

Digital Engagements with Visitors during Covid-19: A Case Study of Digha Science Centre

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Abstract:- The effect of Covid-19 pandemic has been felt across everyone's life. It has affected all economic sectors, including museums. Digha Science Centre also experienced drastic financial losses after the imposition of lockdown. Previous study indicated role of digital practices adopted by Science Museums while this study by Digha Science Centre focused on role of digital media, social media engagement and future planning in the situation like Covid-19 temporary closure. Usage of digital practices, during the Covid-19 times, can be said, as the perfect utilization of existing available technology. Facebook is the primary social media platform, used in this case study. In the scarcity of the best tool to determine social media engagement, likes, shares and comments were used for the same.

Keywords:- Museum, Digital, social media, Covid-19, temporary closure.

I. INTRODUCTION

Digha Science Centre & National Science Camp, is a Satellite unit of BITM (Birla Industrial and Technological Museum) functioning under the aegis of National Council of Science Museums, Ministry of Culture, Govt. of India. It is situated on the east coast of India, at the popular tourist spot named Digha, West Bengal. Due to its strategic location, it attracts tourist round the year, having an average footfall of 5 lakh visitors plus per year.

Digha Science Centre is built for propagation of science to the tourist, students, rural community with the help of various technological prototypes and science activities. Digha Science Centre became the hotspot for tourist and school students since its opening in 1997 with following objectives-

- To inculcate a scientific temperament among rural masses, students though popularization of science.
- To augment the science education given in schools, to help in developing creativity and scientific enquiry.
- To preserve and display historical scientific objects having certain role in the development of technology.

COVID-19, as we all knows how it affected people across the world. Museum across the world also got affected in its own ways. It transformed the way museums present their exhibits and contents to the visitors. Digha Science Centre was also forced to close the doors for visitors, making the exhibits and display physically inaccessible. This sudden change prompted museums to re-design their strategies.

Digha Science Centre was also closed to check the spread of virus, which affected its normal functioning. Even after re-opening, ticket sales also dropped significantly while maintaining social distances and keeping the occupancy of 50% during different shows.

Digha Science Centre, which creates and cultivates science temperament in its adjoining areas, came to complete halt during lockdown. To minimize the gap with the visitors, science enthusiasts, students, Innovation Hub members, centre made its strong presence on digital world. Various online Webinars, Workshops and Popular Lecture were performed through the help of social media. Social media allowed the Digha Science Centre to communicate with wider audience and receive feedback.

This study will evaluate the types of social media platform used by Digha Science Centre and also the effectiveness of the platform in engaging the audiences. Online programs broadcasted on Facebook, is primarily used here in this case study. Some research questions has also been tried in this study like,

- 1) What kinds of digital content did Digha Science Centre used during the temporary closures of COVID-19?
- 2) How sorts of digital content was provided during COVID-19 temporary closures and how it affected the social media involvement?
- 3) After the COVID-19 temporary restrictions, what types of digital activities would be continued in the future?

Digital contents worth is solely defined by the context, audience, and time frame in which it is employed. During COVID-19's temporary shutdown, this concept is especially pertinent to Digha Science Centre. Although digital content

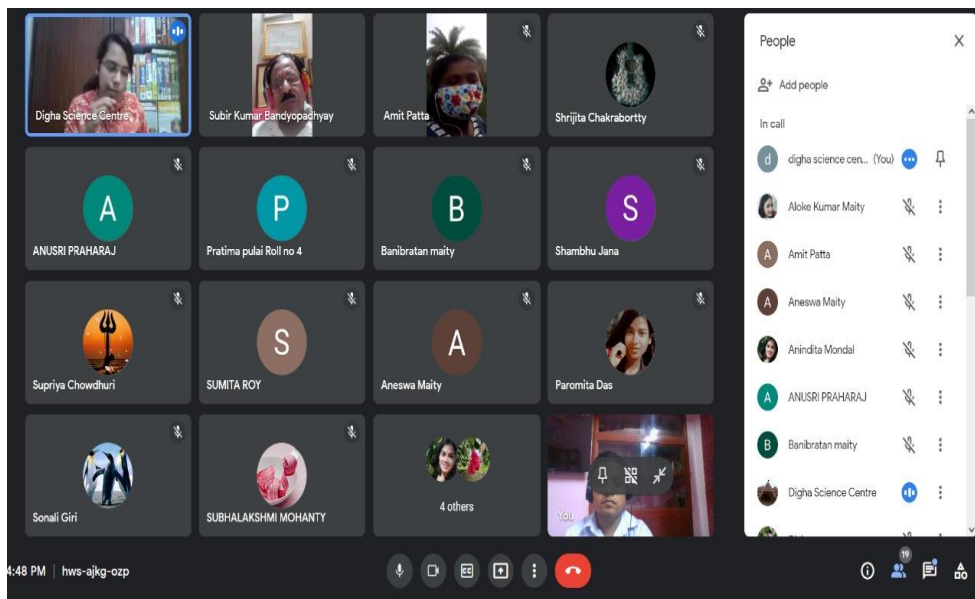
has long played a role, it might be argued that it became far more important during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In this study reaches, likes, shares has been considered as the main tool to focus on digital interactions with the visitors. These tools give, more or less a quality insight on the interaction with visitors on Facebook platform. This study also pointed out that, interaction on digital platform during Covid-19 lockdown was more than during Pre-Covid. It can also be said that internet uses increased drastically during lockdown imposed due to Covid-19.

II. METHODOLOGY

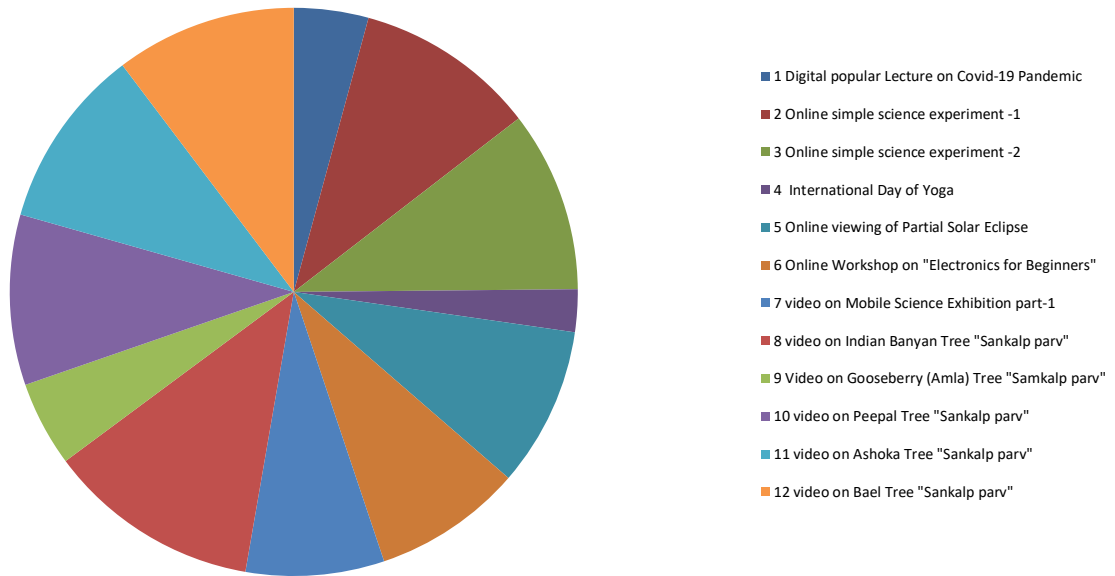
Workshop were conducted through Google Meet, while Webinar, Popular Lecture were conducted through Streamyard and broadcasted on Facebook page of Digha Science Centre. Study is presented through various charts, graphs and photographs. Photos mainly consist of the screenshot taken from mobile/PC, during the ongoing programs. Graphs of likes, reaches and engagements are plotted against their corresponding quantity. No of likes, reaches and engagement on each post were recorded and presented below.

Screenshot of the programs:



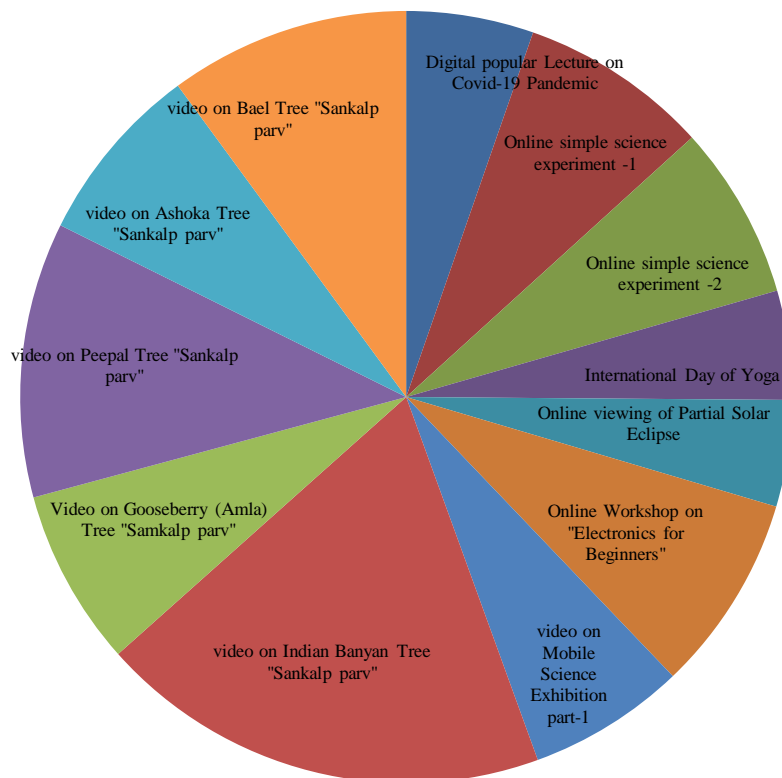
Likes received on the Facebook page of Digha Science Centre is given below (Date:-1st April to 16th July, 2020):

Likes

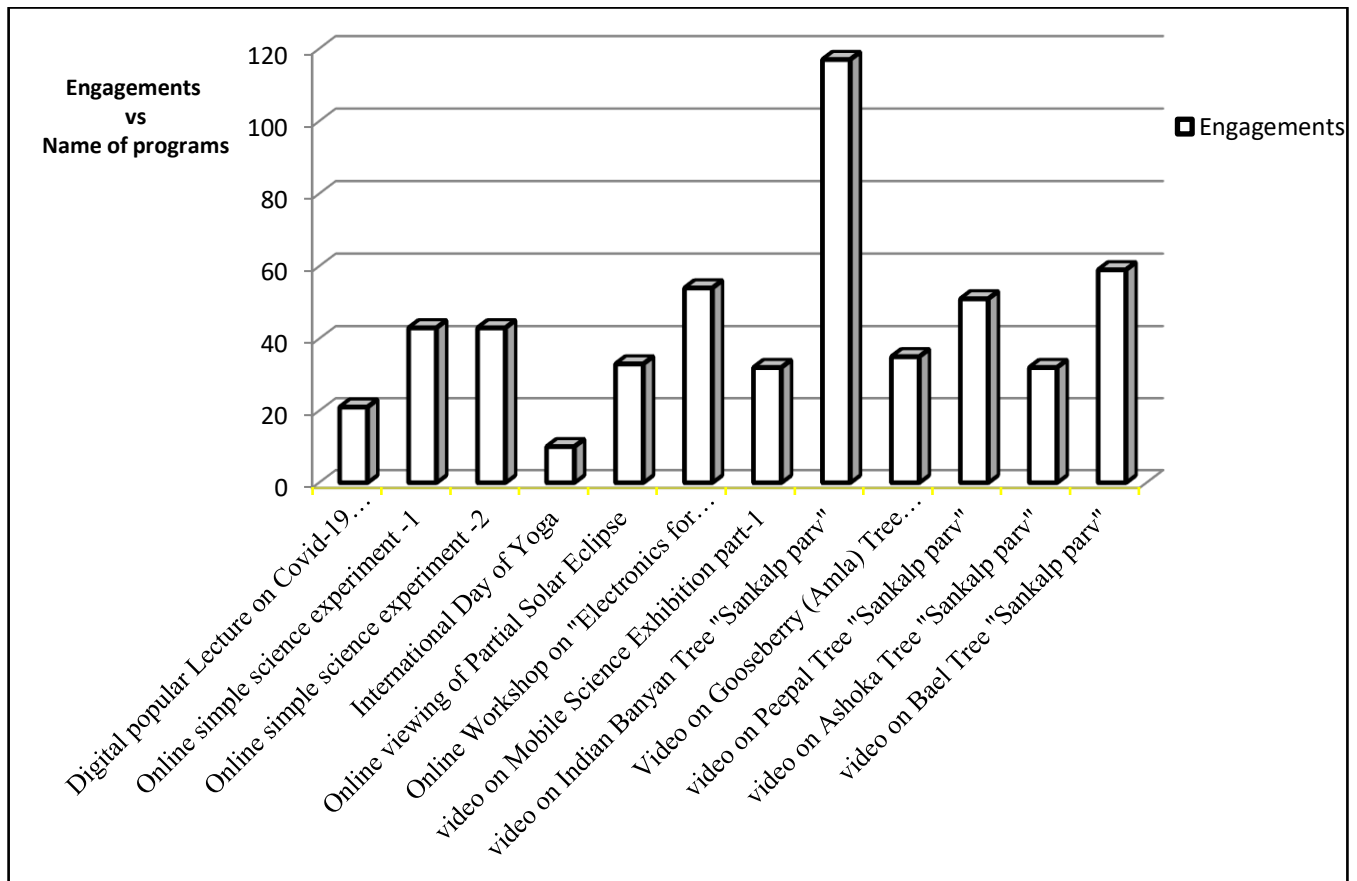


No of people reached during broadcasting of the programs on the Facebook page of Digha Science Centre (Date:-1st April to 16th July, 2020):-

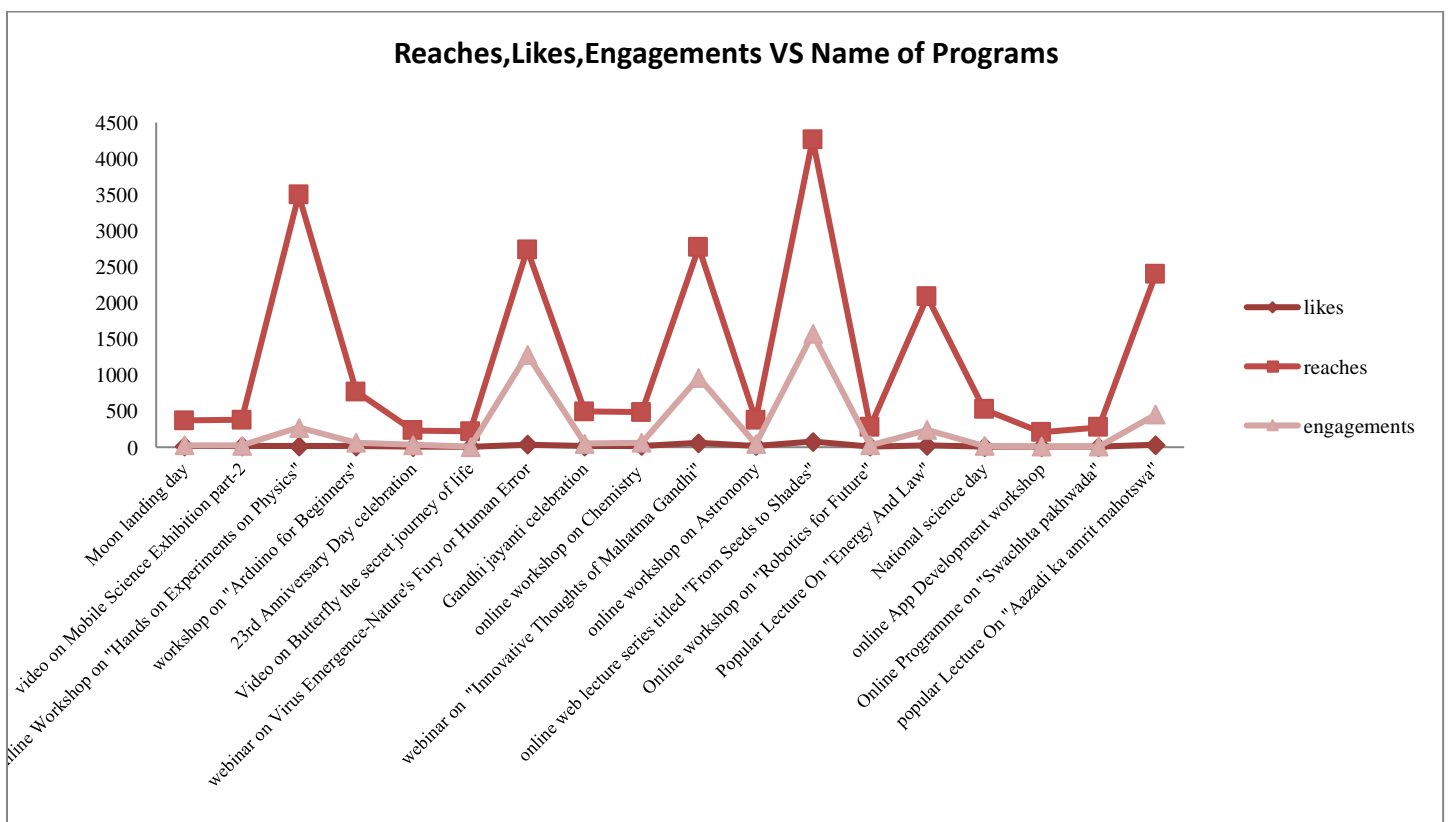
Reaches



No of Engagement during the broadcasting of different programs on the Facebook page of Digha Science Centre (Date:-1st April to 16th July, 2020):-



No of Likes, reaches and engagements during the broadcasting of different programs on the Facebook page of Digha Science Centre (Date:-19th July to 11 April, 2021)



III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Museums' social media engagement has gained tract to the changing society. This study reflects lights on the social media engagements during temporary closure.

It has been concluded that reaches, likes and engagements on Facebook page of Digha Science Centre has increased significantly, if compared with the Facebook data before Covid-19. Programs Broadcasted on social media, reached to wider audiences irrespective of place. Audiences from every corner of the country, gets benefitted from the online programs. Various online programs were conducted before the temporary closure, but the frequency of programs increased during the museum closure. The reasons for the increased views during this time may be attributed to the people spending more time on internet. While the programs were broadcasted on both YouTube and Facebook, Facebook received most engagement.

Prompt engagements like comments on the post of Facebook, gave a more direct communication between Digha Science Centre and the audiences. One of the most beneficial outcomes of this study was accessibility. Audiences now can access the contents of the Centre from far distances. As the digital contents were available free, it also helped the visitors economically, who find it difficult to buy the tickets. Those who were hesitant to visit the Centre, also accessed the contents virtually.

Although digital practices may decrease after the normal functioning, but the impact of digital media cannot be ignored. Centre should try to strengthen the digital practices adopted during the closure of the centre.

The goal of digital material during COVID 19's temporary shutdown was never to completely replace the in-person experience of visiting a museum, as a result, the necessity for digital content did not go away when the museum reopened.

Digital content became an entry point for those who previously lacked access to institutions. It also becomes a great resource for establishing a community among traditional visitors. This has the long-term potential to change how the public perceives and interacts with Digha Science Centre, even beyond the temporary closures of COVID-19.

Live content on various topics of science were deemed to be the most important and beneficial during the COVID-19 temporary shutdown. The current study also establishes a theoretical link between digital material and museum accessibility. Furthermore, it also recognizes that likes, shares, and comments are effective tool to recognize social media engagements.

Finally, the examiner observed that the utilization of community-constructing virtual content, in addition to YouTube and Facebook, had a useful effect on Digha Science Centre media involvement in the course of COVID-19's transient shutdown.

As a result, now is the time to consider how to become more resilient in the coming days. Digha Science centre may need to focus more on the digital content in order to be resilient. Digital platforms might also provide an additional source of revenue.

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