Smartphone beacon | Photo source Pixabay

MUMBAI SLUM USES BEACONS TO ADVERTISE LOCAL RETAIL MARKET

🇮🇳 TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Google backed project uses beacons to help small businesses in one of Asia's biggest slums to compete with online retailers by alerting smartphone users as they pass by.

Beacons are small, relatively cheap hardware that use Bluetooth connections to transmit messages or prompts to smartphones and tablets. Because they can detect very accurate location data, beacons are utilised in innovations looking to deliver hyper-contextual content to users based on their location. We have recently written about some interesting startups using beacons as an integral part of their business. This agentless real estate startup uses them to transmit information about the houses for sale as they tour the property, and this innovation uses beacons to display accurate wait times at JFK airport. Now, a 535-acre slum in Mumbai has started using the technology to advertise local products to those with smartphones.

Part of a project by Google, the Industrial Design Centre (IDC), the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) and Swansea University, the aim is to improve the slum market's visibility amongst smartphone users. Dharavi is one of Asia's largest slums. It has a manufacturing and retail sector worth around USD 1 billion and deals primarily in leather products, pottery, jewelry, and textiles. The project has come about as a result of more mobile users coming online and starting to use distributors like Amazon, Flipkart and Snapdeal. The use of beacons allows local manufacturers and designers to compete with these retail giants by alerting potential customers walking past, showing new products, offers and other announcements. Since many mobile users turn off Bluetooth because it drains battery on low-end devices, retailers have also been provided with posters that ask consumers to turn the network on so that they can receive the notifications. To date, 11 of the 100 beacons supplied by Google have been used by retailers.

Google has been investing in a number of digital projects in Asia. Although the end goal is turning people into online consumers, the in-between investment could help slum businesses increase legitimacy and competitiveness. Will beacon technology be able to help developing economies compete in other ways?

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