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Twitter Becomes Key for Moscow Protests

By Rina Soloveitchik

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Recommended Twitter Accounts

Opposition (All in Russian)

@WakeUpR Official rally tweet
@navalny Alexei Navalny
@KSHN Oleg Kashin
@4irikova
Yevgenia Chirikova, Khimki Forest campaigner
@KermlinRussia Satirical version of Kremlin Twitter
@Dobrokhotov Roman Dobrokhotov
@borisakunin Author, activist
@udaltsova_ Anastasia Udaltsova
@iponomarev Ilya Ponomaryov
@gudkov_g Gennady Gudkov

@abstract2001 Marina Litvinovich, political activist
@v_milov Vladimir Milov, opposition politician
@gruppa_voina Art group Voina
@varlamov Photographer
@petunder Blue Buckets activist
@Adagamov Roustem Adagamov, photographer

Not the Opposition

@KirillSchitov Moscow city deputy
@tvrain_live Live translation of the protest, from TV channel Dozhd
@asvoloshin Alexander Voloshin, former Kremlin insider
@MedvedevRussia President Dmitry Medvedev
@Rogozin
Dmitry Rogozin, Russia's ambassador to NATO
@KremlinRussia President of Russia
@VRSoloviev Radio / TV presenter
@M_Simonyan Head of Russia Today
@rykov Former United Russia deputy
@KrisPotupchik Nashi press secretary
@advorkovich Arkady Dvorkovich
@MD_Prokhorov Mikhail Prokhorov
@Molgvard_msk Young Guard movement
@shlegel Robert Shlegel, State Duma deputy

Journalists (In English)

@miriamelder Guardian correspondent
@ioffeinmoscow Julia Ioffe, The New Yorker, Foreign Policy
@NatVasilyevaAP Nataliya Vasilieva, The Associated Press
@charles_clover Financial Times
@WalkerSkyNews
Amanda Walker, Sky correspondent in Moscow
@michaelidov
New York magazine journalist flying in for protest
@shustry Simon Shuster, Time magazine
@A_Osborn Andrew Osborn, Daily Telegraph
@courtneymoscow Courtney Weaver, Financial Times
@parfitt_tom Guardian correspondent
@BBCDanielS Daniel Sandford, BBC
@agent_Alka Albina Kovalyova, freelance TV producer for Reuters and BBC
@mschwirtz Michael Schwirtz, New York Times

Moscow Times journalists on Twitter

@MoscowTimes The official account of The Moscow Times
@RolandOliphant
@oflynnkevin

@nielsenreporter Rachel Nielsen
@niktwick Nikolaus von Twickel
@jearlemsk Jonathan Earle

Various

@OMON_Moscow Anonymous a riot policeman
@xenia_sobchak
Ksenia Sobchak, It-girl turned political commentator
@sidorenko_intl Alexey Sidorenko, Global Voices contributor
@seansrussiablog Sean Guillory, postdoc student and blogger
@agoodtreaty Kevin Rothrock, commentator

Journalists (Other Languages)

@obk Olaf Koens, Dutch journalist
@Fredotchka Frédérick Lavoie, journalist for Radio-Canada
@veronidor Veronika Dorman, correspondent for Libération en Russie
@JNiemelainen Jussi Niemelainen, Finnish journalist
@KBolchaK Ksenia Bolchakova, French journalist
@crusoes Simon Kruse, Danish journalist
@abojke Arleta Bojke, Polish journalist
@arnout_brouwers Arnout Brouwers, Dutch correspondent
@Kysia Kysia Hekster, NOS correspondent
@Lenkakab Lenka Kabrhelova, correspondent for Czech Radio
@Krielaars Michel Krielaars, Dutch correspondent

You may have heard that tens of thousands of people would protest against election falsifications on Saturday. You probably didn't hear it from state-controlled Russian television, for obvious reasons. Maybe you read it in newspapers or you have been following it in real time on Twitter.

Twitter has become the quickest and sometimes the best medium for finding out about events in Moscow as they happen. During Prime Minister Vladimir Putin's marathon question-and-answer session on Dec. 15, four of the top 10 trending handles on Twitter were at one point connected to it, most notably #ботокс, or botox, the mocking nickname the opposition have given him in honor of the allegations that he has had plastic surgery.

This did cause some confusion outside the Cyrillic world. One person asked on Twitter whether #ботокс was connected to teenage pop singer Justin Bieber.

The opposition, many from a new generation for whom social media is as natural as breathing, is particularly well-represented in Twitter, but those in power have also taken to the medium — and there are plenty in between.

Where else can you hear the thoughts of a riot policeman in real time? After the Dec. 10 protest, @Omon_Moscow wrote of how the police did not "hate the people" and asked people

"don't go crazy!"

Or that Oleg Kashin, a journalist and prominent opposition member, wrote of how his parents called him up the day after his appearance at the Dec. 10 protest, where he read a letter out from Alexei Navalny, the opposition blogger who was then still in jail, and was told off for not wearing a hat. Kashin, who is known for his often profane tweets, did not, of course, use the words "told off."

The Twitter boom has seen huge numbers of users for a medium already increasing at a huge pace — more than 1 million users were registered by August this year. Navalny has seen his followers leap from 60,000 on Dec. 2 to more than 160,000 today despite being in jail for much of that time.

Glamour girl and television host Ksenia Sobchak (@xenia_sobchak) has turned into a political commentator. You could watch her interviewing a contestant of "Dom-2" one night this week and the next day read an interview with her that she had tweeted about a "new perestroika." Her followers have noticeably increased in the last month, from 150,000 on Nov. 23 to nearly 250,000 on Wednesday.

The official tweet of the protests (@WakeUpR) started posting information about the rally on Dec. 14 with zero followers and had 12,000 followers on Thursday.

There are fake accounts out there — former Guardian journalist Luke Harding, who was expelled from the country earlier this year, had at least 20 at one point — there are Kremlin bots that fill opposition hashtags with pro-Kremlin posts, and unreliable tweeters who report false news without checking, but if you want to know the ebb and flow of what is happening right now, Twitter is pretty essential.

This is a list of Twitter accounts that is neither complete nor perfect, but following them on Saturday can give you a glimpse at both sides of the battle, as well as let you see the insights of the numerous journalists currently watching what will happen at the rally.

Twitter can be offensive, annoying and shallow. It can also be entertaining, illuminating and addictive. Now, it is pretty impossible to ignore in Russia today.

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