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Games against misinformation: “Cranky Uncle Vaccine” launch

by Charlotte Kilpatrick | Dec 12, 2023 | Technology | 0 comments



Tackling vaccine misinformation is high on the list of challenges almost every member of the vaccine community is facing, so an innovative strategy is exactly what the doctor ordered! The latest effort, developed by GoodBeast, is an edition of the “Cranky Uncle” game that specifically addresses vaccine misinformation. UNICEF reports that it has been launched as a mobile app in Tanzania to equip players with the skills to identify misinformation while consolidating their understanding of vaccine safety, efficacy, and importance!

Informed by “inoculation theory”, the game exposes people to a “weakened form” of misinformation to build “immunity to actual misinformation. This is achieved through

explanations of the rhetorical tricks that are used to mislead.

A collaborative effort

UNICEF reports that “**Cranky Uncle Vaccine**” is a collaborative effort by UNICEF, in partnership with the Sabin Vaccine Institute, Irimi, and the Senior Research Fellow Dr John Cook of University of Melbourne. Dr Cook pioneered the original game with a combination of cartoons and critical thinking to expose the techniques of science denial.

Early in the pandemic, **Dr Angus Thomson**, Principal at Irimi Company, and Dr Cook conceived the idea of a vaccine version of this game as they were writing UNICEF’s **Vaccine Misinformation Management Field Guide**. UNICEF and Sabin entered the ‘game’ with a specific focus on tailoring and testing the game’s “resonance and relevance to local culture and traditions”.

UNICEF Tanzania’s Social and Behavioural Change Manager, Awet Araya, described the importance of arming the community with information.

“In a world overflowing with misinformation, the true vaccine is knowledge, and the tools to discern it are more crucial now than ever before.”

A touch of humour

Dr Cook reflects that “games and humour are perfect allies for tackling vaccine misinformation”.

“They are interactive, engaging, and can be scaled up to reach enough people to make a difference in building resilience against misinformation.”

The **central character** in “Cranky Uncle Vaccine” may be familiar to some; he is an “archetypal science-denying individual” who insists that he knows better than scientists and a health worker, who contributes information throughout the game. Cranky Uncle ‘mentors’ players throughout the game, teaching different misinformation techniques to mislead people.

Local and personal

The team behind the game engaged end users to tailor the script and characters to their contexts. The game is being tested in countries like Rwanda and Pakistan for roll out in 2024; it is already available in multiple languages. UNICEF emphasises the importance of ensuring equitable access and decreasing the “digital divide”; thus, the game is being optimised for low-bandwidth devices. It can also be accessed as an offline print version.

We were glad to speak to Dr Thomson earlier this year to learn more about the importance of social listening for informing vaccine education; if you’re interested in this interview, [click here!](#)

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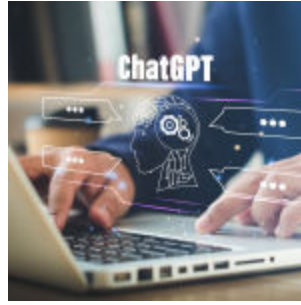
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