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WikiLeaks gave Trump edge in campaign race, Twitter study finds

Criticism of Hillary Clinton over documents posted by WikiLeaks played a key role in her failed US presidential campaign, analysis of social media suggests.

A study of viral tweets during the final two months of the 2016 election race shows Clinton was much more heavily criticised on social media compared with her rival Donald Trump.

Posts relating to WikiLeaks were the most common form of attack on social media for the Democratic candidate, who was also heavily criticised on Twitter over an FBI investigation into her use of a private email server.

A study of the top 50 most retweeted posts each day between 1 September and 8 November found that there were three times as many posts attacking Clinton than posts in her favour. By contrast, viral tweets relating to Trump were split equally in favour and against his campaign.

Posts from Trump's social media campaign and his supporters had a more positive tone than that of his rival, with effective reach for slogans, policy promises and campaigning for swing states. Tweets backing Clinton tended to compare her with her rival, and to attack Trump rather than praise Clinton.

Trump was criticised for his performance in election debates more than his links to scandals such as the Access Hollywood tape. Trump supporters were more likely to share news reports from less credible sources, the study found.

Researchers from the University of Edinburgh used computer analysis to study the top viral tweets. In all they analysed almost 3,500 posts, which together were retweeted more than 25 million times. Tweets were labelled as being favourable to Trump, Clinton, or neither.

The study, carried out in collaboration with the Qatar Computing Research Institute, will be presented at the *Social Informatics 2017* conference in Oxford in September. It used data from TweetElect.com, which collates the most retweeted posts related to the US election.

Dr Walid Magdy of the University of Edinburgh's School of Informatics, who led the research, said: "Our findings reveal a wide disparity between traditional media, which was very critical of Donald Trump, and social media, where Hillary Clinton was much worse off."

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