

VACCINE MIS/DISINFORMATION

WEEKLY REPORT

This week's Mis/Disinformation report looks into social media conversations from two platforms - Facebook over the last month and Twitter over the last week. Conversations relative to the vaccine seem to be largely driven by mistrust, misinformation, and fear.

17 February Summary:

Facebook

- Analysis of the last 31 days

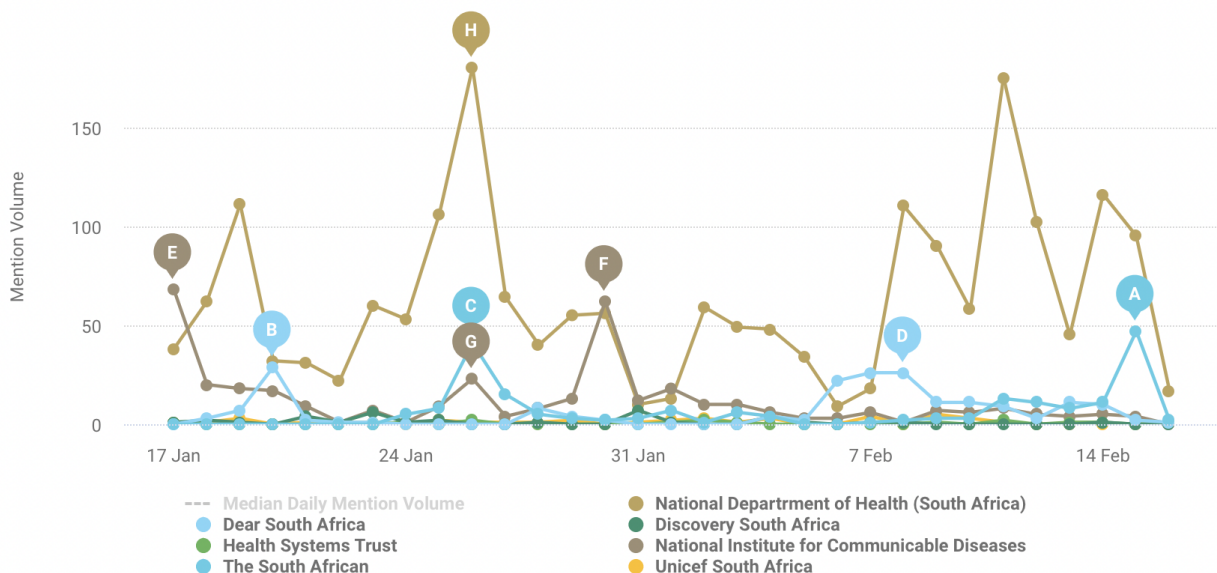
Twitter

- SAHPRA not prepared for hearings regarding minors being vaccinated
- Chief Justice Mogoeng Mogoeng's views the vaccine
- Botswana threatens to fine or jail citizens who refuse to vaccinate
- Misinformation spreading due to new research indicating that some vaccines could increase risk of HIV infection
- Moderna CEO ditches vaccine stock
- COVID-19 miracle cure billboard on Pretoria highway

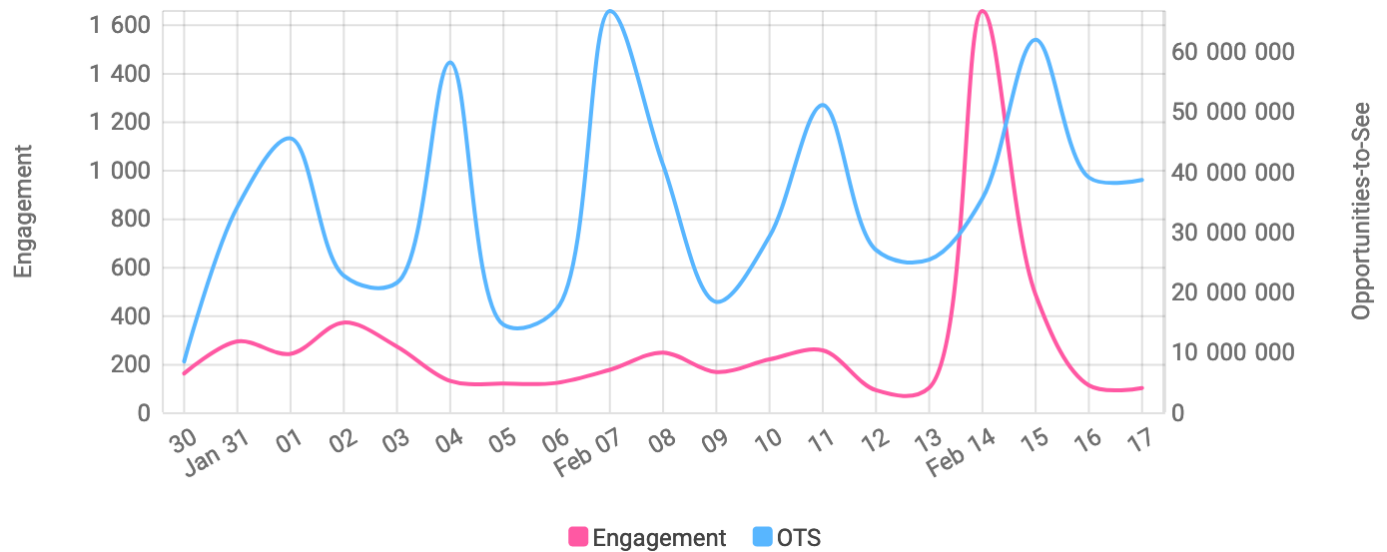
Part 1

Our data analysis has now begun extending beyond Twitter and onto Facebook. These analytics have significantly enriched our understanding of the different tones and voices.

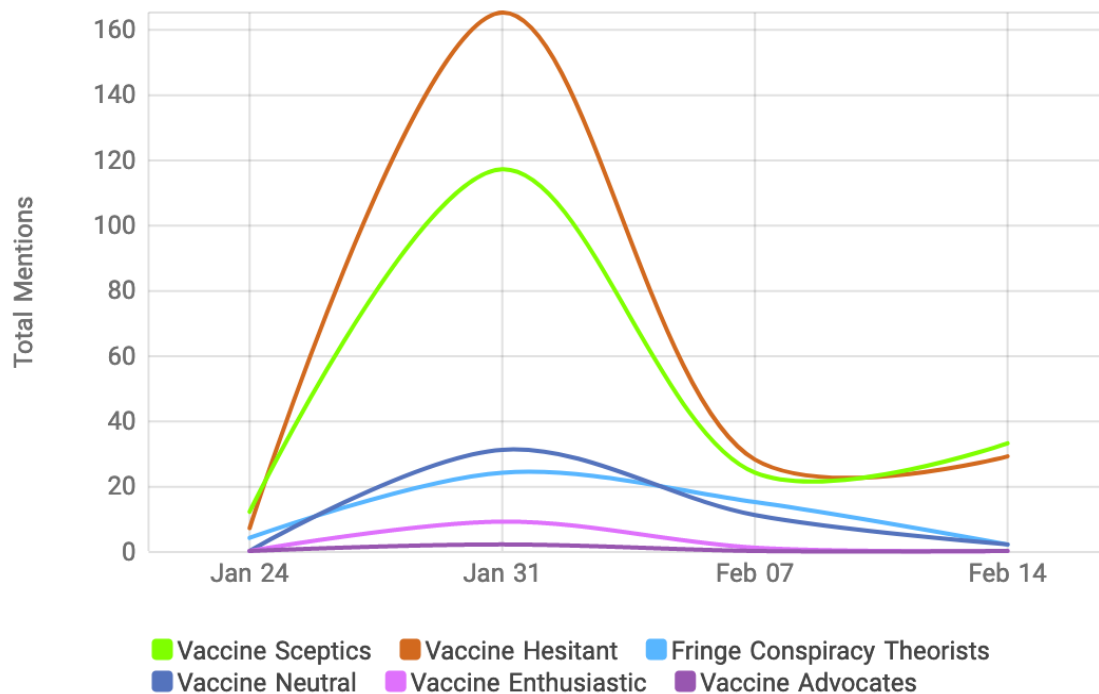
We are currently tracking conversations on seven public Facebook pages. These are: 1) The National Department of Health (South Africa), 2) National Institute for Communicable Diseases, 3) Dear South Africa, 4) Discovery South Africa, 5) Health Systems Trust, 6) The South African, 7) UNICEF South Africa. The graph shows the mention volume of the last 31 days:



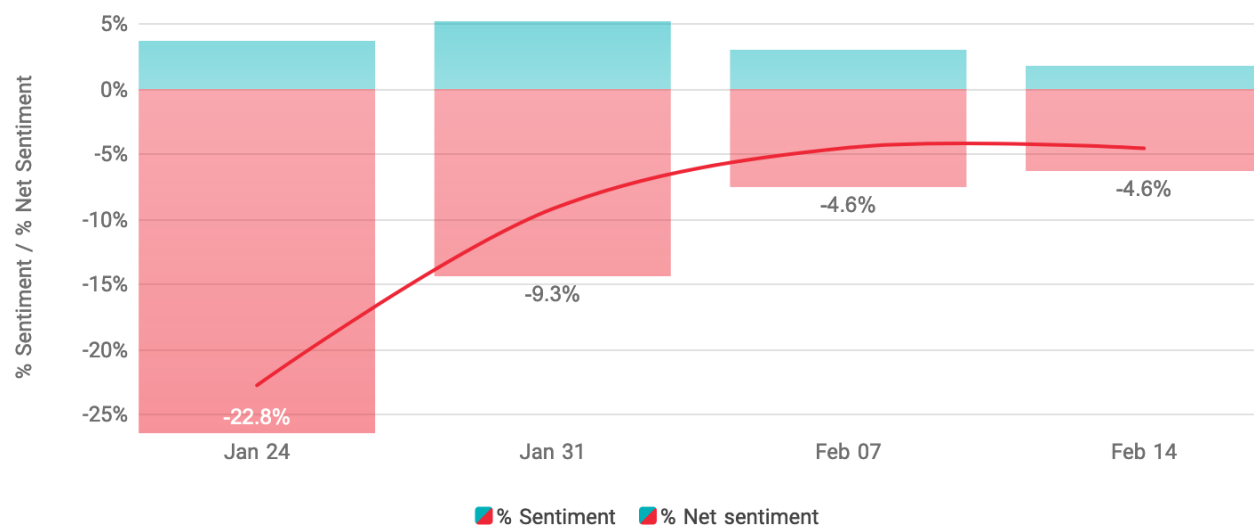
Engagement (i.e., interactions with posts) and Opportunities-to-See (i.e., impressions) were quite significant as seen in the graph below:



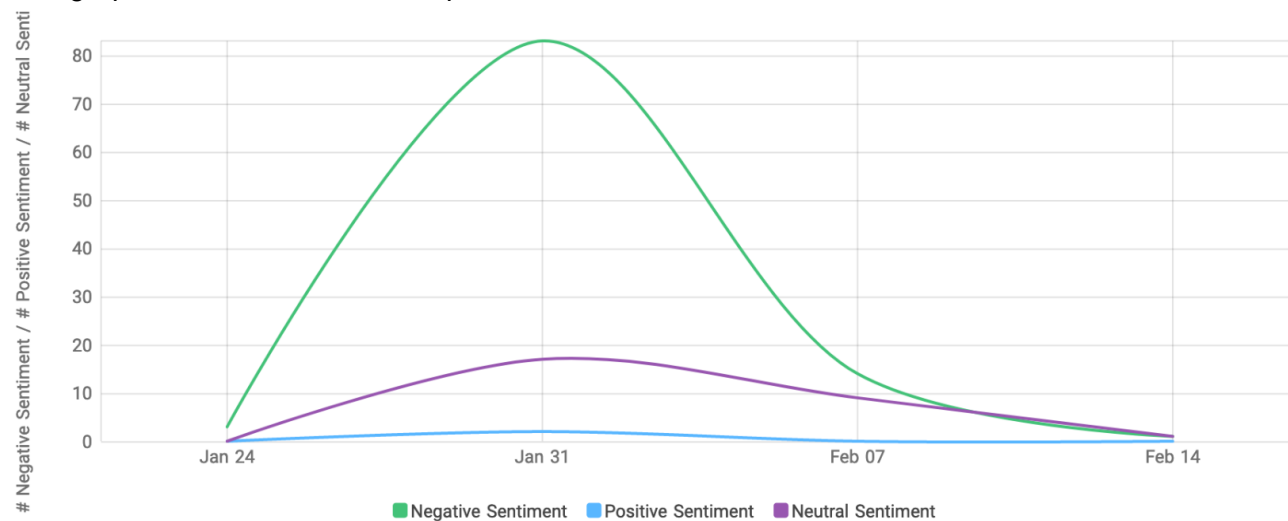
The graph below illustrates the different tones of the Twitter online conversation according to our vaccine trust spectrum:



The graph below shows the overall net sentiment of mentions over the last week. The blue indicates positive sentiments and the red indicates negative sentiments. As has been for the last month, sentiments over this period have been in the negative zone:



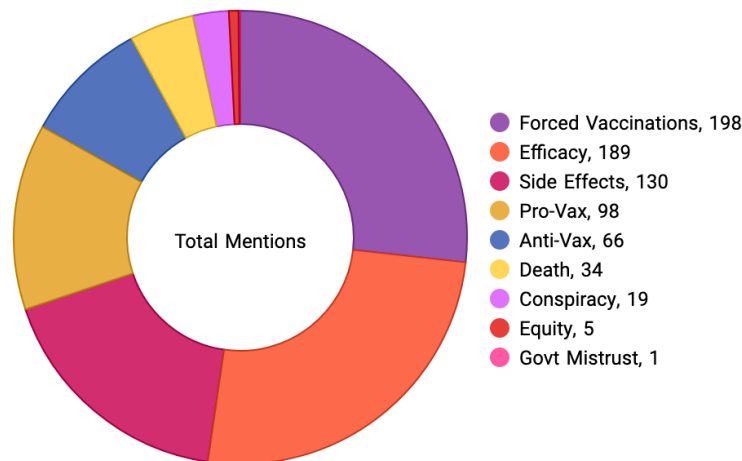
The graph below is another example of this:



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 hesitancy, vaccine skepticism and fringe conspiracy theories:

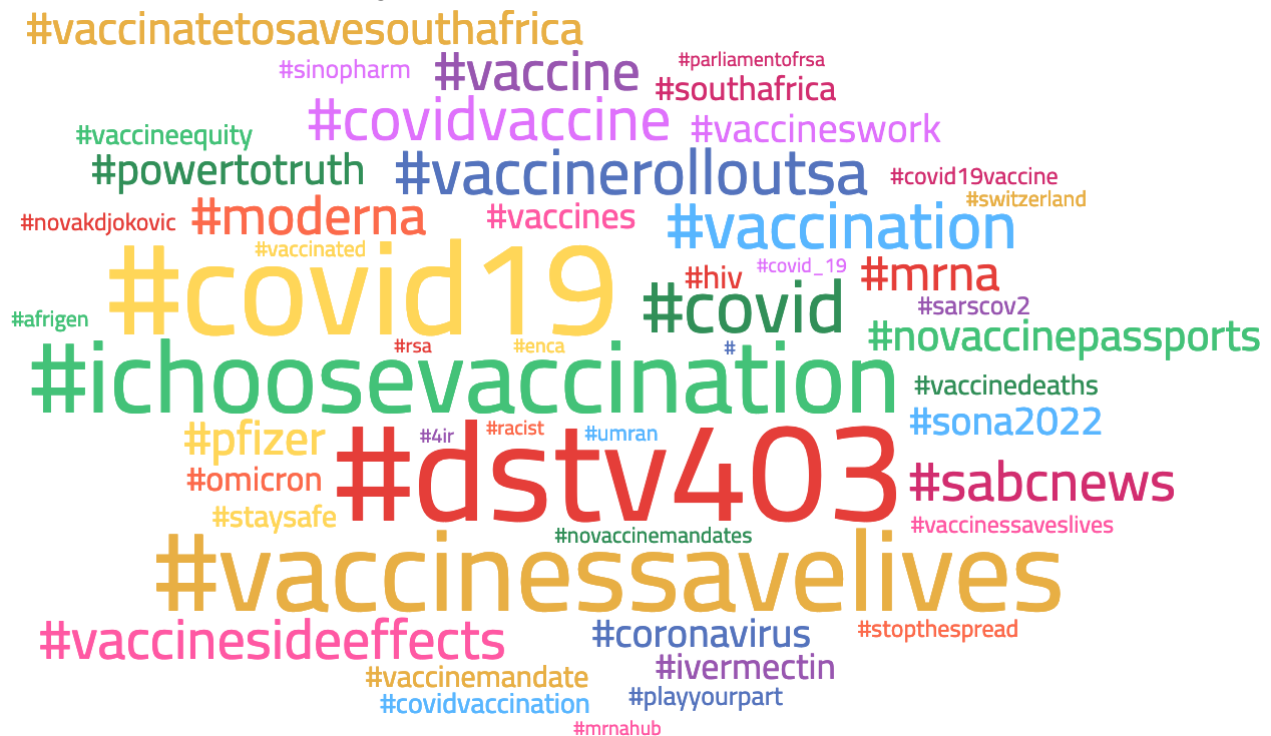
	Volume	Engagement	OTS	Sentiment	Authors	Followers	Conversations	Engagement Rate
Vaccine Hesitant	44.3% <div></div>	40	570 079	-60.7%	189	85 369	159	0.2
Vaccine Sceptics	36.0% <div></div>	21	11 962 484	-98.4%	157	4 476 732	156	0.1
Fringe Conspiracy Theorists	8.9% <div></div>	6	107 169	-97.8%	44	15 219	44	0.1
Vaccine Neutral	8.5% <div></div>	1	166 917	-9.1%	43	79 491	35	0.0
Vaccine Enthusiastic	1.9% <div></div>	2	1 189 797	100.0%	10	583 163	9	0.2
Vaccine Advocates	0.4% <div></div>	0	3 279	100.0%	2	1 972	1	0.0

And lastly, the figure below gives some insights into the kind of rhetoric being used online:



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 has been a consistent trend over the last few weeks.

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*:

SAHPRA not prepared for hearings regarding minors being vaccinated

Non-profit organization Free the Children - Save the Nation has requested that the South African Health Products Regulatory Authority (SAHPRA) produce documents that were used to allow vaccines to be administered to children. The regulator was not able to as seen [below](#):



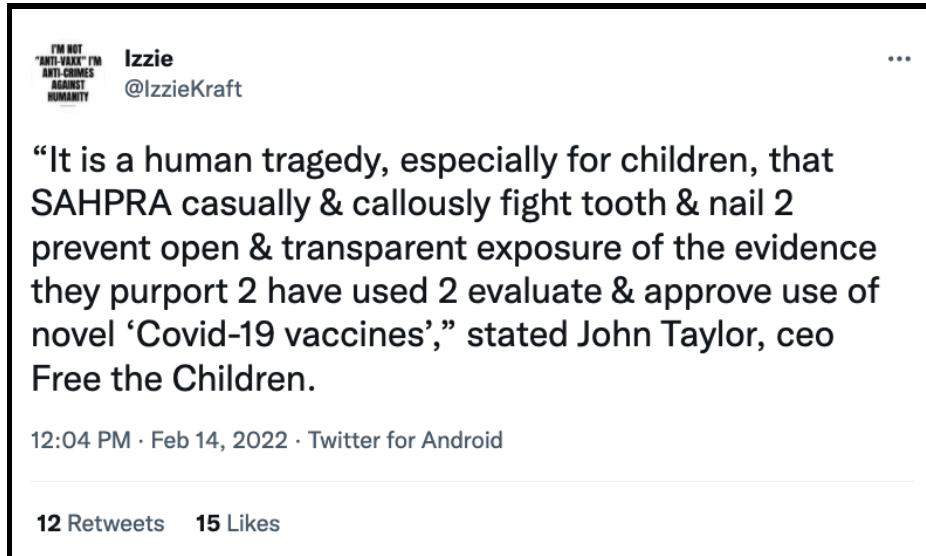
Many were unimpressed with the regulatory being unprepared as seen in this [tweet](#):



Dialogue suggestions:

- *SAHPRA must be getting a lot of attention and queries due to Covid-19 demands. So there are situations and instances where they will not be ready to produce certain information and documents, not because they don't have them, but because they have so much worklog to deal with.*
- *I'm sure they will defend their decision.*

Many, as seen in the [quote below](#) by the CEO of Free the Children, have requested more transparency from the health regulator:

**Dialogue suggestions:**

- *I don't see why SAHPRA should hide any information that should be available to the public. Unless of course what you refer to as evidence was demanded without following the right channels and procedures.*
- *Can you develop your idea around freeing the children?*
- *Are you saying SAPRA has not been transparent?*

Chief Justice Mogoeng Mogoeng's views on the vaccine

Former Chief Justice Mogoeng Mogoeng has trended in previous months for his controversial views about the COVID-19 vaccine. One that stands out in particular is when he [claimed](#) that the vaccine was marked by satan.

Recently, the former Chief Justice appeared in an interview on eNCA where he questioned vaccine mandates in the workplace and beyond. This has gained considerable traction online. See video in the [tweet](#) below:



Dialogue suggestions:

- *Well, we know that the vaccine provides at least 'some' protection against transmission of Covid-19. People at work are close to each other for extended periods, so vaccination minimizes that risk. But then we also need to look at the employer's interests. An employer knows that vaccinated employees are more likely to 'bounce back' quickly after a Covid-19 infection. In the past, we've seen employees take advantage of Covid-19 protocols to stay at home.*
- *Remember you have less chance to contract the virus if you are vaccinated - I am not saying you cannot. If the majority of the people are vaccinated, they represent a low chance as a whole to get infected.*

Many have seemingly come out in support of his views as seen in the [tweet](#) below:



Dialogue suggestions:

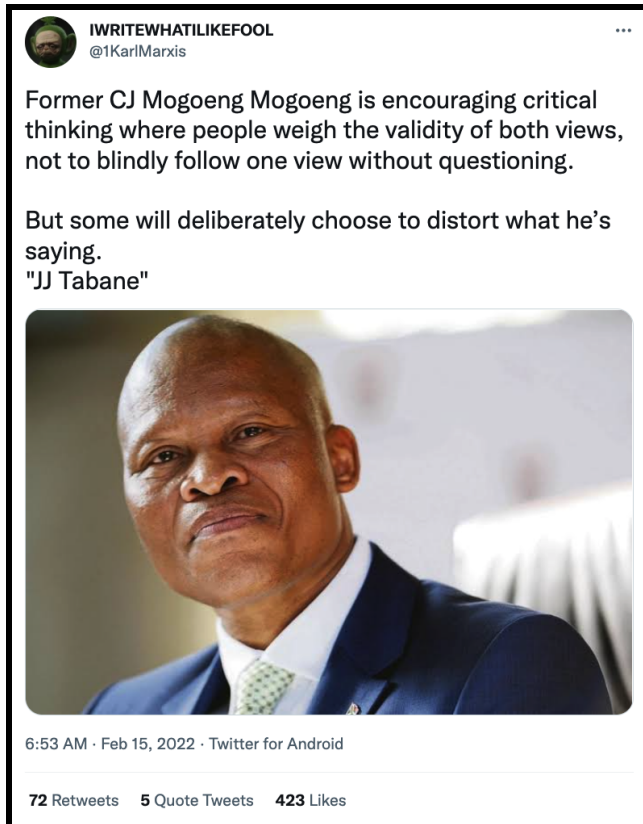
- *What's the point that you are trying to make?*
- *What do you think he meant by that statement? And do you view boosters as a negative thing? If so, why?*
- *How many booster shots do you think are required? You are making it seem like they are endless.*

This [post](#) shares similar sentiments:

**Dialogue suggestions:**

- *I don't know about the RET but anyone who says the vaccine is from the devil cannot be trusted. Not sure if he is an anti-vaxxer, but his comments around the vaccine have been bizarre, what do you think?*
- *He didn't say people should not take the vaccine, did he? If not that does not make him anti-Vaxxer.*

Others have come out to support the former Chief Justice by citing that he is promoting critical thinking. See the [tweet](#) below:

**Dialogue suggestions:**

- *If only he did the same thing. As a judge he should know to inform himself and not blindly follow misinformation around the vaccine. Would've loved for him to speak about the benefits of the vaccines too. Do you think he is being impartial and weighing the validity of both sides?*
- *People should make it their own personal responsibility to get informed and not to rely solely on other peoples' opinions.*

Conversely, others have called out his views. See [tweet](#) below which cites that his evidence seems anecdotal rather than scientific:



Dialogue suggestions:

- *Exactly. Anecdotal evidence is not evidence. It would have been great if the former Chief Justice investigated a little further around the efficacy of the vaccines and not just rely on misinformation.*

Botswana threatens to fine or jail citizens who refuse to vaccinate

Vaccination related developments in other countries have often gained traction amongst South African audiences.

Recently, South Africa's neighbour Botswana announced vaccine mandates that threaten to imprison or fine citizens who refuse the COVID-19 vaccination. See the [post](#) below:

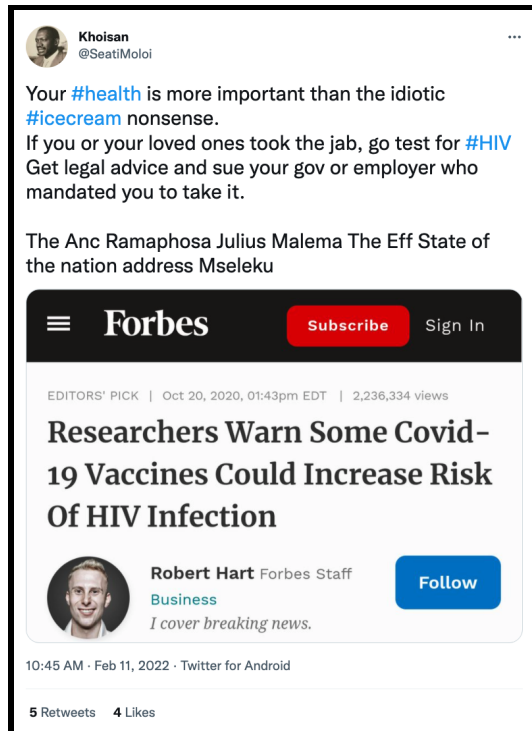
**Dialogue suggestions:**

- *And here we are complaining about our jobs making vaccination mandatory*

Misinformation spreading due to new research indicating that some vaccines could increase risk of HIV infection

New research indicating that some COVID-19 vaccines have the potential to increase the risk of HIV infection has gained considerable traction amongst South African audiences.

As seen in the post below, this has seemingly led to some confusion, miseducation and panic:



Dialogue suggestions:

- *It may 'increase risk' not 'cause' HIV. Also, these vaccines are either not in circulation or widely used. These are Ad5 vectored vaccines, we use largely mRNA vaccines.*
- *More studies are ongoing on the matter. But, the vaccine does not give you HIV!*

Misinformation continues to spread as seen in in this [tweet](#) which suggests that there is an HIV variant:



Dialogue suggestions:

- *I don't think it is a good idea to spread mis/disinformation to people. Where did you get all of this information?*

This [post](#) contains similar sentiments that spread more misinformation:

**Dialogue suggestions:**

- *Where did you get this information?*
- *Will be curious to know where you learn about this, mind sharing your sources ?*
- *Who's they? The people on twitter? You trust people on Twitter for health decisions?*

Moderna CEO ditches vaccine stock

News of the Moderna's executive team dumping their stocks has caused quite a bit of speculation and concern online. See [tweet](#) below:



Similarity, the [tweet](#) below shares similar sentiments suggesting that something sinister is going on:



Dialogue suggestions:

- Going through hell at work because of what? Be specific on what you are saying

COVID-19 miracle cure on billboard on Pretoria highway

Miseducation and misinformation around alternative medicine and COVID-19 cures continues to spread. This [post](#) shares photos of a billboard in Pretoria selling a “miracle cure”:



Dialogue suggestions:

- *People will consume all sorts of silly, dangerous 'cures' but when you tell them to take the vaccine, they say 'my body is a temple, I don't consume toxic substances'. Like bruh?????*