

# Africa Infodemic Response Alliance

A WHO-HOSTED NETWORK



AIRA Infodemic Trends Report

**March 7, 2022**



Help grow Viral Facts Africa viewership! Follow and share Viral Facts on these social media forums:



[Facebook](#) [Twitter](#) [Instagram](#)

## Quick Reference Guide

### Key COVID-19 Misinformation/Rumor Trends

- [COVID-19 is not a threat](#).....Pg. 3

### Key Polio Misinformation/Rumors and Information Trends

- [Polio vaccine campaign is COVID-19's replacement](#).....Pg. 5

[Persistent Rumors](#).....Pg. 6

[Information Gaps](#) (COVID-19 transmission after vaccination)....Pg. 6

### Viral Facts Africa recent productions

- [Vaccine safety and effectiveness](#).....Pg. 7
- The COVID-19 pandemic is not over!.....Pg. 7

[Methodology](#).....Pg. 8



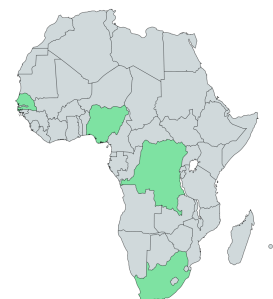
## Public Health Infodemic Trends in the African Region

This report seeks to communicate operational recommendations based on social media monitoring from February 26- March 4, as well as relevant information on current mis/disinformation.

Target countries include Angola (PT), Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa (EN), Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Guinea, Ivory Coast, Niger, Mali, Mauritania, Mauritius, and Senegal (FR). Descriptions of “engagements” and information gathering are listed in the methodology section at the end of this report.

### COVID-19 is not a threat

*CONTEXT: Over the last week, conversations around the spread of COVID-19 and COVID-19 vaccines has declined drastically. While media attentions shifts to coverage of the Russia-Ukraine war, many have interpreted the shift as a sign of the end of the pandemic.*



#### Cameroon, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ivory Coast, Senegal, South Africa

**Coverage: 9k+ engagements, 2k+ comments, 500+ shares**

- Multiple posts on Facebook, Twitter, and messaging apps have highlighted the decline of reporting on COVID-19 figures across Africa. This is being misinterpreted as proof that COVID-19 is not a current threat and likely has not been a threat during the pandemic, but just a media-controlled narrative intended to drive fear for global leadership to reestablish control or pharmaceutical companies to drive profits.
- The Russian and Ukrainian war was often cited as the new global concern, which allowed the media to no longer “pretend” that the COVID-19 pandemic is still a threat. [\[LINK\]](#)[\[LINK\]](#)
- The war has also served as a backdrop for new rumors to propagate regarding the manufacture of new COVID-19 variants and new dangerous diseases. [\[LINK\]](#)



“GUERRE RUSSIE UKRAINE



Pour ceux qui n'ont encore rien compris du combat de Vladimir Poutine, président de la république fédérale de Russie, d'abord nous ne soutenons pas la guerre mais soutenons le combat de Vladimir Poutine.

Comprenez tous que Donald Trump aussi menait le même combat contre le nouvel ordre mondial et c'est le même combat que Vladimir Poutine mène actuellement. Remarquez que les premiers jours des bombardements en Ukraine l'armée russe a ciblé des sites stratégiques et des endroits où la fabrication d'une nouvelle maladie au laboratoire en Ukraine après la covid-19.

Pensez-vous que Vladimir Poutine agit dans le vide? Beaucoup comprendront plus tard.”

- On Facebook, Médecins Sans Frontières promoted a mural competition in South Africa that called attention to COVID-19 vaccination that was met with criticism from social media users. One user on Facebook even claimed to have reported the MSF post for sharing false information.

[\[LINK\]](#)

### **Why is it concerning?**

- Even when COVID-19 is mentioned, there is little concern visible in the public narrative. While it is promising that there is no longer panic around the disease, it is concerning that such a large share of individuals believe that COVID-19 no longer poses a threat.

### **What can we do?**

- Simple epidemiological figures can speak volumes at this stage. The conversation around COVID-19 in monitored countries has declined roughly 98% from January 1 in French and English-speaking countries, yet new COVID-19 cases have only declined roughly 16%. Addressing this discrepancy to highlight that diminished conversation does not equal a diminished threat is essential.



## Polio vaccine campaign is COVID-19's replacement

Recent reports regarding the poliovirus vaccination campaign in Malawi revealed that over 3 million children will be receiving the vaccination in coming weeks. The first round of vaccinations will be distributed starting on March 21 following the emergence of polio in a three-year-old Malawian girl in February. [\[LINK\]](#)

### Developing Misinformation Narratives (Kenya, Malawi, South Africa, Zambia)

- Concerns continue to surround announcements regarding the distribution of polio vaccines, specifically in tandem with the global drive for COVID-19 vaccinations. Most notably, claims are prominent that COVID-19's decline has led to relying on a new disease to continue unnecessary vaccine campaigns.
- Some social media users have responded to the proposed 3 million children getting vaccinated as a result of a singular case of polio presenting in the country as extreme, while others are distrusting of the safety of the vaccine.

[\[LINK\]](#)

- “So they going to vaccinate 2.9 million young children. Because of 1 case. Nna I really don't trust anything anymore”

- Intensified claims of a racial component to try to drive population control in Africa via a polio vaccine was seen in Telegram channels, with the most widely shared post containing the image of the vaccine being called the “polio monkey serum.” (South African Telegram)

### Why is it concerning?

- The distrust and negative responses to a new polio vaccine campaign announcement are stark evidence of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. New vaccination campaigns will be met with additional skepticism, making new potential outbreaks of other diseases outside of COVID-19 more challenging to combat. [\[LINK\]](#) [\[LINK\]](#)

1945 and After: US Water Fluoridation Program Spurs Backlash from John Birch Society; Group Claims Program Evidence of 'Creeping Socialism' in America

At the Sign of THE UNHOLY THREE



Are you willing to PUT IN PAIN in the UNHOLY THREE: all of the material, mental and spiritual resources of this GREAT REPUBLIC? Portion of a 1955 cartoon warning against the evils of three government health programs, including water fluoridation. (Source: Saectator)

As World War II i US Public Health a pilot program i fluoride to selec as a tooth-decay 87 American tow to have the agen water supply. By fluoridation is cc that children bet 9 show significar cavities and toot regularly drink fl though studies o adults are less cl government heoi



## **Persistent Rumors**

### **Rumor: Vaccines don't prevent death or the virus' spread / vaccines are not effective**

- Response: Vaccines provide protection against serious complications from COVID-19 and the new variants. (Viral Facts response [here](#))

### **Rumor: Foreign companies or governments profit from the vaccine rollout in Africa**

- Response: Highlight successes in vaccine distribution, as well as new manufacturing campaigns beginning in Africa.

### **Rumor: Inaccurate assumptions of vaccine side effects/ long-term effects**

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

### **Rumor: COVID-19 no longer exists / never existed**

- Response: COVID-19 cases have declined but health authorities are warning of a potential 5th wave (Viral Facts response [here](#))

### **Rumor: Frustration with looting and mismanagement of COVID-19 funds**

- Response: Review the COVAX program and the global effort to effectively distribute vaccines via a multi-organizational campaign

## **Information Gaps: COVID-19 transmission after vaccination**

Conversations continue to address an individual's susceptibility to contracting COVID-19 following vaccination, with questions regarding how many vaccine doses are required to provide complete immunity to contraction of the disease. This confusion highlights a potential information gap regarding the vaccine's effectiveness. Critics of the vaccine [claim](#) that there is no use in getting vaccinated if it doesn't prevent infection, which underscores a potential lack of understanding of the prevention of severe complications from the virus via inoculation.





Help grow Viral Facts views these social media forums:

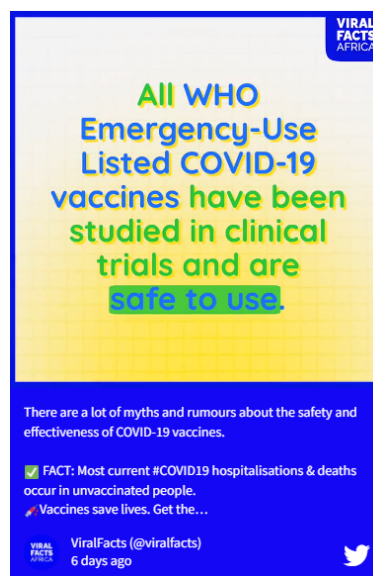


share Viral Facts on

[Facebook](#) [Twitter](#) [Instagram](#)

### Vaccine safety and effectiveness

Last week, Viral Facts addressed the safety and effectiveness of COVID-19 vaccines. Questions about specific vaccines were raised, highlighting confusion regarding whether one particular brand may be more effective or provide greater safety. Additionally, there were many claims that vaccines were simply a profit mechanism for pharmaceutical companies and public health organizations like the WHO. **There were 510k+ views, 130+ comments, and 4.5k+ likes showing prominent support for COVID-19 vaccines.**



### The COVID-19 pandemic is not over!

Viral Facts addressed the growing belief that the COVID-19 pandemic has come to an end. Claims that the best way to move on from the pandemic is not getting vaccinated and achieving herd immunity. Viral Facts content reminds that vaccines significantly reduce severe symptoms if COVID-19 is contracted because it is still spreading as the pandemic has not yet ended. **There were 5k+ engagements, 1k+ comments, and 350+ shares of the Viral Facts content found [here](#).**





## Methodology

The social media listening process relies on a split of social media analysis 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, 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, Google Trends, 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**

**WHO social listening tools:**



**Early AI-supported Response  
with Social Listening**