

# Chatbot auto-tweets replies to climate change arguments

November 4 2010, by Lin Edwards

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(PhysOrg.com) -- A software developer has created a "chatbot" program for Twitter to automatically detect set phrases associated with arguments put forward by those skeptical of anthropogenic global warming, and to send automated replies of set phrases debunking their arguments.

Nigel Leck's creation is [@AI AGW](#) (also known as [Turing Test](#)), and the script searches the [Twitter](#) site for hundreds of phrases he believes tend to be used by those who think global warming is not occurring, or who think it is occurring but is not anthropogenic or entirely anthropogenic. When the script finds one of the phrases it then "[tweets](#)" a response from an extensive database of countering phrases.

The return tweets are selected to match the phrases found so, for example, tweets about global warming occurring on Mars or Neptune

will produce a response suggesting this does not prove the sun is warming and producing Earth's global warming. Tweets often contain a link to a scientific source or a video refuting the argument.

Leck said he originally wrote many of the rebuttals himself, but he has now extracted many from a university source, but one which he will not identify. Some of the responses relate to religion, which is where Leck says debates with the chatbot often end up.

The tweets are not identified as autoresponses, although the name provides clues, and Leck said many people receiving them continue their "conversations" for hours or days, which is possible because the program selects from a range of responses and does not reply the same way each time.

Leck said if the program "argues them into a corner," there tends to be two "crowds": one who resort to the "God created it that way" final response, and a second group Leck calls "skeptics so unyielding they won't be swayed by any amount of argumentation."

One problem with the chatbot is its inability to spot sarcasm, which is often rife during extreme weather events such as heat waves, when many tweets suggest it's so hot outside it's "a good thing global warming is a myth," or cold snaps, when tweets sarcastically suggest [global warming](#) is a hoax. Leck said the program includes an algorithm that enables it to learn to recognize such false positives, but that he promptly apologizes when the chatbot is found to have irritated Twitter users who are not arguing about climate change, and whitelists their accounts.

Leck said he intends to expand the program at some time by enabling it to cull new phrases from tweets from others (presumably also non-scientists like Leck) debating with those skeptical of climate change arguments. He said this would allow it to argue "into the ground" the

increasing number of what he called “anti-science tweeters who are unwilling or unable to look up the proper scientific literature themselves.”

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