

Africa Infodemic Response Alliance

A WHO-HOSTED NETWORK



AIRA Infodemic Trends Report
26 December 2022 - 2 January 2023
(Weekly brief #53)

Top Trends

[Concerns over COVID-19 surge in China](#)

Recent comments regarding the surge of COVID-19 infections in China show concerns over the potential consequences on African countries.

[Concerns over the cholera situation in African countries](#)

The response from social media users to the rapid increase of cholera cases in various African countries has been predominantly negative.

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Public Health Infodemic Trends in the African Region

This weekly report provides key highlights and operational recommendations based on social media monitoring from December 26- January 2 in Eastern, Western and Southern Africa, as well as relevant information on current mis/disinformation.

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Concerns over COVID-19 infection surge in China

CONTEXT: [Various](#) African media outlets have reported the recent [surge](#) of COVID-19 infections in China. The WHO remains [concerned](#) about the evolving situation, and online users are apprehensive about the re-emergence of the infections and their potential impact on African countries.



Engagement: 13 posts, 5k likes, 2443 comments.

- Over the last seven days, narratives on African social media pages have focused on the new [surge](#) of COVID-19 infections in China. Various concerns and sentiments include the fear of potential repercussions such as increased cases in Africa, potential lockdowns, and mismanagement of a “new” wave, suggestions of flight bans to and from China, and the lack of concern and media exhaustion regarding COVID-19 updates.

Kenya

- Two particular concerns were reiterated by Kenyan social media users. Of 536 monitored comments on a Facebook [post](#) by Kenyan media outlet NTV, **55%** of comments displayed fear about the potential consequences of the new surge while reminiscing about the impact of the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2019. Around **18%** of users suggested the government restrict travel flights to and from China as a preventive measure.

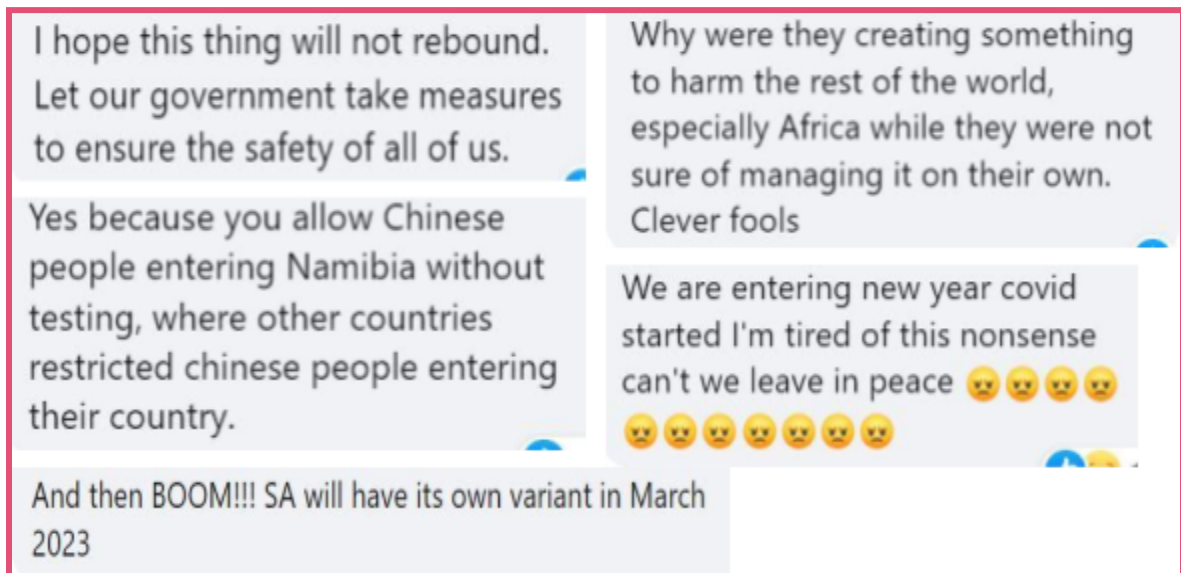
South Africa

- Another key trend from social media users is the general fatigue around COVID-19 updates and their shift of concern to other daily pressing issues. For instance, **15%** of the comments on monitored Facebook [posts](#) for South Africa show higher concern about electricity load shedding across the country.

Namibia

- Comments on a Facebook [post](#) from The Namibian, the largest daily newspaper in Namibia, display a general skepticism about the authorities’ ability to contain the virus and its new variants out of the country’s borders.
- A limited share of individuals across all social media platforms have linked the surge of cases in China to be an adverse consequence of the current vaccines.

- Information gaps on upcoming COVID-19 concerns (including governmental measures, travel restrictions, and a potential new surge in Africa) are shared in the snapshots below:



Why is it concerning?

- COVID-19 news continues to incite fear and frustration. The news of surges in COVID-19 cases is mostly generating negative sentiment as users are tired of COVID-19 updates. This could mean a lower willingness from the public to comply with COVID-19 preventive measures.
- The reports of the new COVID-19 cases surge in China and other countries might reignite anti-Chinese and anti-foreigner sentiments that were observed at the beginning of the pandemic in 2019.

What can we do?

- Specific messages to fill information gaps that have fostered fear regarding the new surge could also be drafted to respond to online users' and community members about their questions, including information gaps on variant name, cause of the surge, severity, and effectiveness of current vaccines on the Omicron variant.
- Continue monitoring the epidemiological situation in China and the timely publication of data to formulate accurate risk assessments and to inform effective responses in each country.
- Reiterate that the pandemic is not over yet and that vigilance and adherence to public health measures are vital to mitigate the spread of cases.
- Amplify the message that [COVID-19 vaccines](#) are safe and effective, and the vaccines' ability to mitigate the complications of the disease if contracted.

Concerns over the rise of cholera cases in African countries

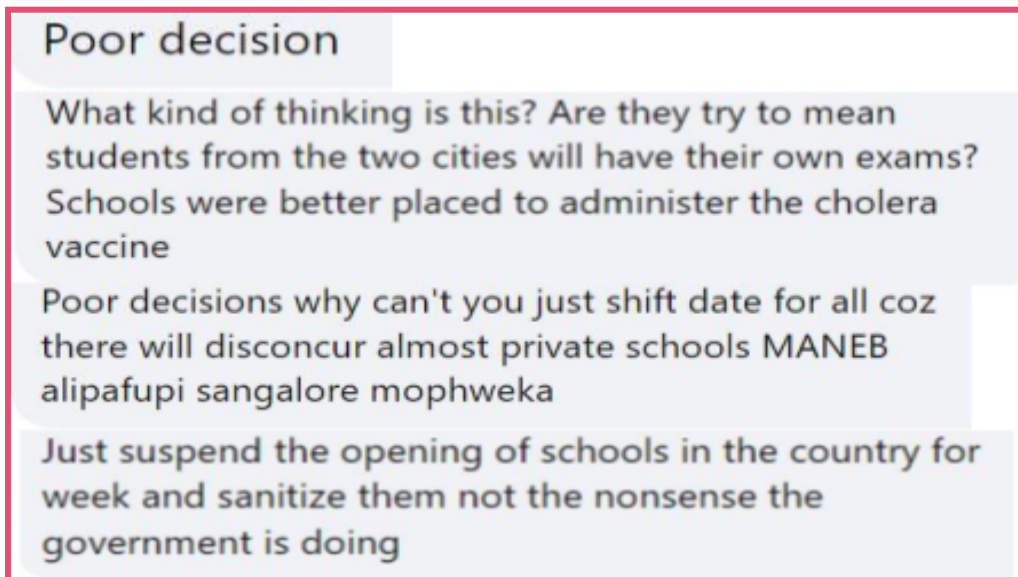
CONTEXT: Due to the rise of Cholera cases in various African countries, authorities have been actively posting relevant guidance and preventative measures to take on their respective social media platforms. The response from social media users to the rapid increase in Cholera cases has been predominantly negative.



Engagement: 10 posts, 2982 likes, 1494 comments

Malawi

- The recent spike in Cholera cases in Malawi has led authorities to suspend school opening for two more weeks after the holiday break.
- Of 459 monitored comments on a Facebook [post](#) by Times 360 Malawi, a digital newspaper, 76% (roughly 350 comments) of online users disagree with the new decision claiming that the authorities had ample time to sanitize the schools during the festive season and raise more awareness on Cholera to pupils. Individuals are also concerned with the pupils' learning gap as some will be disadvantaged when sitting for national exams.
- Below are some snapshots of the comments:



- The Ministry of Health has amplified the accessibility of Oral Cholera Vaccine (OCV) in health facilities in both cities on its Facebook [page](#).

Kenya

- The response from social media users to the rapid increase of new Cholera cases registered in Kenya has been predominantly [negative](#), as many still believe the government is mismanaging it. The general social media community in Kenya has highly politicized the cholera outbreak and continued criticism, particularly of the local authorities, has drawn the community's focus away from the response measures taken by the authorities to mitigate the outbreak.
- A post on [Twitter](#) about the cholera outbreak in Kenya has garnered over 750 likes, and at least 900 retweets. Online users have expressed their sadness regarding the loss of cholera patients.

Why is it concerning?

- Blatant criticism over the authorities' handling of the different cholera outbreaks can indicate a low trust and credibility in their approach. The pushback against governmental cholera-related measures can bring more challenges in effectively responding to the outbreak.

What can we do?

- Accountability and transparency from the authorities and public health institutions is needed at every stage of the response to gain credibility and trust with social media users and the wider communities. In order to build trust, it is important to continuously inform the public via daily and weekly updates regarding the cholera situation in all countries.
- Collaborate and engage trusted influencers in affected areas to highlight how individuals can contribute to addressing the cholera outbreak. Public-facing messaging can help limit overall confusion and information gaps.
- Share the WHO Cholera [fact sheet](#), Viral Facts content, or other resources from verified sources that explain the treatments, prevention, and control measures.

Persistent Rumors

Inaccurate assumptions of vaccine side effects/ long-term effects

- Response: Fear of vaccine side effects/ long-term effects continues to be misinterpreted or overstated (Viral Facts response [here](#)).

Information Gaps

The most common questions raised by social media users this week are:

COVID-19

- What is the cause of the new COVID-19 surge in China?
- Are the vaccines and booster shots still effective?
- What are the implications of the recent COVID surge in China for the upcoming year?
- Will African countries ban flights to and from China?

Cholera

- What will happen to pupils' school calendars and exams?
- Why are schools closed in Malawi? Can the government opt for another measure to mitigate the spread of cholera?

Key resources

Viral Facts Africa social media content: [Facebook](#) [Twitter](#) [Instagram](#)

COVID-19 VFA content

- Debunk: COVID vaccines safety and approval [ENG](#) [FR](#)
- Debunk: Vaccine causing COVID-19 infection [ENG](#) [FR](#)
- Prebunk: COVID preventive measures during the festive season [ENG](#)

Cholera VFA content

- Explainer: Cholera 101 [ENG](#) [FR](#)
- Explainer: Cholera preventive measures [ENG](#) [FR](#)

Methodology

The social media listening process relies on a split of social media analyses conducted for French, English, and Lusophone-speaking countries. The social media analysis for French-speaking countries is conducted by the AIRA Infodemic Manager Consultant based in Guinea, the one for Lusophone-speaking countries by the AIRA Infodemic Manager Consultant based in Angola, and the one for English-speaking countries by a WHO AFRO social media officer.

The final report is a combination of the three analyses and recommendations.

The shift from a social media listening monitoring conducted by only one person for the whole African region into a combined one based on the 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 (siloeed engagement).

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

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.

Our commercial social listening tools include:



NEWSWHIP



TweetDeck



Talkwalker