

Analyze a Science Communication Initiative

My initiative is Greta Thunberg's Climate Activism. Organized by Greta Thunberg beginning in 2018 when she was only 15. It started with a solo school strike outside the Swedish parliament with a sign that read "Skolstrejk för Klimatet" or "School Strike for Climate. This strike sparked the global Fridays for Future movement, inspiring millions of young people to protest for stronger climate action. Her target audience is world leaders and politicians as well as other young people passionate about climate change who want to make a difference.

Thunberg's campaign communicates the science through protest signs and banners, flyers, as well as speeches, lectures, and public addresses. Thunberg also communicates the science through her books. Specifically her third book published in 2023, *The Climate Book*, which included essays from dozens of experts about the climate crisis. Thunberg also emphasizes the importance of listening to scientists and acting on scientific evidence, particularly the reports from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). To connect to shared values, Thunberg and her campaign reframe the crisis around moral principles like intergenerational justice, authenticity, and accountability. Her messaging strategy, like emotional appeals and calls for collective action, resonates with diverse audiences while emphasizing the urgency of the issue. For example, in 2019, at the UN Climate Action Summit in New York City, she chastised the assembled officials for pinning their hopes on youth like her rather than taking meaningful action themselves. At the same summit, Thunberg and fifteen other youth filed a legal complaint against Argentina, Brazil, France, Germany, and Turkey, all signatories of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, for violating their rights by failing to reduce carbon emissions and encouraging fossil fuels. Thunberg has also used her platform to amplify the voices of activists from the Global South and Indigenous communities, highlighting how climate change disproportionately affects marginalized people. This adds an intersectional layer to her activism that resonates with a wider audience. In terms of increasing trust, she has earned approval from leaders such as former US president Barack Obama and Pope Francis. Approval from the Pope helps her increase trust within the Catholic community. She also uses motivational framing

and pronouns like "we" and "us" to emphasize collective action and the power of the movement. Her campaigns, like the school strikes, are built around the message that anyone, regardless of age, can make a difference. This ties into Thunberg's campaign using participatory approaches to science communication. Using pronouns like "we" and "us" involves the community in the campaign more, encouraging them to actively participate in the campaign through protests and other actions. As Druckman et al. stated, participatory approaches "focus on dialog or participation. Instead of the dissemination of knowledge via unilateral translation and transmission, the dialog model aims to promote two-way conversations between scientists and the public" (2025). This approach helps the community to better understand the science as they are more directly involved.

Thunberg's climate activism campaign navigates politicalization by directly confronting the global political and economic systems she sees as failing to address the climate crisis. She also maintains focus on science-based demands, challenging the political establishment's inaction, and evolving her critique of the economic and social systems that contribute to the climate crisis. While Greta Thunberg's activism has succeeded in making climate change a mainstream political issue, she has also become a polarizing figure, facing both fierce opposition and shifting support from different parts of the political spectrum. Thunberg repeatedly insists that her activism is not a matter of politics but of following scientific facts, a strategy that is both a strength and a weakness in a polarized climate. A key aspect of her approach is urging world leaders to listen to climate science from bodies like the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). This frames her demands as objective and non-negotiable rather than ideological. Thunberg also has resisted being used as a political prop. Despite being embraced by some political figures early on. She dismisses polite praise from leaders who do not follow up with concrete action, arguing that their inaction proves the current political system is broken. Her recent focus includes connecting the climate crisis to the global capitalist system. She now argues that the fight for climate justice is tied to workers' rights and global inequality, leading to criticism from some former supporters. Thunberg is known for her direct and impassioned speeches, in which she publicly

chastises world leaders for their inaction. This direct language and open criticism resonates with young people who are also distrustful of political institutions and elites.

While Thunberg's campaign has shown some great success, there are still some areas for improvement. Thunberg's campaign lacks a clear, long-term political strategy and realistic proposals to address the structural issues of the climate crisis. An improvement would be including more clear solutions and actual political strategies for the politicians she is trying to encourage to take action. Another improvement to be had could be developing strategies to sustain long-term public attention beyond initial protests. The initial protests are great but without more long-term strategies they fizzle out without much real change occurring. There is also more trust to be had and her campaign could improve in broadening her base and gaining trust from more audiences like skeptics. Her current strategies may build trust within her base, but they have not been effective at preempting skepticism or persuading hardened opponents. This can lead to critics responding to her tactics with intensified attacks on her character and motives. Thunberg's current strategy also seems to draw more attention and support from the younger generation, when gaining attention and interest from the older generations may be more beneficial for the goal of change in policies. I think the reason for young people seeming to support and join her campaign more is due to attention. Using social media and the fear of a destroyed environment and planet in the future as Thunberg's campaign does, draws in more young people. This is because they are "conveying materials in ways that speak directly to audience members' affective triggers" (Lupia 2013) with the younger generation being more concerned about the future.