

Good practices and key lessons learnt in Eastern and Southern Africa region in digital social listening, rumour management and digital engagement interventions in times of COVID-19

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Interim consultancy report

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Overview

Social listening activities are designed and implemented within the local information ecosystem. This means that findings from social listening need to be interpreted in relation to the role each communication channels plays in a particular context.

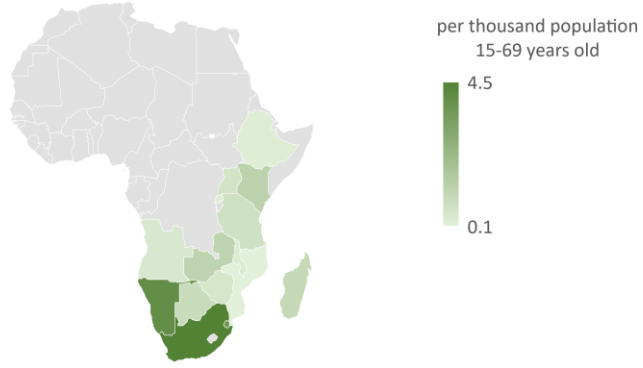
For example, in countries where internet penetration is low, digital social listening findings present generalizability limitations, although its insights can still provide signals of the conversations happening on other channels, such as on traditional media or within community networks (see regional dashboard approach on slide 10). Digital social listening is also key to guide own social media communication strategies and positioning, even in contexts of low internet use (see use of social listening for campaign monitoring on slide 13).

Each component of the information ecosystem presents limitations in terms of reach and representativeness. It is therefore important to conduct social listening with an integrated approach that bridges digital and offline conversations to identify key trends, concerns and rumours that need to be managed. The African Infodemic Response Alliance Joint Report (slide 7), the South Africa COVID-19/Vaccine Social Listening Report (slide 11) and the Zimbabwe Social Listening Report (slide 12) are examples of integrated approaches at regional and country level. The suggested best practice for crisis communication situations is to activate both online and offline social listening channels simultaneously (slide 5).

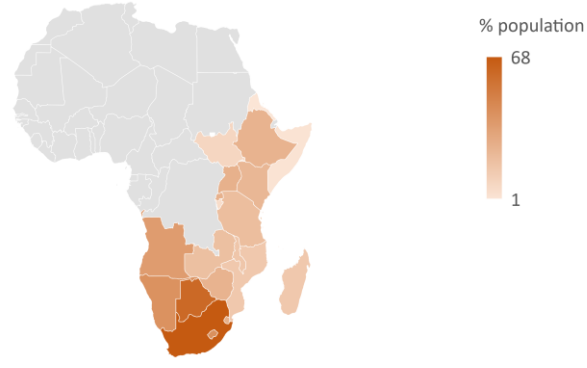
Similarly, engagement products from social listening insights should be adapted and disseminated through channels that go beyond social media. Viral Facts Africa produces content geared towards social media but has occasionally produced adaptations for use on WhatsApp, which is a key community channel in the region (slide 15). UNICEF and partners can also rely on platforms that are specifically tailored to reach individuals at the last digital mile through mobile-based systems such as the Internet of Good Things (slide 14) or U-Report.

The next slide provides some key data on the information ecosystem in ESAR that help put social listening activities in this report in context.

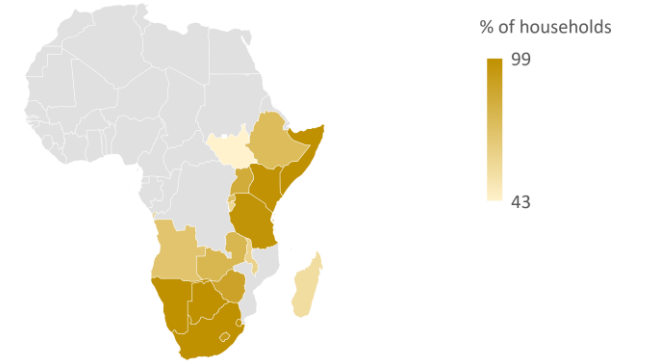
Daily Newspapers Circulation



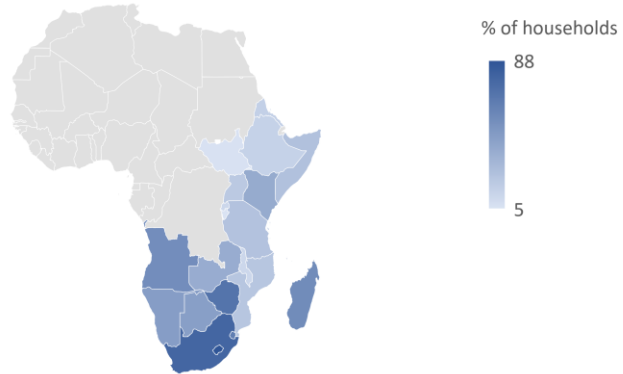
Individuals using the Internet



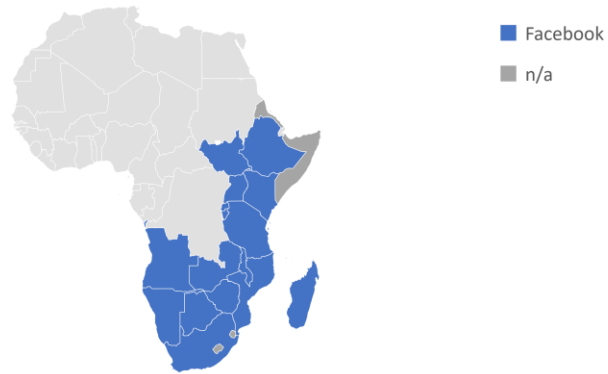
Households with a cellphone



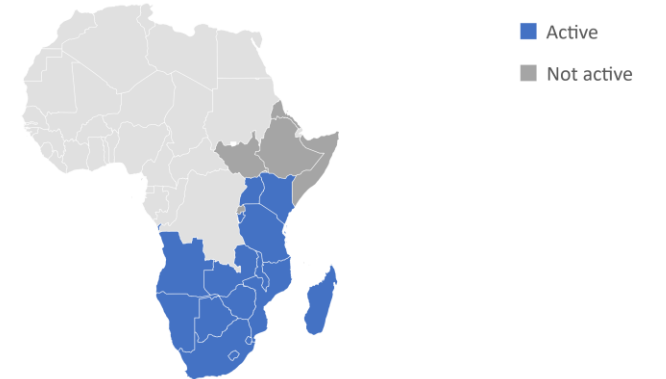
Households with a TV



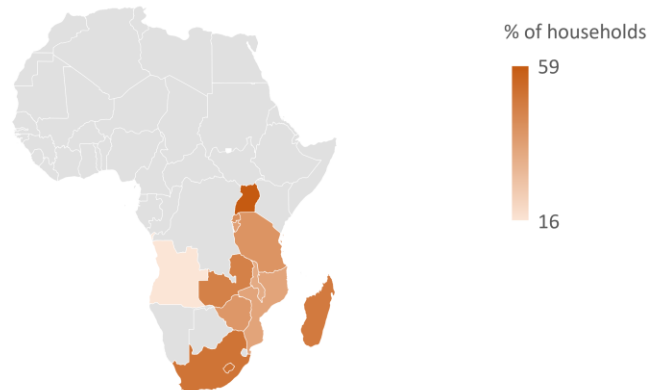
Top social networks



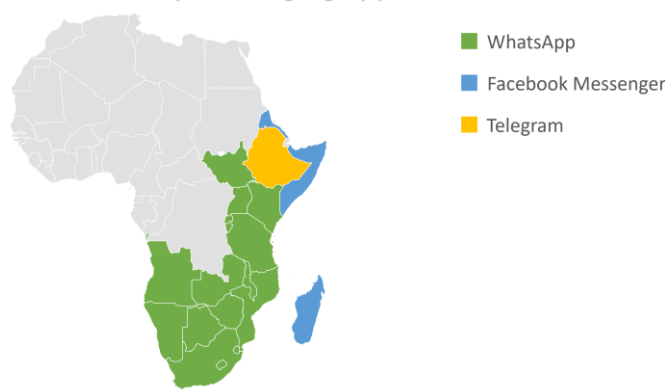
U-Report



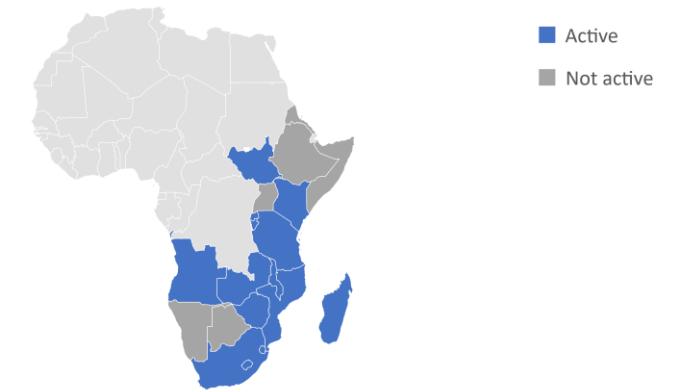
Households with a radio



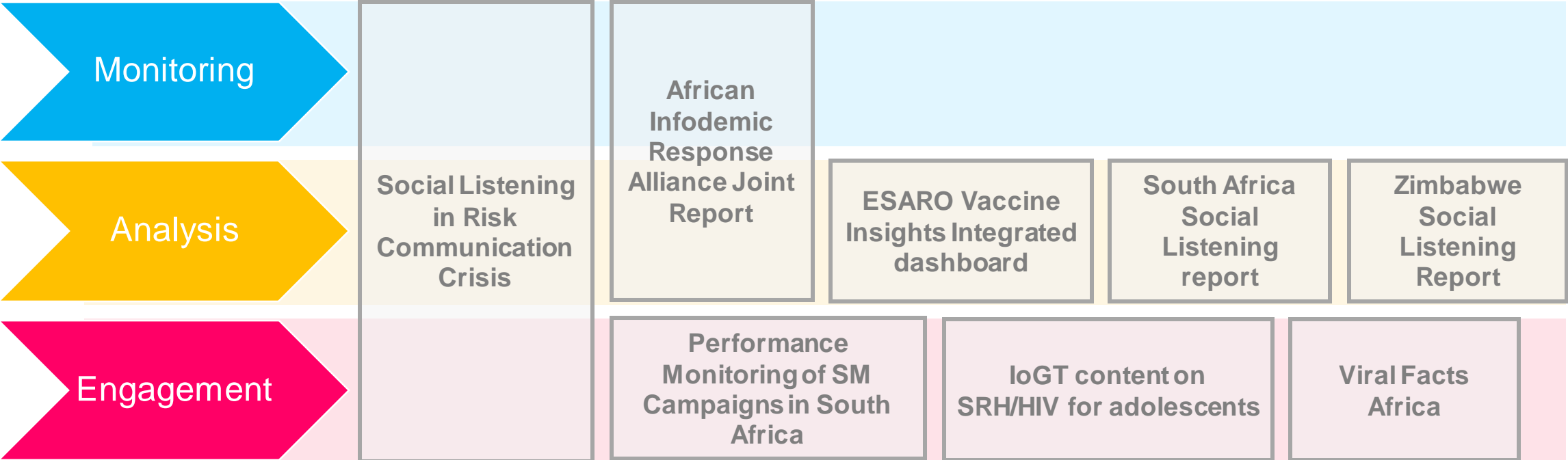
Top messaging apps



Internet of Good Things



Social listening activities in ESAR: 8 good practices



Social Listening in Risk Communication Crisis (1/2)

Overview: Social listening tools were deployed during risk communication crisis response associated to the COVID-19 vaccine rollout in Madagascar (June 2021) and Lesotho (August 2021).

Role of social listening: Both digital and offline social listening helps inform decision making in accordance to the Crisis Communication Plans at national level. A reliable system for tracking rumours and monitoring public opinion is the backbone of any crisis communication plan.

Approach: Both crises were caused by reports of Adverse Events Following Immunization. Social listening was activated on several fronts, for example through traditional media monitoring, call centers, and social media monitoring. On the digital front, the following steps were performed:

- Identification of content circulating about the AEFIs, assessment of the engagement generated and development of keyword search strings to establish specific monitoring (in addition to ongoing general vaccine monitoring).
- Qualitative deep dive into user comments to understand how the public is processing the news/rumour beyond engagement metrics. Identification of any other related concern/falsehood emerging.
- Updates initially shared with RCCE partners at 4-6 hours, 12 hours and 24 hours since beginning of the crisis. Continuous monitoring and updates shared on as needed basis following.
- Monitoring of social media reception of official response (e.g. Government press release) to understand reach and engagement.

Social Listening in Risk Communication Crisis (2/2)

Lessons learnt: In Lesotho and Madagascar crisis communication responses, social listening helped assess the initial impact of the AEFI reports and monitor the situation in the days that followed. Elements that emerged as key for successful use of social listening in risk communication crisis context included:

- The inclusion of social listening as a pillar of Risk Communication Plans at national level.
- The ability of national RCCE partners to activate social listening mechanisms on multiple channels, both online and on the ground.
- The use of mixed method approaches, both looking at metrics of reach and engagement on social media and identifying emerging narratives.
- The development of tools to monitor any spillover of the conversation in nearby countries.
- The existence of digital social listening infrastructure that could be quickly activated and adjusted to monitor the developments of the crisis.
- The capacity of RCCE partners to translate social listening insights into recommendations for the communication response, also in accordance to rumour management principles.

Example slide from social listening update in crisis comms



African Infodemic Response Alliance Joint Report (1/3)

Overview: Several partners involved in the COVID-19 response and vaccine rollout have been undertaking social listening efforts through owned platforms and organization-specific mechanisms, with the goal of managing rumours and engage communities with relevant information and resources. This presented an opportunity to capitalize on existing initiatives, with the goal to maximize the impact of social listening work and strengthen the response.

In May 2021, under the leadership of the African Infodemic Response Alliance's (AIRA) social listening team and in coordination with RCCE technical working groups, some of the partners began producing a monthly joint social listening report titled "COVID-19 Infodemic Trends in Africa".

Role of social listening: The report ties together social listening activities conducted both on digital platforms and on the ground across organizations, with the goal of producing actionable recommendations for COVID-19 prevention and response.

Approach: The reports are based on online social listening feedback from AIRA and UNICEF ESARO, as well as online and offline community feedback provided by a broad network of partners who contribute to the RCCE ESAR Community Feedback Sub-Working Group, chaired by IFRC. Monitored online channels include Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, digital news, and any WhatsApp messages forwarded to the researchers. Online and offline information is also obtained through the community feedback form that RCCE partners fill out on a monthly basis.

African Infodemic Response Alliance Joint Report (2/3)

Alliance Members contributing to the report meet every month to review trends and identify shared recommendations. They also discuss themes and related recommendations on a bi-weekly basis during AIRA regular meetings, as well as the RCCE community feedback working group meetings.

Lessons learnt: While work around the “COVID-19 Infodemic Trends in Africa” Joint Report is in progress, some points of learning have already emerged and have been discussed among participating partners:

- The report presents actionable recommendations that are evidence-informed in a format that is concise, simple and consistent over time. This facilitates dissemination.
- The report focuses on common themes tracked across multiple partners and countries. This has been done to maximize the applicability of recommendations and leverage regional synergies in the development of resources to address the frequent concerns and questions tracked.

Front page of the AIRA Joint Report – July 2021

COVID-19 Infodemic Trends in Africa - July 2021

Scope
This report presents operational recommendations based on COVID-19 online and offline community feedback trends analysis in Africa for the month of July 2021. It aims to enable evidence-based decision-making at regional and national levels.

Methodology
Partners contributing to the report meet on a monthly basis to review trends and identify shared recommendations. They also discuss themes and recommendations on a bi-weekly basis during Africa Infodemic Response Alliance (AIRA) as well as the RCCE ESAR Sub-Working Group meetings.

The report is based on online social listening feedback from UNICEF ESARO and AIRA, as well as online and offline community feedback provided by a broad network of partners who contribute to the ESAR RCCE Community Feedback Sub-Working Group. Monitored online channels include Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, digital news, and WhatsApp messages forwarded to the researchers. Online and offline information is also obtained through the community feedback form that RCCE partners fill out on a monthly basis.

For each trend, the report specifies the countries in which relevant content was tracked. This information may nonetheless be circulating in other African countries not mentioned in this report.

Five key themes related to COVID-19 emerged from social listening and community feedback this month, in large part related to the COVID-19 vaccine rollout:

1. Vaccine safety
2. Vaccine effectiveness
3. Non-compliance with safety measures
4. COVID-19 treatment and cures
5. Vaccine access

#1 - Vaccine Safety

African Infodemic Response Alliance Joint Report (3/3)

- At the same time, the names of the countries where the insights have been tracked are flagged to allow country offices to focus on priority concerns and questions relevant to the local context, with the disclaimer that rumours and misinformation can travel quickly across borders, especially on digital channels.
- Insights and recommendations from the report are also fed into Viral Facts Africa for content production at regional level.
- Moving forward, systematically monitoring the degree to which recommendations are implemented will be key to evaluate the role of social listening in the response and adjust ongoing activities.

Key themes and recommendation section

#2 - Vaccine Effectiveness

South Africa, Zimbabwe, Kenya, South Africa, Nigeria, DRC, Ghana, Tanzania

- Concerns about vaccines not being effective against variants. Delta and Lambda variants were the two most mentioned ones in ESAR
- Concern about vaccinated individuals contracting COVID-19
- Deaths of vaccinated individuals in the Seychelles (where most of the population is vaccinated) sparked concerns about vaccine effectiveness
- Questions about the vaccine's purpose if it does not prevent from contracting COVID



Recommendations

- Continue to share information about vaccine effectiveness at preventing hospitalization and deaths, including: updated information on variants as it is released; accurate data on resistance to COVID for vaccinated people; messaging on the importance of continuing to comply with public health measures; and messaging on the possibility of contracting COVID despite being vaccinated (WHO example [here](#))

#3 - Non-Compliance with Safety Measures

Botswana, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Mauritius, Namibia, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe

- Inadequate compliance with COVID-19 protocols in public places such as public transport, banks, supermarkets, etc.
- Frustrations with officials disregarding public safety measures (in Kenya & South Africa only)
- Concerns over COVID-19 outbreaks in schools and belief that students are intentionally spreading the virus among themselves in order to skip school (in Uganda & Botswana only)
- Stigma and discrimination of COVID-19 suspected/confirmed cases causing delayed care seeking and non-adherence to isolation at home



Recommendations

- Engage with teachers and students at schools and discuss solutions for keeping them and their peers safe (e.g. establishing student committees to share regular information on COVID-19)

ESARO Vaccine Insights Integrated Dashboard

Overview: This dashboard updates and expands the previous dashboard “COVID-19 Social Media and Digital Listening dashboard for the ESAR” to display rumours and trends tracked at country-level and region-wide.

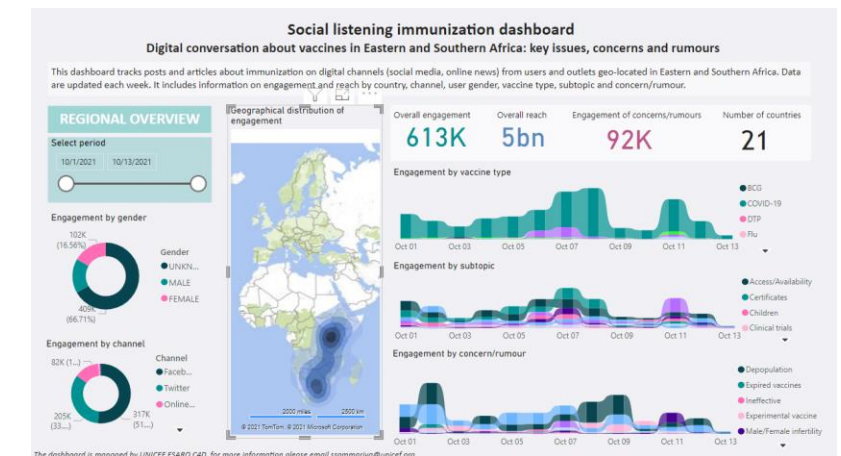
Role of social listening: The dashboard analyzes and displays social listening insights about immunization in ESA.

Approach: The dashboard tracks posts and articles about immunization on digital channels (social media and online news) from users and outlets geolocated in the region. It includes information about engagement and reach of content by country, channel, gender, vaccine type and concern/rumour category. The dashboard finally integrates data from Talkwalker on digital news and Twitter with Facebook data, offering an integrated view of the online conversation around vaccines. The dashboard is built in Power Bi.

Lessons learnt from the development of the dashboard process include:

- Need to automatize components of the data collection (e.g. Using AI to categorize data) to ensure sustainability.
- Importance of an established repository of common rumour/concerns to inform the taxonomy and also allow flexibility to adapt to the emergence of new rumours/categories.
- Helps identify regional trends and flag early signals of misinformation that could be circulating also offline.

Regional section of the “Social listening immunization dashboard”



South Africa COVID-19/Vaccine Social Listening Report

Overview: The South Africa RCCE Social Listening team produces a weekly report on COVID-19 and vaccine conversation in the country.

Role of social listening: The report is informed by social listening activities conducted by several partners.

Approach: The report is a collaborative effort involving 14 partners which provide social listening insights at the national and district level. It is compiled following the methodology of the AIRA, particularly the “Identify” stage. Insights are collated into one preliminary document, which is then used to develop the report. The report includes an analysis of key trends, local issues, misinformation, and suggested actions.

Lessons learnt: A key strength of the report is its collaborative nature, which allows to collect evidence across multiple channels in a systematic and consistent fashion. The effort is led by the SA National Department of Health, which facilitates implementation of key recommendations into communication and policy streams. The report also considers comments received on owned social media content (e.g. Comments to MoH posts on social media). In addition, the misinformation section includes links to debunking content for each specific falsehood identified, which facilitates rumour management. Suggested actions identified are extremely practical and in many cases can be readily implemented.

Sample report



This is a weekly report of COVID & vaccine sentiment, rumours & misinformation in SA. Further information giving the background to this report, including reports from districts, is given [here](#).

KEY TRENDS

- **Vooma Vaccination Weekend:** Widespread welcome for the large effort for increased vaccination in the weekend 1 – 3 October which led to 350,000 vaccinations (double a normal weekend).
- **End of the third Covid wave:** There is widespread relief that the third wave of Covid has officially ended in SA, with greatly reduced infection and death numbers ([here](#)).
- **Politicisation:** Some political parties are opposing vaccination and other aspects of the Covid response ([here](#)). While the ANC, DA, EFF, UDM and IFP are generally supportive of the vaccination campaign, many smaller parties are not. The ACDP is actively hostile to vaccinations ([here](#) and [here](#)). The African Transformation Movement also is ([here](#)). The newly-formed Party Of Action (POA) is very opposed to vaccination ([here](#) & [here](#)). In KZN some Radical Economic Transformation elements of the ANC are against vaccination. The Cape Independence Party is hostile to vaccination, joining anti-vaccination protests. “Forced vaccination” is the focus of much political opposition, though no one is proposing this. Warnings that the election itself could lead to super-spreader events ([here](#)).
- **Vaccine passports:** President Ramaphosa has announced that vaccine passports will be used in SA

Social listening report on media conversations in Zimbabwe's mainstream and alternative platforms

Overview: The report integrates insights from Zimbabwe's mainstream and alternative media platforms.

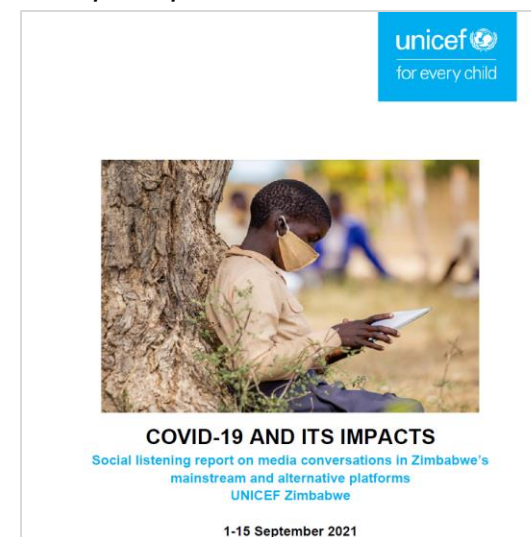
Role of social listening: Content in the report is based on monitoring conducted using a custom media monitoring tool developed by Media Monitors.

Approach: The report is produced by UNICEF Zimbabwe C4D every two weeks to highlight the rapid changing COVID-19 information in the media (accurate or inaccurate), public attitudes towards the COVID-19 pandemic, government and key institutions responses, and quality of information available in the media.

Lessons learnt: Key areas of strength of the report include:

- Integration across platforms: The report covers 30+ platforms, including print media, radio stations, TV and digital platforms including online news and social media.
- Customized coding framework: this was developed based on two key documents from the RCCE pillar (2021 Zimbabwe RCCE Strategy and the Ministry of Health and Child Care COVID-19 Key Messages document).
- Individual stories on COVID-19 are coded using indicators that include area of focus, sentiment analysis, and online engagement, sourcing patterns, geographic focus and claims identification.

Sample report



Performance Monitoring of Social Media Campaigns

Overview: In the context of the infodemic around COVID-19 vaccines, RCCE working groups in the region have developed digital communication campaigns to build vaccine confidence. Two examples in South Africa include the *Zwakala* and *GenV* campaigns.

Role of social listening: Social listening tools were used to track the performance of the two campaigns.

Approach: Search strings and dashboards have been set up on social listening tools Talkwalker and Crowdtangle to monitor the engagement and reach generated by the campaigns. Additional widgets were built to track key drivers of sentiment and user reactions.

Lessons learnt: Social listening tools can also be employed to monitor the impact of engagement strategies that have been in turn informed by social listening insights. This allows to close the feedback loop and further inform and refine communication strategies.

Monitoring dashboard for the Zwakala campaign



Example monitoring for the GenV campaign



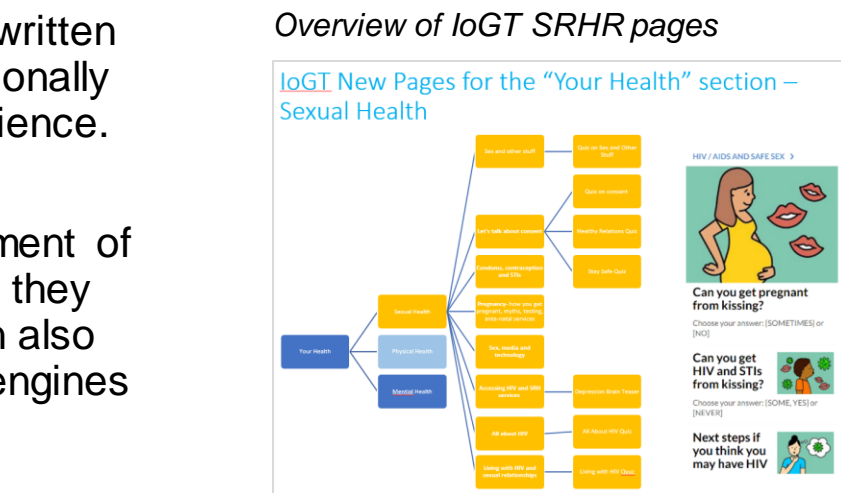
IoGT content package on SRHR/HIV for Adolescents

Overview: In July 2021, ESARO HIV Section, in collaboration with C4D, developed a toolkit titled “HIV/SRHR/C4D Toolkit for Adolescents and Young People in ESA Region”. This toolkit consists in a set of high-quality communication for development materials for adolescents and young people on HIV, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and related topics, including in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The toolkit includes 15 pages of content designed specifically for the Internet of Good Things.

Role of social listening: The materials have been in part informed by concerns and questions around SRHR issues tracked on social media and through U-Report.

Approach: The materials have been developed in co-creation with adolescents and young people from the region, with the goal to fill information gaps. The content has been specifically tailored to meet adolescents’ and young people’s needs and provides inclusive, empowering and rights-based messages. The package is visual, engaging and creative and the text is written in simple, clear and friendly language. The content and design are intentionally tailored to a low resource/technology environment and lower literacy audience.

Lessons learnt: Social listening provides evidence that, along with other sources of quantitative and qualitative data, can help inform the development of content that engages key audiences on the very questions and concerns they have expressed and centers the information around the end users. It can also allow UNICEF and partner platforms to be found more easily on search engines by providing answers to frequently searched questions.



Viral Facts Africa (1/2)

Overview: Viral Facts Africa is the content production arm of the African Infodemic Response Alliance.

Role of social listening: Social media content produced by Viral Facts is informed by social listening conducted within the AIRA network (including the AIRA Joint Report).

Approach: VFA produces engaging digital content that addresses rumours/concerns that affect the COVID-19 response in the African continent. Country offices can access the materials and social media copies produced by VFA through a shared platform and integrate them into their rumour management strategies.

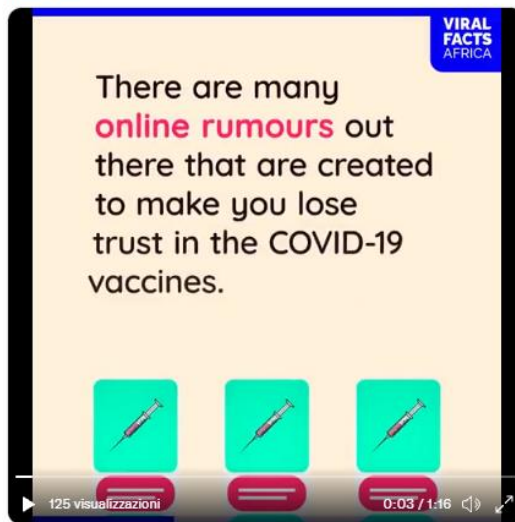
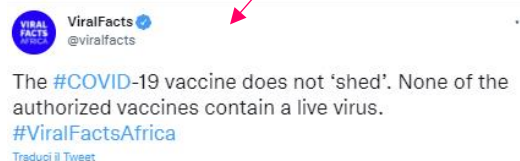
Lessons learnt:

- VFA complements the social listening pillar by developing high quality digital content that simplifies technical knowledge around key COVID-19 issues, amplifies the correct information and debunks misinformation.
- VFA provides country offices with ready-to-use content to address COVID-19 questions and concerns.
- VFA content follows key principles of effective rumour management such as focusing on the facts, exposing misinformation techniques, and producing curated and visually appealing products.
- Content is produced timely and with a distinctive look & feel which boosts engagement and helps users recognized the VFA brand on social media.
- Most VFA content is produced for social media consumption, but adaptations for use on WhatsApp have also been done in some instances to facilitate dissemination.

Viral Facts Africa (2/2)

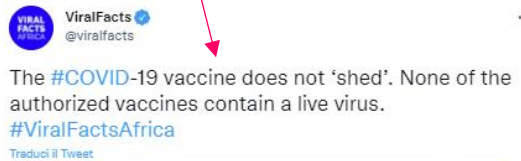
Example of debunking video produced by Viral Facts

Exposing misinformation technique



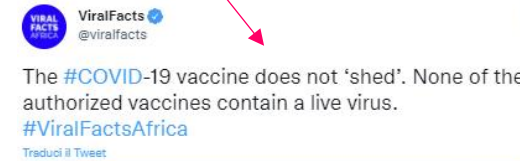
8:00 AM - 28 set 2021 - Hootsuite Inc.

Mentioning the rumour for saliency but with clear label to indicate it is false



8:00 AM - 28 set 2021 - Hootsuite Inc.

Focus on the facts



8:00 AM - 28 set 2021 - Hootsuite Inc.

