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Medvedev Makes It Big on Twitter

By Rachel Nielsen

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Internet-savvy Medvedev tweeting as Putin is using old-fashioned paper. **Denis Abramov**

Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev is one of the most engaged users of Twitter among heads of government, while President Vladimir Putin ranks among the least connected on the social networking tool, a report released Thursday suggests.

The findings about the Russian leaders appeared in a report from Burson-Marsteller in which the global public relations firm looked at 264 accounts belonging to presidents, prime ministers and their offices in 125 countries.

The report said "Medvedev is one of the most connected world leaders," noting that he subscribes to Twitter messages from seven other heads of state or government, who in turn subscribe to, or "follow," him on Twitter. By comparison, U.S. President Barack Obama follows only two other world leaders, Medvedev and Norwegian Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg.

The Most Popular Tweeting Leaders

World leaders' Twitter followers as of Thursday afternoon

U.S. President Barack Obama	17,859,329
Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez	3,236,376
The U.S. White House	2,986,586
Jordanian Queen Rania	2,206,811
Turkish President Abdullah Gül	2,043,697
British Prime Minister David Cameron	2,038,287
Mexican President Felipe Calderon	1,955,593
Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan	1,651,182
Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff	1,561,234
Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev	1,342,803
Argentine President Cristina Fernandez	1,194,375
Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos	1,129,672
The Russian president's executive office	529,108
Russian President Vladimir Putin	51,454

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Burson-Marsteller collected and analyzed the material for its report earlier this month.

Medvedev also is one of the most popular government chiefs on Twitter, a publicly available Web service in which users send comments and Web links in messages called "tweets" consisting of 140 characters or less.

As of Thursday, Medvedev had more than 1.3 million followers, making him one of a dozen governmental leaders or their offices with more than a million followers. Displaying similar popularity on Twitter are the presidents of Argentina and Brazil and the prime minister of Turkey. Obama is No. 1, with more than 17 million followers.

As president, Medvedev in June 2010 set up the Russian government's first Twitter account. He did so while at Twitter's headquarters in San Francisco, a milestone that happened during his Silicon Valley tour and complemented his modernization push.

He opened the account with the handle @KremlinRussia but now uses @MedvedevRussia as his personal account.

In contrast to his political protege, Putin has only about 51,000 followers for his account, @PutinRF, which his staff launched in January as his presidential campaign picked up speed and protests by Web-savvy urbanites rocked the country.

Putin's account is among the 16 percent of head-of-state accounts in the report that don't follow any other Twitter user at all. Medvedev follows roughly 50 people, @KremlinRussia

follows about 30, and Obama subscribes to almost 700,000 people.

While Medvedev regularly sends out links to photographs snapped on his official travels and writes in first person, Putin's tweets are typically written in third person and talk about official news.

The president has indicated that he is uninterested in the Internet, telling reporters he doesn't use e-mail or carry a cell phone.

The numbers closely corresponded to the Internet-savviness of the two men and their political supporters. Putin's base includes Internet users, but it is far less Web-savvy than the prime minister's.

"Putin has a relationship with people who watch television and read the newspaper," said Olga Mefodyeva, head of public relations projects for Moscow's Center for Political Technologies.

It wouldn't make sense for him to expand his Twitter use because his target audience doesn't include young people in big cities, she said.

"Medvedev is closer to the so-called creative class," Mefodyeva said, referring to educated middle and upper classes in large cities such as Moscow and St. Petersburg.

If Putin's political base uses Web communications less than Medvedev's, then "it's not surprising" that Putin is far less active on Twitter, said Matthias Luefkens, head of Burson-Marsteller's digital practice for Europe, the Middle East and Africa.

With Putin's account, "there's no personal engagement, and it shows," Luefkens said in a phone interview.

Given Putin's hot temper and sarcastic ripostes, it is difficult to imagine him personally tapping out a Twitter message. In 2002, he responded to a question about Chechen War atrocities from a French journalist by inviting him to Moscow for a circumcision, and he has used street language in many appearances.

In December, he called protesters at anti-government rallies "Bandar-logs," the monkey people from "The Jungle Book," and said the activists' white ribbons looked like condoms.

Luefkens acknowledged that some world leaders have lashed out or used obscenities in their Twitter messages.

Estonian President Toomas Hendrik Ilves defended his country with "Let's s--t on East Europeans: their English is bad, won't respond" in a tweet in June. Others have tweeted vulgarities and then retracted them.

Though he has a far softer public image than Putin, Medvedev is actually one of the three world leaders who have tweeted obscene language. Medvedev called the message "an improper retweet."

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