

General disappointment, anti-vaxxers, conspiracy theories and misinformation

 By [Charles Siboto](#)

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"A lie can travel halfway around the world while the truth is still putting on its shoes." - Mark Twain (but likely not.)

Like those work emails we all send, I hope that this #YouthMonth2021 piece finds you well, but it's probably finding you frustrated and generally disappointed. The winter chills are settling in across the country, load shedding looms large and Malume Cyril called the dreaded family meeting and put us on Level 3. The third wave of Covid-19 has crashed upon us, we're wondering when we'll get vaccinated and a cousin on our family WhatsApp group has suddenly become an expert on nanotech overnight and knows how Bill Gates is using the vaccines as the delivery method to control us. Also, remind me, do we have a health minister again? It's a tough time to be positive.



Charles Siboto - Source: Supplied

We've been living through the 'Panna cotta' since the beginning of 2020 and so many levels of lockdown later, there's a feeling of frustration and Covid-19 fatigue in the air. Which is understandable, of course. I mean, it's our first time living through a pandemic on this scale and we're still learning how to cope with it. Memes and TikTok seem to be the go-to coping mechanism. Almost every aspect of our daily lives has been changed by this pandemic in a relatively short space of time. It makes sense that we're all slightly on edge. But while most of us have masked up and hunkered down with the hope

of making it through these unprecedented times, voices spreading conspiracy theories and misinformation, in general, seem to be ringing louder. What is worrying, though, is how many young people are adding their voices to this choir.



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Charles Siboto 12 Jun 2020



Starting blocks remain unequal

You know what, though, I do get it. Promises of a brighter future were made to the born-free generation. Some of those promises have been delivered, we can admit. Many of us who grew up poor are doing better than our parents. Most of that progress can be attributed to access to education. But the starting blocks remain unequal between Black kids and white kids, rich kids and poor kids. Our trajectories are different as a result. It doesn't help that our government isn't coming to the party.

“ Economic change takes time, we get it, but blatant corruption and poor governance frustrate the process at great cost to the quality of young people's lives. Add Covid-19 to this and things become bleaker. ”

Poor kids are getting their degrees and then going back home to their impoverished conditions and it's a Herculean challenge to get out. Wealthy kids are getting their degrees, going back home, jamming some Playstation for a bit while they look for work. If they can't get work through normal channels (which is currently rough for everyone), maybe they can lean on a family connection (which is fine, it is what it is) and if that doesn't work maybe even go try abroad. Kids in the middle class, if you can even call it that in SA, are in the precarious position of having some resources but also facing the real challenge of maybe being unemployed long enough that it puts a strain on those resources to the point that they run out. These are real, concrete problems. Especially during a very real pandemic that's costing lives and livelihoods.



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There are great stories of people overcoming their circumstances and finding creative solutions to economic challenges, of course. Hell, almost every #YouthMonth in the past three years I've been shouting from the rooftops how the kids are doing it for themselves. Struggling your way to the top against all odds is fine but it can't be the norm to build a country on. We need systems and institutions that do what they are supposed to.

The rise of misinformation vs real problems

The point I'm getting to (in the most roundabout way) is that the rise of misinformation distracts from these real problems. How can we take the government to task when we're too busy wading through a sea of conspiracies? Misinformation is actively killing people during the pandemic as well. People aren't taking precautions against catching Covid-19 or mistrust vaccines, which results in deaths that could've been avoided. We're all vulnerable to misinformation because we want to make sense of the outrageousness of things. Conspiracy theories get under our skin because they're sexier than the truth and make it easier for us to turn off our brains. Everything that's going wrong? It's Bill Gates, China, immigrants, 5G, the Illuminati or some multi-government cabal. The government cabal is maybe closer to the truth, but not in any complex, multilayered way. It's just sheer arrogant incompetence. Because they can get away with it and we are too distracted to do anything about it.

“ All the people on Twitter telling us that we are sheeple are also just sheeple to misinformation. ”

This #YouthMonth is a rough one and things are generally disappointing. It's difficult for all of us and perhaps there is light at the end of the tunnel, I don't know. Protect yourself and the people around you by taking the necessary Covid-19 precautions. I'd say get vaccinated but there's not much to do but wait on that count.

ABOUT CHARLES SIBOTO

Charles Siboto is a delightful, youngish person. He firmly believes that kindness matters and cannot abide people who are asshats.

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