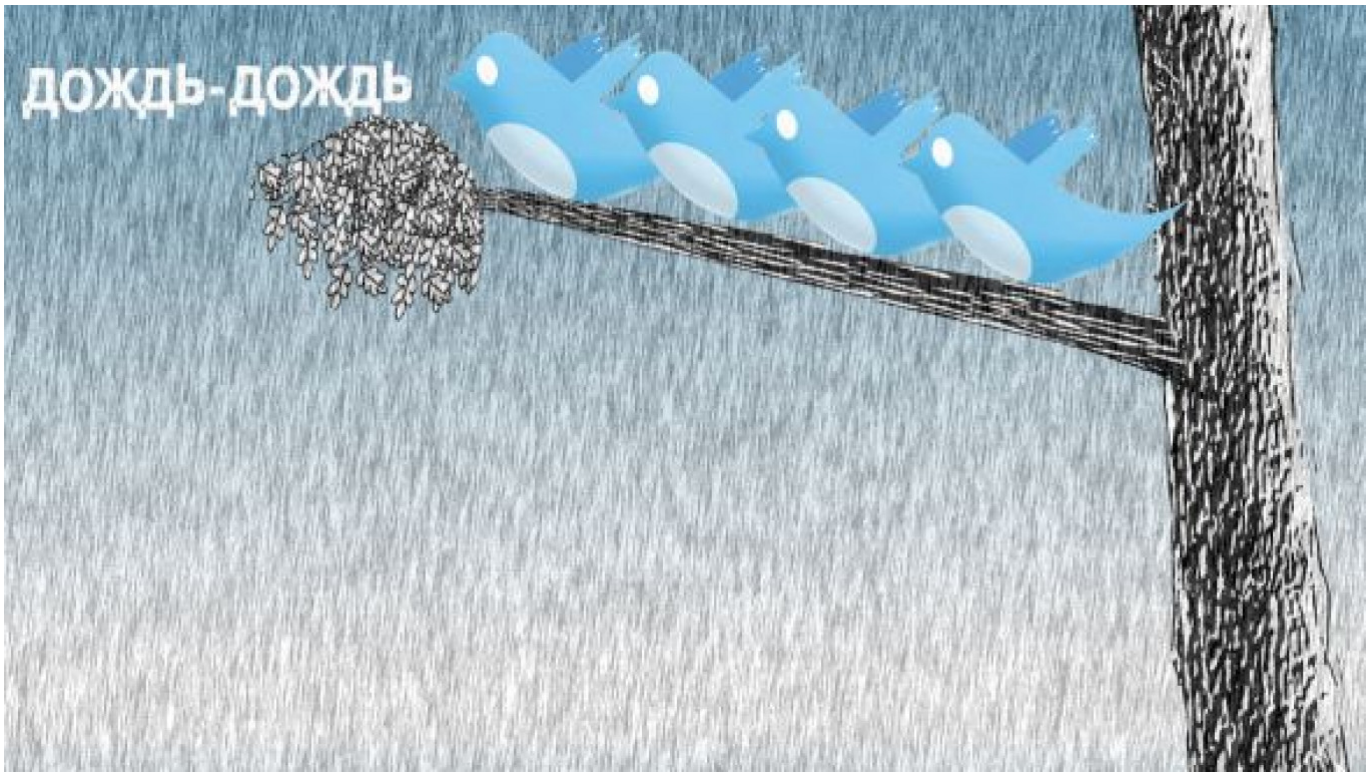
The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

In the Spotlight: Twitter

By Anna Malpas

July 22, 2010



This week, President Dmitry Medvedev has been tweeting about a visit to Finland, the blast in a hydroelectric power station in Kabardino-Balkaria, oh and a rather impressive rain storm in Moscow. And he's not the only one.

Twitter users were baffled on Tuesday when Russians got so excited about the first rain for a couple of weeks that the Russian word dozhd was in the top 10 of the most popular topics, the first time that a Cyrillic word has ever made the listing.

Bang on trend, Medvedev wrote: "I heard there was rain in Moscow?"

Not realizing that Russians can be just as boring about the weather as any other nation, some jumped to the conclusion that there was some kind of nuclear war brewing. Dozhd is "the name of a new Russian nuclear bomb," a user called Glacialmax wrote.

The word even made Rossia-24 television news, which showed a joke photograph of a missile with the word "dozhd" written on it.

Since Medvedev joined Twitter on his visit to Silicon Valley in late June, there has been a stampede of Russian bureaucrats eager to show that they share Dear Leader's taste for the Internet.

Among them are brilliantined Kremlin children's ombudsman Pavel Astakhov and several regional governors. Even the Finance Ministry has launched a Twitter account with snappy posts on foreign debt.

Moscow Mayor Yury Luzhkov dug his heels in, however, using a lovely metaphor: "I don't fear openness. I'm already in a Speedo."

Medvedev's Twitter so far has been unchallenging soundbites with the odd flash of personality. When he visited a food factory he confessed to a sweet tooth "even though it's unhealthy," which could have been a cri de coeur from a man who has slimmed down drastically in recent years.

When he met U.S. President Barack Obama for a much-photographed visit to a burger restaurant, he wrote wistfully: "I haven't had a burger in a long time."

A microblog cleverly titled KermlinRussia follows Medvedev's every statement with a satirical paraphrase. After Medvedev wrote about the birthday of an actor famous for playing Sherlock Holmes, it wrote: "You don't need to be Sherlock Holmes to guess who will be president in 2012."

Paraphrasing a message by Medvedev about the chaos in Kyrgyzstan, it wrote: "For us in Moscow, everything that happens in Russia is not something far away; it is a country close to us."

It's a good idea, though you wonder whether they realized how prolific Medvedev was going to be.

The best Twitter account from a Russian official is one written by Dmitry Rogozin, Russia's representative to NATO. He once did a television ad featuring immigrants from the Caucasus with the slogan: "We'll clear our town of rubbish." But I have to admit he does have a sense of fun.

He writes of being mistaken for falsetto-voiced pop singer Konstantin Meladze and of a waiter at NATO who gives him special treatment. "I've got a fan at NATO. A waiter. When talks are on, he brings everyone else brown filter coffee, but he makes me a pot of Turkish coffee," he gloated recently.

Not surprisingly, Russia's showbiz stars have also gone in for Twitter in a big way. It can be an eye-opener. Yevgeny Plushenko leaves everyone else in the dust when he's carving through the ice, but his Twitter account reveals a man apparently more interested in collecting designer labels.

While skating in Tokyo recently, he name-dropped his "favorite shop" Gucci, as well as Chanel and Louis Vuitton. "It's a kind of illness. If I go in, I come out with parcels," he sighs.

Original url: https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2010/07/22/in-the-spotlight-twitter-a61