

Chavez rockets to No. 1 on Twitter in Venezuela

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Writer



Venezuela's President Hugo Chavez smiles as he speaks to gathered diplomats inside Presidential Palace in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, Wednesday May 5, 2010. (AP Photo/Manuel Diaz)

(AP) -- President Hugo Chavez is tops on Twitter in Venezuela less than 2 weeks after launching his account, surpassing Internet-savvy foes who dominate the social networking site and use it to oppose him.

Chavez's account, "chavezcandanga," had racked up more than 237,000 followers as of Saturday morning - besting the 234,000 who receive

tweets from Globovision, the only TV channel that remains critical of the socialist leader.

In recent televised appearances, Chavez has trumpeted the meteoric rise of his [Twitter](#) popularity while downplaying the critical, often disparaging messages he receives.

"Some criticize me, others insult me. I don't care," he said. "It's a form of contact with the world."

The president joined Twitter on April 27 in an attempt to counter adversaries who have actively used the site to make accusations of human rights violations, organize protests and - above all - ridicule Chavez.

He urged supporters to join as well, calling Twitter "a weapon that also needs to be used by the revolution."

With an average of about 20,000 people per day signing up to follow Chavez's tweets, the president says he has been overwhelmed by nearly 54,000 messages from supporters, critics and people writing to ask for help with a problem or lodge a complaint. On Thursday, he announced that a new team of 200 aides would help him manage the stream.

"I'm creating a team due to the avalanche of requests, and some grievances," he said.

Opposition lawmaker Juan Jose Molina said he was not surprised by Chavez's ability to attract a crowd in [cyberspace](#), but he thinks the president should spend less time tweeting and more time working to reduce soaring inflation and violent crime.

"Nobody can deny that Chavez has leadership. But it's also true that

nobody can deny his inability to govern," Molina said. "He should be more dedicated to solving the country's problems."

"I'm not thinking about following him (on Twitter) because I don't care about what he has to say," Molina added.

Chavez's foray into Twitter has also inspired U.S. State Department spokesman P.J. Crowley to sign up.

"With chavezcandanga entering the field, how could I resist?" Crowley tweeted May 3.

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