


Blurring the Literary Horizons in the Digital Age

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OPEN ACCESS

Manuscript ID:
ASH-2024-11047400

Volume: 11

Issue: 4

Month: April

Year: 2024

P-ISSN: 2321-788X

E-ISSN: 2582-0397

Received: 09.01.2024

Accepted: 21.03.2024

Published: 01.04.2024

Citation:

Nandhini, S. "Blurring the Literary Horizons in the Digital Age." *Shanlax International Journal of Arts, Science and Humanities*, vol. 11, no. 4, 2024, pp. 115–17.

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.34293/sijash.v11i4.7400>



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Abstract

Literature is the manifestation of the societal, political and cultural factors that govern that society. Every piece of literature is reflective of the shared social values, cultural identity and political ideologies that strengthen the ethnical, linguistic and anthropological studies. Transition from one age to another is accelerated by the changing standards of living, geo-political influences and cultural values that distinguish one age from the other. The birth of digital era can be traced back to the rapid industrialisation, globalization and consumerism culture. The inevitable phenomenon of digitalization has seeped into all fields namely commerce, media, education and healthcare which influence the way of living and living standards. It goes unsaid that literature mirrors the living conditions and characteristics of the age in which it is produced. Therefore, digitalization of literature can be considered as the natural outcome of the digital ways of living.

Keywords: Digital Age, Literature, Geo-Political Influences, Cultural Values, ICT Tools

Digitalization of literature is a boundless phenomenon as it does not stop with transformation of analog information into digital. The form, structure and core characteristics of literature are digitalized. The two dimensional printed books are virtually recreated with the aid of ICT tools. Digitalization of literature allures the audience by employing visual imagery and sound effects. The aim of employing ICT tools is to appeal all the senses. Thereby, the sound effects and visual imagery an extra edge to e-books over printed books.

Numerous organizations have opened digital libraries with the aim to reach wider population. The demand of e-books is being compensated by private organizations that aim to provide quality content in the most cost-efficient ways. The promotion of e-books testifies the revival of reading habit and the appreciation of classics in the contemporary society. Numerous organizations namely Internet Archive and Project Gutenberg aim to cater the needs of books lovers in the current scenario. The digital libraries are highly favourable in archiving classical works and it can be considered the most effective and cost-efficient way of preserving information. E-books transcend the borders and reach masses and are long-lasting in a sense that is can be archived. "In the United States of America, eBooks Statistics projects that the market volume will be \$5.86 billion which will grow at a CAGR of 0.82% by 2027."(Elad)

The increasing usage of smartphones and other digital devices also constitute as one of the major reasons for the consumption of e-books. E-books meet the demands of the present generation readers as it promotes wide variety of content from the across to the globe to the hands of the readers. Numerous websites offer free download of classical books, scholarly articles and academic texts which is of great help to younger generations. It is to be noted that younger generation readers are accustomed to surfing and scrolling in digital screens that spending their time flipping the pages of books.

The liberty to access books of any genre at any time and for any number of times is considered advantageous and desirable by the younger generation users. On the flip side, the consumption of printed books is still a thriving business. Many adult users are still inclined to possess the hard copies of books than soft copies. The joy of holding printed copies of books and the sounds of flipping of pages is cherished by the global reading community.

On the other hand, some argue that digitalization of literature has to be distinguished from the digital literature or electronic literature. Digital literature is an emerging genre and a boundless phenomenon. The scope of digital literature is ever-increasing. On the other hand, the primary objective of the digitalization of literary works is the conversion of printed content to a digital format. David Thomas Henry Wright, the recipient of Queensland Literary Awards' QUT Digital Literature Prize states that "Electronic or digital literature does not refer to e-books, but to works that depend on electronic "code" to exist. Put simply, you can print an e-book, but you cannot print electronic literature." (Wright)

Digital literature challenges the boundaries of conventional concepts of story-telling and constantly changes to meet the specifications of its audience. Digital literature is considered as a separate genre by indicating that it is created digitally by employing digital elements that can be exclusively accessed through digital devices such as hypertext fiction, interactive fiction and digital poetry. The capabilities of ICT tools are best employed to produce more interactive and engaging content that would distinguish digital literature from the traditional form of writing and literature. Social media platforms serves as an ideal platform for numerous freelancers and amateur writers. Social media platforms are one of the most inclusive media platforms that transcends the restraints of class distinction, nationality and gender identity. Henceforth, writers from various backgrounds could reach wider audience with limited resources. One of the popular social media platform has become an accomodator of amateur writers as well as to people who hail writing as a passion. It features poetry, novellas and fan-fictions that are enhanced with the aid of visual imagery and sound effects. The writing community

of Instagram has their own rules of writing to fit the digital platform.

Instapoetry can be defined as short, free verse poems that are often paired with a symbolic sketch or shared on an image that represents the poem. Instapoets like Rupi Kaur carefully craft themes, colors, and images to suit their poetry - the work is not only about writing but also using visual art to communicate meaning (Gray).

Twitterature and Instapoetry are challenging the established literary genres and are pioneering brand-new genres of creative writing. Young readers of fiction are drawn to Wattpad and Inkitt from all over the world. Numerous freelancers and authors who self-publish are benefiting from these apps in their working lives. Wattpad is a globally recognized app that patronizes amateur writers across the globe. It is an inclusive platform which can be considered efficacious platform for self-publication. Ashleigh Gardner, Head of Partnerships at Wattpad Studios, in an interview answered a question regarding the users of Wattpad as follows,

Wattpad stories are available in more than 50 languages. Our demographics are more than 70-percent female, and 80 percent of Wattpad users are Millennials or Gen Z. Some of our largest global regions include the USA, the Philippines, Indonesia, India, Turkey, and Brazil, reflecting the true global diversity of the Wattpad community (Anderson).

The scope of digital literature is ever-growing and the forms of digital literature undergo a drastic changes in accordance with the technological advances. In spite of the consistent market of printed books, the growth of digital forms of literature is also thriving. The arena of digital literature is boundless and it challenges the traditional notion of story-telling and the conventional forms of writing as it evolves in accordance to the demands of the digital age. It can be considered that digital literature is not a replacement to printed books but an alternate that could possibly develop as a separate form of literature apart from the printed form of literature.

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