

Africa Infodemic Response Alliance

A WHO-HOSTED NETWORK



AIRA Infodemic Trends Report

26 August - 2 September 2024

Weekly brief #134

Top concern

[Increase in conspiracy narratives about mpox vaccine and disease amidst sentiment of weariness towards what is viewed as recurring health outbreaks in Africa. References to COVID-19 outbreak misinformation and conspiracy theories.](#)
[Use of unproven remedies to treat mpox.](#)

This week, the prevalent theme in mpox discussions centered around conspiracy narratives, with many online users drawing comparisons to COVID-19 conspiracy theories. As vaccine distribution nears in the DRC and vaccine-related conversations increase in Nigeria and Kenya, relying solely on communication-based recommendations is insufficient. Instead, fostering greater involvement of community voices in policymaking may help address the existing distrust of health authorities, as highlighted in previous reports.

Reference Guide

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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 26 August -2 September 2024 in Africa.

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Kenya, Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria

Increase in conspiracy narratives about mpox vaccine and disease amidst sentiment of weariness towards what is viewed as recurring health outbreaks in Africa.

References to COVID-19 outbreak misinformation and conspiracy theories.

Use of unproven remedies to treat mpox.

Top infodemic concerns:

1. Sentiment of distrust, criticism and skepticism towards arrival/approval of vaccines in general.
2. Distrust in health authorities.
3. Advocacy for natural remedies and herbal medicine, such as cassava leaves and sugar cane.
4. Sense of weariness and cynicism towards what is viewed as recurring health crises.

Breakdown per country

Kenya

Engagement: 12 posts, 3603 likes, 1269 comments

1. Below are the main concerns from Kenyan online users: [References [LINK](#), [LINK](#), [LINK](#)]
 - a. High skepticism, distrust in mpox vaccine with anxiety related to COVID-19 vaccine
 - b. Conspiracy narratives about depopulation of Africans through vaccination
 - c. Misinformation that mpox is a fraud and that vaccines are poisonous, and that Africans are tested as guinea pigs
 - d. Reference to COVID-19 similar scenario (After the initial cases were detected, conversations about response and containment efforts, development of vaccines, and public health messaging from local authorities remind online users of a similar process drawn during the COVID-19 pandemic. COVID-19 scenario is being referenced as a benchmark for how public health crises are managed)

Democratic Republic of Congo

Engagement: **8 posts, 7849 likes, 1711 comments**

2. Below are the main concerns from Congolese online users [References: [LINK](#), [LINK](#), [LINK](#)]
 - a. Anxiety about school opening and mpox spread.
 - b. Reoccurring warning featuring renowned Congolese artist, who was invited by Bill Gates to promote the polio vaccine in the DRC and warned against polio vaccination campaign. anti-polio messaging is being repurposed for anti-mpox vaccine messaging.
 - c. Calls for accountability from health authorities (transparency in fund management)
 - d. Confusion between varicella and mpox
 - e. Conspiracy narratives involving Bill Gates' agenda in Africa
 - f. Calls for rejection of vaccines in the DRC, skepticism about vaccine agenda

Circulation of rumors in WhatsApp channels in the DRC

- The video on the left below, features the testimonial of an mpox patient who claims she was cured using a natural remedy of cassava leaves and sugar cane.
- She emphasizes that no Western medicine can cure the disease, only this traditional remedy.
- The photo on the right, mentions “another effective product for the treatment of the mpox called “confo” and makes itching disappear all over the infectious body.”

Forwarded



1:08 2:17 PM

Forwarded many times



Le confo: un autre produit très efficace pour le traitement du virus **variole** appelé **maladie de singe** 🐒, le confo traite efficacement la variole et fait disparaître les démangeaisons sur tout le corps infectieux.

Le mode d'utilisation se présente de la manière suivante pour toute personne contaminée :

1. bouillir l'eau puis la mettre dans le seau de bain, et mettre de 5 à 10 gouttes de confo dans le seau, ajoutez un peu de germol ou detol (**à utiliser avec le savon antiseptique monganga rouge**)
2. Après le bain, frottez légèrement le confo sur tout le corps.

Le confo est un grand soulagement pour toutes les personnes contaminées.

Nigeria

Engagement: 9 posts, 7128 likes, 450 comments

3. Below are the main concerns from Nigerian online users [References [LINK](#), [LINK](#), [LINK](#)]
 - a. Distrust in local authorities' management of the outbreak (suspicion of corrupt actions)
 - b. Continuation of beliefs in a failed western attempt to eliminate Africans with the COVID vaccine.
 - c. Conspiracy narratives including Bill Gates' agenda in Africa and engineering of vaccines to change DNA
 - d. Nigerian private users reject mpox vaccines

Why is it concerning?

- While there is a large volume of articles originating from Nigeria, the commentary is predominantly from Kenyan and Congolese populations.
- While discussions about mpox remain high, the number of articles published in the African region has decreased by 24% compared to last week.
- There is an increasing tone of misinformation and conspiracy narratives in conversations about mpox from Kenyan and Congolese users. The prevalent taxonomy is about overarching conspiracy narratives of the illness being a scam, a lie, health authorities planning population control, similar narratives involving alleged COVID-19. The increase might be related to the prospective arrival of vaccines.
- The sentiments expressed by Nigerian online users are highly negative and conspiratorial. There is a strong distrust towards the western motives, suggesting that vaccines are part of a depopulation agenda aimed at Africans. There is a belief that current vaccination efforts are a repeat of past harmful actions, driven by political agendas, particularly involving U.S. presidential elections.
- There is a slight increase in questions about mpox vaccine (effectiveness, recipient of vaccine)
- Visual analysis reveals an increase of videos and photos about non proven alternative treatments
- There is a recurring theme of disease burden and pandemic fatigue across Africa. While ongoing communication efforts remain crucial, it appears that the public's reaction is also driven by a gap in health programming and communication strategies. This shortfall may be contributing to the growing frustration and disengagement among communities.

What can we do?

- Collaborate with trusted voices to promote vaccine uptake among communities in need.
- Engage in inclusive dialogues with technical experts and community leaders to address the use of traditional remedies that may be dangerous and ineffective in the treatment of mpox and advocate for recommended prevention strategies (videos can be further disseminated on WhatsApp channels to provide an alternative of reliable information to the current misinformation)

- Continue to assess the perceived gaps in local populations around the delivery of public health programming and the resultant lack of trust, use these findings to address public distrust.
- Collaborate with patients who healed from mpox to share success stories and spread more positive statements related to the outbreak while emphasizing on the importance of preventive measures in high risk areas.

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.

The shift from a social media listening and monitoring conducted by only one person for the entire African region, to a combined one based on analysis conducted by three different people, may result in a less detailed and exhaustive report.

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 (siloe engagement).

The monitoring reports are produced using NewsWhip Analytics, Crowdtangle, Google Trends and UNICEF Talkwalker dashboards, as well as the WHO EPI-WIN weekly infodemic insight reports.

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 (e.g. Whatsapp) or groups (e.g. private Facebook groups).

We also rely on our fact-checking partners, who provide invaluable insights into relevant national and regional trends or content, as well as country-level reports, including the South Africa Social Listening Weekly Report and the Mali Social Listening Weekly Report.

In producing these summaries and recommendations, we have consulted community feedback survey reports, as well as monitoring and recommendations from AIRA partners. We also draw from WHO EPI-WIN weekly reports and UNICEF monthly reports to formulate recommendations. As we produce more content, we seek to triangulate and corroborate information across these groups to strengthen our infodemic response.