"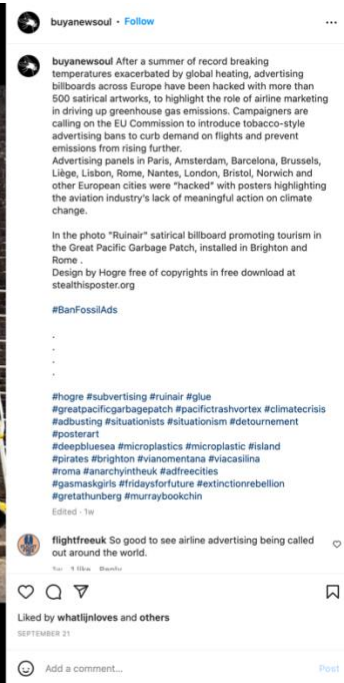Low fares to plastic island": How environmental activists and artists boycott the aviation industry over lack of action on climate change


(Credit: Instagram, @buyanewsoul)

Brandalism, a collective of activists and artists, hijacked over 500 billboards across Europe last week, publishing sarcastic subvertising in a protest targeting airline advertising over its climate impact.

This guerilla advertising campaign is supporting a growing movement, the European Citizens' initiative called "BanFossilAds". The initiative is calling on the EU Commission to introduce tobacco-style advertising bans on the aviation industry to curb the demand on flights and prevent emissions from rising further. In addition to enhance environmental protection, the initiative argues that the law would also be aimed at increasing consumer protection and public health.
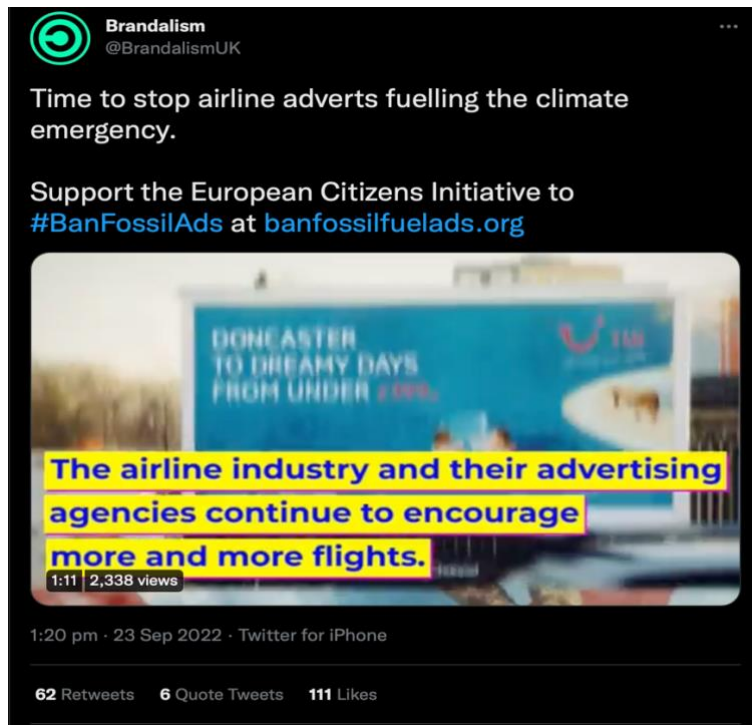
"We're turning Business Class green with the world's first on-board golf course", reads one billboard by artist Darren Cullen, who, together with artist Michelle Tylicki created this project.

"I think the idea came from just thinking about quite how much extra space there is in First/Business, sometimes with a bar, flat beds etc. And combining that with another great ecologically harmful waste of space which is enjoyed primarily by the rich: golf", said Darren about his billboard.
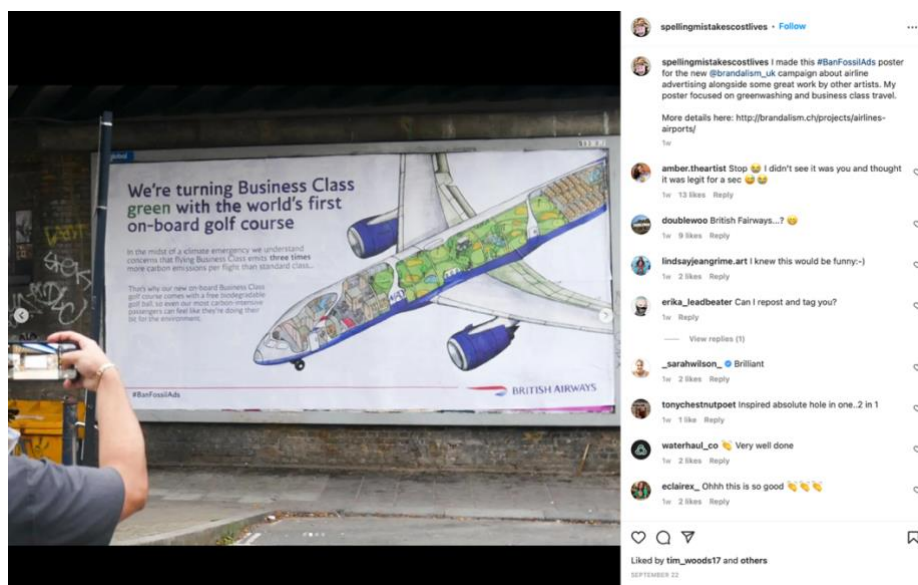
Activism illustrated through art and advertisement can be a powerful tool to tackle issues such as climate change. However, when boosting high-carbon goods like cheap flights, advertising can become complicit in increasing carbon emissions and is, therefore, still often overlooked in fueling the climate crisis, stated Andrew Simms, co-director of the New Weather Institute.

This mass action by Brandalism is also a response to a summer of wildfires and record-breaking heat across Europe. The hijacked billboards were published in 15 cities across Europe such as London, Manchester, Bristol, as well as Brussels, Paris, Lisbon, and Amsterdam. Amongst British Airways, other well-known airlines including KLM, Air France, Lufthansa, and EasyJet were targeted in the artworks.