THE EXPRESSION

An International Multidisciplinary e-Journal

Bimonthly Refereed & Indexed Open Access e-Journal

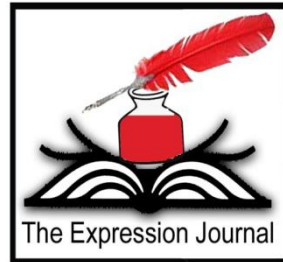The Expression Journal

Impact Factor 3.9

Editor-in-Chief : Dr. Bijender Singh

THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON MODERN LITERARY WORKS

Sukanya Basu Mallik
Bachelor's Degree Student of Business Administration
Techno India College, Hooghly
West Bengal, India

:::

Abstract

This paper emphasizes on the connection between social media and literature. The growth of social networks shaped significant variations in terms of reading, writing and discussing customs. In this context, the threat of the de-canonization of both literary craft and writer has been already stated by a few significant researchers. In this vein, I am interested to see whether these apprehensions have adequate ground or if it is the other way round. Social media has been blamed for breaking up relationships, destroying careers, disintegrating family connections, reducing attention spans, and proliferating unemployment. But in this paper, what have chiefly been explored are its effects on the modern day litterateurs and their literature.

Keywords

Social Media and Literature, Web Based Collaboration Tool for Writers, Decimation of Literature on Social Media Forums, Online Activism and Desensitization in Social Media.

:::

THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON MODERN LITERARY WORKS

Sukanya Basu Mallik
Bachelor's Degree Student of Business Administration
Techno India College, Hooghly
West Bengal, India

::

Introduction

Social networks, websites and applications enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking. These have greatly shaped modern-day habits of reading, writing and discussing customs. In this context, the threat of the de-canonization of both literary craft and writer has been already stated by a few significant researchers. This research has been conducted to comprehensively explore what other researchers and writers/literary experts have to say regarding the same besides professionals of book publishing and movie industry.

Analysis

An article titled "Is Social Media Killing Literature?" published by *The London Magazine,* sates the following:

> "Critics state that people are turning away from reading, preferring to can see an image or play within it, rather than imagine one from carefully crafted words. A diet of abbreviated words and short sentences render them incapable of reading and writing, stunted from employing language to its full capability, and unable to use vocabulary and grammar correctly. Few bother reading or writing a book when they can transmit the same message in only a few lines. We 'like' and 'favourite' our way through the day – does this mean we can no longer like literature?" ("Is Social Media Killing Literature?" *The London Magazine*)

The very same article further goes on to state that to position online social media channels in opposition to literature, with some kind of Manichean unsurpassable divide between them, is to misinterpret the use of literature in the

modern times. In itself it is just another medium, a tool for communication, and art reliant upon an interaction with at least one other human being.

Casey Brienza, sociologist and Lecturer in Publishing and Digital Media at City University London, says 'All media are platforms of human communication and expression, and in this sense, all media, including literature, is social.'

The article further informs us about novelist and Editor Goldstein Love who spoke at the first 'Twitter fiction festival' at the *New York Public Library*, saying, "People say that Twitter is ruining people's attention span—but what if we harnessed that through serialized fiction?"

The first festival was held in March 2014, and invited users to create their own stories in 140-character installments. It was an effort to revive literature and explore the social media site's capabilities to facilitate dialogue between writers and their audience. 'Books are social. We share them, we discuss and debate them, we cite them, and we gather in places like libraries and bookstores that collect them.' (Brienza)

Voices of protest tend to come from the Western world—those attuned to a certain canon and rules as to what makes 'real literature.'

The December 2013 'Taj Literary Festival' explored the effect of social media, and technology as a whole upon the perception of literature, and its democratization as a medium overall.

A report published on *DNA India* about "Instant social media outbursts new 'literature'?" states that literature does not have to be typical, and the ability to self-publish means that days of 'stifled creative expression' have given way to an age when 'each person can now be his own editor, writer and publisher,' according to Piyush Pandey. ("Instant social media outbursts new 'literature'?", *DNA India.*)

It's not just about reaching more people any longer—there are massive benefits for authors. There are now a number of combined or what they call 'collaborative' writing sites that allow persons to work collectedly.

"Being a writer today has its ups and downs. On one hand, we have a very different process involved in becoming well known for our works; and a great deal of the PR efforts that once would have gone to an official publishing house now rests on our shoulders.

On the other, we have an infinite number of tools, publishing platforms, and increased global visibility at our fingertips. Our success is entirely within our own hands, and that is an empowering aspect of writing today that only increase as the years pass and the rules change.

Another benefit is the ability to collaborate. Writers of all types, from novelists to blogs, to scientific report drafters, can get together with whole teams in real time. You don't even have to be in the same country!"(Come Together: 6 Web-Based Collaboration Tools for Writers and Content Marketers, by Ann Smarty, *business.com writer* | Jan 21, 2016)

Also word of mouth is the most 'classic' means of all. Miranda Dickinson used Twitter to get recommendations from her fans on plot developments, character names etc., for her latest best seller *Take a Look at Me Now*. Jennifer

Egan's 'Black Box' appeared as a series of tweets before being published in The New Yorker. ("Twitter Gears Up for Second Fiction Festival" - *The New York Times*)

Nicholas Belardes made history by writing a novel via Twitter. From 2008 to 2010, Belardes composed just over 900 tweets to produce "Small Places," a visionary love story about one man's journey to add sense to the ordinary goings on of daily life.

While many criticized Belardes's novel and the advent of "Twitterature" as a gimmick, upon its completion is was covered by some of the top blogs and media sites, including Mashable, Reuters and the UK Guardian.

Affordable technologies such as micro blogging platforms mentioned before in this paper enable people to publish snippets and get instant response from potential readers. These are all trends being seen in today's literary society.

On the reverse side, the brevity of social media messages and the lack of formalized grammatical structure could well be considered to be proof that it cannot be a form of literature. But you only need to consider the work of E. E. Cummings, or even James Joyce and Virginia Woolf to recognize that lack of perfect structure does not mean no literary worth. The fact is that most people do have busy lives and an expectation of short form and immediate entertainment rather than length and depth. Social media may not be 'proper' literature. But it does offer innovative and attractive possibilities for people in terms of expression, creativity, collaboration and participation.

> "Perhaps it is time for us to reconsider our use of language and expression, what media and creativity is, and our definition of 'proper literature,' in 2020 rather than that of a nostalgic and sentimentalized canon of the past."(Is Social Media Killing Literature? - *The London Magazine*)

The slight problem with this shift is that as an article in 2014 *The New Yorker* points out, The Novel is not necessarily meant to capture reality and every little detail. Works that have in no way attempted to reflect the truth such as the magic realism of Marquez, the surrealism of Robbe-Grillet or the all-out confusion of Pynchon's novels have become the figureheads of whole literary movements, but they cannot be read within the confines of a technological apparatus. The book must speak for itself.

Author Tim Ellison says something along the same lines in her article, "Social media and literature" published at *blog.pshares.org (*Mar 11, 2015)

> "Fiction and poetry are very intimate forms of communication. Appreciating literature requires time alone and a heightened degree of concentration. As you struggle with the book, the book struggles with you. It restructures your thoughts, teaches you to think and feel from a unique angle. Real appreciation doesn't end in a tweet saying "This book is so good!" That's not going far enough, and it's not even very helpful (unless you've got books to sell). Real appreciation ends with personal knowledge, a renewed awareness of your own past and present and future. All previous images you've had of yourself are smashed to pieces; no image you could receive from anyone else can accompany it. *The connections literature helps you*

make with other people are nothing in comparison to the connections it can help you make within yourself."

-Tim Ellison(Social Media and Literature, Tim Ellison, Mar. 11, 2015)

So that was about the writers, what about us as readers? An article titled "8 Reasons Why Social Media Is Decimating Art and Literature" By Phil James published on qwiklit.com highlights the issue of 'The Social Gaze', "Social Media is forcing us to judge based on our powers of judgement—superficial likes and clever comments."

Laura Mulvey in her essay, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", asserts that popular cinema compels the spectator to be voyeuristic, to sexualize and objectify whoever is on the other side of the camera lens. This is known as "The Male Gaze".

Phil James in reference to the same wrote, "I would argue that social media follows a similar structure; since likes and shares are sacrosanct to whoever is promoting a given page, whatever creates a desire to validate content will become the norm."

But besides that we also need to understand that literature is its truest sense isn't just about being consumable as a form of intellectual entertainment. Phil writes that "Art is Contemplative—Social Media is consumable…, the disposability of pages on social media can be harmful to art. Another reason for this is the space where we host these pieces–pages full of bells and whistles, with constant notifications and endless distractions."

He goes on to state that it is rather like 'a casino with no clocks' or 'a restaurant designed to make us hungrier 'which is unhealthy because works of literature are supposed to inspire critical thinking and deep contemplation. Regrettably, social media actually inspires product design and aesthetics to further promote the consumption of technology. Now what that means is that catchy titles and great graphic design on social media will be preferred over good content.

This also goes for shareable works of literature. Recently, several websites have depended on the model of using beguiling, "click bait" article headings to instantly pique reader4's or buyer's interest.

Speaking of the 'Shareability' factor, if something is shareable, it is often because it rouses a certain set of emotions in the viewer. The problem with this model is that it is difficult to reproduce over and over.

As the article "Online activism and desensitization social media" published on *examiner.com* states,

"The internet has desensitized a whole generation to the horrors of war and the bare intimacy of disaster."

The article states how 'Art and literature' have always used pathos, the capacity to evoke liberating emotion, as a rhetorical tool to help audiences retain the message of a given piece. Social media is eroding the value of pathos by using it as a currency.

The problem being, longer this model remains, the more difficult it will become to create something worth sharing.

Later in his article, Phil further uses that phrase, 'The Lowest Common Denominator' to explain that before the modern era; there was generally a great divide between the institution of fine art and the lower class. Today the Internet has democratized the spread of art.

"While this is fundamentally a good thing, art is now competing with media that is produced to briefly wow for cheap validation, and this collusion is creating a false binary–that art and literature, in their erudition and complexity, represent the ivory-tower mentality of higher economic classes. This is caused by a growing internet audience that is also craving likes and retweets for their responses; complex analysis and unique readings will rarely receive any validation, but more often than not, memes and witty responses become a more popular method of dialogue. It's not that art requires a certain elitism to survive on the internet, it's that social media will rarely allow difficult interpretations over simplistic, immediately-likeable comments."- Phil James

Phil also states that 'Social Media is fundamentally extroverted–and many creators are not'. True enough, that's in fact the New Face of Poetry

"I am not against slam poetry and I love how it has maintained literary scenes all over the world, but it becomes nearly impossible to discover the next Emily Dickinson or Marcel Proust on major social platforms, because they lack a key ingredient: sociability. Social media is allowing non-artists such as marketing teams to become the main orators of poetry–and in doing so, is destroying the medium as a whole."

Consider the ad by Apple for their new tablet in which it associated engaging with their product as a form of cathartic poetry. Phil writes "Poetry will lose its value if it becomes a rallying cry for major corporations."

Theatlantic.com, in its article, "How Netflix reverse engineered Hollywood" highlighted how companies like Netflix are producing shows that accommodate your interests, but what they are failing to do is challenge the status-quo. Art cannot exist within an echo chamber.

They collect your interests together and make fair approximations about who and what you will like next which is very much unjust and unfair as a prospect for anyone whose art require an amount of time to be understood. You can't expect traditional poets to suddenly become insta-poets, can you?

"The fusion of literature and social media" By Adrienne Erin (Updated Mar 07, 2019; Posted Oct 13, 2014) adds an interesting point about 'Parody Twitter Accounts'.

Adrienne Erin claims that, "English and Literature teachers everywhere are terrified of a literary apocalypse. People are afraid that the love for books and libraries will die. While libraries might be on life support, there are still avid book readers who have a prominent Internet presence in the form of blogs and social media profiles."

Along the same vein as the fictional Facebook updates, people have created parody Twitter accounts for great authors from long ago, sending actual tweets about current events and pop culture. Like the Facebook updates, the Twitter

accounts feed into our curiosity about the clash between pre-modern eras and the new age of technology.

It's both funny and interesting to read the 140-character ramblings of the likes of Charles Dickens, Williams Shakespeare and Alexander Pope."- *Adrienne Erin*

Conclusion

In sum, we may say that social networks have both their positives and negatives. We must take people out of their comfort zones to figure out what they really want, instead of simply making their interests estimable through algorithms and SEOs. On the other hand writers those who present difficult opinions and complex thoughts shouldn't be cornered, because they embolden and enrich people. Let us not reject their ideas because they aren't immediately consumable. Also littérateurs need to host public events besides social networks. We must continue to promote events that allow for intimate conversation with authors, poets and other speakers. However, until the current pandemic situation comes to an end, we can very well continue to use social media for our activities.

Works Cited

"Instant Social Media Outbursts New 'Literature'?" *DNA India*, 2020, https://www.dnaindia.com/technology/report-instant-social-media-outbursts-new-literature-1796213.

Baker, Francesca. "Is Social Media Killing Literature? By Francesca Baker - The London Magazine". *The London Magazine*, 2020, https://www.thelondonmagazine.org/is-social-media-killing-literature-by-francesca-baker/.

Ellison, Tim. "Social Media And Literature". *Blog.Pshares.Org*, 2020, http://blog.pshares.org/index.php/social-media-and-literature/.

Erin, Adrienne. "The Fusion of Literature and Social Media". *Al*, 2020, https://www.al.com/living/2014/10/the_fusion_of_literature_and_s.html.

Hart, A., 2014. *Online Activism And Desensitization In Social Media*. [online] Examiner.com. Available at: <http://www.examiner.com/article/online-activism-and-desensitization-social-media>

http://www.examiner.com/article/online-activism-and-desensitization-social-media. Accessed 20 June 2020.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jiyIcz7wUH0. Accessed 19 June 2020.

https://qwiklit.com/2014/03/08/8-reasons-why-social-media-is-decimating-art-and-literature/.

James, Phil. "8 Reasons Why Social Media Is Decimating Art And Literature". *Qwiklit*, 2020.

Madrigal, Alexis. "How Netflix Reverse-Engineered Hollywood". *The Atlantic*, 2020, http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2014/01/how-netflix-reverse-engineered-hollywood/282679/.

Mulvey, L. *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, 2020.

Siegel, Lee. "Is the News Replacing Literature?" *The New Yorker*, 2020, http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/books/2014/02/has-the-new-replaced-literature.html.

Smarty, Ann. "6 Collaboration Tools for Writers - Business.Com - Business.Com". *Business.Com*, 2020. https://www.business.com/articles/6-web-based-collaboration-tools-for-writers-and-content-marketers/.

Williams, John. "Twitter Gears Up For Second Fiction Festival". *Arts Beat New York Times Blog*, 2020. https://artsbeat.blogs.nytimes.com/2014https://artsbeat.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/01/10/twitter-gears-up-for-second-fiction-festival//01/10/twitter-gears-up-for-second-fiction-festival/. Accessed 20 June 2020.