

“#Women's Hell” – The Activity and Image of a Polish Woman in the Virtual Space. The Analysis of Internet Posts in the Context of the 2020 Nationwide Polish Women's Strike

Monika Zak

Institute of Sociology, University of Silesia in Katowice, Katowice, Poland

Email: monika.zak@us.edu.pl

Abstract: “This is war!” is one of the main slogans accompanying the National Women's Strike in Poland in 2020. Women who disagree with the decision of the Constitutional Tribunal concerning a total ban on abortion took to the streets to voice their protest against the announced tightening of Poland's abortion law. Their activity – undertaken against the background of the COVID-19 pandemic – occurred in the streets of Polish cities and, above all, in the virtual space. It drew both support and severe criticism from the public, including internet users. Those involved carried out their campaign both in the public and virtual space, thus generating a rich collection of slogans placed on banners and internet posts. Citizens of the digital world actively commented on the actions of the women. At the same time – in a more or less conscious way – they contributed to the formation of the image of a contemporary Polish woman. The women involved used the digital world to propagate their beliefs and share their arguments. At that, they turned out to be highly creative and reached for solutions and tools previously used only to a minor extent by women. This article presents an analysis of selected internet activities undertaken as part of the Polish Women's Strike – entries by activists, supporters and opponents of this social movement. The image of a Polish woman resulting from the digital activity of the commentators on the current social reality in Poland will be outlined here. The outcome of the research undertaken is the typology of women engaged in virtual activities.

Keywords: Digital World; Image; Slogan; Strike; Symbol; Women.

INTRODUCTION

Women's fight for their rights and equality has lasted for many years, but even in the societies which have come to be called highly developed ones there are problems requiring the involvement of wider masses. One of the issues which regularly appears in the Polish public discourse is the one of the legality of abortion. The current “abortion compromise”, as the legal solution in force in Poland since 1993 (with minor later amendments) has come to be called, every now and then becomes the subject of debate in various social environments – from the ultra-Catholic circles to the extreme left ones. Despite many attempts to amend the existing regulations (both in terms of tightening and easing them), they are still in force and are – as shown by numerous public opinion polls – accepted by the Polish society.

The Nationwide Polish Women's Strike is a grassroots initiative which sprouted in Poland in 2016, as a response to the Polish government's announcements regarding the tightening of the abortion law. The so-called “Black Monday”

became a symbol of the events which occurred at the time, with women coming out in protest into the streets of over 200 Polish cities. Owing to their determination and the scale of the event itself, Polish politicians withdrew from further proceeding with the regulations which totally prohibited abortion. In 2020, the decision of the Constitutional Tribunal was announced which unanimously stated that performing an abortion (regardless of the reason) is inconsistent with the Constitution in force in Poland. This decision, although not yet published at the time of writing of this article, caused a wave of indignation and stirred to action the circles fighting for women's rights. Women took to the streets again, but due to the prevailing COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting restrictions on activities undertaken in the public space (especially the need to maintain interpersonal distance and the prohibition of public meetings), a significant part of their activity moved to the internet. Women popularised their campaign also by means of many slogans placed on banners, clothes, as well as online posters. Though the event attracted numerous supporters, many people

opposed the idea as well as the forms of the strike. The public space and the digital world became an arena for exchanging opinions and shaping the image of a contemporary Polish woman. Both activists and their opponents used the internet to promote their beliefs and ideas (Nehita, 2019). The initiative resulted in very interesting slogans and a new perspective on contemporary women. The aim of the article is not to assess the legitimacy of Polish women's actions, but to analyse their activity in the digital world and – more importantly – the effect of this activity, which undoubtedly includes creation of an image.

WOMEN IN THE DIGITAL WORLD - THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The use of digital media for communication is very common today. In some cases, it even replaces the traditional face to face communication. Its advantage is that, in fact, it hardly requires any physical activity and all the actions are limited to logging in and making a few clicks. The internet has become an instrument widely used in everyday life almost all over the world (de Zúñiga & Chen, 2019). Its new tools and the solutions these tools offer make functioning offline unimaginable to the majority of the society (especially the young generation) (Hladíková, 2018). The universality and easy access to digital tools, as well as their global reach, make them a kind of weapon in promoting their views and publicising significant events (Plenković & Mustić, 2020). Digital communication is primarily interaction and interactivity, which are closely related (Ghisleni & Knoll, 2020). The ability to convey one's opinions and even emotions by means of digital tools is common today and is willingly used both in private life relationships and in a wider virtual space (Vasiliu, 2020). The multitude of possibilities offered by digital tools makes it possible to reach almost every active user of the digital world (Dua, 2017).

The digital world offers great opportunities and is an arena for information exchange. It is also a tool significantly shaping one's image. Network users themselves moderate the overall way they are perceived by others - this is a kind of self-presentation in everyday life (Goffman, 1959). Users shape their image, but this image is also

subject to modifications introduced by other members of the virtual community. Frequently, such activity gets out of control and becomes a source of many problems – in both personal and professional life – which often ends in emotional disorders or even a suicide. Nowadays, immunity to online hatred is the basis for functioning in the digital world. Social media is a place to meet acquaintances, friends and family, but it is also a place where minor problems can transform into a catastrophe when they become an incentive for irresponsible network users. Almost all internet users are exposed to hate attacks, but it seems that women are particularly prone to become victims of internet attacks (Pacilli & Mannarini, 2019).

In recent years, it can be noticed that various social groups (including politicians) use digital communication tools in order to promote their activity and acquaint a wider audience with their views and slogans. Digital communication cannot be overestimated in this respect (Freelon et al., 2020). Women, whose roles used to be significantly limited, seem to be particularly active in this dimension (Makananise & Madima, 2020). Their image in the media was often based on the traditional division of roles and was limited to portraying them as wives, mothers and homemakers (Davtyan-Gevorgyan, 2016).

Today, the opposite trend can be observed – the image of a woman has changed radically. More and more frequently we deal with the presentation of women as leaders of various organisations and social movements (Castillo & Berdasco-Gancedo, 2020). Using the tools of the digital world, women actively influence the building of their image. They use various types of social media sites to be able to educate themselves more effectively, develop skills and competences (Gajjala & Mamidipudi, 2004; Hayes, 2000) and engage in social movements (Burch, 1999). They show what they really are like and what they want to be like, not in what framework they should function from the traditional perspective (Gül Ünlü, 2019). Women actively stand up for their rights, especially in terms of equal opportunities of professional development and shaping the public opinion (Mendick & Moreau, 2013). The digital world is a helpful instrument for fighting with limitations and inequalities, which makes women's voices heard all over the world (Kim, 2015). Owing to their activity, the gap between the roles and positions of

women and men is reduced, while the former want to participate in the public life to the same extent as men. The only limiting factor is access to digital tools and the prejudices resulting from the long standing cultural tradition of a given region (Moussa & Seraphim, 2017).

Wide access to many digital communication tools allows to express one's opinions, shape attitudes and change one's image. It is up to the users whether – and to what extent – their virtual activity will have an impact on others – it is an effective tool, but it also requires an attitude of responsibility towards other people, because, in the digital world, almost everything can be 'sold' (Berthon et al., 1996). Disseminating one's views and opinions may facilitate functioning in the ocean of information, but, at the same time, it may create a one-sided picture of reality. In addition, many network users derive a peculiar satisfaction from misleading others by means of the so-called fake news – one should, therefore, receive all information coming from the digital world with caution and confirm its credibility in competent and trusted sources.

Owing to virtual activity, a specific network of connections is created, persons with a similar profile are sought, according to their interests, skills, views and cooperation opportunities – social capital. Bezanson (2006) categorised social capital into three groups: the first is bonding capital, which concerns family, kinship and frequent interactions between contacts; the second group is bridging capital, which means an increase in mobility with a simultaneous reduction in relations with new contacts; the third is linking capital, which connects regular customers and contractors in a mutual relationship.

Social networks facilitate establishing contacts on a large scale, which would be difficult or even impossible in the case of direct contacts (Riaz et al., 2016). Women, therefore, actively use the solutions of the digital world to build social capital, develop and shape their image (Burgess, 2009). They exchange knowledge and experiences, thus enriching their culture and strengthening their position in the virtual world. The digital world is an arena of women's activity, and digital tools are their specific weapon in the fight for rights and loud expression of their views. The rest of the article will be devoted to the activity Polish women undertake in the digital world to promote their

beliefs and ideas. The image of a woman will be shown – both the positive one and the one created by those opposing the women's activity.

METHODOLOGY

The aim of the study was to analyse the image of women in the virtual world, which has a real impact on the real world. The activity of Polish women, who undertook a specific protest campaign in city streets and in the virtual space in response to the government's announcements regarding the tightening of abortion rules, became the motivation for the study, as it generated numerous slogans, banners and entries from people interested in their activity. The study, the results of which will be discussed in the pages of this article, was conducted in the period from October to December 2020. The qualitative method was used in the research, namely, the analysis of the content placed on the internet. For this purpose, social media platforms and instant messaging (such as Facebook and Twitter) were used in the study, as well as websites dealing with the activity of women associated with the Nationwide Polish Women's Strike. Both the posts by the activists themselves and the observers – active internet users were analysed. The way the activists want to be perceived (in terms of what they expect and what means they will use to achieve it) was examined as well as how their activity is assessed by the environment (both by their supporters and opponents). Symbols and slogans which became the hallmark of this initiative were analysed as well. On this basis, a typology of images of active participants of the Nationwide Polish Women's Strike of 2020 was created.

RESULTS

The involvement of women in social and political activity has been noticeable in Poland for many years. Owing to the access to virtual tools, it is much more visible, and its range is limited only by the power of the servers. The importance of the situation in Poland, connected with the discussion around the abortion law, is emphasised by the amount of information and the number of active participants who are focused around it in the virtual space. The Nationwide Women's Strike mobilised various circles (both pro-abortion and anti-abortion ones) to action, undertaken primarily in the virtual

space. As a result, many sites devoted to the issue of abortion emerged, moderated by people representing various positions. The content of these pages, activities conducted in the public sphere (women's marches), as well as numerous internet posts, encourage even passive internet users to share their thoughts. Naturally, it is a great breeding ground for internet trolls, who see an opportunity to speak out, frequently in a non-factual manner, in order to maintain a high level of emotion in virtual discussions.

SYMBOLS

As a campaign aimed at preventing the tightening of abortion law in Poland, the Nationwide Polish Women's Strike tried to be recognisable in the virtual space. Taking into account that the women's campaign took place for the first time in 2016, it was necessary to give it a specific logo - it was especially important for members of the digital world familiar with the use of various abbreviations and emoticons. In 2016, an umbrella became such a symbol (as a reference to the march of "black umbrellas" which took place on "black Monday", when women marched through the streets of Polish cities hiding under black umbrellas). In 2020, red lightning bolt became the symbol of the women's campaign, which was intended by its originator to send a clear message: be careful, be warned. We do not agree to depriving women of their fundamental rights (Stawikowska, 2020). The symbol appeared on protective masks used during the COVID-19 pandemic, on posters and banners, as well as in the virtual space as signs and profile markings on social networks. The opponents of the Nationwide Polish Women's Strike construed it to be a Nazi symbol. This was protested against not only by the originator of the logo but also by those who began to use it as a warning sign against violating women's rights and ignoring them. Under the internet articles calling for the use of the symbol of lightning, posts appeared written both by its supporters and opponents: A lightning bolt is a symbol of high electrical voltage, all electrical appliances from refrigerator and dishwasher to electric shaves are marked with such a pictogram. However, the symbol of the Nazi SS, that is, the Schutzstaffel, was completely different, so I advise the Marshall (...) to distinguish the difference. My husband, an electrician, says that a lightning bolt means HIGH VOLTAGE. And that's what it is. It

fits perfectly with what is happening; Even my 4-year-old grandson knows that a lightning bolt is a warning of danger, so the associations some have with fascism are greatly exaggerated, not to say - idiotic; These screaming feminists hate themselves, children, families, the church ... this is the hate culture and the SS is their sign. Everything fits together. What is happening in the streets now is nothing but lynching people who love instead of hating! Wake up people ! The lightning bolt is a reference to Nazi symbolism and nothing will change that! It's a DISGRACE, huge embarrassment!!! shame. The symbol which became the hallmark of women's strikes also became a subject of discussions and even conflicts between the members of the digital world. Most supporters - though not all, as shown by the quotations above - interpret it in accordance with the originator's intentions. Its opponents bring disparaging arguments referring to the infamous Nazi history.

SLOGANS

Symbols - although often significant, telling and effective - are not sufficient to conduct information campaigns. In the case discussed, the first and most obvious signs of women's activity - both in the real world and in the virtual space - were the slogans which became the symbols of the Nationwide Women's Strike. "Women's Hell"; "This is war" are the first two which appeared in connection with the ongoing campaign. In this way, women wanted to show that by creating regulations inadequate to the realities, the government created a hell for them, that is, living conditions striking against the contemporary sense of woman's worth. They also defined as hell a situation in which, following the possible change in regulations, a rape victim would be forced to give birth to a child conceived in the assault. Finally, this hell consisted in depriving women of the possibility to improve their life quality by deciding whether to give birth to a child with significant birth defects. The term "Women's Hell" also draws attention to the fact that women are in a much worse situation than men, who, in the opinion of activists, create laws and set standards undermining women's well-being. The slogan "Women's Hell" is addressed primarily to the government, but also to the people who have a real impact on the situation of women in the modern world. In the context of this slogan, the image of a

woman is of a victim unable to change her difficult situation. Hell is equated with punishment, pain and a trap from which it is difficult to get out - to be in hell means to be completely plunged into suffering. Therefore, this slogan was addressed primarily to people who should take an empathetic look at the proposed changes in the law. As a very dramatic statement, "Hell" was to make husbands, fiancées, fathers, brothers, etc. reflect and take action aimed at freeing their wives, daughters and sisters from the torment which the politicians were preparing for them. The purpose for such choice of words was to show woman as a weak, tormented and suffering creature - its recipients were people characterised by a high degree of empathy and a deep need to care for the weak.

The second main slogan had a decidedly different meaning. "This is war!" – women should actively fight for their rights. In the light of this slogan, women are brave warriors who try to change the reality in order to improve the comfort of their lives. Here, we are no longer dealing with the image of a defenceless, oppressed woman, but with the image of an activist who has the will and ability to fight. "War" is also a slogan with a very powerful impact and is primarily associated with the activity of men. In this case, it is women who play the role of soldiers, while the social reality and legal provisions inconsistent with their beliefs constitute the battlefield. War is associated with a fight to the death, where there can be only one winner. The slogan calling for the fight for women's rights was addressed primarily to people who want to be actively involved in campaigning for them. They are recipients who - just like in the case of war - are ready to suffer any losses for the sake of victory. This slogan was intended to motivate people who do not like to be victims of the government or other decision makers, but take matters into their own hands. A fighting woman is a strong, decisive and determined to achieve all her goals. She will not hesitate to take actions which, in the opinion of other people, may seem too radical or even "unfeminine".

The participants of the Nationwide Women's Strike and its passive observers were divided into two main groups. One of them included people to whom the slogan "Women's Hell" appeals more – here we most often deal with supporting women in the fight for their rights. This help mainly concerns emotional support, activities of little spectacularity

(e.g. marking one's internet profile with a lightning bolt) and negligibility of the actual impact, yet important from the perspective of the sense of security and faith in the legitimacy of the actions. The other group consists of the supporters of the slogan "This is war!". In their case, the assistance is definitely more tangible. These persons actually join the activities – they create new slogans, march in protests, conduct information campaigns, etc. Frequently, they personally participate in the protest campaign or become its leaders in small local communities. This slogan stimulates them to action, releases their resources of creativity and solutions aimed at supporting the women's fight. It is important to emphasise that both women and men belong to both groups.

Women who decided – risking their own and others' health during the pandemic – to participate in the strikes and protests showed great determination. They turned their frustration and anger at the governmental decisions into a slogan which is widely considered vulgar. The slogan was addressed primarily to the members of the ruling party, whose actions are, in the strikers' opinion, detrimental for women. The slogan "J***ć PiS – "F**k L&J" (in Poland, the government is comprised of, among others, a party called "Prawo i Sprawiedliwość" (PiS), which means "Law and Justice" (L&J)) is a vulgar expression of negative emotions towards those in power, indicating lack of acceptance for their actions. In order not to risk possible legal sanctions for using a slogan commonly considered offensive in the public space, some letters were replaced with asterisks, which resulted in its proclamation without actually using the actual words. This slogan seems to have divided the commentators of Polish social reality the most. Many of its opponents argued that women should not use such a vocabulary, as it violates the principles of social coexistence and deprives them of their femininity – if anyone is to use it, it should rather be men. Its proponents, on the other hand, argue that those in power put women up against the wall, forcing them to fight for their rights even at the expense of their femininity. It is also emphasised that the use of this slogan by women proved that they had reached the stage of the fight when no holds are barred. Numerous slogans appeared during the protests and in the virtual world, considered offensive in Poland. Women reached for the most powerful verbal weapons, which spurred many reactions:

What kind of women these militants are! What aggression, what foul language!; People are fed up, emotions run high so even the vocabulary gets extreme. (...) Let these vulgarisms shake up all the sleepy Poles who ignore what is happening. They have the right to disagree with this form, but they should do something about this situation; To speak to bandits, you have to use the language they understand; I support all the ladies protesting. I have been to the protests and I conclude that you are too polite anyway; I remind you that swearing in a public place is punishable under the Criminal Code and I demand the implementation of this provision; For communication to be effective, both parties should use the same language. In this particular case, the descent into profanity, emphasising not only the firmness but also emotions, is completely justified; Please be more polite. I understand the indignation, but this is a bit too far-fetched. Not everyone wants to hear so much profanity; And everyone suddenly saw that women were also people, that there was a limit to their patience, that they would fight for themselves and that – oh, dear! – they could swear. The above quotations, taken from internet posts, demonstrate how different opinions may be with respect to the use of obscene words by women during the protests. Opinions were divided in Polish virtual space as to the assessment of the women's attitudes. On the one hand, this form of fight is supported, and the woman is seen here as a warrior equal to the man (although still feminine), able to use various methods to reach wider masses. On the other hand, this form of fight makes women perceived as vulgar hags, devoid of femininity, who raise their hand against the traditionally established division of social roles. On the one hand, women who chose to use them presented themselves as strong, independent and fighting for their citizen's rights. On the other, they jeopardised an image of woman, who, in the eyes of a major section of the public, should express her opinions in a more subtle way. Interestingly, among the supporters of this form of protest there were many men, who succoured women in the virtual space by placing complimentary entries, justifying their behaviour and adding their own slogans. It was often the women themselves who disliked profanity, as they perceived this form of strike as a threat of underrating its proper message. It is worth noting that many online posts also contained obscene words which may indicate that many

commentators identified with the women and found this form of "fight" appealing. The digital world gives a fairly large margin of freedom in this regard, because it is up to the administrator of a given portal to what extent the use of this type of language is accepted. An example is the Facebook page administered by the leaders of the Nationwide Polish Women's Strike, which is very liberal and tolerant to the use of profanity in posts. It is hardly surprising, considering that women chose, among others, this kind of weapon to fight for their rights. Regardless of the assessment of the use of this type of slogans, it should be noted that, due to their controversial nature, they became very visible in public and virtual space, and many of them became a specific symbol of the women's strikes in Poland in 2020.

An interesting tool used by women (and not only by them) during the protests, were numerous posters and banners with slogans referring directly to the issue of abortion and those in power (in particular the ruling party's leader). Many of them contained puns, which became a characteristic feature of the activity of Polish women. Slogans from the banners also function in the virtual space, and any user interested can download them in order to transfer them, for example, to an item of clothing (such as T-shirts). Many of them also contain obscene words, but there are also ones which appeared at the beginning of the campaign, when the emotional load was not high enough as yet to induce the use of profanity. The administrators themselves who are also the campaign leaders, encourage people to send new slogans: Make effort to map our collective anger, humour, imagination, claims. Get inspired, send us your slogans, go to protests, keep up the pressure. Among those to be found in the virtual space there are: "Revolution is a woman"; "I think, I feel, I decide"; "Democracy = Freedom for Women"; "Politics is a woman"; "Solidarity is our weapon"; "Girls just wanna have fundamental rights"; "You will never walk alone"; "I'm not afraid of hell - I already live in it" (source: www.slogany.space). These slogans have become a symbol of the women's fight and many of their recipients believe that this form of communication is interesting and apt. Their authors are praised primarily for their creativity, which reaches the heart of the problem by means of wordplay. Many slogans can become a permanent component in the set of tools which women will continue to apply in fighting for their rights. However, there are people

who question the point of devising them at all. Particularly slogans containing profanity or directly referring to the issue of abortion were criticised – the society does not approve of the public proclamation of such slogans. This is reflected in numerous negative comments on the internet. The interesting fact that the vast majority of banners were made on cardboard boxes obtained from stores and production halls, which were fully recycled afterwards, is also worth mentioning.

WOMEN - ICONS

Apart from its formal leaders, the Nationwide Polish Women's Strike also included persons who became a specific symbol of the fight for women's rights quite unintentionally. As already mentioned, this year's campaign took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, and thus the protest activity was limited by the sanitary regulations in force. Public gatherings were forbidden, and it was absolutely necessary to cover one's nose and mouth in public spaces. Nevertheless, many people took to the streets in protest against the proposed changes in abortion laws. An elderly woman named Kasia also participated in these marches, although she had been fined by the police for her activity there. Granny Kasia, as she was dubbed in the virtual world, was not discouraged and continued to actively participate in walks along the streets of Warsaw. Her attitude became a symbol of the fight and many young people wanted to accompany her. Events were even created in the social media, aimed at a joint marching in the capital: Today we cordially invite you for a solidarity walk with Granny Kasia, which starts at 5 p.m. at the Sigismund's Column. We will walk around her favourite places because Granny never lets us go alone - we go with her because she is an amazing person and we love her very much. Granny Kasia's attitude became a symbol and generated an image of a Polish woman who, regardless of age, regardless of experience, still wants to actively create social reality. She was the kind of leader who unintentionally drew masses of people to follow her. When the police decided to detain Granny Kasia and subjected her to many hours' interrogation at the police station, the internet went wild. The users gathered in front of the police station, fighting for her release. When there was no contact with the detainee, the situation was reported minute by minute. Granny Kasia has been released! Dear Granny, you will never go

alone any more, thank you for being here and we love you very much !!! We also thank the people present in Wilcza Street (the address of the Police Station - the author's note) for being there and going out into the streets. Get home safely, take care! For many, Granny Kasia became an inspiration to act, but her behaviour (especially in the context of a pandemic situation) also drew many criticisms. She was accused of exposing herself and others to the coronavirus infection with her activities. An additional flashpoint was the fact that Granny Kasia took part in the marches carrying a bag with a rainbow motif (a symbol of LGBT communities), which additionally raised numerous controversies. This is pure adventurism, that's all I have to say. Bravo Lady Kasia, young at heart, rich in experience, the young can take an example how to fight and this is already happening, of course; The poor old woman makes a "spectacle" of herself; This lady's attitude fills me with hope that not everything has been lost, tarnished and tainted yet. Thank you very much; Bravo. We support you at every point; What more can we say.. Some people get dumb with age; Grandma has nothing else to do. She gets bored in retirement, while here she can mark her presence. They'll take a picture of her. She will become a martyr and publicity will follow; It's a shame that a granny must fight for our freedom ...; After all, this grandmother is a professional provocateur, the police know her very well, each time she won't follow the orders of the police and she looks for a fight; Respect for Granny Kasia !!!; Kaśka for president !; Great, unwavering Granny Kasia. I wish you best of health.

The person of Granny Kasia is one of the images of a woman which have recently appeared in the Polish virtual space - it is an image of a woman fighting for her beliefs regardless of age and situation, a woman who knows her rights and can exercise them. Finally, it is an image of a woman who, having experienced life in the system of a communist regime, strives to spare the young generation a return to the reality in which citizens were deprived of their right to speak out and to publicly fight for their beliefs. On the other hand, what we are dealing with here is overcoming a specific stereotype of a Polish grandmother, who was associated primarily with the warmth of a domestic nest, needlework, taking care of grandchildren – the grandmother whose kingdom was the kitchen, where she prepared delicious dishes for her loved ones. Such a clash with the

stereotype must have caused controversy and divide the observers of Granny Kasia's activities into her supporters and opponents.

IMAGE OF POLISH WOMAN IN THE VIRTUAL SPACE

The activity of Polish women met with a very wide response from the public. Both their supporters and opponents actively comment on the reality in the virtual space. The digital world – owing to its unlimited range – meant that people from other countries joined the Polish campaign, also expressing their objection to the tightening of the abortion law as a gesture of solidarity. Numerous posts appeared on the Internet, which, on the one hand, supported and motivated women to undertake further activities or, on the other hand, pointed to the pointlessness of this initiative. Supporters and opponents are very active in their virtual activities and try to comment on all events related to the initiative. As a woman, as a mother, I will never understand or support the protesters. The vulgar and rude behaviour does not make women attractive, they remind me of packs of Papuans and brainless savages capable only of beating and reckless sex. (...). Special reserves should be created for all these blaspheming pseudo-women, in which they'd be used as incubators; You are wonderful, I support you with all my heart and I regret that my health doesn't allow me to be with you at this roundabout, but I will support you always and everywhere. I am with you; I am already a grandmother, I've got a daughter and a granddaughter myself. I support you with all my heart. My son also supports you. Fight for your freedom!; These supposed protests turned into some irrational and vulgar politicised march for nobody knows what purpose; The marches are done with... (...) The comrades got bored with going back and forth ... these marches are as sensible as those who loaf around in them ... It's cringy and vulgar; Bravo Women !!! But that's still not enough. There must be more of you to win. I hope this is just the beginning; (...) why, they are not women, but savages, real women are at home with their husbands and children, and don't chase along city roads; Revolution is a woman! I support with all my heart and I wish I could participate more actively! The above quotes are only a small fragment of what can be found in the virtual world about the Nationwide Polish Women's Strike. Users actively or passively support or criticise this

initiative, it is not without an impact on the way the image of a Polish woman is shaped. On the one hand, she is perceived as a warrior. On the other, she is assigned roles and tasks considered typically female in the light of the centuries-old tradition. One commentator of the women's activity even decided to support them with a poem, which he published on the Facebook profile of the Nationwide Polish Women's Strike.

The analysis of the women's virtual activity brought about interesting conclusions, which allowed to elaborate a typology of digitally active women – both the supporters and the opponents of the Nationwide Polish Women's Strike. Considering the slogans, the scope of the activities and the tools used by them, four basic types of women can be distinguished. The first of them is a fighting activist - a woman convinced of the rightness of her activities, reaching for any tool available to achieve her goal. It is from her lips and posts that the slogans (including the obscene ones) most often come, to function later in the virtual space as the slogans of striking women. A fighting activist does not passively wait for the actions of others, but takes the initiative by creating new events, adding entries, inviting new people to cooperate - she acts as a formal or informal leader. The slogan "This is war!" is close to her heart and she understands that, just like military ground, the virtual space is a place where people expressing different views and representing various attitudes to life can clash. A fighting activist often exceeds the boundaries the digital world and conducts her activity in the real world, perceiving it as the possibility to reach the so-called digitally excluded people. She is completely devoted to the cause and treats the achievement of the set goal as a kind of mission. Another category of a woman which emerges from the analysis of internet entries is the supporting activist. It is a woman who is convinced of the rightness of the cause fought for, but her activities are limited to small range actions with a low degree of spectacularity. It is a person who marks and tags her profile, thus taking a stand in favour of the fighters, sends links to interesting events and materials related to the ongoing campaigns. She invites others to support or actively participate, but she herself – for various reasons – does not want or cannot act in a more active way. A supportive activist is an important element in the activities, because by devoting her attention to the virtual space, she is able to react quickly or provide

information about the new content appearing there. The slogan "Women's Hell" is much closer to her, because, analysing the situation, she comes to the conclusion that the reality is still far from the conditions which women could consider a good quality of life. An active opponent is a representative of the third type of a woman. It is a woman who does not agree with the ideas and goals of the Nationwide Polish Women's Strike and voices her disapproval in virtual activity. She writes posts aimed at undermining the activity of the other party – answers their arguments and puts forward her own propositions. An active opponent is not afraid of the confrontation in the digital world and often enters into discussions and disputes. She publishes materials aimed at confirming the validity of her beliefs and undermining the credibility of the opposing party. Its activity stems from a different system of values and a different world view. Similarly to a fighting activist she finds the slogan "This is war!" appealing – she uses various tools provided by the virtual world to justify her arguments. Very often, she goes beyond virtual reality and acts in the real world. The representative of the last group which emerges from the analysis of internet entries is an active undecided or otherwise uncertain activist, who, in principle, agrees with the main postulates of the Nationwide Polish Women's Strike, but does not like the methods the activists use to pursue their goal. It is a woman who often loudly criticises the methods used by activists. In particular, she dislikes vulgarity and actions which deprive femininity. She agrees that the main theme of the campaign, that is, preventing the tightening of the abortion law, is important and should be the goal, but the manner in which it is pursued should be more subdued. Additionally, her entries deprecate the political commitment of the Strike leaders and the fact that new minor demands are made,

obscuring the main postulate. Frequently, a virtual confrontation takes place between an uncertain activist and a fighting activist. The former believes that it is necessary to consciously choose the means and methods of warfare. The latter, in turn, takes the position that "the end justifies the means" and, just as it is during the war, almost all available methods can be used.

DISCUSSION

The above analysis and the typology created on its basis constitute a certain introduction to in-depth research on the virtual activity of women focused on the fight for the rights and values they find fundamental. The virtual space has become an additional weapon which can be used in this fight. It is also useful in the situation of the limitations related to the COVID-19 pandemic, when not every activity can be undertaken in real space. This text may become a contribution to the further analysis of the social activity of women and the methods they use to achieve the goal. Things which, in the opinion of many, were previously reserved solely for men, today have become weapons in the hands of women. It is debatable whether women should resort to methods which may de facto harm their cause arousing criticism and disgust from part of the society. One of the more interesting topics deserving further analysis is the language which became the symbol of the Nationwide Polish Women's Strike. Words generally considered obscene became a tool for demonstrating emotions and determination to act. Entries, slogans and memes functioning in the digital world constitute an excellent space for research on the creativity and effectiveness of such tools.

REFERENCES

- [1] Berthon, P., Pitt, L.F., Watson, R.T. (1996). The World Wide Web as an Advertising Medium: Toward an Understanding of Conversion Efficiency. *Journal of Advertising Research*, Vol. 36, Issue 1, 43-54.
- [2] Bezanson, K. (2006). Gender and the Limits of Social Capital. *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology*, 43(4), 427–443. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1755-618X.2006.tb01142.x>
- [3] Burch, S. (1999). ALAI: A Latin American Experience in Social Networking. In W. Harcourt (ed.), *Women@Internet: Creating New Cultures in Cyberspace*. London: Zed Books.
- [4] Burges, K.R. (2009). Social Networking Technologies as Vehicles of Support for Women in Learning Communities. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, no. 122, 63-71. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ace.335>

- [5] Castillo, C.A., Berdasco-Gancedo, Y. (2020). Brexit and female leadership in Spanish digital media from a linguistic perspective. The case of Theresa May's decline. *Communication and Society*, Vol. 33(2), 243-257. <https://doi.org/10.15581/003.33.2.243-257>
- [6] Davtyan-Gevorgyan, A. (2016). Women and Mass Media. Retrieved from <http://feminism-boell.org/en/2016/04/08/women-and-mass-media>.
- [7] De Zúñiga, H.G., Chen, H-S. (2019). Digital Media and Politics: Effects of the Great Information and Communication Divides. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 63(3), 365-373. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08838151.2019.1662019>
- [8] Dua, S. (2017). Digital Communication Management: The World is Going Digital. *International Journal of Recent Research Aspects*, Vol. 4, Issue 3, 50-53.
- [9] Freelon, D., Marwick, A., Kreiss, D. (2020). False equivalencies: Online activism from left to right. *Democracy in the Balance*, Vol 369, Issue 6508, 1197-1201. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.abb2428>
- [10] Gajjala, R., Mamidipudi, A. (2004). Cyberfeminism, Technology, and International 'Development. In R. Gajjala (ed.), *Cyber Selves: Feminist Ethnographies of South Asian Women*. Walnut Creek, Calif.: AltaMira Press.
- [11] Ghisleni, T.S., Knoll, G.F. (2020). Communication strategies in digital environment: Conceptual framework mapping. *Revista de Comunicação, Cultura e Política*, v. 20 – n. 40 – jan-jul/2020, 83-102. <https://doi.org/10.46391/alceu.v20.ed40.2020.48>
- [12] Goffman, E. (1959). *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Doubleday Anchor Books, Doubleday & Company, Inc. Carden City, New York.
- [13] Gül Ünlü, D. (2019). Evaluation of Digital Media Usage of Women Through Motherhood Models as a Cultural Ideology. *Galatasaray Üniversitesi İletişim Dergisi*, December, 137-167. <https://doi.org/10.16878/gsuilet.658080>
- [14] Hayes, E. (2000). Social Contexts. In E. Hayes, D. D. Flannery (eds.), *Women as Learners: The Significance of Gender in Adult Learning*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- [15] Hladíková, V. (2018). Transformation of Thinking and Education under the Influence of Internet Communication. *Journal of Interdisciplinary Research*, Vol. 8 Issue 1, 99-103.
- [16] Kim, G.J-S. (2015). The New: "Dot.com Women": Women Engaging Religious and Theological Discourse Online. *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, 31 no 2, 154-159. <https://doi.org/10.2979/jfemistudreli.31.2.154>
- [17] Makananise, F.O., Madima, S.E. (2020). The Use of Digital Media Technology to Promote Female Youth Voices and Socio-Economic Empowerment in Rural Areas of Thohoyandou, South Africa. *Gender & Behaviour*, Vol. 18, No. 2, 15851-15861.
- [18] Mendick, H., Moreau, M-P. (2013). New media, old images: constructing online representations of women and men in science, engineering and technology. *Gender and Education*, Vol. 25, No. 3, 325–339. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2012.740447>
- [19] Moussa, M.B., Seraphin, J. (2017). Digital gender divides and e-empowerment in the UAE: A critical perspective. *International Journal of Education Development using Information and Communication Technology (IJEDICT)*, Vol. 13, Issue 3, 145-161.
- [20] Nehita, F. (2019). Urban Changes and Citizens' Engagement by Using Digital Media. *Bulletin of the Transilvania University of Braşov*, Vol. 12(61) No. 1 – 2019, 161-170. <https://doi.org/10.31926/but.ssl.2019.12.61.1.15>
- [21] Pacilli, M.G., Mannarini, T. (2019). Are Women Welcome on Facebook? A Study of Facebook Profiles of Italian Female and Man Public Figures. *TPM: Testing, Psychometrics. Methodology in Applied Psychology*, Vol. 26 Issue 2, 199-207.
- [22] Plenković, M., Mustić, D. (2020). Media Communication and Cultural Hibridization of Digital Society. *Media, Culture and Public Relations*, 11, 2020, 2, 151-160. <https://doi.org/10.32914/mcpr.11.2.3>
- [23] Stawikowska, E. (2020). Czerwona błyskawica – symbol protestów – nawiązuje do nazistowskich źródeł? „Zarzutek prawicowców jest absurdalny”. *Newsweek Polska*. Retrieved from <https://www.newsweek.pl/polska/ogolnopolski-strajk-kobiet-autorka-blyskawicy/ph9d2xk>

- [24] Riaz, S., Aksar, I.A., Pasha, S.A. (2016). Social Media and women: A gratification analysis. *The Women, Research Journal*, Volume 8, 57-82.
- [25] Vasiliu, E. (2020). Website Design for Effective Digital Audience Engagement: A Conceptual Framework. *Journal of Media Research* Vol. 13, Issue 3(38) / 2020, 70–94.
<https://doi.org/10.24193/jmr.38.5>

Received on 01-06-2023

Accepted on 15-06-2023

Published on 24-06-2023

© 2023 Monika Zak; Licensee ATSK Publishers.

This is an open access article licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/>) which permits unrestricted, noncommercial use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the work is properly cited.