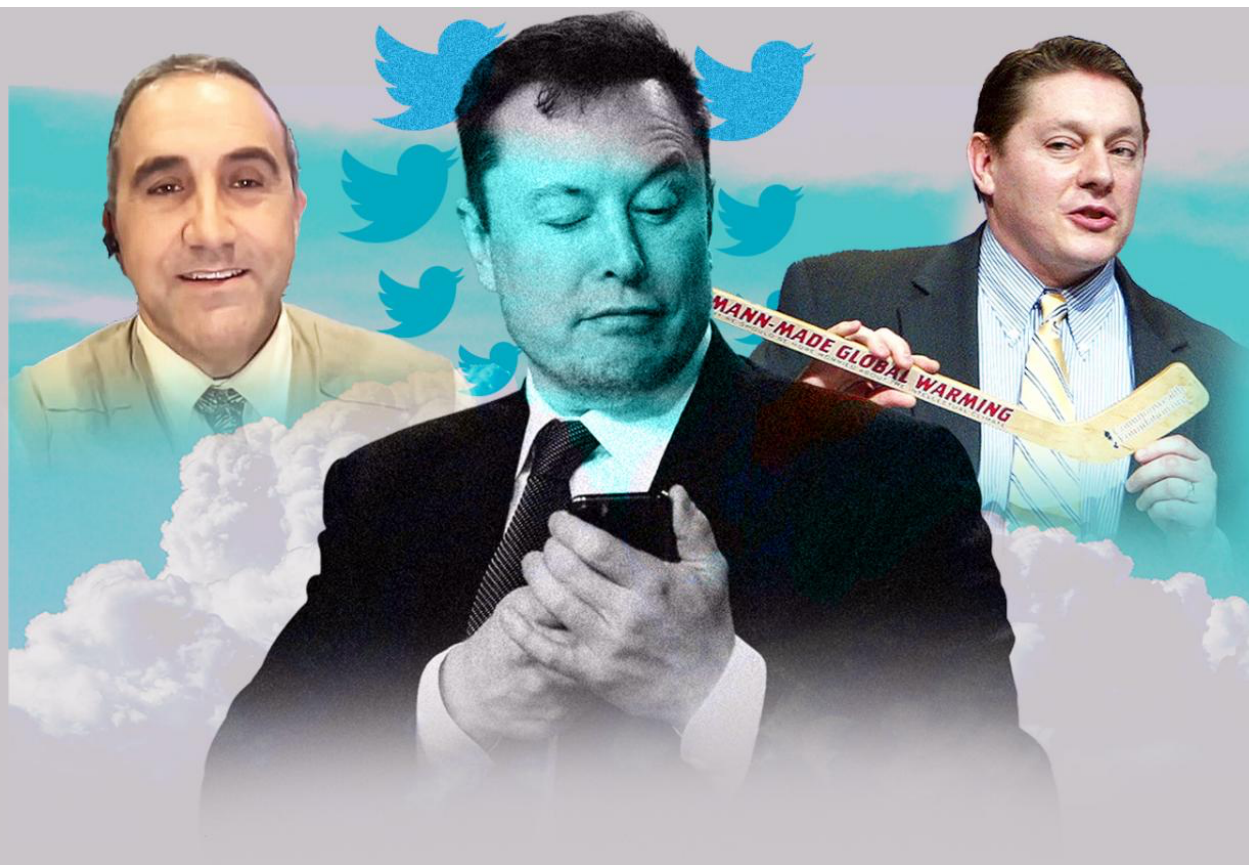


TECHNOLOGY

# Climate-sceptic accounts surge after Elon Musk's Twitter takeover



[Adam Vaughan](#), Environment Editor Monday April 17 2023, 2.10pm BST, The Times

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**T**he follower counts of climate change deniers on Twitter have boomed since Elon Musk bought the social media platform.

UN officials warned of an “alarming flood” of misinformation on Twitter after the use of hashtags including #climatescam soared during the Cop27 climate conference last year, shortly after Musk’s takeover. Anecdotally, climate scientists have reported a significant increase in climate denial tweets.

An analysis revealed that 50 prominent accounts had benefited hugely from the new ownership, gaining 718 followers a week on average since Musk’s takeover. Before the entrepreneur [bought Twitter for \\$44 billion in October](#), the average was 335 a week.

Among the accounts are Peter Imanuelsen, a Swedish commentator with more than half a million followers who has posted “retweet if you agree there is NO climate emergency”, and the Canadian consultant Patrick Moore, who tweeted last month: “Every time you see the words ‘climate change’ replace them with ‘gobbledegook’.”

The Centre for Countering Digital Hate (CCDH) said the rapid growth of the 50 accounts was unlikely to be down to a “universal uplift” of follower counts after Musk’s takeover. The group said a probable reason for the surge was the platform’s new paid-for Twitter Blue subscription. The service adds a blue tick identical to so-called “legacy verified accounts”, which were designed to make clear to users that the accounts of public figures are controlled by them.

## ADVERTISEMENT

The CCDH found that 23 of the 50 accounts were paying for Twitter Blue, including well-known climate deniers, Steve Milloy and Marc Morano.

“Giving users blue verified badges for \$8 a month, Musk is giving climate deniers a veneer of credibility they just couldn’t get before,” Callum Hood, head of research at the CCDH, said. “It helps them look legitimate, like a comparable source of authority to all the scientists and experts.”



Climate activists wearing masks of prominent businessmen including Elon Musk, Warren Buffett and Bill Gates at a protest in Berlin on Thursday  
JOHN MACDOUGALL/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Another possible explanation is cuts to moderation teams at Twitter. “We know the teams that worked on setting Twitter’s policies and enforcing those policies, those teams have been decimated,” Hood said. Musk [told the BBC last week](#) that staff numbers had been cut from 8,000 to about 1,500, but rejected the idea that hateful content had risen on the platform.

When people follow an account on the platform’s mobile app, Twitter prompts them to follow a group of ten accounts. Further research by the CCDH found that four in five of those recommendation follows on the 50 climate denial accounts were for more climate sceptic users, suggesting algorithms were helping the growth for deniers. In total, the team looked at 500 recommended accounts.

- [Elon Musk: Owning Twitter has been painful](#)

“We say, ‘Stop giving them a boost in your algorithm by recommending these accounts to anyone that looks at a climate denier’,” Hood said. He said the other big change Musk could make is to rethink Twitter Blue and how users are verified.

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Hood and colleagues used Social Blade, the analytics tool, to monitor follower growth from late July last year to late March this year. The team only included accounts that had at least 1,000 followers and had tweeted climate misinformation, including content undermining the link on humanity's role in driving climate change and the

need for urgent action highlighted by scientists.

Last month the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change reiterated that humanity was "unequivocally" behind [the 1.1C rise in global average temperatures](#) since the industrial revolution.

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"We're having really important conversations about climate change and how it needs to be addressed," Hood said. "The more millions of followers that climate deniers can reach with content that is simply false, [the more] they are skewing the public conversation in a significant way. It [more digital misinformation] is going to be hugely damaging as we try to confront the reality of climate change."

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Twitter was contacted for comment. It responded with an

automated reply containing only a “poo emoji”.

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