TRANSLATORS WITHOUT BORDERS

Chatbots against COVID

Uji is a multilingual chatbot that answers people's questions about COVID-19 by engaging them in real conversations in their own language. A chatbot is a computer program that simulates human conversations on messaging apps and devices. They are programmed to respond in realtime to users' questions about a given topic. Chatbots like Uji let users ask questions in their own words and receive relevant answers in the same language. They can also relay multimedia content to mass audiences, including those with lower literacy levels.

Uji is currently helping contain COVID-19 in the Democratic Republic of Congo with IFRC and the Congolese Red Cross Society. Currently, Uji speaks French, Congolese Swahili, and Lingala, and we'll add more languages soon.

Uji gives humanitarians valuable information

The questions that users ask Uji reveal trends in people's COVID-19 information needs. Those trends help organizations to tailor their communication efforts and provide relevant information to their intended audience.

Uji also tracks rumors without reinforcing them through repetition. For example, a user will only receive information on whether their pet can catch COVID-19 if they ask that question. Uji can then ask follow-up questions to gain more insights on a user's sources of misinformation *("Where did you hear that?").*

Uji collects anonymous user information by asking targeted questions and flagging unrecognized inputs. Our team regularly categorizes and analyzes this information, following current data protection regulations. We'll use this information to further develop language technology like machine translation for local languages. Ultimately, that can enable crisis-affected people to access the information that they want directly, and have their voices heard.

Uji is flexible and FUN

Uji is launching on Telegram and WhatsApp, but can operate with adaptations on a range of platforms, including SMS, to reach a wider audience. The next step will be to add capacity for users to engage by voice alone.

Uji is designed to complement existing platforms that provide reliable information about COVID-19, including the WHO's Health Alert. Such information services typically invite users to select text-heavy information from a menu of predefined topics in official national languages. By contrast, Uji engages users in a dynamic open-format conversation in their own language. Users don't have to find the information themselves; Uji finds it for them.

TWB's experience is that communication in public health emergencies or other humanitarian crises works best when affected people:

- Get answers to their specific questions.
- Receive information that is tailored to their situation.
- Can communicate in a language and format they understand, using familiar words.
- Are confident that humanitarian organizations will collect and respond to feedback.

That's why we created Uji. We know that communicating about public health is a serious business, but Uji is FUN:

- **Fresh** content, regularly updated to address emerging topics.
- **Useful**, relevant, and accessible content, prioritizing local languages.
- **Natural** language that engages users and feels like a real conversation.

Uji can support your programs

We are keen to expand Uji's impact across DRC and into other countries and languages. We plan to apply the technology to other humanitarian and development challenges too. Contact corona@translatorswithoutborders.org to get involved or to find out more.