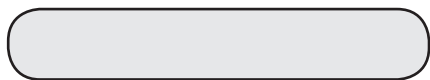


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## Instapoetry: An Exploration of Activism through the Works of Atticus and Kaur

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#### Abstract

Social media remains a constant source of innovation and change in the modern world, including literature and poetry. The two are expressions of their times and reflections of their generation, so it comes as no surprise that today's generation will exert their unique stamp on modern poetry. We have seen a rise in poets using social media as their main publication domain and exchange medium with their readers.

To gather further insight into this relatively new phenomenon, we will explore this topic through a qualitative analysis of the structural integrity of the poems, the topics used for inspiration, the engagement between poets and audiences, and the possible impacts on poetry and literature. These poems will be explored through a qualitative analysis based on the theory of activism. The results show engagement from the younger generation, who are

interested in the topics that these new poets, use since they get inspiration from modern pop cultural topics and events. If this movement continues to gather momentum, it will surely exert far-reaching effects on how we produce and consume poetry. Since this topic is still so new, it can be difficult to predict the outcomes, and there is a need for further exploration of the expansion of this genre.

Keywords: poetry, modern, social media, e-literature, activism, Instapoetry, Instapoets

### الخلاصة

تظل وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي مصدرًا دائمًا للابتكار والتغيير في العالم الحديث، بما في ذلك الأدب والشعر. فكلاهما يعد تعبيرًا عن عصره وانعكاسًا لجيله، لذلك ليس من المستغرب أن يضع الجيل الحالي بصمته الفريدة على الشعر الحديث. لقد شهدنا تزايدًا في استخدام الشعراء لوسائل التواصل الاجتماعي كمنصة رئيسية للنشر ووسيلة للتفاعل مع قرائهم.

ولفهم أعمق لهذا الظاهرة الحديثة نسبيًا، سنستكشف هذا الموضوع من خلال تحليل نوعي يركز على سلامة البنية الشعرية، والموضوعات المستوحاة، ومستوى التفاعل بين الشعراء والجمهور، والتأثيرات المحتملة على الشعر والأدب. سيتم تحليل هذه القصائد من خلال نهج نوعي يستند إلى نظرية النشاط.

وتُظهر النتائج مشاركة واسعة من الجيل الشاب، الذي يجذب إلى الموضوعات

التي يتناولها هؤلاء الشعراء الجدد، حيث يستمدون إلهامهم من قضايا ثقافة البوب الحديثة والأحداث الراهنة. وإذا استمرت هذه الحركة في اكتساب الزخم، فمن المؤكد أنها ستؤثر بشكل عميق على طريقة إنتاج الشعر واستهلاكه. ونظرًا لحداثة هذا الموضوع، قد يكون من الصعب التنبؤ بنتائجه، مما يستدعي مزيدًا من البحث لاستكشاف توسع هذا النوع الأدبي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الشعر، الحديث، وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي، الأدب الإلكتروني، النشاط، شعر الإنستغرام، شعراء الإنستغرام.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

### 1.1 Background

Poetry is an essential component of human consciousness, and it has been part of human experiences since the beginning of civilizations. Poems and songs were arguably our first attempt at maintaining human lore. The oral transfer of stories and traditions from one generation to another was essential for preserving knowledge and paved the way for evolution and innovation (Caesar & Sanasam, 2018). Some cultures such as the Native American and Arabian tribes were renowned for their oral traditions and talent in creating some of the most famous poems. Poetry is a fluid and vibrant expression of human existence in forms that adapt to its current environment. Therefore, it should come as no surprise if social media creates forms and



genres of poetry that reflect the new generation.

### 1.2 Statement of Problem

Social media remains a double-edged sword in all aspects including poetry. There is no denying that platforms such as Instagram and TikTok make poems more accessible to everyone. They are domains where billions of users come to share information and experiences. This makes them an excellent conduit for the democratization of poetry where everyone can have the privilege of exploring literature and poetry with like-minded individuals. But on the flip side, social media is mostly driven by aesthetics and popularity. Content creators are mostly concerned with getting likes and followers that they compromise about what they put on their platforms. They might think they should forgo the essence of their message to appeal to greater audiences. However, it is possible that this “diluted” version could be a true representative of today’s poetry. It would be hasty to condemn it without carefully considering the ramifications. This requires an in-depth understanding of this new poetry which has scarce literature.

### 1.3 Significance of the Study

This study gets its significance from its relevancy to the changing landscape

of artistic expression dominated by new technologies and social media. It will shed light on how these platforms shape artistic freedom of expression. It also tackles the ongoing conversation about accessibility to art and literature. Although there have been great strides in spreading literacy and knowledge, access to these things can be quite expensive and beyond the means of an average person, especially in light of the increasing cost of life. Furthermore, we need to understand how engaging with these new art forms will influence and affect the perceptions and behavioral patterns of the newer and older generations as part of the extended discussion on art and science in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### 1.4 Objectives of the Study

There are several objectives pertaining to our topic that need to be explored.

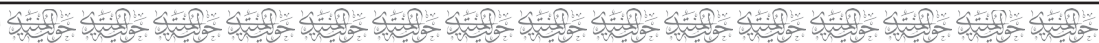
1.4.1 Impact of social media on themes and stylistic forms

1.4.2 Cultural impact of social media poets

1.4.3 Public engagement and acceptance of new Instapoetry

### 1.5 Research Questions

These objectives can be achieved by answering the following research questions.



Q1: How did social media change the content and style of poetry?

Q2: How are these new poems impacting the pop-cultural movement of today's generation?

### 1.6 Scope of the Study

This research will focus on Instagram as the chosen platform for sharing poetry. It has been so closely associated with this new form of poetry that it has coined a new term "Instapoetry". If needed, we might branch out to other popular platforms such as X and TikTok. We will consider the work of some of the most famous Instagram such as Rupi Kaur and Atticus. These poets were pivotal in creating and popularizing this genre, so their work deserves close attention. We will also be exploring the interactions and reactions of the audiences and how they feel about these poems.

### 1.7 Structure of the Study

The study starts with an introduction that provides a background and objectives to answer the research questions. The literature review offers more insight into the topic and correlates the existing literature to what will be explored. The methodology details the approaches for data collection and analysis. We will present our findings and interpret all the results to end up with cohesive

conclusions. We will furthermore offer some possibilities for future studies and recommendations.

### 1.8 Limitations of the Study

This study is limited to exploring Instapoetry which is not necessarily the only type of modern poem. There could be other poets who might not be so associated with social media. We will also be reviewing some of the most popular poems which might not give a comprehensive representation of the poems because these creators might be conforming with what appeals to the masses which causes them to dilute or alter their work.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

Social media was the precursor of new artistic expression and allowed for more creative freedom than ever. New genres of poetry have emerged with new forms and consumption which led to new ways and scopes of influence. This section considers some of the most notable shifts in the paradigm of writing and consuming poetry.

### 1.1 The Social Equalizer

Following the European Renaissance, books and literature became more accessible to the general public. This does not mean that there was equality in the ease of access. Books can be incredibly expensive to buy



and publish. Until recently, the most popular way for any poet to promote their work is through printing their material at personal expense or through a publishing house. Most poets were unable to get their material out there because of the monopoly of printed publication. This is no longer the case because social media allows everyone access to infinite readers by bypassing all the middlemen between author and reader. In a previous study, Montgomery (2020) showcased Instagram as an open platform that would allow individuals from different academic and socioeconomic backgrounds to have a voice. This appeals to the newer generation that is accustomed to instant gratification. They want to easily access and engage with their preferred content. This made Instapoets a popular option for mass consumption of artistic and literary creations.

### 1.2 New Styles

As mentioned before, poems are fluid in form and content. When we think of poetry, we often associate it with the English language which limits the scope of our perception. Many languages have even more diversity than English such as Arabic which is rich in different meters. Another example is the Japanese Haiku which was unique to that language before becoming popular

in other languages including English. This variation came from a desire to constantly evolve and diversify the modes of expression. While Instapoetry is relatively new and shocking to some elements, it is a natural progression to appeal to a newer audience. One of the most glaring differences is the reliability of aesthetic appeal and brevity of what is popular nowadays (Murray, 2019). This does not diminish the value of these poems because it takes talent to infuse so many ideas and emotions in concise sentences and create a visual medium that is attractive and engaging for readers. There was a natural pushback from traditional literary critics who considered this form of poetry inferior due to its brevity and reliance on visual stimulation. Jones (2021) discussed this division by citing the work of Rupi Kaur, one of the most prominent Instapoets, who was credited and discredited for her style. Consumers admire her ability to concentrate on her work making it readily available for those who need this dose of pleasure. She was also criticized for diluting complex experiences into neat and garish parcels that further fuel the desire for instant gratification without real contemplation.

### 1.3 Instapoetry in the Modern Poetry Landscape

As much as critics would want to deny

it, Instapoets have had a significant impact on the modern landscape of poetry. Names such as Rupi Kaur and Atticus have become household names among readers. They have millions of loyal followers with high engagement in terms of likes and shares. These followers relate to this content and seek to spread it to other readers on Instagram and other social media platforms. They talk about the things the younger generations struggle with such as identity, sexuality, love, and mental health (Smith & Harper, 2022). Even the stylistic delivery mode appeals to these masses. Traditionalists always argue this mass appeal is a hindrance because it is a sign of pandering. However, let us remember that Mozart's music was once considered "fast" and Shakespeare's tales were attended by all men high and low. Being popular does not always mean something is not good.

#### 1.4 Engagement

This is another aspect of Instapoets that differs significantly from traditional poetry. There is an open and direct communication channel between readers and poets. Through likes, comments, and shares, the poet is getting direct and unfiltered feedback from their readers (Taylor, 2020). People tend to be brutally honest online comfortable with the cloak of

anonymity. Poets get to experience the real impact their words have on their readers. They can adapt and grow in their craft because of this direct connection. It empowers both sides and allows them to evolve hand in hand.

#### 1.5 Controversy

There is an ongoing debate about the relevancy of Instapoetry. Plenty of critics accept that there is a considerable cultural shift, but they do not consider it a positive development. This transformation threatens the traditional molds for art and poetry. They also say that algorithms and marketing might obscure other poets and forms of poetry on social media (Brown, 2019). As we have seen with almost every trend before, once something becomes popular, others will give up their originality in favor of aligning with what has the most mass appeal.

### Chapter 3: Research Methodology

This research will rely on a qualitative methodology for analyzing the new forms of Instapoetry and the engagement between authors and readers. We want to focus on a few of the most popular pieces and their creators to get an inkling about this genre.





### 1.1 Research Design

This study is a qualitative approach with a descriptive analysis of the poems. We want to examine the relationships between the themes of modern life and those that are reflected in today's life, especially on social media. We explore the correlation between the new forms in terms of stylistics and visual expression.

We will be analyzing the results within the context of activism. According to Karmakar (2024), activism is a fluid concept relating to various life concepts. The study will focus on the literary activism that these poets are engaged in. The themes of love, liberation, and mental health are the pillars of this literary activism movement. This is not new to poetry which has always been a catalyst for challenging norms and breaking conventions (Ekmark, 2022). The new poets embody this movement in their new style and delivery.

### 1.2 Population and Sample

The population of the study is related to the Instapoems of Rupī Kaur and Atticus. We will choose some of their most famous poems with high engagement. This will give us an indication of what is popular yet offers some variety of content. The main source of this material is Instagram as it is the most popular forum for these

types of poems.

### 1.3 Data Collection and Analysis

The data was collected over two weeks. This does not mean that the data was restricted to that timeframe because we relied on relevancy rather than chronological order. We wanted to get enough material from the comment section to show the quantity and quality of engagement in said poems. These poems and comments were then analyzed using descriptive analysis as well as some level of compare/contrast. The duration does not reflect the engagement with the poems as we have chosen material that has not been recently published. The scope of this study does not involve the analysis of the engagement as it is happening.

### 1.4 Ethical Considerations

The poems are available online for all users, and there are no restrictions on their use as we will not be profiting in any way or have any personal conflict of interest with them. Because we will be using online comments, we will not be using direct quotes from any user as we do not have their consent. We will paraphrase and summarize the content of their comments while maintaining total anonymity of their names or any other personal information. None of the information gathered will be stored

or used outside the context of this study.

#### Chapter 4: Analysis

We will divide this chapter into two main sections. The first concerns the analysis of the poems' style and form, and the second is about engagement. We will be considering the work of each of our chosen poets and speaking about the engagement at the same time. As with any comment section, there will always be two extremes; the "haters" who will condemn anything

and everything and the "followers" who cannot see any wrong in anything she does. This is true for all the poets we will discuss later on. We will be disregarding both ends of the spectrum and focus on the middle ground. We wanted to discuss some of the Instapoems that resonate with the audience. We will start with two poems by Rupi Kaur from her posts on Instagram and other social media platforms.

and here you are living  
despite it all

- rupi kaur



you treat them as if  
they have a heart like yours  
but not everyone can be  
as soft and as tender as you  
you don't see  
the person they are  
you see the person  
they have the potential to be  
you give and give till  
they have taken everything  
out of you and leave  
you empty

- rupi kaur



Rupi has two distinct styles that she uses, but all her poems are accompanied by an image that is usually in black and white. Sometimes these images are rough such as in the first example above, and others have more details such as the second. She has some highly

condensed poems such as the first one that are between one to three or four sentences. She sometimes even chooses to have one word accompanied by an image. She also writes longer poems, but they generally do not exceed half a page or so because they need to be

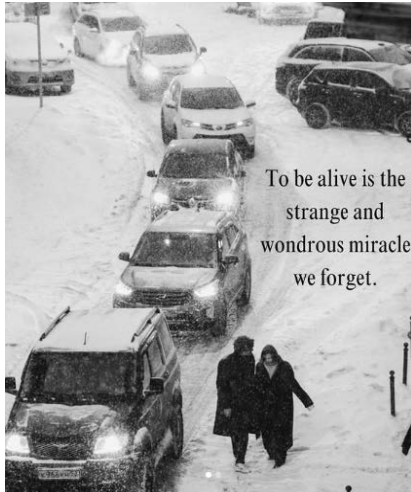


posted as an image on Instagram. She wrote some longer poems in her book that was published, but her social media posts tend to adhere to the first two styles.

In both cases, she uses a free verse with an emphasis on ideas rather than musicality. Rupi chooses simple words for her purpose. She does not attempt to rhyme or complicate her verses. She does use too many figures of speech because she is more concerned with resonating with her audience. The author has some common themes that are typical of her poems. She talks a lot about self-love which is mentioned in both poems. She taps into the loneliness that of her generation feels when they are faced with mental health challenges and emotional disappointment. Her generation has a different perspective about self-worth and love than older generations which makes them more vulnerable. However, their courage to confront these challenges and mental illness conditions can empower them

to become stronger individuals because they face their fears and shortcomings. The comments are mostly positive. They consider Rupi's poems to be inspirational. This seems to be a highly common theme within the community. Her poems are used on other platforms on pages specializing in inspirational posts. Many of the comments also said she speaks about what they all think. Rupi is a big proponent of personal empowerment and her readers seem to latch on to that in her work. Atticus is different from Rupi in more than gender. He is an anonymous poet who has managed to keep his identity a secret from the world. His magnetism earned him the nickname Lord Byron among some of his diehard fans. There are many rumors and suspicions about his identity online, but no one can be sure who he is since he always wears a mask during public appearances. He does seem to embody the typical American good looks according to his fans.





You are worth your imperfections  
 you are worth your bad days  
 you are worth your good  
 you are worth your confusion  
 you are worth your insecurities  
 you are worth fighting for  
 and you are worth loving.  
 And that's a fck'ing fact.

Atticus

He seems to have a similar approach to that of Rupi Kaur. His poems tend to be short with no specific meter. He also writes condensed poems as well as longer ones. He promotes his published works that can be a bit longer. He has more visual freedom than Rupi allows herself. He does not necessarily include an image in his work, and even that can be a video, drawing, or animation. Sometimes, he only uses words with no added visual content. The focus remains on what will properly convey the message instead of relying on complex imagery. He is known to use colloquial words and expressions of the spoken language.

Atticus exudes confidence that some would call arrogance. Even though his poems are not necessarily self-centered, his presence is just as impactful as his work. His air of mystery is fed by his anonymity. Atticus mainly targets the

younger generation by referencing themes they connect with. He speaks about the challenges of finding a genuine connection in today's world. His work about romance embraces imperfection; he thinks that we all deserve to be loved along with the imperfections that make us unique. His romantic figure is reflected in his work as he speaks about a genuine connection that makes us feel comfortable in our skins. He does not shy away from the reality of modern life, but he advocates optimism that we will eventually find that missing piece that would complete us.

His fans are not limited to fangirls as you might expect. His confidence does not mean he cannot be vulnerable when writing about critical issues such as mental health and disappointment in life. He has the typical bravado, but there is a layer of sensitivity to his work that attracts people to his work. In a



world of toxic masculinity, Atticus has struck a balance between the tough guy and the sensitive soul.

The two poets do not initially appear to have much in common. They have different genders, sexualities, and cultural backgrounds. They do belong to the same generation and have similar outlooks on life. They want to encourage their readers to be self-empowered and strong. Activism is all about change, and this message resonates in their poems. The poets show bravery in expressing vulnerability that was often discouraged before. This is their form of activism where societal norms of gender and gender characteristics are questioned and refuted for the sake of emotional satisfaction. The intriguing aspect is that this call for a “softer” and more accepting society transcends genders and brings all under one umbrella.

### Chapter 5: Conclusion

Instapoetry is a product of the modernization of societal norms and ethics. This newness can make many skeptical about the validity and integrity of these poets. They use a visual medium to engage with others who are used to ingesting content in this form. They can even break barriers and reach wider audiences because they talk about the human experience. Such sentiments are universal regardless of age, gender, and

culture. This study explored some of the most popular poets’ main themes and styles. It can be expanded to explore each of the themes of love, mental health, and empowerment. There is also an avenue to explore the differences between various poets. Engagement can be another study for more in-depth knowledge about how different people engage with these poets.



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