the piece. The second theoretical framework comes from the sociology of literature and concerns gatekeeping and the mechanisms by which literary works receive public validation. In particular, Bourdieu's theory of taste and judgment provides a foundation for understanding how Instagram poetry informs literary production in terms of gatekeeping. This perspective is useful in examining the ways in which social media publishing circumvents traditional mechanisms of gatekeeping, such as publisher editing, peer-review, and institutional endorsement, replacing them with crowdsourcing and algorithmic curation (Aspany, n.d.).

The Rise of Insta-Poetry: Form, Aesthetics, and Practice

Instapoetry proper is characterized by a set of formal features: brevity, frequent use of lowercase letters, lack of punctuation, confessional tone, and themes of love, loss, self-love, feminism, and healing. Poetry is often accompanied by a doodle or an illustration, with the two being inextricably linked, reflecting the Instagram-centric nature of the medium. Instagram's interface as a visual platform favors brevity, with the poetry being displayed alongside images and other users' content in a vertical stream.

The brevity of Instapoetry often draws criticism from literary scholars, but it can be seen as a natural outgrowth of the platform's affordances. Just as sonnets responded to the needs of the printed page and the reader's engagement with it, Instapoetry's aphoristic nature reflects the realities of the smartphone screen. It has been argued that poetry is uniquely suited to this mode of delivery due to its intrinsic brevity compared to other genres (Genc, 2025). In the attention economy, when a reader has several seconds to engage with a post before deciding to swipe away, a longer poem would fail to achieve its purpose. Thus, Instapoetry prioritizes accessibility and directness over the condensed, ambiguous, and multi-leveled language of modernist and postmodernist poetry.

In addition, Instapoetry disrupts the relationship between the author and the audience in a way that print publishing could not. While traditional publishing is a highly individual, introspective act, Instapoets often serialize their works on Instagram, interacting with their audiences in between. They may then use this input to refine their works, eventually publishing them in print. In this way, an Instapoet's audiences act as a kind of informal editorial board, with the poets' following engaging in a kind of continuous peer-review (Jyoti, 2025). This dynamic is especially evident in the ways in which the poets react to audience reception of individual poems, incorporating the feedback into later works. It reflects a broader change in the literary production process, fueled by social media and exemplified by self-publishing, which has been noted by researchers (Ahmad, 2025; Asian Journal of Education and Social Studies, 2025).

Digital Storytelling: Multimodality and Platform Affordances

Beyond poetry, the larger phenomenon of digital storytelling informs this paper. Researchers have noted that the rise of digital platforms has transformed narrative fiction in fundamental ways. Genc (2025) conceptualizes digital storytelling as short-form works utilizing various multimedia components, such as voice, animation, and music. He argues that digital storytelling represents a shift in narrative production, with the narrative discourse itself being transformed by the affordances of the technology. Particularly in platforms such as Wattpad, Archive of Our Own, and similar platforms, the mechanics of publishing serialized stories engage the audiences in a unique kind of co-creation. Between installments, story authors may interact with their audiences, responding to their feedback, with a study in Asian Journal of Education and Social Studies (2025) noting that this mode of production fosters the emergence of interactive and climate fiction and the blurring of genre conventions.

Meanwhile, Twitter and similar platforms have enabled short-form fiction writing, with scholars analyzing the ways in which the constraints of the medium (character limit, threading) intersect with code-switching, performance of identity, and the transformation of language (Ahmad, 2025). Overall, researchers argue that digital platforms have enabled greater inclusivity in the realms of literary publishing and storytelling. The gatekeeping function traditionally performed by agents, publishers, and other specialists has been delegated to algorithms (Ahmad, 2025). This has resulted in a more diverse literary ecosystem in terms of authorial voices and styles, with many writers publishing directly on social media platforms without going through traditional publishing channels.

Case Study: Rupi Kaur and Instapoetry Essay

Rupi Kaur's *Milk and Honey*, initially self-published in 2014 after her poems went viral on Instagram and Tumblr, can be used to demonstrate how books are marketed from social media to bookstores. According to Aspany's (n.d.) analysis of the popularity of *Milk and Honey*, Kaur's use of Instagram's algorithm to reach new audiences before her traditional publisher capitalized on the demand demonstrates how the usual book-to-social media cycle was reversed for this bestseller.

A number of critics have interpreted Kaur's poetry through a feminist and post-colonial lens, suggesting that Kaur's focus on themes of trauma, immigration, assault, and recovery resonates with female readers who might not otherwise engage with poetry through traditional publishing channels (Deconstruction of 'The Woman' in Rupi Kaur's Poetry, 2021). However, critics note that Kaur's prominence in scholarly discourse on Instapoetry presents missed opportunities to further examine the work of numerous non-English language poets who also publish their work on Instagram (Missed Possibilities from Unobtainable Data, 2023). While Kaur represents the type of Instapoetry that is routinely reviewed in literary journals, hundreds of other Instagram-based poets do not have similar followings or critical attention. In this way, while Instapoetry is a useful entry point for examining the relationship between social media and traditional publishing, it does not represent the larger phenomenon of online literature beyond one prominent figure.

Democratization versus Gatekeeping: Debates on Literary Value

Criticism of Instapoetry's place in literary studies has centered on debates concerning the merit of the poetry itself. Instapoetry's popularity among Instagram users represents a challenge to traditional canons of literary value that have been established by centuries of literary scholarship and criticism.

Most prominently, Instapoetry's detractors have asserted that the popularity of Instapoetry represents a misplaced emphasis on easily consumable content made available to social media users (The Importance of Instapoetry in Light of Dominant Forms, 2022). The primary way that Instapoetry fits into the dominant forms of literary expression is through its presence on Instagram as a digital space for poetry creation and consumption.

Supporters of Instapoetry's inclusion in literary canons have countered that the poetry's popularity reflects its appeal to audiences beyond the traditional gatekeeping structures of literary publishing. Instapoetry's proponents have cited the relevance of the genre's themes and multimodal presentation to contemporary audiences. For example, Instapoetry's accessibility has allowed it to engage a young audience that is often not served by traditional poetry, and the genre's popularity has made it commercially viable, enabling Instapoets to profit from their work (Jyoti, 2025). Thus, Instapoetry has been incorporated by some critics into broader literary traditions based on the poetry's themes and popularity among readers.

The debate around Instapoetry's value reflects past disagreements among critics about the worth of other genres and modes of publication. The rise of the novel in the eighteenth century sparked similar controversy, with early novelists' works being dismissed as frivolous by defenders of poetry and drama. Similar clashes have occurred in the wake of the rise of genres such as science fiction, fantasy, and graphic novels, as well as various forms of spoken word performances and digital literature. What distinguishes the current debate is that social media's rise has created new ways for literature to gain popularity independent of literary critics, unless and until critics choose to engage with a given work or mode of publication.

The Transformation of Literary Culture: Authorship, Readership, and the Market

A synthesis of the preceding arguments can demonstrate how Instapoetry and digital literature more broadly represent a fundamental transformation of literary culture. First, Instapoetry and similar digital literature projects illustrate a shift in authorship, from a system in which authors rely upon literary gatekeepers to a method in which writers use social media to build an audience with the potential to support their writing careers. Instapoetry's popularity has demonstrated the capacity of digital literature to bypass traditional methods of literary distribution, enabling a new wave of writers to build their audiences independent of university creative writing programs and traditional publishing houses.

For example, many South Asian poets who follow in the tradition of Rupi Kaur have been able to launch their literary careers on Instagram before transitioning to traditional publishing (Sharma & Saraswat, 2025).

Second, Instapoetry represents a shift in readership, from passive consumers of published works to active participants in the literary process. Reading on social media transforms the experience of reading literature in a way that has been previously seen in the rise of other serialized literary forms, such as the novel and modern graphic novels (Asian Journal of Education and Social Studies, 2025). In particular, social media enables readers to engage with literature in comment sections below posts, effectively transforming reader responses into a part of the literary work.

Third, the rise of Instapoetry has transformed the market for literary works, shifting it from one in which books are selected for production based on critical reception to one in which publishers seek out works that have already proven commercially viable. The traditional model of literary publishing, in which a work is published and then received by critics and the public, has been reversed for digital literature. Thus, social media allows writers to build audiences with potential readers before submitting their work to traditional publishing houses, a shift that has transformed the relationship between critics and commercially viable literature (Aspany, n.d.).

Literary historians have identified these changes as fundamental to the evolution of literary cultures. The transformation of the relationship between authors and readers, while not unprecedented, has been facilitated by social media, enabling individuals to participate in literary production without the intervention of traditional gatekeeping figures such as agents, publishers, and critics. Some have interpreted the increased visibility of diverse voices in literary cultures as democratization, while the reduction of critical evaluation has been viewed by others as a diminishment of quality. However, the rise of Instapoetry and digital literature has ushered in a new era for literature.

Works Cited

1. Ahmad, S. (2024). Narrative innovations in the digital age: An analysis of the effectiveness of social media on contemporary English fiction. ResearchGate.
2. Asian Journal of Education and Social Studies. (2025). Digital narratives and reader engagement: Transforming literary forms in the digital era. Asian Journal of Education and Social Studies.
3. Aspany, N. F. (n.d.). Insta-poetry as a popular product: A case study on Rupī Kaur Milk & Honey. Gagarina, 11, 87-100.
4. Barbosa, R., & Fazano, C. A. (2023). Missed possibilities from unobtainable data: The case of Instapoetry and a wish to go beyond Rupī Kaur. ResearchGate.
5. Deconstruction of “the woman” in Rupī Kaur’s poetry. (2021). Webology, 18 (5).
6. Genc, T. (2025). Innovative strategies of the storytelling genre in the era of new digital generation. ResearchGate.
7. International Journal of Social Impact. (2025). Digital storytelling: The future of literature in the age of AI. International Journal of Social Impact.
8. Jyoti. (2025). Instapoetry: Social media’s multimodal phenomenon [Doctoral dissertation].
9. Kaur, R. (2014). Milk and honey . Andrews McMeel Publishing.
10. Rupī Kaur—Unapologetic insta-poet. (2023). ResearchGate.
11. Rupī Kaur: Poetic creation amid the affordances of the Instagram platform. (2023). Revista Extraprensa, Universidade de Sao Paulo.
12. Sharma, E., & Saraswat, S. (2025). From page to screen: The role of digital media in shaping contemporary poetic expressions on Insta poetry of Rupī Kaur . Amity Institute of English Studies and Research, Amity University.
13. The impact of social media platforms on creative writing in English literature. (2025). International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Studies in Technology (IJMRAST).
14. The importance of Instapoetry in light of dominant forms, with special reference to Rupī Kaur’s Milk and Honey. (2022). ResearchGate.



**International Journal of English Literature and
Literary Theories**