

Scientist develops game to arm users against climate change 'fake news'

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New Cranky Uncle app uses gamification to debunk fake news on climate change. Credit: John Cook, Cranky Uncle(tm) app

A George Mason University scientist is developing a mobile game that will teach users to defend themselves from 'fake news' on climate change.

Professor John Cook, an expert on misinformation with Mason's Center for Climate Change Communication, has launched a [crowdfunding campaign](#) to enable development of the [game](#), "Cranky Uncle," for iPhone and Android phones.

Cook has spent over a decade studying different ways to counter misinformation. He is now combining his research into inoculation, critical thinking, cartoon humor, and gamification, into a [mobile game](#).

"Misinformation does great damage to society," said Professor Cook, a member of Mason's Institute for a Sustainable Earth. "An essential solution is making the public more resilient against [fake news](#). But how? Gamification is a powerful approach that can potentially reach many millions of people."

In the game, players are mentored by a cartoon Cranky Uncle who is dismissive of climate science. As they learn to recognize the flaws in Cranky Uncle's arguments, they gain points. This is based on a behavioral technique called active inoculation.

"Before becoming a scientist, I drew cartoons for a living," said Cook. "So, imagine my delighted surprise when after a decade of research, I discovered that cartoons were a powerful tool in countering misinformation."

Cook has tested a prototype of the game in various college classes. "My students appreciated the combination of humor and real-world examples, while I appreciated how engaged they were in learning how to critically think," said Professor Melanie Trecek-King at Massasoit Community

College, Massachusetts. "Learning how not to be fooled is empowering."



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More information: The crowdfunding page is at advancement.gmu.edu/crowdfunding-crankyuncle and more information is available at crankyuncle.com.

Provided by George Mason University

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