

Africa Infodemic Response Alliance

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AIRA Infodemic Trends Report

16-23 September 2024

Weekly brief #137

Top concern

[Conspiracy-driven sentiments in conversations about mpox in Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya and Rwanda](#)

This week, Rwanda launched its mpox vaccination campaign, targeting people in high-risk areas. Social listening data reveals that conspiracy-driven sentiments are widespread, with many expressing fatigue over what they perceive as a never-ending cycle of vaccines for each new outbreak as well as the belief that vaccines and diseases are deliberately manufactured by Western nations as a means to control Africans.

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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 16-23 September 2024 in Africa.

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Kenya, Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda

Conspiracy-driven sentiments in conversations about mpox in Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya and Rwanda

Breakdown per country

Democratic Republic of Congo

Engagement: 7 posts, 1012 likes, 200 comments

Below are the main concerns from Congolese online users

[References: [LINK](#), [LINK](#), [LINK](#)]

- Question about what preventive measures are being taken to stop the spread of the disease.
- Concern from online users that some people are neglecting the seriousness of the disease.
- Fear that the government is causing more harm to the population than the disease itself.
- Frustration that all experiments seem to be conducted in Congo and on the Congolese people.
- Strong refusal to allow any family member to be vaccinated. Doubts about the vaccine's safety and discouragement from recommending it to family members (including children at schools).
- Belief that the virus is being created intentionally and suspicion that those who create the virus will also offer the vaccine to profit from the situation.
- Reference to Bill Gates and Maitre Gims' interview that emerged in mid-July. The clip showcases the artist's decision to turn down the role of ambassador for a polio vaccination campaign in the DRC, and reinforces conspiracies that Bill Gates is involved in suspicious activities related to vaccines.

Kenya

Engagement: 9 posts, 10,555 likes, 459 comments

Below are the main concerns from Kenyan online users

[References [LINK](#), [LINK](#), [LINK](#)]

- Perception that mpox is a strategy to steal Congo's minerals (this can be triggered by the title of the article: "Congo gold-mining town is mpox hotspot as new strain spreads" [LINK](#)).

- Criticism of the Congolese government for being inactive and allowing exploitation of its resources.
- Suspicion that individuals involved in exploitation of African resources will later use UN donations, pretending to help the African continent.
- Concern that this situation will create “mpox billionaires,” benefiting from the crisis rather than addressing it.
- Doubt over the existence of mpox cases in Kenya, with users claiming they've never seen anyone with the disease.
- General sentiment that nobody wants to receive mpox vaccines.

Rwanda

Engagement: 7 posts, 1272 likes, 538 comments

Below are the main concerns from Rwandese online users

[References [LINK](#), [LINK](#), [LINK](#), [LINK](#), [LINK](#)]

- A sense of fatigue expressed by people who say they are not ready for another round of vaccines each time a new outbreak occurs. The comment which stands out is the one about vaccines and diseases being manufactured by the West to control Africans.
- Questions why some groups were not prioritized in mpox vaccination.
- Concerns over taking a new vaccine while the effects of the COVID-19 vaccine are still unclear, then welcoming the news yet another effort to save lives, or asking whether the country has become a big laboratory for any new drug to be tested on its citizens.
- Users criticize African leaders for following Western advice, implying that Western countries may have ulterior motives. There’s a conspiracy-driven sentiment, with claims that Western countries use Africa for testing vaccines.

Why is it concerning?

- Rwanda began vaccinating people in high-risk areas against mpox, the first country in Africa to start the vaccination campaign against mpox, amid a rise in cases in multiple countries, including its neighbors, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Burundi.[\[LINK\]](#) Online narratives in Rwanda have been heavily influenced by conspiracy-driven sentiments, with claims that Western countries use Africa for testing vaccines. Such narratives testify of the distrust in health authorities, both international and local, which can lead to continued skepticism

in use of vaccines in responding to health outbreaks and local authorities' work in mitigating the spread of the disease.

- A top post on X this week by a Kenyan account, Eric [\[LINK\]](#), who claims to be certified medical specialist in reproductive health, falsely claims that children are being injected with mpox vaccines in schools without parental consent. [\[LINK\]](#). The post has fueled concern among online users, who express anxiety about unauthorized vaccinations, emphasizing the need for parental consent and urging others to question school health practices, reflecting growing mistrust and fear. The latest public health communication on mpox in Kenya does not include any update on mpox vaccination [\[LINK\]](#)
- Anti-polio messaging is being repurposed for anti-mpox messaging with recycled misinformation in the DRC. Misinformation that a known celebrity pushed back against being a polio campaign ambassador is now being used in messaging against mpox vaccines. This goes to show how sticky misinformation can be in the context of disease outbreaks and shared to respond to unconscious biases from online users.

What can we do?

- **Promoting local actors in the fight against mpox in Rwanda and DRC to reduce conspiracy-driven sentiments:** Leverage the trust and reach of local technical experts to provide accurate information, dispel misinformation, and promote preventive measures within communities. Explainer videos featuring technical experts and in local languages specific to affected areas can provide communities with essential information about mpox symptoms, treatments, and vaccine safety.
- **Collaborate with media partners in the DRC to prevent circulation of misinformation about mpox vaccine ahead of campaign next week:** Provide media partners with fact sheets, talking points, and infographics that address common myths and misinformation about the mpox vaccine. Ensure journalists are equipped with credible sources and scientific data to combat rumors and false claims.
- **Provide guidance to community members about vaccine eligibility in DRC (and other countries if vaccination campaigns are announced):**

Collaborate with local communicators and trusted health experts to provide further explanation about mpox vaccines including 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, western actors, and local authorities.

- **Ongoing monitoring of misinformation about mpox in all countries:**
Anti-vaccine narratives can fuel existing distrust in healthcare authorities. Monitoring the impact of their messages can help us identify the most vulnerable online communities and evaluate if immediate response is needed.

Key resources

Mpox

Resources for social listening analysts

- [WHO](#), Public health taxonomy for social listening on mpox conversations

Resources for journalists & fact checking

- [Internews](#), reporting on mpox, a guide for journalists
- [WHO](#), comprehensive list of mpox webinar series
- [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 mpox

Resources/Content for social media

- [VFA](#), mpox social media kit
- [WHO](#), LIVE: Q&A on #mpox. Join us and #AskWHO your questions!
- [WHO](#), Episode #124 - mpox: what you need to know

Technical update

- [WHO](#), Strategic framework for enhancing prevention and control of mpox
- [WHO](#), Mpox in the Democratic Republic of Congo
- [Africa CDC](#), Mpox situation in Africa
- [WHO](#), multi-country outbreak of Mpox

Public health guidance/RCCE

- [WHO](#), Risk communication and community engagement (RCCE) for mpox
- [WHO](#), the Global Mpox Dashboard

- [SSHAP](#), Key Considerations: Risk Communication and Community Engagement for Mpox Vaccination in Eastern DRC
- [WHO](#), Risk communication and community engagement (RCCE) for monkeypox outbreaks: interim guidance, 24 June 2022.
- [WHO](#), Public health advice for sex workers on mpox

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.