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ABSTRACT
        This paper investigates a number of questions
concerning the relative advantages of the U.S. Mail versus electronic
mail. Specifically, the paper asks: (1) what is the impact that
E-mail has on the ways in which people communicate interpersonally in
a visual presentation; (2) will E-mail replace such traditional forms
of communication as greeting cards or are the two mediums simply
different visual presentations; and (3) how can educators help
students to understand the elements of the verbal, nonverbal code as
they are manifest in both E-mail and the U.S. Mail's visual
presentation of images? This paper reaches the conclusion that the
difference between the two mediums is mainly one of texture, that is,
how the message feels to the sender or receiver or how it makes them
feel. The paper argues that "further humanization" of E-mail can be
developed when students have knowledge and experience with both the
technology and the "new" language code that is being developed to
allow for increased interpersonal communication. An extensive chart
examines in detail some of the relative advantages and disadvantages
of the two mediums. (TB)

"The U. S. Mail vs. E-mail: Understanding Interpersonal Communication through Traditional and Technological Pedagogical Pathways"

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"The U. S. Mail vs. E-mail: Understanding Interpersonal Communication through Traditional and Technological Pedagogical Pathways."

Technological advances such as E-mail have begun to alter our ways of communicating interpersonally. New opportunities and challenges for maintaining interpersonal vs. impersonal communication have become apparent, specifically in terms of the visual presentation of messages. Three qustions come to mind. First, what is the impact that E-mail has on the ways in which we communicate interpersonally in a visual presentation? Second, will E-mail replace such traditional forms of communication of greeting cards (U. S. Mail), or are E-mail and the U. S. Mail simply different visual presentations reaching the same goals/conclusions? Third, how can we help students to understand the elements of the verbal, nonverbal, and non-verbal (non-symbolic) code as they are manifested in both the E-mail and the U. S. Mail visual presentation of messages?

Assume that you are interested in sending a birthday greeting to a friend. If you are "card" oriented you must first go to your local card shop and make an appropriate selection. The card needs an address, an optional return address, and a stamp. Perhaps you might also include a brief note either inserted in the card or written on the available white space of the card; you might also sign the card.

E-mail is not all that different from traditional "card" sending, but there are some differences. E-mail "saves a tree", and saves the time and energy of making the trip to the card shop. By turning on the computer and opening an E-Mail program, the process has begun. (America On-Line currently offers a service that allows for computer selection of a Hallmark or other card service as well as the ʾressing and mailing of the selected card - a personal shopper service from your terminal eliminating the need to leave your house.) Although the message must still be addressed to the receiver, return addresses are automatically provided. The question that needs to be addressed is: To what extent does "the medium become the message?"

The major difference between the two forms of communication, as these authors see it, involves a concept that we label "texture".

The "texture" of a message is a function of the interpersonal relationship that exists between the sender and the receiver. Texture involves feelings. It focuses on *how it feels to us* and *how it makes us feel*. Texture involves *tangibility, permanence, and perception*.

For some individuals, a message on a computer screen is lacking in sufficient texture. The perception may be that there has been limited involvement, effort or commitment.

The purpose of this analysis is to stimulate discussion from students on the extent and nature of the texture that is present or absent in messages which are delivered via the U. S. Mail and the E-mail. The authors firmly believe that "further humanization" of E-mail can be developed when students have knowledge and experience with both the technology and the "new" language code that is being developed to allow for increased interpersonal communication.

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U. S. MAIL	E-MAIL	Communication Pathway
Pre-Specialized - by occasion (Happy Mothers Day); for a specific interpersonal relationship (To My Uncle); by a decoration or nonverbal graphic (a graduate's picture or diploma).	Individualized by the sender - subject indication, downloaded graphic, attachments.	In order to indicate personalization or specialization, the sender must utilize more internal creativity when using E-mail. The sender of US Mail must adapt to the external limitations of card design or options for design (i.e., create-a-card). Of course, both options can choose to ignore this variable: i.e., a blank card or no subject indication on E-mail heading. The extent of the choices made are perceived and evaluated, and thus contribute to the "texture".
Cards are displayed and saved. They can be shared with others. They are frequently read aloud at special gatherings. They can be collected and sold - they have value for others. They are tangible evidence of an interpersonal relationhip.	E-mail can be displayed, but usually isn't. They are saved for the receiver's personal viewing (in folders). They are shared only when the receiver makes a hard copy or forwards the message to others. They have limited or no value for others. They are tangible evidence of an interpersonal relationship.	E-mail is limited in terms of its external value or worth - its tangibility. It was not designed for this purpose; it was designed to be immediate and private. The long-term value vs immediacy of response contributes to the "texture".
Cards suggest that choices were made; either carefully or causally. The message is evaluated for appropriateness; the design is evaluated for personalization. Hence, both verbal and nonverbal codes are used.	E-mail choices typically reside in the verbal code only. The evaluation of the choices are according to criteria of brevity and conciseness.	Each option demands a seperate criteria for evaluation. When the wrong criteria is used on a given form, the "texture" is misperceived and a breakdown in communication or interpersonal relationship might result.

U. S. MAIL	E-MAIL	Communication Pathway
The "packaging" of the card has value. Sometimes the stamp or postmark has worth. Stickers and rubber stamps can be added to the envelope or the envelope can be selected with pre-printed designs.	There is no direct "packaging" of E-mail. Printed copies are frequently given headers or footers by the receiver, not the sender.	The control of the extent and amount of any packaging resides with the sender of U. S. Mail and with the receiver of E-mail. The receiver determines the folders and method of storage for the message. The act of saving a message increases its tangibility.
Cards can very in size, shape and method of folding. They vary in color and paper quality as well as ornamental decoration. The sender is in control.	E-mail messages, when printed, are controlled by the receiver. E-mail messages are more standardized. But frequently, the screen font and the printed font change the appearance of the message.	More discrete variation is involved in U. S. Mail, and any variation may be perceived by the receiver as being important to the interpersonal relationship.
Cards can be multisensory. They can talk, play music, or light up. They can have cutouts, windows, and three dimensional additives, such as jewelery, sea shells, lace and ribbons. They can smell, be embossed, or be written in Braille.	E-mail is restricted to visual reception. Electronic signatures, smileys and emoticons attempt to provide affective content.	E-mail is limited at this time. At this point, E-mail can not be three dimensional. Cards, at this point in time, are perceived as being more tangible - they can trigger affective responses in the receiver, they can recall both long term and short term memories.

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U. S. MAIL	E-MAIL	Communication Pathway
Cards can be containers for three dimensional objects - money and small gifts. They can be holders for business cards.	E-mail can be a container for two dimensional objects - attachments.	Cards are a three dimensional media; E-mail is two dimensional. Cards are perceived as being more tangible because of their potential functionality and practicality.
Cards can represent themes and movies. They can promote ideas and events, they can show a sender's support for a cause or organization. They can show where we've been or contain a portrait of us or our family.	E-mail is void of association with ideas, events, causes, or organizations. They are limited in terms of providing implicit information.	The receiver has engaged in more implicit self-disclosure with traditional cards. The perception can involve secondary messages and indications of the sender's attitudes and beliefs.
Cards can have predetermined insertion points. (Check boxes or check lines or fill-in word/s).	E-mail senders must indicate the insertion points when replying to a message.	There is more sender accuracy and personal involvement in E-mail insertions. The insertions must be perceived as being representative of the true reflection of the thoughts and ideas of the sender.
Postcards, are entirely in the public domain. Greeting cards frequently identify the sender as well as the receiver. XOXO on the outside of a sealed envelope indicates a relationship as does the odor of perfume which might emit from the card.	E-mail can only be read by an individual who has control of a pin number or password - relationships and knowledge of the fact that a communication was sent are hidden from the general public.	E-mail is frequently considered more "private", more secure, and less invasive than the U. S. Mail. E-mail is perceived as being more "secure" and hence the relationship between the sender and the receiver is perceived as being more "personal".

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U. S. MAIL	E-MAIL	Communication Pathway
Cards take time, (hence the term SNAIL MAIL). There is no guarantee that the message was delivered (unless registration and return receipting is demanded). Feedback on the status of the card is not always available (dead letters; can not forward to a new address; lost in transit).	E-mail is immediate. Acknowledgement of receipt is indicated. Permanent addresses can exist, and be accessed from anywhere in the world.	E-mail is more efficient, secure, and timely than U. S. Mail. E-mail fulfills the demand of "I want it now!"; hence, the potential for immediate feedback allows the receiver to place more tangibility in E-mail messages. (It is interesting to note that many users of FAX and E-mail telephone the receiver to confirm the immediate receipt of the message.) Could it be that mailers are more uncomfortable or more untrusting of technology?

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