

# #LoveLettersFromMumbai:

## Analogue romance for a digital world

An unexpected design intervention for a wholesome future of NYC

[Watch full video here.](#)

Friday, 12th February, 2021:

It's 2 days before Valentine's Day. I, an international student from Mumbai, was currently feeling very lonely in my Upper Manhattan bedroom. Suddenly, an idea struck me. What if people from Mumbai sent love letters to absolute strangers in NYC? Would that result in new friendships and a sense of warmth in these cold times? Would people be interested?

And just like that, a million questions rushed to my mind, as I started to figure out ways to make this idea work. The plan was simple:

1. Use Instagram to ask my followers in Mumbai to send their wishes
2. Gather those messages and convert them into handwritten love letters
3. Distribute them in NYC and film the reactions of the strangers

As I finally uploaded a story to my profile, asking people to send their wishes, I prayed to get 5-6 decent responses. According to my initial calculations, I intended to distribute 20 letters, and hopefully get 5-6 good interviews. But, oh boy, was I wrong!

A whopping 50 lovely people flooded my inbox within the next few hours. Each message was more heartwarming than the former, and my heart was filled with joy. It was working! People were resonating with the idea, and quite excited to see the outcome. Now the ball

was in my court. So on the next day, 13th February, I set out to purchase some lovely, high-quality stationery in the Village. As soon as I got home, I got to writing the letters and 4 hours later, I had a pile of 50 handwritten pink love letters, waiting to be distributed. The next day, I executed the idea. Here are some of my learnings:

## The Design - Why love letters?

There's a certain romance about love letters. People just don't exchange them anymore. In the age of DMs and Emojis, words have become de-valued somehow. Or, the written word feels a lot more dearer and personal, compared to the hundreds of messages chiming your phone all day. 2020 has forced us all to do things digitally -love digitally, meet digitally, even date digitally! In such a zeitgeist, receiving handwritten words of affection, from a real person half-way across the world had a profound impact on all the New Yorkers that received them. Proper sanitation procedures were enforced while creating and distributing the letters, and the lovely messages from absolute strangers in Mumbai found their way to the hearts of strangers in New York.

A lot of thought went into the selection of stationery for the letters. The stationery had to be pink and premium to the touch. This was largely driven by the assumption that if the letter was written on a high-quality piece of paper, wrapped in a lovely envelope, it would enhance the appeal and desirability of the letter. The assumption worked. I needed the envelopes to be pink because the colour is synonymous with love, and because it would look great against the largely gray and white skyline of the city. The \$50 that were spent on buying 50 envelopes, 150 sheets of designer paper and 2 felt-tip pens were totally worth it.

# New Yorkers - Learnings and Anecdotes

## **The Vibe Check**

Every person that I interacted with on Valentine's Day 2021 was subjected to a very stringent 'vibe check', if I may, that was mainly based on one question - "Are you going to treat this love letter as a flyer?" Because if even a single love letter ended up in trash, it would deeply hurt me because of all the efforts that had gone into it. I wanted people to understand that it took a few very specific set of events for a #LoveLetterFromMumbai to end up in their hands, and I wanted them to acknowledge it. As a result of this, I ended up having over a hundred conversations with absolute strangers on Sunday.

## **The Geography**

The night before, I opened Google Maps and planned the route to be taken the next day. The idea was simple: capture NYC landmarks on film so that the viewers (mostly in India) get a glimpse of the city anew.

1. 9/11 Memorial
2. Wall Street
3. DUMBO
4. Washington Square Park
5. Central Park

## Key Insights:

The streets are the un-friendliest location in NYC. I realized very early on that if you were out on the streets in NYC on a cold, winter morning, it was because either you had somewhere to be or you were homeless/soliciting. And sadly, no one wants to speak to the latter. So the most reluctant people I encountered happened to be on the streets.

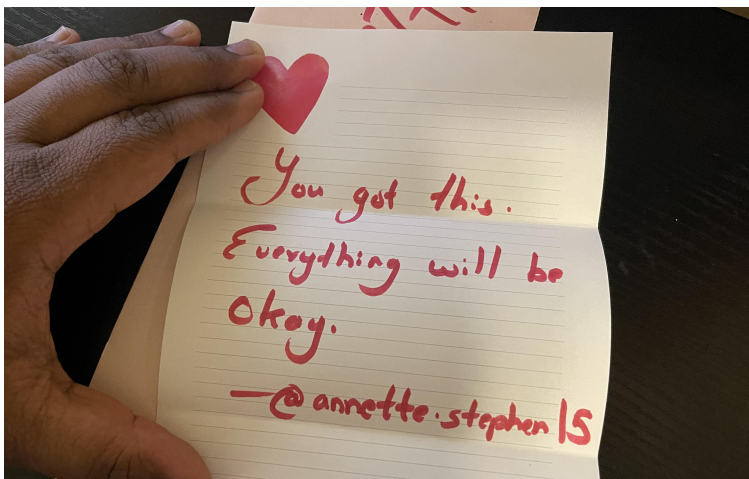
The places that proved to be the most successful for this project were the parks! I discovered the NYC tradition (American tradition?) of couples eating takeaway pizzas on park benches. It was such a cute sight! It also dawned on me that most New Yorkers are more approachable in the parks because they are mentally open to interactions and in general, in a very sociable mood.

And lastly, regardless of geography, everybody loves to feel special! Everyone who received the letters was elated and grateful. The project and the message was positively received by NYC.

## The Effects

The campaign has had an endearing effect on the lives of the people involved in it. Here are a few instances:

1. After distributing 49 letters, I came home. It had been a long day. I walked around 14 kms that day, faced multiple rejections and had a few fantastic interactions. I was tired and emotionally exhausted. I reached inside my pocket to find letter #50 - the one letter that I had preserved for myself. I opened it. The contents of the letter made me cry! It made me feel like someone had my back, and it's a damn good feeling to have!



2. I wasn't the only one who was healed by these letters:



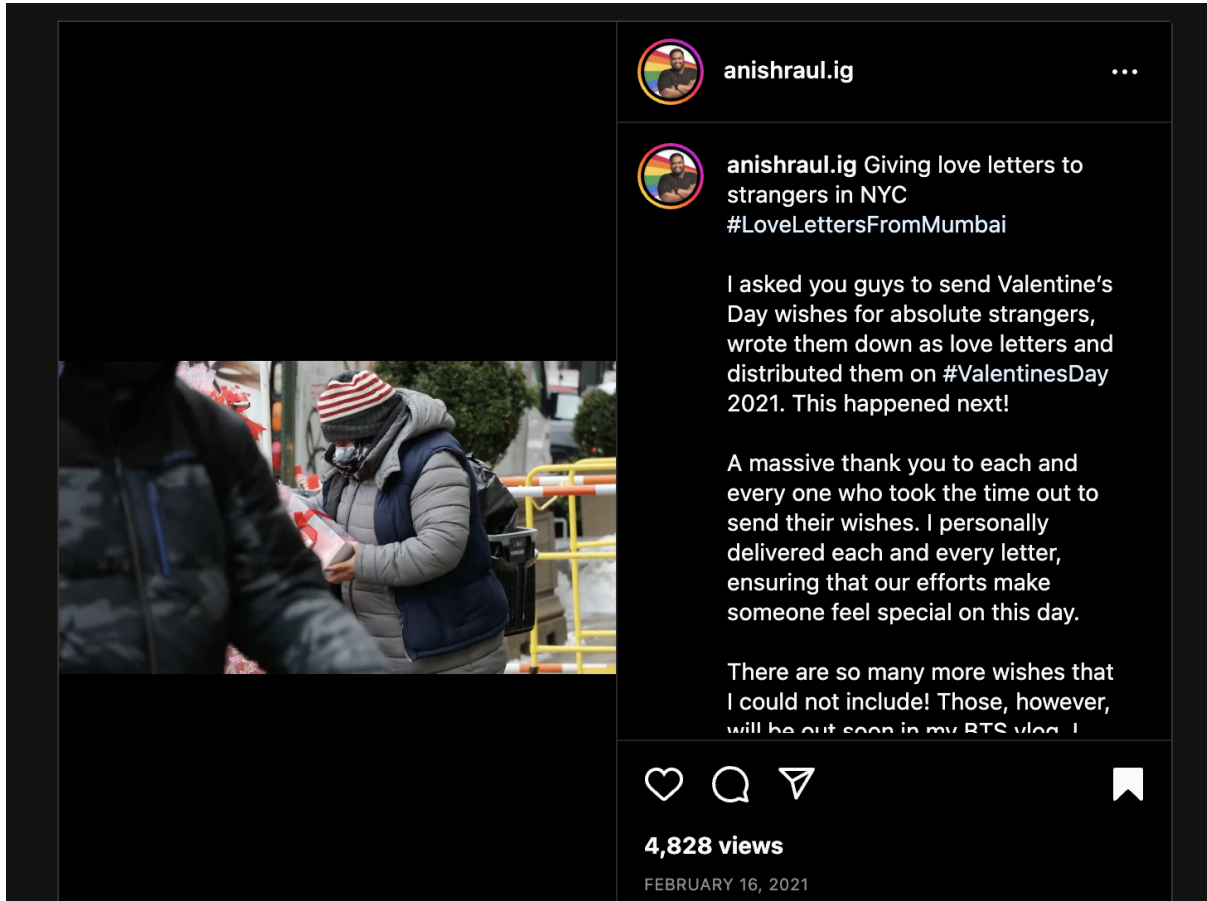
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@insightswalla for real.  
My grandma just passed this last Tuesday and whenever I was feeling sad I read that letter and it helped brighten up my day a little more. Reminded me of how I loved to see my grandma smile and how good it felt when we laughed together 🥰❤️

1d 1 like Reply

3. The film was shared extensively:




**Anish Raul**  
 MS in Media Management at The New School · Creative Lead  
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I used [Instagram](#) to ask my friends in Mumbai to send me [#ValentinesDay](#) wishes for absolute strangers in New York City.

I converted them into handwritten love letters and personally distributed them on 14th February.

Here's what happened:


[#LoveLettersFromMumbai](#)



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Reactions

**4. It was even featured by a publisher:**



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[#LoveLettersFromMumbai](#)

"I had just moved from Mumbai to NYC a month ago and I was feeling quite lonely, especially during Valentine's Week. So, I thought of doing something that would not only connect me with my friends back home, but also give me a chance to make a few new friends.

I asked my friends in Mumbai to send me valentine's day wishes for strangers in NYC. And that's how [#LoveLettersFromMumbai](#) was born.

When I first asked people to send me their messages, I only expected to

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<https://officialpeopleofindia.wordpress.com/2021/02/21/anish-raul-lovelettersfrommumbai/>

Here's my favourite anecdote from that day:

*I distinctly remember, I was at the 9/11 memorial when I saw a security guard. I approached her, explained the project to her, and handed the love letter to her. She was so overwhelmed that all she could manage to say was, "That's so sweet, I have to give you something". She reached into her pocket, pulled out a tiny Rhinoceros-shaped eraser, and handed it to me! It was one of the cutest moments of the day!*

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Even in the middle of a pandemic, when global borders are shut, #LoveLettersFromMumbai connected 100 strangers and positively impacted the lives of everyone who engaged with it.

The success of this campaign has reinforced my belief in the fact that the world could always do with a little more love, and a future with a revival of love letters would definitely make the city warmer.

Thank you for being a part of this journey.