Science@Mobile

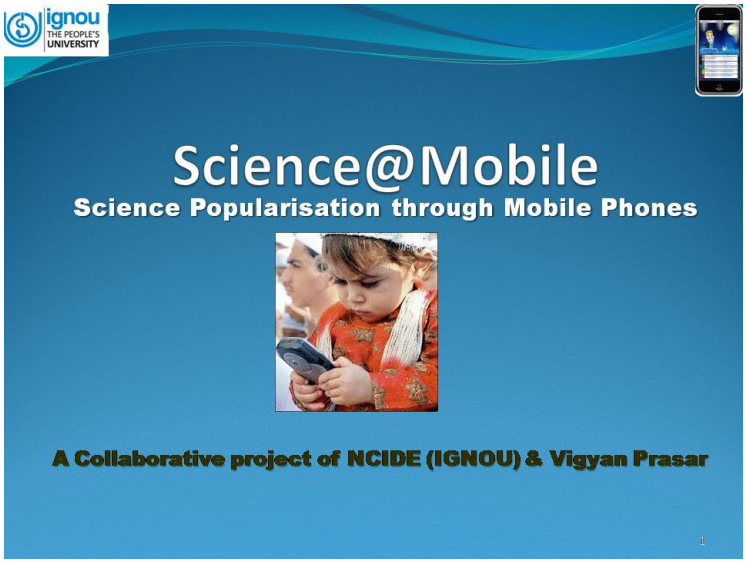
An Innovative Scheme of Science Popularization through Mobile

Background

The increasing number of mobile subscribers in India indicates that the mobile is not now the symbol of status or urbanization. In fact, it has become the necessity of the people. It is not remained the means of communication, but it is proving to be an effective tool of teaching-learning all over the world. It is well recognized that the mobile phones could add a completely new dimension to the teaching-learning process due to a wide range of attributes such as talk, text, camera, video, radio and internet, etc. According to a TRAI report, India added 9.88 million new mobile subscribers in the month of Jan 2012, taking the total tally of mobile subscribers in India to 903.73 million. **India now has a overall teledensity of 77.57,** with Delhi having the maximum density of 237.5 percent while Assam has the lowest with 46% teledensity. The mobiles have penetrated into the rural areas also and the number of users is increasing year after year. Because of its value added functions and wide spread, the mobile phones have potential to be used for teaching-learning purpose.

Need of the Innovation

In view of the decreasing cost, increasing penetration, and adding of new features, it was thought that, the mobile could be a very effective means of spreading scientific knowledge and cultivating scientific temper among the people.



In order to exploit the potential of mobile phones for science popularization in the society, and to spread the scientific knowledge including science news and updates among the people through mobile service, the scheme of Science@Mobile was launched.

Description of the Innovation

The scheme of Science@Mobile had basically three components – variety of content for SMS, software application to select and send SMS automatically and a gateway for sending SMSs.

In the first phase of the scheme eight different types of SMS items were delivered through mobiles which included interesting science facts, science quotations, latest science news, about scientists, science humour, health tips, green tips, and events and days of scientific importance. In the next phase it was planned to add more categories of SMS such as agriculture, energy, career in science, etc. In order to ensure the quality and correctness of the SMS content, each and every SMS item used for Science@Mobile was reviewed and edited by a group of experts. It was tried that the SMS content was interesting,

informative and was useful to the subscribers both in terms of imparting knowledge of science and inculcating the scientific temper among the people.

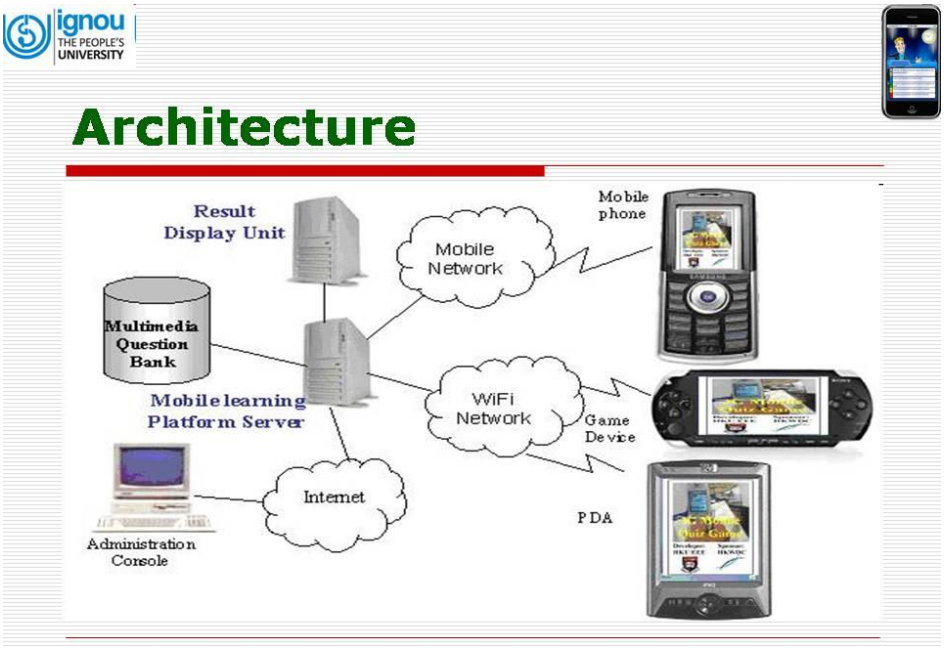
The software application to short out different types of SMS, as per the choice of the users and to push it to the SMS gateway was designed and developed by the NCIDE. There was a provision of adding and updating the content of SMSs in the database of Science@Mobile.

The people interested in getting the facility of SMS on their mobile were required to give a missed call on the given mobile number. They could also call on this number and register their choice of getting SMS on their mobile.

The scheme of Science@Mobile, basically targeted all the people irrespective of age, gender, socio-economic background, geographical location. However, the content was categorized for three categories of people. First category included the less educated common man who needed basic scientific literacy. The second category was meant for the educated people having no science background. The third category was for the educated people having science background.

Innovative Features of Science@Mobile

The scheme of Science@Mobile had certain innovative features. One of the important features of the scheme was that there was no fee for subscribing science SMS and it could be subscribed through mobile as well as through computer from anywhere and anytime. Another features was that the people had the option to select what type of information they would like to receive on their mobile as per their choice and interest. Also they could select the frequency of receiving the SMS, i.e. daily or weekly. There was a provision of getting feedback from the subscribers. Subscriber had also the option to unsubscribe the service anytime from anywhere.



Achievements

In order to exploit the potential of the fast spreading mobile technology in the country, the National Centre for Innovations in Distance Education (NCIDE) in IGNOU in collaboration with *Vigyan Prasar* (Department of Science and Technology) Government of India had started **"Science@Mobile** – an innovative scheme of science popularization through mobile in 2012 on the occasion of National Science day.

The scheme worked smoothly and successfully for one year. But the project could not be funded further by the Vigyan Prasar, therefore, it had to be stopped.

Application and Uses of the Innovation

The response of the people towards the newly launched scheme of science popularization through mobile was overwhelming. Within two months of launch of the scheme, around sixty thousand people had subscribed which included 37850 through mobiles and around 21256 through internet. The internet subscribers included 65% students and 34% others which indicates that the scheme was most liked by the school children. Such a big response was highly encouraging and it indicated that majority of the people liked to gain knowledge at all stages provided they get right kind of information relevant for them.

The scheme of Science@Mobile was highly useful in creating an awareness about the health, energy and environmental issues of common interest in the society through mobile devices, to create interest among the people towards science and hence to develop a scientifically empowered society in India.

Way Forward

The scheme of science@mobile has great potential to popularize science and technology in the society. As the use of mobile phones is increasing day by day, some interactive mobile apps could be developed in future.

In order to make it interactive, mobile based science quiz may also be planned for the next phase which could aim at developing interest in science and its application in day to day life. Presently, the scheme is available in English medium. The Hindi version of the SMS can also be developed in future so as to reach to a larger section of the society. If possible, with the support of state level agencies, the scheme could be extended in the regional languages also. Further, it would be made interactive, i.e. the users could respond to the information received on their mobile. In view of the favoruable response from the society, this project need to be continued with added features.

Coordinator and Innovator

Dr. Oum Prakash Sharma
Technical Team : Mr. Ajay Bhardwaj, Ms. Poonam Trikka and Mr. Akhilesh Kumar
Period : 2012-2013