

KAZAKHSTAN

Chatbots: A Conversation with the Community

A Case Study

Background

As Kazakhstan went into lockdown because of COVID-19 in 2020, many people were not ready. The Red Crescent of Kazakhstan worked to provide assistance to those who were vulnerable, support the healthcare system through providing PPEs, and supporting people in quarantine through calls, and still responding to other emergencies such as natural and manmade disasters.

The Red Crescent Society was spread thin, yet the calls and request for information continued to come in. The Red Crescent of Kazakhstan wanted to provide the information so when a chatbot was suggested to reduce the workload and still support the public with request for information about COVID-19, they began to pursue it. They realized this was a tool that could reach people in their own homes and support people to learn about COVID-19 and take steps to keep themselves and their family safe.

THE TEAM

The team behind the programme:

- 1 CEA focal point in the Red Crescent of Kazakhstan
- Red Crescent Volunteers
- IFRC CEA
- Third-party digital development company





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The Response

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic there was a big desire for information in Kazakhstan about the virus and how to stay safe and healthy. The Red Crescent of Kazakhstan worked to provide assistance to those who were vulnerable and support the healthcare system through providing PPEs, and supporting people in quarantine through calls.

The National Society wanted a way to reach people with information about COVID-19, but without putting an increased workload on staff and volunteers. The chatbot was developed by the Red Crescent of Kazakhstan and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) with the goal that people will be able to learn about the virus with a click of a button.

The chatbot is a computer program that interacts with people through social media. When people ask it a simple question or a comment the chatbot automatically provides an answer, directs people to the service they want, or passes on the comment to the best person via email. This hugely increases the ability of the National Society to provide people with direct access to accurate, reliable information. It brings information to people where they are in an easy to use format.

Through a survey conducted by the Red Crescent of Kazakhstan in partnership with IFRC, people said that social media networks and messaging apps are among the most trusted sources of information on COVID-19. The study was conducted in November-December 2020 and found that television and social media as sources of information were trusted more than formal sources, including medical personnel.

The team contacted a development company for the technical creation of the chatbot. This company continues to provide technical support and answering to the needs of the National Society. The Red Crescent of Kazakhstan created the informational component for the chatbot.

When the bot was launched, in March 2021 the National Society promoted its use through a large social media campaign, and advertising spots in publications – ensuring people had the number to use to receive information.

There was a lot of positive feedback during testing with volunteers about the quality of information being provided. In response, the Red Crescent of Kazakhstan plans to keep information up to date about COVID-19 and the activities of the organization. They use ongoing feedback to know what areas people were interested in and where they didn't need to provide as much information.

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Successes

There were three areas that helped the chatbot succeed:

The technical and design company worked closely with the Kazakhstan Red Crescent Society providing suggestions to help them to create an intuitive interface.

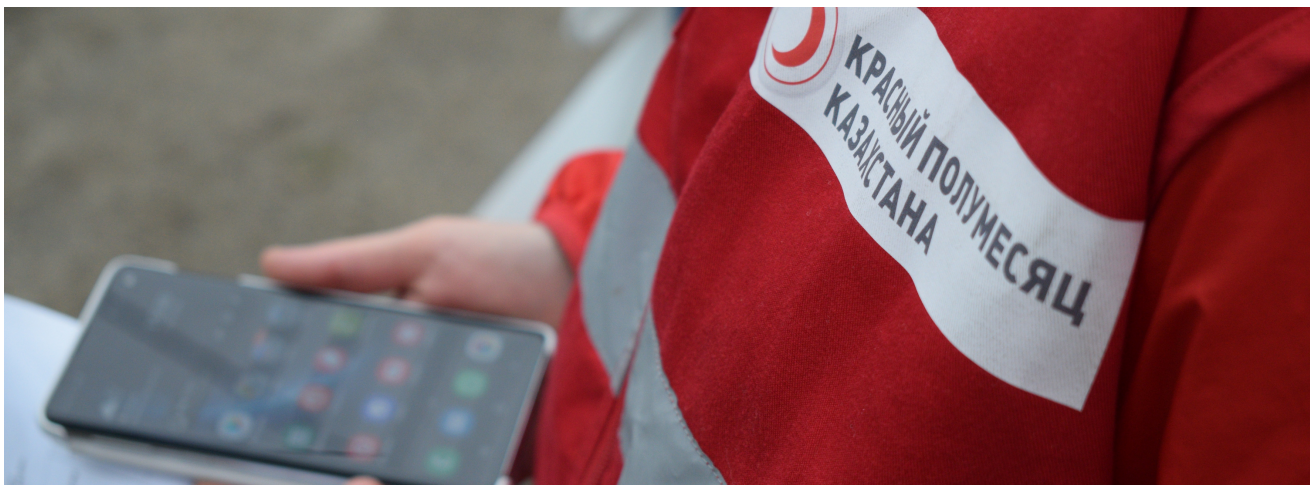
While the bot was launched during COVID-19, it was designed to provide more than just information on the pandemic, this has attracted a variety of people to learn more about the Red Crescent of Kazakhstan.

Active involvement from volunteers including being available to test the bot in the early stages and provide feedback on the information included in the bot and to the bot structure.

Challenges and Reflections

A few times the chatbot system couldn't handle the demand and went down preventing people from being able to use the app. However, the Red Crescent team was able to liaise with the development company for quick repairs. This ongoing relationship has been an important part of keeping the bot technically functioning.

The team had many discussions at the beginning about what would go into a chatbot, there were many rounds of edits and tests, causing some delays to address risks that were learned late in the process. This was the first time the team worked on a project like this, and building on this experience they will assess risks in more detail earlier in the process.

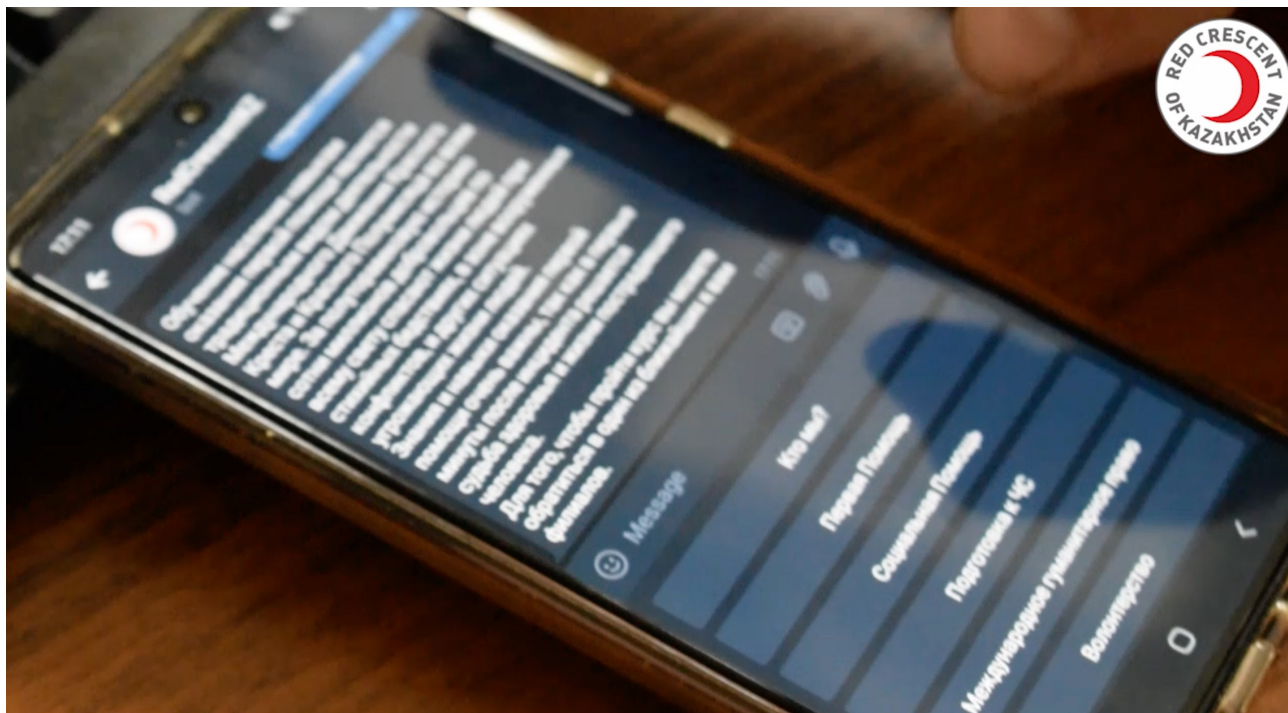


Activity Coverage

The bot was available across the country, however there are regions within Kazakhstan with low-speed internet, where it could be difficult to use. The bot is primarily aimed at younger generations, who find it easier to use digital technologies and quickly adapt to innovation.

The chatbot is available in two languages Russian and Kazak as they are both spoken by the people of Kazakhstan.

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The Impact

In response to the survey about trusted sources of information, the Kazakhstan Red Crescent Society launched the chatbot to provide information from a trusted source in a forum that people had identified as a place they go for information on COVID-19. The chatbot also shared information on how to apply for social assistance and contact information for branches. The bot allowed for a more simplified process of applying for support.

The team will continue to assess the impact of the bot through gathering feedback and other sources of information.

The National Society is still in contact with the developer, so they have left some options to supplement its content. The potential for integrating Red Crescent projects and cases into the chatbot is quite high.

For more information or feedback, please contact:

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