



COVID-19 Infodemic Trends in the African Region

This report seeks to communicate **operational recommendations** based on social media monitoring from June 21-27, as well as relevant information on current mis/disinformation.

Target countries include Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa (ENG), Ivory Coast, Burkina Faso, Senegal, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Niger (FR). We have outlined what we mean by “engagements” and how we gather information in the methodology section at the end of this report.

CONCERNING TRENDS

- Ongoing concerns around vaccine safety and side effects
- Questions about the vaccine’s purpose and efficacy

OBSERVED TREND

- Frustration with pandemic and vaccine management & government corruption
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Ongoing concerns around vaccine safety and side effects

Where have we observed this trend?

Other content

- Kenya
 - False claims circulating in a video claiming that UK health authorities have declared all vaccines “unsafe for use in humans,” that they are toxic, and that 6,000 people have died from vaccination (WhatsApp)
 - AZ doses that Denmark has banned arrive in Kenya [here](#) and [here](#) (Facebook)
⇒ Fuelling concerns over side effects & feeling that Africa is a “dumping site”
 - Thread addressing false claims about vaccine side effects [here](#) and [here](#) (Twitter)
- South Africa
 - A post warns about the fast vaccine rollout by comparing it to thalidomide, a rapidly approved drug in the 1950s that led to malformations in newborns [here](#) (Facebook)
⇒ Vaccine testing being [falsely equated with the thalidomide development](#) is not new
 - Question about vaccine safety and long term effects [here](#) (Twitter)
 - About why people should take vaccines;
 - About how long they remain in one’s body;
 - About whether they’re safe when taking antibiotics or have chronic illnesses



- Comment about people dying in Norway after receiving Pfizer [here](#) (Twitter)
- Comment about young boys suffering from rare heart inflammation [here](#) (Twitter)
- Some teachers refuse the vaccine due to health concerns [here](#) (Twitter)
- Comment with video stating the vaccines were designed to kill people [here](#) (News)

- Nigeria
 - Videos circulating suggesting that **vaccinated people can turn on light bulbs/ flashlights when bringing them near their vaccinated arm** [here](#) and [here](#) (Facebook)
 - A Nigerian doctor's post about brain clots after vaccination is criticized for sounding alarmist [here](#) (Facebook)
 - The FDA adds warning about a rare heart inflammation to Pfizer and Moderna shots [here](#) (News)

- DRC
 - Request that the government stop administering vaccines, claim that they are killing people and are the cause of COVID symptoms [here](#) (Facebook)

Outside of target countries

- Uganda
 - Comments about AZ and J&J vaccines having been banned in Europe continue to circulate in comments [here](#), with people also concerned about the safety of **mixing vaccines** (Facebook)

- Sierra Leone
 - Claim that a nurse has died after taking the vaccine [here](#) (Facebook)

- Ghana
 - Ghana Fact debunked a claim alleging that COVID vaccines are poisonous and that people should drink warm water with charcoal to help “detoxify” [here](#) (WhatsApp)

Why is it concerning?

- Concerns over safety and side effects drive vaccine hesitancy & refusal in the region
- Reports of serious adverse side effects are now been associated with several vaccines
- Comments on these and other posts in the region illustrate increasingly prevalent links between news on side effects and vaccine hesitancy & refusal
- Vaccine acceptant people also appear to be changing their minds about vaccination in response to the content listed above
- Reports of blood clots and side effects are particularly associated with AZ and J&J; AZ is the most widely used vaccine in Africa



What can we do?

- Create clear, consistent messaging about vaccine developments and communicate often about what is known and unknown (from US-CDC J&J Rapid Report)
- Emphasize **hopeful messages** highlighting vaccines are crucial ending the pandemic
- Share solidarity messages around protective measure and safe behaviours, such as the ones circulated by the [UN's Zwakala "I do it for you" campaign](#)
- Expand content related to cases of myocarditis/ pericarditis after vaccination. Include information about the conditions, their seriousness, signs and symptoms, when to seek medical care, and what is known about who might be at increased risk (US-CDC SoVC Special Report Recommendation)
- Produce content explaining **why vaccines are considered safe and effective**
⇒ Viral Facts example [here](#)
- Consider emphasizing that **rollout pauses are precautionary measures**. The fact that health institutions are transparent and implement them show that they are thorough. This could help reinforce rather than undermine trust
⇒ Viral Facts example [here](#)
- Consider providing **country-specific vaccine safety information** based on the vaccine being disseminated nationally, particularly in relation to the AZ vaccine
- Produce video content **outlining ongoing monitoring and risk management processes** (*WHO EPI-WIN report recommendation*)
⇒ Viral Facts example [here](#)
- Clarify **indicators of potential side effects** for people to watch out for and **how to respond** (*WHO EPI-WIN report recommendation*)
⇒ Viral facts example [here](#)
- Produce content for journalists on Adverse Events Following Immunization (AEFI) reporting and best practices, including using non-scientific language that is clear and understandable
- Communicate clearly around the relationship between vaccines and changes in the menstrual cycle
⇒ Viral Facts example [here](#)
 - Include answers that address this misinformation in FAQ documents, call center scripts, and help chat-bots made available to the public
- **Continue to manage expectations around possible side effects**, underlining the safety profile of different vaccines and providing information on the systems public health practitioners use to investigate AEFIs (*UNICEF ESARO Feb recommendation*)
- Continue to advocate for trusted public figures and politicians to take the vaccine
- Continue to encourage community engagement to address concerns as they arise, and continue to mobilize the healthcare worker community
- Ensure any of the above content is widely circulated and shared on **Facebook** and/or on any trusted communication channels. **Choose accepted and trusted organizations and messengers** to share the content, including **local** sources and unofficial channels



Questions about the vaccine's purpose and efficacy

Where have we observed this trend?

- A NYT article [here](#) pointing to rising infections in countries that used Chinese vaccines (News) generated conversations and warnings on social media (example [here](#) from Zimbabwe with comments from South Africa as well)
- Last week's misleading headlines about the AstraZeneca treatment's ineffectiveness have been clarified by AFP [here](#) (News) and by Studio Kalangou in Niger [here](#) (Facebook)

Other content

- DRC
 - A person retelling their battle with COVID asks whether vaccination will be mandatory, as well as why it should be mandatory if it does not prevent one from contracting the virus [here](#) (Facebook)
 - Question about how many vaccine doses a professor had obtained before being hospitalized with COVID [here](#) (Twitter)
 - Question about how a vaccinated person can contract the virus [here](#) (Twitter)
- South Africa
 - Claims that people have died after taking the vaccine [here](#) and [here](#) (Twitter)
 - Question about the vaccine's purpose if people are getting re-infected [here](#) (Twitter)
 - The minister of transport posted and subsequently deleted a Tweet stating that people can still die of COVID after vaccination [here](#), generating debate (Twitter)

Outside of target countries

- Ghana
 - Response to question about the importance of vaccination despite surges in countries with advanced vaccination rollouts [here](#) (News)

Why is it concerning?

- The perception that vaccines are not effective undermines vaccine acceptance
- It may also exacerbate COVID fatigue, and the perception that life will not regain a sense of normalcy in the foreseeable future

What can we do?

- Emphasize **accurate information** around resistance to the COVID vaccines, with verified statistics on the risk of contracting COVID and having severe symptoms for vaccinated people
- **Provide context** for publications leading to the perception that the vaccines do not protect people against COVID (in Seychelles, for example, many people have



contracted COVID despite the advanced vaccination rollout; however, most of those who contracted COVID were not vaccinated)

- Disseminate **updated data about the effectiveness of COVID-19 vaccines**. Continue to provide updates about the effectiveness of current vaccines against common variants in Africa (adapted from US CDC Insights Report 9 recommendations)
- Amplify new evidence that vaccination likely results in **less severe illness for those who are vaccinated** and get infected with COVID-19 (adapted from US CDC Insights Report 9 recommendations)
- Emphasize proactive community engagement and address concerns around vaccine effectiveness as they arise
- Emphasize/ circulate personal stories of people affected by the disease
↔ Viral Facts example [here](#), [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#)

Frustration with pandemic and vaccine management & government corruption

Where have we observed this trend?

- South Africa
 - Post with **very high engagement** noting that COVID is now officially a “third world problem” [here](#) (similar post [here](#), and comment [here](#)) (Twitter)
 - Frustration with government mismanagement of the pandemic and vaccine rollout, as well as with vaccine inequity [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#) (Twitter and News)
 - Frustration with government corruption [here](#), stolen COVID funds [here](#), and absence of political engagement [here](#) (Twitter)
 - In response to questions about the country’s slow rollout, South Africa’s transport minister responded that some people die of COVID after having received the vaccine, generating outrage [here](#) (News)
 - Request to provide vaccines for everyone, not just teachers [here](#) (Twitter)
 - Telecommunications billionaire states rich countries have withheld vaccine [here](#) (Twitter) (also circulating in Zimbabwe)
 - Frustration with COVAX shortcomings [here](#) (Twitter)
 - Frustration with double-standards of safety measures (politicians not wearing masks) [here](#) (Twitter)
- Kenya
 - Frustration with double-standards and flawed logic of safety measures [here](#) and [here](#) (Twitter)
 - Frustration with slow vaccine rollout [here](#), inadequate government spending [here](#), and lack of political mobilization [here](#) (Twitter and Facebook)
 - Frustration with COVAX shortcomings and vaccine inequity [here](#) and [here](#) (Twitter)
 - Anxiety over vaccine shortages [here](#) and [here](#) (Twitter and News)



- Claim that the commercialization of vaccines is not moral [here](#) (Twitter)
- This week’s WHO EARS report notes concerns about the availability of vaccines., questions about non eligible individuals jumping queues to get vaccinated, and concerns about the shortage of second vaccine doses

Outside of target countries

- Zimbabwe
 - Frustration with vaccine inequity and COVAX failures [here](#) (Twitter)

SPECIFIC CONTENT TO CONSIDER

❖ SOUTH AFRICA (ENG)

- ❖ This week’s South Africa Feedback report notes discussions around the lack of SAHPRA approval for the Sinovac and Sputnik vaccines
 - ↪ Our report also notes debates about the EFF party’s actions to acquire access to the Sputnik vaccine [here](#)



Online claims suggesting the WHO does not recommend the vaccine for children [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#) were countered [here](#)



Comment about first vaccine jab “deactivating your immune system” [here](#)



Concerns over forced vaccinations for teachers [here](#) and comments about the need to also vaccinate children/close schools [here](#) and [here](#)



Statistics and post alleging that COVID is not as dangerous as other issues [here](#)



Thread on **vaccines’ effectiveness against variants** [here](#)



Comment on use of ivermectin [here](#)



Comment about spike proteins “assisting the virus” [here](#)
↪ UNICEF ESAR has also flagged “spike protein” as a breakout search this past week in South Africa



News of a 63-year-old woman dying in a COVID vaccine queue sparked comments on social media [here](#)
↪ some criticized slow vaccine rollout, others asked about the cause of her death



Comments on the hidden “[ramifications of the vaccine](#),” referring to [misinformation about Dr. Dolores Cahill](#) and [Dr. Geert Vanden Bossche](#)



- ❖ Guidance encouraging pregnant women to get vaccinated [here](#) and [here](#) (News)
- ❖ Member of the Executive Council (MEC) for education says there is nothing “devilish” about the vaccine and encourages teachers to get it [here](#) (News)

❖ **KENYA (ENG)**



Claim that Denmark seeks to dispose of its AZ vaccines by donating them to Kenya [here](#)

↔ this kind of concern has surfaced every time a European country donates its AZ vaccines to an African nation



Ongoing questions about why **Covishield not being a recognized vaccine** for those seeking EU travel rights [here](#) (person posting appears to have confused “Covishield” with “COVAX”)



The ministry of health clarifies that it obtained AZ doses manufactured in Italy, not in India [here](#)



Study shows that **vaccines do not affect fertility** [here](#)

❖ **NIGERIA (ENG)**



Post about the lack of attention on issues like hunger (vs. COVID) because they do not kill the rich [here](#)

- ❖ Debunk of the claim that the vaccine can give you the virus [here](#) (News)
- ❖ Femi Fani-Kayode, an **anti-vaccination champion, receives the job** [here](#) (News)
- ❖ Top 10 COVID vaccine rumours [here](#) (News)

❖ **DRC (FR)**



Question about which vaccine is being used in the DRC [here](#) in light of vaccine expiry [here](#) - information about incoming vaccine imports [here](#)

❖ **BURKINA FASO (FR)**



Cartoon **criticizing Europe’s “leftover” vaccine donations to Africa** [here](#)



❖ NIGER (FR)



Plea **not to make vaccines mandatory** [here](#)

❖ SENEGAL (FR)



President of the African Development Bank states Africans should produce vaccines rather than beg for them [here](#) (also in Nigeria [here](#))

OUTSIDE OF TARGET COUNTRIES

❖ UGANDA (ENG)



Countering claim that the president has agreed to the mass production of “Covidex” to cure COVID [here](#)



Claim that **fake vaccine certificates** are circulating in the country [here](#)

❖ GHANA (ENG)



GhanaFact debunked a false claim circulating on WhatsApp stating that “Singapore has performed an autopsy on the corpse of a COVID-19 victim” and found that COVID is a “bacterium” rather than a virus [here](#)



PERSISTING ONLINE TRENDS

* any trends in blue are newly included this week

** bolded trends appear to circulate more this week

- **Frustration with slowness or mismanagement of vaccine rollout**
- Vaccine deaths will be logged as COVID deaths
- I would rather die of COVID than of the vaccine
- **Vaccines don't prevent death or the virus' spread / vaccines are not effective**
- COVID palliatives are being hidden/ denied to citizens
- COVID/ the vaccine is intended to control/ reduce the African population
 - According to the Africa CDC February Vaccine Perceptions report, almost 1 in 2 respondents believe that COVID 19 is a planned event by foreign actors
- Lockdowns are not an effective way of controlling COVID
- **Frustration with double standards around health and safety measures (e.g. politicians not wearing masks)**
- **Questions and concerns around forced vaccinations**
- Politicians have taken fake vaccines
- Clinical trials were rushed

- Africans are lab rats or being used to test vaccines (Viral Facts response [here](#))
- New pandemic waves/ COVID are caused by vaccines
- **Other issues and/or diseases are more important than vaccination**
- **Vaccines won't stop the need for protective measures, why bother (Viral Facts response [here](#))**
- COVID case numbers/ mortality rates are exaggerated
- Foreign companies or governments profit from the vaccine rollout in Africa
- **Fear of vaccine side effects/ long-term effects**
- COVID does not exist (Viral Facts response [here](#))
- Effectiveness of herbal remedies (Viral Facts response [here](#))
- **Effectiveness of ivermectin and alternative remedies (particularly in South Africa) (Viral Facts response [here](#))**
- **Frustration with looting and mismanagement of COVID funds**

TRENDS TO WATCH

- According to a [study conducted by Smart Phorce](#) in partnership with Financial Afrik in urban settings in Algeria, Ivory Coast, Morocco, Nigeria, Ghana and Cameroon, 15% of respondents believe vaccines were invented in the West to harm Africans
 - Respondents cite fear of side effects (20%) and concern that the vaccines were developed too fast (16%) as the two leading hesitancy drivers



- First Draft's publication on [how foreign anti-vaccine narratives reach West African nations online](#) highlights key harmful narratives in the region as well as the need for proactive health messaging
- Debate over whether the Sputnik and [AstraZeneca](#) vaccines are [effective](#) or [not effective](#) against the Delta variant
- [Angela Merkel takes Moderna](#) for her second vaccine dose, after having taken AstraZeneca for her first
- [South Africa plans to produce mRNA vaccines locally](#) under a WHO deal
- [Travelers can pay for Sinopharm and Sinovac](#) vaccines in Zimbabwe
- Experts say [J&J booster shots might be needed](#) to help counter the Delta variant, as [concerns over the variant's spread](#) increase
- Reports of [fake vaccine injections](#) surfaced in India this week
- Ongoing conversation about Covishield's exclusion from the vaccines approved for the [European "Green Pass"](#) (also [here](#) and [here](#))
- Ongoing criticism of COVAX scheme [here](#) and [here](#)
- Oxford scientists [triallying ivermectin](#) for COVID treatment
- Cuba develops a new vaccine, "Abdala"

And some words of wisdom for the week...

Corona Virus made me realize that the only solution to any problem is avoiding people.

💬 16

↻ 202

❤️ 1K



Methodology

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, 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 (siloes engagement).

The monitoring reports are produced using NewsWhip Analytics, TweetDeck, Crowdtangle, UNICEF Talkwalker dashboards as well as the 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.

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.