INDIGENOUS RESURGENCE IN THE DIGITAL AGE: A MULTIMODAL ANALYSIS OF SHINA NOVALINGA'S SELF REPRESENTATION ON INSTAGRAM AND TIKTOK

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Abstract – Social media have become an established source of entertainment and information for most people and today serve as the preferred method of self-presentation through digital personal profiles (boyd 2010). Platforms such as Instagram and TikTok dominate mainstream online activities, offering users a space to share snippets of their daily life through photos, videos and texts, and engage with others through comments and likes (Chen 2023). Additionally, social network sites represent an essential tool for activism, especially for marginalised communities. To Indigenous communities all over the world, digital platforms become outlets to recognise Indigenous strength and talents (Carlson and Berglund 2021), demonstrate Indigenous control over their own self-representation and create counter-discursive spaces of resistance against neocolonial powers (Mongibello 2021). Indigenous peoples have thus emerged as key figures in digital landscapes, making their own personal profiles online topical expressions of Indigenous resurgence (Wemigwams 2018). Shina Novalinga, an Inuk influencer-activist, exemplifies one of the newest forms of Indigenous political advocacy, with more than six million followers between her Instagram and TikTok profiles. Her online presence as both an influencer and an activist for the Indigenous community clearly intertwines with the dynamics at the core of digital platforms. This paper explores the ramifications of Indigenous activism online through a multimodal critical discourse analysis. Adopting this methodological approach to compare Shina Novalinga's activities on her Instagram and TikTok profiles, this work shows how Indigenous presence on social network sites challenges social power structures, how an Indigenous influencer-activist represents her cultural heritage and digital identity online, and what strategies she adopts on the two platforms. The observation of Shina Novalinga's activities online offers insights into the processes of Indigenous alterNative ways of being in the world (Simpson 2011), and into the radical power of Indigenous transformative storytelling.

Keywords: Indigenous resurgence; Indigenous activism; influencer-activism; multimodal critical discourse analysis; social media.

1. Introduction

In the age of digital connectivity, social media platforms have become powerful tools for self-expression, storytelling, and political engagement. Today, they are dominant modes of online self-presentation: users curate personal profiles and post photos and videos of themselves and their daily activities, leaving no doubt about the substantial weight that social media platforms now hold in almost every person's life (Chen 2023). On average, the daily time spent on social media worldwide reached 143 minutes in 2024 – a rise of over 50 minutes compared to 2012 (Statista 2025). This increase reflects not only broader access to digital devices, but also the platforms' growing social and cultural relevance. In fact, social media are in constant evolution: platforms such as Instagram and TikTok have moved beyond simple content-sharing functions among friends and family. They serve as sources of entertainment and information; TikTok generates an experience that mirrors – and in many ways upgrades – the televisual format (Firth and Marinelli 2025), while both platforms have become key news sources on politics, identity, and current events.

At their core, though, Instagram and TikTok still function as non-tangible stages where everyone can share their own opinion and create polysemic, multimodal performances with the potential to reach diverse audiences (Papacharissi 2018) without geographical limits. On these platforms, people express themselves through images, videos, music and sounds; more importantly, people can share their dissent and speak up against exploitation and oppression. Social media have thus become powerful tools for marginalised voices seeking to resist dominant discourses.

To Indigenous communities all over the world, social media offer critical spaces to exhibit their power and talents, reclaim cultural narratives and challenge colonial representation – finally placing themselves at the centre of conversations, gaining influence on a constantly increasing audience (Carlson and Berglund 2021). This is central to Indigenous resurgence: a collective movement aimed at revitalizing Indigenous cultural and political traditions, practising Indigenous languages and ceremonies, using and sharing Indigenous creativity and art to foreground the reactivation of Indigenous ways of being (Simpson 2011), now in the digital sphere as well. While this phenomenon is global in scope, this paper focuses on Indigenous peoples in Canada, where these dynamics are particularly visible online through the many digital Indigenous content creators and influencer-activists that have gained enormous visibility in the last few years – especially since 2020 with the global Covid19 pandemic.

This paper explores the role of social media in Indigenous resistance through the case of Shina Novalinga (@shinanova both on TikTok and Instagram), the most followed Indigenous influencer-activist in Canada, reaching over six million people on Instagram and TikTok. The definition of Shina Novalinga as *influencer-activist* (Munoz 2021) is not casual, and will be further clarified in the following section.

Therefore, this paper addresses two research questions: How does Shina Novalinga perform Indigenous resistance online? And, what are the multimodal strategies she uses on Instagram vs. TikTok to challenge dominant narratives?

Adopting a multimodal critical discourse analysis approach, this work explores how Shina Novalinga constructs and performs Indigenous identity on social media and how she uses digital platforms to resist and confront mainstream colonial narratives.

Section 2 presents the theoretical framework, introducing key concepts such as Indigenous resurgence, Indigenous digital activism, the influencer-activist identity, platform affordances and critical discourse analysis. Section 3 describes the methodological approach, including data collection, sample selection, the analytical tools employed and some ethical considerations. Section 4 performs the core analysis of Shina Novalinga's posts, focusing on personal identity, the use of irony as resistance, and the use of platform specific features as decolonial tools. Lastly, Section 5 offers final reflections and possible future directions for the research.

2. Theoretical framework

In order to critically analyse Shina Novalinga's social media presence as a form of Indigenous resistance and resurgence, this section presents the key theoretical concepts at the core of this analysis.

The concept of Indigenous resurgence represents the heart of this work. As Leanne Betasamosake Simpson argues (2011), Indigenous resurgence involves the active revitalization of Indigenous knowledge systems and connections, and reflects the diversity of thoughts and identities among Indigenous peoples. Storytelling is a fundamental aspect of Indigenous resurgence that is "at its core decolonizing, because it is a process of remembering, visioning and creating a just reality" (Simpson 2011, p. 33). Here the performance of the storyteller to their audience acquires both individual meaning and collective resonance; Indigenous peoples are able to translate this on digital platforms as well, expanding the tools and strategies through which they challenge imperialistic thoughts and reclaim their own power.

Social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok offer new sites for this resurgence to unfold: Indigenous peoples are using them to subvert the stereotypical narrative too often associated

with their representation, operating a digital decolonization where they "*embody* rather than disembody their identity" (Carlson and Frazer 2021, p. 31) and create newer forms of counter-discourses to dismantle neo-colonial power structures (Mongibello 2021). This political use of digital infrastructures to stage Indigenous online vitality and action is another illustration of "how Indigenous peoples have been [digitally] asserting their sovereignty" (Morford and Ansloos 2021, p. 301) particularly over the last two decades.

Starting in 2012, the grassroot movement *Idle No More* gained traction on Facebook and Twitter as a means of support environmental protection, Indigenous sovereignty while opposing a series of governmental bills and amendments that deprived First Nations of lands and waterways control (Duarte 2017). The movement – both online and offline – managed to bring together different generations of Indigenous people and spread widely online through the viral hashtag #idlenomore. This movement represents the first widely recognized mass instance of digital activism carries out by Indigenous peoples of Canada but, of course, not the last. In 2019 a similar strategy was adopted by Wet'suwet'en people protesting the construction of the Coastal GasLink pipeline crossing their ancestral and unceded territory. The Wet'suwet'en people opened a Twitter account (@Gidimten) where numerous hashtags "containing reference to land claim and sovereignty were the most prominent and were also used as political slogans" (Mongibello 2021, p. 71). Therefore, even when extending into the digital realm, Indigenous sovereignty continues to be a guiding force behind Indigenous activism.

However, digital platforms like Instagram and TikTok have now acquired the most prominence and dissemination and, since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, several Instagram and TikTok's profiles of Indigenous peoples in Canada have reached significant popularity – demonstrating their commitment to the decolonisation of digital spaces and becoming known as activists-like figures for the Indigenous communities. This change in platform status and popularity brought the emergence of new hybrid figures (not exclusive to Indigenous communities): influencer-activists. The definition of influencer-activists comes from the double presence of these content creators: on the one hand, they use their social media profiles to protest against political and social issues, being very vocal in the positions they express online (Munoz 2021); on the other, they also use social media like Instagram and TikTok to share personal life moments, clothing choices, recipes, and paid brand collaborations – all features typical of an influencer (Lou and Yuan 2019). Shina Novalinga – the Inuk online personality chosen for this study – perfectly encapsulates all the characteristics of an influencer-activist.

Both Instagram and TikTok are essentially video based, giving huge importance to visual representation and aesthetics. It is then natural that the type of activist content presented on these two platforms has evolved (and is in constant evolution), following specific platform affordances and dynamics.

Understanding the concept of affordances is essential for analysing how users interact with and adapt to social media platforms. Affordances refer to the possibilities for action and interaction offered by a platform's design and technical feature (boyd 2010). They do not necessarily dictate what type of content is going to be produced on set platforms, but they shape how users produce it, engage with it and with other users, and perform identity through it. They are relational properties because "the same feature of an app, such as a 'like' button, will have different meanings and afford different things to different people in different settings" (Schellewald 2023, p. 1569).

For platforms like TikTok and Instagram, Treem and Leonardi (2013) identify four key affordances: visibility (the ability of one's content to be seen by others through posts and comments); editability (the capacity to design, modify and revise content before and even after its publication); persistence (the ongoing availability of content); and association (establishing connection between users and content). Similarly, boyd (2010) highlights features such as scalability (the potential visibility of content), replicability (the ability to duplicate content), persistence and searchability (the possibility to access content through search). Although presenting slightly different terminology, these features overlap and often work in combination – e.g. scalability directly impacts a post's

visibility. For Indigenous creators, these affordances are not just technical tools but spaces of negotiation and resistance. Social media are, in fact, designed within capitalist and colonial logics of commodification and virality; however, Indigenous influencer-activists like Shina Novalinga can strategically maneuver these logics to make visible acts of political and cultural expression in order to reclaim space, assert identity, and exercise sovereignty.

These platform-specific affordances do not merely structure how content is shared; they also shape the discursive strategies employed to communicate identity, politics, and culture. The content produced on social media is, per se, rich in both visuals and discourse; moreover, it is multi-layered by nature since multiple meanings can be attached to just one single post. In the context of Indigenous resistance, this complexity develops even further since cultural and political elements integrate into the platform design. For this reason, this study adopts a critical discourse analysis (CDA) framework, extended through a multimodal lens, to examine how meaning is produced through language, imagery, and audio across Instagram and TikTok.

Critical discourse analysis (Fairclough 1995; van Dijk 2008) offers a method for examining the interrelationship between ideology, language, and power. As its distinctive trait, CDA "intervenes on the side of dominated and oppressed groups and against dominating groups" (Fairclough and Wodak 1997, p. 259), hence it is especially useful for studying marginalised voices within dominant (digital) media systems – as with this specific case. However, in the context of platforms like TikTok and Instagram – where communication is not only verbal but also visual and auditory – a multimodal approach becomes essential. Following the work of Kress and van Leeuwen and their definition of a "general grammar of contemporary visual design practices in 'Western' cultures" (Kress and van Leeuwen 2020, p. 4), this study discloses how visual aesthetics, visual trends, movement, sound choices and layering contribute to meaning making on two digital platforms that are themselves designed within Western traditions of visual communication. At the same time, though, Indigenous voices like Shina Novalinga are strategically re-appropriating this visual grammar through their online presence and the development of anti-colonial counter-discourses online.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA) approach to examine how Indigenous identity, culture, and activism are constructed and communicated through social media. More specifically, it compares the discursive and visual strategies adopted by the Inuk influencer-activist Shina Novalinga (@ShinaNova) on her TikTok and Instagram profiles, to understand the similarities and the possible differences between her use of the two social media platforms. The focus is on the post captions, but also on the visual and audio features present in the selected posts, in order to conduct an examination that is as thorough as possible.

Shina Novalinga's online visibility started in March 2020, when some of her TikTok videos portraying aspects of Inuit culture and tradition went viral. Today, she has more than four million followers on TikTok and two million on Instagram. On her social media, she presents content about Inuit food, music, and fashion, and often appears throat singing with her mother. Since 2020, she has become a recognised personality in the Indigenous communities of Canada and a prominent influencer, as she is also represented by the influencer talent agency *Dulcedo*[1]. Her high visibility and activity on both platforms, combined with her clear positioning as both an influencer and an activist, make her a perfect candidate for this type of multimodal critical discourse analysis.

3.1. Data collection and sample selection

The qualitative comparison of Shina Novalinga's use of Instagram and TikTok is based on a set of posts obtained from her profiles on both TikTok and Instagram and uploaded during the month of

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[1] Dulcedo 2025, "Shina Novalinga", *Dulcedo*. https://dulcedo.com/influencer/shina-novalinga/ (26.06.2025).

May 2021. There was no special occurrence that led to the selection of the specific month of May for this qualitative investigation – the month was randomly selected among the twelve. The choice of focusing on the year 2021, however, was not random: this is the year when her online presence became established, and her figure had already achieved a widespread degree of attention.

In May 2021, Shina Novalinga published fifteen posts on each social media, for a total of thirty posts in thirty-one days. Because the platform did not allow the posting of images at the time, TikTok posts are solely video-based; by contrast, the Inuk activist-influencer uploaded eleven video-based posts and four photo-based posts on Instagram.

3.2. Analytical framework

To examine how Shina Novalinga constructs and communicates Indigenous identity and activism online, this study employs Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (CMDA). This method allows for the integrated analysis of multiple semiotic modes – specifically, captions, hashtags, visuals, audio, and platform interactions. These elements are never isolated but often interwoven, creating and expressing meaning on social media through audiovisual elements, in addition to traditionally linguistic ones (Machin 2015). The analysis also considers platform-specific structures that shaped content creation and interaction during the period under study. For instance, in 2021, Instagram supported longer captions and offered the possibility to upload curated photo carousels; TikTok, by contrast, emphasized short-form video and interactive tools such as duets and stitches. Since 2021, some of these features have changed: TikTok now includes *Photo Mode*, allowing the upload of up to thirty-five pictures, while Instagram has integrated the *Remix* and *Sequence* functions, replicating TikTok's *Duet* and *Stitch* respectively. These structural differences that existed in 2021 were significant during the examined period, influencing the way in which content creators used the two platforms. Therefore, although both platforms have since evolved, their earlier affordances are impossible to ignore in this analysis, as they directly shaped how Shina Novalinga's expressions of Indigenous identity and resistance were crafted and shared across platforms.

3.3. Ethical considerations

This research involves the analysis of publicly available social media content; hence no direct interaction with participants was required, nor was it necessary to ask permission for the retrieval of data. All posts presented herein have been directly uploaded by Shina Novalinga on her verified and public accounts on TikTok and Instagram.

Nevertheless, ethical considerations remain essential when working with Indigenous representation and digital activism. This study is not intended to evaluate or regulate the strategies of resistance that Indigenous women – and Shina Novalinga specifically – have chosen to challenge and respond to colonial power; rather, it is a way to explore those strategies. The aim is to understand them and to understand the discourses that stem from them. Therefore, the analysis is conducted with respect for the creator's autonomy, cultural identity, and self-representation; a critical approach to the material is required but, crucially, the analysis aims to maintain respect for Shina Novalinga's authorial intent and cultural nuance throughout its course.

4. Analysis

The first thing to mention about Shina Novalinga's posting habits is that she does not have a fixed posting schedule on any of the two platforms. Her post publication does not follow a pattern, nor does she favour a specific day of the week to upload her content. In fact, there are days when she uploads multiple posts without any reason behind this choice. On Instagram, she uploads twice on May 7th, May 8th, May 9th, and May 19th; on TikTok, she shares two posts a day on May 7th and May 19th, and on May 29th, she even uploads five videos in one day.

Furthermore, an observation of her two profiles reveals that she prefers video-based over image-based content. During the month of May 2021, she shares photos on only four occasions: three posts capture personal moments – two of which feature her mother – while the fourth is a sponsored carousel in collaboration with the clothing brand *OldNavy,* showcasing two pictures of herself in an open field. Thiss immediately signals a first difference in the use of the two platforms: the influencer-activist uses Instagram also to share moments of personal nature. As Fig. 1 and 2 show, on May 1st she uploads a picture of herself as a toddler with the caption "Unaaluk"[2] (Fig. 1) and on May 9th she posts a carousel of pictures with her mother celebrating Mother's Day with the caption "Happy Mother's Day to the best mama @kayuulanov 🌷 And to all the great mamas out there 🤲🏻 ❤️ " (Fig. 2).

These four photo posts could not be replicated on TikTok, being the platform exclusively video-based in 2021; however, they are not even recreated there in a video format, reserving postings involving private life moments solely for Instagram.

The photos shown in Figures 1 and 2 are naturalistic portraits of both Shina Novalinga and her mother, presenting what Kress and van Leeuwen describe as "high validity" (Kress and van Leeuwen 2020, p. 154). It is possible to clearly distinguish the details of the two represented participants (*ibidem*): strands of hair, redness of the skin and the accessories and clothes they are wearing. Moreover, the colours are also naturalistic, with medium-range saturation that reinforces the sense of realism. Only the Instagram carousel (Figure 2) contains a childhood photo of Shina Novalinga and her mother hugging, where brightness and saturation respectively increase and decrease slightly; this does not reduce the realism of the picture but enhances its aura of memory and nostalgia (Wagner 2018).

Social distance between the Inuk influencer-activist and her audience is also extremely reduced by the size and perspective of the frame: in fact, the photos are all close to medium shots, creating a "close personal distance" (Kress and van Leeuwen 2020, p. 124), and giving the impression that viewers and represented participants are just a touch away from each other. The choice of sharing these moments of personal life increases a sense of intimacy and supports the idea of "people […] portrayed as though they are friends" (ivi, p. 125). Closeness is further reinforced by the vertical angle typical of social media photography, with a central perspective, and Shina Novalinga and her mother appearing at eye level with the viewer. The only exception is the afore mentioned picture in Figure 2 where Shina Novalinga, as a child, is hugging her mother. In this specific instance, the high angle does not convey any sense of superiority from the viewer's part (Kress and van Leeuwen 2020): it reflects the perspective of the producer of the image - who is also the represented participant – fondly looking back at a past moment, while including her audience in this familial memory.

There are two additional posts (video-based) which Shina Novalinga does not replicate on her TikTok profile, respectively published on May 7th and 8th. The first post is a video for a paid partnership with the *Royal Bank of Canada* (RBC) in the occasion of *National Child & Youth Mental Health Day*; the second is a reel where the Inuk influencer-activist shows herself wearing a *silapaaq*, a traditional Indigenous garment made by her mother.

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[2] According to Mary D. Swift the translation of "Unaaluk" is "This one" (Swift 2004, p. 174 e 186).

Figure 1
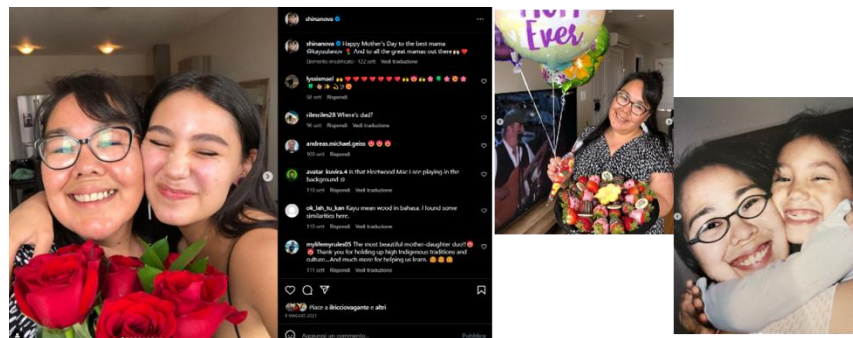Instagram post of Shina Novalinga as a toddler – May 1st, 2021

Figure 2
Instagram carousel post of Shina Novaling for Mother's Day – May 9th, 2021

It is especially interesting to reflect on how the sponsored video with one of the principal banking companies of the country is not shared on TikTok. The post caption does not promote any financial or economic service directly, but focuses on Novalinga's personal mental health struggles in the first part:

> Let's be honest, this hasn't been an easy year for a lot of us, and if it's taught me anything, it's the importance of my mental well-being. I have personally struggled with my mental health and I do understand how difficult it can be to reach out to people and ask for help. But luckily, you have the chance to find help through virtual support and services because they are there for you!!!
>
> Mental health apps or online services, available through @rbc Future Launch at Home, might be a good first step for you. #RBCFutureLaunch at Home is a resource hub that connects you with free, youth-focused workshops, online learning modules and vital mental wellbeing supports & services, so that you can stay well and stay ready during these unprecedented times.
> Head to rbc.com/futurelaunchathome, to find mental health supports and services available for you. (Novalinga 2021a)

She opens her statement with the discourse marker "Let's be honest", immediately establishing a rapport of transparency and sincerity with her audience; she then continues by stating that "this hasn't been an easy year for a lot of us" thereby including her audience in the narration of a collective sense of struggle. Of course, in 2021, Covid-19 remains a massive global preoccupation; therefore, it is hardly surprising that a lot of people continue to feel the repercussions of the pandemic – her audience included. Her opening remarks, then, foster empathic alignment, positioning her as connected to her followers and authentic in her approach – something typical of influencer discourse,

where personal authenticity is a key rhetorical and affective resource (Page 2014). The caption continues by presenting a tool to help everyone overcome this negative mental space offered by the *Royal Bank of Canada*: a section in the RBC website aimed at helping young people with free workshops and online learning materials about mental wellbeing but also financial education.

As previously noted, Shina Novalinga exclusively shares this post on Instagram. Although the content does not explicitly promote any financial product, its presence solely on Instagram is presumably influenced by TikTok's audience demographics: TikTok's user base tends to be younger than Instagram's, with a significant portion under the age of eighteen years old[3] – a youthful public that usually lacks the financial resources or interest in banking services. Even without a direct sales pitch, it is reasonable to assume that the *Royal Bank of Canada* aims to reach an audience at least potentially bankable; and it wants to do this through a service connected to mental health and promoting a positive approach to learning. Therefore, the choice of limiting this type of sponsorship visibility to Instagram aligns with strategic marketing logics.

4.1. Ironic storytelling: subverting colonial narratives

For the most part, on both Instagram and TikTok, Shina Novalinga's posts revolve around Indigenous life and traditions, with a preference for throat singing videos. Throat singing is an ancient, traditional Inuk singing method involving

> two people, usually women, facing each other and using their throat, belly and diaphragm to expel sounds. The two participants go back and forth, matching their partners rhythm until one goes silent or starts laughing[4].

Looking at other posts on both platforms, most of them are indeed the same. Nine of the fifteen videos are replicated on both platforms and appear on the same days as well, except for a video uploaded on TikTok on May 8th and then reposted two days later on Instagram.

On both social media platforms, the videos generally adopt two styles: they are either throat singing videos where she sings alone or with the company of her mother, or they are videos where the Inuk influencer-activist shows other aspects of Indigenousness, often using viral sounds and transitions ironically.

Irony is central in social media discourse, particularly on TikTok. It allows users to critique and mock undesirable and upsetting social and political issues by creatively manipulating images and sounds. The content produced often reveals a "hidden meaning" – a message that counters the literal interpretation of words or visuals, while remaining clear and effective in its intended meaning (Marentino and Markhamah 2023). The final effect is both unexpected and oppositional, representing a subtle yet powerful form of resistance and political commentary (Matamoros-Fernández 2023).

Shina Novalinga does not shy away from this type of ironic commentary. On the contrary, she frequently incorporates it into her content to reassert the importance of Indigenous identity and to articulate contemporary forms of Indigenous storytelling (Wemigwans 2018). Figures 3 and 4 illustrate two examples of how she uses humour and irony through her digital content.

The video in Figure 3 uses a viral audio mashup combining an instrumental segment from Fleetwood Mac's *The Chain* with a brief dialogue excerpt from the 2011 animated film *Rango* (a western-style comedy). The video is structured into four parts, presented in Figure 3 through four screenshots. In the first three, the dialogue from *Rango* plays: "It only takes one bullet" (Part 1), "You ain't got the nerve" (Part 2), and "Try me" (Part 3). These lines, originally from a duel scene between the characters Rango and Rattlesnake Jake, are repurposed here by the Inuk influencer-activist.

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[3] MarketingCharts 2023, "Teens and Younger", *MarketingCharts*. https://www.marketingcharts.com/demographics-and-audiences/teens-and-younger-234207 (26.06.2025).
[4] See BBC 2021, "A revival of Indigenous throat singing", in *BBC Travel*, 14 April. https://www.bbc.com/travel/article/20210414-a-revival-of-indigenous-throat-singing (24.06.2025).

During these segments, Shina Novalinga appears in a plain grey t-shirt, without makeup or jewellery; the instrumental section of *The Chain* plays underneath, adding emotional tension and narrative buildup.

Meanwhile, Novalinga overlays textual commentary that reframes the dialogue through an Indigenous lens. In Part 1 (Figure 3), the written statement "Me: finally embracing my Indigenous identity" shifts the original meaning of the film's dialogue to reflect a personal and cultural affirmation. In Part 2 (Figure 3), the antagonist's challenge becomes symbolic of societal antagonism towards Indigenous self-expression. Finally, in Part 4, there is a video transition and the tone changes: the lyrics "And if you don't love me now" from *The Chain* begin and the Inuk influencer-activist appears smiling and wearing traditional Indigenous clothing and jewellery.

Figure 3

Screenshots of a TikTok and Instagram video on Indigenous empowerment using viral sounds ironically – May 7th, 2021. https://www.tiktok.com/@shinanova/video/6959313248621497606

Though the original scene from *Rango* has no connection to Indigenousness, her recontextualization of the viral audio constructs a narrative of Indigenous empowerment, pride, and resistance. She highlights the strength of Indigenous peoples fighting against colonial forces, standing up for their cultural identity and traditions. Apart from the hashtag #aboriginal, which is replaced by #culture on Instagram, the caption uploaded on both social media is the same: "Im here now 👋🏻 #indigenous #inuit #indigenouspride" – a statement of Shina Novalinga's presence as an Indigenous woman who refuses erasure.

The video in Figure 4 presents another ironic comment Shina Novalinga makes. This time she refers to the colonial invasion of Indigenous land, and the progressive elimination of Indigenous customs and people carried by colonizers. She uploads the video on May 19th both on Instagram and TikTok; both uploads have the same caption.

In the video depicted in Figure 4, the reference is to the viral "save me a slice" meme: a reaction video originally posted on TikTok in which a user comically reacts to a pizza being cut into an excessive number of slices. The background audio features the lines "A fresh pie! Save me a slice!" followed by increasingly exasperated repetitions of "That's good", as the pizza is continually sliced. The overlaying text paired with this part of the audio is a critique of settler colonialism in Canada. In the audio, the expression "That's good" becomes more agitated with every repetition; each time the expression is repeated, the Inuk influencer-activist adds a series of statements that expose the

escalating harms of colonization: "Canada: comes on our land", "Canada: Teaches us english & french", "Canada: Gives us road and education", "Canada: Exploits our land", "Canada: Tells us to stop our traditions", "Canada: Steals our children". The repeated use of "Canada" functions metonymically: it does not refer to the nation-state per se, but to the European colonizers that – over centuries – stole Indigenous territories, killed Indigenous people while presenting themselves as saviours and liberators. The video concludes with the line from the original audio "it's enough slices!" shouted by the original creator, which Shina Novalinga lip-syncs with a distressed and angry expression – a striking contrast with the light-hearted demeanour she had at the start of the video.
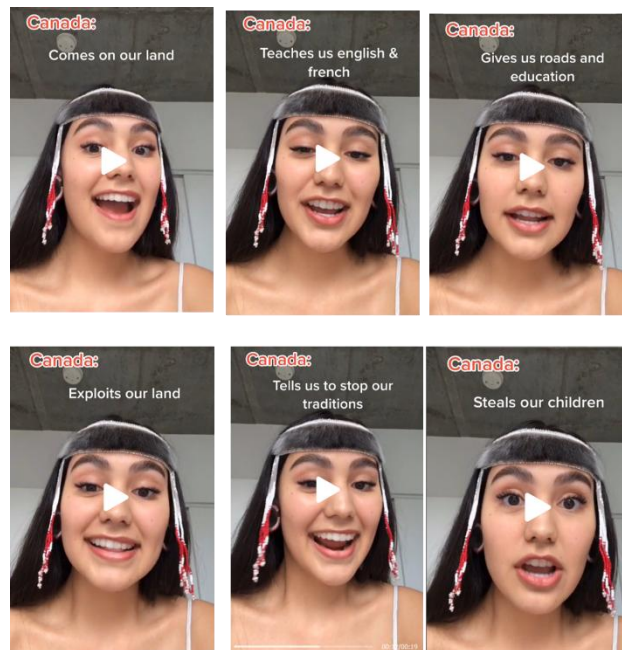

Figure 4
Screenshot of a TikTok and Instagram video ironically commenting on Canadian colonization of Indigenous peoples and land – May 19th, 2021.
https://www.tiktok.com/@shinanova/video/6964062999044836613

Both examples in Figures 3 and 4 use ironic and figurative techniques typical of TikTok to criticise the colonial system of oppression that Indigenous peoples had to endure and, in different forms, still face today. Through her creative reformulation of platform-specific trends, not only does Shina Novalinga engage with mainstream forms of digital communication but subverts them – affirming the resurgence of Indigenous cultural identity in the face of colonial erasure.

4.2. Platform nativeness: remixing tradition and technology

As previously mentioned, throat singing videos are frequent on both platforms and are typically replicated: the same throat singing video usually gets posted on Instagram and on TikTok. They are also generally shot in a more conventional manner, in which Shina Novalinga sings alone or with her mother. However, there are certain throat singing videos that are only available on TikTok and incorporate TikTok native features not available on Instagram in 2021 (although since then, Instagram has implemented similar features on its platform as well).

On May 29th, Shina Novalinga posts a first video of herself throat singing, exclusively on TikTok, with the caption "This throat song is called the saw 😊 😊 #throatsinger #inuit #culture #indigenous #inuktiktok #nunavik" (Novalinga 2021b). In the video, she briefly introduces the song before immediately beginning to throat sing. Later that same day, she uploads a second TikTok video using the platform's native *Duet* feature. The *Duet* allows users to create a collaborative video side-by-side with someone else's existing video; both videos then play alongside each other – usually

split-screen – and users can see both videos at the same time. The platform automatically notifies the original (duetted) user about the duet.

The Inuk influencer-activist thus creates a duet with herself, following up on her first throat singing video of the day – the one she called "the saw" in the caption. In this second duet video, she personifies the saw, reproducing the utensil's sound herself and adding it to her previous performance. The video caption automatically signals the duet and tags the associated profile, informing viewers of the connection between the two clips (Fig. 5).
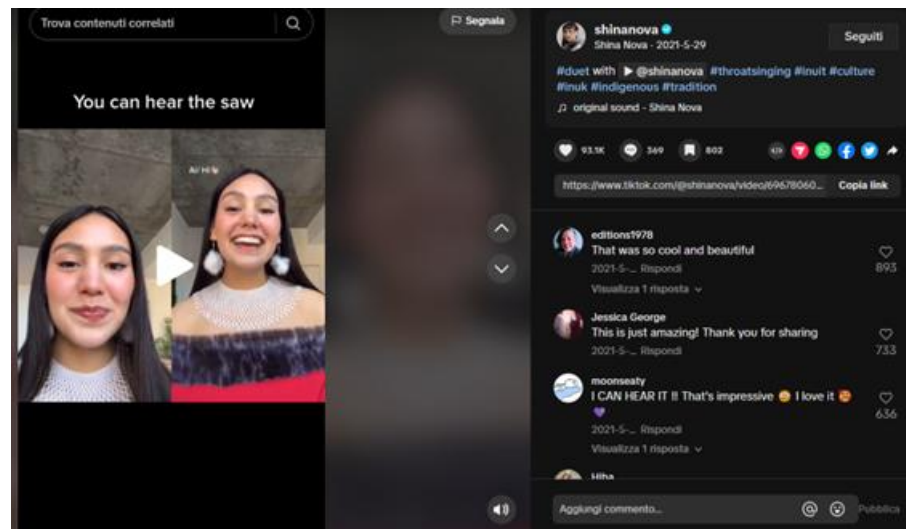

Figure 5
Figure 19: Screenshot of the TikTok throat singing duet Shina Novalinga has with herself – May 29th, 2021. https://www.tiktok.com/@shinanova/video/6967806083477835013

On May 29th, Shina Novalinga posts a third throat singing video, using another built-in TikTok tool: the *Stitch*. This feature lets users take a short clip (five seconds maximum) from someone else's video and integrate it into the beginning of their own, creating a continuous video that blends the original clip with the new content. This feature is commonly used for reactions to other videos and personal commentary. Any public video on the platform can potentially be stitched. Like the Duet she posted earlier that day, Novalinga "stitches" her own video (Fig. 6), taking the initial five seconds of the first throat singing video of the day to address a frequently asked question from her followers: "Does your throat hurt?". She then explains that – if performed correctly – throat singing does not harm the singer. In doing so, she not only satisfies her audience's curiosity and counters common misconceptions, but also prevents possible criticism for this Indigenous tradition, normalizing an Indigenous practice that might otherwise be misunderstood or criticised. Here as well, the platform automatically puts the hashtag #stitch in the video caption while also tagging the TikTok user (in this instance, Shina Novalinga herself) from whence the original video had been acquired.

Figure 6

Figure 20: Screenshot of the Shina Novalinga's throat singing "stitch" video – May 29th, 2021

Through these two native TikTok features, Shina Novalinga reclaims control over the digital narrative space and creates a form of reflexive storytelling that she uses to inform audiences about Inuit cultural practices, while re-affirming Indigenous knowledge that has often been dismissed or erased by settler-colonial systems. Following Kress and van Leeuwen's principles, she represents herself as both a *Carrier* and an *Actor*. In embodying her culture proudly, she functions as a *Carrier* of Inuit identity, while the traditional clothes and jewellery she wears, and the throat-singing practices she shares online function as *Possessive Attributes* that specify the cultural identity she belongs to (Kress & van Leeuwen 2020). However, she is not a static carrier: her social media presence is never passive, as she decides how her Indigenousness is represented through her often ironic and performative videos, making her an *Actor* engaging in processes that challenge colonial stereotypes and reassert Indigenous resistance through her digital narration (*ibidem*). She resists being cast as a *Goal* – "the participant to whom or which the action is done, or at whom or which the action is aimed" (ivi, p. 60). Instead, her multimodal storytelling shows Indigenous identity as something enacted and lived rather than merely displayed.

Moreover, in the videos presented in Figures 4, 5 and 6, Shina Novalinga appears frontally and directs her gaze at the viewers, inviting her audience into her digital activities. At the same time, the angle is consistently low, positioning viewers slightly below her. As Kress and van Leeuwen (ivi, pp. 139-140) note, low angles signify power on the part of the represented participant. Through this visual choice, Novalinga asserts her power and authority as an Indigenous woman, owning the necessity of being respected by those who encounter her content online and making her cultural presence undeniable within the digital sphere.

5. Concluding remarks

This work has analysed a small sample of Instagram and TikTok posts by the Inuk influencer-activist Shina Novalinga, all posted in the month of May 2021 on her public and verified social media profiles. The aim of this work was to understand how Shina Novalinga performed Indigenous resistance online and what strategies she adopted on the two digital platforms, during a period that established her recognizability as an Indigenous influencer-activist – following her first viral videos and rapid follower growth in 2020. The study employed Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis as the analytical framework of reference, whose "general compositional principles […] can be applied across a wide range of genres themes and representational media" (ivi, p. 47).

The analysis found no stark alterations in Novalinga's use of the two platforms: the majority of posts are shared and posted on both platforms, occasionally on the same day, without any modification in the video. There are, however, a few relevant differences that should be recognised.

First, Instagram posts seem to express more intimate moments: nostalgic childhood memories, joyous occasions, and festivities such as Mother's Day appear only on Instagram. This is probably due to the impossibility – at the time – to upload photos on TikTok; still, there are no TikTok videos directly related to the more intimate and familial sphere of Shina Novalinga's life – as photos on Instagram are instead. Second, while most postings on the two social media platforms are the same, TikTok is more likely to present posts with additional explanation, typically enacted through the TikTok specific tools *Duet* and *Stitch*. This might result in extra clarifications being made regarding one or more videos, as Shina Novalinga does when she uses the *Stitch* function to clarify that throat singing is not detrimental to the throat (Figure 6). The original throat singing video is posted on both platforms; yet the additional information added through the *Stitich* is not available on her Instagram. Of course, clarifications or expansions on particular topics could appear in her Instagram stories; however, if not saved, Instagram stories disappear after twenty-four hours – their content is not permanent nor visible anymore. Lastly, there is an indication that the age of Shina Novalinga followers might differ between platforms: the *Royal Bank of Canada* sponsors a video that only appears on her Instagram and not on TikTok. This is an assumption – as follower demographic data is private – but its absence from TikTok could be related to TikToks audience age demographic, which is often younger than Instagram.

These observations demonstrate how platform-specific affordances shape not just the format but also the tone of Indigenous digital storytelling. Irony clearly emerges as a powerful tool to resemanticize viral audio and platform trends, stripping them of their original (often comedic and/or superficial) meanings to reframe them within an Indigenous lens. In doing so, Novalinga consistently embodies what Kress and van Leeuwen (2020) describe as both *Carrier* and *Actor* roles: showing Inuit cultural attributes while actively behaving in ways that challenge colonial narratives and the stereotypes associated with Indigenous peoples. This form of Indigenous storytelling aligns with what Wemigwans (2018) describes as a political act of survival that connects and unites past beliefs and values with contemporary ones. The use of gaze and low angles further positions her as authoritative within the digital sphere, enacting rather than requesting recognition as an Indigenous influencer-activist. By leveraging platform-native features, Shina Novalinga ensures that her content remains algorithmically relevant – participating in the social media culture of performance while subtly subverting it. These strategies may certainly be critiqued, complying with the capitalist logics of digital platforms – but such critiques mark the beginning of another discussion. What remains clear is that Novalinga's content is both layered and engaging, finding a balance between resistance and representation and expressing a nuanced and multimodal practice of Indigenous resurgence – an *alterNative* to settler-dominated narratives, where Indigenous peoples can "invent and reinvent" themselves (Recollet 2015, p. 132) in the digital space as well, reclaiming discursive space and presenting Indigenous identity as multifaceted and authentically dynamic.

This research is limited to the very small sample analysed. Therefore, due to space and time constraints, it was not possible to focus on a more substantial collection of posts which would have surely made the analysis more thorough and nuanced. Future research could expand on this preliminary analysis by examining a larger time frame or comparing the practices of multiple Indigenous influencer-activists to map broader trends in Indigenous digital activism. This will surely contribute to a deeper understanding of how multimodal strategies evolve across platforms, while further demonstrating the ways in which social media function as platforms of Indigenous cultural resurgence and political resistance.

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