

# Africa Infodemic Response Alliance

A WHO-HOSTED NETWORK



**AIRA Infodemic Trends Report**

**5-12 August 2024**

**Weekly brief #131**

# Top concern

[Mpox outbreaks: calls for urgent action by online users in Democratic Republic of Congo and South Sudan, more questions about Mpox prevention measures, cause and symptoms in Kenya, misinformation that a Nigerian prophet healed an Mpox patient, ahead of WHO assessment meeting about Mpox as a public health of international concern](#)

The WHO Director General convened an Emergency Committee to assess whether the recent upsurge of mpox in the African region constitutes a public health emergency of international concern. As the epidemiological situation evolves, the infodemic in the African region evolves too, including more anxiety, questions about Mpox and sentiment of distrust towards the WHO.

## Reference Guide

[Mpox outbreaks: calls for urgent action by online users in Democratic Republic of Congo and South Sudan, more questions about Mpox prevention measures, cause and symptoms in Kenya, misinformation that a Nigerian prophet healed Mpox patient, ahead of WHO assessment meeting about Mpox as a public health of international concern](#).....Pg.3

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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 5-12 August 2024 in Africa.

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## Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria, South Sudan, Kenya, South Africa

**Mpox outbreaks: calls for urgent action by online users in Democratic Republic of Congo and South Sudan, more questions about Mpox prevention measures, cause and symptoms in Kenya, misinformation that a Nigerian prophet healed an Mpox patient, ahead of WHO assessment meeting about Mpox as a public health of international concern**

### Democratic Republic of Congo

**Engagement: 10 posts, 1046 likes, 162 comments**

- Online commentary is increasingly calling on authorities to take immediate action. There is a growing concern about the disease, with calls for robust surveillance mechanisms to be implemented swiftly to manage and mitigate anxiety within the community. [[LINK](#), [LINK](#)] Below are some comments:

Nous sommes décimés en silence car, les autorités refusent de faire quelques choses.

Soit fort mon frère, que les autorités concernées prennent au sérieux cette maladie

Il est temps de prendre les mesures nécessaires maintenant là avant que les pires ne puissent arriver.

C'est très grave... Que les autorités sanitaires fassent quelque chose. Les mesures barrières sont à prendre au sérieux pour limiter la propagation: se laver les mains après qu'on ait salué quelqu'un, éviter tout rapport sexuel avec n'importe qui, ne pas manger la viande d'un animal mort sans savoir de raison de sa mort,...

### Nigeria

**Engagement: 5 posts, 1659 likes, 405 comments**

- Across the top Facebook posts with highest interaction this week is a post by Prophet Jeremiah Omoto Fufeyin, a prominent Nigerian Christian pastor and televangelist known for his prophetic ministry, healing services, and philanthropy.
- In the video, a young lady testified to being healed of chronic Mpox and attributed her recovery to his prophecy. [[LINK](#)] Based on the comments below the video, online reactions are divided between supporters of spiritual healing which has been at the core of religious activities of Nigerian prophetic churches

and detractors of it. An online user shared a video on [X](#) expressing skepticism about the prophet's products, revealing that after purchasing several of his products, none of them worked. [[LINK](#)].

### South Sudan

**Engagement: 5 posts, 1659 likes, 405 comments**

- Three radio stations in South Sudan, namely Eye Radio, Radio Miraya reported that health authorities in Northern Bahr el Ghazal State have detected the first two suspected cases of Mpox in Aweil town. [[LINK](#), [LINK](#), [LINK](#)]
- Online users are calling for urgent intervention from health practitioners, increased public awareness about the disease, intra-state movement restrictions, and heightened attention from health authorities regarding this latest development.

### Kenya

**Engagement: 13 posts, 3822 likes, 397 comments**

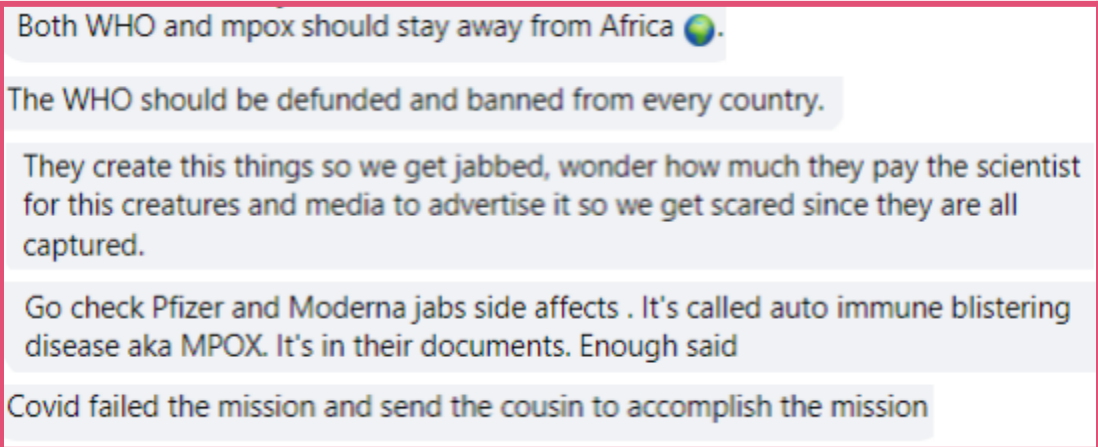
- Online users in Kenya are expressing concern about mpox, seeking clear prevention measures, and information on the disease's cause, spread, and symptoms. There are questions about available medications and the reliability of hospital care. [[LINK](#), [LINK](#), [LINK](#)]
- An X page with a history of spreading disinformation on his page has recently circulated anti-vaccine narratives about COVID-19, Mpox and other vaccines, urging Kenyans to reject vaccinations and framing it as a "wake-up call." The page also reinforces skepticism about western healthcare initiatives in Africa including the work of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation by framing vaccination as a bioweapon. A total of eight commentators expressed anxiety about his claims and amplified conspiracy narratives. [[LINK](#)]

### South Africa

**Engagement: 6 posts, 340 likes, 239 comments**

- In this reporting period, online reactions to posts by South African news media about the World Health Organization's (WHO) consideration of convening an expert committee to potentially declare an international emergency reveal significant distrust in WHO. Many online commentators express skepticism about the organization's intentions in Africa and its partnerships with western

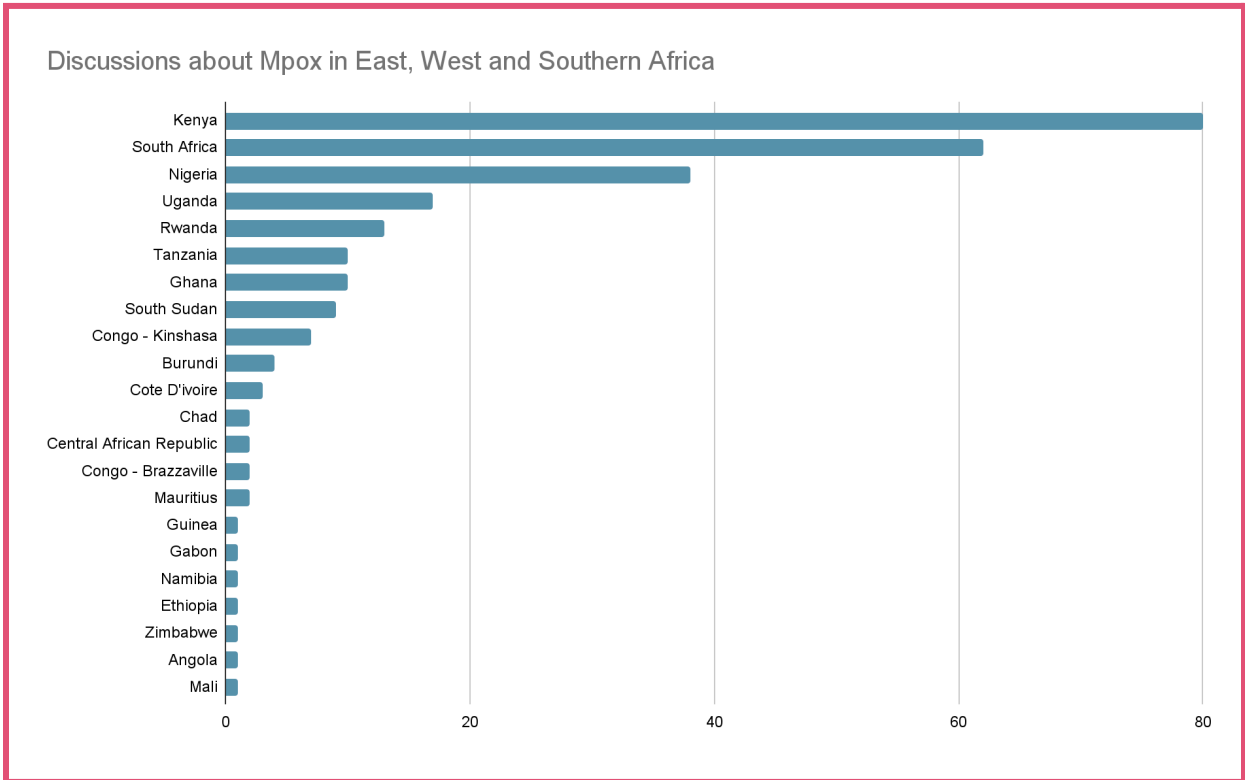
philanthropies, and spread misinformation that mpox is a side effect of the COVID-19 vaccine. Below are some comments [[LINK](#), [LINK](#)]

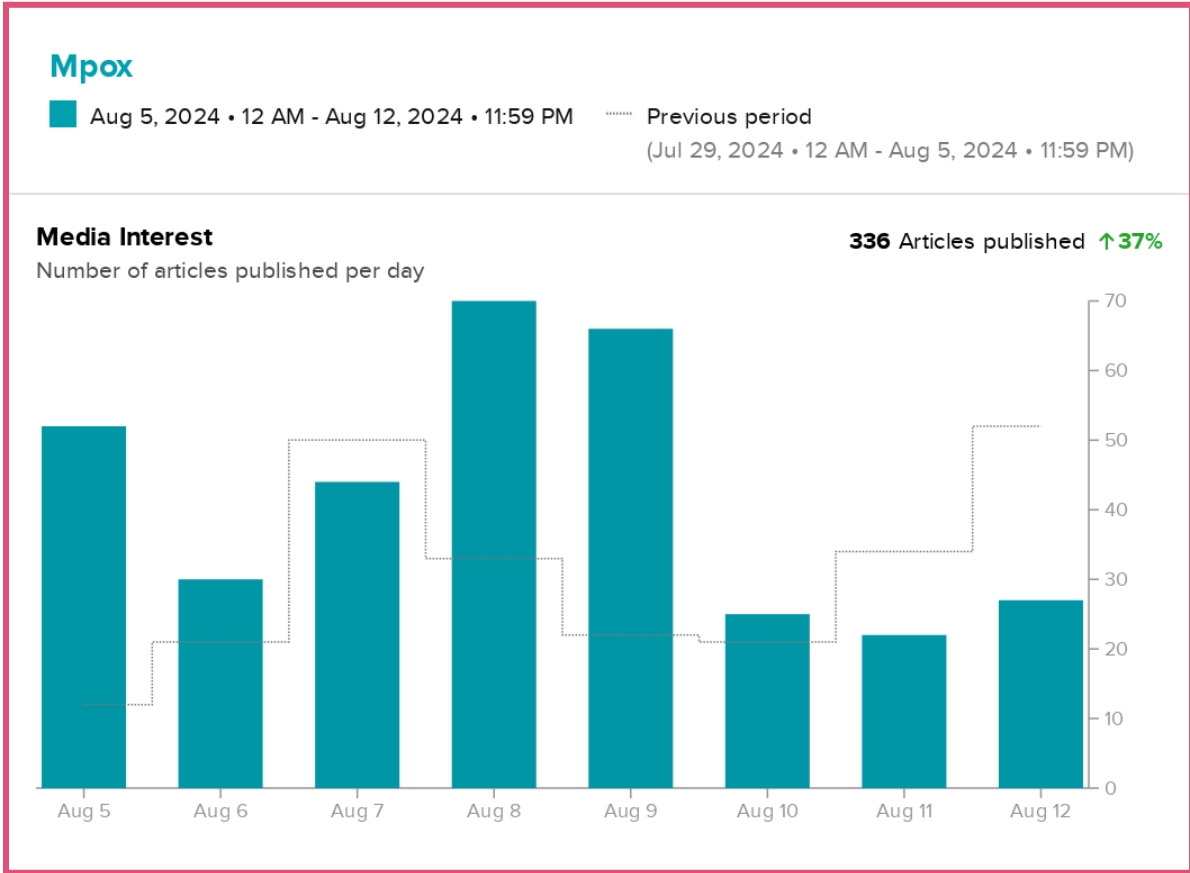


### Why is it concerning?

- The World Health Organization is set to convene an emergency meeting on 14 August to assess whether the outbreak constitutes a public health emergency of international concern [[LINK](#)]. Africa CDC has also shared its intentions towards declaring Mpox as a continent-wide public health emergency. [[LINK](#)]
- According to the multi-country outbreak of Mpox, WHO at the time of writing this report, has regraded the global mpox multi-country event to an acute grade 3 emergency in accordance with the WHO Emergency Response Framework and issued an information posting to WHO Member States [[LINK](#)]
- Sustained interest in Mpox from African news media agencies is evident, as reflected in the high quantitative insights captured during the monitored period (refer to the bar and screenshot below extracted from the data of NewsWhip social monitoring tool). However, the upcoming meeting to potentially declare Mpox as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) is expected to draw significant attention from news media agencies, online users, and disinformation accounts that were active during the COVID-19 pandemic. The announcement may trigger disinformation groups to remind online users of conspiracy theories that were relevant during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, and suggest that these theories may still be relevant to other outbreaks in the region. This might also trigger stereotypical issues surrounding mpox to surface, including associating the disease with certain groups or blaming communities for the spread of the disease.

- According to the Multi-country outbreak of mpox, External situation report#35-12 August 2024, a new variant of the Mpox virus, known as Clade 1b, is driving the outbreak in eastern DRC and has spread to neighboring countries including Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, and Uganda, which had never reported Mpox cases before. [\[LINK\]](#)





### What can we do?

- Given the evolving nature of the Mpox outbreak in different countries, continuous social listening monitoring is crucial. This will help track public sentiment and emerging trends, monitor both disinformation accounts and questions by users that if left unanswered may turn towards less trustworthy sources of information, as highlighted in the last three AIRA reports, while enabling timely and targeted RCCE interventions.
- Equipping media professionals and journalists with accurate information about topics that predictably could trend such as the Mpox vaccine, especially concerning vulnerable people such as pregnant women or children, the difference between Mpox and COVID-19 vaccines to counter misinformation that might follow the announcement.
- Consider clarifying what is a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) in simple language as this represents a different level of global health risks and has different implications for public health responses can be relevant, as online users might amplify sentiment of recurring outbreaks.
- Addressing the anxiety and the demand for information by online users requires a multifaceted approach including but not limited to:

- Providing clear, timely, and consistent information about the Mpox outbreaks in the African region to show how local authorities are mitigating the spread of the disease.
- Disseminating credible information about the work of health care providers in hospitals, treatment centers to debunk non-scientific interventions that can hamper the delivery of evidence-based healthcare services.
- Collaborate with fact checkers should disinformation about Mpox be amplified.

## 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

## 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 (siloed 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.