In May 2022, Internews collected 320 rumors, misconceptions and community concerns on social media about the COVID-19 pandemic and vaccines, and rumors linking Monkeypox and COVID-19 in Sudan. The rumors were collected from social media sources most commonly used in the country (Facebook and Twitter), and were selected through a risk analysis that identifies misinformation with the highest risk and potential impact on vulnerable people, which are the target communities of the Rooted in Trust Sudan project. Rumors highlighting vaccine safety continue to circulate, and in May a new rumor trend emerged. Some social media users shared that donated COVID-19 vaccines are expired or medical waste, and that’s why they’re free-of-charge. Also, other social media users said that vaccines are not a necessity, and that there are other priorities.

Rumors that fall under the endemic theme highlight perceptions that COVID-19 is endemic, and is no longer a concern. Political Agenda is for overarching conspiracy theory content, such as media is being controlled, international agenda to decrease global population, and business agenda.

Although there are relatively few high-risk rumors, they require a rapid response, as they could cause significant harm to community members.

Most of the posts shared by women are shared in private groups/pages.

We aim to tackle misinformation and rumors around the pandemic and vaccines, to engage and support humanitarian, public health and media actors in responding to vulnerable communities’ COVID-19 information needs.
A couple of posts from Darfur, also cited that the vaccines will be tested on Darfurians, and vaccines were sent from Khartoum to Darfur only because they had passed the expiration date. Another trending rumor is that COVID-19 is a hoax and is driven to yield political and economic gain, and end immigration. Some posts cited that there is no scientific evidence to show that COVID-19 exists, and that no infections have been recorded so far. On the other hand, there are social media users acknowledging that COVID-19 is real, but has ended with the Russia-Ukraine War or has become endemic. A couple of posts reasoned that COVID-19 is over, as mask-wearing is no longer mandatory for those performing Haj/Umra in Saudi Arabia.

Sentiment Analysis of Rumors

Sentiment analysis looks at the emotions expressed in a text. Rumors collected in May 2022, have been classified according to sentiment. This can help us contextualize rumors, and may allow us to answer questions on why certain rumors might persist and receive a lot of engagement.

The majority of rumors collected in May, expressed anger and frustration, sometimes associated with rumors downplaying the COVID-19 pandemic or denying its existence. Also, several rumors linking Monkepox and COVID-19; and others questioning the safety of vaccines evoked feelings of fear.
The Rooted in Trust project aims to promote a healthy information ecosystem, by dispelling rumors and misinformation about COVID-19 and vaccines by collecting and analyzing community feedback found on social media. We aim to address the information needs of vulnerable communities impacted by armed conflict and other humanitarian crises, such as people with disabilities and displaced people. By collecting community feedback and sharing people’s questions, complaints, and comments, together with humanitarians and public health responders we can address information voids and cater our programs and activities so that they are relevant and responsive to communities’ needs.

While men shared more rumor posts on social media in May 2022, both men and women between ages 26 and 35 accounted for most rumors shared when compared to other age groups.

Internews’ data analysts were able to access rumor data in private groups and accounts. Community posts and comments collected in May consisted mostly of rumors, and other posts, such as perceptions and concerns reflecting people’s hopes and fears during the pandemic.

Some of the rumors highlighted that Monkeypox is manmade or a biological weapon, like COVID-19, or a tool by powerful countries to pass their agenda and to ruin China’s economy. Others say Monkeypox is a side effect of the COVID-19 vaccine and may even transform you into a zombie. A post on Facebook, also noted that people’s immunity would be weakened due to the COVID-19 vaccines, and that Monkeypox would come along and kill them.

About Rooted in Trust

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ABOUT ROOTED IN TRUST

Please visit: Internews Sudan COVID-19 Rumor Bulletins

We welcome your feedback and suggestions. Please contact: Mayada Mahdi, Information Management Officer, mibrahim@internews.org