

# “CONFRONTATION” AND “RIVALRY” IN SELECTED FACEBOOK PROFILES FOR/ABOUT WOMEN. SHORT QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

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## Abstract

*This article discusses the nature of discourse about confrontation and rivalry which takes place between women (and men) as portrayed in materials published in 50 selected Facebook profiles for/about women. The women portrayed in those profiles were competing with other women or men, on a number of levels relating to their professional careers, sports and other elements of their lives. The areas in which confrontations were identified included: promotion; management of staff and subordinates; salary increases and success. Both quantitative and qualitative analysis (BuzzSumo and Atlas.ti as a research tools) of the discourse were applied. The answers to questions regarding the tone of the materials in this sector of selected Facebook profiles were obtained.*

**Key words:** mass media, a woman, confrontation, discourse, qualitative analysis

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## Introduction

Almost all forms of activities of contemporary women are analysed in a variety of scientific and popular scientific publications. Therefore, research (from the perspective of social sciences and humanities) about the activities of contemporary women who are striving to fulfil their own ambitions is being undertaken. A popular theme is the rivalry with competitors who also want to achieve the material and non-material goods that are desired – from business, through politics, to judo and other sports (Cynarski & Szajna, 2014; Wolska et al., 2017). In addition, many other roles are attributed to women: biological, social and cultural (e.g. being a mother, a Catholic, or a sex object), and the fulfilment of these roles is also the subject of interest by the mass media. The issue of “competition” between women and between women and men has become an even more prevalent topic. Mass media contents addressed to women have probably also played a role in this respect, as taking this rivalry as one of the main themes has exposed social roles differing from those prevailing in social media (Slater, 2015).

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Recognition of women's narratives devoted to the types of confrontation in the media will help to find answers to the following research questions:

1. Do selected Facebook profiles addressed to women mention the problem of confrontation resulting from mutual rivalry?
2. What are the confrontations about?
3. Which confrontations ("a woman against a woman" or "a woman against a man") dominate?

The analysed issues of the selected Facebook profiles will concern women who are professionally active in economic and political sectors (as the most exposed ones), excluding the unemployed, who do not represent the media model of a successful woman. This short article is a report on the analysis carried out, it is divided into several sections containing appropriate definitions and an outline of the general characteristics of the media for women which cover the subject. It will consist of a methodological section, the results obtained, discussion, conclusions, summary and literature.

The examined sample included Facebook profiles that appeared in the mentioned search engine as a result of entering the following words: Facebook, profile, women, career. It was assumed that the randomly selected profiles were primarily created for/about women (Oberts et al., 2016).

### **Review of literature on the subject**

Literature which refers to the subject being addressed was divided into three thematic categories:

1. the characteristics of the social media profiles addressed to women,
  2. descriptions of the models of women distinguished as being present in these mass media,
  3. an outline of current knowledge about competition between individuals in society.
- This limited framework, however, allows us to select only a few items from innumerable types of studies.

Media images significantly influence narratives and discourses related to gender in the content targeted at women on social media. Therefore, analysing the role that women play in social media allows us to understand the models of behaviour that inspire women today (Roberti, 2017).

Profiles targeted at women may be dependent on psychological factors, motivating individuals to participate in social media. This type of inquiry is particularly significant in the continuously expanding network created by creators and consumers of such media (Correa et al., 2010).

The subject of the analysis is profiled thematically in terms of consumers interested in stimulating and fulfilling their own professional ambitions. These media create their own discourses (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017), using information and journalistic genres (Jahng & Littau, 2015) that appear with varying frequency (Felt, 2016). Their role in influencing consumers' perception of social reality is also underlined (Carr & Hayes, 2015). This can be interpreted based on the ways it is presented, the genres used, the narrative and the related intertextuality. Media content is therefore a description of some facts, while the descriptions used have to – in accordance with the expectations of their authors – convince the recipients about the advantages of accepting the subjective ideas of those who create and transmit them (Rantakari & Eero, 2017).

Mieke Ceulemans and Guido Fauconnier at the end of the 1970's emphasized the great importance of media discourse in creating widespread perception of women between their audiences. To achieve this, various media forms were used, ranging from low-profile magazines to the so-called television "soap operas", along with advertising

messages which referred to the various sociological models of women (1979). However, Rebecca L. Collins proves that women are underrepresented in various media, and if they are the main figure they are “sexualized”, unprofessional, housewives, wives and/or mothers. The dominant factor is their subordination in private and professional life. However, there are numerous opinions among authors about the stereotyping of such roles (2011).

Gawin J. Kilduff, Hillary Angel Elfenbein and Barry M. Staw try to prove the assumption of possible and legitimate analysis of all forms of competition at the level of individuals, groups and other communities. This rivalry becomes particularly important when the competences of individuals taking part in it play a significant role (2010). However, the factor affecting its course may – as noted by for instance April Bleske-Rechek and Melissa Lighthall – be informal contacts and accepted strategies that start, develop and end or sustain each competition for any desirable good (2010).

### **Outline of the confrontation issue**

Existing rivalry between women allows them to acquire both the resources needed for survival and reproduction as well as a preferred partner. The selected forms of actions are characterized by different levels of aggression, which are limited depending on the constraints formed. They may include: having offspring (determining the selection of less risky options for resolving conflicts), personality traits and the level of attractiveness of the desired goods (Stockley & Campbell, 2013). The diverse levels of competition can take the form of aggression, either 1) direct and unrestricted or 2) limited, and thus serving as an indispensable element of every confrontation, ‘when one actor signals to another actor that his or her behaviour has violated a rule or expectation for appropriate conduct within the relationship or situation. A model of social confrontation, developed over a series of studies, is presented’ (Newell & Stutman, 2016, p. 266). In the first case, the consequence may be a temporary or total elimination of the opponent, while in the second case it may for example be a reduction in the value of the goods owned by one or other of the protagonists in the conflict, or their total loss. Therefore, – motivated by concern for their own possessions – competitive interactions between women cover a wide repertoire of strategies adapted to both the duration of events (short or long-term) and social conditions (favourable or unfavourable to their actions) at the social and/or individual level (Stockley & Campbell, 2013).

One of the areas in which this competition – usually a confrontation – is present, is in women’s professional environment. Women, when finding a job, employment; maintaining their position at work or achieving success – as evidenced by American researchers – need to overcome a number of obstacles.

Professional environments in which women operate can be spaces where specific paradoxes occur. This phenomenon does not exclusively apply to women occupying ‘elite’ professional roles. The first paradox (*The Pay Paradox*) affecting the levels of competition and the confrontational dimension concerns remuneration, which is usually inadequately low in relation to the skills of the women employed in a given position with a significant number of duties. The second paradox (*The Double-Bind Paradox*), is the desire to be liked while exercising power over subordinates, when the appropriate balance between these two elements is not adhered to. The third paradox (*The Promotion Paradox*) concerns self-promotion by women who want to occupy high positions, with (allegedly) less aggression and less determination to achieve such success in comparison with men. *The Networking Paradox* is a lack of ability to use the social network of close relatives and peer groups in order to gain employment or gain promotion. The fifth paradox (*The Start Up Paradox*) is based on the fact that women receive trust from employers in the initial stages of ventures but are replaced by men in the further implementation phases. The sixth paradox (*The Careful-What-You-Wish-For-Paradox*) concerns the

combination of the desire for promotion with that of maternity care, which is in turn associated with stereotypes about the limited occupational opportunities for women given their family plans (potential contradiction of goals) (Flynn et al., 2013).

The paradoxes, the sources of all the rivalry among competing employees, are characterized by the existence of desirable goods without an unambiguous economic dimension. The internal compulsion to be accepted or trusted can also be in a form of goods on which rivals may take confrontational positions.

### **The manifestations of women's confrontations**

The activity of women as employees concerns not only a specific position, but also a discussion about the chances for their professional development. In this aspect, two opposing approaches clash: the positive (women are more difficult to be promoted than men, but this phenomenon is not common) or negative (women must accept male domination in gaining well-paid positions) (Seppälä et al., 2012). Both can be the starting point to create a model corresponding to the definition of women characterized by their careers.

The theoretical issues related to rivalry have been divided into selected categories related to a professional career, in particular, building one's own position through the process of competition, and against the possibility of confrontation. This choice was dictated by a later assumption about the possible occurrence of just such categorization of the subject in media addressed to women.

According to the assumptions of some researchers, the reason for rivalry (and the shaping of confrontational attitudes) in the professional field is the phenomenon of the so-called "glass ceiling", distinguished by Wendy C. Wolf and Neil D. Fligstein. This is the identification of barriers encountered by "successful women" in developing their professional careers. This is favoured by the (allegedly) established universal patriarchal system perpetuated by stereotypes dividing professional reality into "feminine" and "masculine", according to which – generally speaking – women achieve success only in the dimension accepted by men. Therefore, women's careers usually develop only to a level that does not threaten male domination (e.g., in the form of gained promotion). However, some women manage to break the "glass ceiling" and – as a result of competition – occupy positions due to their knowledge and competences (1979).

Another phenomenon of the discouragement of women's vocations is the so-called "velvet ghetto". It involves not allowing women to manage technical, production or marketing issues. If women have the right knowledge, they are directed to lower positions (Fletcher & Meyerson, 2000). This is due to decision makers' mistaken belief in the lack of involvement of women who also have to manage their own family life, as Christine B. Whelan reminds us (2012). The subject of competition and confrontation are therefore positions adopted from these areas. Rivalries and confrontations become visible in the different ways the two sexes communicate, because women create different communication cultures from those of men, seeing the goals that are paramount in the communication itself. An active woman creates messages, and a passive one accepts the content as presented which contributes to the formation of stereotypes (Kiprotich & Chang'orok, 2015).

In the first case, the woman who creates the message has an impact on the perception of specific issues by the recipient. The message strives to influence the group (or groups) of recipients, so that the content presented by them is considered to be particularly important. Thanks to this it can be treated as authoritative. Passive users, on the other hand, may be exposed to manipulation aimed at inducing desires or aspirations in the undertaken competitions (Kiprotich & Chang'orok, 2015). Furthermore, the female style of communication is "affiliated". The main features of this are: dynamism and fluency, valuation and expressiveness of language. The male style is "dominant", that is:

messages in the first person singular, use of conversational rituals, lack of admission to ignorance. Confrontation at a professional level may result from the style of the authority superior to other women and/or men. The power exercised by a career-making woman can be strengthened by financial factors. Both her professional career and the standard of living of many men may depend on her decisions. However, this power has limitations, as it can only put pressure on representatives of the other sex in the professional sphere. The place to exercise such power may be a company run by a woman (or women), where the role of subordinates will be fulfilled by men (Hoobler et al., 2018). In addition, fulfilling professional duties requires women to supervise their subordinates. However, some women would be more likely to see men other than their male superiors as their superiors, as they are more likely to favour male supervision of a company or office (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

### **Content depicting rivalry in Facebook profiles designed “for women”**

In media, there is some information about women working in professions considered typically ‘feminine’. The accompanying descriptions attribute the role of a teacher, a nurse or a secretary to the protagonists of these publications. In addition to their other functions (e.g. political ones), they have diverse economic and material statuses, but for most of them home and family, and above all, children remain the supreme value. Some of them start the next stage of education, which is necessary to obtain or maintain a satisfying job. In some media addressed to women, the issue of women’s activity in public life is rarely considered, while they devote a significant amount of space to social practices (Saleem et al., 2014). It must be mentioned that hierarchization of their professions in terms of social prestige and earnings is an important issue in considering the image of working women (Cheng, 2020).

From a cultural perspective, the aspiration of women to achieve professional success in – as the authors of this approach claim – a traditional model, based on male dominance, has been supplanted, by, for example, the “feminist” model. The rhythm of men’s lives and ways of achieving success has been replaced by a rhythm of life that also takes into account the aspirations of women, the potential consequence of which may be the taking over of “men-only” positions (Johns, 2013). In media, there is information about women working in professions considered typically ‘feminine’ and it was decided that the research value in this case would be represented by media aimed directly at women. The rationale for this choice is the existence of a continuous communication process in which the presence of variously defined media images of women is not only a response to the expectations of people “consuming” the media, but also evidence of changes in the treatment of women in cultural messages.

### **Aim and research methods**

The study of dimensions of confrontation and rivalry involved the description and analysis of attitudes of the authors and/or figures of publications appearing on 50 randomly selected (using the Google.com search engine) Facebook profiles (in Polish and English) between July 2022 and July 2023 (Regardless of who the creators of these profiles were (e.g. influencers, media, organizations, or ordinary people). At the same time, the following questions were asked:

1. Do Facebook profiles addressed to/about women mention the problem of confrontation resulting from mutual rivalry?
2. What thematic categories are associated with the subject of confrontation and rivalry?
3. Which categories of confrontations and rivalry (“a woman against women” or “a woman against men”) are more often presented?



The confrontation content of these profiles revolves around the expression of values and beliefs regarding the role of women in professional careers, sports, and other aspects of their lives. The presence of this theme was related to content related to antagonism, dissonance, conflict, and polemics.

Rivalry content will refer to women competing against women and/or men to achieve a specific goal. Contents related to competition will apply struggles, races, competition, games, and conflict

Written, audio and audio-visual publications were examined using the qualitative and quantitative method of content analysis of Małgorzata Lisowska-Magdziarz (2004). It was assumed that in the materials posted on the selected Facebook profiles, there were:

1. "direct quotes vs. indirect references",
2. "references to persons",
3. "use of modal expressions",
4. "expression of personal beliefs",
5. "overt expression of judgments" and
6. "first person singular forms" (Gruber, 2011).

In addition the Atlas.ti computer program was used to code, segregate codes, create categories and search for potential relationships and dependencies between codes and categories (Niedbalski, 2014). BuzzSumo was used to analyse of trends of content about women and "confrontation" and "rivalry" terms on Facebook.

## Results

Based on the conducted analysis, the results obtained are presented below.



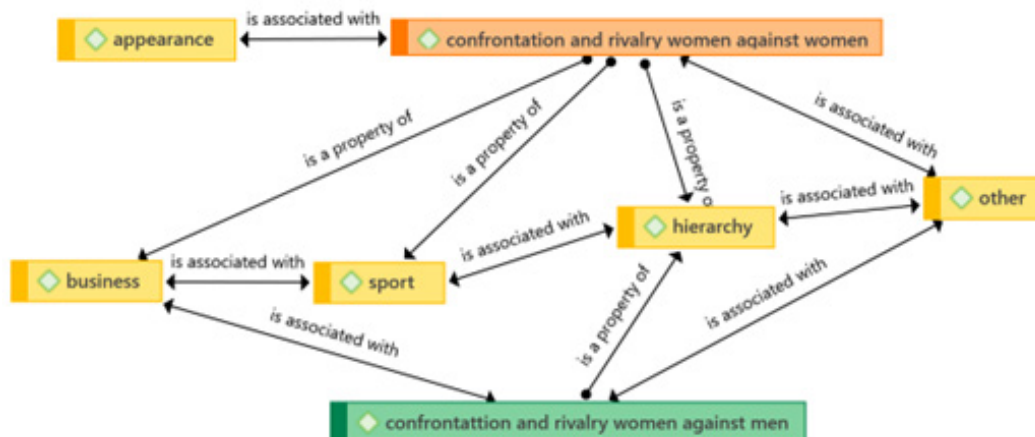
**Graph 1. "Confrontation" and "Rivalry" as Facebook profiles theme – a quantitative analysis**  
Source: the authors' research.

The answers to the first research question allowed to identify the occurrence of this topic on Facebook profiles (62% of confrontation; 38% of rivalry materials). Significant differences appeared only in the frequency of its appearance in individual profiles. The number of publications on these topics ranged from 18 in July 2022 to about 60 in October 2022. Facebook Total Engagement (user reactions to presented content. The indicators include clicks, comments, shares, and likes) as, on the other hand, ranged from about 500 in July 2022 to about 7,000 in June 2023.

The calculations which were made with regard to the second question showed an even distribution of emphasis in the journals studied. The most likely explanation for this

is the combining of the subjects of rivalry and confrontation in the context of both sexes all Facebook profiles.

Separation categories contributed to the answer to the second question. In this case, the results (sport, appearance, business, hierarchy and other) obtained are presented on a graph no. 2.



**Graph 2. "Confrontation" and "Rivalry" as Facebook profiles – a qualitative analysis**  
Source: the authors' research.

The results of the qualitative study show that the content contained in the analysed materials on Facebook profiles regarding confrontation and rivalry women against women concern:

1. the interdependence between appearance (emphasizing the beauty and attractive condition of the body) and other categories (e.g. having a family),
2. dependence on business topics, sports and occupied hierarchy (both social and professional). On the other hand, in the case of confrontation and rivalry women against men, interdependencies occur in business, hierarchy and other topics. The theme of sports and the physicality of women based on biological determinants of sex appeal did not occur (emphasized, for example, within media discourses).

As a complement to the above-mentioned results, it can be indicated that in these social media profiles there were:

1. references to people,
2. modal expressions,
3. personal beliefs,
4. explicitly expressed assessments, and
5. first-person forms of the singular in each of the analysed publications.

The use of direct quotes against indirect references did not occur in the selected Facebook profiles. This is evidenced by the elements of statements utilized in the discourse concerning the presented issues and present in the examined profiles.

The following examples of profiles with materials classified into the category of "confrontation and rivalry women against women" can be presented:

1. Fair Play For Women (Confrontation against transwomen in society as the other category),
2. Female Sports Forum (Rivalry against women in sport as a sport category),
3. Miss World (Confrontation against in appearance as an appearance category),
4. Women Against Feminism (Confrontation against in hierarchy as a hierarchy category), and

5. Women Startup Competition (Rivalry against women as a business category).

On the other hand, profiles with materials classified into the category of “confrontation and rivalry women against men” are, for example:

1. Women Employed (Rivalry against men as a business category),
2. Equality Now (Confrontation against men in society as the other category),
3. Free Women Writers (Confrontation against men in religious aspects as the other category).

### Discussion

Women’s professional supervision of men may be accompanied by gender-based rivalry. The scheme of such confrontation can, for instance, be determined by psychological factors placing a specific gender as either dominant or dominated in the process of exercising power. Domination and dominance may be supported by stereotypes about certain features of both sexes, which were determined in a study conducted by David J. Schneider, and used for instance by Sylwia Celińska and Zdzisław Nieckarz.

The combination of expressing opinions by the creators of individual materials, communication and promotion via Facebook serves presenting content regarding possible relationships of confrontation and/or competition between women and women and women and men. Facebook, as a social media, can therefore raise the awareness of its users regarding their economic, social and other roles. Facebook is, as José van Dijck (2013) puts it, a tool for creating identity. Therefore, the presented results of the analysis can be interpreted in the context of the discourse on creating and/or modifying recipients’ beliefs regarding the shapes and ways of gaining or losing specific benefits (material and non-material) by women.

The conclusion that “framing” content provides readers with possible patterns that facilitate the interpretation of information present on Facebook is also debatable. Stereotypes are then created, which may also have negative consequences, which are factors influencing the course and effects of confrontation and competition between women and men (Power et. al, 2020).

### Summary

Taking into account the above outline of the subject, the assumption is that the research area requires further studies. This is supported by the multi-faceted nature of the “illustrative” content presented in the media, which shows women’s competitiveness with men in all aspects of their, for example in their professional career. Besides, it can be agreed that although the phenomena of confrontation and competition have been fairly well established in literature, more work is needed to assess the importance of gender differences in competitiveness in accounting for gender differences in educational and occupational outcomes. This new and vibrant literature has made some progress in asking when competitiveness is harmful, when it is useful, how valuable it is, and how to change it; however, many open questions remain” (Niederle & Vesterlund, 2011, p. 626).

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