

Geeks come up with mobile app to help the blind read faces

Contrary to popular belief that the Indian education system does not promote innovation, Indian students are coming up with top-of-the-line science projects and even winning prestigious international competitions worldwide. Recently, four students from different private engineering colleges in Delhi-NCR developed a mobile application for the visually impaired and bagged the first prize at the influential Geeklist#hack4good competition. Their invention helps the visually challenged recognise faces and even the emotions reflected therein. Not surprising, their project has fetched them \$10,000 as cash prize, free trips to UK and US, and even a host of national and international sponsors who are willing to buy their invention.

The students are Sonu Raj and Siddarth Sudhakar of Apeejay Stya University in Sohna, Hitesh Dua of Amity School of Engineering in Noida and Manish Bisht of GB Pant Engineering College, Delhi.

The Hack4good competition is sponsored by a San Francisco-based organisation called Geeklist. The forum encourages software development and entrepreneurship to help in social areas such as disability, healthcare, education, human rights, agriculture and humanitarian aid. It is held online every year across 50 cities worldwide. This time they had participation from over 5,000 software developers across the globe, which came down to 2,500 at the semi-final and

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the project developed by the Indian students at the grand finale.

Bachelor of Technology IIIrd year student Sonu Raj tells us, “We knew that we wanted to develop a mobile application but weren’t sure of the social issue to target. Then we noticed that blind persons are a much neglected section when it comes to mobile use and applications. The biggest problem that visually-impaired persons encounter is recognising people by the face. This is also the story of those affected by Prosopagnosia or Face Blindness – a condition caused by



INGENIOUS Students pose after winning the competition for their mobile application for blind people. Sonu and Siddarth show the application (below).

brain injury. We decided that we have to help them.”

Sonu’s junior in college,

BTech Ist year student Siddarth adds, “It took us a week to develop ‘White Cane.’ This android application recognises faces and speaks out their names. It is also able to describe the facial features of a person right down to his mood. Not just that, it stores a database of faces and people to which more can be added or deleted at will. It starts up with a hard key button, which is easy to locate and operate by the visually challenged.”

The students proudly share that the judges were most impressed at the “focused and technologically-sound” project. “The judges were extremely pleased with the execution and presentation of this project – the voice

interface, the added features of understanding emotion – it just blew them away!” says Hitesh Dua of Amity School of Engineering.

Now the youngsters are also planning to test their application on a target audience to get better feedback for ‘White Cane’.

“From a video we put up on YouTube, we have already received a comment from a patient of Prosopagnosia. This has boosted our confidence immensely. We want White Cane to ease the lives of the visually impaired who form a significant part of our society. It’s a proud moment,” added Manish Bisht of GB Pant Engineering College, Delhi.

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