

Study finds world leaders take to Twitter, but new 'Twiplomacy' has its limits

JOHN HEILPRIN Associated Press

GENEVA (AP) -- Almost two-thirds of world leaders have joined the Twitterverse where President Barack Obama and his tweet on gay marriage are the most popular to date, says a new study Thursday.

But the rise in so-called "Twiplomacy" resembles something of an echo chamber, according to an analysis of 264 government accounts in 125 countries that the PR firm Burson-Marsteller describes as the first-ever global study of world leaders on Twitter.

Some 264 world leaders now have a Twitter account, and the researchers believe that 30 of them do their own tweeting. Altogether they have sent more than 350,000 tweets to almost 52 million followers, the study shows.

But about a third of them don't follow each other and dozens of them don't even follow any other Twitterers. But that doesn't mean they don't converse. More than nine of every 10 tweets by the Ugandan prime minister and the Rwandan president are replies, the study says.

World leaders tweet in 43 languages, with English favored by 90 of the accounts. Spanish is the next most-used, with 41 accounts, French is third with 25 accounts and Arabic fourth with 17 accounts.

"Sixteen of the G-20 leaders are actively using Twitter for public diplomacy, but it is sad to see that the heads of state and government in China, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia and Italy still have not joined the Twitterverse," said Matthias Luefkens of Burson-Marteller in Geneva. "What is really interesting is how the world is divided into English and Spanish tweets."

The data, gathered in July, looked at more than 30 variables such as tweets, retweets and hashtags. Luefkens said Twitter was not involved in any way in the study.

The most-followed account is (@)BarackObama, which is run by the Obama campaign and has 17.8 million followers. Of those followers 76 are the president's peers and other governments. Obama rarely sends his own tweets, but when he does he signs them, as he did in one to the first lady on Valentine's Day, Luefkens says.

A May 9 tweet sent by the campaign team quoting Obama as saying "same-sex couples should be able to get married" is the most re-tweeted to date - more than 62,000 times.

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Twitter is often used by politicians during election campaigns whose accounts go silent once they are elected, the study says, citing Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff and French President Francois Hollande as examples.

John Heilprin can be reached at <https://twitter.com/JohnHeilprin>

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