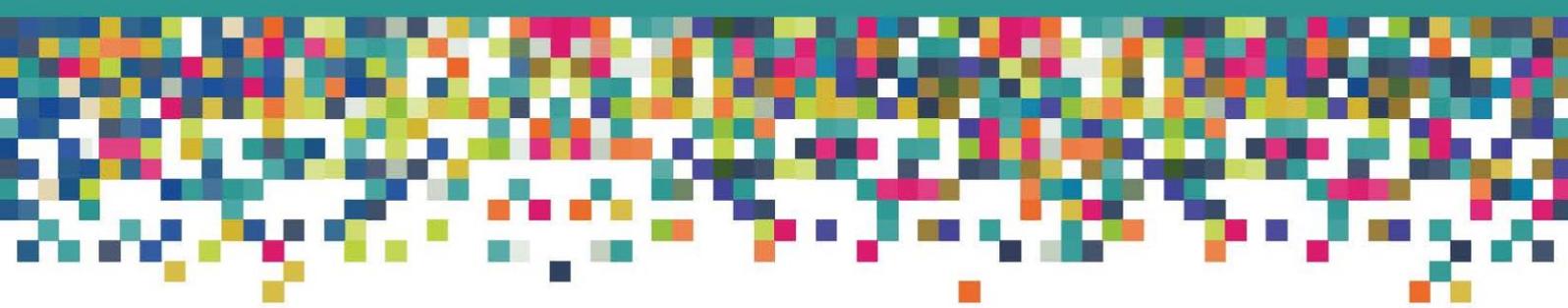




Media and  
Communications

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## We are raising our voices

The use of TikTok for the public self-representation of  
indigenous identity in Latin America

**Camila Figueroa-Zepeda**



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## **ABSTRACT**

*Indigenous people from Latin America are distributing their native identity through TikTok, creating videos labelled with #indigena, #tiktokindigena, and #indígena, among others, reaching more than 320 million views. Inspired by this phenomenon, this research approaches the question: Why are indigenous people of Latin America using TikTok to self-represent their identity? Moreover, it looks in depth at discourses and practices embedded in the public self-depiction of native identity on social media and the suitability of TikTok for achieving self-representation.*

*This dissertation is located in media, communication, and social studies, using concepts and theories such as socio-techno determinism, user-generated media, the circuit of culture, identity, self-representation, decolonise and indigenous video. Six native TikTok creators from Latin America were interviewed in depth to address the research. To be chosen, they had to be Spanish speakers, have over 10 thousand followers, and regularly create videos about native topics. The data analysis was thematic, gathering a grid with six global themes, 21 sub-themes, and illustrative quotes. The results show that the main motives for TikTok video-creation are education and visibility of their culture with humour, involving the depiction and reinforcement of native elements as a demonstration of empowerment. However, self-recording requires personal recognition as native and self-representation is also a collective process that helps creators assume their ethnicity with pride. Regarding the embedded discourses, the evidence suggests that TikTok videos are becoming online tools to challenge discrimination and stereotypes, vindicate the causes of the creators' ancestors, and decolonise other natives who do not recognise them as such. Finally, participants highlighted the platform's suitability, such as easy video editing and creative instruments to express themselves. Meanwhile, the massive audience reach and interactivity appeared as positive features for online community-building. Overall, the research concludes that TikTok videos give indigenous people a broader showcase for their culture, with their native identity becoming a political matter that mobilises meanings of resistance and decolonisation.*

## INTRODUCTION

It's about the many wresting power from the few and helping one another for nothing and how that will not only change the world, but also change the way the world changes (Grossman, 2006).

During the last decade, society has been developing in online environments, with smartphones that have an internet connection being the essential tool for human interaction, offering people a vehicle to express and communicate with others via social media applications (Vincent & Haddon, 2018). One of those key social media platforms is TikTok, which in 2020 took the lead in discharges globally, reaching 850 million and putting it in first position among its competitors (Apptopia Team, 2021). In an explorative way, I opened an account to watch and analyse the social interaction on the platform, realising that multiple groups from different nationalities, genders, races, ages, and interests depicted their identity publicly through short-clip video-creation.

One of those groups is indigenous people, especially from Latin America, who are using online spaces of content production to install their voices independently of the mainstream media (Burrows, 2016). However, the question that came to my mind was: Are indigenous people appropriating media production for the first time? After an exhaustive review on the field, I found that native audio-visual production in Latin America is not new, and since the 1990s governments and private institutions have been supporting its development. Nevertheless, the existing literature focuses on cinema and radio, presenting issues of misrepresentation, insufficient funding, and the poor positioning of their documentaries in the cinematography industry (Salazar & Córdova, 2008). Because of the lack of specific literature about the use of social media by indigenous people for content production, this dissertation emerges as novel research in the area, discussing the appropriation of online spaces for the self-representation of native identities in the region. Moreover, using TikTok as a platform, this dissertation goes beyond and explores the motives, practices, discourses, and consequences involved in native video-creation and public publication.

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For the purpose of conducting this enquiry, this dissertation is structured in three parts. Firstly, the conceptual framework establishes video-creation on TikTok from a socio-determinist perspective, where the subject can accomplish agency through the user-generated media to articulate messages, looking for audience interaction and online community-building. However, those messages are cultural artefacts that mobilise meanings of native identity, which are reinforced with elements of their culture to achieve an accurate self-representation. Therefore, the native identity depicted in cultural artefacts finds its meaning within the circuit of culture (Du Gay *et al.*, 1997) because the videos are produced to promote the identification and consequent consumption of the desired audience. Moreover, the literature presented also approaches the discourses involved in the TikTok makers' practices, suggesting that their videos are for resisting and decolonising biased media representations and societal traces of western supremacy (González Hurtado, 2021).

Secondly, to test the proposed conceptual framework, I used qualitative research, conducting in-depth interviews with six indigenous TikTok creators from Latin America who are Spanish speakers and whose profiles have over ten thousand followers. That allowed me to know from their voices the experiences and perspectives of putting their identities into public. For the analysis, I used thematic analysis, dividing the conversation topics in a grid with six global themes and subthemes (Appendix A). Finally, the results are consistent with the conceptual framework proposed, suggesting the motives for the video-creation, the issues involved in native identity, the practices embedded in the self-representation, the discourses driven by native TikTok videos, and the suitable technological features of TikTok for native presentation. In addition, due to the data-driven and inductive approach of the analysis, I address new findings in the results section, such as diaspora identities and the consequences that online public self- depiction has brought to them.

Ultimately, this study contributes to closing the gap between native self-production and the use of social media, suggesting that TikTok videos provide a critical scenario for the public self-representation of different communities and identities. Furthermore, they have been used advantageously by native people of Latin America to create new forms of indigenous media,

using their own voices for content production as resistance tools in this mediated era, where experiences and interactions are happening online.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

This section explores some of the relevant literature to support that indigenous people of Latin America use TikTok to express their cultural identity. First, from a socio-deterministic perspective of social media and user-generated media theory, native people use technology to create videos to accomplish social purposes. Later, the circuit of culture will be the communicational frame for analysing the video creation, pointing out the production of cultural artefacts and looking for consumption and identification. Following this, there will be an in-depth conceptual revision of identity and representation with regard to the critical elements used in video self-production. Finally, the discussion will settle that native identity on media emerges as a political identity, mobilising actions of resistance and decolonisation.

### Creating cultural artefacts

The socio-deterministic perspective and user-generated media theory

The adoption of the internet, the development of the web 2.0 and, later, the creation and spread of social media applications show an appropriation of technology, establishing new possibilities of connection to the broader social world, offering a showcase to present people and their experiences, as well as their constructed knowledge, to others (Schrader, 2015). For Green (2002), talking about technology today must be done under a socio-deterministic perspective, since society and social processes, alongside the creation, usability, and enhancement of technology, are responsible for the development and deployment of the internet. People are no longer passively affected by technology but actively adapt, shape, and influence it, 'not only act with it, but also onto it' (Bakardjieva, 2005; Bargh & McKenna, 2004).

One of the forms of acting on the internet is actively participating in social media by creating content and forming relationships with online communities. For example, the user-generated media theory (UGM) proposed by Shao (2009) suggests that media content is produced

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publicly on the internet to attract others' attention and generate online interactions such as likes, comments, and shares. TikTok is one of the applications that promote UGM; in 15 to 180 seconds, it gives users a space of creation despite the limited media producers, inserting and connecting them with niche audiences that share common values and, as a result, reinforcing further engagement (Ohlheiser, 2021; Omar & Dequan, 2020).

In 2020, TikTok was the most downloaded app, reaching 850 million discharges globally. For Quiroz (2020), this breakthrough is associated with the increase in users on the platform due to lockdowns and quarantines during the Covid-19 pandemic. However, the main motive is users' "active involvement in TikTok, from sharing other people's videos to creating own videos, [...] driven by the need to express themselves publicly" (Omar & Dequan, 2020:131). Moreover, Verma (2021) suggests a social justice perspective on the platform, opening spaces for the voice of marginalised communities and putting them at the forefront of cultural production. Hence, indigenous people of Latin America are taking the horizontality of TikTok to disseminate their ethnicity, influencing public opinion with their own online media production (Burrows, 2016). For example, their videos labelled with hashtags #indigena, #tiktokindigena, and #indígena have reached more than 320 million views.

### The Circuit of Culture

The circuit of culture proposed by Du Gay et al. (1997) is a relational model of creating and re-producing artefacts, situations, and processes, which offers an accurate frame in which to locate UGM theory. Through the five stages of the model, any cultural artefact– in this case, TikTok videos of native people from Latin America – can be explored. The model explains the production and consumption of the videos, what mechanism regulates their distribution, how they represent social identities, and how people feel identified with the artefact (Du Gay *et al.*, 1997). Although the circuit stages are not linear or sequential, allowing for association of meaning anywhere and in any combination, and even with overlap in some processes (Champ, 2008; Woodward, 1997), this dissertation will only take four stages, which will be explained alongside this section.

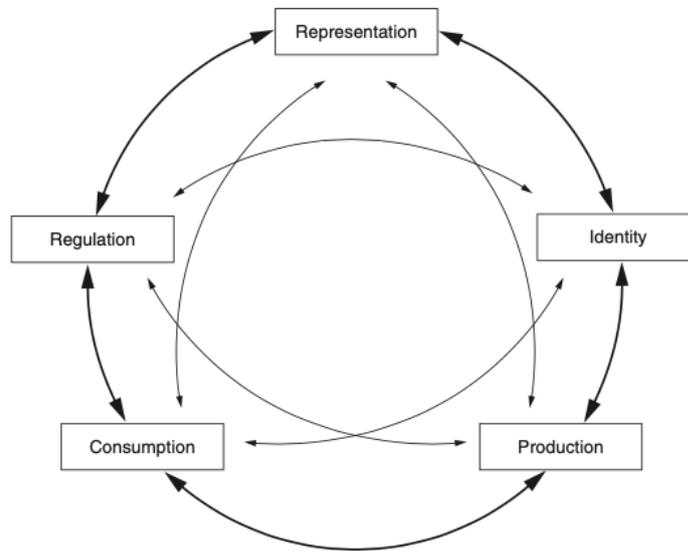


Figure 1: Circuit of Culture (Du Gay et al. 2013: xxxi)

## Culture, meaning, and artefacts

Geertz (1973) has contributed with a publicly and communicational perspective of culture. He pointed out that culture is a pattern of meaning that is historically transmitted, expressed in symbolic forms where people communicate, perpetuate, and develop their understanding of attitudes toward life. For Du Gay et al. (1997, 2013), culture is a process based on meanings or "making sense" of the world that surrounds us through a representational object, but culture is not a fixed structure. Instead, we attribute meanings to that representational object about which we already know something, we refresh meaning by adding new inflexions, or we replace old meanings with new ones according to the cultural process that we have experienced.

Meanings are not only abstract ideas; they also need validation, "bridging the gap between the material world and the world in which language, thinking and communicating takes place" (Du Gay *et al.*, 1997: 10). One form of putting those meanings into place is the necessity to associate them with objects constituting cultural artefacts as the materialisation of that cultural value into a community. TikTok videos act as the cultural artefact, an object which constitutes a social practice of recording a self-discourse and a self-portraiture to be published, carrying

the meaningful act of representing an identity to amplify audiences' voices in the interests of social justice (Livingstone, 2019).

### Production

In the media landscape, production refers to creating material or cultural objects that can be constrained or influenced for social or logistical issues affecting the meanings in the encoding process (Champ, 2008). However, the production also includes "how the processes that have produced that artefact have been represented" (Du Gay *et al.*, 1997: 43), bringing the user perspective into the discussion. In the current scenario of social media, where the barrier between producer and audience is blurred, people actively "(re)produce meanings by negotiating the mutual interface of text and reader. On the other, audiences (re)produce social relations by negotiating the material/social determinations that structure their everyday contexts of action" (Livingstone & Das, 2013: 2). In the case of TikTok, it has provided a platform for encoding cultural artefacts where people can actively shape their media culture, contributing, selecting, and co-constructing their material and the symbolic environment through video selection, interaction, and production.

### Consumption and identification

Consumption is the appropriation of cultural forms in our daily life routines (Mackay, 1997), also comparable to Hall's decoding act (1980). The historical discussion on consumption has been linked to production, pointing out the producer's intentions of putting value and meaning into cultural objects. However, for Du Gay *et al.* (2013), identity plays a crucial role in consuming specific goods due to the acquisition of cultural codes. Thus, consumption involves an active process by the audience to acquire cultural artefacts that mobilise an identity appealing to them.

Consequently, for an artefact to be consumed, it is necessary to identify the identity that it carries. Identification is an ongoing process where we see in the symbolic systems the sense of ourselves and how others see us as indicators of who we are or are not (Champ, 2008; Woodward, 1997). Thus, the identification processes that figure out outside the self are firmly

rooted in how others represent us and how those representations are accurate symbols of our perception and who we are, that is, with our identities.

### Identity and Representation

What is identity?

Identity is commonly linked with nationality, class, gender, race, or any other classification offering a stable group membership (Woodward, 1997). Despite that essentialist perspective, for Hall & Du Gay (1996), identity is a 'point of suture' between interpolative practices trying to locate us as social subjects in specific discourses and subjective processes that construct us as people who can speak. Hall offers a dynamic perspective on identity, finding its sense in discursive practices throughout history and globalisation contexts, instead of one main fixed idea of belonging. Furthermore, as identities are constructed in representational practices, they are rooted in a symbolic system of power that excludes and stigmatises groups, creating hierarchies between poles such as man/woman (Laclau, 1990; Woodward, 1997) or white/indigenous/mestizo in the case of native people.

### Native identity politics

The indigenous landscape of Latin America and the Caribbean is diverse, with more than 500 native groups representing over 54 million people, the equivalent of 11.5% of the population in the region (International Labour Organization, 2019). Each one has its own identity as an element of differentiation from another ethnic groups; however, the main element of indigenous identity is their disposition to differentiate themselves from the dominant culture, assuring their own exclusion (Maldonado Rivera et al., 2019). Woodward (1997) brings the concept of identity politics, claiming that one's identity as a victim of oppression and marginalisation is the primary factor and point of departure for political mobilisation. Consequently, for indigenous groups that have been historically disregarded and misrepresented in political, social, and media spaces, their cultural values and conceptions are enough to be displayed in online cultural artefacts as mobilising meanings of resistance.

### Representation, power, and self-representation

For Hall *et al.* (2013), representation can be found in any form of language, such as videos, which operate as symbols representing – or 'symbolising'- meanings that we want to communicate. These signs "stand for or represent our concepts, ideas and feelings in such a way as to enable others to 'read', decode or interpret their meaning in roughly the same way that we do" (p. xxi). Thus, representation works in two layers; the first is the conceptual mental map of the meaning we want to communicate. The second refers to translating that meaning to a language where we can correlate concepts with written words, sounds, or images.

However, representation also involves unpacking the idea that is transmitted. Along that line, for Foucault (1980), representational language involves a relation of power that regulates the conduct and perception of others. For him, "the apparatus is thus always inscribed in a play of power, but it is also always linked to certain co-ordinates of knowledge. [...] This is what the apparatus consists in: strategies of relations of forces supporting and supported by types of knowledge" (pp. 194,196). In that sense, we can say that the media representation of indigenous people has been historically stereotyped and poorly depicted:

Indigenous people are generally featured in supporting roles and are represented as the pre-Columbian Indian, the peasant, the servant, the villain, or the "pure Indian"—naïve and glorified—with the darkness of their skin serving as an "iconographic brand" that contrasts with the pale skin of the main characters. The indigenous cinematic stereotype is also characterised by other motifs such as wearing a blanket dress, walking with short steps, and speaking with grammatical errors or in archaic forms of Spanish (González Hurtado, 2021: 65).

For that reason, the social media and technological appropriation of indigenous people takes on relevance, opening opportunities for self-representation on their own terms. Goffman (1959) proposed self-presentation theory, accurately predicting how people present themselves today on social media by making a dramaturgical performance in front of others, they influence the observers. Social media content becomes an artefact that shows how the actor performs their identity as a negotiating act toward the audience about "myself" and "my

perspective" (Chua & Chang, 2016; Zhao & Zappavigna, 2018). The performance of indigenous people on TikTok tells us that they are no longer passive audiences of messages in isolation from production and its cultural construction (Salazar, 2009). On the contrary, they are taking the space to present old stories and stories of their current lives, including gender and migration issues, as artefacts for political and cultural activism (González Hurtado, 2021).

### Video Indígena: resistance and decolonisation

The current literature about indigenous social media is still new, and there are more resources based on native production of cinema, documentary, and radio. However, the existing research tends to go in the same direction, locating the production of cultural artefacts as discourses platforms for political and cultural resistance toward meanings imposed by the dominant culture (Maldonado Rivera *et al.*, 2019). For Ramos Martín (2018), indigenous media emerge as a counter-response to the stereotyped representation of indigenous people in the traditional media and a confrontational resource towards the public-private communicational media that support political and economic control over indigenous emancipatory movements.

### Video Indígena

As was explained before, only native identity depicted on social media content nowadays is adequate to mobilise political resistance. Therefore, TikTok videos of native people teaching their language, showing their everyday lives, talking about their history, or only wearing their clothes can be assumed as a demonstration of video indígena. For Salazar & Córdova (2008), video indígena – or indigenous video- is the self-conscious appropriation of popular video to create an imperfect audio-visual material that is in "constant search for new languages, languages unconcerned with technical perfection or conventional rules and modes of representation and narrativisation" (p. 50). Nevertheless, indigenous videos are not only an attempt against the caricatured representation of native people in the media and biased news coverage, as González Hurtado and Ramos Martín argue, but they also establish political responses to the legacies of indigenismo- indigeneity. This means to struggle with the sympathetic interest of ethnographic filmmakers with a paternalistic view of indigenous

people, trying to naturalise and romanticise the preservation of their culture (Novo, 2003; Salazar & Córdova, 2008), which constitutes another form of stereotyping.

### Decolonisation

Along that line, the self-representation of identity that emerges on TikTok videos is part of a fight for decolonisation, as Fanon (1963) suggested, a process between two antagonised forces that struggle to change the world's order. The platform allows indigenous people to subvert the 'fixity' of the discourse of colonialism about the ideological construction of the other, based on western white supremacy, reproducing cultural, historical, and racial representation as unalterable (Bhabha, 2004). Moreover, the critical point of TikTok is the opportunity for indigenous people to speak themselves and about themselves, and that also decolonising, putting the subject that speaks in a geopolitical and body-political location (Grosfoguel, 2007).

Social media and its forms of video indígena challenge a range of negotiations and power relations between state institutions and identity categories, where indigenous activists construct their autonomy through audio-visual technology appropriation (Wortham, 2004). Nevertheless, also, videos have provided opportunities to distribute media content in a broader sense, with their communities, other indigenous people, and society in general (Burrows, 2016), making an open invitation to decolonise and demystify the mind of the audience, locating indigenous people as technological active subjects and participants in the modern public sphere.

### Theoretical framework and research question

Many scholars have focused on the misrepresentation and stereotypical representation of indigenous people in media as a colonial act. Additionally, other literature has pointed out technological appropriation by indigenous communities, linking it with funding and the emerging cinema industry in Latin America. However, just a few new studies have been conducted around social media usage for the self-production of content that mobilises indigenous identity.

For that reason, and taking the relevant literature outlined above, this dissertation aims to create a coherent conceptual framework that links the phenomenon of the self-representation of indigenous people on social media, specifically in TikTok. The theories and concepts founded in broader media studies and specific articles of indigenous media production have been displayed in a coherent order to form a reasonable base upon which to locate future results and the findings of this dissertation:

(1) First, the socio-deterministic perspective of technology is the basis for understanding the user-generated media theory that people are practising in any social media platform, such as TikTok, to formulate content, in this case, videos.

(2) TikTok videos are cultural artefacts that carry meanings and practices which circulate in different stages of the circuit of culture (Du Gay *et al.*, 1997) —pointing to their forms and motives for production and looking for consumption by the audience, which is driven by identification with the meanings/identities embedded on them.

(3) Furthermore, indigenous people have appropriated cultural artefacts, using them as symbolic self-representational systems of native identity, which is a form of political identity.

(4) Lastly, comparing native TikTok videos with existing literature on indigenous audio-visual production allows us to locate them under the concept of video indígena- indigenous video, emerging as a manifestation of resistance and decolonisation.

Moreover, I would like to explain why TikTok has been the social media platform selected for this research despite the existence of others. TikTok is a new platform, released to the market in 2017 but only reaching its massive size last year. Also, it has become popular in Latin America, increasing its usage by 185% in the region between 2019 and 2020 (Buckle, 2020). The platform's formula is short videos that unfold randomly on the main page where users can slide up and down to change them with only one hand and allow quick interactions of 'likes', 'share', and 'comments'. Moreover, the platform has reduced the cost of video editing; anyone with a smartphone can record things around them or themselves and shared it as public content in minutes (SHI & Chung, 2020), taking the power of one media producer to millions

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of producers. Along that line, we can say that the TikTok formula is a hit offering an interactive experience to the audience and becoming popular across regions, countries, and classes. Consequently, it has allowed the engagement of audiences not represented in other media and social media on a global scale (Quiroz, 2020; Verma, 2021), offering a democratising space of production to spread individual voices.

With the information above in mind, this research pursues the following question: Why are indigenous people in Latin America using TikTok to self-represent their identity? Furthermore, because of the broad scope of the question presented, this study attempts to tackle more specific research questions: Which discourses and practices are embedded in the public self-depiction of native identity on social media? and, Is TikTok the suitable platform for expressing their native identity?

In order to answer these questions, the methodology chosen for this research is semi-structured in-depth interviews applied to creators of TikTok videos who define and identify themselves with indigenous groups in Latin America. The methodology selected allows the interviewer to create an open and safe environment to discuss issues of struggle and personal topics (Warren, 2002), in this case, ethnic origin, episodes of discrimination, and digging into self-representation as political manifestation. The objective of this research is to discover: (1) the suitability and affordance of the platform for self-representation; (2) the reason the TikTok creators express publicly their indigenous identity instead of other elements of their identity such as their hobbies, studies, or any other personal activity; and (3) the social responsibility carried by the position of social media creator with a native discourse.

Due to the lack of enough data that link indigenous people and social media usage, and the insufficient literature about TikTok, this research contributes to media and social studies in two forms: first, understanding the meanings and purposes of the public depiction of marginalised and oppressed identities on social media, which can turn into political identities; and secondly, the comprehension and exploration of the user's perspective on the cutting-edge platform TikTok. Within postcolonial and decolonial studies, the contribution is based on understanding the appropriation of social media platforms to mobilise political discourses of

resistance that emerge from the oppressed voices without intermediaries. Even though this research focuses on a specific group – natives - of a particular region of the global south – Latin America – it can give insights into broader studies of marginalised identities depicted on social media.

### **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

This section reviews the qualitative methodology used to explore the research questions, addressing the sampling approach, the creation and application of the researching tools, and the analysis procedure for the data gathered. It ends with a review of the ethical and reflexivity aspect of the process carried out.

#### **Methodological rationale**

This dissertation uses semi-structured qualitative interviews to explore, in a deep conversation between researcher and respondents, the personal issues that interviewees may not be consciously aware in certain situations, such as feelings, attitudes, and predisposition (Berger, 1998; Warren, 2002). Along this line, for Silverman (2019), this method comes under a constructivist approach because the research topic is mutually constructed, with the interviewer and interviewees being in an equal position of interest to build narratives about what people do in real life. Semi-structured interviews have a unique topic guide for all respondents; however, its application is individual, and it is possible to alter the guide to the understanding and velocity of each respondent (Fielding & Thomas, 2016). Moreover, during the interview process, there is space to ask follow-up questions to pursue the topics of interest for the research, and to practice prompting to encourage the respondents to produce answers, reformulating the question slightly for better delivery of these answers (Berger, 1998; Fielding & Thomas, 2016).

Semi-structured interviews are an advantageous method because: (1) they do not involve special skills, but are just about the interaction with the person; (2) they are versatile and flexible, allowing for the exploration of the topic from ideas, opinions, or anecdotes in an open-

ended question guide; (3) the data is collaboratively produced, involving the researcher as an active participant in exploring the topic; and (4) they allow the investigation of topics that involve complex issues such as race, ethnicity, sexual identity, and political opinions (Berger, 1998; Fielding & Thomas, 2016; Warren, 2002). Additionally, I conducted a pilot audio-visual analysis of TikTok videos produced by a specific native group of South America. However, the result and conclusion presented disadvantages for clarifying the motives of the TikTok creators because the methodology itself is grounded in the researcher's interpretation, introducing biases in analysing the codes presented on the videos. Consequently, that methodology was discarded for the purpose of this dissertation.

Considering what has been outlined above, semi-structured interviews are the suitable method for knowing the motives of indigenous TikTok makers from their own voices, speaking directly with enough space and flexibility to clarify their meaning-making on videos, and making a critical reflection on self-recording (Galletta & Cross, 2016). Besides, they provide a one-to-one space of conversation with the researcher who wants to explore the experiences of those people who have been ignored or misrepresented, reducing the influence of other perspective and the forced self-disclosure that other methods such as focus groups entail (Silverman, 2019).

### Research design

#### Sampling

When I defined the sample for this project, the characteristics that interviewees needed to fulfil in order to participate in the research were clear. I consciously prepared the homogeneity of the respondents based on Spanish speakers, owners of TikTok accounts with more than 10 thousand followers, and profiles dedicated to showing ethnicity. However, I also assumed the representational heterogeneity of the sample, selecting people from different genders, occupations, and diverse indigenous groups in Latin America. For Robinson (2014), the exercise of inclusion and exclusion of the subjects' characteristics allows for the definition of a coherent sample that can accomplish the research purposes, facilitating further analysis and interpretation.

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Occupation	Followers (rounded)	Ethnicity	Nationality (If applicable)
Participant 1	Male	22	University student	116 thousand	Quechua	Peruvian
Participant 2	Female	31	Actress	35 thousand	Quechua and Aymara	No applicable
Participant 3	Male	40	Publicist and Artist	12 thousand	Mapuche	Chilean
Participant 4	Female	24	Publicist	12 thousand	Gunayala	Panamanian
Participant 5	Female	-	Dancer	25 thousand	Rapa Nui	Chilean
Participant 6	Male	32	-	219 thousand	Nahualt	No applicable

Figure 2: Participant profiles

In qualitative interviews, the sample size is a range suggested between six and nine participants (Silverman, 2019). For this project, I completed six full interviews with an average of one hour of recording. It was unnecessary to expand the size because of data saturation; this means that additional data would not add or change the existing data and doing more interviews would merely collect repeat responses (Silverman, 2019). Additionally, with the six interviews, I already represented diverse ethnic groups in Latin America, achieving the sample strategy of quota purposive (Robinson, 2014), that means I established a minimum number of cases required to represent the two regions of Latin America, ending up with two cases for Central America and four for South America<sup>1</sup>.

Finally, the contact process was carried out directly for each respondent. After a review of TikTok profiles, looking for creators who fulfilled the sampling characteristics, I contacted them through Instagram private messages, whose accounts were linked to their TikTok profiles. After a first approach, I requested their emails to send the formal invitation and the consent form. The interviewees presented a willingness to talk; this was attributable to the

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<sup>1</sup> When I refer to Central America, I am including Mexico. South America includes a respondent from Easter Island, a Polynesian region which administratively belongs to Chile (Biblioteca del Congreso Nacional de Chile, 2005).

careful selection of the sample and their roles as social media producers, which involves high communication competencies (Warren, 2002).

### Research tools

#### Interview guide

The interview guide (appendix B) has three sections. In the first part are the research presentation and explanation of the interview procedure. Second are the questions addressed by this project, focusing on three main areas – creator purpose, ethnicity, and TikTok's advantages for social media self-representation. Lastly, there are demographic question to confirm interviewees' identity and to "see if any correlations can be drawn between particular characteristics" (Berger, 1998: 59).

#### Conducting interviews

The interviews were conducted online, giving the researcher the possibility to connect with people located in different regions, far from the researcher's location. Additionally, interviewees were located in different places, with participants scattered across Latin America. Five of them used Zoom without connection constraints, allowing for synchronous conversations to give an immediate 'real' sense of the other for the interviewer and the participant (Mann & Stewart, 2000). However, one interview was done by WhatsApp voice message due to lack of internet bandwidth to connect a video call in the participant's location. Despite the asynchronous mode, the interview was personal, fruitful, and thoughtful (Kivits, 2005). The interviews' recording was in audio and video throughout the Zoom platform and with an additional voice recorded as back-up in case of Zoom failures and in order to save the archive.

Before conducting the analysis, the interviews were transcribed manually and the verbatim technique was used to capture everything the respondents said that could later become significant. Also, manual transcription is advantageous for further analysis because it allows the researcher early familiarisation with the data (Fielding & Thomas, 2016). Furthermore, the transcription and coding process was in the original language, Spanish, in order not to not

alter any interpretation. Therefore, I translated only the sample interview and the analysis matrix (appendix A) into English in order to present them in this dissertation.

### Thematic analysis

I used manual thematic analysis to analyse the qualitative data gathered because it allows for the detailed organisation, description, and identification of patterns present in the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). After transcribing, I reduced the data by doing the first coding round with an interpretative approach, which means "without trying to fit it into a pre-existing coding frame, or the researcher's analytic preconceptions" (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 84). Later, I followed some steps of Attride-Stirling (2001) proposal for thematic networks to organise the codes into categories, collating and clustering the codes that shared similar topics and creating themes. Finally, following a deductive approach based on the literature review concepts and the interview guide, I identified, deduced, and separated the themes into two: global themes and sub-themes; the latter are contained within the global ones. In the end, I selected quotes from the interviews to illustrate the sub-themes, which are helpful for the results and interpretation of the thematic network (Appendix A).

### Ethics and reflexivity

#### Ethics

All the participants received a consent form to secure the protection and anonymisation of their data. The majority signed it before the interview, but some of them consented orally at the beginning of the session. The supervisor revised the formal invitation to the research and the consent form in English, suggesting slight changes to avoid repetitive information that could confuse the participants. As all the sample participants were Spanish speakers, the invitation and the consent form were translated and delivered to them in that language. The participants' names were anonymised, while the names of their TikTok accounts are not present in this study.

During the interviews, I realised that two participants were raised in the US, presenting some issues with Spanish and using English expressions. I encouraged them to provide a safe and

friendly context for the conversation (Warren, 2002), asking them to change the language of the interviews to English, but they insisted on conducting it in Spanish. During the transcription, the testimonies were fully respected, making the English influence evident in some expressions in the interview transcription.

### Reflexivity

The main motives for producing this dissertation were my interest in TikTok from a media researcher perspective and my identification as a Latin American woman, believing that my position could establish a closer connection with native identity. However, during the literature review and methodology application process, I realised that this last statement could be controversial for the participants and me. Despite my proximity in territory with the topic and the sample, my identification within a nationality and the western heritage present in my name and corporality are characteristics that influence the interview and the interpretation of the results (Warren, 2002). Therefore, to reduce the power imbalance that can produce unequal research, I openly shared my identity with the respondents, creating a collaborative and exploratory meaning-making of data (Doucet & Mauthner, 2008). Moreover, I informed myself about decolonisation and indigeneity to be aware of my narrow conceptions of the topic in the attempt to make the maximum effort to pursue neutral research.

## RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION

In the following section, I display the results obtained by the individual in-depth interviews carried out with six indigenous TikTok creators from Latin America. To generate the interpretations from the thematic grid, I used a data-driven and deductive approach, keeping in mind the emergence of new issues and ideas that influence the analysis. To address these, I provided critical and analytical justifications for those interpretations, using the literature review presented above and new literature on the topic (Gilbert & Stoneman, 2016). Finally, I present the results according to the global themes sections of the thematic grid, also including new findings that provide valuable insights for the field's elucidation. The discussions are illustrated with relevant quotes from the interviewees.

## Purpose of creating videos

### Entertaining

In the first approach of the interview guide, the respondents were asked about the main motive for creating videos. Two of them answered in line with Quiroz's proposal (2020), expressing that their introduction to TikTok was explorative during the quarantines and lockdowns due to the pandemic Covid-19, finding it entertaining for their use and later deciding to create funny and humorous content to display their culture.

My 15-year-old daughter had this application, and one day I asked her what it was about, and she says 'No, this is TikTok', and we started to see it together. I found TikTok super entertaining, and obviously, to cope with those pandemic afternoons. I found it amusing and getting to know things from outside... and it had humour. I used it to cheer people up here on the island in the beginning. Then, I opened my account to create entertaining information for my people (Participant 5).

### Education

Two of the respondents assumed that they opened their accounts to educate the audience, especially teaching some words in their native language. For them, TikTok became a complementary new platform for the work that they had been doing in other social media.

My purpose before starting on social networks was, is and will be the contribution, dissemination and revaluation of the Andean culture, in this case obviously through the Quechua language (Participant 1).

### Visibility

Another reason that promotes video creation is visibility, mainly when the respondent analysed the lack of a presence of native history in the educational curriculum of their countries. Furthermore, they also realised the absence of native people in other cultural atmospheres such as broadcasting and cinema. Thus, TikTok emerges as an alternative scenario for the expression of marginalised groups, motivating cultural production among them (Verma, 2021).

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My intention with the videos is that people learn. As I told you, some people know more about European history than the history of us in Panama (Participant 4).

In Netflix, we have LGBTQ issues, black voices, and Asians, but we do not have indigenous. There is nothing about indigenous, and there is no in Amazon; it is very little represented, basically invisible. So, I feel that in TikTok for us, indigenous people, it is very important because it is the first time our voices are being heard on a massive level. We are making visible that we are connecting with each other, empowering ourselves, and learning from us (Participant 2).

Despite the driving reasons for video creation, we can conclude that videos are cultural artefacts (Du Gay *et al.*, 2013) that mobilise meanings, in this case, native culture, which is displayed in several kinds of performances. Also, those videos are embedded in the circuit of culture in the way they are produced, where creators put a clear intention in their creation and consumption, gathering audience's engagement according to their necessities to learn and entertain, and their curiosity.

### Indigenous identity

As videos are cultural artefacts, respondents were asked why to put on public display their native identity instead of displaying other sides of their self-construction, such as hobbies, occupations, or others. During the interview, they realised in an explorative way with the researcher (Warren, 2002) the reasons for showing their ethnicity, with three recurrent themes appearing among the respondents. The themes are consequently interconnected.

### Self-recognition

Identity is a 'never-ending' process that involves an interface where social and cultural situations, representations, and subjects' positions merge (Hall & Du Gay, 1996), completing the process of identification. In the respondents' case, most were raised in cities alongside globalisation and modernity, using technological artefacts, and receiving formal education. However, media representations of indigenous people reduce them to primitive subjects deprived of any technological development (Salazar, 2009). Therefore, it is correct to think of

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an 'identity crisis' as a characteristic of modern societies (Woodward, 1997), where subjects are challenged to identify themselves and their particularities in the midst of stimuli and biased representations.

During pandemic times, I felt that something was missing. So, I began to look for more information about where I came from, investigating history and culture. My parents always talked to us, but there are things that one does not know because of being in the city. Sometimes you forget certain things about yourself, so I began to look for my identity (Participant 4).

For Woodward (1997), a way to lead with an identity crisis is the contestation and reconstruction of fixed 'imagined communities' which establish boundaries of nationality, race, gender, among others, gathering classifications and discriminations based on discourses of power (Laclau, 1990). Therefore, native people consolidate their own exclusion as marginalised groups, transforming and recognising their identity in a political point of departure for mobilisation (Woodward, 1997).

In Tik Tok I am transparenting my ancestral awakening. (...) And that for me that is strong because I feel that I am naked and exposed; it also fills me with fear. I thought it would be much more rejection that people would say 'oh the Mapuches and the territories, the alcoholics, the fire, and the barricade ... like the terrorists', which people have said, but I thought the percentage of prejudice would be much higher. I did not know how they would receive this idea of mine to expose my ethnic group, expose myself as Mapuche, and dare to speak Mapudungun (Participant 3).

### Collective identity

As identity is related to a constant process where the self is localised, while native identity practices its own exclusion when subjects are represented with bias, the leverage in others who share the same values seems to be a possibility to locate self-identification. Along that line, other native videos displayed on the platform influenced their identity construction, allowing the for "recognition of some common origin or shared characteristics with another person or

group, or with an idea, and with the natural closure of solidarity and allegiance established on this foundation" (Hall & Du Gay, 1996: 2).

I loved seeing the beautiful people from Canada and the US, I truly liked knowing about their culture, and we had so many things in common that made me feel at home, like in my family, and that is how I discovered the hashtag #TikTok or #family. All that inspired me to show my own identity (...) Watch different creators say, 'indigenous pride' for me... it was like 'wow, I am so proud to be indigenous ', so I said, 'it is my time' (Participant 2).

However, collective identity construction also implies an active involvement within the group. For Edgar & Toone (2019), participation in imagining fields, such as TikTok, carries out habitus to rebuild the material world in the service of collective social justice. To illustrate this statement, the respondents clearly showed identification and fraternity with other native groups and their own groups.

With my indigenous people, we understand each other. We know what we are going through. We have that connection that our people have gone through genocides, not only... massacres, but also cultural ones. And that is something that unifies us, from people who are in Alaska to people from Patagonia (Participant 2).

I did not expect to find a great family like the one I have so far in Tik Tok, and I really consider them as my brothers and sisters. What we put into practice is the Andean worldview. It is enough that we have something in common; it is enough that we are in the same context (Participant 1).

### New finding: diaspora identity

One interesting finding in this global theme is the non-national identification expressed by two respondents, which coinciding with those born and raised in the United States. As respondent six says:

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I was born in the US, but my inheritances are from Mexico. And I have spoken about my experience of being Mexican in the US, Mexican-American. I have said that even though I walk in these places, knowing that I am American, people do not see me as American; they see as Mexican first. And that makes sense because I was raised by my parents, who are Callamberos, from Mexico.

I: So then, with which nationality do you identify?

Well, I say I am native...indigenous.

As an interpretation for this finding, I can argue for the concept of 'diaspora identity' (Hall, 1990), experienced by people dispersed and located across the globe and not at 'home'. Therefore, the meaning of one cultural identity with specific manners and traditions do not make sense for them, hosting their identity crisis and returning to their identities of origin, linking them with their native affiliations as illustrated in the quote above (Woodward, 1997).

### Pride

To close this section, all the respondents explicitly show a feeling of pride in their indigenous identities, reinforcing the values of their native history, land and language.

I am very proud of my personality and identity. I do it for love, for my ancestors, my real story, not the story after our people's oppression (Participant 6).

Where we are, we must be us; if we speak Quechua, we speak Quechua; if we have the possibility of wearing our typical clothes, we have to wear them well. We have to show ourselves as we are (Participant 1).

### Self-representation

During the self-video-recording, Tiktokers display an intentional performance to influence the audience (Goffman, 1959), complementing it with elements to create a representational system. Applying Hall *et al.* (2013) representation approach, respondents were asked about the

elements they use in the videos, giving a symbolic configuration in two layers: the idea or conceptual map and signs that symbolised that idea carrying meanings.

### Language

Among all the respondents, language appears as an essential resource in their videos, focusing on teaching pronunciation, writing, significance, and translation of some words. Thus, despite the semiotic perspective of the words themselves, based on 'langue' and 'parole' as proposed by Saussure, the interpretation of the use of native language on TikTok must be seen as an overall system of representation (Hall *et al.*, 2013), carrying meanings of preservation and education.

I am a Quechua speaker; my mother tongue is Quechua. My relatives, my father, and my mother are Quechua-speaking peasants and farmers. As a Quechua speaker, I am responsible for spreading what is mine and not waiting for others to do it... I do it according to my possibilities; that is the purpose that drives all this (Participant 1).

Some people are forced to speak Spanish. Language carries culture: it carries identity, so the simple fact that they do not talk is like they are leaving their identity aside, and it is a way to kill your identity. So, it is very important to speak these languages that are original and come long before Spanish (Participant 2)

### Clothes, accessories, music, and dance

In addition to language, clothes, accessories, music and dance are external elements taken by the creator in a conscious act to reinforce their public identity presentation, focusing on the meanings of those elements and not on their usability (Hall *et al.*, 2013).

That is a conscious act. Here in the city, few young people wear indigenous clothing. You usually see people who wore regular clothing and not Kuna. So yes, my content is always based on wearing my clothes because it makes me feel proud of where I come from, my identity (Participant 4).

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My passion is dance, so I communicate what I am passionate about, and I realise that people like it. Also, they do not handle much information. I have seen dances from there that are not what our dances are, so I take the opportunity to transmit accurately what Rapa Nui dance is like (Participant 5).

### Corporality

Embodiment is complex because it moves between the biological and naturally given, and the conscious modifications we can make to it. Therefore, the meanings of the natural body carry interpretations and categorisations outside the subject's control, serving to recognise the individual's locality (Woodward, 1997), in this case, native facial features.

My face is enough. Someone sees me and already knows 'okay, that girl is not white, she is not Chinese, she is not from India, she is indigenous' (Participant 2).

However, body self-alterations such as body painting, hairstyle, or piercings offer the subject directed social interactions (Woodward, 1997), being used by native people to empower with pride the physical features historically associated with indigenous representations.

I tell a story and make a video, and while I am braiding and empowering the braids, right? That it is also beautiful to have braids (participant 2).

I paint my face to show everyone how I live, and I do it because I feel that way and I like it. And I also wear feathers and braid my hair because it is part of our indigenous culture (Participant 6).

To sum up, there is a strong connection between identity and representation. Identity is constituted within discourse and modes of representation by specific enunciative strategies where modalities of power are at play (Hall & Du Gay, 1996). On the one hand, native identity is inherent to the self, being the object of biased representations to support types of knowledge that exclude and stigmatise certain groups (Foucault, 1980; Laclau, 1990). On the other hand, self-determined subjects can appropriate representational systems as counter-strategies to

those 'politics of representation' (Hall et al., 2013), introducing and changing symbols to reinforce and empower meanings in their identity presentation.

### Decolonisation and resistance

The respondents were not directly asked about decolonisation; nevertheless, during the interview process, they demonstrated that their TikTok videos consequently challenge power discourses that constrain opinions and interactions towards them throughout society. Therefore, the different consequences gathered by their videos, intentional or not, were classified in the decolonisation and resistance theme.

### Combating discrimination and stereotyping

Traces of colonialist discourse are still present in society, constantly emphasising western supremacy and re-reproducing historical and racial representations of pre-Columbus indigeneity (Bhabha, 2004). For Novo (2003), one of those traces is exclusion based on race, associating 'whiteness' as something desirable because it symbolises education, manners, morality, and progress. Therefore, native subjects are stigmatised and discriminated against, relegating them as subjects who belong only to the countryside and denying them education, health, and housing rights. Along that line, TikTok natives' videos defy discriminatory practices that hierarchise social construction based on race.

To decolonise, I mean to change the mindset. For example, the standard of beauty that we have is something totally colonised. Only white people with green eyes are beautiful, but there is diversity; we are all beautiful. Racism is basically a colonising idea, and colourism still remains from those times of colonisation (Participant 2).

Furthermore, indigenous technological appropriation and self-generated content provide opportunities to challenge and resist stereotypical mainstream media representations (Burrows, 2016), which are commonly associated with an "idealised version of a 'whitened Indian' through mestizaje (miscegenation) and acculturation" (González Hurtado, 2021: 66).

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In reality, there are not many films about indigenous people. Yes, there are, but not at the levels of US movies or something like that. Sometimes there are indigenous actors, but they put us as immigrants, postmen, as an extra, just present. There is no protagonist of the film, like ...they reject us (Participant 6).

For example, in some posts, people said to me, "Is it true that you live in caves?" Then I answer ..."No, we do not live in caves"...So I try to convey the truth (Participant 5).

### Decolonising other natives

The construction of Latin American identity has always been a struggle, influenced by recent external forces of organisation and mediation, and the heritage of colonialist practices (Ramos Martín, 2018). As a matter of fact, the idea of 'whiteness' is deeply rooted in Latin American societies, not only because it has been associated with progress since colonisation, as I said, but also because national identities were constructed by colonists who identified themselves as closer to 'white men' fighting against 'rebel Indians' (Novo, 2003). Although Latin America is a mixed-race land, indigenous people are perceived as an 'other' that is not included in national discourses that affirm national identities (Bhabha, 2004); it is therefore difficult for mixed-race and indigenous people, inserted in modern societies, to identify within a native identity. Hence, native TikTok videos contribute to identity construction and search for other people with native roots who do not recognise themselves as indigenous on the first attempt.

Many people do not show their Mapuche second last name, and they never name it, so that no one knows that they are Mapuche, but I feel that what I am doing contributes to feeling the pride of having indigenous ancestry (Participant 3).

Some people find me and send me some beautiful messages telling me that it was precisely what they were looking for. They were crying ... they discovered that they were indigenous and did not know it. All their lives had been called mestizos (Participant 2).

### Vindication

During the interviews, some respondents feel responsible, as new generations, to take advantage of online spaces to fight for their rights and raise the voice for their ancestors, because their public native identity is an antagonist force against the systematic and historical oppression of their communities. Thus, the internet and TikTok are "the new global public sphere, offer[ing] Indigenous peoples renewed opportunities to control communication channels and to influence public opinion using their own media" (Burrows, 2016: 3).

It is that now young people are making history. Why? Although it is true, our parents may not have been like us. They have not raised their heads for us using their language because they were afraid that they would be discriminated against – 'oh what a cholito', but in our case as young people, we are showing our faces for them, we are looking for that claim in which we are all equal, in which we all have the same rights (Participant 1).

All in all, indigenous TikTok videos are, in fact, a form of Video Indígena (Salazar & Córdova, 2008) because they transfer the audio-visual production to the natives, allowing them to use their voices for the mobilisation of a decolonial discourse. Moreover, they are challenging discrimination and stereotyping, encouraging self-recognition in their peers, and installing their ancestors' causes in the public sphere.

### Platform-suitability

With the socio-deterministic technological perspective in mind, the interviewees were invited to talk about TikToks' features to express their identity on social media, coming up with four themes that seem advantageous to put user-generated media theory in practice

### Audience-reaching

This topic was discussed by most of the respondents, usually being compared to other platforms. They commented that TikTok is growing in user numbers, offering a broader showcase for their videos and connecting them with fans (Ohlheiser, 2021), while Instagram and Facebook are used to maintain contact with their close ties.

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I like the platform because you can reach people from Panama and other people around the world. It is a platform that has grown a lot, and yes, I like it because I can make my culture visible. The difference that it is made with Instagram is that Instagram connects you with friends or people you already have added, but on TikTok, you can reach more people (Participant 4).

### Easy video-editing

TikTok has made video-editing accessible to the audience because it reduces the difficulty and the cost, and anyone with a smartphone can record themselves and things around (SHI & Chung, 2020). Therefore, respondents highlighted the platform's feasibility for putting together elements such as music, stickers, text, and clips in one audio-visual product.

It allows you to edit it yourself in a very simple way, a fixed camera only by putting on impressions, or if you want, you can also edit the video, adding effects, brightness, transitions. So it has everything, and I feel that it is a platform that gives you many possibilities as a creator (Participant 3).

### Creativity and interactivity

For Quiroz (2020), TikTok puts the subjects into action, actively participating in several kinds of videos, including tutorials, acting, and dances. Respondents confirm this statement and remark on the platform's extensive possibilities for showing their creative side. Also, it has been beneficial for some of them who have artistic occupations.

I highlight the diversity of tools that TikTok puts at your disposal in a little box. It is incredible! I strongly agree that it democratises creativity, makes artists more creative, and raises people who can be very interesting, who until now had not dared to show their performance (Participant 3).

In the case of interactivity, participants recognise that TikTok allows them to contact their audience directly, receive comments and likes, create content due to the audience's request, and duet videos with other TikTokers. Therefore, for Omar & Dequan (2020: 132), "TikTok must optimise its interactive features to facilitate interactions between users and users, content

creators and users, as well as users and the medium for its continuous success and sustainable development".

I think people like my videos because they ask me a lot, they always ask me for techniques, or how to do this step, how to do this other step, what does this step mean, what does this other one mean, so they ask me a lot and I try to make videos answering them (Participant 5).

It is no longer the television that has a screen, and I am watching it without acting. Here, I can interact directly on Tik Tok, make a duo video with someone, and interact with that person (Participant 1).

### Platform-impact

This complete section emerges as a new finding. Even though respondents discussed the platform features in the previous section, they also answered about the unexpected consequences that video-creation has brought to them, making changes in their video-production routines and interaction with the platform. To interpret the findings, I use user-generated media theory alongside other social concepts.

### Feedback-dealing

During the conversation, respondents expressed issues related to audience feedback. Some of those experiences were perceived as positive and others as hostile. To deal with negative comments, some participants ignore them, while others actively delete and filter posts. This last attitude can be explained by the uncertain reduction theory (Rains & Scott, 2007), about the subject's conscious attempt to minimise other's unpleasant behaviours, applying passive strategies such as looking at audience attitudes, or active strategies like manipulating the platform to affect the individual reaction.

I do not answer negative comments ... I am practising not answering them because I am a proud person. It is conflictive that a person judges the indigenous people or me, and I am always ready to defend my people. So then, it is a challenge, a problematic scenario for not responding because part of my characteristics is facing

those negatives. Still, I try not to answer a lot. I am practising being more patient (Participant 6).

There are times when there are too many haters, and I know what I have to do for my mental health is to block them, right? (Participant 2).

### Content responsibility

To provide accurate and truthful content, indigenous TikTokers prepare, revise, and corroborate the information displayed on the videos with detail. That situation demonstrates impression management theory (Goffman, 1959), where subjects have the deliberative control of others' perceptions about them. Therefore, social media features have deepened their applicability (Amichai-Hamburger & Vinitzky, 2010), allowing the previous content preparation to avoid any stumbles and interpellation from the audience in the information delivery.

In my case, I make a calendar with the type of content that I want to upload on TikTok and Instagram. It carries responsibility because it depends on what you want to say; it can be good or bad, so yes, before uploading the content, one must verify. For example, I have teachers who tell me, "Yes, you can upload it" or "you have to correct this" because I am also learning from my culture (Participant 4).

### Community-building

Lastly, one of the consequences of online user-generated media is the active involvement with their audiences. The positive reinforcement makes them more likely to post new materials, building an online community around their content that encourages dynamic co-creation (Shao, 2009).

I see how a community is building now because there are people who talk to me every day to ask me for things, like this teacher who tells me that he used a video to teach interculturality to his students. Thus, we generated a community that makes me very cheerful (Participant 3).

There are many more Quechua creators, and many of them were my followers who started their accounts with me. I have helped them to grow and be better known (...) I did an online duo to introduce them to the audience about their Quechua identity (...) right now they are doing very well (Participant 1).

### CONCLUSION

The main aim of this project is to provide a novel perspective on how and why indigenous people from Latin America are appropriating online production spaces to raise their voices, putting out front their native identity as a central value. Through self-representation, native identity emerges as a political matter to decolonise the power discourses present in traditional media and society.

The key questions of this research are: Why are indigenous people of Latin America using TikTok to self-represent their identity? Which practices and discourses are embedded in the public self-depiction of native identity on social media? and, Is TikTok the suitable platform to express their native identity? Hence, through in-depth interviews carried out with six native TikTokers from Latin America, the main findings suggest that social media without beauty, discourse, and representation constraints, such as TikTok (Quiroz, 2020; Verma, 2021), seems to be a scenario to install natives' discussion through video creation. They educate the audience about their culture with humour and gain visibility that challenges broadcasting and cinema production about them.

However, the appropriation of cultural spaces of production on social media requires self-determined subjects. Still, self-recognition as a native person is a struggle due to biased media representation and the ideal 'whiteness' embedded in Latin American societies. This study suggests that to cope with the process of self-recognition, the leverage in collective identity can be a solution, having, therefore, self-determined subjects that recognise themselves as native with pride. Also, this study serves as the first reference for exploring the field of identity diaspora among indigenous subjects born and raised far from their communities due to globalisation and migration processes.

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Once the subjects are secure in their native identity, they express this on social media, highlighting elements of their culture such as language, clothes, accessories, music, and dance. At the same time, they reinforce their corporality with modifications to empower their representations. Furthermore, because of the constructivist approach of the interviews (Warren, 2002), respondents realised that their public native self-depiction had embedded decolonial discourses, fighting discriminatory and stereotyped practices, vindicating their ancestors' causes and decolonising other natives who do not recognise themselves as such.

It is critical to remark that putting native identity on public display requires open and democratic platforms, as I said, but also platforms that provide a wide range of creative possibilities to express their performances, supported by easy-video editing and low-cost production (SHI & Chung, 2020). Moreover, to generate the desired impact, the platform must contribute with broader audience-reaching with which to interact and build community. Nevertheless, despite the fact that TikTok can provide all these features, it also has consequences for their performance, with creators having to deal with undesired feedback and forcing the exhausting preparation of their videos.

To sum up, and coming back to the research questions, Participant 1 said: "We must get up to look for those opportunities, assert ourselves so they can respect our rights and accept us as we are. And one way of doing that is by using, taking advantage of social networks". This statement shows that democratic and creative online production spaces like TikTok are suitable for indigenous self-representation, the participation in which is catalysed by years of invisibility and discrimination in society and media. Moreover, the public display of native identity allows creators to re-value their ethnicity and raise their voices to decolonise and fight against the values of the western public sphere.

Ultimately, this dissertation contributes to further research in two ways: First, in the exploration of the articulation of a wider variety of identities in online imagined communities, finding its sense of belonging in others' self-representations and in the extended possibilities that a platform can offer for their display; and secondly, in the case of indigenous people, to the understanding of the appropriation of social media to depict accurate representations of

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themselves using their own voices and realities, with TikTok videos being a new form of Video Indígena to provide counter-arguments against the mainstream media's discourses of power.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A – Thematic analysis grid

Global themes	Themes	Quotes
Purpose of creating videos	Entertainment	“My 15-year-old daughter had this application, and one day I asked her what it was about, and she says ‘no, this is TikTok’, and we started to see it together. I found TikTok super entertaining, and obviously, to cope with those pandemic afternoons. I found it amusing and getting to know things from outside... and it had humour. I used it to cheer people up here on the island in the beginning. Then, I opened my account to create entertaining information for my people” (Participant 5)
	Education and teaching	“I started uploading that type of content so that people could learn. People told me, “Wow, I the meaning of this... I am Panamanian, and I am learning it thanks to you. They never taught me this kind of thing at school, much less at university”. So yes, I have had positive responses, people have also been learning a lot (...) in the end, what I want to achieve with this is that people learn” (Participant 4).
	Visibility	“In Netflix, we have LGBTQ issues, black voices, and Asians, but we do not have indigenous. There is nothing about indigenous, and there is no in Amazon; it is very little represented, basically invisible. So, I feel that in TikTok for us, indigenous people, it is very important because it is the first time our voices are being heard on a massive level. We are making visible that we are connecting with each other, empowering ourselves, and learning from us” (Participant 2).
Indigenous Identity	Self-recognition	“During pandemic times, I felt that something was missing. So, I began to look for more information about where I came from, investigating history and culture. My parents always talked to us, but there are things that one does not know because of being in the city. Sometimes you forget certain things about yourself, so I began to look for my identity” (Participant 4).

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	Collective identity	“I loved seeing the beautiful people from Canada and the US, I really liked knowing about their culture, and we had so many things in common that made me feel at home, like in my family, and that is how I discovered the hashtag #TikTok or #family. All that inspired me to show my own identity (...) Watch different creators say, ‘indigenous pride’ for me... it was like ‘wow, I am so proud to be indigenous’, so I said, ‘it is my time’” (Participant 2).
	Pride	“I am very proud of my personality and identity. I do it out of love, for my ancestors, my real story, not the story after our people's oppression” (participant 6).
Self-representation	Language	“I am a Quechua speaker, my mother tongue is Quechua. My relatives, my father, and my mother are Quechua-speaking peasants and farmers. As a Quechua speaker, I am responsible for spreading what is mine and not waiting for others to do it... I do it according to my possibilities; that is the purpose that drives all this” (Participant 1).
	Corporality	“My face is enough. Someone sees me and already knows ‘okay, that girl is not white, she is not Chinese, she is not from India, she is indigenous’” (Participant 2)
	Clothes and accessories	“That is a conscious act. Here in the city few young people wear indigenous clothing. You usually see people who wore regular clothing and not Kuna. So yes, my content is always based on wearing my clothes because it makes me feel proud of where I come from, my identity” (Participant 4).
	Music and dance	“My passion is dance, so I communicate what I am passionate about, and I realize that people like it. Also, they do not handle much information. I have seen dances from there that are not what our dances are, so I take the opportunity to transmit accurately how Rapa Nui dance is like” (Participant 5)
Decolonising and resistance	Decolonising other natives	“I think mainly to recognize them as Mapuche, to put aside that prejudice of not saying that you are Mapuche. Many people do not show their Mapuche second last name, and they never name it, so that no one knows that they are Mapuche, but I feel that what I am doing contributes to feeling the pride of having indigenous ancestry” (Participant 3).

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	Combating discrimination	“To decolonize, I mean to change the mindset. For example, the standard of beauty that we have is something totally colonized. Only white people with green eyes are beautiful, but there is diversity; we are all beautiful. Racism is basically a colonizing idea, and colourism still remains from those times of colonization” (Participant 2).
	Combating stereotyping	“In reality, there are not many films about indigenous people. Yes, there are, but not at the levels of US movies or something like that. Sometimes there are indigenous actors, but they put us as immigrants, postmen, as an extra, just present. There is no the protagonist of the film, like ...they have us rejected” (Participant 6).
	Vindication	"It is that now young people are making history. Why? Although it is true, our parents may not have been like us. They have not raised their heads for us using their language because they were afraid that they would be discriminated 'oh what a cholito', but in our case as young people, we are giving face for them, we are looking for that claim in which we are all equal, in which we all have the same rights" (Participant 1).
Platform's Suitability	Audience-reaching	“I like the platform because you can reach people from Panama and other people around the world. It is a platform that has grown a lot, and yes, I like it because I can make visible my culture. The difference that it is made with Instagram is that Instagram connects you with friends or people you already have added, but on TikTok you can reach more people” (Participant 4).
	Easy-video editing	“It allows you to edit it yourself in a very simple way, a fixed camera only by putting on impressions, or if you want, you can also edit the video, adding effects, brightness, transitions. It has everything, and I feel that it is a platform that gives you many possibilities as a creator” (Participant 3).
	Interactivity	“I think people like my videos because they ask me a lot, they always ask me for techniques, or how to do this step, how to do this other step, what does this step mean, what does this other mean, so they ask me a lot and I try to make videos answering them” (Participant 5).

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	Creativity	“I highlight the diversity of tools that Tik Tok puts at your disposal in a little box. It is incredible! I strongly agree that it democratizes creativity, makes artists more creative, and raises people who can be very interesting, who until now had not dared to show their performance” (Participant 3)
Platform’s Impact	Feedback-dealing	“I don't answer negative comments ... I'm practising not answering them because I am a proud person. It is conflictive that a person judges the indigenous people or me, and I am always ready to defend my people. So then, it is a challenge, a problematic scenario for not responding because part of my characteristics is facing those negatives. Still, I try not to answer a lot. I am practising being more patient” (Participant 6).
	Content-responsibility	“In my case, I make a calendar with the type of content that I want to upload on TikTok and Instagram. It carries responsibility because it depends on what you want to say; it can be good or bad, so yes, before uploading the content, one must verify. For example, I have teachers who tell me, “Yes, you can upload it” or “you have to correct this” because I am also learning from my culture” (Participant 4).
	Community building	“I see how a community is building now because there are people who talk to me every day to ask me for things, like this teacher who tells me that he used a video to teach interculturality to his students. Thus, we generated a community that has me very cheerful” (Participant 3).

Appendix B - Interview guide

**MC499 script questionnaire for interviews**

**The use of TikTok for the expression of the cultural identity of indigenous people in Latin America**

Hello (Here I present myself). Are you agree to record this session on zoom and use a voice recorder to get a backup source just in case?

Let begin. This is the interview number X for the dissertation project "The use of TikTok for the expression of the cultural identity of indigenous people in Latin America" for the master's in media and Communication (Data and society) of LSE 2020-2021.

The first part of the interview is information about you as a creator of content. The second part is about the disposition of your ethnicity on videos. The third part consists in the advantages of TikTok versus other social media to express yourself. And finally, there is a questionnaire about your personal information and account TikTok. I assure you that I will not ask anything that compromise your identity and feel free to avoid questions that make you feel uncomfortable.

One more thing, do you have the informant consent signed? Do you prefer that I read here with you, and it can be signed verbally? Thank you.

**1. Creator purpose**

- How do you feel on TikTok?
- Which was the initial purpose of the account?
  - Did you open it to create videos or watch other's videos?
- When did you decide to become a creator?
- Do you perceive that you are the creator of content?
  - How do you take that role?

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- Be a creator involves a responsibility? Which one?
- Do your videos require preparation? How is the process of recording?
- How much time do you spend a day on TikTok?
- Do you think that videos mobilise a message and/or produce something in the audience?

## 2. Ethnicity

- How do you choose the topic of your videos? Why ethnicity and to no other characteristic of yourself?
- What means for you to expose your ethnicity publicly?
- Do you think that you want to install a discourse or a cause?
- What is the kind of video that you usually do? Challenges, lip-sync or more talking?
  - Why do you prefer this type of video, and how they match with the form you want to present to others?
- Which elements do you use and put in your videos to represent your ethnicity? (Accessories, flag, clothes)
  - Which is the purpose to display these objects?
- Do you think that your videos have an educational purpose?
- What has been the response of the public?
- How you manage and cope with comments and feedback?
- Do you think your videos have contributed to see the indigenous people in other manner?
- Do you think that people feel represented with your videos?
- Is TikTok a meeting point for indigenous people?

## 3. TikTok as platform

- Explain to me a little bit more about the use of TikTok. When did you discover this platform?

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- How you assume the double role of creator and audience?
- Why do you think it is suitable to show your ethnicity? What about the format, videos?
- Do you think it is more advantageous than other social media? Why?
- Do you combine the use of social media? For example, TikTok and Instagram?
  - Which purpose do you attribute to your different social media apps? Do you use both for the same purpose, or are they different?
- What do you think that TikTok is a good platform for self-expression?
- What does TikTok provide that other media, including traditional media, do not offer to the creator?

#### 4. Personal information

Now we are in the last part of the interview, I will make you some question to corroborate information about you.

- TikTok Account name
- Age
- Ethnicity
- Nationality (if it is applicable)
- Occupation
- Auto-perception of digital literacy and use of TikTok
- Number of followers
- How long do you have the account?

Now are closing the interview. Thank you for your time. Would you like to add anything else?

For further questions or requirements, you can contact me.

**Thank you for your participation.**

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