

## Declaration

I hereby affirm that this PhD thesis, titled "(Re)-Reading Poetry: The Question of Art and Aesthetic Experience in Instapoetry," contains my original work that was solely directed as a requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English. I was guided and supervised in this endeavour by Prof. Madhurita Choudhary from the Department of English, Faculty of Arts, at The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda. The interpretations presented here are derived from my reading and comprehension of the materials referred to and have not been published before in the form of books or articles. All the books, journals, and web sources that I have utilised have been adequately referenced within the body of the thesis. I have not received any degree or diploma from any university for the thesis that I am now submitting to The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda.

Shah Vaimani Sarjubhai



## Certificate

This is to certify that Shah Vaimani Sarjubhai's original research, which she carried out under my supervision and direction, resulted in the thesis, "(Re)-Reading Poetry: The Question of Art and Aesthetic Experience in Instapoetry," which she submitted to the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, Vadodara, for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the work presented in this thesis has not been previously proposed to this or any other university or examining body for the award of any degree or diploma.

Place:

Date:

**Prof Madhurita Choudhary**

Research Guide

*To my loving mother and grandmother, Rupaben and Jyotibaa,  
Whose spirituality grows evermore in me.*

*To my father and grandfather, Sarjubhai and Kantidada  
Whose diligence I have never failed to mirror*

*To Nimit*

## Acknowledgement

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## Abstract

Given its origins on social media platforms and popularisation on Instagram, Instapoetry is synonymous with not only Instagram poetry but necessarily instant poetry. In that respect, Instagram itself is a blend of "instant" and "telegram," where the former stands for the speed at which it aims to make information accessible to its users, and the latter, a metonymy for the aspect of communication it affords in its capacity as a social media platform. Despite its prominent presence across online poetry reading cultures, and the attention it receives from scholars in various fields, Instapoetry is not accorded the degree of legitimacy that characterises traditionally printed poetry.

The possibility of questioning the status of Instapoetry arises as a response to several conjectures. Firstly, as a form of digital poetry, Instapoetry is presumed to be antithetical to the antecedent that print poetry appears to be. If this claim is refuted owing to the coexistence of both print and digital poetry today, then Instapoetry is more so dismissed as a special case of popular poetry on which the excesses of cultural studies have not been duly exhausted. Secondly, the theories under the philosophical discipline of Aesthetics that define art based on the aesthetic experience it allows, necessitate endurance as a prime quality, transposing the "high v/s low" debate into another impasse staged by the critical discussion on "art v/s non-art" as ephemerality of Instapoetry diminishes the possibility of a sustained aesthetic experience.

In spite of Instapoetry gaining traction in the wake of online social communication, it is often charged for usurping the *art* of poetry by critics like Rebecca Watts (2018). However, this presumed demise of poetry is mistakenly attributed to its disuse; the autopsy suggests that the uncommon exaltation of its aesthetic experience and emphasis on its form engenders irregularities in the appreciation of the art form of poetry. In other words, the axiomatic understanding that accessible popular poetry does not afford an aesthetic experience and so is not furnished with the sincerity of *art*, and upholding inaccessibility as a defining characteristic of poetry, nudges the art form of poetry towards obsolescence.

If art is to be appraised at all by its aesthetic experience, modern aesthetics dictates that this experience must be disinterested and that art should be appreciated for its own sake—that is, not for its moral goodness or pleasing qualities, but merely because it is beautiful in itself. However, postmodern thought asserts that art is inherently intertwined with the



immediate circumstances in which it originates and the effects it generates. Art should be examined based on the emotional response it elicits in an individual within a specific temporal and spatial framework. Therefore, the everyday experience of Instapoetry cannot be misconstrued as inherently lacking or dissociated from concerns related to aesthetic experience or art. John Dewey's theory of aesthetic experience may be evoked in this light to support the foundation of such a submission. In his consideration of the popular arts in *Art as Experience* (1980 [1934]), explicates that experience of any work of art in question must be put under the lens of contextual inspection to see what environment the work is borne in. Dewey notes that the broad and subtle ideas that elevate art to a pedestal are so prevalent that many individuals would be embarrassed, rather than pleased, to discover that they enjoy their casual pastimes solely for aesthetic pleasures. The arts that are generally overlooked by these individuals are actually the ones that hold the greatest significance for them (1980, 6).

By conceiving of art as “consummatory experience,” he is able to bridge the gap between the *popular* and the *art*. According to him, consummation of experience is the *raison d'être* of any work of art, therefore, the environment in which art is experienced must be equally considered along with its content. Thus, the present research proposes to re-position the definition of art and aesthetic experience using the theory of experience propounded by John Dewey and further sees Arnold Berleant's theory on/in *The Aesthetic Field* (1970) and *Art and Engagement* (1991) as relevant in configuring the core of this experience, specifically in the case of Instagram.

Since Instapoetry, being popular, presents a site suggesting the need to contemporise the conception of aesthetic experience, this research will read Instapoetry by resituating it in its respective aesthetic field, i.e., in the context of its medium, as advocated by the new media theorist Marshall McLuhan (1994 [1964]). Following eminent scholars of Digital Humanities like Leonardo Flores (2019), the thesis further attempts to read poetry in contemporary reading cultures by attending to and analysing the paradigms introduced by Instapoetry as a representative specimen of third-generation e-literature. This is accomplished using not only theory but also primary quantitative and qualitative data. In doing so, the research work sets out to establish that poetry too adapts to the affordances of the platform, similar to other content that floods the *Feed* of Instagram, resulting in a significant shift in the production, distribution, and reception of any form of poetry on Instagram.

