

CONFESSIONS OF A CLIMATE BRAWLER

Gerald Kutney

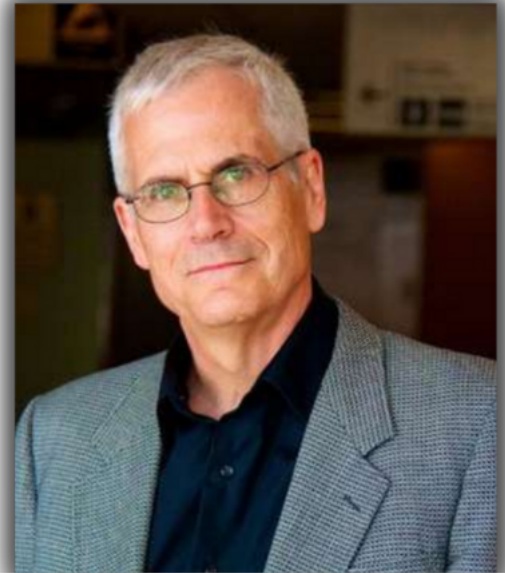
Twitter has over 300 million monthly active users from around the world. Of these, I have estimated the number of climate deniers to be around 100 million, but many are passive tweeters. Of particular concern are the high-profile, hard-core climate deniers who tweet aggressively and usually dominate the platform. Their numbers are relatively small; personally, I have seen a few thousand, including the bots, at most.

Climate deniers gravitate to Twitter as it is a way of finding others of the same ilk, and it is a global soapbox for their propaganda, conspiracy theories, and other lies. So, the platform can serve as a teaching tool as one can observe the dirty tricks of these keyboard outlaws on a live basis. More importantly, since Twitter easily exaggerates their influence, they must be challenged here.

Just after joining Twitter ten years ago, I was tweeting on “climate skeptics.” Four years later, my tweets were much more frequent but I was now using the better term “climate denier”. There are many shades of climate denialism that range from complete denial of climate change to those who allegedly accept climate change but believe that immediate action is not necessary; all shades deny major aspects of accepted science and challenge any action to restrict the burning of fossil fuels.

By this time, I was challenging climate deniers on a regular basis on Twitter. I was using the common defensive strategy of sharing scientific studies that unequivocally proved that the climate deniers were wrong. Though “winning” every battle in the Twitter trenches, there was no overall victory: undeterred, the climate deniers just kept on aggressively tweeting one lie after another.

I soon tired of playing their game. After much trial and error, I switched to an offensive strategy where I made the climate deniers defend their evidence, their sources, and their own credentials. After more than 150K tweets, I found this to be an effective strategy. A nagging problem arising in Twitter engagements with high-



Gerald Kutney

Author, Media Commentator/Public
Speaker on the Politics of the Climate
Crisis & Climate Activist.

**WHAT DO WE
MEAN BY
CLIMATE
DENIER?**



"A person who does not accept that climate change is happening, or does not accept that it is caused by human activity such as burning Fossil fuels."

profile climate deniers proved to be their swarm of followers who would enter the fray, making engagements more intense and gruelling. Many believe that you can just walk away (stop replying) if this happens. All I can say is once you are caught in a heated tweet storm, it is not so easy to quit, and such engagements become exhausting because it is you alone against one denier, then another, then another.

I could tell that there were others on Twitter who would help, if only I had a way of contacting them in the middle

of such an engagement. I thought that I would try something new for me: introduce a hashtag – #ClimateBrawl – as a Twitter bat signal to let the twitterverse know that an intense engagement with a climate denier was underway and support was needed. Here is the tweet that started it off:

And the hashtag worked! No longer was there one isolated defender of science in a Twitter brawl. #ClimateBrawl has since morphed into the “friends of #ClimateBrawl,” a community of like-minded tweeters who support each other. The motto of the friends of #ClimateBrawl is to “be active, civil, and factual.” Often, when climate deniers are met now with the hashtag, they tend to block, instead of staying to fight.



The friends of #ClimateBrawl are found around the world. How many are there? Many of my 60K followers are members, but I also keep a Twitter list that recognizes the most active ones:

The twitterverse, at least my small section of it, has become better since the arrival of #ClimateBrawl. There are still bullies and other trolls, but the faux-science tweets, once so popular, are now mostly gone.

What remains are rants and raves, insults, and babbling, which just demonstrate that climate denial is a lost cause (one of my favorite slogans).

Is the strategy of #ClimateBrawl to challenge the propaganda of climate deniers the proper one to take? “Don’t feed the trolls” is a traditional internet adage; in other words, don’t engage them. Also, with the hard-core climate deniers, there is no hope of influencing them anyways. But there is a greater problem: propaganda repeated, again and again, becomes the “truth” if not challenged, and silence is an enabler of propaganda. Such propaganda has depressed the political will to act on the climate crisis. The friends of #ClimateBrawl are attempting to discredit the propaganda and influence the followers of climate deniers and others on Twitter.

Why not just block the climate deniers? I don’t block, for their tweets are still there; you have only made yourself blind to their

tweets, preventing you from challenging their propaganda. At the same time, I do wish to limit their exposure on Twitter. To balance the issue of feeding the trolls, I generally save my engagements for high-profile climate deniers, and I keep my engagements short; often ending with: “Your tweets betray your character and credentials. No need to engage further. Have a nice day.” For other climate deniers who have tweeted obvious nonsense, I screenshot their tweet and add it to a tweet of my own to avoid promoting them and simply let their own words discredit them.

There are many ways to help stop the climate crisis, and the friends of #ClimateBrawl, by challenging the propaganda of climate denial, raise public and political awareness which will hopefully trigger action. If you wish to join, please follow me (@GeraldKutney) and other friends of #ClimateBrawl and, especially, use and follow the hashtag.

