

Climate change deniers, why and how this community was formed?

The concerns about possible climate impacts date back to the 1950s and early 1960s. Scientists found that introducing carbon dioxide (CO₂) - as a product of burning fossil fuel – to the atmosphere creates a greenhouse gas effect. The scientific discussions about it can be traced back to the 50s [1]. Scientific publications confirm a consensus about human-induced climate change among the academic community [2]. More than 90% of climate scientists agreed on human-induced climate change. Not only scientists but experts in some oil companies also raised concerns about the adverse effect of CO₂ on the climate [3]. The conventional policy back then was to continue the oil business regardless of climatic concerns. For example, internal documents indicate that the policy of an oil company was to confuse and to misinform people in order to continue business as usual [3]. Oil companies believed that this technique would cancel or at least delay the support of people for any climate action.

To achieve this goal several methods were implemented. Namely, a campaign was funded to counter scientific evidence. Oil companies tried to cast doubt on the evidence and make people think that climate change is not 100% certain, so it is totally unreliable. This is not the standard approach in science and is an unreasonable expectation.

In parallel, oil companies started introducing programs that would demonstrate their commitment to the environment. Finally, the method of referring to single events was another debate for deniers. While a huge snowfall voids the validity of global warming, a serious drought can't be attributed to climate change because it might be an outlier. This reasoning is flawed as it follows a double standard.

How successful has been this massive investment?

The momentum created by oil companies seems to have some inertia in the world. A social movement to control the climate crisis has started recently. Canada witnessed several student strikes in past months. To gauge public awareness and concern about the effects of climate change, more than a decade ago, Yale University created a poll [4]. According to the outcome, America can be categorized into six groups from *Alarmed* to *Dismissive*. This is an ongoing research project which gets updated regularly. In a recent update, the five-year trend indicated that the *Alarmed* category has a 15% rise (since 2013) and is 29% now [5]. In other words, approximately, from

every three Americans, one is really concerned about climate change. This can be interpreted as the role of proper communication in raising public awareness in recent years. By recognizing proper communication as the key, reputable universities (e.g. Yale University, Monash University [6]) have launched academic programs to study the best method to communicate climate change with people. For instance, Yale University conducted an experiment to find out how the same climate change message can differently influence people across the USA. This helps in finding the proper location-specific communication approach. As another example, one project of Monash University was to provide climate change information to people using available resources: television weather forecast with a discussion on local climate change [7].

Knowing the audience is the first step in developing the most suitable and efficient climate change communication approach. This creates a necessary trust that ensures a smooth buy-in from the public.

Reference

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- [7] <https://www.monash.edu/mcccrh/projects/tv-weather-presenters-as-climate-communicator>