

Africa Infodemic Response Alliance

A WHO-HOSTED NETWORK



AIRA Infodemic Trends Report

2-9 September 2024

Weekly brief #135

Top concern

[Donation of mpox vaccines in DRC triggers misinformation about vaccines.](#)

[African and global influencers with anti-vaccine agenda share misinformation about mpox vaccine side effects.](#)

[Discussions about public health and social measures increase in Kenya.](#)

This week, influencers with anti-vaccine narratives influenced mpox discussions in the African region.

Videos include disinformation that mpox vaccines cause sterility and infertility as well as claims that fuel distrust in the WHO.

Conversations about challenging living conditions: Congolese online users complain about outweigh interest in mpox vaccination.

Reference Guide

[Donation of mpox vaccines in DRC triggers misinformation about vaccines.](#)

[African and global influencers with anti-vaccine agenda share misinformation about mpox vaccine side effects.](#)

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Public Health Infodemic Trends in the African Region

This weekly report provides key highlights and operational recommendations based on social listening data from 2-9 September 2024 in Africa.

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Kenya, Democratic Republic of Congo, South Africa, Uganda, Burundi

Donation of mpox vaccines in DRC triggers misinformation about vaccines.

African and global influencers with anti-vaccine agenda share misinformation about mpox vaccine side effects.

Discussions about public health and social measures increase in Kenya.

Breakdown per country

Democratic Republic of Congo

Engagement: 6 posts, 7395 likes, 499 comments

Below are the main concerns from Congolese online users [References: [LINK](#), [LINK](#), [LINK](#)]

- Online sentiment in the DRC regarding mpox vaccines reflects **mistrust and frustration**. Many question why vaccines come from abroad while local experts are “sidelined”, not providing any guidance or sharing their technical expertise. There's suspicion of foreign influence, with references to Bill Gates and “western agendas”.
- Online users believe **the vaccine is a distraction from more urgent issues** like insecurity, poverty, and mismanagement of resources.
- **Vaccination is seen as secondary to basic needs** such as food and safety.
- According to an article by BBC Gahuza [[LINK](#)] a knowledge gap in mpox information at the Rwanda/DRC border makes it difficult for communities (including shoppers, traders) to comply with preventive measures. Local health experts say more efforts in risk communication and community engagement is needed to share more awareness about the disease.

Circulation of disinformation in WhatsApp channels in Francophone countries

Two videos by anti-vaxx influencers were shared this week:

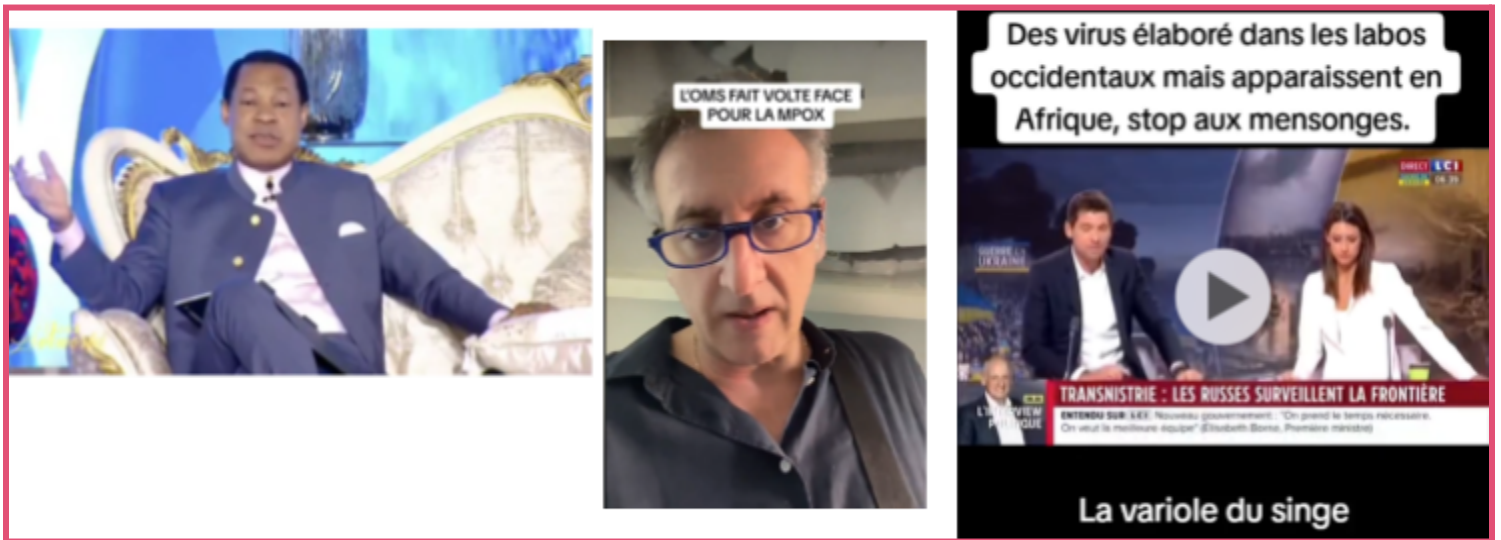
1- The Nigerian pastor Chris Oyakhilome, one of Africa’s most influential pastors, with a large following in the DRC spreads misinformation

- Skepticism about intentions behind the distribution of mpox vaccines in DRC
- References to political insecurity and instability in DRC while no peace prevails fuels skepticism about UN’s role in DRC
- Reference to depopulation, infertility and sterility as vaccine side effects

2-Jim Leveilleur (Jean-Marc Deparnay) is the pseudonym of a conspiracy theorist and Youtube. [\[LINK\]](#)

- Criticism of the declaration of mpox as a PHEIC by WHO when he claims that there is a low number of cases in Africa (around 500), and that “the cases are not transmissible” from one person to another since the method of transmission is only via sexual or close contact”
- Conspiracy theory that suggests Bill Gates had knowledge about the spread of the disease.

3- Conspiracy narrative added that *monkeypox virus* is created in a western lab but only appears in Africa - on a video of a journalist on LCI, a French free-to-air news channel, part of TF1 Group, explains the endemic nature of mpox in Africa and its spread to other countries



Kenya

Engagement: **8 posts, 2691 likes, 576 comments**

Below are the main concerns from Kenyan online users: [References [LINK](#), [LINK](#), [LINK](#)]

- Speculations about **public health and social measures** (suggestions or speculations of a potential lockdown, school closure, social distancing, curfew, wearing of masks) Some comments included an underlying concern that this is a similar scenario to COVID-19 preventive measures.

South Africa

Engagement: **4 posts, 109 likes, 91 comments**

Below are the main concerns from South African online users [References [LINK](#), [LINK](#), [LINK](#)]

- The sentiment of South African online users is marked by distrust and conspiracy theories. Many believe **mpox is linked to side effects from COVID-19 vaccines**, express skepticism about the unknown nature of the strain and concerns about the safety of vaccines coming from other countries.
- There are also **suspicious of financial incentives behind the vaccine donations**, with some fearing government overreach, including forced vaccination and emergency declarations.

Uganda

Engagement: **5 posts, 467 likes, 149 comments**

Below are the main concerns from Ugandan online users [References [LINK](#), [LINK](#), [LINK](#)]

- The sentiment of Ugandan online users is marked by caution, fear over mpox vaccines, and a preference for traditional medicine, such as herbs.
- Online users are also warning educational institutions and communities to be vigilant about the potential risks of vaccination on children.

Burundi

- According to the rapid qualitative assessment on mpox in Bujumbura hotspots collected by the interagency coordinator of the Collective Service on behalf of WHO, IFRC and UNICEF, preliminary findings show a high knowledge of the symptoms of mpox, and knowledge about transmission routes including touching and shaking hands. Sexual transmission is mentioned last, which means that this is the transmission mode that people are less knowledgeable of.
- The high cost of soap is noted as a barrier to preventive measures, and there is a widespread perception that mpox is extremely dangerous, with heightening concerns about the disease.
- Concerns have arisen about children returning to school, with many questioning the availability and safety of vaccines before schools reopen (as there is a high willingness in taking the vaccines according to the rapid qualitative assessment).

Why is it concerning?

- Between 2–9 September, the number of published articles saw a 47% decline compared to the previous week (26 August – 2 September), while social media interactions on articles per day dropped by 55%. Although approximately 550 Facebook posts were published during this period, the total number of comments across all posts remained below 2,100. This might indicate a waning interest in mpox content on Facebook and website interactions (graph 1 below)
- While there is a large volume of Facebook posts originating from Kenya and Nigeria, the online commentary is predominantly from Kenyan and Congolese populations. Kenyan and Congolese users are more actively engaged in discussing, commenting, and reacting to posts about mpox which means that they may also play a larger role in spreading misinformation.
- Public health communication should acknowledge the difficult realities many people face, including economic hardship, conflict, and fear of renewed lockdowns. These fears, often tied to past trauma from COVID-19 restrictions, can reignite anxiety, stress, and mistrust, contributing to social tensions.
- According to the [WHO's Regional mpox bulletin from September 6th, 2024](#), the situation in Burundi escalated rapidly after the declaration of the mpox emergency and, as of 1 September 2024, a total of 1 226 suspected and 328 laboratory confirmed cases with no deaths have been reported in 29 out of the 49 districts. The most affected age groups are children under 10 years (40.0%). The significant rise in cases in Burundi, combined with the limited number of published articles, means awareness about mpox in hotposts areas in Bujumbura may be circulating through different channels. According to data reportal, at the start of 2024, Burundi had 1.51 million internet users, representing 11.3 percent of its total population of 13.41 million. Social media usage was slightly lower, with 940.4 thousand users, accounting for 7.0 percent of the population. [\[LINK\]](#)
- The continuation of anti-vaccine narratives may pose a barrier to the public health response if not addressed.

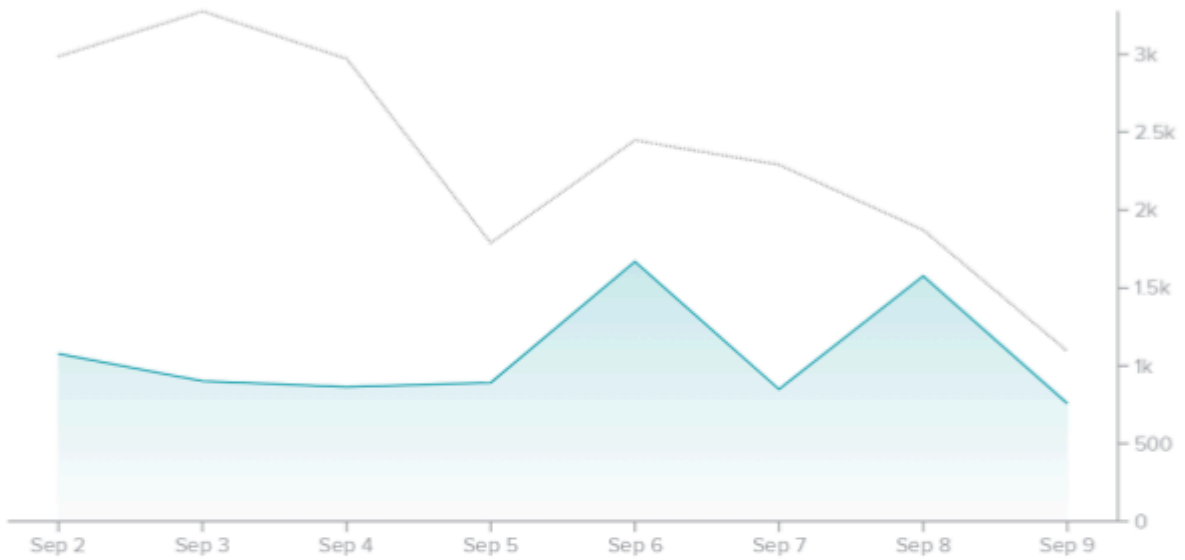
Mpox

— Sep 2, 2024 • 12 AM - Sep 9, 2024 • 11:59 PM - - - - Previous period
(Aug 26, 2024 • 12 AM - Sep 2, 2024 • 11:59 PM)

Public Interest

8.6k Total interactions ↓54%

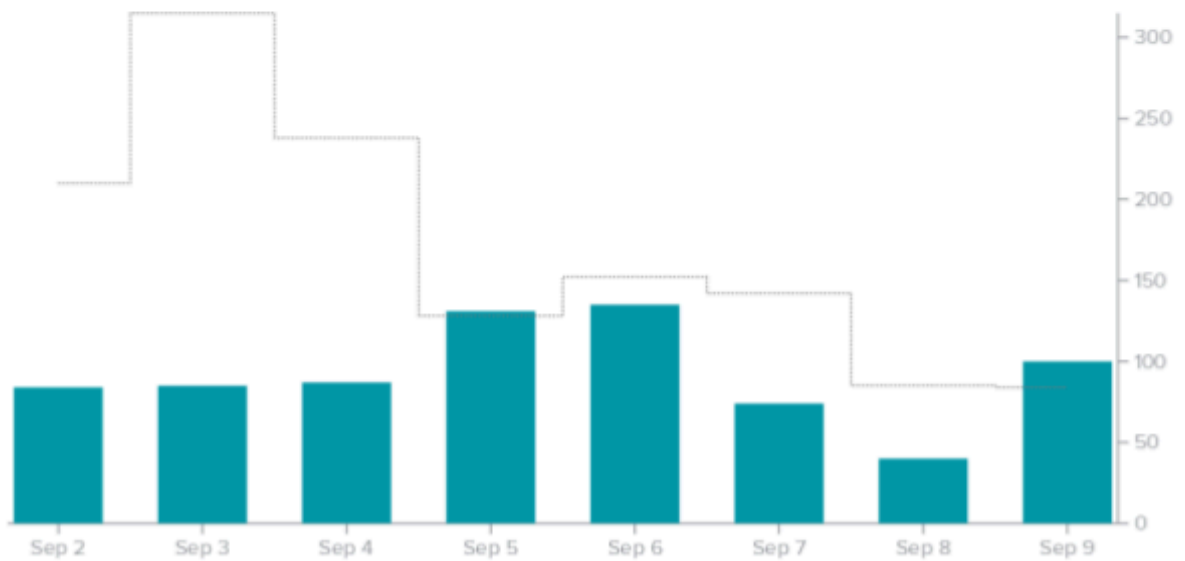
Social media interactions on articles per day



Media Interest

736 Articles published ↓46%

Number of articles published per day



Graph 1, source: NewsWhip

What can we do?

- **Communicate whether mpox vaccines will arrive (or not) in the country:**
Collaborate with national health experts in African countries experiencing rapid spread of mpox to communicate whether vaccines will arrive in the country (or not) and the reasons for it, diving into the criteria for prioritizing countries heavily affected by the mpox emergency, such as the DRC . Work with local communicators and trusted health experts to explain why vaccines need to be imported from abroad and the procedures followed to ensure their safety and quality This approach will help build trust in the vaccine while clarifying concerns, particularly in light of existing skepticism toward WHO and other Western actors.
- **Consider the living realities of communities:** It's important to pair messages about mpox and vaccines with information that acknowledges and responds to the challenging living conditions that people face. Offering information about alternative protective measures for low-income families or guidance on how to isolate family members in crowded households will ensure the messaging is both relevant, actionable and supportive.
- **Provide guidance to parents:** Anxiety about children's health and implementation of PHSM (public health and social measures) are highly correlated. Collaborate with schools to provide specific guidance to parents and caretakers on how to protect their children while reassuring them on the plans for school continuation.
- **Work through trusted channels to address disinformation campaigns:**
Disinformation is emanating from specific anti-vaxx influencers who use logical fallacies, presenting themselves as trusted and credible sources. It is important to debunk harmful disinformation about vaccine side effects, or conspiracy theories about depopulation through collaboration with trusted actors such as fact checkers, community leaders or social influencers. This way, accurate information can be injected in local information ecosystems and supported by dynamics of trust as a way to counter disinformation narratives.
- **Reach out to people where they are!** There's a gap in knowledge about mpox in the DRC/Rwanda border. Consider the different languages and movement dynamics along the border to reach the different communities. Using culturally appropriate health communication materials that are adapted to minority languages can prove very useful. Working through mobile health units can also help in reaching out to different groups on the move.

Key resources

Mpox

- [WHO](#), Strategic framework for enhancing prevention and control of mpox
- [WHO](#), Mpox in the Democratic Republic of Congo
- [VFA](#), Mpox social media kit
- [WHO](#), Risk communication and community engagement (RCCE) for mpox outbreaks: Interim guidance, 24 June 2022
- [Africa CDC](#), Mpox situation in Africa
- [WHO](#), Public health taxonomy for social listening on monkeypox conversations
- [WHO](#), comprehensive list of Mpox webinar series
- [Internews](#), reporting on Mpox, a guide for journalists
- [WHO](#), multi-country outbreak of Mpox
- [SSHAP](#), Key Considerations: Risk Communication and Community Engagement for Mpox Vaccination in Eastern DRC
- [AFP Fact check](#), WHO mpox emergency declaration does not advise lockdowns
- [DW](#), Fact check: No link between mpox and COVID vaccination
- [DW](#), Fact check: Four fakes about monkeypox
- [WHO](#), LIVE: Q&A on #mpox. Join us and #AskWHO your questions!
- [WHO](#), the Global Mpox Dashboard

Methodology

The social media listening process relies on a combination of social media analyses conducted for French, English and Lusophone-speaking countries.

Engagements, otherwise known as interactions, **refer to the number of likes, comments, reactions and re-shares on a post.**

This is not a perfect measure of engagement:

- Some may have seen the post and chosen not to interact with it;
- Commenting on or re-sharing a post may constitute a more meaningful form of engagement than simply reacting to it;
- We are not systematically distinguishing between the types of responses that each engagement generates (e.g. while a post may contain misinformation, people may be countering/debunking it in the comments).

We seek to mitigate these limitations by:

- Scanning comments and monitoring reactions to qualitatively evaluate responses to each post;
- Assessing the velocity of a post (i.e. how fast is it obtaining reactions, likes, and shares) and the re-emergence of specific themes;
- Identifying whether the post is shared across a variety of platforms and sources (broad engagement), or simply soliciting a high level of attention within a given community/platform (siloeed engagement).

The monitoring reports are produced using NewsWhip Analytics, Google Trends.

As a result, data may be biased towards data emerging from formal news outlets/ official social media pages, and does not incorporate content circulating on closed platforms or groups (e.g. private Facebook groups).

We also rely on infodemic managers based in Nigeria, Democratic Republic of Congo and Kenya to provide insights into relevant national infodemic trends or offline content, as well as country-level reports. As we produce more content, we seek to triangulate and corroborate information across these groups to strengthen our infodemic response.