

VACCINE MIS/DISINFORMATION

WEEKLY REPORT

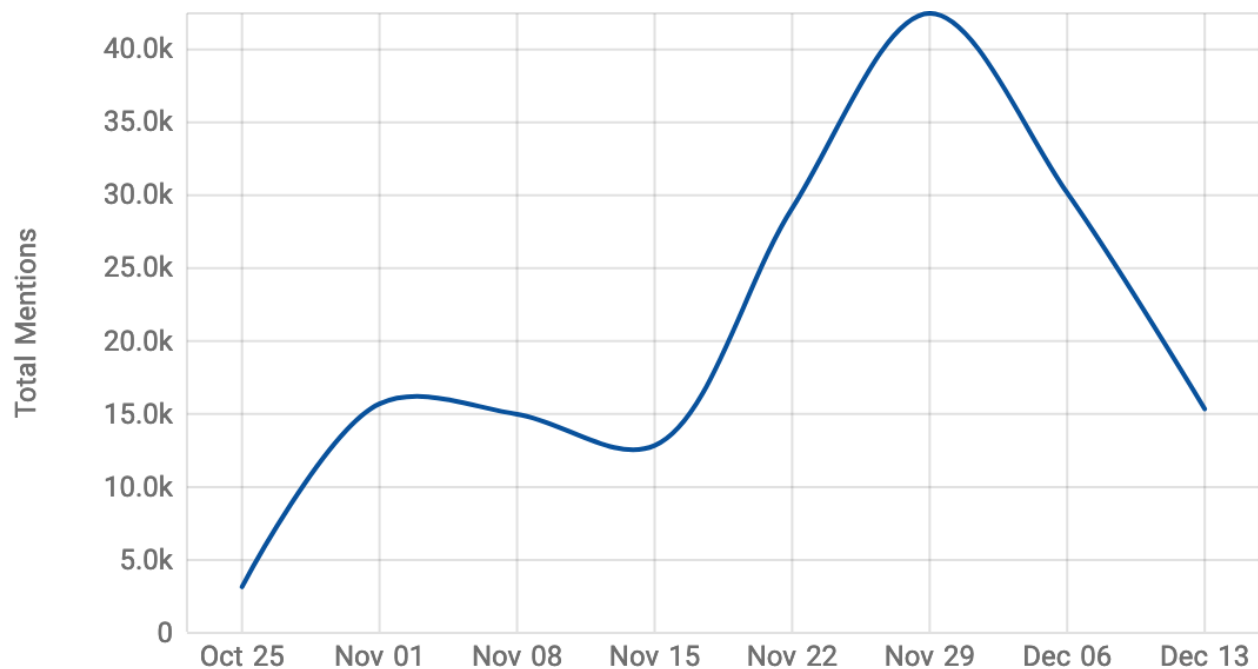
This week's Vaccine Mis/Disinformation report focuses on the social media conversations driven by Ramaphosa's positive COVID-19 test result, vaccine hesitancy, vaccine skepticism, frustrations related to inequality, and uncertainty regarding the Omicron variant.

16 December Summary:

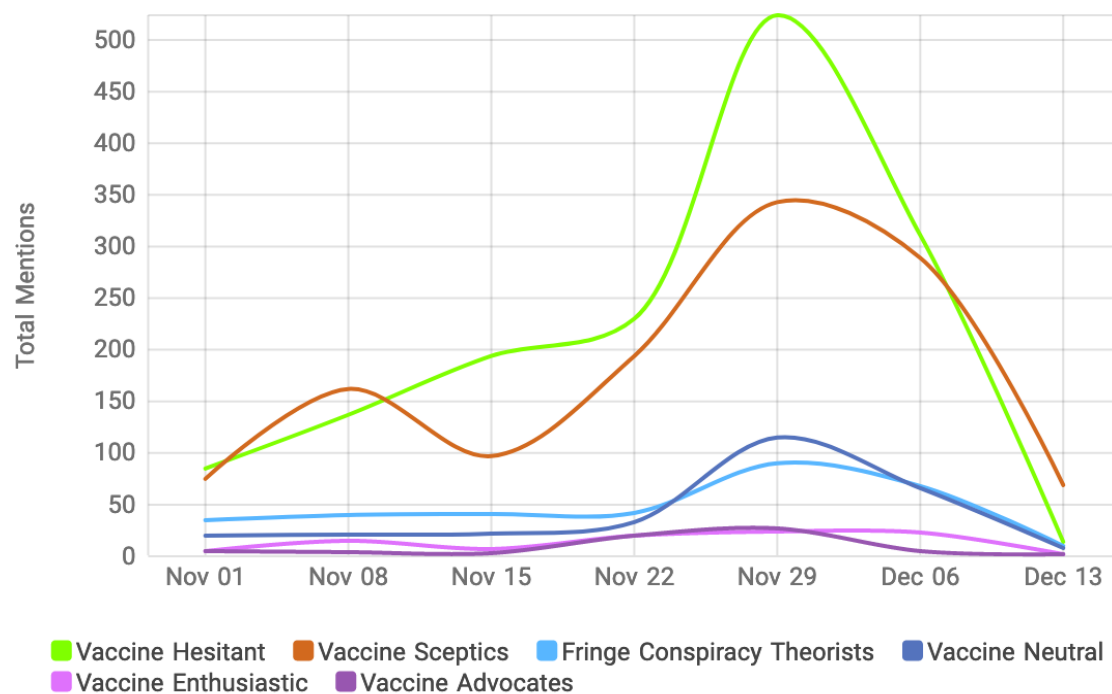
- **Ramaphosa tests positive for COVID-19**
- **Do vaccines really work?**
- **Anti-vaxxers will be blamed for unemployment**
- **Expensive PCR testing (now reduced from R850 to R500)**
- **Omicron variant and discrimination against African countries**
- **Booster shots**

Part 1

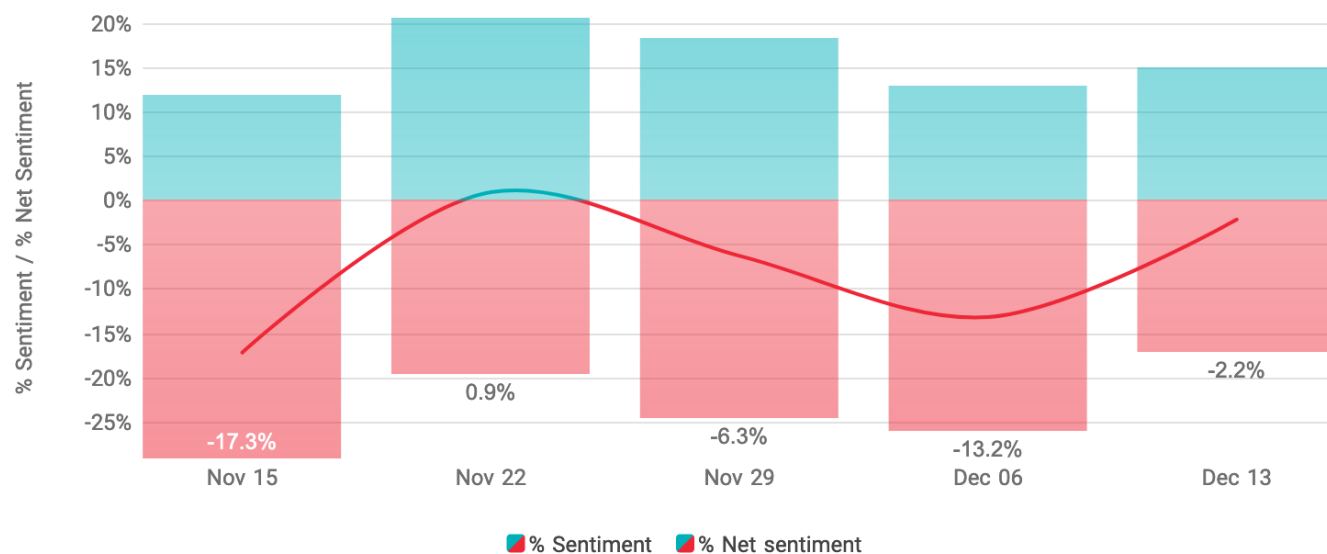
Twitter conversations surrounding the COVID-19 vaccine have shown increased volume as of late. Amongst other factors, this has been driven by the Omicron variant. See the graph below:



The graph below illustrates the different tones of the Twitter online conversation according to our vaccine trust spectrum. Note that vaccine hesitancy and vaccine skepticism have been the most prominent:



The graph below shows the overall net sentiment of mentions over November into mid-December. The blue indicates positive sentiments and the red indicates negative sentiments. Most of the sentiments over this period have been in the negative zone:

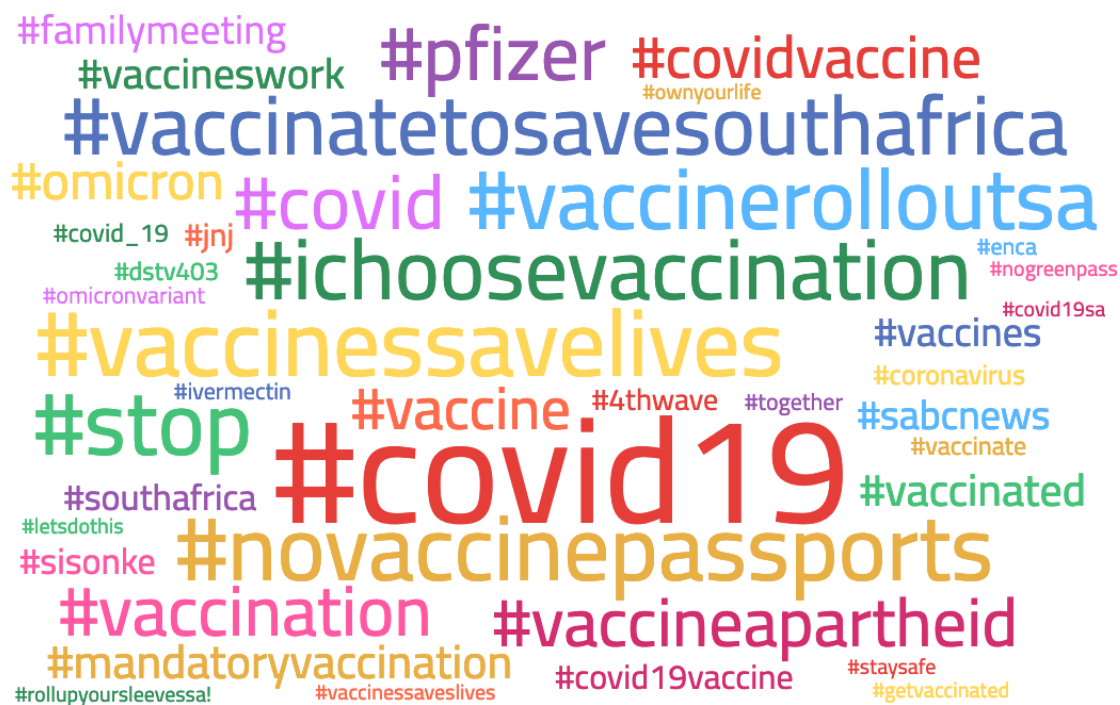


This table below goes even further by unpacking a variety of factors such as engagement, opportunities to see, sentiment etc. Draw your attention to volume column; here you clearly see that the top three drivers in volume are vaccine hesitants, vaccine skeptics and fringe conspiracy theories:

	Volume	Engagement	OTS	Sentiment	Authors	Followers	Conversations	Engagement Rate
Vaccine Hesitant	43.0% <div></div>	354	7 629 994	-45.5%	1 145	1 433 071	1 150	0.2
Vaccine Sceptics	35.5% <div></div>	530	6 757 051	-98.3%	956	1 053 419	919	0.4
Fringe Conspiracy Theorists	9.2% <div></div>	48	1 000 486	-99.4%	268	150 329	252	0.2
Vaccine Neutral	8.0% <div></div>	109	5 264 120	0.0%	256	3 090 039	200	0.4
Vaccine Enthusiastic	2.6% <div></div>	62	6 421 856	95.5%	86	4 315 858	72	0.7
Vaccine Advocates	1.7% <div></div>	7	243 655	98.3%	58	76 874	57	0.1

Part 2

Recent online conversations around the vaccine have demonstrated a range of attitudes towards the vaccine - both against and pro-vaccine. See the word cloud below:



As discussed in Part 1, recent online conversations have been largely driven by vaccine hesitancy and vaccine skepticism. This section will unpack some of the top trending issues that were picked up by our analysts. These topics will also be accompanied by dialogue facilitation suggestions highlighted in *italics*:

Ramaphosa tests positive for COVID-19

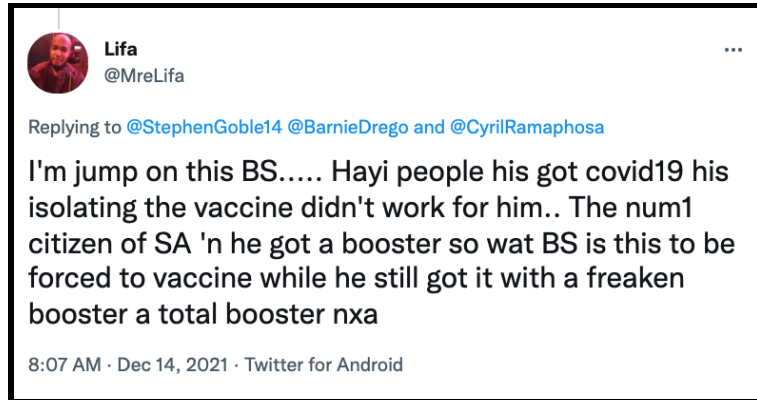
Earlier this week on Sunday 12 December 2021, South African president Ramaphosa tested positive for COVID-19. While some sent well-wishes, others expressed confusion and mistrust of the vaccine's effectiveness. The [post](#) below is a good example of this:



Dialogue Suggestions:

- *Our president is highly exposed to a lot of risk environments due to the nature of his job... I have more faith in the vaccine because it is only now that our president got Covid- during the other waves he was safe and healthy. Why does it not make sense to you that fully vaccinated can catch Covid?*
- *Seems that he suffered only mild symptoms due to his vaccination status. That sounds like an absolute win to me, does it not? Further, everyone maintained that you can acquire Covid even when vaccinated but the chances of infection are drastically reduced.*
- *It has been communicated time and time again that the vaccine does not stop transmission of the virus. It is because the president is vaccinated that he did not become seriously ill and only caught Covid during the less fatal variants.*
- *Covid-19 vaccines help protect against severe illness with Covid-19 with Covid-19 Vaccine breakthrough cases. While Covid-19 vaccines are working well, some people who are fully vaccinated against Covid-19 will still get sick, because no vaccines are 100% effective*
- *The vaccine is proof once again that it is a working measure by preventing or developing a severe case of the disease, it may not guarantee the prevention of you getting infected, but it increases the chance of survival of the disease especially in advanced age groups like our president.*

Similarly, the [tweet](#) below expresses frustration towards the effectiveness of the vaccine. Because Ramaphosa also has also received a booster shot, some have begun to express even more skepticism:



Dialogue Suggestions:

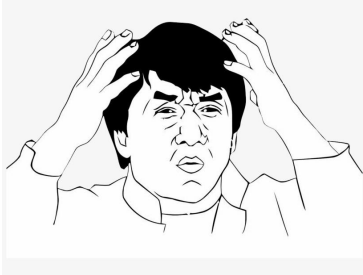
- *One can still get breakthrough COVID infections even when vaccinated but it does greatly reduce the chances of infection. So if enough people around him have COVID-19, he is more likely to get infected. That is why vaccination is so important - to reduce the chances of each one getting infected.*
- *The vaccine does not stop you from getting the virus. It is because he is the number one citizen that he chose to get vaccinated, his job demands it. He is also setting an example, he did exactly what he's asking the country to do, he got vaccinated.*
- *In his capacity as a president he had to take the injection first, I think we know that.*
- *Remember boosters are made to try to counter variants that came out, now the vaccine can arguably not prevent you from getting infected but in terms of reaching global immunity without losing lots of lives in the process, it is still the safest way. And remember global immunisation leads to not having new variants and by that fact stops other needs of booster shots.*

On the far side of the spectrum are bizarre conspiracy theories that suggest that Ramaphosa's positive result is a scam, that the vaccine is linked to satanism and more. See the [tweet](#) below:



Dialogue Suggestions:

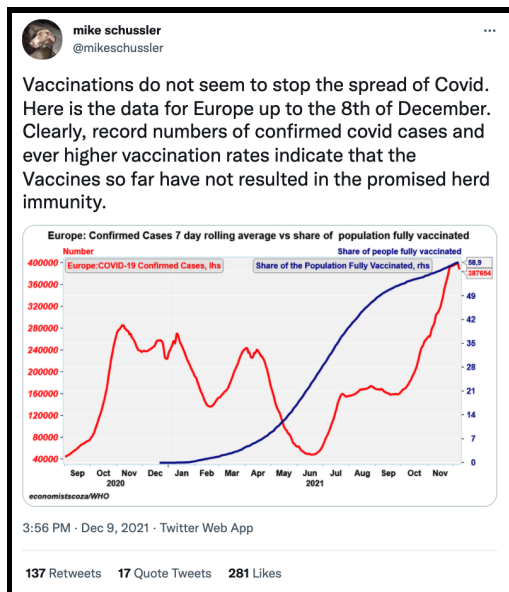
- *I don't think our president is running away from any responsibility - he is just a person who got a virus... What does this have to do with satanism and the French President?*
- *Haibo, and then?*



- *There are so many points to your tweet, one does not know where to start. Why would he lie about having Covid? He has no reason to run away from anything, because as the president, the issue of mandates and how the country feels about them is an issue he cannot avoid. It is something he would need to address sooner or later. How does the French president come into play in our country's personal issues? Lastly, Satanism? What does satanism have to do with the price of milk? There are plenty of religious leaders who have been sending the very same message Ramaphosa is sending, to get vaccinated. How does satanism fit into this whole discussion and what is the closing date? What happens on the closing date? End of days?*
- *Where did you get all of this information?*
- *I am a bit confused about the message you are trying to convey...*

Do vaccines really work?

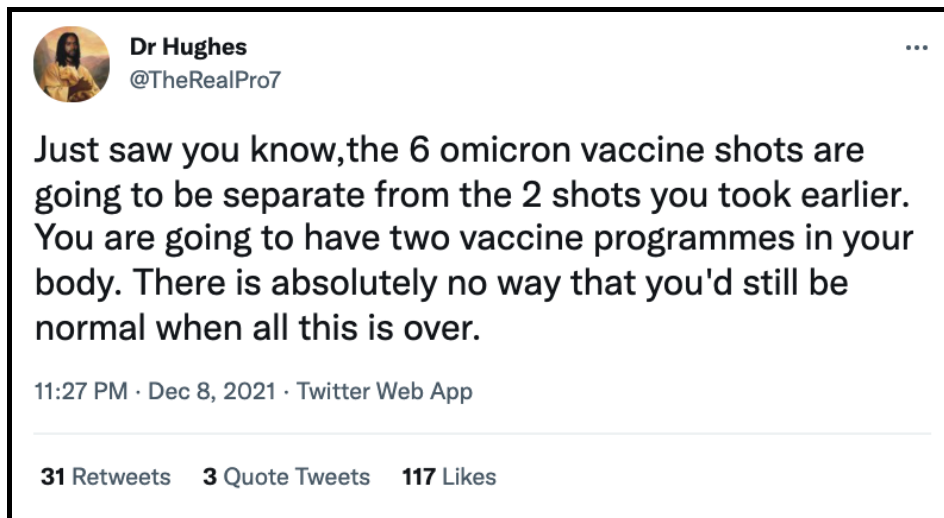
The rising cases of infections in countries where vaccination rates are high have led to more and more skepticism. See [tweet](#) below speaking on the spike of infections in Europe:



Dialogue Suggestions:

- *I think the lack of herd immunity has a lot to do with the fact that people are becoming more and more lax between the waves. As I remember, herd immunity is an indirect effect of vaccination, so there are a lot of other factors that influence it... What do you think?*
- *The spread of the virus has proven to be something that is very hard to get right. The lack of herd immunity is a factor but also the new variant is said to be easily transmittable resulting in a higher infection rate. It's also important to remember the most basic precautions against Covid. Vaccines seem to definitely be doing it's job in keeping people out of hospitals though.*
- *The appearance of the new variant and its ease of contagion made the battle against Covid more difficult that's for sure, but on the other end some part of this graph can be explained also by the lack of some to respect the distancing measure put in place in the beginning of the pandemic.*

Misinformation seems to be at an alltime high because of the new Omicron variant. Many are doubting the vaccine's effectiveness, and are sharing sentiments that are driven by fear and unchecked claims. See the [tweet](#) below claiming that we need "6 Omicron vaccine shots":

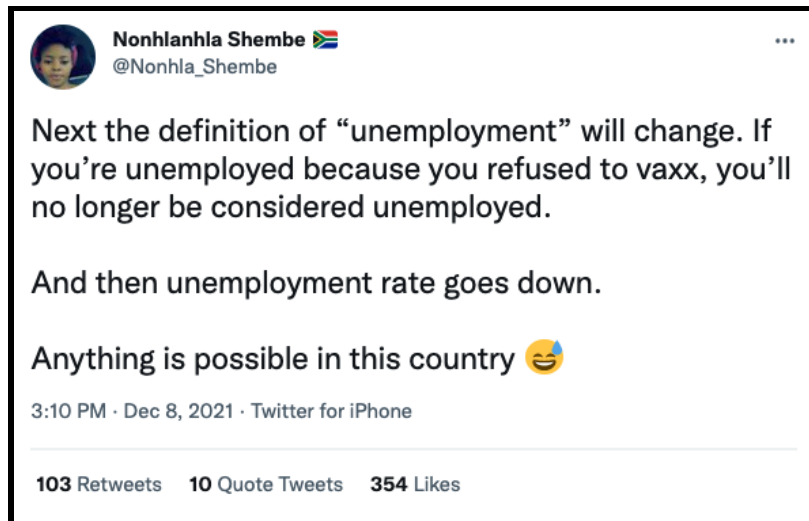
**Dialogue Suggestions:**

- *Where did you get the information that we need 6 Omicron vaccine shots? Is it from a verified source? And is it really 2 vaccine programmes? As far as I am aware, booster shots fall within the same programme...*
- *I have not heard about any of this? Are you sure it is true and not just someone spreading panic... We have to be careful of misinformation. What is your source?*
- *I have not heard anything about 6 shots for Omicron. Would you please share your source? Also, from your day of birth to the time you were 12, how many vaccinations did your mother take you for? Are you not normal?*
- *Where did you get this information?*

- Any scientific proof you have to support your claim?

Anti-vaxxers will be blamed for unemployment

Confusion, frustration and misinformation are driving narratives that are causing more and more fear. South Africa's inequality has undoubtedly been exacerbated by the pandemic. The [post](#) below conflates unemployment with the (un)vaccinated:



Dialogue Suggestions:

- *Lol I highly doubt they'd change the definition of unemployed but I would recommend getting vaxxed! It is safe and effective.*
- *Where did you hear this? I am vaxxed, not only to secure a job but also for the health of my colleagues and family.*
- *I don't think Covid and the vaccines warrant changing the definition of a word. You do not have to leave your job in a lot of companies, you just have to provide a negative test as often as they need you to.*
- *Did you see this information on any official South African website or government website?*
- *We are not vaccinated because we are scared to lose our jobs, we are vaccinated because we are protecting us and our loved ones.*

Expensive PCR testing (now reduced from R850 to R500)

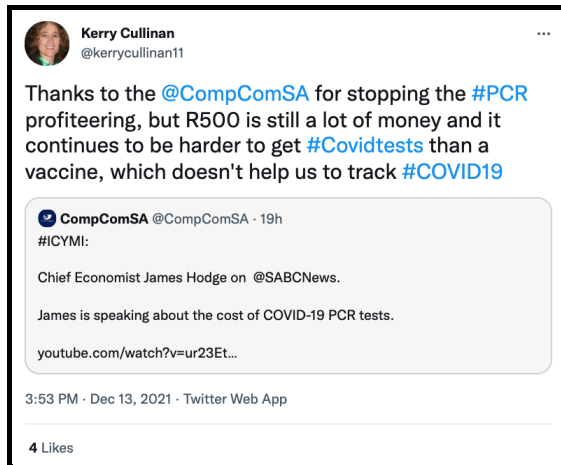
The Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) test is the most accurate way to detect the COVID-19 virus in a person's body. Over the pandemic period beginning in 2020, many have made calls for a price reduction by citing that it is too expensive. Recently, the major private laboratories in South Africa announced that the PCR tests would now be offered at a reduced rate of R500.00 moving forward. As seen in the [post](#) below, this issue sparked debate online with many claiming that pharmaceutical companies are only concerned about making profits:



Dialogue Suggestions:

- *So you would like the test prices to be higher and unaffordable? So less tests = less cases (in terms of data only) = less fear = less jabs = less money made = but more deaths. Smart plan!*
Also, creator of PCR test did not say that - [fake news](#)
- *I do not understand your logic. How does all of that result in fear? The more of a handle we can get on the virus. The more people that actually know they have Covid the easier it will be for them to isolate themselves and stop the spread. Also we are not standing still with research on Covid. Fear will not increase because the more we know the more we can do to protect ourselves.*
- *Really confused by your analogy, doesn't make sense to me. PCR tests are there to detect the disease so people can be aware that they might be a danger to others, how does this help big pharma?*

Furthermore, while the reduced price comes as a welcome move, many still believe that a R500.00 price point is still too high. See the [tweet](#) below which speaks to this:



Dialogue Suggestions:

- *Very true, but bringing the price down is a welcomed stride nevertheless. Our first priority should still be vaccination for everyone!*
- *It is definitely still a lot, but it's a start. Hopefully we can work towards self testing. In the meantime we have to do all we can to curb the spread. Everyone knows the basic precautions and vaccination is still a very important way to start keeping yourself safe.*
- *You've got a point here.*

Omicron variant and discrimination against African countries

The travel ban discrimination against African states following the Omicron variant has been very blatant. Equally, the biased media coverage by Western media outlets has been equally concerning. See this [post](#) below:



Dialogue Suggestions:

- *The journalistic coverage regarding Omicron has been very poor, especially from Western Countries. It is good to call them out. Gentle reminder however, that Omicron is not the only variant floating around and vaccination remains the safest and most effective way of protecting yourself.*
- *It is fair to say that these countries have not been completely fair to South Africa during the time of the Omicron variant. It really does feel like they are being prejudicial to us for no reason. This is a good time to reflect on how South Africans treat other Africans...*

Booster shots

The announcement of the need for more booster shots has raised questions about the motivation behind this. Many have alleged that pharmaceutical companies are pushing an agenda driven by profiteering, not fighting the virus.

**Dialogue Suggestions:**

- *Some things will just become routine. In the medieval times one of the leading causes of death was oral infections and now we see dentists at least once a year. I'm not denying that it might be good for someone's purse, but I think firstly we should do what is needed for our health... What do you think?*
- *We must separate the business from the health. Someone was always going to profit off of the vaccine. That does not, however, mean that the vaccine is not effective. Big pharma profits off all vaccines and medication and yet they still do their jobs, do they not?*
- *This information needs to be taken with a bit of grain of salt as nothing is sure yet.*
- *Yes they do profit, that does not negate the fact that they are doing good work, helping the entire world get through this. Not just this but every single medical issue that requires medication. Politics and business have nothing to do with the issue at hand. We have a global pandemic and we need to fight it by any means necessary. Would you be happier*

if the world leaders just said “People all over the world are getting sick? Dying? oh well, let them sort themselves out”