


# Intellectual Property Rights in Polish Feminist Activism: Navigating Identity, Values, and Commodification

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The study maps out how trademarking practices influence activist movements' identity, values and resistance to commodification. While previous studies have explored legal entanglements within social movements, there remains a significant gap regarding the rise of trademarking within contemporary social movements. This study addresses this gap by examining the intersection of intellectual property rights (IPR) and human rights activism within the feminist movement in Poland, which gained momentum in 2016 in response to proposed abortion restrictions. The article proceeds by way of a single case study – a high profile trademarking case involving the *Dziewuchy Dziewuchom* [Gals for Gals] activist group, which sparked significant controversy and debate in 2018 in the feminist circles in Poland.

Utilising a feminist cultural conceptual lens and methodology, the study extracts from literature on the socio-political and cultural framework of IPR and feminist brand activism. The study draws on extensive research conducted since 2016 within the contemporary feminist movement in Poland, consisting of interviews and ethnographic fieldwork.

The findings indicated that contemporary social movements increasingly use trademarking to protect their identities and control their narratives. However, this introduces contradictions between ownership and the collective nature of activism. While trademarking aims to safeguard a movement's identity, it simultaneously risks commodifying its core values.

**Contribution:** The main contribution of this research is its insight into how trademarking practices affect the identity, values and resistance to commodification of activist movements, aligning with the broader focus on intellectual property in social and cultural studies.

**Keywords:** trademark; IPR (Intellectual Property Rights); Polish feminism; legal abortion; mediatisation.

## Introduction

Recent years have seen the recognition of the contingent uses of law in contemporary social movements and the progressively developing legal entanglements in social justice activism (McCann 2006). While legal studies have long explored such interconnections, specifically from the point of view of law development and the centrality of legal procedures in social change (Briker 2023; Edelman, Leachman & McAdam 2010; Rajagopal 2003), social and cultural studies, including media scholarship, still rarely turn their analytical gaze to the juridification of activism. Only a limited number of pioneering publications have discussed the pervasive liberal imaginations of contemporary social movements (e.g., D'Souza 2018), the widespread employment of legal tools, including legal appeal processes and litigation as public campaigning tools (e.g. Fjellborg 2023; Wonneberger 2024), activists circumventing and evading the algorithmicisation of social reality (e.g. Bonini & Treré 2024), social movements resisting and escaping pervasive surveillance (Arora 2019; ed. Baybars-Hawks 2015; ed. Choudry 2019; Schlembach 2018), and the actions of overturning or even reclaiming SLAPP (Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation) cases (Hilson 2016; Landry 2010).

Although these processes came to be conceptualised as juridification of culture more broadly (Aksikas & Andrews 2016; Andrews 2019), there is still a significant gap in scholarly work regarding the pervasive rise of intellectual property rights (IPR) cases, especially trade marking, within contemporary social movements. Starting with Black Lives Matter,<sup>1</sup> Women's March

1. Some controversies related to BLM's trademark are discussed in this article: <https://www.worldtrademarkreview.com/article/controlling-black-lives-matter-the-battle-trademark-movement> [accessed 30 May 2024].

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on Washington,<sup>2</sup> Fridays for Future,<sup>3</sup> and Pussyhat project associated with the 2017 feminist marches in the United States (US),<sup>4</sup> social movement actors and activist strands engage in battles over their activist slogans, symbols and artefacts, or set alarm bells ringing in face of appropriation and commodification. Across these cases, the point of contention has been the extent to which the protection and potential commodification of activist identities and symbols affect public perception, support and the efficacy of these movements. While enhancing the commercial potential of activist artefacts allows them to become more widely palatable, commercialisation has equally been criticised for flattening their political message.

As a way of addressing this to-date heavily under-explored yet ubiquitous phenomenon, this article maps out the intersection of IPR and human rights activism with its multilayered textures of perceived and projected senses of ownership. I engage with the topic of IPR in relation to feminism and activism in the context of the contemporary feminist movement in Poland, which in 2018 experienced a high-profile case of activist trademarking. The contemporary feminist movement in Poland began in March 2016 in response to a proposal to outlaw abortion (Graff & Korolczuk 2022; Majewska 2021). This proposal was put forward by conservative groups and supported by the government in power, aligning with a globally recognised right-wing political shift (Arruzza 2017; Gago 2020). This sparked widespread feminist activism and mobilisation, with a series of activist events such as the Black Protest and Black Monday in late 2016, 2017 and 2018, as well as a renewed wave of protests during 2020 (Muszel & Piotrowski 2022).

In April 2016, a Facebook group, *Dziewuchy Dziewuchom* [Gals for Gals], gathered hundreds of thousands of individuals alerted by the changing climate around the abortion law. Since then, *Ogólnopolski Strajk Kobiet* [Polish Women's Strike] organised nation-wide protests, international collaborations (such as the International Women's Strike in 2017), and directed their efforts towards other social and political issues such as defence of free courts, support for people with disabilities and their parents among others. The feminist movement as a whole consists of additional organisations, such as art-activist collectives (e.g., *Czarne Szmaty* [Black Rags]), social media fan pages, groups and networks (e.g., *Dziewuchy Dziewuchom* [Gals for gals]), as well as non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and networks advocating legal abortion and supporting individuals in terminating pregnancies (e.g., *Aborcyjny Dream Team* [Abortion Dream Team]).

2. The case was commented on by the Washington Post: [https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/womens-march-group-drops-application-to-trademark-name-after-two-year-battle/2019/04/03/78e987bc-5587-11e9-814f-e2f46684196e\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/womens-march-group-drops-application-to-trademark-name-after-two-year-battle/2019/04/03/78e987bc-5587-11e9-814f-e2f46684196e_story.html).

3. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-51308536> [accessed 30 May 2024].

4. On their website, the organisers mention the process of securing the trademark: <https://www.pussyhatproject.com/our-story> [accessed 30 May 2024].

The *Dziewuchy Dziewuchom*<sup>5</sup> trademarking case was one of the biggest controversies in the early years of the contemporary feminist movement in Poland. In 2018, 2 years after the social media group was started, its founders registered their name as a trademark; therefore, many local activist groups using the name were deleted on account of breaching IPR. The group was formed on Facebook after the *Marsz Godności* [March of Dignity] in April 2016, with over 100 000 members. Graff and Korolczuk (2022) noted that *Dziewuchy Dziewuchom* was crucial in raising alarms against new anti-abortion legislation. Known for its strong social media presence, the group positioned itself as the organiser of the new feminist movement in Poland. However, the founders and administrators, four women in Warsaw, maintained a solely online presence; local *Dziewuchy Dziewuchom* groups were formed with a specific purpose of organising activist events, protests and marches off-line. After the first *Strajk Kobiet* [Women's Strike] in October 2016, these local groups often aligned with the Strike group on Facebook. These local groups played a crucial role in contributing to the national and international visibility of the newly formed feminist movement.

Local groups used identification and social media groups of both *Dziewuchy Dziewuchom* and *Strajk Kobiet* for national protests. Tensions arose when the administrators of the original '*Dziewuchy Dziewuchom*' did not support 'their' name being used by local activist groups, culminating on 19 April 2018, when access to the name was restricted, forcing local groups to rebrand by including a name of the town or city where they functioned and reducing the title to simple '*Dziewuchy*' (Łozowska 2020; Rak 2018, 2020). A new, nation-wide group, *Polskie* [Polish Gals], was formed on Facebook as an alternative to the original '*Dziewuchy Dziewuchom*' fan page. Over 2 years since the case started, *Łódzkie Dziewuchy Dziewuchom* [Gals for Gals, Łódź] won the case overturning the trademark restriction.<sup>6</sup> Despite conflicts, '*Dziewuchy Dziewuchom*' fan page on social media remained influential, commenting on current affairs and feminist topics with unchanged branding since 2018. *Strajk Kobiet*, although without any controversies, also ended up legally securing its name.

This article proceeds by way of a single case study following the discussions around the idea of trademarking, IPR, and sense of ownership that were fuelled by the trademark case in Poland. Using feminist cultural conceptual lens and methodology, the article draws from literature on the socio-political and cultural framework of IPR (Aksikas & Andrews 2016; Andrews 2019; Coombe 1998; Reyman 2010), feminist brand activism (e.g., Banet-Weiser 2018; Mukherjee & Banet-Weiser 2012; Phipps 2020; Prügl 2015; Rottenberg 2017) and conceptualisations around woke capitalism (Fan 2019;

5. The group started functioning outside of Polish language as Gals for Gals or Gals4Gals, which has become a standard translation of the movement as used in both English academic literature and media articles. In my opinion the more apt translation of *dziewucha* is a *wench*, rather than a *gal*. While the meaning and resonance of the name will be further explored on the further part of the article, I will continue referring to group using the standard translation of the group's name rather than my own translation.

6. <https://prawo.gazetaprawna.pl/artykuly/1494075.znak-dziewuchy-dziewuchom-bez-monopolu.html> [accessed: 30 May 2024].

Kanai & Gill 2020; Rhodes 2021; Sobande 2019). The main argument of the article is that contemporary social movements are increasingly engaging in trademarking their names and slogans to protect their identities and control their narratives. This trend reflects a broader pattern within activist culture where legal tools are used to manage and potentially commodify the unique elements of activism. Firstly, I will examine how the use of IPR within activism reveals contradictions about ownership and the value of ideas in collective actions. Secondly, this process of trademarking, while intended to protect the movement's identity from misuse, introduces a complex dynamic between branding and activism. Here, I will discuss how the universal appeal and inclusivity of the feminist movement in Poland can paradoxically strengthen their brand, making them more susceptible to commercialisation. Thirdly, I will discuss how the spread of unverified entities offering activist-inspired merchandise has flooded the market, making the legal measures taken against the appropriation of activist symbols futile. The final argument underscores the complexities and contradictions that arise when activist movements navigate the commercial landscape, striving to protect their identity and values while resisting commodification. The research on the Polish feminist movement's experience with trademarking provides a unique case study that contributes to the broader understanding of intellectual property issues in activism. Specifically, it examines how trademarking practices affect the movement's identity, values and resistance to commodification.

## Methods

The study employed empirical research, including 28 individual and group interviews with activist organisers, predominantly from non-metropolitan areas, to explore the intricate relationship between embodied, situated experiences and the narrative and rhetorical tools utilised in activist endeavours. Conducted between 2016 and 2018, the fieldwork was characterised by a series of journeys to various parts of Poland, where I engaged in numerous activist events and interviewed 35 organisers from the contemporary feminist movement in Poland. As such, my data set extends beyond transcribed interviews to include materials from protests and gatherings, numerous notes from informal conversations, observations about rural Poland, personal reflections and digital ethnography from closely following activist materials shared on social media platforms (predominantly on Facebook, Instagram, and Telegram during the 2020 protests). Before starting the actual process of recorded interviewing, I had undergone a formal ethical review at the University of Sussex.

## 'A protest is a kind of competition, as in who will be first': The copyright culture of activism

This section examines the culture of ownership in contemporary feminist activism. Several trademark cases

have rolled through the highly mediated landscape of social movements in the past decade, including 'Black Lives Matter', the Women's March, and 'Fridays For Future'. A trademark refers to a word, phrase, symbol or design that, depending on national legal contexts, can exhibit sufficient originality to be protected as intellectual property. This protection effectively prevents others from using these elements for commercial purposes. The underlying dynamic of trademark law, therefore, is about securing a commercial monopoly, without hindering the spread of cultural movements. However, the aesthetic representations of these movements can vary widely. For instance, numerous designs interpreting 'Black Lives Matter' were subject to trademark disputes by various groups and individuals between 2015 and the heightened visibility of BLM during the 2020 protests.<sup>7</sup>

The high-profile cases of activist trademarking often revolve around the tension between entities seeking to restrict the use of a name or logo as a trademark and those who oppose such restrictions. The division between these two sides is frequently blurred, as in many instances, social movements that oppose the illicit use of their logos or references end up restricting elements of their own activist representation. While it is easy to assume that those filing for trademark restrictions are driven by commercial interests, the reality is often more nuanced. For example, in a controversial case, Adidas opposed the trademarking of a Black Lives Matter (BLM) design featuring three stripes, with the global commercial conglomerate acting as the opposing party.<sup>8</sup> Meanwhile, the practice of trademarking activist brands has become increasingly common, with legal firms specialising in the protection of activist IPR carving out a niche in the legal market.<sup>9</sup> The highbrow legal cases are often cited interchangeably by parties interested in securing legal restrictions on the names. In two separate posts,<sup>10</sup> *Dziewuchy Dziewuchom* presents themselves as victims in light of the lost court case, comparing their own case to Greta Thunberg who in 2020 also decided to trademark her own name as well as the titles under which the movement she is associated with is known: 'Fridays For Future'/'Skolstrejk för klimatet'. In line with Thunberg's explanation,<sup>11</sup> *Dziewuchy Dziewuchom* repeats that:

7. <https://www.worldtrademarkreview.com/article/controlling-black-lives-matter-the-battle-trademark-movement> [accessed: 30 May 2024].

8. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-65107924> [accessed: 30 May 2024].

9. For example, a legal firm 'Trama': <https://www.tramatm.com/about-us> [accessed: 30 May 2024].

10. [https://www.facebook.com/dziewuchydziewuchom/posts/3430605263681131?\\_xts\\_\\_\[0\]=68.ARDR11Rdt3w1a4cmDVp3FCcwXD4h4-p9T3h\\_FQLfzeY4KEa7a9dkaUiMF02w-C00xQRKyJCV2kyGJI1xsU4Tvw2zV6jYbqJkoVfes4hkhHCVQIDGVLAF1Xx4YzvA5V\\_UPxp9oA-TmFbXq65bh1nvvkIjgqktnHKqFGL8A\\_\\_p5o5b5-k0SalqC8Eyg8\\_R7mNK8q\\_GWup2414XOwdGZiWeHjKxR46wEq\\_6\\_eR\\_yQ89iXLIhM3fJCHMg8KvNFotYf11AQ5eNRDP6UGMQVGoJIDPUbbDRHF51wGDmo3xUC5LhzusD9R5LqmM12fe\\_YE14MnPkLICRS5LT6e6p4aVcwXk\\_K-&fbclid=IwAR0Lfm2vk30HyB8k2IODDiufPNxOT\\_ka4inL3xdK8spM50GWxfhj5Ytfur8](https://www.facebook.com/dziewuchydziewuchom/posts/3430605263681131?_xts__[0]=68.ARDR11Rdt3w1a4cmDVp3FCcwXD4h4-p9T3h_FQLfzeY4KEa7a9dkaUiMF02w-C00xQRKyJCV2kyGJI1xsU4Tvw2zV6jYbqJkoVfes4hkhHCVQIDGVLAF1Xx4YzvA5V_UPxp9oA-TmFbXq65bh1nvvkIjgqktnHKqFGL8A__p5o5b5-k0SalqC8Eyg8_R7mNK8q_GWup2414XOwdGZiWeHjKxR46wEq_6_eR_yQ89iXLIhM3fJCHMg8KvNFotYf11AQ5eNRDP6UGMQVGoJIDPUbbDRHF51wGDmo3xUC5LhzusD9R5LqmM12fe_YE14MnPkLICRS5LT6e6p4aVcwXk_K-&fbclid=IwAR0Lfm2vk30HyB8k2IODDiufPNxOT_ka4inL3xdK8spM50GWxfhj5Ytfur8) [accessed: 30 May 2024].

11. [https://www.facebook.com/story.php?story\\_fbid=1047448005623019&id=732846497083173&paipv=0&eav=AfavEakDTJXJZy3O1RisohBto6bgGyh4h7MSjidkcbJsrpNiXPY-30wdm4R0tq9qXOI&\\_rdr](https://www.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=1047448005623019&id=732846497083173&paipv=0&eav=AfavEakDTJXJZy3O1RisohBto6bgGyh4h7MSjidkcbJsrpNiXPY-30wdm4R0tq9qXOI&_rdr) also quoted in a BBC article <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-513085367fbclid=IwAR0UBB2vyUS2FxeIRK06PPZogyOk3UVdEAlrby30jsKqu7iyeOEwA8-ldml> [accessed: 30 May 2024].

[R]egistering a trademark [no, this is not the same as obtaining a patent] allows us to take legal action against individuals or companies who want to use the name *Dziewuchy Dziewuchom* in violation of its purpose.<sup>12</sup>

While the actual bases for comparison might be questionable, it is worth focussing on the fact that the trademarking of *Dziewuchy Dziewuchom* and Fridays for Future are not isolated cases within a culture of contemporary social movements. An equivalent trajectory with mixed intentions to control a heterogeneous movement and potentially combine activist practice with financial gratification can be found in a trademarking case of the Women's March on Washington in 2017, which divided the movement into two fractions. Not unlike the *Dziewuchy Dziewuchom* case, Washington March Inc.<sup>13</sup> sent legal notices to other organisations within the movement warning them against using the name without permission and, after widespread controversy, eventually decided to withdraw from a 2-year quest to register the 'women's march' phrase.

Both cases, almost identical in their development, reveal an inherent contradiction about ownership over ideas in a community. Crucially, however, they construct a pattern of contemporary activism in which ideas, inspirations, and fashions – which, by their nature, tend to spread and evolve more rapidly than anyone can pin them down – are to be captured and registered. This phenomenon is accelerated in a networked culture of digitally enabled activism as well as intensified usage of legal tools in cultural battles. Coombe's (1998) pioneering study highlights the problem of authorship of culture in the context of (commercial) culture, while Reyman (2010) adds a digital element to the discussion, exploring solutions for regulating technology, authorship and cultural conservancy on the Internet. Aksikas and Andrews (2016:xviii) note the 'intensification' of the 'juridical turn' in neoliberal capitalism since 2014, with the legitimisation of culture through law and the resurgence of social movements as a site for challenging power. This trend has not gone unnoticed by social movement scholars, as evidenced by Fjellborg's (2023) recent exploration of litigation as an increasingly popular tool of action among social movements. While conflicts are a feature of most activist groups and social movements (e.g., Nunes 2021), phrases such as 'women's march' or 'strike of women' have been used throughout historical uprisings without falling a victim of a proprietary logic of IPR.<sup>14</sup> When registered, leftovers of collective action such as slogans, images, 'souvenirs' of activism past, come to

12. [https://www.facebook.com/dziewuchydziewuchom/photos/to-nie-by%C5%82aby-prawdziwa-wiosna-gdyby-w-%C5%9Brodowisku-feministycznym-nie-wybuch%C5%82a-ko/3882543111820675/?paipv=0&eav=AFYjI0BibRBpt2D\\_MZLNk0OqluqK5SrVh21Lv-IRY3JaI0SMuYRivwJ7AjilfeQ18&\\_rdr](https://www.facebook.com/dziewuchydziewuchom/photos/to-nie-by%C5%82aby-prawdziwa-wiosna-gdyby-w-%C5%9Brodowisku-feministycznym-nie-wybuch%C5%82a-ko/3882543111820675/?paipv=0&eav=AFYjI0BibRBpt2D_MZLNk0OqluqK5SrVh21Lv-IRY3JaI0SMuYRivwJ7AjilfeQ18&_rdr) [accessed: 30 May 2024].

13. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/womens-march-group-drops-application-to-trademark-name-after-two-year-battle/2019/04/03/78e987bc-5587-11e9-814f-e2f46684196e\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/womens-march-group-drops-application-to-trademark-name-after-two-year-battle/2019/04/03/78e987bc-5587-11e9-814f-e2f46684196e_story.html) [accessed: 30 May 2024].

14. As examples could serve the French Women's March on Versailles in 1789, Women's Strike for Equality from 1970 in the USA, or a more recent Łódź women's hunger strike march of 1981, Poland.

suggest uniqueness, originality and unprecedentedness – values, which can become sellable commodities.

The pervasive nature of linking the value of activism to its potential for financial gain within social movements and contemporary culture can make it seem invisible. I only realised how ubiquitous it is when 1 day during my fieldwork journey it was contrasted with an alternative way of looking at activist labels. When I asked *Dziewuchy Węgorzewo*, a small activist group in Węgorzewo,<sup>15</sup> why they called themselves *Dziewuchy* while technically they see themselves as part of *Strajk Kobiet* [Women's Strike], they replied:

- Well, because we didn't know what all that was. Dog's breakfast. [Laughs]
- Eliza [one of them] decided, and we joined.

They were caught off-guard by my question because they did not seem to pay attention to the name as much as their practice. Activist organisers from Węgorzewo needed to choose a name for themselves and unaware of potential divisions between groups opted for the first name they picked up online. The relaxed, almost uncommitted approach to the activist identification of *Dziewuchy Węgorzewo* stands as a rare example that without commercial aspirations or fear that others might have such aspirations, a name can possess little economic value, as well exemplified by a whole strand of academic literature on self-branding in feminist activism (e.g., Mahoney 2020; Sciberras & Tanner 2022; Saraswati 2023). Their dismissive attitude towards the idea of origins and ownership of the activist labels also highlights that no matter how unique and catchy the name or aesthetic the design of the logo, neither of them swayed people to join the protests nor did they play a deciding part in convincing individuals to take more responsibility as organisers.

Whereas motivations to engage in activist organising may be purely political and rooted in social sensitivity, the traffic of organisations involved in a social movement becomes a factor in activist organisers' sense of ownership over protest visibility. K., one of the activist organisers active across several urban centres in Poland, tells me how the rush to register events in order to claim them for a particular activist group has become a common practice:

I mean yes, of course as *Strajk Kobiet* in general we have such problems. [...] Sometimes it's the case that in some places girls are both in *Strajk Kobiet*, they're in some political party or they're not, but they're also in KOD, for example. It intermingles, it's true. And sometimes I had the impression that organising a protest is a kind of competition, as if who will be first.

What K. conveys is that the activist environment is a melting pot in which affiliations, names, labels and various political groups constantly overlap and mingle. The final protest is then an achievement of many forces – not just individuals

15. Węgorzewo is a town located in with a population of approximately 10 000 to 12 000 inhabitants (2021).

and groups, but also interactions between them, which as K. points out, are often obscure and flexible. K.'s statement exposes the ugly truth of the moments of activist mobilisation. Their eagerness to be 'first' does not undermine their intentions or the activist labour of actually organising events. What it does, however, is to spell out a painful realisation underlying at least some of the contemporary activist practice, that activist work is regarded as impersonal and labour less if not registered, archived or recorded. In other words, if you are not first you might not have been there at all.

Through the citation of the two interview extracts aforementioned, the intention to illuminate and entertain a contrast between what we could regard as the more idealistic and the calculative relation to value. However, it is not my intention to put one of them on a pedestal as the 'right' or 'purer' version of activist value. There are several variables that might have influenced the *Dziewuchy Węgorzewo* organisers' approach – most of all, the scale of their activist practice in a small town in which they are often the only activists. They are always 'first', even if on one occasion only one of them is actually unable to turn up. The little claim they considered themselves to have over the activist labels they joined might be seen as proportional to their sense of control over the activist environment in Węgorzewo. In a context of metropolitan, national and, further, globalised scope of networked, organisationally multiheaded and leaderless activism, registering of any sort is an exclamation of powerlessness in the face of chaos. The increasing widespread role of the legal system in shaping cultural practices has been observed and critiqued since the 1990s (e.g. Aksikas & Andrews 2016; Andrews 2019; Coombe 1998; Reyman 2010). Sean Andrews (2019:12), for example, in his theorisation of the 'reified culture of property', contends that even though digitalisation and globalisation have altered the property production landscape, the metaphorical extension of property rights to intangible objects through the IPR highlights the inadequacy and adaptability of the value concept. In other words, while the definition of property or intellectual property may seem to be shifting, discussions around property still revolve around 'how value is produced and distributed relative to the legal owners of property'. In light of this, we can see that immaterial and intellectual properties, created as part of activism on both the legal and cultural levels, come to be defined in relation to the primacy of their 'inventors'. That primacy is, as we observed, impacted by the social-economic context in which activism takes place – online or offline, in the metropolitan centres or in political and geographic peripheries. In it, then, closely linked to one's ability is to regard themselves as 'inventors' and claim such primacy. Activism, however, with its heightened property production capability, is trapped in its relationality to the capital, where the potential claim on the primacy of inventorship looms ever present.

## 'It's activism; it's not a packet of cigarettes': Activist brand and identity

In this section, I examine how the mentioned primacy of inventorship, in following the Lockean notion of ownership developed through agriculture, engages personal and group identification. Such semi-commercial, transitional quality of activism is exemplified by an increasingly intricate nexus of activist brand and identity, which emerges as a by-product of the popularity of social movements. This is how M., an organiser in Sanok, describes her relationship with *Strajk Kobiet* in a context of potential restricting of their trademark:

- I mean yes, this is some people's work for this 'head' [*she refers to Strajk's logo*] of our movement. It was designed especially for us, especially for this movement. [...] You cannot appropriate or somehow materialise this movement, because it is a movement made up of hundreds of thousands of individual girls. If it wasn't for them, not for their activism ... – it's activism, it's not a packet of cigarettes or a packet of, I don't know, some product that you can brand and write – this is mine and ... Something like that. No, I didn't like it. I'll tell you, yes, these girls ... Because it's not just theirs. Do you see what I mean?

Yes.

- You simply cannot materialise neither K. [*her own surname*] nor Stasia from Zgorzelec that we are this ... I identify myself with *Strajk Kobiet* all the time, I always stress it [...] I signed my name as M. K., *Ogólnopolski Strajk Kobiet* [Polish Women's Strike] in Sanok. I keep emphasising this. I am not hiding, no ... And I have the same right to use this name as Stasia from Zgorzelec or Basia from Wrocław<sup>16</sup> or anyone else who is active in this strike. It's a movement, and no, it's not a thing. That's how I perceive it.

M.'s emotional statement is marked by several contradictions almost as if her descriptions were to unconsciously undermine the opinions she voices. On the one hand, she is clearly against commodification or commercialisation of the movement she participated in building from the beginning. On the other hand, as she discloses in an interview, she just issued a formal proposal to restrict *Strajk Kobiet's* logo (the head). As such, she repeats reasoning known from the previous trademarking cases discussed earlier, namely, that the economic and social value of activism can only be protected and allowed to circulate freely, if 'we' are in charge of managing it. However, compared to *Dziewuchy Dziewuchom* or Greta Thunberg's explanation, M.'s argument touches another register in the discussion about activist 'ownership'. The language she uses may remind us of marriage of local identity and commitment to supporting a football club where the idea of 'work' for the club's badge encapsulates a tender entanglement of one's identity with inequalities of the global history power games and shifts (e.g., Barnes 2023; Gómez-Bantel 2016; Ronald & Jean-Pierre 2019). The commodification of a feminist activist 'badge' reveals a problematic layering of brand and identity. Another similarity to football is the under-defined 'work' for the badge which unifies players with supporters and/or spectators. The activist identity has

<sup>16</sup>'Stasia' is a shorthand for Stanisława and 'Basia' for Barbara. Additionally, 'Stasia' refers to one of recognisable activist figures of the movement.

been forged through 'work for' the logo, the badge, or in M.'s case, 'the head', but the universality of experiences of inequality and emotions behind 'the head', when shared in a neo-liberalised culture transform it into a brand. The movement cannot be 'appropriated or somehow materialised', as M. argues, and, pervasively, it needs to be restricted because it is not or no longer just 'a thing' – a group name or logo – but individual identity developed through collective labour for the movement. The value of economic capital is ingrained in its legacy, virtue carried by the identity of activist and activist organisers who formed the movement. Hence, M. perceives trademarking of the activist logo very personally, as an appropriation of activist organisers, symbolically turning them into slaves of the brand. When she argues that 'you simply cannot materialise neither K. [*her own surname*] nor Stasia from Zgorzelec', M. raises that through commodification of the activist name, activists and activist organisers involved in the movement whose labour built it are also being commodified, turned into property.

However, the right to the movement's identity, in M.'s narrative, can be understood in two ways. On one hand, when she claims that 'anyone else who is active in this strike' can identify with it, M. does not specify exactly how broadly she defines 'anyone' or 'active'. Yet, that line follows her own name and 'Stasia from Zgorzelec', both well-known and prominent figures within *Strajk Kobiet*. It is then plausible to assume that she argues that the movement is or should be in ownership of activist organisers, rather than just followers, protest-attenders. She highlights that she does not shy away from linking her own name with *Strajk Kobiet*. If anything, the decision to identify herself with *Strajk Kobiet* belongs to her, as such association, in the face of conflicts or controversies within the movement, comes with a set of burdens and responsibilities.

On the other hand, in stating that 'it is a movement made up of hundreds of thousands of individual girls', M. proclaims everyone's right to belong and identify with the movement. Following M.'s previous point about 'materialisation' of activists through commodification of 'the head', we might assume that the danger is that through even most sparse participation and affiliation with the movement, everyone may become 'materialised'. This is where the labour of practising feminism shifts from activist involvement to a more 'applied', personal, and often consumer-oriented form of labour. Consequently, political and activist identification is distilled into the act of wearing the 'badge' as a symbolic representation. Hearn (2012:23) wrote that as work and life boundaries become increasingly blurred, issues that are systemic, structural and collective in nature are often reduced to matters of 'personal responsibility' and the construction of the self through self-branding. This reflexive project of the self, or the creation of a distinct 'ME', becomes a form of labour in itself. While M. does not go as far to envisage such implications of commodification of her movement, she clearly understands that as someone who provides socially valuable yet free labour she can be turned

into a product for sale. It is noteworthy that M. as a 'producer' sees her own position as endangered by commodification or as she calls it 'materialisation'. Hence, while women and girls have been argued to gain a dual character as both consumers and products, which markets rely on (e.g., Banet-Weiser 2015), in a context of activism, however, it is worth adding one additional function as producers. That role is certainly a new acquisition to the new, activist stage of contemporary feminist, post-postfeminist culture (Gill, 2016).

Feminist 'badges' with the weight of common experience underlying them become a perfect vehicle for that three-fold function: producers, products and consumers, often reconceptualised as creative reproducers (Jarrett 2015, 2022). 'The head' of *Strajk Kobiet* is evocative of grandness of 'fighting femininity' with a profile head image typically reserved for official portraits of historical importance such as banknotes. While its universal character might and has been disputed because of the Caucasian features of the head as well as traditionally 'feminine' hairstyle narrowing the definition of femininity, the message of 'the head' as putting overlooked femininity on a pedestal and as such an actual badge of pride is easy to grasp. The term '*dziewucha*' [wench] from *Dziewuchy Dziewuchom* has a similar relevance. It connotes a number of traits that go against the grain of traditional gender roles and domestic, obedient femininity. PWN dictionary<sup>17</sup> also highlights a classist aspect of the term, as a derivative from a neutral '*dziewczyna*' [girl], it highlights its roots in a societally stratified perception of rural or lower-class femininity as vulgar, unpolished, crude, promiscuous and heavy-handed in manner. It is the kind of derogative term that would traditionally be used against an unruly girl or teenager, and as such, we can regard it as reclaimed when used in a context of contemporary feminist activism. *Dziewucha* draws on a universal experience of Polish socialisation into womanhood; hence, by adding reciprocal relation between women, *Dziewuchy Dziewuchom* [Gals for Gals] rises against an alienating experience of othering and policing of patriarchal governmentality. The story of *Dziewuchy Dziewuchom* then directly follows 'Girl Power', a radical and feminist slogan originated from an anti-capitalist zine produced by Bikini Kill band, pioneers of the Riot Grrrl subculture of the early 1990s. Its commercial rendition popularised by Spice Girls turned a directly political exclamation to dismantle a system of patriarchal and capitalist exploitation into a power of girls to purchase pop albums and merchandise. However, Zeisler (2016) in her book *We were feminists once: From Riot Grrrl to CoverGirl*<sup>®</sup>, the buying and selling of a political movement also argues that the mainstreaming of feminist ideas and language through Riot Grrrl's commercial success helped to make feminist ideas more accessible and less stigmatised in popular culture. Most importantly, she notes that some Riot Grrrl bands and artists were able to use their commercial success to fund and support feminist and political causes. Therefore, this almost identical activist slogan and trajectory also reminds us that

<sup>17</sup><https://sjp.pwn.pl/sjp/dziewucha;2455875.html> [accessed: 30 May 2024].

even the most commercialised of feminist slogans once played a political role in some social movement.

Finally, it is essential to point to the irony of the phrase, *Dziewuchy Dziewuchom* becoming a bone of contention not just between the group administrators – the ‘inventors’ of the name but also among local activist organisers. The activist name, whose power lies in its universal articulation of solidarity among women and dissent against cultural and legal forms of patriarchal governmentality, became the very reason for a breakdown of such solidarity. In other words, in a neoliberal cycle, feminist badge formed of feminist identity and brand aims at selling ‘unity’ in struggle at the same time reproducing differences that oil up the structures of the struggle. When the sense of ownership over the movement is dispersed, the idea of the movement’s ‘brand’ is paradoxically strengthened because many people can identify with it. Logo, name, slogans or aesthetic identification truly stop belonging to anyone because through participation and identification everyone can own it and use it for both activist and commercial ends, which is exactly the outcome activist organisers feared.

## ‘It’s not just advertising, and it’s not just shopping’: Fundraising and commerce in activism

This section explores the inherently shareable and horizontally produced nature of social movements and their potentially problematic role in commodification of social justice activism. When the second major wave of protests broke at the end of October 2020,<sup>18</sup> the appropriation of activist capital, which used to be an issue of marginal importance in 2016, 2017 and 2018, morphed into a commercial campaign of an unprecedented scale (in a Polish context).

Just a couple of days after the first protests Vogue Poland<sup>19</sup> praised the fashion industry for being vocal in support of the feminist movement. In their short summary, some brands showed support on social media, others started producing fashion items decorated with *Strajk*’s logo, and some decided to financially support *Strajk Kobiet*. Apart from the established brands, smaller commercial initiatives started popping (see Figure 1, Figure 2 and Figure 3). The situation was even noticed by some journalists<sup>20</sup> who condemned the home-grown ‘businessmen’ unethically cashing in on women as ‘the internet became overflowing with *Strajk*’s merchandise’. Instead, the author recommended protestors to ‘donate a couple of quid to one of the women’s organisations and decorate your facemask at home’ rather than ‘giving money to persons who try to make an easy buck on a serious cause’.

18. On 22 October 2020 Constitutional Tribunal issued a ruling banning the most commonly used of the three cases allowing a small number of legal abortions in Poland.

19. <https://www.vogue.pl/a/polskie-marki-wspieraja-strajk-kobiet> [accessed: 30 May 2024].

20. <https://innpoland.pl/162991,gadzet-y-na-strajk-kobiet-sprzedawcy-z-allegro-zweszyl-biznes> [accessed: 30 May 2024].

On 27 October 2020, *Strajk Kobiet* issued the following message as a reaction to the commercial and unverified fundraising campaigns:<sup>21</sup>

DEAR ALL! We are outraged at how many fake fundraisers or other merchandise with our logo is appearing at ridiculous prices. Remember – check who has set up the fundraiser and that it is verified. The #strajkkobiet fundraiser is set up by @martalempart. The money goes to coordinators across the country for protest action. Link: <https://zrzutka.pl/strajkkobiet#strajkkobiet#ThisIsWar>.

On 30 October 2020, [wirtualnemedi.pl](http://wirtualnemedi.pl),<sup>22</sup> a media, advertisement, Internet and public relations (PR) news outlet mentioned that after entering a keyword ‘*strajku kobiet*’ in the search engine of the Allegro<sup>23</sup> platform, the page returns more than 43 000 offers. Despite attempts on the *Strajk Kobiet*’s part as well as the Rights Protection Cooperation programme created by Allegro platform,<sup>24</sup> merchandise featuring logo, name, and direct references to *Strajk Kobiet* continued to be a common sight.<sup>25</sup>

As shared with me in many interviews in 2019, *Strajk*’s activist organisers were just in the process of exploring an option of restricting their own logo and name. *Rada Strajku Kobiet* [Committee of Women’s Strike] had approved these decisions in 2020 and *Strajk Kobiet* opened their own shop in March 2021 as a statutory activity of the foundation.<sup>26</sup> The restricting of the *Strajk*’s signs did not seem to help as the Internet remains full of unverified materials and merchandise directly. Some materials circumvent the restrictions of *Strajk*’s full name and logo, others have simply not been caught.

The outbreak of activist merchandise produced by entities not connected to any of the groups organising the protests and trying to profit from the on-going protests conclude the conversations activist organisers had with me during my research revealing the broken promise of IPR. While all the activist organisers expressed frustration with the commercialisation of activist signs outside of the circle of individuals who contributed their labour to the movement, none of the interviewees questioned the potential effectiveness of trademark restrictions. These, in fact, proved to be mainly of symbolic importance. Among calls to remain vigilant and not trust unverified sellers, *Strajk Kobiet* as the only verified seller of its own merchandise, was levelled up with other traders and entered stormy waters in which it has to compete with them for attention of activists/consumers. That places *Strajk Kobiet* in an

21. <https://www.facebook.com/ogolnopoliskistrajkkobiet/photos/a.4357333040959327/5292201280805827/?type=3> [accessed: 30 May 2024].

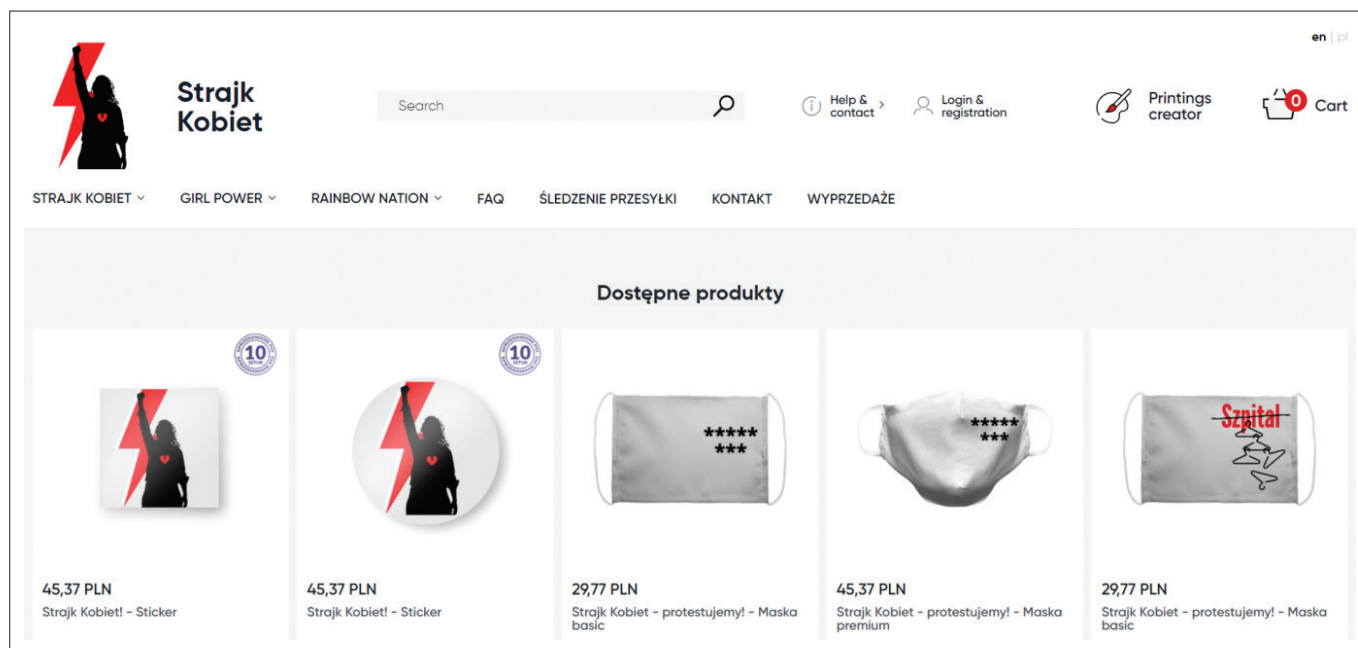
22. <https://www.wirtualnemedi.pl/artykul/ogolnopolski-strajk-kobiet-gadzet-sprzedaz-w-internecie>

23. Allegro.pl is a leading online e-commerce platform functioning in Poland.

24. <https://www.wirtualnemedi.pl/artykul/ogolnopolski-strajk-kobiet-gadzet-sprzedaz-w-internecie>

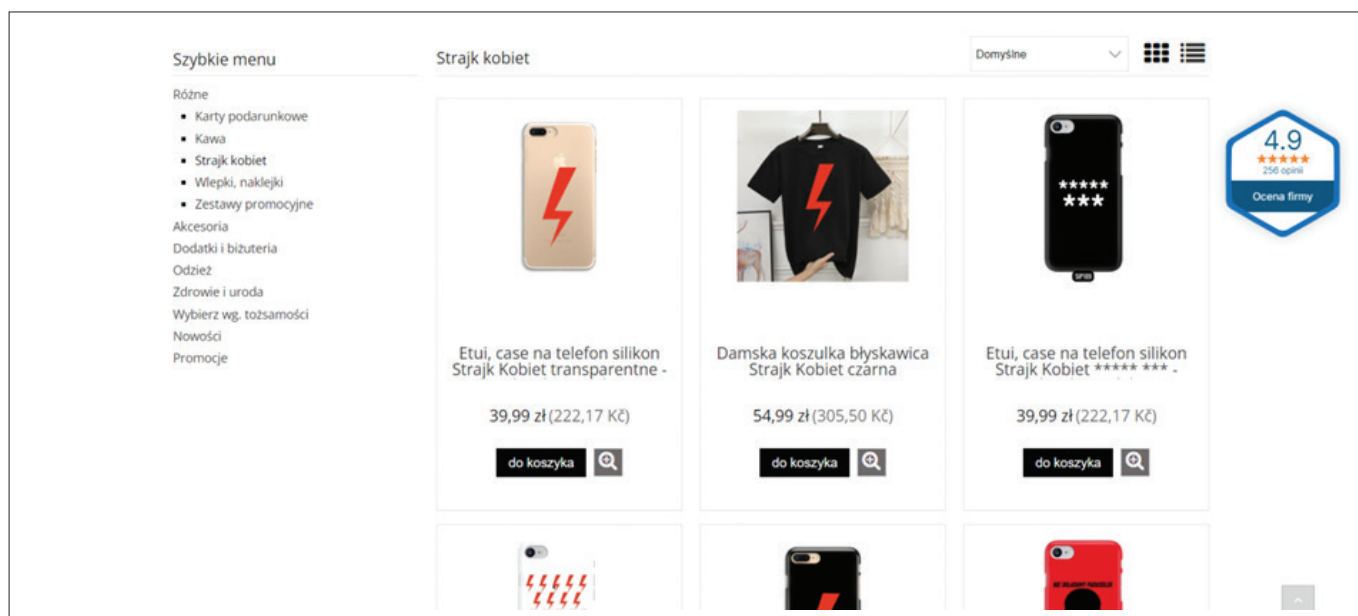
25. As of 05.05.2022 there are 3,146 items marked as ‘Strajk Kobiet’ on Allegro.pl

26. Official social media announcement can be found here: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CMsongTHzkP/?hl=en> [accessed: 30 May 2024].



Source: <https://strajkobiet.sklep.pl/>

FIGURE 1: An example of an unverified merchandise of *Strajk Kobiet*.



Source: <https://teczowysklep.pl/strajk-kobiet>

FIGURE 2: An example of an unverified merchandise of *Strajk Kobiet*.

uncomfortable if not absurd situation in which it has to prove the authenticity of its merchandise and in doing so rely on rhetoric replicating what came to be conceptualised as woke advertising or commodity activism (Feng & Hye Hyun 2024; Moorman 2020; Mukherjee & Banet-Weiser 2012; Sobande; 2019; Vredenburg et al. 2020). Although authenticity and proven commitment to social causes have been recently argued to be positive predictors for corporate and brand reputation (e.g., Mirzaei, Wilkie & Siuki 2022), understandably there has been little research focussed on 'perceived authenticity' of actual activist organisations conducting commercial endeavours to sustain their practice.

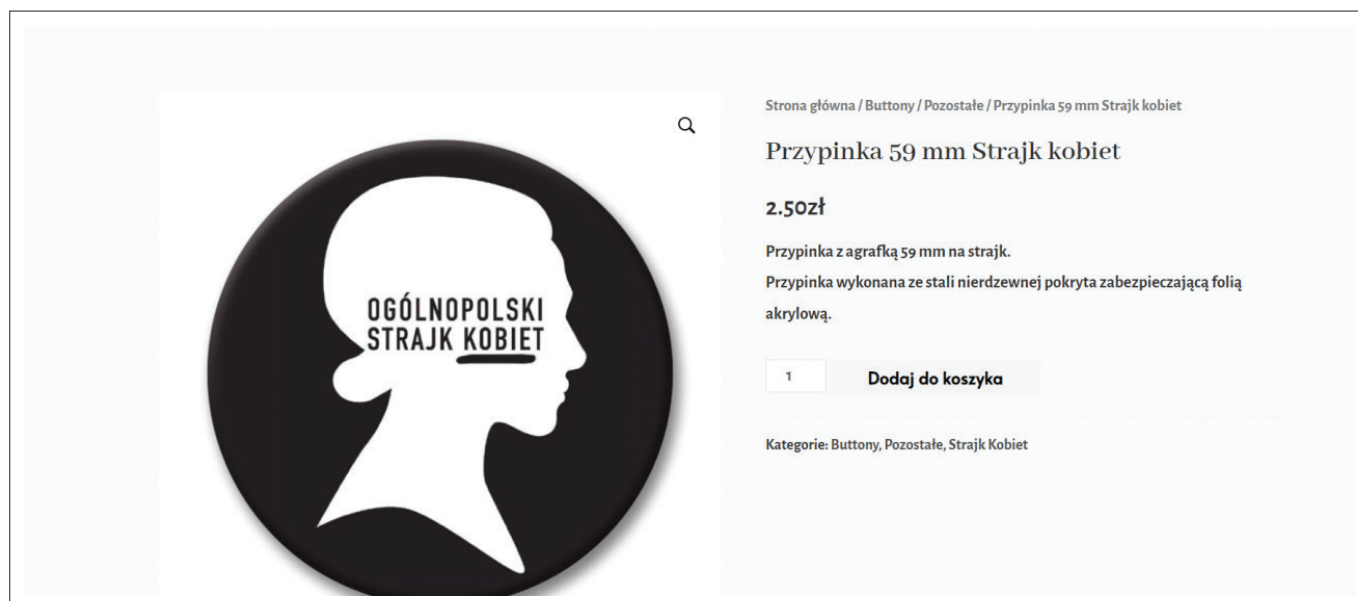
In their commercial activity, *Strajk Kobiet* tries to differentiate themselves from other activist merchandise on sale by referring to their achievements and the values of activist work. On 21 March 2021, in a post officially announcing the opening of the shop *Strajk Kobiet* states:

[...] As far as merchandising is concerned: we have opted for quality and design. If there are no compromises, then there are no compromises – from the 100,000th demonstration to the smallest sticker. It has to have character, it has to be unmissable, relevant to our activities.

[...]

Be recognisable, be a revolution, in action and every day. Buy and get to work. Thunderbolt [*thunder is one of the symbols of the*





Source: <https://przypinki-sklep.pl/produkt/przypinka-59-mm-strajk-kobiet/>

**FIGURE 3:** An example of an unverified merchandise of *Strajk Kobiet*.

*movement*] the tyrants at the top and the fanatics all around until they flee swiftly from the horizon [...]<sup>27</sup>

In just one line, the post collides the value of past achievements of the movement with quality of products on sale, almost seamlessly embedding consumerism in intent and practice of overthrowing the Polish ultra-conservative government. The immaterial value of the merchandise is secured through a two-fold linkage to activist labour: firstly, the labour invested in development of the movement, and secondly and perhaps more importantly, the potential activist labour one can engage in while wearing the T-shirt suggesting that the activism is reduced to simply buying/wearing/appearing in a T shirt.

Given this potential, symbolically everyone can be part of the movement and support it in ways that do not require the investment of activist, non-consumer labour. The existence of activist potential is key as it secures authenticity of the products and consequently authenticity of activist identity of buyers. Therefore, we might note a paradox of *Strajk Kobiet's* promotional posts – the more they try to stray away from the consumerist, commercial character of their practice and present their activist oeuvre as convincingly authentic, the more consumerist and commercial their practice becomes to look. In a Facebook post on the shop's official fan page<sup>28</sup> from 04 September 2022 we can read:

This is not just advertising, and this is not just shopping.

<https://allegro.pl/uzytkownik/OSKSklep>

We invite you to support the actions of the All-Poland Women's Strike

27. Official social media announcement can be found here: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CMsongTHzkP/?hl=en> [accessed: 30 May 2024].

28. By the time this journal was published, the unverified website [Strajkkobiet.sklep.pl](https://strajkkobiet.sklep.pl) had been taken down and is no longer accessible. However, traces of its existence can still be found on its Facebook profile, which has been inactive since 2022: <https://www.facebook.com/strajkkobiet.sklep>.

We fight for the right to legal, safe, free abortion, for easy access to emergency contraception, prenatal testing and in vitro reimbursement. We fight for sex and equality education in schools. We support people who experience domestic violence. We help harassed women and activists.

We rescue refugees.

T-shirts, bags, caps, umbrellas, badges and other gadgets – they're just gadgets. Worn on a daily basis they become an important signal to the world, given to a loved one – a gesture with a valuable message, put away in a wardrobe – a historical memento that acquires more power every day of our common struggle for freedoms

Through the use of transparency and undermining the material, consumer character of the merchandise ('they are just gadgets'), the post seems to convince consumers that they are activists, whereas the opposite might be argued to be true. After all, the fan page of *Strajk Kobiet's* shop (with only 1522 followers<sup>29</sup>) as a side-practice of the non-commercial social movement remains an unpopular social media site with following of activists, rather than consumers. The employment of the evocative 'we' as consumers and activists, producers and products become equalised under one 'brand'/identity is then entirely contextual. It is worth noting that social media posts containing same or similar activist messaging without a commercial attachment of a link to Allegro would read as simply authentic and not trying to emulate a commercial frame of woke authenticity.

The advertising language persuading consumers to join 'the movement', although in an entirely different context, is also employed by the unverified commercial practices. On no longer functioning website, [strajkkobiet.sklep.pl](https://strajkkobiet.sklep.pl), among various materials (T-shirts, sweatshirts, mugs, facemasks etc.) featuring slogans and signs directly relating to the

29. Checked on 05 May 2023.

history of the movement's feminist and pro-democratic campaigns, there is an additional category of products labelled as (see Figure 4). This category consists of products employing the globally recognisable post-feminist 'classics' in English such as 'feminist as fuck', 'girl power' or 'woman up'. Being part of 'the movement' in this case should be read in the ironically broad way as activism being considered the latest fashion, something to wear and own.

In 'about us' Strajkkobiet.sklep.pl are honest by disclosing that:

[F]irstly, we are not an official partner of the Women's Strike. The shop is purely our initiative and our desire to show that we do not agree with what is happening in Poland. Secondly, we are not creating a charity.

At the same time, they place their commercial practice in a context of current cultural and political changes, female empowerment and productivity, by stating 'We are witnessing a real revolution of women! [...] Remember, together we can do anything!'

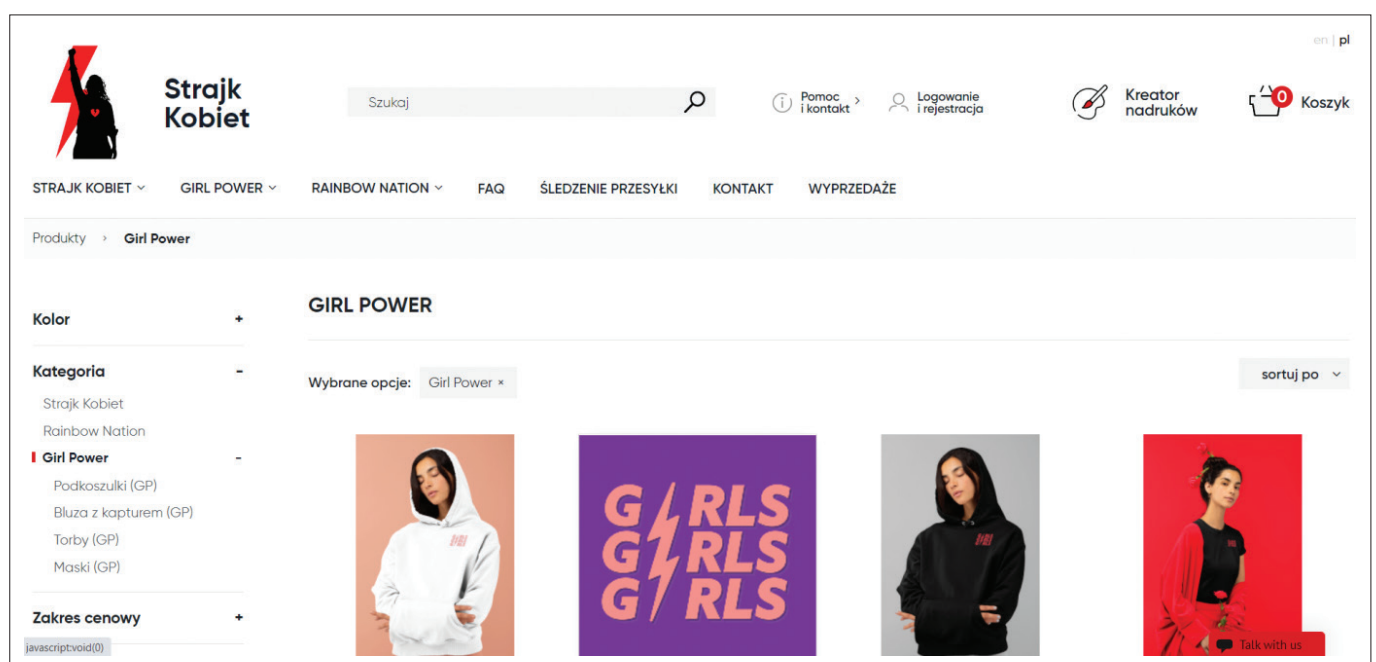
Not unlike the posts on *Strajk Kobiet's* official social media profiles, the unverified Strajkkobiet.sklep.pl bridges the commercial and activist functions in their narrative, portraying themselves as both spectators and actors of the protests. Being active, however, is drawn very vaguely as one's ability to get 'anything' done, merging individualistic discourse of 'empowerment' and with productivity of free domestic and activist labour.

Most of all, the dual function of consumers as spectators of social change and actors in their own lives shifts meaning of activist merchandise from a material representation of one's activist identity to being, as Leiss and Botterill (2018:366) call

it: '[...] mere props in the construction of fluid lifescrpts'. They argue that from the 1990s, the on-going cultural frame of products is them being the *mise en scène* of consumer life as 'consumers write their own scripts of being green, compassionate, and/or politically progressive' (Leiss and Botterill 2018:369). While the identity of consumers took a backseat in this article's explorations of the commercialisation of activist organising, which turns activist organisers' identity into a sharable and profitable brand, Leiss and Botterill (2018:306) accentuate consumers' role as 'the "directors" of the scenes' encouraged to 'regard themselves as the true artisans of meaning-creation'. Banet-Weiser (2018) makes a similar point when she writes that:

[E]conomies of visibility fundamentally shift politics of visibility so that visibility becomes the end rather than a means to an end. [...] For example, wearing a T-shirt that says 'This is What a Feminist Looks Like' transmutes the political logic of what it means to be a feminist, as a political subjectivity invested in challenging gender inequalities, into what a feminist looks like, her visual representation [*even if the person wearing the T-shirt practices feminist politics*]. The T-shirt is the politics; the politics are contained within the visibility- visual representation becomes the beginning and the end of political action. (p. 23)

The problem with the conceptualisations of activist expressions under the umbrella of woke capitalism is that the subject of their critique is corporate and commercial entities rather than grassroots activist ones. When Banet-Weiser argues that commodities are 'beginning and the end of political action', she refers to a context in which feminism or activism in general, is a popular *mise en scène* of contemporary life. In short, it is a reality in which large brands openly print 'feminist' slogans borrowed from an indistinguishable pool of social movement references on T-shirts, while actual activist groups and transformative political activism are



Source: <https://strajkkobiet.sklep.pl/>

FIGURE 4: 'Girl Power' category of activist merchandise on unverified website Strajkkobiet.sklep.pl/.

excluded from academic analysis, as if they do not exist. Feminism and other activism are referred to as either empty performances, which at times accidentally turn 'political', or painful 'tag-alongs' of for corporate interests. In liaisons of neoliberalism and social movements, the social movement claims are the borrowed elements, as 'diversity is being appropriated, accommodated and transformed' (Van Tine 2021:220–221) while 'the capitalist market economy in which it [*woke capitalism*] thrives, is maintained' (Rhodes 2021:180).

What remains ever missing is a perspective in which not the political and social causes promoted by social movements are the 'add-ons', but the neoliberal order with its woke capitalism are 'tag-alongs' to an activist practice. While it is important to acknowledge the hegemony of capitalism in how it alters in reductive ways every trace of diversity, it is following its own logic to present it as the only existing actor. Therefore, Kanai and Gill (2020) ask if there is more for us to understand from woke capitalism than just an incorporation, recuperation and commodification of left-wing identity politics. In the context of this article, the answer would be to look beyond feminist activism as 'identity politics' to notice its incremental and transformative potential in changing material realities through articulation of activist labour and disappointment in how it tends to be appropriated. Although it may be tempting to conclude that the commodification of the movement, exemplified by Strajk Kobiet starting its own shop, further contributes to the neoliberal underpinnings of feminist popularity, the reality is more complex. This phenomenon of trademark restriction within social movements could be seen as a manifestation of Banet-Weiser's argument about the replacement of politics of visibility with an economy of visibility. It is important to note that the feminist politics of this movement did not originate from an economy of feminist visibility. Contrary to the expectations of my interviewees in 2019, the merchandise available in the shop did not contribute significantly to the movement's development and diversification. By 2020, the movement had already established itself as a powerful force for activism and civic engagement in Polish politics. The current unavailability of items in the shop suggests that the commercial element is of secondary importance. Within the well-established framework of the movement, its impact is not primarily measured by its commercial success, but rather by its ability to effect change and mobilise resources.

The high-profile trademark overturn cases serve as a significant mechanism against exploitation. While these cases may not always halt the economy of such merchandise, they carry a powerful symbolic message. Ultimately, this articulation challenges the system's authority and demonstrates the limited benefits it provides to those whose rights are continuously violated. It prompts a re-evaluation of how activism is co-opted and reappropriated. It signifies the need to resist the commodification of dissent and the sharing of ideas, which often fall prey to capitalist forces. Challenging the appropriation of activist labour is important

not because it reframes it as labour of productive value rather than reproductive – that happens without activists' involvement anyway. It matters because it sets a limit sign on extraction of collective practice. It reaffirms ethical boundaries and underscores the importance of recognising the worth of activist efforts. At the same time, this opposition to the commodification of activism rests on various aspects of the juridification of activism, within which intellectual property laws and trademarking, as discussed in this article, are only a small part. The articulation of activist ideas through a liberal imagination and neoliberal commercial practices risks co-opting the political and cultural potency of social movements for the economic system, thereby undermining the potential of radical imagination to fundamentally alter these systems.

While it would be advisable to produce a set of concrete recommendations for social movements and individual activists based on the lessons learned, this task proves difficult in a socio-political environment permeated by neoliberal values and media platforms. The greater the popularity and resonance of activist ideas, the greater the threat of their commodification, which can turn the aesthetics and articulation of social movement goals into trademarks. Changing this dynamic would require a holistic and conscious approach to revising activist politics and practices, which may not always be possible, feasible or even desirable for social movements. Developing an organisational culture that consciously and systematically undermines both IPR regimes and the broader juridification of culture and activism is essential. Investing in alternative media practices and developing spaces outside the mainstream digital platforms could help reclaim some of the practices of brand authenticity to serve the movement. This can include self-referentially mocking the commercial environment through brand jamming. Most importantly, however, activists should cultivate a patient and observant culture that vigilantly monitors and reacts to changes and dynamics that shape an organisation or group as it grows and becomes subject to commercialisation, professionalisation, and NGO-isation.

Certainly, relying on employing trademarking is not radical and impactful enough. Using the very solutions offered by the property system to highlight its flaws sounds like using of the master's tools, or one of those ideas Rinaldo Walcott (2021:99) in his powerful work on property and abolition, calls out as 'broadening our horizons while slowing down real change'. However, he also argues that the difference between acts of defiance and inclusion in the system is 'the desires underlying the invocation' Walcott (2021:102). Building a counter-narrative and resisting exploitation is a complex and ongoing process. Although resorting to legal mechanisms may appear misguided, unveiling power as transient and grounded in the illusion of an all-powerful, digitally interconnected network can be an act of defiance. In a landscape where even initiatives designed to promote the unrestricted exchange of dissenting ideas are subjected to

commodification, it becomes crucial to articulate the appropriation of labour, emotions and dissenting voices.

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K.S. is the sole author of this research article.

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### Data availability

The data that support the findings of this study were collected through qualitative methods and are not publicly available because of privacy and ethical restrictions. The data are held by the author and may be available from the corresponding author, K.S., upon reasonable request and with permission from the participants involved in the study.

### Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and are the product of professional research. The article does not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated institution, funder, agency or that of the publisher. The author is responsible for this article's results, findings and content.

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