LEVERAGING AI TO IMPROVE ACCESS TO SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH (SRH) INFORMATION AND SERVICES FOR ADOLESCENTS AND YOUNG PEOPLE: INSIGHTS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS FROM JUSTASK! AI CHATBOT IN INDIA

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Background

India, home to 380 million young people, the world's largest youth cohort, holds immense potential for progress in sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). However, social stigma, misinformation, and limited healthcare access continue to hinder the realisation of this potential, particularly for girls and women who face challenges such as early marriage, poor menstrual health knowledge, and early pregnancy risks. Addressing these barriers is crucial to unlocking the full potential of India's youth and ensuring equitable health outcomes for all.

Introduction

JustAsk! is an **AI-enabled WhatsApp based platform,** revolutionising access to SRHR information and services among adolescents and youth in India. Launched in August 2023 by UNFPA India in collaboration with the National Health Mission, State Governments of Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan and Bayer AG, it bridges **critical knowledge gaps while addressing the stigma surrounding SRHR and mental health topics.** As a pioneering **behaviour-led intervention, JustAsk! leverages Human-Centred Design (HCD) and Artificial Intelligence (AI)** to create a personalised, safe and non-judgmental virtual space, providing accurate information and seamless connections to government helplines, online service providers and healthcare facilities.
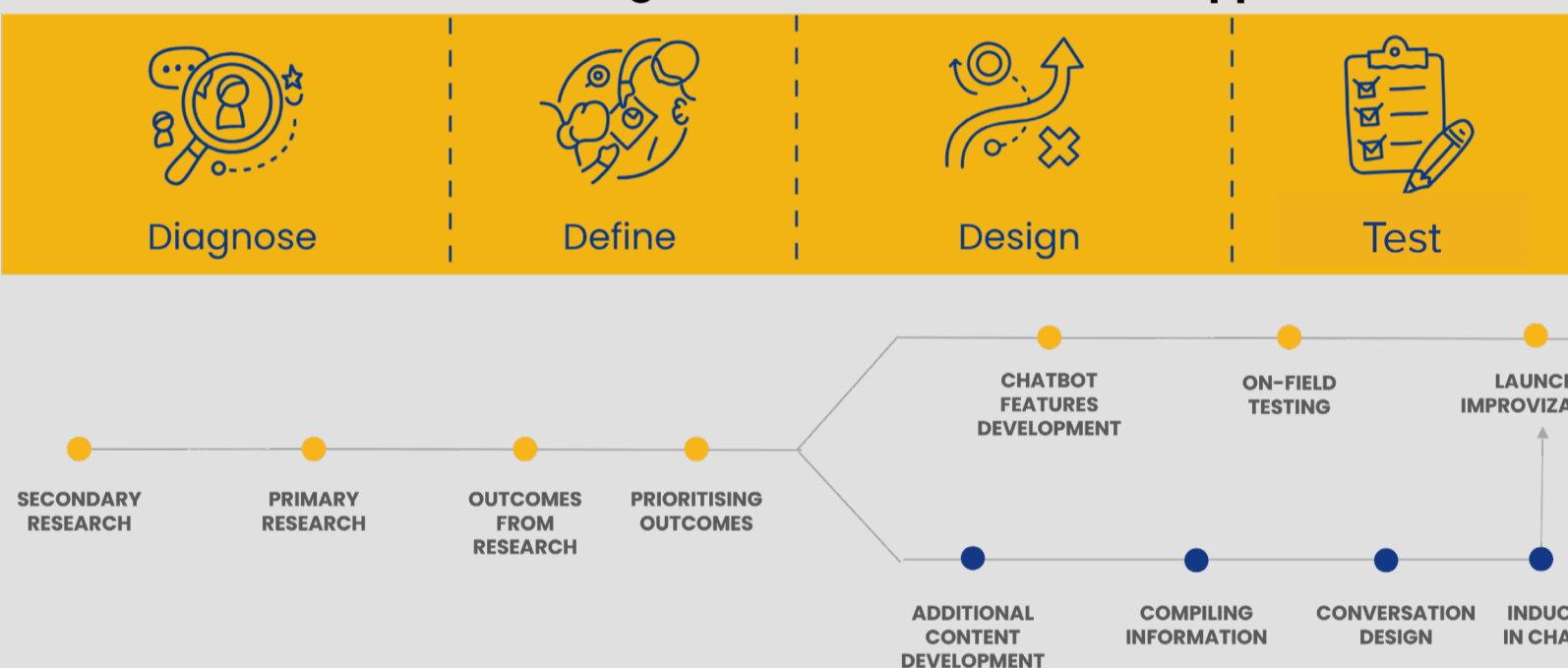
Objectives

JustAsk! aims to empower adolescents, young people with accurate and reliable information on SRHR, mental health, safe internet use, promoting access to quality services and addressing societal taboos. The specific objectives of the platform include:

Empower adolescents and youth by providing reliable, accurate information on SRH, mental health, and safe internet use	Enhance access to services by connecting youth with quality healthcare services and support systems.	Promote inclusivity by addressing the diverse needs of marginalized and vulnerable groups.	Inform policymakers by providing real-time data insights to shape health strategies and programs.	Establish a scalable, replicable model to expand the platform's global reach and impact.

Methodology

JustAsk! leverages an innovative, multi-disciplinary approach, centered on understanding the user needs, technology integration, pilot testing and multi-stakeholder collaboration, ensuring impactful and scalable solutions.

Human-Centred Design X Behavioural Science Approach

Diagnose — Define — Design — Test

SECONDARY RESEARCH — PRIMARY RESEARCH — OUTCOMES FROM RESEARCH — PRIORITISING OUTCOMES — CHATBOT FEATURES DEVELOPMENT — ON-FIELD TESTING — LAUNCH/ IMPROVIZATION

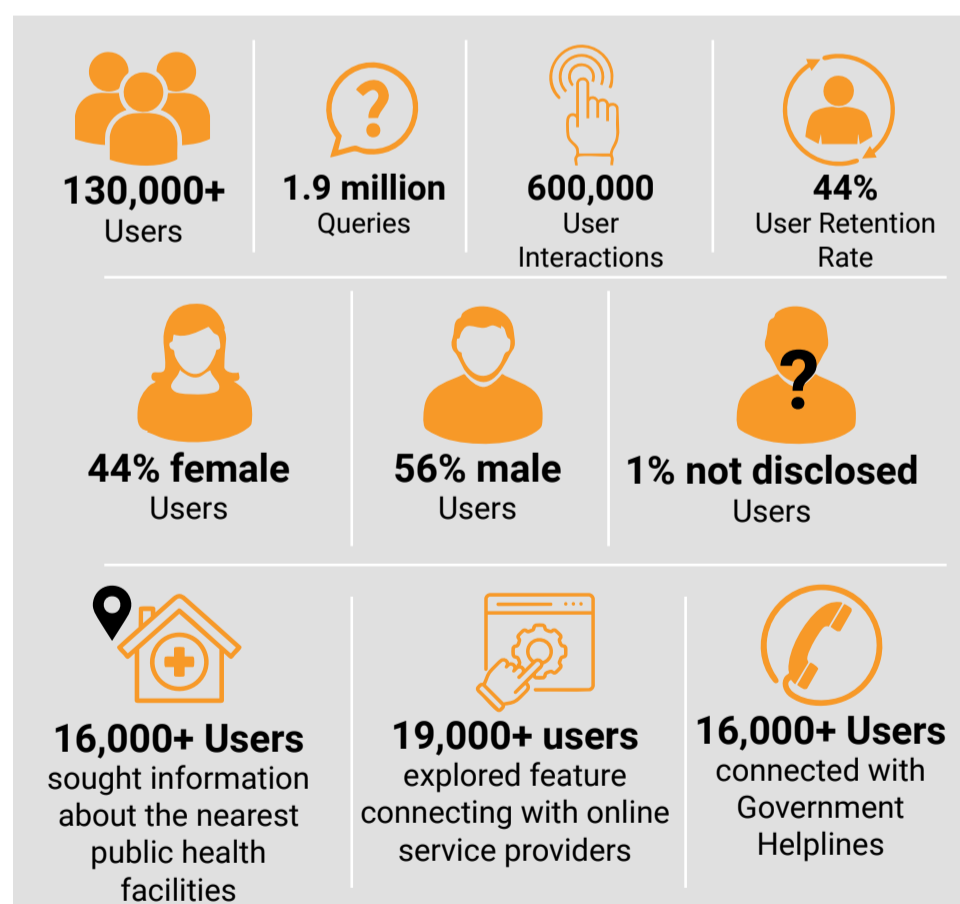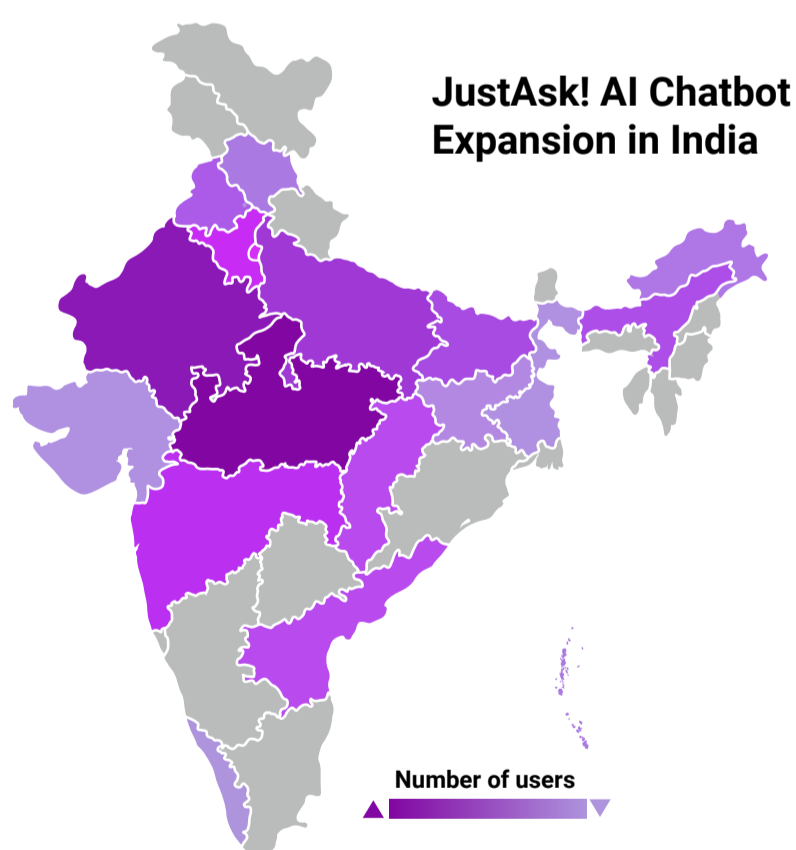ADDITIONAL CONTENT DEVELOPMENT — COMPILING INFORMATION — CONVERSATION DESIGN — INDUCTION IN CHATBOT

Key Design Components

Behavioral Science and Human Centered Design - JustAsk! AI leverages behavioral science and human-centered design to address user needs, offering a safe, user-friendly virtual space for personalized engagement. Insights from research and journey mapping shaped a solution promoting positive behavior change, with initial versions tested by adolescents, youth, and experts to bridge SRHR and mental health information gaps.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) - The platform leverages open source AI algorithms to provide accurate, expert-validated and age appropriate content aligned with Indian Government's Adolescent Health Programs as well as International SRHR Guidelines. It supports multiple languages through the Government of India's Bhashini AI initiative and operates 24/7 using AI-driven conversations.

Technology - Safety Integrations - JustAsk! chatbot prioritizes user privacy and security through robust safety measures. The platform follows the principles of lawfulness, fairness, and transparency, informing users about data collection and processing before registration and obtaining their informed consent before information exchange. It employs MD5 hashing to safeguard data privacy.

Results/Major Findings

JustAsk! AI Chatbot Expansion in India

Number of users

- **130,000+** Users
- **1.9 million** Queries
- **600,000** User Interactions
- **44%** User Retention Rate
- **44% female** Users
- **56% male** Users
- **1% not disclosed** Users
- **16,000+ Users** sought information about the nearest public health facilities
- **19,000+ users** explored feature connecting with online service providers
- **16,000+ Users** connected with Government Helplines

Conclusion

JustAsk! demonstrates the power of AI-driven solutions in addressing critical gaps in SRHR and mental health information and services, especially for adolescent and youth health. Through the integration of behavioural science and AI, the platform has successfully created a safe, accessible, and personalized space for young people to engage with sensitive topics.

Lessons Learned:

- Integrating technology with empathy and accessibility is crucial in creating meaningful health interventions.
- Prioritizing the needs of young people through in-depth user research and incorporating their voices and behavioral insights has been critical in creating effective, accessible solutions that meet evolving needs.
- AI-driven, multilingual support enhances the accessibility of health information, transcending language barriers, while prioritizing user privacy and anonymity to build trust and foster engagement.
- Strong partnerships with key stakeholders, particularly government have been essential for the platform's relevance, sustainability, and impact.

Policy Recommendations

- Integrate AI tools, such as "JustAsk!", in national health initiatives to improve access to information and services for users.
- Utilize data insights from digital to inform and design targeted health programs for adolescents and youth.
- Support research on the effectiveness of digital health interventions and their impact on health outcomes, encouraging the development of innovative solutions to reach the underserved populations.

Most Frequently Asked Queries

Puberty and Growing Up
High interest in body changes, emotional shifts, and the timing of puberty
8,000+ queries

Staying Safe & Practices
Strong focus on understanding safe sex practices, including information on contraception methods and STI prevention
6,000+ queries

Menstrual Health
Key concerns about menstrual hygiene, cramps, and the menstrual cycle
5000+ queries

Mental Health
Explored information on good mental health, exam anxiety, conflict relationships
4000+ queries

JustAsk! aims to reach **1 million** users by 2025 as part of its scale-up plan. By leveraging technology to facilitate open dialogue and empower youth with essential knowledge, JustAsk! is transforming access to vital health information and services.

Scan the QR code or Type 'Hi' on
+91-8657024842
to access the Chatbot

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