

Hate Speech Directed at Spanish Female Actors: Penélope Cruz—A Case Study

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Abstract

Penélope Cruz is one of the most internationally acclaimed Spanish performers. However, despite her successful career, she is also one of the celebrities subject to most controversy on social media and the most frequent target of hate speech. Although she does not manage her own profile on X (previously Twitter), her name and criticism of her are constant on this platform. The objective of this study is to detect possible hate speech, as well as to categorise it by its intensity and typology. The study analyses the unrestricted comments on X containing the name Penélope Cruz posted during the period between January and June 2023. The methodology utilised is that of quantitative and qualitative content analysis of the comments registered ($N = 6,620$). One of the chief results is the fact that the majority of the comments classified as hate speech refer to ideological issues (70.9%) and/or are misogynistic (8.9%), among which are the specific allusions to her acting skills and her physical characteristics. The results coincide with other studies in which hate messages directed at actresses are related to their physical appearance. However, they differ in that in this case the main type of hatred is not misogyny, but ideological hatred. The actor is not only accused of being a “communist” and a “hypocrite” for her lifestyle, but also for having used her body to succeed in her profession. Both her physique and intellectual capacity are also subject to hate speech. Most of these messages are based on conjecture, prejudice, and stereotypes.

Keywords

hate speech; ideological hatred; misogyny; Penélope Cruz; sexism; Spanish cinema; Twitter

1. Introduction

The bias of sexual objectification and reductionism towards a merely objectual perspective has taken root in the feminine conception of the acting profession. The association between acting and prostitution is not a new phenomenon since actors have long been related to a dissolute lifestyle. The equating of acting and prostitution has become so common that a phrase has been coined: “What mother, however dishonest she may be, would not rather see her daughter in the grave than in the theatre or on stage” (Garcías, 1998, p. 39).

This vision has been transferred to social media, where actresses are frequently the subject of comments in physical terms, judging their appearance, their clothing, and even their normativity based on their matching up to the traditional feminine ideal. In contrast to the notion of masculinity, a clear distinction is made between what it means and implies to be a woman. Sexist language, also observed on these platforms, highlights the social differences between sexes and establishes the way in which the construction of gender is materialised: The presence of sexism at the linguistic level did not seem to be a priority in the fight for respect for women’s rights. However, over the last decade, due to social movements that seek to revindicate women’s position in society, questions have arisen concerning different areas where they have been discriminated against, abused, and ostracized. Language is one of those spaces, through which the reality of the speakers is manifested where discrimination, stereotypes, and gender violence clearly prevail, and therefore it was decided to term this issue “linguistic sexism” (Corse et al., 2014, p. 141).

An example of the use of this type of language on social media is found in Spain during the 2021 Goya Awards ceremony. During the gala, despite the limitations imposed by the pandemic, a television presenter recorded a colleague’s sexist comments (neither his identity nor his profession were disclosed), a colleague who not only defended his right to judge and classify female actors by their appearance, but also criticized their morality when referring to one of them as a prostitute. The response was immediate and actresses like Letizia Dolera expressed their discontent on social media with the idea that a woman was a prostitute solely for wishing to act: “And once again, blurting out ‘whore’” (Riaño, 2021). However, there were no further repercussions and only TVE (the Spanish public broadcaster) issued a statement disassociating itself from the comments. Appearing on the program *Hora 25*, the journalist and screenwriter Eduardo Galán affirmed that social media treat men and women differently, which is a reality: “While they insult me by talking about how ‘dumb’ I am, they insult my wife, Marta Flich, by saying she’s a ‘whore.’ And this always happens. There you can see the machismo on social media” (Bretos, 2023).

Beyond gender issues, expressions of hatred towards audiovisual professions in Spain are mainly due to ideological factors. Film workers, particularly actors, are criticised due to a belief that they are affiliated to a certain political faction, which influences the conceptualisation of their work in certain areas. It is evident that not all actors share progressive positions; however, the prevailing national mentality considers them members of left-wing parties. In fact, one of the topics that generates the greatest contempt on social media is when an actor reveals his or her ideology:

There is a question that goes further and provides a lot of information about what these characters are like and what they really think: Who do they vote for?...Voting is secret and, like everything unknown, excites curiosity. In many cases, people in the public eye try to conceal their ideology. The main reasons for this may be to avoid being judged or not wanting to influence others with their ideas. (Yaben, 2021)

Although it is commonly believed that the world of cinema leans to the political left, there are many artists who have expressed their support for other groupings, such as actors and comedians related with Vox, or presenters and actors who support PP (People's Party). In recent times, there have been a large number of artists who have taken on a political role in the public sphere, including actors in UPyD (Union, Progress and Democracy), and presenters in *Compromís* or *Ciudadanos* (Campos, 2016)—although Spain is marked by a two-party system between PSOE (Spanish Socialist Workers' Party—progressives) and PP (liberals), it also has a wide political spectrum that includes national and regional parties. Among them, there are far-right (Vox), liberal (*Ciudadanos*), centre (UPyD), and left-wing regional groups (*Compromís*).

Although many actors have felt the need to express their disagreement with politics interfering in the artistic life of performers, the preconceived idea still prevails: "Culture should be outside of political comings and goings, it needs freedom and independence to develop itself, it is essential that we can talk about an autonomous culture" (Campos, 2016).

The conceptualisation of big screen actors as subversive "puppeteers" is one of the most obvious examples of the ideologization of the profession. The term is used to refer to actors in a derogatory and insulting way. As the actor Rosana Pastor mentions, "We are all tired of reading about 'the puppeteers or comedians' with a highly pejorative tone" (Campos, 2016). The fact of receiving subsidies has also been used against the film sector. In reality, most industries in Spain receive subsidies from the government. These include the automotive, mining, insurance, electrical, food, and construction industries (Gabinete de Estudios Económicos de Axesor, 2013). Even political parties receive funding. Such terms as "subsidised," "puppeteers," or "reds" have persisted in anti-cinema discourse in Spain over the decades, despite the fact that countries like France allocate six times more funds to their film industry and Italy offers greater tax incentives to theirs (Álvarez, 2020).

Despite the frequency with which these and other terms are used to generate hate speech against actors and actresses on social media, the academic world has shown little interest in their study. Sexism has been identified as a problem in video games, blogs, online forums, and social media (Fox & Tang, 2015; Marwick, 2013; Pedersen & Macafee, 2007; Penny, 2014; Shaw, 2014), but not towards actresses.

Women as targets of hate speech have been the subject of numerous studies. However, some female authors argue that production of research in this area is scarce, possibly due to the somewhat limited definition of hate speech in Europe (Kopytowska & Baider, 2017). Hanash (2018) compared cyberbullying of women to the witch hunts of the 16th and 17th centuries. This case study concludes that self-censorship is one of the consequences of the cyberbullying of women. Others have investigated the causes of online misogyny. The two main components that contribute to the disinhibition of sexist attacks on the internet are anonymity and the virtualisation of relationships (Fox et al., 2015; Lapidot-Lefler & Barak, 2012).

Much of the research on social media hatred toward women is based on automation. This is common in research into hate speech and misogyny (Burnap et al., 2015; Escalante et al., 2017; Fersini et al., 2018; Justo et al., 2014; Nobata et al., 2016). Some recognise that tools of this type are insufficient due to factors largely related to language and lack of context (Frenda et al., 2019; Sood et al., 2012). Even rarer are studies focused on the hate targeted at female celebrities. Some research has focused on the case of the most important influencers in Spain (Martínez-Valerio & Mayagoitia-Soria, 2021). The researchers conclude that these individuals with their millions of followers have chosen to self-censor the content they create in order

to stop receiving hate messages. Most of such messages were related to their ideology or physical appearance. There are some case studies from other countries of women involved in films. Harassment campaigns orchestrated from social media against actresses such as the American Leslie Jones (Brojakowski & Cruz, 2022) or the Indian Parvathy (Karthika, 2022) have been studied, while others have analysed the messages that the actor, screenwriter, and director Lena Dunham receives for displaying her body and her illness on Instagram (Ghaffari, 2020). All three received misogynistic messages; Jones also received racist comments, and Dunham was subject to attacks regarding her body.

As can be seen, in general terms, hate speech is a type of language that aims to be harmful (Davidson et al., 2017) and constitutes a deliberate, voluntary, and detrimental attack against identity and human dignity. Its offensive and/or obscene discourse motivates potentially damaging activities and could also lead to illegal actions such as defamation or fraud (Lamson et al., 2022). This speech diminishes the quality of democracy, spreading prejudice and intolerance (Said-Hung et al., 2023). Anonymity, mass communication, and the use of false identities on social networks are key factors that allow the rise of illicit behaviour, discriminatory comments, and increasing verbal violence against women (Terrón, 2020). The social networks sphere is used for verbalizing sexual insinuations, insults, or ridicule expressions led by profiles (mostly male) that amplify gender inequalities by reproducing stereotypes and spreading misinformation, disinformation, and hate speech against women (Tarullo et al., 2024).

1.1. Objectives

The general objective of this study is to explore the presence of hate speech directed against the actor Penélope Cruz on the X platform (formerly Twitter). As specific objectives, the work proposes to:

- Detect hate speech that contains the words “Penélope Cruz.”
- Classify the hate speech detected based on the level of hate and its typology.
- Study the content of the hate messages directed against the actor.

2. Methodology

The research works with the case study of the actor Penélope Cruz through the empirical content analysis of the posts that contain her name on the X social media platform. The selection of Penélope Cruz as a case study is due, on the one hand, to the fact that public figures, such as politicians (Piñeiro-Otero & Martínez-Rolán, 2021; Sánchez-Meza et al., 2023; Zamora-Martínez et al., 2024), actors (Karthika, 2022; Piñeiro-Otero & Martínez-Rolán, 2021), content creators (Martínez-Valerio & Mayagoitia-Soria, 2021), etc., are often common targets of hate messages on social media. On the other hand, previous studies indicate that this particular actor stands out as a target of hate messages within the Spanish film industry (Martínez-Valerio & Tello-Díaz, 2024). Furthermore, Penélope Cruz is the most internationally recognized Spanish actor. She is a renowned pioneer in Hollywood (Mao, 2019), being the first Spanish woman who won the Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress (2010). Cruz has received all the European film awards (the BAFTA Award, the Donostia Award, the Best Female Performance Award at the Cannes Film Festival, the David de Donatello Award, the Cesar Award, and the Volpi Cup), and has also achieved the Spanish Gold Medal for Merit in Fine Arts and has been nominated for the Golden Globe Awards and the European Film Awards more than five times. However, she is also known for her commitment and closeness to progressive policies, which has implied some conflicts

with Spanish media (Fernández, 2012). This is a key factor for choosing the actor as representative of hate speech in social networks.

The messages analysed can originate from various parts of the world and are not limited to Spanish users. The period of analysis consists of the first half of 2023 (January–June), months during which the most important film awards ceremonies for this case study take place (Goyas, Oscars, and the Italian David awards), as well as other notable events attended by the actor (the Met Gala). The final sample included an analysis of the comments generated in Spanish by all X users during the period explained above using the keywords “Penelope Cruz” ($N = 6,620$). Quantitative content analysis was chosen, said technique allowing for the objective and systematic study of the content of the tweets (X posts) analysed (Igartua, 2006; Piñuel, 2002), following the compilation of information by automatic download of the comments using the Export Comments tool.

The choice of X as the social media platform for the study is due to several factors. It is a social medium on which the influence of micronarratives has increased significantly since its inception and on which users follow current events (García-de-Torres et al., 2011). Moreover, not only has the capacity of the media to disseminate content increased, but also their ability to perform journalistic tasks. Furthermore, compared to other social media such as Facebook, it has more active user participation (Aruguete, 2015; Mayo-Cubero, 2019). Finally, it is one of the social media with the greatest presence of users linked to both traditional and digital media in Europe (S. González & Ramos, 2013).

Labelling was carried out separately by the two authors, coinciding in 97.7% of cases. Based on this process, the content was labelled into the following categories:

- Presence or absence of expressions of hate.
- Type of hate detected based on the vulnerable groups targeted by hate speech (González-Aguilar et al., 2023): religious, xenophobic, racist, misogynistic, sexual, ideological, and other.
- Level of intensity of hatred observed on a scale from 0 to 5 following the proposal of De Lucas et al. (2022):
 - Level 0: Messages that use expressions with socially negative connotations. There is no clear incitement to hatred, but it may be a first step toward encouraging it. E.g., “extreme left” or “fascist.”
 - Level 1: Messages in which there is no verbal violence, but something is presented factually in order to stigmatise a specific social group.
 - Level 2: Messages containing abusive expressions without being insulting; however, they clearly attribute actions with the intention of spreading a negative image. E.g., “young immigrants commit crimes.”
 - Level 3: Messages with overt verbal violence. E.g., “femi-nazi,” “fascist,” “moron.”
 - Level 4: Messages with veiled or implicit threats. E.g., “I’d better not run into one of those puppeteers on the street...”
 - Level 5: Messages that include a call for physical violence or that express a desire for another to die or suffer physical harm. E.g., “I hope Covid wipes out all those good-for-nothing actors.”
- Presence of a humorous tone within the messages containing expressions of hatred.

3. Results

Of the 6,620 tweets analysed, 213 were classified as hate speech. That is 3.2% of the total. The majority of them, 70.9%, have been categorised as hate speech for ideological reasons. The second most common type is Other, 18.8% of the total. As will be seen later in the qualitative analysis, these messages are mainly related to her performances as an actor. Next are misogynistic messages, 8.9%. Only three racist messages were found (0.9%). No messages were found that could be categorised as religious hatred, xenophobia, or discrimination against a sexual orientation (Figure 1).

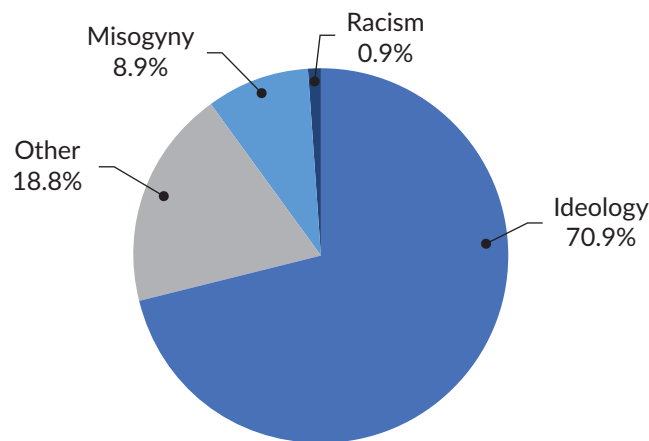


Figure 1. Categories found within hate speech.

3.1. Hate Speech Based on Ideology

The labelling of ideological messages showed that over half of the tweets are at level 0, which means content with socially negative connotations (74 tweets, 54.41%). There is also a significant portion corresponding to level 1 (62 tweets, 45.5%), in which the actor and part of her family are presented in a stigmatising way. Likewise, a single tweet (0.7%) reaches level 2, that is, it tries to spread a negative image of her and her family, as well as two tweets (1.4%) reaching level 3 (tweets with overt verbal violence) as broken down below. Humour is only observed in tweets in 8.08% of cases (11 messages).

Regarding the tweets' impact, the vast majority of them (91.4%) have fewer than 10 retweets, including the five most intense messages (those ranging from 2 to 4); 5.9% of the tweets had between 10 and 100 retweets; and 2.6% have between 981 and 2,969. The figures are similar in the number of comments, since 94% of the tweets analysed got fewer than 10 comments. Also, among them are the tweets with the most intense hatred: 3.3% have between 10 and 100 comments and 2.6% between 199 and 650 comments. These last four tweets coincide with the most retweeted.

3.1.1. Political Positioning

The core of the criticism towards Penélope Cruz on social media focuses on her political positioning (136 tweets), something that is constantly criticised through ideologically tinged messages. A large number of tweets in this category criticise areas as diverse as her political affiliation (71 tweets), her participation in an advertising campaign for the airline Fly Emirates (42 tweets), the choice of the hospital where she gave

birth (39 tweets), her friendship with Pedro Almodóvar and the subsidies for Spanish cinema (27 tweets), or her position on international politics (11 tweets). All of this, apparently disparate, is integrated into a generalised criticism of her explicit adherence to progressive actions, substantiated by her support for the LGBTBI community, defence of public healthcare, or opposition to the violence of the Iranian regime; as well as the continuous recrimination by certain sectors of the X community of actions they consider to be incoherent. Such criticism supposes a mix of animosity towards her personally, and towards Spanish cinema in general, as happens with tweets about subsidies and production. This criticism assumes a moderate tone (“Do Penélope Cruz or Almodóvar share the millions we pay for their films with our taxes?”) but is sometimes also hostile (“How ridiculous the woman is! Penélope Cruz and Javier Bardem. That scum only knows how to make money from the nobodies who go to see their mediocre, subsidised films. Penélope Cruz has no morals!”).

Another aspect of hate speech towards the actor is determined by the widespread assumption that she supports communist ideology. There are frequent tweets such as: “Javier Bardem is a communist and so is Penélope Cruz. They didn’t win the Oscar for being good actors, but because the Academy is infested with communists: the downfall of the United States”; “For mental health reasons, I’ve gone years without seeing anything with the shitty communists the Bardems and Penélope Cruz”; “I refuse to watch any Bardem or Penélope Cruz movies. Bargain-basement commies”; “Penelope Cruz from Alcobendas? Or is she a communist? Well, it’s all the same. A commie from Santa Barbara, LA.” This animosity stems from the idea of hypocrisy that some X users have of the Penélope Cruz who has such an apparent ideology and lives in the world of cinema, this being one of the commonest criticisms: “Like Bardem and Penélope Cruz who live in Calcutta in Mother Teresa’s hospice helping selflessly, right? No. But long live the farce.” As can be seen, this last tweet is highly ironic, despite which, its level of aggression is not tempered, but rather, even more evident. This is a constant in all the tweets with a certain degree of humour: “Of course, Javier Bardem and Penélope Cruz live in a slum, right? Yeah, the mask is slipping.”

3.1.2. Public Healthcare and Cedars-Sinai Medical Center

The actor and her husband, Javier Bardem, became parents with the birth of their first child in January 2011, the birth taking place in the Cedars-Sinai Medical Center private clinic in Los Angeles. This centre, founded by Jews, is frequently confused by X users with the Mount Sinai Hospital in Manhattan, founded by the New York Jewish community. X users reported the birth, criticising the actor for defending public healthcare when she herself has chosen a private hospital to give birth. It is worth mentioning that both actors, working in Hollywood studios, “belong by law to the union and their insurance covers medical expenses one hundred percent” (R. González, 2011).

Criticism also points to the hospital where she gave birth to her second child, the Ruber International Clinic in Madrid; the majority of tweets criticising the actor and her husband on this particular point are especially polarised in two senses: firstly, because both actors defend Spanish public healthcare, and, secondly, because the American hospital is Jewish-funded, something that also exacerbates anti-Semitic comments: “Penelope Cruz and her husband? The woman who gave birth at Mount Sinai, private, Jewish and in the United States.” Other tweets hammer away about this: “Penelope Cruz closed a whole floor at Mount Sinai to give birth at ease. Follow her for more posh-progressiveness”; “Almodóvar, Bardem, Luis Tosar, Penélope Cruz...and 85% of left-wing officials and politicians, who choose private healthcare”; “I guess Javier Barden will go to the

demonstration, Mount Sinai Hospital, €2,500 a day, where Penélope Cruz gave birth”; or “This socialist who rented an entire floor of a private hospital so that his wife could have her baby (Penélope Cruz) and they live in the US, where they don’t pay for the public healthcare that they defend.”

The criticism is extended to the 2023 Goyas’ Gala, where the importance of public healthcare was revindicated, despite the fact that the private company Quirón Salud Sevilla was the official medical service of the awards. That fact forced the organisation itself to justify the hiring of two ambulances, since “in such a long a ceremony, public healthcare personnel could not be used” (Salinas, 2023), although its impact also affected Penélope Cruz, this being clear in tweets with a patently ironic air: “Thank you for this gala with so many calls for public healthcare. Our protest event has been sponsored by Salud Quirón, Ruber Internacional, Mount Sinai Hospital, Pedro Almodóvar and Penélope Cruz.”

3.1.3. Iran and the Fly Emirates Controversy

Another of the axes of ideological criticism of Penélope Cruz is due to the actor’s participation in an advertising campaign for the Qatari airline Fly Emirates. The ads, directed by Robert Stromberg and produced by Ridley Scott Associates, feature Penélope Cruz as the face and ambassador of the airline (Fly Emirates, 2023). This collaboration led to considerable ideological criticism, due to the supposed incoherence of her position: “Penélope Cruz is very outspoken about feminism and is now an ambassador for Fly Emirates. Our social elites are so obscenely hypocritical that only a masterpiece of social engineering explains why there are no massive torchlit marches.”

Qatar’s human rights policies, especially with regard to women’s rights and the LGTBI community, are a constant in the tweets directed at the actor on this matter: “For those who are still dazzled by Spain’s progressive artistry, Penélope Cruz advertises Emirates airlines. She’s so feminist, so LGTBI, so communist. They are all just fakes”; “Fuck the communists of the new false neo-left. How shameless they are, they’re pitiful, all for the money”; “How much do you think they paid Penélope Cruz to make that advert?”; “She and her husband are communists, they curse capitalism, they call big businessmen like Ortega exploiters, but when push comes to shove, they don’t put anything they preach into practice.”

The actor is also criticised for speaking out against climate change, while she advertises one of the most polluting modes of transport:

This lady, who boasts of being progressive, is just another elite opportunist. Those who abhor the extreme right like Penélope Cruz does, but then advertise Qatar airlines. And the poor can’t even drive a delivery van because they emit CO2. Another “storming of the Bastille”!

This advertisement was also the occasion to rekindle another controversy involving the actor, who appeared in a video broadcast on social media in October 2022 cutting a lock of her hair to condemn the killing of Mahsa Amini, the young Kurdish woman arrested for wearing her hijab incorrectly and killed in police custody (Sahuquillo, 2022). Although the video featured 70 other Spanish and French artists (“Protestas en Irán,” 2022), only Penélope Cruz became the target of criticism for the amount of hair cut from her fringe, becoming a meme for her gesture of solidarity (“Penélope Cruz se convierte en un meme,” 2022). This was highlighted in May 2023 in numerous messages pointing to the inconsistency of supporting Qatar, while

criticising Iran. A large portion of them take a clearly humorous tone, which does not detract from their scathing criticism: “Penélope Cruz, who cut her fringe in solidarity with women who suffer repression in the Middle East, is now the new image of Emirates Airlines”; “One day Penelope Cruz is cutting her bangs in ‘solidarity’ with Iranian women, and the next she’s an Islamic religious police officer, screaming at you because you’re revealing some flesh”; and even “Penelope Cruz has agreed to cut off some fringe each time the ad is broadcast.” The criticism becomes denigrating when it moves into religious matters, especially antisemitic: “Waiting for Penélope Cruz to fix her fringe again....Ah, no...the whole of post-progressive showbiz is on all fours offering its ass to Zionism.” And even topics unrelated to the Fly Emirates issue slide into antisemitism when talking about the couple: “They did the same thing to Penélope Cruz and Javier Bardem, when they mentioned the invasion of Palestine, the owners of Hollywood, from the self-chosen people, made them retract or their careers were over.”

3.2. Misogynistic Hate Speech

The labelling of tweets with misogynistic content (40 tweets) follows the trend of ideological content, with 18.4% of the messages located at level 0 (socially negative connotations), followed by 17 tweets (42%) corresponding to level 1 (hate speech that stigmatises the actor); four tweets (10%) reach level 2 (abusive expressions) and one (2.5%) even reaches level 4 (hate speech with veiled or implicit threats), which, given the nature of this section, implies a considerable degree of risk to the actor. That is, 55% of misogynistic tweets have stigmatising, abusive, or threatening content. It should be added that all of the inappropriate tweets are posted by male profiles (as they show in their own messages). Only three of the 40 tweets of a misogynistic nature offered a humorous-ridiculing tone, this being the lowest percentage of ironic content of all the categories analysed (7.5%). Misogynistic tweets have little impact on the number of retweets and comments. Only 15.8% received retweets (fewer than five retweets each), while 31.6% received comments (also fewer than five each).

3.2.1. Sexuality, Desire, and Animosity

The most insulting tweets (55%) are aimed at highlighting Penélope Cruz’s physical attributes, not to indicate the desire she arouses in the commenters, but to recriminate her for the dislike they feel; though they do feel attracted to the actor: “Penélope Cruz is really daft, but she’s very hot.” There are also those who reproach her for making them feel aroused: “How difficult it is for me to watch movies with Penélope Cruz because I can’t stop looking at her tits” or “My 140th hand job was dedicated to Penélope Cruz, the Galician left me dry as a bone.” And there are even those who express themselves, in sexual terms, contrary to the actor’s attractiveness: “I wouldn’t even masturbate to Penélope Cruz.”

3.2.2. Talent, Accusations, and Objectification of Her Body

The tone rises when they talk about the actor’s ability to act (10.25%), directly relating her talent to the means used to reach stardom: “The most frequently seen tits in Spain: Penélope Cruz.” Or extending the criticism to other actors, such as Aitana Sánchez Gijón: “Crap films that put me to sleep. She turns up in *Volavérunt*, some pseudo-historical bullshit by Bigas Luna. Even though there were some who usually flash the gash, like Penélope Cruz or Aitana Sánchez Gijón.”

The insults turn into accusations (five tweets, 12%) alleging the actor lacks talent and has instrumentalised her body to further her film career: “The thing about Penélope Cruz with all that American crap, lots of people said at the time it was a stratagem”; “Penelope Cruz. They even gave her an Oscar, she fucked the whole of Hollywood”; “Penelope Cruz talent? Other things more like”; “This is like Penélope Cruz going to bed with all the actors she made a movie with when she went to Hollywood.”

Finally, the remaining tweets (three, 7.5%) strive to position the actor as someone volatile and unintelligent: “She’ll be like Penélope Cruz, given the absence of thoughts, ideas and opinions of her own, she borrows those of her boyfriends.” As well as utilising casually vulgar expressions of a sexual nature and a certain tone of humour: “Penelope Cruz, a close friend of mine who I affectionately call ‘penis’” or rather “being called Penélope Cruz is like being called Vagina Martínez Cara.”

3.3. *Miscellany of Hatred*

The last category of hate speech towards Penélope Cruz (“Other”) is a miscellany of slurs, insults, and denigrating comments concerning her ability as an actor (33 tweets, 75%), followed by her physical (eight tweets, 18.2%) and intellectual (five tweets, 11.36%) characteristics. There are also comments of an ideological-misogynistic nature regarding her physique (six tweets, 13.6%). Two other messages refer to her home in the United States and her tax abode (4.5%). Although the majority of comments are level 0, that is, with socially negative connotations (33), nine tweets are level 1 (stigmatising her and her family) and two are level 2, aimed at spreading a clear negative image of the actor or, directly, the tweeter’s hatred towards her, as illustrated by this tweet: “Those of us who hate Penélope Cruz are few, but resistant and we know we’re right. We’re like brothers and as such we love and support each other.” Regarding the humorous slant of the tweets, this category is the one with the greatest use of humour, found in six of the 44 tweets (13.6%) and based, essentially, on a criticism of her ability as an actor. The impact of tweets in this category is much lower than that of ideological messages. Only one had retweets, two of them. And none of them had more than 10 comments. Those with greater intensity (levels 2 and 3) had no retweets and only one comment each.

3.3.1. *Criticism of Her Acting*

The category that comprises criticisms of her ability as a performer is made up of 33 tweets, which attack the Madrilenian from various perspectives, the most frequent being her lack of acting skill, her poor choice of scripts, or her voice. Tweets such as “I try not to hate...but Penélope Cruz is a really bad actor,” “Penelope Cruz is the worst actress in the world,” or “Penelope Cruz is bad, terrible, a horror as an actor” stand out. Comparisons are also made between actors: “Eduardo Casanova makes the worst Spanish actor good. Even Penélope Cruz”; “I wouldn’t hire Antonio Banderas and Penélope Cruz to do an advert on Canal Cádiz”; or “Anne Hathaway is not worth a damn (like Penélope Cruz), no matter what they say.”

In addition to these comments, there are others that attack her nominations for the Goya Awards, like “Penelope Cruz is overrated!!! And you know it!!!!” addressed to the Spanish Film Academy, as well as “How happy I am every time Penélope Cruz doesn’t win an award” and “Penelope Cruz, despite making, I dunno, an ad for asparagus, I get the feeling that she gets nominated by decree” also referring to the 2023 Goya Awards. This last comment goes further:

Do we have to give an award to all the thick women? Penélope Cruz, Goya for wearing a fucking fake ass in an Almodóvar film and talking like in all her films, like a redneck. Sofia, wife of a thief just like her, almost sanctified for wearing horns and swallowing. S.O.B.

This message, in addition to insulting the actor for her acting skills, not only includes both a derogatory comment towards her husband (calling him a thief) and a misogynistic one, but also ends with an insult veiled behind the acronym S.O.B., for “son of a bitch.” In fact, in this comment Penélope Cruz is referred to as “thick,” an insult that is repeated countless times in other comments and to which are added “dumbass” and “useless.”

3.3.2. Awards, Insults, and Being Over-Rated

Apart from the above tweets, there is one type of tweet that combines two types of insults. On the one hand, that of a lack of intellect, and, on the other, that of being a bad actor who wins awards: “And useless Penélope Cruz winning awards!” or “If a waste of space like Penélope Cruz has won it, Brendan deserves to win it” in reference to actor Brendan Fraser’s Oscar nomination for *The Whale*. Equally insulting is the tweet suggesting that the actor’s Oscar was due to a bribe: “Didn’t Penélope Cruz win the Oscar for best actress for *Vicky Cristina Barcelona*? You can buy anything.”

These tweets are completed with a series of comments about the idea of her work being over-rated: “Over-rated Spanish actor. I’ll start: Penélope Cruz”; “Top 3 scandalously over-rated things: *The Beach*. *The Little Prince*. Penélope Cruz.” To this last comment a thread was added in which, invariably, Penélope Cruz appears in all the lists: “11 overrated things: 1. Alcohol (all drinks that contain it). 2. Coffee. 3. Cow’s milk. 4. Penelope Cruz. 5. Tobacco...” There are also those who place the actor on a scale of acting talent: “I’m currently a firm believer that we send the worst actors we have to Hollywood, because how the fuck can Ana de Armas and Penélope Cruz [be] there, while Blanca Suárez and Úrsula Corberó are still here.”

3.3.3. Ugliness, Scripts, Screen Actors Guild, and Narration

The third branch of criticism of the actor is based on aesthetic criteria. In fact, 5% of the tweets refer to her supposed ugliness: “If she wasn’t pretty, she wouldn’t catch a cold. Now, Penélope Cruz is worse, for example, even after the plastic surgery she doesn’t do it for me” or “I’m watching a movie where Penélope Cruz appears. Christ, she’s ugly.” In addition to being unattractive, she is also criticised for her supposed vulgarity: “How can he kiss that cheap bitch?—Penelope Cruz” or “I don’t like her. I can’t stand Penélope Cruz. I don’t think she’s pretty. Ana Belén’s pretty.” Another criticism of her beauty and elegance is to be found in the tweets related to her presence on the red carpet at the Goyas, going so far as to say “Penelope Cruz must use up all her glamour in Hollywood, because in the interview on RTVE at the #Goya2023 she looks like a blinged-up DIA cashier (nothing against supermarket cashiers, lots of them are glamorous university students).”

Finally, the actor is constantly insulted as a representative of the union, as portrayed in tweets such as the one below, which combines animosity towards the profession, towards Spanish cinema, towards the marriage of Cruz and Bardem, and towards left-wing ideology: “Nobody goes to the movies to see actors as crummy as those in Spain today. Javier Bardem and Penélope Cruz are the best examples, a long, long way from the golden age of Spanish and North American cinema. Vulgar lefties.”

There are also tweets that allude to the poor quality of the actor's films: "Has Penélope Cruz made a single good film?" Or her limited skills at narrating films, this in reference to her dubbing of the documentary *Nuestro Planeta*: "If you have trouble getting to sleep, I strongly recommend you watch the documentary series *Nuestro Planeta*, narrated by Penélope Cruz. You could probably be more anodyne, but it'd be difficult" or "With the number of good voice actors there are in this country...whoever had the disastrous idea of putting Penélope Cruz as the narrator...it couldn't be done worse."

4. Discussion and Conclusions

It has been clarified that hate speech is not only a harmful manner of communication, but also the expression of discriminative ideals referred to a person (or group) based on the conviction of superiority. Comments against Penélope Cruz on the X social media platform represent hate speech because they offend Cruz while unfolding ideological misogynistic content against her. The tweets are not based on specific events or proven facts, but rather on conjecture, prejudice, and stereotypes, calling into question the actor's talent and the decisions she makes regarding her way of life or her own body. The results show that the comments directed towards her go beyond mere opinion, entering the realm of insult and contempt. Despite the scarcity and satirical intention of some tweets of a humorous or ironic nature, these are every bit as humiliating as the more direct comments.

This study coincides with others (Martínez-Valerio, 2021) in pointing out the difficulty of classifying content, especially if it is done exclusively by means of software. Although there are automatic language detection tools for the study of hate speech (Amores et al., 2021; Blanco, 2021; Felipe, 2020), on many occasions machines may have difficulty interpreting the comments made; an example would be the use of emoticons. Additionally, some users write ironically, so a comment that is actually favourable may be classified as unfavourable and vice versa. Therefore, it is essential to highlight the importance of continuing to work on methodologies that employ technological advances in linguistic analysis hand-in-hand with human knowledge.

The objective of this study was to explore the presence of hate speech directed at the actor Penélope Cruz on the social media platform X. After analysing 6,620 comments, it is concluded that hate speech is only present in 3.2% of the posts in which the actor is mentioned and mostly appears in its least harmful form on the scale of possible manifestations of hate speech (levels 0 and 1). The rest of the analysed comments could be considered criticism according to the definition of hate speech cited in the introductory part of this work. The percentage is very similar to that found in other studies focused on individuals related to the film industry, regardless of their gender (Martínez-Valerio & Tello-Díaz, 2024). Observing the classification of hate speech detected based on typology, the commonest kind of hate was ideological (70.9%), within which different aspects were detected, as was the case in the category "Other" (18.8%). Misogynistic messages were the third most common type (8.9%), in which she is accused of using her body to get ahead and of buying votes in the awards she has received. In addition to the illicit means attributed to her in her rise to stardom, her intelligence, beauty, acting talent, and way of thinking are also called into question. These results coincide with the messages analysed in the work of Brojakowski and Cruz (2022) and Karthika (2022). The first study examines the case of hate messages directed at the American actress Leslie Jones. Most of these messages were misogynistic or racist in nature. In the second case, that of the Indian actress Parvathy, the analysed messages were predominantly misogynistic. In the case of Penélope Cruz, some even question whether her ideology is her own, arguing that her opinions have been acquired by living with Javier Bardem, doubting her

intellectual capacity to make political decisions. This infantilisation or need for guardianship by her husband is also supposedly shown when judging the place and the way in which the actor gave birth to her children. Users of X claim Javier Bardem made the choice of and paid for the American hospital where their eldest child was born, denying the mother's agency to decide, contract, or pay for herself.

Apart from her personal qualities, the figure of Penélope Cruz is a focal point for the criticism that extends to the entire acting profession, her name appearing even when the news, comment, or criticism had another protagonist. This also happens when the actors' union, or any of its members, takes a political stance, citing the actor in critical comments, despite her neither being present nor participating in the relevant act or event. Moreover, all of this is taken to reveal supposed ideological incoherence on the part of the actor who, without publicly expressing herself in the way that some of her colleagues have done, is systematically accused of communism, reproaching her for the paradox of having progressive ideas and a comfortable lifestyle. The intersection between ideological hate and misogyny is a particularity of this Spanish case study. Other research has found different types of intersections, with the most frequent being between misogyny and racism (Brojakowski & Cruz, 2022; López, 2022). However, considering the politicization present in various areas of Spanish society, from sports (Bueno, 2013) to the Covid-19 pandemic (Herrero et al., 2024), it is not surprising that ideological hate intersects with misogyny and even extends to other actors beyond gender.

In short, the confusion between freedom of expression on one hand and defamatory and humiliating excesses on the other should be a priority for a platform which encourages public debate and the expression of opinions. Hence the importance of detecting and analysing comments in the absence of an authority that protects against insults and accusations, ensures the well-being of users, monitors the rise of hate speech, and applies a certain sense of proportion. It would be of interest to carry out future research in which hate speech against female Spanish actors is compared with that received by their peers from other countries, chiefly in order to analyse the ideological component detected in this case study.

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Conflict of Interests

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