

Snail mail is far from dead, research finds

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'Postcrossing' might give researchers clues to improving digital communications.

The rise of social media is often associated with a decline in the use of traditional forms of paper-based correspondence.

However, in a recent study by PhD researchers from the Department of Computer Science has found that the old methods of communication now often overlooked are actually more valuable than ever before.

The researchers studied [communication practices](#) in the online community 'Postcrossing', where members send paper-based postcards to other members around the world.

Their research seeks to understand what it is about sending a postcard that motivates participation in this community. It is hoped that by understanding this, new [communication tools](#) that incorporate the most treasured elements of digital and traditional [correspondence](#) can be designed.

The project is being carried out by Ryan Kelly and Daniel Gooch. Ryan said: "With the rise in use of email, [Facebook](#) and online forums, it would be easy to believe that the writing of letters is dying a death.

"However, we've found that the power of these technologies mean that there are opportunities to facilitate the exchange of paper-based media in new and exciting ways.

"From the knowledge achieved through this study we plan to derive some design criteria to help improve digital communication systems."

Daniel said: "Our research found that the most valued elements of correspondence through postcards were the [stamps](#), the wear and tear received during transit and the use of personalised images on cards.

"People like to receive a letter through the post, it carries an element of surprise, people are keen to quickly find out who the letter is from."

These are the treasured elements of correspondence that the researchers believe could be useful to build new digital [communication](#) systems that help people connect in a more meaningful way.

The [research paper](#), 'Understanding participation and opportunities for design from an online postcard sending community', is available to [read here](#).

The research team hopes to continue its studies involving Postcrossing, and to look at other practices like online pen-palling and use of Christmas cards. These will give the researchers new ideas about how to link digital and physical technologies.

Provided by University of Bath

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