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DIGITAL SELF-REPRESENTATION IN INSTA-POETRY AND ONLINE LITERARY EXPRESSION: AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION AND PLATFORM POWER

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Abstract
The expansion of social media has transformed the material, cultural and communicative conditions of literary production. Insta-poetry, broadly understood as poetry designed for or substantially circulated through social-media environments, demonstrates this transformation particularly clearly because poetic meaning is produced through the interaction of words, typography, images, captions, hashtags, performance and audience response. This conceptual paper examines digital self-representation in Insta-poetry and online literary expression, with particular attention to identity performance, multimodality, audience participation, algorithmic visibility and platform power. Drawing on performativity, platform-affordance theory and multimodal discourse perspectives, the paper undertakes a qualitative conceptual analysis of representative practices associated with Instagram and short-form video poetry, including Nigerian digital-poetic practices. The analysis shows that digital self-representation is neither purely spontaneous self-expression nor merely strategic branding. Rather, it is a recursive process in which lived experience is selected, compressed, visually encoded, published, interpreted and fed back through audience interaction and platform metrics. The Nigerian dimension demonstrates that digital poetry can also carry indigenous oral aesthetics, code-switching, social commentary and activist concerns into global networked publics. The paper argues that the principal contribution of Insta-poetry lies in its ability to expand literary participation while simultaneously subjecting poetic visibility to platform logics. It recommends multimodal digital-literacy approaches, culturally responsive literary pedagogy and greater scholarly attention to algorithmic conditions of literary visibility.

Keywords: *Digital self-representation; Insta-poetry; digital poetry; online literary expression audience participation ; platform Power.*

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Introduction

The digital revolution has changed not only where literature is published but also the material conditions through which literary meaning is produced, circulated and received. Social-media platforms have become important sites of literary encounter because they combine publication, visual design, interpersonal communication and audience analytics within the same interface. Instagram poetry is especially significant because the poem may function simultaneously as literary text, image, profile content, social invitation and personal-branding device. Recent scholarship treats Instapoetry as a platform-specific phenomenon in which poets adapt literary production to the affordances and routines of social media rather than simply transferring pre-existing print poems to a screen (Penke, 2023). The transformation is therefore best understood as a change in literary ecology. A printed poem normally reaches readers through relatively stable material forms: a book, journal, anthology or classroom text. A digital poem may instead appear in a scrolling feed, surrounded by advertisements, photographs, videos and other competing forms of attention. The reader can comment, share, save, remix or respond immediately. The poem can also disappear from practical visibility when platform recommendation systems change. Caldeira Júnior and Martins (2023), for example, demonstrate that analysis of Rupi Kaur's poetry becomes more productive when the affordances of Instagram are considered as part of the literary environment rather than as neutral background.

Digital self-representation is central to this transformation. A poet on social media presents more than an isolated text. Profile photographs, biographies, captions, recurring typography, visual motifs, posting rhythms and interactions with followers collectively contribute to the construction of a recognizable public persona. The poet's identity consequently becomes partly textual and partly infrastructural. The account, feed and audience become part of the conditions through which literary identity is interpreted. The central thesis of this paper is that Insta-poetry produces a double movement: it democratizes literary participation by reducing some traditional barriers to publication and simultaneously intensifies regulation through platform visibility systems, attention metrics and expectations of continuous self-presentation. This tension explains why digital poetry should neither be dismissed as simplistic nor celebrated uncritically as inherently democratic. Its significance lies in the contradictory space between agency and constraint. The emergence of social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, Tumblr, and YouTube has altered how literature is created, distributed, consumed, and interpreted across global audiences. In this evolving media landscape, literature is no longer restricted to printed books, academic institutions, or conventional publishing houses. Instead, literary expression increasingly exists within digital environments characterized by interactivity, multimodality, algorithmic circulation, and participatory engagement. One of the most prominent manifestations of this transformation is Insta-poetry, a digital literary form that combines concise poetic language with visual aesthetics and online self-presentation. Insta-poetry has emerged as a cultural phenomenon that reflects broader shifts in communication, identity formation, and literary creativity in the twenty-first century (Page, 2020).

Digital self-representation refers to the ways individuals construct, negotiate, and perform identity within online spaces through

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language, images, videos, symbols, and interactive communication. Social media users continuously shape their digital identities through carefully curated posts, captions, hashtags, and visual content designed for public visibility and audience interaction. In online literary environments, self-representation becomes deeply connected to creativity, emotional disclosure, personal branding, and performative identity. Consequently, Insta-poetry functions not merely as literary production but also as a mode of self-performance through which writers communicate personal experiences, emotional struggles, social realities, and ideological positions to digitally connected audiences (Cover, 2016).Digital literary expression has become strongly associated with emotional culture and public vulnerability in online s paces. Many Insta-poets write about trauma, heartbreak, anxiety, depression, identity crises, gender inequality, racism, migration, healing, loneliness, and empowerment. Social media platforms encourage emotional visibility by rewarding relatable and emotionally expressive content with likes, shares, comments, and algorithmic promotion.

The increasing popularity of Insta-poetry demonstrates how digital technologies have democratized literary participation by allowing individuals to bypass traditional publishing structures and directly reach global audiences. Unlike conventional literary systems that rely heavily on publishing gatekeepers, editorial institutions, and academic recognition, social media enables writers to distribute literary works instantly through digital networks. Poets such as Rupi Kaur, Nikita Gill, Atticus, and Nayyirah Waheed have gained international recognition through online platforms rather than through traditional literary institutions. Their popularity illustrates how digital media has transformed literary visibility and redefined contemporary authorship (Murray, 2018). Insta-poetry is particularly significant because it combines literary expression with visual culture. Poems are often presented alongside photographs, illustrations, minimalist typography, digital art, handwritten fonts, or emotionally symbolic imagery. This multimodal presentation enhances emotional resonance while simultaneously adapting poetry to the visual culture of social media platforms. The aesthetics of Insta-poetry reflect broader transformations in digital communication where textual meaning increasingly interacts with images, layout design, and platform-specific affordances. Scholars argue that contemporary digital literature cannot be understood solely through textual analysis because meaning production now occurs through the interaction of linguistic and visual elements within technologically mediated environments (Rettberg, 2019).

Digital self-representation in online literary spaces also raises important questions concerning authenticity and performance. Although social media encourages self-expression, it simultaneously promotes curated self-presentation shaped by visibility metrics, audience expectations, and algorithmic structures. Online poets often balance genuine emotional disclosure with strategic self-branding practices intended to increase engagement and digital influence. This phenomenon reflects broader theories of performativity, which suggest that identity is constructed through repeated acts of representation and social interaction rather than existing as a fixed or stable essence (Butler, 1990). In digital literary spaces, poetry becomes a performative act through which writers negotiate visibility, intimacy, and social recognition. The relationship between identity and technology has become

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increasingly important in contemporary literary studies because digital platforms influence not only what individuals communicate but also how they communicate it. The structure of Instagram, for example, privileges brevity, immediacy, visual appeal, and audience interaction. As a result, Insta-poetry often employs concise language, emotionally direct statements, fragmented syntax, and aesthetically minimalist forms designed for rapid consumption within scrolling interfaces. These stylistic features demonstrate how technological environments shape literary form and reading practices. Contemporary digital literature therefore reflects the convergence of technological affordances, audience expectations, and cultural communication patterns (Hayles, 2017).

Despite the growing visibility of Insta-poetry, critical discussions sometimes reduce the phenomenon to a debate about whether short social-media poems constitute 'real' poetry. Such a binary is inadequate because it concentrates on the verbal text while neglecting the technological, visual and social conditions through which the text becomes meaningful. A digital poem may depend on line spacing, font, image, caption, hashtag, screen size, timing and audience response. Ignoring these dimensions produces an incomplete account of the genre. Social media encourages users to disclose personal experiences, yet disclosure takes place within environments organised around visibility and engagement. The poet may therefore experience a pressure to transform vulnerability into communicable content. Emotional language can generate solidarity, but it can also become part of a personal brand. This creates an ethical and analytical problem: how should scholars distinguish expressive agency from the platform-driven commodification of the self?

Theoretical and Analytical Framework

The paper integrates three perspectives: performativity, platform affordances and multimodality.

Performativity

Performativity provides a framework for understanding identity as constituted through repeated acts rather than as a completely stable essence (Butler, 1990). Applied to digital poetry, the theory directs attention to repetition: repeated themes of healing, feminism, heartbreak, migration or resilience; repeated visual motifs; recurring linguistic choices; and repeated forms of audience address. Through such patterns, the account becomes legible as a particular kind of literary self. The digital environment extends performativity because repetition is measurable. Likes, comments, shares and follower responses create visible feedback. A poet can therefore encounter audience interpretations almost immediately. This does not mean that the audience determines identity completely, but it means identity construction becomes relational. The poet anticipates audiences, responds to them and sometimes adjusts future content.

Platform Affordances

Platform-affordance theory shifts attention from what the poet wants to communicate to what the technological environment enables, encourages or constrains. Instagram affords visual presentation, short captions, hashtags, comments, sharing and profile curation. TikTok affords video, voice, music, movement, editing and algorithmically recommended short-form content. These affordances do not mechanically determine creativity, but they influence the range of practical

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possibilities available to creators.

Recent research demonstrates the value of treating platform affordances as part of literary analysis. Caldeira Júnior and Martins (2023) examined Kaur's Instagram practice through the relationship between poetic creation and platform affordances, while Penke (2023) situates Instapoetry within platform-specific production and reception routines. The implication is methodological: the platform should be analysed alongside the poem.

Multimodality

Multimodality explains how meaning is distributed across modes such as written language, image, typography, colour, spatial arrangement, sound, movement and gesture. In digital poetry, the poem is often not exhausted by its verbal transcript. Its line breaks, visual position, background, font and accompanying image can influence interpretation. Brusselaers (2024) similarly identifies multimodality and self-reflexivity as central to the study of Instapoetry.

Together, the three perspectives create a focused analytical lens: performativity asks how the self is repeatedly constructed; platform theory asks how technological affordances shape the possibilities of construction and circulation; multimodality asks how different semiotic modes combine to produce meaning.

Analytical Procedure

Analysis proceeds in seven steps. First, the study identifies the communicative situation: who is presenting, on which platform and to what implied audience. Second, the verbal text is examined for diction, lineation, repetition, pronouns, code-switching and rhetorical strategies. Third, visual elements are examined, including typography, spacing, image, colour and composition. Fourth, captions and hashtags are analysed as framing devices. Fifth, audience affordances such as comments, shares and remix possibilities are considered. Sixth, the relationship between creative agency and platform pressure is interpreted. Seventh, the cultural implications of the case are considered, especially where Nigerian or African identities are involved. This procedure responds directly to the reviewer's concern that the original manuscript named theoretical concepts without consistently showing how they illuminate concrete practices. The revised approach makes the relationship among theory, evidence and interpretation explicit.

Step-by-Step Analytical Model

The analytical model below converts the conceptual framework into an operational sequence that can be applied to a digital poem. It also provides a practical structure for future empirical studies in which a larger corpus of posts could be examined systematically.

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Figure 1. Step-by step analytical procedure

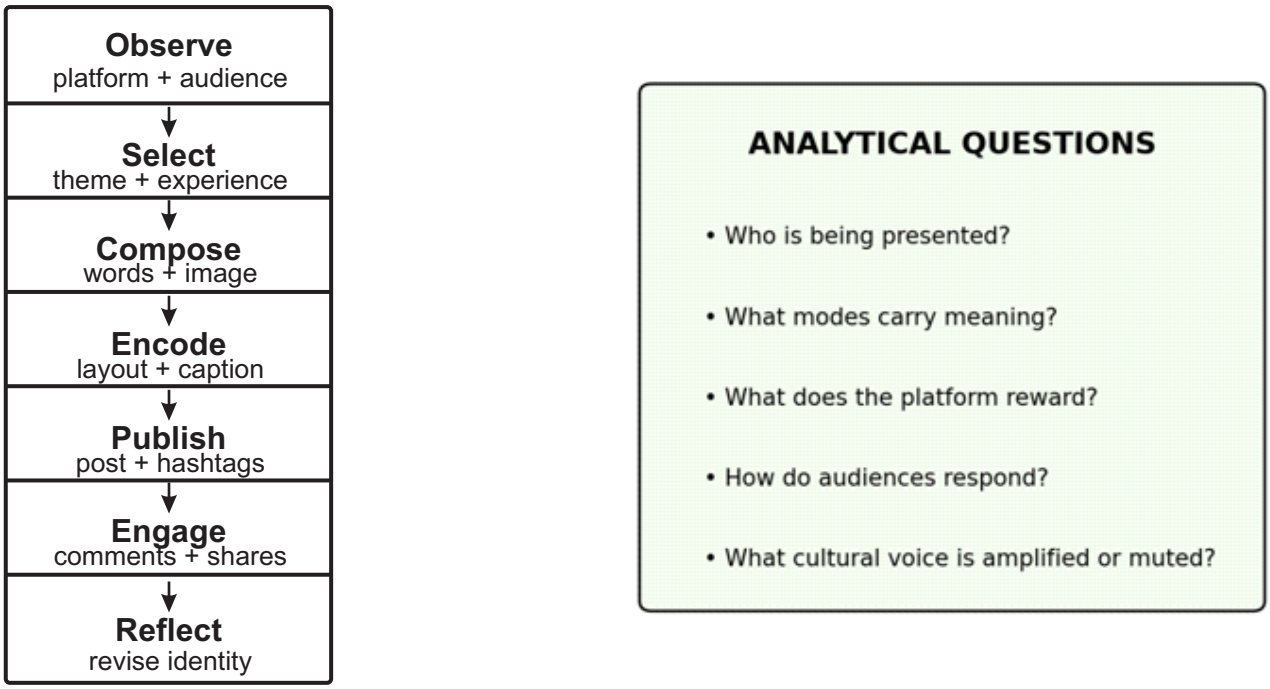


Figure 1. Step-by-step analytical procedure for examining digital self-representation.

Step 1—Observe: identify the platform, account context, visible audience cues and technological format. Step 2—Select: identify the lived experience or social issue being foregrounded. Step 3—Compose: examine how words, line breaks and poetic devices construct the message. Step 4—Encode: examine typography, image, colour, caption and hashtags. Step 5—Publish: consider how the work is positioned for mobile viewing and circulation. Step 6—Engage: examine the forms of audience response the platform enables. Step 7—Reflect: interpret what the combined process reveals about identity, agency, visibility and power. The sequence is deliberately recursive rather than linear. Audience response can influence future selection and composition. Platform changes can also require new encoding strategies. Consequently, digital self-representation should be viewed as a cycle of production, circulation, reception and revision.

Analytical Questions

For each illustrative case, the following questions guide interpretation: What version of the self is being made visible? What textual features construct that identity? What visual or multimodal choices intensify the message? What does the platform make easier or harder? How can audiences participate? What forms of cultural identity are foregrounded? What pressures toward branding, visibility or emotional labour are present?

Illustrative Case Analysis: Rupi Kaur and Instagram Affordances

Rupi Kaur provides a useful international case because her work demonstrates the interaction of short poetic texts, minimalist visual design, personal branding and platform circulation. Scholarship has examined her poetry not

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only as verbal literature but also as a practice shaped by Instagram's affordances. Caldeira Júnior and Martins (2023) followed Kaur's posts and explicitly connected poetic creation to the platform environment. Paquet (2019) likewise argues that Instagram poetry combines poetry and a self-help aesthetic while relying heavily on multimodal presentation. The analytical importance of Kaur's work is not simply that it is popular. Rather, the case demonstrates how a literary identity can be assembled across a coherent visual and thematic ecosystem. The poem, image, author photograph and account presentation can reinforce one another. This creates what may be termed an integrated literary persona: the reader encounters not only a poem but a recognisable authorial world.

Textual Compression

Kaur's widely discussed style illustrates the importance of compression. Short lines and direct statements reduce the amount of processing required during scrolling while retaining emotional intensity. Such compression can be interpreted as adaptation to platform conditions rather than automatically as a lack of craft. The critical question is whether the simplicity is functional, strategic and aesthetically coherent.

Visual Consistency

Minimalist typography and small illustrative forms can make the poem visually identifiable before it is fully read. The visual design therefore performs a gatekeeping function within the attention economy: it helps a post become recognisable among competing content. At the same time, repeated visual conventions contribute to the author's identity as a brand.

The case therefore illustrates the paper's central thesis. Platform affordances can expand literary reach while simultaneously encouraging creators to make their literary identity visually consistent, emotionally accessible and continuously visible. Agency and regulation operate together.

Text, Typography and Visual Self-Presentation

Digital poetry requires attention to the material arrangement of language on the screen. Line breaks can slow or accelerate reading. Lowercase lettering can produce an impression of intimacy or informality. Large blank spaces can isolate a phrase and increase its emotional weight. A handwritten font can suggest personal authenticity even when the poem is digitally produced. These choices are not merely decorative; they participate in meaning-making.

Recent scholarship continues to emphasise this point. Brusselaers (2024) describes multimodality as a significant feature of Instapoetry, while later work on digital poetry argues that textual, visual and platform dimensions need to be considered together. A poem that appears as a screenshot is therefore not equivalent to the same words copied into a conventional essay. The visual arrangement changes the reading event.

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Figure 2. Multimodal construction of the digital poem

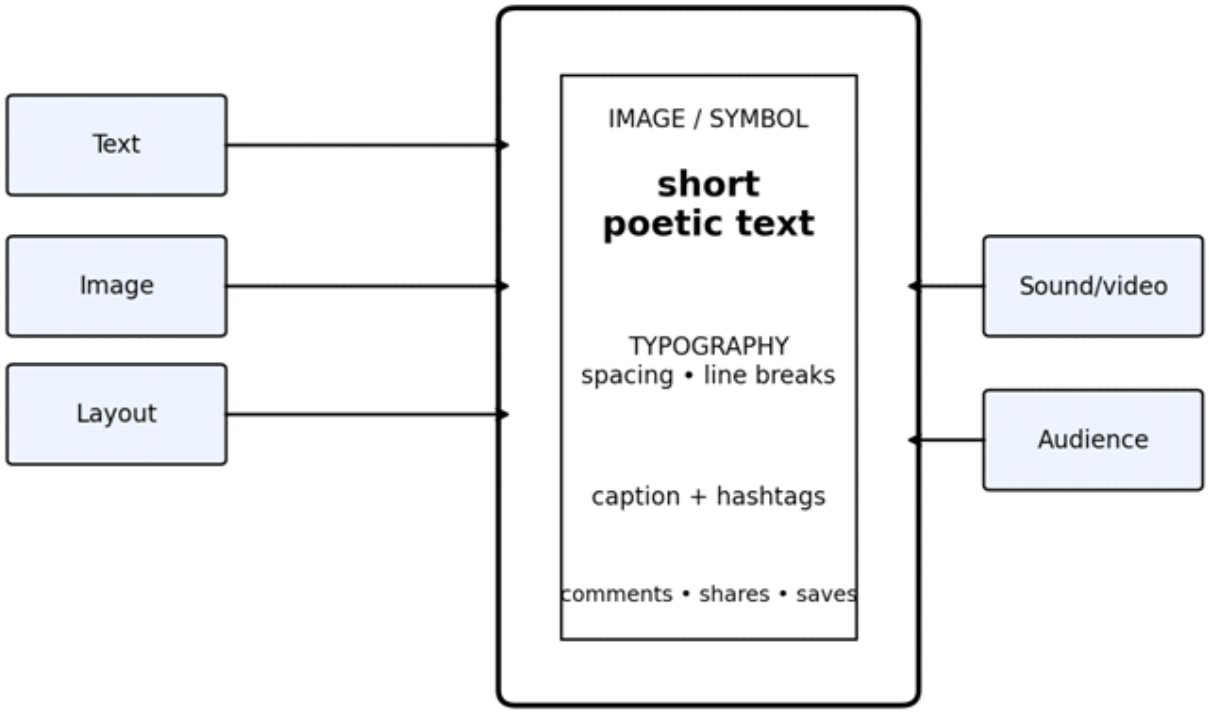


Figure 2. Multimodal construction of a digital poem.

The diagram demonstrates five interacting layers: text, image, layout, sound/video and audience response. Not every poem uses all five. The analytical point is that meaning may be distributed among several modes. In TikTok poetry, for instance, vocal intensity, facial expression and background music can become as important as the written words.

Illustrative Nigerian Poem 1: 'Harmattan Morning'

The following is an original illustrative composition created solely for this study. It is designed to demonstrate how a Nigerian local environment can be translated into an Instagram-style multimodal poem.

Illustrated Nigerian Digital Poem: "Harmattan Morning"

Original illustrative composition for analytical demonstration; not attributed to an existing poet.

HARMATTAN MORNING

The morning arrives
wearing dust.

A bus coughs
at the junction.

Mothers wrap their children
inside bright sweaters
against a cold
that is not winter.

I open my phone
and the sky opens too—

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brown,
wide,
remembering
every road home.

Suggested visual treatment: pale dust-textured background; a faint road line; small bus icon; wide spacing around the final stanza. The visual design should reinforce atmosphere without overpowering the words.

Identity Performance and Construction of Digital Self

The concept of identity performance has become central to discussions of digital culture and online literary expression in the twenty-first century. Social media environments encourage users to continuously construct, negotiate, edit, and display versions of themselves before public audiences. In digital literary spaces such as Instagram, TikTok, Tumblr, and X, identity is not simply expressed but actively performed through language, aesthetics, emotions, and audience interaction. Insta-poetry particularly exemplifies this phenomenon because poets often merge autobiographical narration with curated digital personas, creating literary identities that exist simultaneously as artistic voices and social media performances. Consequently, the digital poet functions not only as a writer but also as a visible online personality navigating attention, relatability, intimacy, and public engagement within networked environments (Marwick, 2015). The performative nature of digital identity aligns with poststructuralist theories that understand identity as fluid, constructed, and socially negotiated rather than fixed or stable. In online literary environments, identity emerges through repeated acts of communication, self-disclosure, visual representation, and emotional narration. The poet's digital presence is constructed through carefully selected photographs, captions, typography, hashtags, profile descriptions, aesthetic consistency, and patterns of audience interaction. These elements collectively produce a recognizable literary persona that audiences consume alongside the poetry itself. Thus, in Insta-poetry, the poet and the poem become inseparable components of digital self-representation (Cover, 2016). Social media platforms encourage visibility through algorithmic systems that reward engagement and interaction. As a result, poets are often compelled to construct emotionally accessible identities capable of attracting audience attention and sustaining online relevance.

Digital self-representation in online poetry reflects the increasing influence of influencer culture on literary production. Successful Insta-poets frequently cultivate distinctive personal brands that extend beyond poetry into lifestyle representation, activism, fashion, wellness, and motivational discourse. Their literary identities become intertwined with broader digital branding practices involving visual consistency, audience management, collaborations, sponsorships, and monetization. In this context, poetry functions not only as artistic communication but also as a mechanism for building digital influence and sustaining public visibility within competitive attention economies (Duffy & Hund, 2019). The commercialization of literary identity raises important questions concerning authenticity and commodification in digital culture. Critics argue that social media platforms

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transform emotional expression into consumable content optimized for engagement metrics such as likes, shares, comments, and follower growth. Poems about mental health, heartbreak, empowerment, and self-love often circulate widely because they resonate emotionally with audiences and encourage digital interaction. Consequently, literary expression becomes entangled with platform capitalism, where emotional visibility contributes to personal branding and economic opportunities. Nevertheless, supporters contend that online poetry democratizes literary culture by making creative expression more accessible to broader audiences outside traditional publishing institutions (Cotter, 2019).

Identity performance in Insta-poetry also intersects significantly with gender representation and feminist discourse. Female poets have particularly utilized digital platforms to challenge patriarchal narratives, reclaim bodily autonomy, and articulate experiences of trauma, sexism, abuse, and emotional survival. Online literary spaces enable women to narrate personal experiences that may previously have been marginalized within mainstream literary institutions. Through poetry, female writers construct empowered digital identities that resist silence and create communities of solidarity among readers sharing similar experiences. The popularity of feminist Insta-poetry demonstrates how digital literary expression functions as both personal storytelling and political intervention within contemporary media culture (Kanai, 2019). Similarly, digital poetry has become an important space for queer identity performance and LGBTQ+ visibility. Social media provides opportunities for queer writers to explore themes of identity, belonging, desire, marginalization, and self-acceptance within supportive online communities. Digital literary expression allows LGBTQ+ individuals to narrate experiences often excluded from dominant cultural narratives while simultaneously finding affirmation through audience interaction and communal engagement. Online poetry therefore contributes to broader processes of identity validation and cultural recognition within digital publics (Hayles 2017).

The emergence of AI-generated literary content further complicates discussions of identity and authorship in digital literary spaces. Artificial intelligence technologies increasingly participate in content creation, aesthetic production, and audience interaction within online environments. As AI-generated poetry becomes more sophisticated, questions arise concerning authenticity, creativity, originality, and the human dimensions of literary self-expression. The growing presence of AI within digital culture challenges traditional assumptions about authorship and raises important ethical concerns regarding the future of online literary identity (Murray, 2022). Ultimately, identity performance in Insta-poetry and online literary expression reflects broader transformations in contemporary culture where selfhood is increasingly mediated through digital technologies. Online literary spaces function as environments of creativity, emotional visibility, community formation, activism, branding, and cultural negotiation. Insta-poetry demonstrates how individuals use literature to construct meaningful

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identities within rapidly evolving digital societies shaped by algorithms, platform economies, and global connectivity.

Language Simplicity and Accessibility in Insta-Poetry

One of the most distinguishing features of Insta-poetry and online literary expression is the deliberate use of simple, accessible, and emotionally direct language. Unlike many forms of traditional poetry that emphasize complex symbolism, dense metaphorical structures, and sophisticated linguistic experimentation, Insta-poetry frequently employs short sentences, conversational tones, uncomplicated vocabulary, and emotionally transparent statements. This stylistic simplicity has become central to the popularity and global reach of online poetry because it enables broad audiences to engage with literary content quickly and emotionally within fast-paced digital environments (Pressman, 2019). The accessibility of Insta-poetry reflects broader transformations in contemporary reading practices associated with digital media culture. Social media platforms encourage rapid scrolling, fragmented attention spans, and brief moments of engagement with content. Readers often encounter poems while multitasking, commuting, or casually browsing online feeds. Consequently, digital poetry adapts to these reading conditions by prioritizing brevity, clarity, and immediate emotional resonance. Poems are often designed to be understood within seconds while still creating affective impact through relatable emotional themes and minimalist expression (Hayles, 2017).

The conversational quality of Insta-poetry contributes significantly to its emotional accessibility. Many digital poems resemble personal confessions, diary entries, affirmations, or intimate conversations rather than formally structured literary texts. This conversational tone creates the impression of closeness and authenticity between poets and readers. Audiences frequently interpret such poetry as emotionally honest because the language appears direct, vulnerable, and relatable. The poet often speaks in a personal voice that invites emotional identification rather than intellectual distance (Page, 2020). Minimalism has become an important aesthetic principle within online literary expression. Insta-poets frequently use short lines, fragmented sentences, lowercase typography, and sparse punctuation to create visual simplicity and emotional immediacy. This minimalist style aligns with broader digital design cultures that value clean aesthetics, readability, and visual clarity. The simplicity of form enables readers to focus on emotional content while simultaneously accommodating the visual and technological structures of social media interfaces (Leaver, Highfield, & Abidin, 2020).

The language of self-help and motivational discourse also strongly influences Insta-poetry. Many online poems incorporate affirmational statements about healing, self-worth, resilience, empowerment, and emotional recovery. Such themes resonate within contemporary wellness cultures that emphasize self-care, mindfulness, and personal growth. Poetry becomes intertwined with motivational communication practices commonly found across social media platforms, thereby blurring distinctions between literature, therapy, and inspirational

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content (Gill & Orgad, 2018). Critics of Insta-poetry often argue that excessive simplicity undermines literary complexity and artistic depth. Some literary scholars contend that online poetry sacrifices metaphorical richness, formal experimentation, and linguistic sophistication in favor of emotional immediacy and mass appeal. From this perspective, the popularity of Insta-poetry reflects the commodification of literature within digital attention economies that prioritize relatability and shareability over aesthetic innovation (Murray, 2018).

Accessibility in online literary expression also intersects with educational and cultural inclusivity. Traditional literary criticism and academic poetry have often been criticized for elitism and exclusionary language practices that alienate general audiences. Insta-poetry challenges these hierarchies by prioritizing emotional communication over intellectual exclusivity. Digital poetry communities frequently encourage participation from amateur writers, marginalized voices, and nontraditional literary audiences who may not possess formal literary training but nevertheless engage deeply with poetic expression (Cover, 2016). Importantly, simplicity within Insta-poetry should not necessarily be interpreted as an absence of meaning. Minimalist poetic forms can communicate powerful emotional experiences through carefully selected words, pauses, and visual arrangements. The brevity of digital poetry often intensifies emotional impact by reducing language to concise and emotionally concentrated expressions. Such stylistic strategies reflect evolving literary aesthetics shaped by digital communication environments and changing audience expectations (Rettberg, 2019).

Ultimately, the language of simplicity and accessibility demonstrates how online literary expression adapts to the technological, cultural, and emotional conditions of contemporary digital life. Insta-poetry prioritizes emotional immediacy, inclusivity, relatability, and rapid communication within fast-moving social media environments. While debates concerning literary quality continue, the popularity and cultural influence of accessible digital poetry reveal its significance as a contemporary literary form capable of connecting diverse audiences through emotionally resonant language and shared digital experiences.

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Multimodality and Visual Aesthetics in Digital Poetry

One of the most defining characteristics of Insta-poetry and online literary expression is the integration of multiple communicative modes within literary production. Unlike traditional print poetry, which primarily depends on written language for meaning construction, digital poetry combines textual elements with images, typography, color, sound, video, animation, emojis, and graphic design. This convergence of modes reflects the multimodal nature of contemporary digital communication and demonstrates how literary expression has adapted to visually oriented social media cultures. Insta-poetry particularly thrives within platforms such as Instagram and TikTok because these environments privilege visual engagement and rapid content consumption. Consequently, the aesthetics of digital poetry are inseparable from the technological structures and visual cultures of social media platforms (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021).

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Multimodality refers to the interaction of different semiotic resources in the production of meaning. In digital literary environments, meaning is created not only through words but also through visual presentation, spatial arrangement, sound effects, and interactive features. A poem displayed in minimalist black typography on a white background may communicate emotional vulnerability differently from the same poem presented alongside abstract illustrations, melancholic music, or cinematic visuals. The visual organization of Insta-poetry significantly shapes audience interpretation because digital readers often process literary content through both textual and visual perception simultaneously. Consequently, digital poetry must be understood as a hybrid literary form situated between literature, visual art, graphic design, and media performance (Serafini & Reid, 2019). The use of photographs and illustrations in Insta-poetry further demonstrates the relationship between visual culture and digital self-representation. Poets frequently accompany their writings with self-portraits, nature imagery, abstract art, urban photography, or symbolic visual elements designed to reinforce emotional themes within the text. These visual choices contribute to the construction of literary identity by presenting poets as emotionally sensitive, aesthetically conscious, reflective, or socially engaged individuals. The poet's visual environment becomes an extension of the poetic voice itself, thereby blurring the distinction between literary expression and personal branding within digital spaces (Leaver, Highfield, & Abidin, 2020).

The multimodal nature of online poetry also challenges traditional literary criticism, which has historically focused primarily on textual analysis. Contemporary digital literature requires interdisciplinary approaches capable of examining the interactions among language, visual culture, media technology, interface design, and audience participation. Scholars must therefore engage with concepts from media studies, digital humanities, visual communication, and cultural studies to fully understand how meaning is produced within online literary environments (Hayles, 2017). Importantly, multimodality contributes to the accessibility of digital poetry among younger audiences. Visual presentation often makes poetry appear less intimidating and more emotionally approachable than conventional printed forms associated with academic institutions and literary elitism. Social media users can quickly engage with visually simplified poems during everyday digital activities, thereby integrating literary consumption into ordinary online routines. This accessibility has contributed significantly to the popularity of Insta-poetry among global youth cultures (Thomas, 2020).

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Multimodal Reading

At the verbal level, the poem uses personification (“the morning arrives wearing dust”) and compressed imagery. At the cultural level, the poem invokes a recognisable Nigerian seasonal experience without requiring a long explanatory description. The bus and junction establish an urban/public environment, while the final reference to 'home' moves from physical atmosphere to identity. For an Instagram presentation, the first stanza could occupy the upper portion of a square image, while the final

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four lines are isolated in greater white space. A small road or bus illustration could function as an anchoring visual. The caption could invite readers to describe their own harmattan memories. In this way, the poem moves from local experience to participatory audience culture. The poem also demonstrates that Nigerian digital poetry need not imitate a global template mechanically. Local references can remain central while the formal principles of digital readability—brevity, line spacing and visual hierarchy—are adopted strategically.

Illustrative Case Analysis: Nigerian Instapoetry and the Global South

The Nigerian dimension significantly strengthens the argument because it demonstrates that digital poetry is not simply an imported Western genre. Akinpelu (2024) specifically examines Nigeria's Instapoetry in relation to ideological activism, African orality and the redefinition of poetry. This scholarship provides an important foundation for reading Nigerian digital poetry as culturally situated rather than as a derivative form. Nigerian digital-poetic practice can draw on oral performance, code-switching, proverbs, rhetorical repetition, call-and-response structures and socially engaged themes. These features complicate the assumption that social-media poetry is necessarily detached from older literary traditions. Digital platforms can become another performance space in which oral and written modes interact.

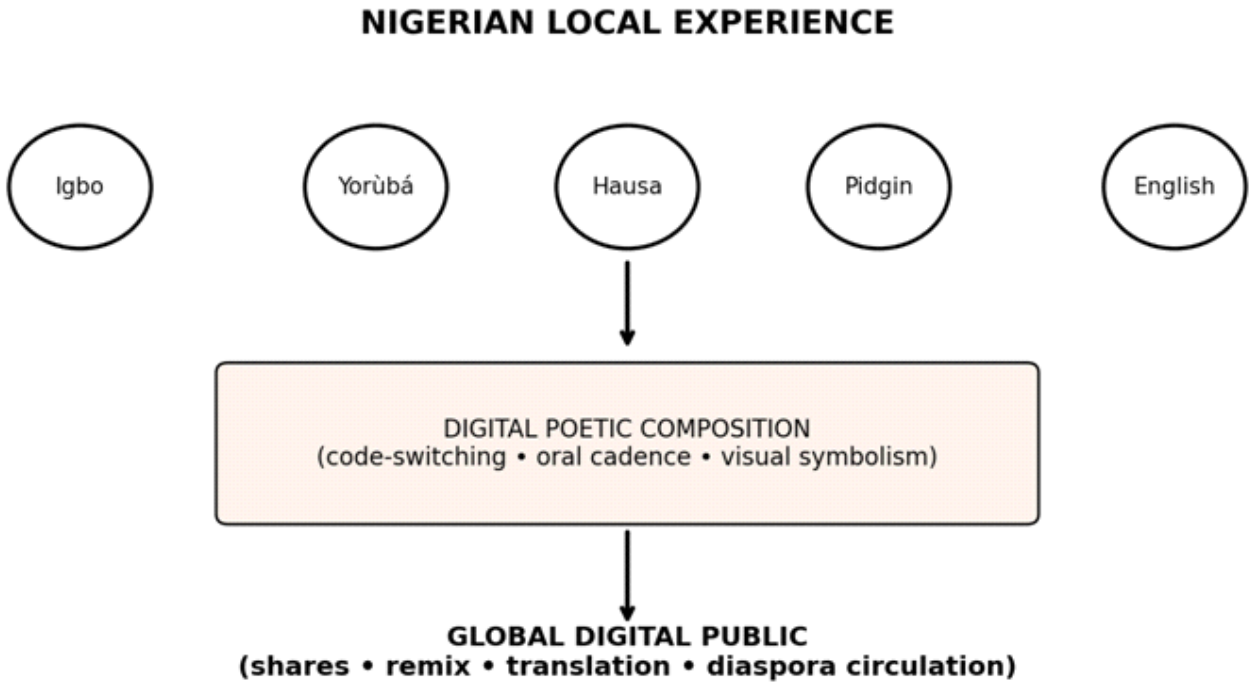


Figure 3. From Nigerian local experience to global digital circulation.

The diagram illustrates a movement from local experience through linguistic and multimodal composition into global circulation. The process is not one-way. Global audiences can comment, reinterpret, translate and remix Nigerian

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poetry, while Nigerian creators may also adapt globally circulating aesthetic conventions. Digital literary identity therefore emerges through cultural negotiation. Language is especially important. English remains central to transnational Nigerian digital communication, but Nigerian Pidgin and indigenous languages can create distinctive registers of intimacy, humour, protest and cultural authority. Code-switching may also challenge assumptions about who must translate for whom. In this sense, digital poetry can become a site of linguistic negotiation and cultural assertion. Visibility is never purely a matter of talent. Access to reliable devices, data, digital skills and stable connectivity affects participation. A platform can appear globally open while still reproducing material inequalities in who can create, maintain and monetise a digital literary presence.

Illustrated Nigerian Digital Poem: "Naija Rain"

Original illustrative composition for analytical demonstration; not attributed to an existing poet.

NAIJA RAIN

Rain does not knock.

It enters the roof,
the street,
the market,
the conversation.

One minute—
we are bargaining.

The next—
everybody is running.

Then laughter.

Because sometimes
survival
sounds like
a neighbour calling your name.

Suggested visual treatment: three descending visual zones—market, rain lines, then a shared doorway. Use typography that becomes increasingly spacious toward the final word "name."

The poem demonstrates how a familiar Nigerian social situation can become a digital affective public. The movement from bargaining to running to laughter compresses a collective experience into a sequence that is easily readable on a phone screen. The final line turns weather into social recognition.

Step-by-Step Digital Construction

Step 1: Identify the local experience—sudden rainfall during ordinary urban activity. Step 2: Select the emotional turn—shared inconvenience becomes shared humour. Step 3: Compress the narrative into short lines. Step 4: Create visual rhythm through line spacing. Step 5: Add a simple image suggesting a market or street. Step 6: Publish with a caption such as "What does rain sound like where you live?" Step 7: Use responses to extend the poem into a conversation about memory, place and community. This process illustrates audience participation as part of meaning rather than an afterthought. The poem invites readers to contribute their own experiences, thereby transforming an individual composition into a networked cultural exchange.

Ultimately, multimodality and visual aesthetics demonstrate that digital poetry is not simply traditional poetry transferred

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onto online platforms. Instead, it represents a transformed literary form shaped by technological interfaces, visual communication cultures, audience interaction, and platform affordances. Insta-poetry illustrates how literature evolves alongside changing media environments while continuing to function as a powerful medium for emotional communication and identity construction.

Emotional Expression and Therapeutic Narratives in Online Poetry

Emotional expression constitutes one of the central features of Insta-poetry and online literary culture. Contemporary digital poetry frequently focuses on themes such as heartbreak, loneliness, trauma, anxiety, healing, self-love, grief, depression, identity confusion, and emotional survival. These themes resonate strongly within social media environments because digital culture increasingly encourages public emotional disclosure and interpersonal vulnerability. Online poetry therefore functions not only as artistic expression but also as emotional communication through which writers and readers negotiate personal experiences within digitally connected communities (Papacharissi, 2015). The emotional accessibility of Insta-poetry has contributed significantly to its widespread popularity among younger audiences. Unlike traditional literary poetry, which may emphasize formal complexity and intellectual abstraction, online poetry often employs simple language, direct emotional statements, and relatable experiences. Readers frequently identify with these emotional narratives because they reflect common psychological struggles associated with contemporary social life. The simplicity of digital poetry enables audiences to quickly connect with literary content and interpret poems as reflections of their own emotional realities (Pressman, 2019). Mental health discourse has become particularly prominent within online literary spaces. Many digital poets openly discuss anxiety disorders, depression, emotional burnout, suicidal thoughts, and self-healing journeys through poetic expression. Social media platforms provide environments where individuals feel increasingly comfortable discussing mental health challenges publicly. Poetry serves as a therapeutic medium for articulating emotional pain, processing trauma, and seeking communal understanding. Readers often respond by sharing similar experiences, thereby creating emotionally supportive online communities centered around collective vulnerability (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2016).

The therapeutic dimension of online literary expression aligns with broader cultural shifts toward emotional openness in digital societies. Contemporary social media cultures encourage users to narrate personal struggles and emotional experiences publicly through posts, captions, videos, and creative content. Insta-poetry participates in this culture of emotional visibility by transforming private feelings into publicly shared literary narratives. Such practices challenge older cultural norms that associated emotional vulnerability with weakness or silence. Instead, emotional openness increasingly functions as a form of authenticity and social connection within online environments (Banet-Weiser, 2018). Trauma narratives are particularly common within digital poetry communities. Writers often use poetry to

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discuss experiences of abuse, heartbreak, discrimination, loss, migration, body insecurity, and psychological suffering. Through literary expression, traumatic experiences become narrativized, contextualized, and emotionally processed. Audiences frequently interpret these poems as validating because they articulate emotions that readers themselves may struggle to express. Consequently, online poetry communities often function as spaces of collective healing and emotional solidarity (Cover, 2016).

The rise of therapeutic narratives in Insta-poetry also reflects broader transformations in contemporary wellness culture. Social media increasingly promotes discourses of healing, self-care, mindfulness, empowerment, and emotional growth. Many digital poets integrate motivational messages and affirmational language into their works, encouraging audiences to embrace self-love, resilience, and personal transformation. Poetry thus becomes intertwined with digital wellness culture and contemporary therapeutic discourse. While such narratives can provide comfort and encouragement, critics argue that they sometimes oversimplify complex psychological experiences and structural social inequalities by framing healing primarily as an individual responsibility (Penke, 2022). Additionally, therapeutic narratives within online poetry often intersect with gender politics. Women particularly use digital literary spaces to discuss emotional labor, body image, toxic relationships, sexual violence, and patriarchal oppression. Poetry enables female writers to reclaim personal narratives and resist cultural silencing through public emotional articulation. Such literary practices contribute to feminist digital activism by transforming individual experiences into collective political discourse within online communities (Kanai, 2019).

Emotional expression in digital poetry also reflects the psychological conditions of contemporary digital life. Many poems address feelings of alienation, overstimulation, loneliness, burnout, and identity fragmentation associated with social media culture and neoliberal social structures. Online literary expression therefore functions as a commentary on the emotional consequences of technologically mediated modernity. Through poetry, writers articulate the anxieties and emotional contradictions of living within hyperconnected yet emotionally fragmented digital societies (Turkle, 2017). Ultimately, the prominence of therapeutic narratives and emotional expression in Insta-poetry demonstrates the enduring relevance of literature as a medium for emotional communication and social connection. Online poetry communities reveal how digital platforms can facilitate empathy, solidarity, healing, and collective vulnerability within increasingly mediated social environments. Despite debates concerning literary quality and commodification, the emotional impact of digital poetry confirms its cultural significance within contemporary digital society.

Audience Participation as Co-Construction

One of the defining characteristics of digital literary expression is the transformation of audiences from passive readers into active participants within literary communication processes. Traditional

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print literature often positioned readers as distant consumers separated from authors through institutional and material boundaries. Digital platforms, however, have radically altered this relationship by enabling direct interaction between writers and audiences through comments, reactions, reposts, duets, stitches, hashtags, and collaborative content creation. Insta-poetry exists within highly interactive digital environments where readers continuously engage with literary texts and contribute to their circulation, interpretation, and cultural significance (Jenkins, Ford, & Green, 2018). Audience participation is central to the popularity and visibility of online poetry because social media algorithms prioritize engagement metrics when determining content circulation. Poems that generate emotional responses, comments, and shares are more likely to appear within algorithmically curated feeds, thereby increasing audience reach and digital visibility. Consequently, poets often create content designed to encourage interaction and relatability. Emotional accessibility becomes particularly important because readers are more likely to engage with texts that reflect familiar experiences involving love, anxiety, heartbreak, healing, identity, and personal struggle. The interactive structure of social media therefore influences both literary style and thematic focus within digital poetry cultures (Abidin, 2018).

Digital literary communities are also characterized by collective emotional participation. Readers frequently share personal stories beneath poems, describe how specific lines resonate with their experiences, and publicly express emotional identification with poetic narratives. Such interactions transform poetry into a communal activity centered around emotional exchange and social connection. Online literary spaces therefore function not merely as platforms for artistic dissemination but also as affective communities where individuals seek validation, empathy, and belonging through shared emotional experiences (Papacharissi, 2015). Hashtag cultures further strengthen audience participation within online literary environments. Hashtags such as #Instapoetry, #PoetryCommunity, #SpokenWord, #HealingPoetry, and #WritersOfInstagram enable users to discover literary content, connect with writers, and participate in broader digital conversations surrounding identity, creativity, and emotional expression. These hashtag networks create decentralized literary publics that transcend geographical boundaries and encourage global cultural participation. Readers and writers become interconnected through shared digital practices involving reading, commenting, reposting, and collaborative interpretation (Leaver et al., 2020).

The most significant differences between print and platformed literary communication is the speed and visibility of audience response. Digital readers can react immediately through comments, shares, saves, remixes and video responses. This creates a participatory literary culture in which the boundaries among author, reader and curator become less stable. The audience does not necessarily rewrite the poem itself, but audience interaction can influence its social meaning and future circulation. A comment may reinterpret an image; a repost may place the poem before a new cultural group; a remix may change its

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genre; and a high level of engagement may encourage the creator to develop similar themes. In this sense, reception becomes part of the production environment. The participatory process can be represented as a feedback loop. A creator selects a theme, publishes a multimodal text, receives audience reactions, observes visibility patterns and then makes subsequent choices. The process can increase creative experimentation, but it can also encourage formulaic production when creators learn that certain emotional themes or visual styles reliably attract engagement.`s

Figure 4. Digital self-representation as a recursive platform process

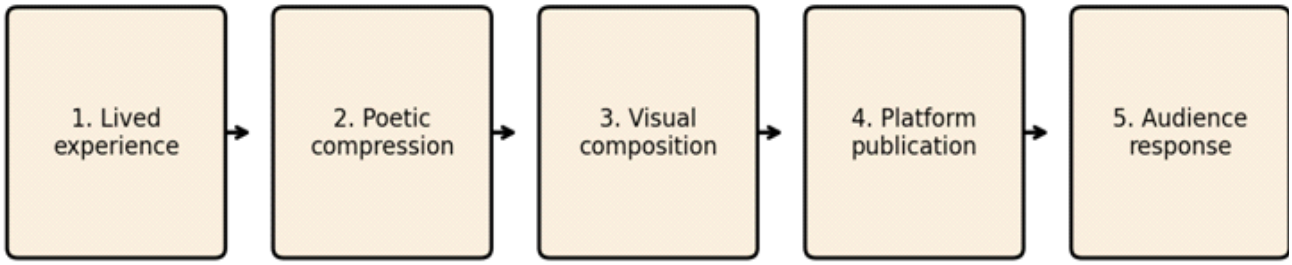


Figure 4. Digital self-representation as a recursive platform process.

The recursive model helps explain why digital identity is dynamic. A poet may begin by writing about private grief. If the post receives strong supportive engagement, the poet may become identified with a 'healing' persona. That identity can then shape audience expectations, creating pressure to continue producing similar content. The result is not necessarily false authenticity; rather, it is an identity increasingly organised around a visible public narrative.

Globalization, Cultural Transnation and Literary Circulation

The emergence of Insta-poetry and online literary expression cannot be separated from the broader processes of globalization and digital connectivity that characterize contemporary society. Digital technologies have transformed literary communication from geographically limited practices into globally interconnected cultural exchanges occurring across transnational networks. Social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Tumblr, X, and YouTube enable poets to distribute literary content instantly to audiences across continents, thereby reshaping traditional boundaries of literary production, readership, and cultural circulation. Online poetry now exists within a globalized digital environment where literary texts move rapidly through interconnected technological systems and

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diverse cultural spaces (Castells, 2015). The globalization of digital literature has contributed significantly to the democratization of literary participation. Historically, literary visibility was largely controlled by publishing institutions, academic establishments, and cultural gatekeepers that determined which writers gained public recognition. Contemporary social media platforms, however, allow individuals from diverse cultural, linguistic, racial, and socioeconomic backgrounds to publish literary content independently without requiring institutional approval. Insta-poetry demonstrates how digital technologies have decentralized literary production and expanded opportunities for marginalized voices to participate within global literary conversations (Murray, 2018).

Digital connectivity enables poets to cultivate international audiences regardless of geographical location. A poet writing from Nigeria, India, Canada, South Africa, or Brazil can reach readers worldwide through hashtags, algorithmic recommendations, reposts, and cross-platform sharing practices. This transnational circulation of poetry contributes to the emergence of global digital literary communities characterized by intercultural interaction and shared emotional experiences. Readers from different cultural contexts may identify with similar themes involving identity, trauma, love, migration, mental health, or social inequality, thereby creating affective connections across geographical boundaries (Appadurai, 2016). Online literary expression reflects the cultural hybridity associated with globalization. Digital poets frequently combine local cultural references with globalized aesthetic styles influenced by international media cultures and social media trends. Contemporary online poetry often integrates multilingual expression, diasporic narratives, popular culture references, and hybrid linguistic forms that reflect increasingly interconnected global realities. Such hybridity demonstrates how digital literature participates in ongoing negotiations between local identity and global cultural influence within transnational media environments (Kraidy, 2017). Migration and diasporic identity have become especially important themes within global digital poetry cultures. Many online poets use literary expression to narrate experiences of displacement, exile, cultural alienation, border crossing, and transnational belonging. Social media platforms provide spaces where diasporic individuals can maintain cultural connections while simultaneously engaging with broader international audiences. Poetry becomes a medium through which fragmented identities associated with migration and globalization are explored and articulated. These digital literary practices contribute to the visibility of migrant experiences within contemporary global culture (Georgiou, 2019).

The transnational circulation of digital poetry also challenges traditional notions of national literature. Literary scholarship has historically categorized literature according to national boundaries and linguistic traditions. However, online literary expression increasingly transcends such classifications because digital texts circulate across multiple cultural and linguistic contexts simultaneously. Insta-poetry therefore reflects the emergence of postnational literary cultures shaped by global digital

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networks rather than geographically confined literary institutions (Damrosch, 2018). Translation practices further enhance the global accessibility of online poetry. Social media users frequently translate poems into multiple languages, repost multilingual versions, or adapt literary content for different cultural audiences. Digital technologies facilitate rapid cultural exchange by enabling literary texts to move fluidly across linguistic communities. Consequently, online poetry contributes to intercultural communication and global literary interaction in ways that were previously less accessible within traditional print systems (Cronin, 2017). Globalization within digital literary culture also raises important concerns regarding cultural homogenization and platform dominance. Major social media platforms are primarily controlled by large technology corporations whose algorithms influence which literary voices gain visibility and which forms of expression become culturally dominant. As a result, certain aesthetic styles and emotional narratives may become globally standardized due to platform logics favoring visually appealing, emotionally accessible, and highly shareable content. Critics argue that such dynamics risk reducing literary diversity by privileging algorithmically profitable forms of expression over culturally specific or experimentally complex literary practices (Srnicek, 2017).

English language dominance within global digital culture presents another important issue. Although social media enables multicultural participation, English frequently functions as the dominant language of international online visibility. Many poets may feel pressured to write in English or adopt globally recognizable aesthetic conventions to reach wider audiences. This linguistic hierarchy reflects broader inequalities within global communication systems and raises questions concerning cultural representation and linguistic power in digital literary spaces (Pennycook, 2018). Additionally, global digital connectivity has intensified the speed and temporality of literary circulation. Poems can become viral within hours through reposts, screenshots, reaction videos, and algorithmic amplification. This accelerated circulation transforms literature into highly immediate and rapidly consumable content within contemporary attention economies. While such visibility expands audience reach, it may also encourage literary simplification and short-form expression optimized for rapid digital consumption rather than sustained critical engagement (Dean, 2019).

Digital platforms enable poems to circulate across national borders at unprecedented speed. A Nigerian poem can be encountered by readers in Ghana, South Africa, India, the United Kingdom or the United States within the same networked environment. This creates opportunities for cultural exchange and new forms of literary community. However, global circulation does not automatically produce equality. English remains a dominant language of transnational digital communication, and platform conventions may favour globally recognisable visual styles. A poet may therefore face a choice between writing in a locally specific register and adapting content for wider accessibility. Cultural translation is consequently more than converting words from one language to

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another. It involves translating references, humour, cultural assumptions, oral forms and social meanings. Digital poetry can become a site where such translation is negotiated by readers themselves. Comments may explain a cultural reference; readers may supply alternative interpretations; creators may add captions or translations.

Nigerian digital literature can also challenge the direction of cultural flow. Rather than imagining global culture as something produced elsewhere and consumed locally, digital platforms allow Nigerian creators to participate in producing global literary aesthetics. Akinpelu's (2024) analysis of Nigerian Instapoetry is important here because it links digital poetry to African orality, activism and the redefinition of poetic practice.

Post-Digital Circulation

A poem should not be assumed to remain on the platform where it first appears. Screenshots, reposts, print books, podcasts, videos and classroom materials can carry it into new media ecologies. Research on post-digital circulation shows that Instapoetry can persist beyond Instagram by moving among different media forms. The platform is therefore crucial but not necessarily permanent. Digital self-representation makes the ethical issue sharper. If a poem presents itself as a personal account of grief, migration or trauma but is generated entirely by AI, audiences may interpret the work differently if they know its origin. Transparency becomes part of digital literary ethics.

Figure 5. Step-by-step classroom pathway for teaching digital poetry

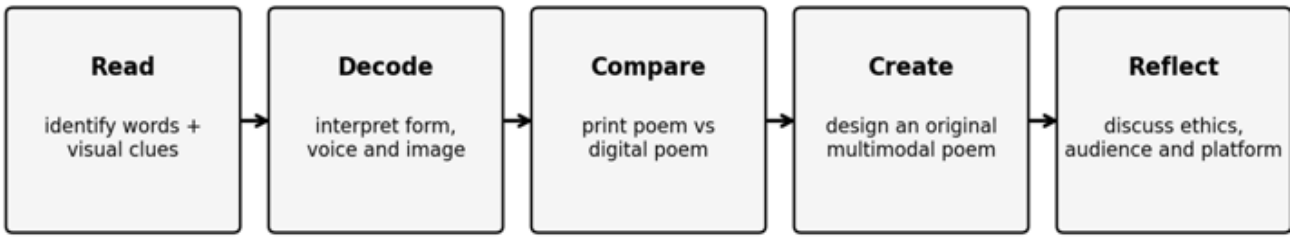


Figure 5. Step-by-step classroom pathway for teaching digital poetry.

Step 1—Read: students identify words, images and visual clues. Step 2—Decode: students interpret voice, form, typography and image. Step 3—Compare: students compare a digital poem with a print poem. Step 4—Create: students design an original multimodal poem. Step 5—Reflect: students discuss audience, ethics, identity and platform power.

A practical classroom activity can begin with an original poem rather than a copyrighted social-media post. The teacher presents the poem first as plain text and then as a designed digital card. Students discuss what changed. The teacher then asks them to identify which meanings arise from words and which arise from layout, image or spacing. A second activity can focus on Nigerian linguistic identity. Students may create short poems incorporating English, Nigerian Pidgin or an indigenous language, accompanied by a brief

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explanation of the cultural meaning. The purpose is not to force students to publish personal information but to help them understand how language choices communicate identity. A third activity can address algorithms. Students compare two hypothetical posts: one complex poem with minimal visual design and one concise poem with strong visual appeal. They discuss why different audiences might encounter them differently. This teaches students that visibility and literary value are related but not identical. Such pedagogy supports contemporary literacy by integrating linguistic, visual, technological and critical competencies.

Conclusion

Insta-poetry represents a significant transformation in the relationship among literature, identity, technology and audience. Its defining feature is not simply brevity. Rather, it is the integration of poetic language with visual design, platform affordances, audience interaction and public self-presentation. The digital poem is therefore both literary text and social-media event. The analysis demonstrates that digital self-representation operates through a continuing cycle. Creators select experiences, compress them into poetic form, encode them through visual and textual modes, publish them within platform environments and receive audience responses that can influence later creative choices. This process creates opportunities for recognition ansd community while also generating pressures toward visibility, emotional labour and self-branding. The Nigerian perspective adds an important dimension. Digital poetry can carry local experiences, multilingual expression, oral aesthetics and activist concerns into global digital publics. Nigerian Instapoetry should therefore be studied not as a peripheral imitation of a foreign genre but as part of the continuing evolution of African literary expression. Ultimately, the significance of Insta-poetry lies in its contradiction: it expands participation while operating within infrastructures that organise attention. Its future scholarly study should therefore combine literary criticism with platform studies, multimodal analysis, cultural studies and digital literacy.

Recommendations

1. Literature and English programmes should teach digital poetry as a legitimate contemporary literary practice alongside print poetry.
2. Digital-literacy instruction should teach students how typography, image, sound, captions and hashtags influence literary meaning.
3. Nigerian digital-literature scholarship should give greater attention to indigenous languages, Nigerian Pidgin, oral traditions and locally grounded digital-poetic practices.
4. Researchers should analyse platform power and algorithmic visibility rather than treating digital circulation as technologically neutral.
5. Creators should be encouraged to distinguish authentic expression from compulsory self-exposure and to protect personal privacy.
6. Educational institutions should teach ethical use of images, consent, copyright and responsible AI-assisted creativity.
7. Future empirical research should develop transparent Nigerian digital-poetry corpora and apply multimodal and audience-centred methods.

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