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It's Giving Tory:" Youth Satirization of Elizabeth Truss on TikTok as Political Commentary

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**“It’s Giving Tory:” Youth Satirization of Elizabeth Truss on TikTok as Political
Commentary**

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Abstract:

This study extends political humor effects research as a means of engaging in political discourse. The current body of research into the influence of social media on political attitudes largely focuses on adults with extreme ideations and organized groups on the internet. This study seeks to better understand young people as newcomers to political discourse. It focuses on how the behavior of women in positions of power is critiqued and analyzed by the youngest voting and pre-voting cohort through analyzing the content produced by young Britons during the Elizabeth Truss administration. Data was gathered using hashtags on TikTok videos posted from September 1st to October 30th, 2022. The analysis used a close reading technique, rhetorical and connotative analysis, tracking patterns and variations. Findings yielded a strong demonstration of political criticism without explicit party allegiance, and how young Britons use different types of satire to enforce gendered norms on women political leaders.

Key words: United Kingdom, Elizabeth Truss, TikTok, Satire, Youth, Sexism

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Introduction

This study seeks to better understand how British youth used TikTok to spread information, opinions, and ideas about Elizabeth Truss to one another through analyzing videos which either used the hashtag #liztruss or made her the subject of their videos. Elizabeth Truss was the shortest serving Prime Minister in the history of the United Kingdom: she served only forty-four days between September 6, 2022 until her resignation on October 25, 2022. Over the span of those two months, thousands of social media users began posting and engaging in discourse about Elizabeth Truss. Everything from her choice of dress to theories that she killed Queen Elizabeth II made its way into how young people began to construct their newest Prime Minister – their third consecutive Conservative leader in just three years. Despite evidence against it, young people have been accused by news organizations, academics, and governments of widespread political disengagement for decades, but the rapid proliferation of Elizabeth Truss-centered content points to alternative ways young Britons decided to engage with their most powerful publicly elected political leader – via TikTok. This study supplies greater understanding of how political satire is used as early explorations of serious political critique on social media. The study of British youth-led satirical content creation on TikTok centered on Elizabeth Truss contributes to the growing literature about the deepening impact of online public discourse on maintaining gendered norms and creating perceptions about political figures, ideas, and systems.

What is TikTok and why does it matter?

Public discourse, especially discourse led by young cohorts, is taking place primarily on the internet. TikTok, a short-form video hosting app owned by Chinese corporation SoundByte, has over one billion users worldwide. Its explosion into Western markets during 2019 and 2020

roused almost immediate suspicion from older generations and governments alike (Cammaerts et al. 2014). As young people began to use the app to engage in lighthearted content creation about their everyday lives, highly localized events, and easily copied dances, they also began to engage in political discourse. The app is geared to reward relatability – creators are especially rewarded if it is also humorous. TikTok’s algorithm drives a wide diversity of trends that connect people – from a common soundbite, to photos of deceased relatives, to walking around American grocery stores comparing them negatively to European ones (spurring on great retaliation from US users) to creating videos ironically mimicking the behaviors of a particularly loathed creator on the app’s platform. When consuming and creating content on TikTok, little else is as relatable to the everyday lives of people in a single nation than their leaders in government. TikTok’s 5 second to 10-minute video length limits and algorithm encourages humor. When that humor is applied to politics, creators are rewarded for their stunted dialogues and absurdist visual, verbal, and written comedy, because they are relating to a large group (the constituents of the government or person they are critiquing) and doing it quickly.

TikTok is rapidly becoming more important in the daily lives of Britons, especially its youngest citizens. According to *World Population Review*, as of 2023, there are roughly 23 million TikTok users living in the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland – or roughly 34% of the UK’s total population. Moreover, 40% of that 23 million are youth between 13 and 24 years of age. Most of these British youth use these platforms every day: a 2023 study of daily social media use by 2,691 people aged 16-24 reported that 68% of Gen-Z users in the UK use TikTok daily (Dixon, 2023). I studied the media outputs of young people from the United Kingdom who are between the ages of 16-24. Not only are a huge number of British youth using TikTok, but UK users spend the highest average hours per-month on the app globally – 27.3 hours (Kemp,

2022). Not only are British youth using TikTok more than any other country in average time spent actively on the app, 29% of Britons age 16-24 use TikTok as their number one news source, and 37% turn to social media more generally for their news according to an Ofcom¹ study.

Social media has allowed for young people to engage with politicians, political groups, and each other in ways that were virtually impossible twenty-three years ago. As a result, young people are being exposed not just to the policies and politics of a group or individual, but what that individual listens to, reads, and enjoys. These aspects of a politician can play a role in how young people begin to construct their image of a politician – and ultimately, how they vote, protest, and think about their government.

This study examines *how* British youth used TikTok to spread information, opinions, and ideas about Elizabeth Truss to one another through analyzing videos which either used the hashtag #liztruss or made her the subject of their videos. Was the way they were producing video content indicative of changing attitudes towards women politicians? How do cultural norms and misogyny translate into political satire produced by young Britons? If young people are criticizing Elizabeth Truss, what aspects of her policies, character, and personal history are they focusing on? Why are these aspects important to understanding attitudes towards political leaders among young British cohorts?

Young Britons have been engaging in conversations about their most visible politicians on social media since its earliest inception. Further, political satire has been critical to understanding the various attitudes of the general public at various points in the United Kingdom's history (Alexander, 1984). Young Britons have found avenues of expressing political

¹ Office of Communications (known as Ofcom) is the government approved regulating authority for the broadcasting, telecommunications and postal industries in the United Kingdom

dissent and dissatisfaction through satire since before the advent of social media – through genres like fanzines, music, and comics. These forms of communication – often led by satirical imagery and strong critiques – contribute to how young people begin to understand their relationship with their communities, governments, and representatives.

Literature Review:

This study draws on scholarship from several fields: media, political, and gender studies. Research into youth political engagement has attracted the interests of scholars from diverse disciplines, including political science, sociology, and psychology. This interest is partly inspired by the popular dialogue surrounding youth political apathy and concerns over the health of democratic institutions (Xenia Chrysochoou and Martyn Barrett (2017), Leonardo Morilino 2011)). As political scientist Mario Quaranta (2016) points out in his article *An Apathetic Generation? Cohorts' Patterns of Political Participation in Italy*, there is an ongoing debate between scholars who claim that the youth are disaffected, disinterested, and disengaged with politics and scholars who think that the appearance of apathy is indicative of youth engaging *differently* from older cohorts. Quaranta's study of Italian youth do not engage in conventional politics (ex: attending political party meetings and donating money) as much as older cohorts. Quaranta's study, however, does not discuss social media's relationship to political engagement by young people. Media Studies researcher Alex Gekker (2019) provides insight into how social media is an avenue for young people to engage in politics in an unconventional way – casual politicking. Gekker gives the example of the official Barack Obama 2008 mobile application for the iOS and Android mobile operating systems, which was integral to Obama's election success in 2008. The app allowed people to give their time and attention in discrete segments, what the developers called “micro-volunteering.” Gekker points out that this same idea was later used in

Donald Trump's "meme war" whose main conceptual innovation was utilizing micro-volunteering for cultural meaning-making and the mixing of various right-wing political groups. Young people are allowed to engage as much or as little as they want on social media, giving their time, money, and attention in small doses. Social media has reframed how relationships to political ideas and political figures are constructed.

Social media's broad use by young people has created an environment where politics can be explored without any real commitment by the user. Casual politicking by youth takes place primarily on social media, where actualizing norms of citizenship are reinforced for young people. This is demonstrated in a study from Michael Xenos, Ariadne Vromen & Brian D. Loader (2014) who found a strong, positive relationship between social media use and political engagement among young people in the US, UK, and Australia – three advanced democracies. With respect to the UK, The study found that the interaction between actualizing norms and social media use lent little support for their hypothesis: Social media use will significantly enhance the relationship between actualizing norms of citizenship and political engagement, except with respect to collective political engagement among British youth. Their study suggests that social media can serve as the moderator for the relationship between actualizing norms of citizenship, or the set of beliefs and values that emphasize the importance of active participation in political life, and political engagement.

TikTok lending itself to casual political engagement has real-world political implications. Media Studies researchers Darsana Vijay and Alex Gekker (2021) published their research on how TikTok, in its short existence, has emerged as an important political actor. Their study of TikTok in the Indian context is significant because it highlights the changing nature of political engagement in the digital age. Vijay and Gekker argue that TikTok's playful architecture has

enabled new forms of political participation that are shaped by distinct sociocultural and political factors. The article notes that TikTok's political potential has not gone unnoticed by governments, as evidenced by the Indian government's ban on the app in 2020 citing national security concerns. Similar discussions of a ban have played out in the United States since 2020, making the app's political power potential all the more interesting.

Vijay and Gekker expand on the concept of playful political engagement, using the term "ludo-literacy." Ludo-literacy refers to the ability to understand and engage with the playful aspects of digital media platforms, including social media. The authors argue that ludo-literacy is an important concept for studying political contention on social media platforms like TikTok because it allows researchers to analyze how power insidiously enters banal social media practices and the implications they can have on the broader political setting.

The design of TikTok has a significant impact on the expression and circulation of political content. Vijay and Gekker note that the platform's algorithm controls what users see to a greater extent than other social media platforms, which can normalize certain behaviors and potentially redefine sociality itself. The scholars' findings pertain to the unique features of TikTok. As they explain, when users create TikTok videos about contentious political issues, the platform's design shapes such expressions and their circulation. Every TikTok user has a "For You" page, whose algorithm is designed to notice user behavior patterns and feed content to the user that they will most likely engage with (via likes, comments, shares, etc). The algorithm allows people to get caught in their own echo chamber. Mark Deuze (2006) points out that most users are aware of the mediated construction of their reality and intervene in the construction of that reality by engaging in "highly personalized, continuous, and more or less autonomous assembly, disassembly, and reassembly of mediated reality." Vijay and Gekker corroborate that

view of reality construction to argue that TikTok's architecture engineers viral spread and replication of content into its very DNA, which has implications for the nature of political discourse and participation on the platform. An example of TikTok's replicating abilities is proven in the rapid proliferation of hyper-specific trends that are made over and over until they are able to fit into every niche possible.

The rapid proliferation and repetition of ideas on TikTok provides an ample space to understand shifting and persisting expectations of gender, especially for women in the public eye. Research into treatment disparities between men and women in politics has grown increasingly popular in feminist and political studies in the digital age. Political researchers Ludovic Rheault, Erica Rayment and Andreea Musulan (2019) found in their study of 2.2 million messages addressed to US and Canadian politicians, that women who achieve a high status in politics are more likely to receive uncivil messages than their male counterparts. The findings suggest that differences in status and visibility may be a relevant factor to consider in future research on women in politics. In terms of mass media, gender and policy researchers Deirdre O'Neill, Heather Savigny & Victoria Cann (2016) looked at the ways women politicians are constructed as "other" against the norm of their male counterparts. They found that mass media in the UK continues to publish more non-political stories about women politicians and place greater emphasis on the personal, feminine, and appearance aspects.

Research into the political implications of social media has largely been limited to the study of written platforms (like Twitter and Reddit) and focuses its attention on adult cohorts (Hong, 2016; Hiaeshutter-Rice, 2022). Gender has been an important lens on social media, especially when it comes to women creators (Marwick, 2013) and how women politicians are treated differently than their male counterparts in social media discussions (Rheault et al., 2019).

Present research into TikTok in relation to political participation has been a new focus, and has not covered the various niches that exist on the app's platform (Vijay and Gekker, 2021). Presently, there is no synthesis of youth political participation on TikTok, or how that participation is important to enforcing gender, social, and political norms.

Methods

This study examined social media posts on TikTok through the lens of gender and political discourse as it relates to youth-produced satire of Elizabeth Truss. I examined social media posts to Tiktok which discuss Prime Minister Elizabeth Truss in order to understand the use of satire as a means of political engagement by young Britons. The social media analysis covers the period immediately before, during, and immediately after the period of Elizabeth Truss' time in office. The upload date of these posts were between September 6, 2022 to October 25, 2022, including content made in the week before and after her appointment and resignation. I gathered media posts [n=92 from TikTok] using in-app search tools, particularly searching the name of the PM in hashtag and tag feature searches (ex: #liztruss, #liztrusspm), sifting for videos uploaded during her tenure which discuss in some way Elizabeth Truss. Posts were gathered whose creators range in race, ethnicity, and gender expression. Creators were chosen from any range of follower count (from 5 followers to 3.4 million followers). Transcribing both spoken dialogue (including sound) and written text (including captions and hashtags) provided a "script" for analysis. Body language and behavior was additionally noted to understand the tone and purpose of written or sound expression.

TikTok's design lends itself to a unique form of content sharing, where the majority of viewers are exposed to videos created by users they do not actively follow, thus making it a useful tool to understand algorithm driven public discourse. TikTok provides a short-form video

format (videos run from 5 seconds to 10 minutes), often showing the person filming accompanied by a sound (music, audio from viral videos, or film and tv) and overlaid with text. The sound of these videos are typically taken from the in-app sound library or from original video and provide the tone for the video's written content. It was noted where videos used a popular soundbite either from the in-app library or a viral video, especially if that sound related directly to Elizabeth Truss. This included speech recordings of Elizabeth Truss from various points in her life and career. Videos can take the form of non-speaking text videos set to music, typically featuring the creator dancing or sitting in a casual setting, often making a face to communicate their feelings about the topic discussed in the text. This type of video is popular for sharing information using language common among younger generations from the UK (i.e. "girlboss," "bricked"). Particular words that became heavily associated with Elizabeth Truss were documented and analyzed separately.

A rhetorical analysis was conducted on 92 TikTok videos, tracking aspects of language used to discuss a woman Prime Minister and how it may or may not foreground misogynistic language and imagery to critique the PM's political work. The analysis observed behaviors, dress, and verbal/sound queues expressed visually and audibly by the video's creator. Three themes emerged in content about the PM: imitations of the PM and behaviors associated with her, written satirical critiques, and content production unrelated to political stances of the PM. Content was scanned for patterns of recurring words, references to real-world events, and types of humor. The analysis focused on recurring patterns and themes specifically related to Elizabeth Truss' gender and how young Britons chose to discuss the PM in relation to her gender and position of power.

Background

The United Kingdom (UK) is an island country located off the north-west coast of Europe comprising the island of Great Britain, which encompasses England, Wales, and Scotland as well as the northern-portion of Ireland. The Prime Minister (PM) of the United Kingdom is the acting head of government for the country. The Prime Minister serves as the advisor to the monarchy on such issues as the appointment of chairs to the Cabinet and the selection of its ministers as well as the exercise of the royal prerogative. The office of the PM is a longstanding convention, wherein the acting monarch of Britain appoints the person most able “to command the confidence of the House of Commons.” This, in practice, translates to the selection of the leader of the majority party in the House of Commons. Prime Ministers have no term limits, and nine have served more than 10 years.

Margaret Thatcher was the first woman to serve as Prime Minister of Britain and the longest serving Prime Minister of the twentieth century – she was in office for over a decade between 1979 until 1990. Following Thatcher, there have only been two other female Prime Ministers – Theresa May who served for three years in the Conservative Party and Elizabeth Truss who served for seven weeks in 2022. All three of these women are members of the Conservative party.²

In her short time in office, Elizabeth Truss’ political history became a popular topic of discussion in the weeks leading up to and following her appointment to Prime Minister.³ During her time at Oxford University, Elizabeth Truss was an active member of the Liberal Democrat Party. In a recorded interview from 1994, Elizabeth Truss, then 19 years old, is seen advocating

² The 2023 House of Commons has a total of 224 (or 34%) women in office, of whom 88 are Conservatives (UK Parliament, 2023).

³ Politico published an article on September 5, 2022 titled: “Everything you wanted to know about Liz Truss but were too afraid to ask,” and on the same day Time published an article titled: “What To Know About Liz Truss, Britain’s New Prime Minister”

for the complete abolition of the monarchy (Browning, 2022). This video resurfaced and became widely circulated both by social media and traditional media outlets.⁴ However, by the time Elizabeth Truss was in her last year at Oxford, she joined the Conservative party (Cole & Heale, 2022). Elizabeth Truss went on to work for Royal Dutch Shell from 1996 until 2000, qualifying as a chartered management accountant (Quinn, 2022).

Following her time in the private sector, Elizabeth Truss was elected as an MP in a 2010 general election. She then served as the Education under-secretary from 2012-14, Environment secretary from 2014-16, Justice secretary and Lord Chancellor from 2016-17, Chief secretary to the Treasury from 2017-18, International Trade secretary from 2019-21, and then Foreign secretary from 2021 until her appointment to Prime Minister in 2022. Two major events during her time as Trade and Foreign secretary include her visit to Japan in October 2020 and her visit to Russia in February 2022.

Elizabeth Truss was appointed to the office of the Prime Minister on September 6th, 2022 after meeting with Queen Elizabeth II at Balmoral Castle in Scotland. The appointment was widely covered by the United Kingdom's major newspapers, and Buckingham Palace made an official statement confirming Elizabeth Truss' appointment. The meeting with Queen Elizabeth II was widely broadcasted, and showed Elizabeth Truss doing the customary bow in the presence of the Queen.

UK political parties

Although the British parliament is dominated by two major parties – the Conservative Party and the Labour Party – nine additional parties had been elected to the House of Commons in 2019. The two most influential parties, Conservative and Labour, in 2023 compose 550 out of

⁴ The Independent published an article titled "Liz Truss calls for monarchy to be abolished during Republican past in resurfaced clip," and On Demand News published the 1994 speech to their YouTube account

the 650 House members (UK Parliament). The Conservative party is the current majority with 353 MPs, and has been the majority since 2010, making the Prime Minister of the UK a member of the Conservative party. The Labour party, on the other hand, has 197 working MPs (UK Parliament).

The Conservative party, informally known as the Tory party, is characterized by right and sometimes center-right beliefs. Conservatism in the United Kingdom has changed since its foundation, especially during and following the term of Margaret Thatcher between 1979 and 1990 (Crewe, 1988). Margaret Thatcher's time in office coincided with the global rise of major conservative leaders, and her politics were a part of a greater change in the social and economic goals of conservatism. Thatcher emphasized obedience to rules and embraced self-discipline and the "Victorian" virtues of hard work, thrift, and deferred gratification (Crewe, 1988). Additionally, Thatcher was a strong advocate of free enterprise and competition over government regulation. Her strong support of consumer capitalism was a departure from traditional Tories in that the traditional Tory view was that modern capitalism, through its alienation and compulsive consumption, was shredding the fabric of traditional British society (Crewe, 1988). Thatcher became notable for her extreme stances which she did not shy away from making known, something that stood out from the traditional British conservatives of the House of Commons. Although the markers of Thatcherism continue to emerge in modern conservatism, like in conservative social policies, generally speaking, the modern party supports free-market economic policies, pro-British unionism, pro-Brexit, increased police presence, limited immigration, and a net-zero carbon emissions goal by 2050.⁵ Twenty-first century Conservative prime ministers (David Cameron, Theresa May, Boris Johnson, and Elizabeth Truss) have

⁵ According to the published "conservative manifesto" of 2019

continued to promote these more explicit policies of their party than the beliefs that are typically associated with Margaret Thatcher.

Political Humor

As elsewhere, Britain's media and public respond to politics, politicians, and policies via humor. Political humor is defined as a humorous message, communicated via any medium that references some aspect of the political world (Young, 2016). Political comedy's main objective is to make people laugh at a political subject. Political satire makes a serious political statement, but delivers the message humorously – satire can include exaggeration and irony. Political satire in a visual medium is a venerable Anglo tradition, and was widely popularized in eighteenth century Britain (Kemnitz, 1973). Satire has long been one of the safer avenues to levy subtle critiques of society, culture, and politics (Burton, 2010). Political satire can be adapted into news, comics, images, radio, television, and print covering a wide array of subjects and taking on unique forms. Prior to the advent of radio and television, newspapers would include single panel cartoons and images of caricatures to lodge its critiques. Parody and satire have been used as protected forms of expression with a privileged role in specifically democratic societies (Young, 2016; Burton, 2010). Much of the history satire can be traced to Western Europe, North America, and other democratized societies and can be associated with icons like writers George Orwell and Aldous Huxley.

Britain has a strong tradition of political cartoonists and caricaturists which have played key roles in political discourse throughout the nation's history (Kemnitz 1973; Courtwright 1999). According to historian Thomas Milton Kemnitz, the political cartoon in Britain has been used to comment upon the sexual and personal habits of monarchs and politicians. For example, Nineteenth century political cartoonist Matt Morgan attacked Queen Victoria for her retirement

from duties as she mourned the death of her husband, and even made references to the gossip that Victoria was in a relationship with her favorite servant (Kemnitz, 1973).⁶ This political cartoon, and those like it, had the power to create a stereotype with far wider acceptance than the readership of the paper it was originally published in.

In the twentieth century, political satire became a regular feature of British television and radio. Satirical comedies include: Monty Python's Flying Circus, Spitting Image, The Man From Auntie, Have I Got News For You, and Rory Bremner - Who Else? (Bee, 2003). These shows often consisted primarily of personal insults aimed at public figures. Satire is meant to be both convincing and amusing. According to scholar Jim Bee, these shows do not necessarily need to provide evidence for *why* or *how* their target, usually a politician, has failed morally. For example, in an episode of British satirical-quiz show *Have I Got News For You?*, princess Diana was described as stupid, ghoulish, and being a dangerous medical case (Bee, 2003). These long traditions of British satire have had a lasting impact on popular and personal British humor.

British Satire of a Woman PM

It was longer form comics which produced some of the most outspoken and extended criticisms of political leaders in 20th century Britain – especially toward Britain's first woman Prime Minister. Steve Bell's weekly *Maggie's Farm* comics in *Time Out* and later *City Limits* hounded Thatcher from 1979 to 1987, and his six-days-a-week *If...* strips in *The Guardian* were some of the most barbed satire of the day (Belltoons Archive). These longer form comics, which were primarily read by young people, engaged readers in criticisms of figures like Margaret Thatcher. Thatcher would become a central figure to be satirized in media produced *for* young audiences and *by* young people. Outside of the mainstream press, British creators responded to

⁶ He referred to Queen Victoria as Mrs. Brown, after the servant she was allegedly in a relationship with, John Brown




Thatcherism in mediums which included youth-made fanzines and comic books. For example, the second issue of fanzine *Mental Children* published in 1980 showed a crude drawing of Queen Elizabeth II and Margaret Thatcher, communicating – as many young fanzine authors did at the time – their strong negative feelings and criticism for the Queen and Thatcher. These fanzines were cheap avenues for young activists and artists to communicate amongst their community information and criticism of their political leaders. Written and visual print content was a way of participating in political discourse and was meant to be shared among like-minded youth. They were also a way to spread information that was not mediated by media outlets, making the information shared in them communicated without restraint. Grant Morrison's *St. Swithin's Day* comic follows the story of a British teenager in the 1980's who plans an encounter (presumably an assassination) with then prime minister Margaret Thatcher (Morrison 1990). Members of parliament were outraged by the comic, and *The Sun*, a conservative tabloid newspaper, published a headline that read: 'Death To Maggie Book Sparks Tory Uproar'. These outlets for political expression were created by and for young people, but their reach and influence went beyond immediate readership.

Engagement in formal, televised political satire and informal, locally distributed political satire is an important part of British political engagement. This long history of humorous political critique as a part of British entertainment and public discourse has created specific cultural habits of British satirists. As political satire has become more democratized with easy-to-use social media platforms like TikTok, the markers of a tradition of political satire persist in conjunction with newer comedic patterns and participants.

Analysis

Using Satire

When looking at the ways young British creators in these 92 videos engage with TikTok content creation as it relates to Elizabeth Truss, patterns begin to emerge in how young people behave and engage with the information they are exposed to. A large majority of videos, 77 out of 92, or roughly 83.7%, used satire to communicate criticism and contempt for Elizabeth Truss in her public and private life. The majority of videos used a combination of written and visual comedy in their video commentary (See Figure 1).

TikTok videos tended towards using connotative modes of satire, taking advantage of existing video styles and trends which could be easily adapted to discuss Elizabeth Truss. The existing internet culture among British youth makes connotative humor easily consumable for young audiences who already possess the ludo-literacy to understand the videos. One trend that was circulating during 2022 was a “text heavy” trend. The video’s main focus was on the written text and the creator served as a background character, usually acting in some way related to the large text written over the frame. Towards the very end of Elizabeth Truss’ time in office, many young creators began summarizing all of the ridiculous things that had happened in such a short period of time using this “text heavy” trend. A prime example of a creator taking advantage of an already popular video-style is a post from @staceymukoyi where she can be seen pouting, putting on sunglasses, and then blowing kisses and waving with the text overlay: “Liz Truss after almost causing a nuclear war after a weekend in Russia, decreasing the value of the £1, maybe   Queen Lizzy, saying 'she's a  er not a quitter' to then quit the next day” (See Figure 2).⁷

@staceymukoyi’s text overlay is recalling events from the past as a means of mocking Elizabeth

⁷ The skull emoticon combined with the knife emoticon is a way of saying “killed” without writing out the word; the fencer emoticon ending in -er is a call back to a direct quote where Elizabeth Truss called herself a “fighter”

Truss. In early 2022, Elizabeth Truss visited Russia, sparking tabloids and major news organizations to publish stories on the relationship between the United Kingdom and Russia. Elizabeth Truss, and her mini-budget plan, were blamed by the majority of the UK public for reducing the value of the pound in the first weeks of her time as Prime Minister. Additionally, there was a popular internet conspiracy theory that Elizabeth Truss was responsible for the death of Queen Elizabeth II. The creator represents this theory by using the knife and skull emoticons, likely for both humorous effect and to avoid censorship by TikTok's community guidelines. The last list-item in @staceymukoyi's text overlay is a reference to a speech given by Elizabeth Truss the day before her resignation, where she said: "I am a fighter and not a quitter." @staceymukoyi replaced the written fighter for the fencing emoticon, likely for the same reasons as her use of the knife and skull emoticon usage. The creator is not dressed as Elizabeth Truss, but her behaviors are supposed to be what Elizabeth Truss, in an absurd world, is doing following her resignation.

@staceymukoyi's video follows the same patterns as a popular trend where the creator can be seen (typically in their home, casually dressed), but they are not the central focus. Viewers are meant to be drawn to the large text overlay which typically covers the majority of the video screen space. This text is typically visibly low effort – they tend to use the standard font in white, mix together emoticons with sentence fragments, ignore minor spelling errors, and incorporate common internet jargon into their messages. The creator of the video is usually behaving humorously – via a dance and/or exaggerated hand movements and facial expressions. All of these small aspects demonstrate an air of nonchalance and authenticity, creating relatability *and* humor.

Similarly, dancing behind text is popular because it is often meant to be an imagined scenario where the person being criticized in the text is doing the dance rather than the video's

creator. @staceymukoyi wants people to imagine Elizabeth Truss being prideful enough to blow kisses at the public as she resigns, and @jamielii wants people to imagine Elizabeth Truss physically dancing as she resigns because of the monetary allowance her time in office has awarded her (See Figure 3). The text overlay of @jamielii's video reads: "Liz Truss quitting after just 45 days but managing to secure £115k/year for the rest of her life." Viewers are meant to link the written text with the visual of acting or dancing as a means of adding a layer of visual humor to critical text.

This style of video is popular across the platform and reoccurs when discussing Elizabeth Truss on TikTok. Another creator, following in this same style of video is @glow_with_ola who is seen dancing to the 2007 UK R&B song *Love is Wicked* by Brick & Lace with a text overlay reading: "On my way to single-handedly overthrow the U.K. government because it's been 12 years of misery and Liz Truss is the final straw and if this was France we'd of marched by now and be eating croissants in peace." @glow_with_ola's video, in the same vein as @staceymukoyi's, wants viewers' attention on the text while the creator can be seen acting in a way that compliments the humor of the text. @glow_with_ola refers to the fact that the Conservative party has held the majority, and thus the Prime Ministership, for the twelve years prior to her video and uses the stereotype that the French march when they feel their government has failed to do what it is supposed to. She packages her criticism of Elizabeth Truss (and the Conservative party more generally) into a consumable package whose sharp critiques are softened by her dancing in the background. Her final sentence fragment reads "and be eating croissants in peace," which is a light hearted way to point out that the British populace *could* have fixed its problems by now, in @glow_with_ola's eyes, had they taken serious action. The creator is lodging serious critique at Elizabeth Truss, the Conservative party, and even the

general UK population – essentially calling Conservative intolerable and the UK populous meek – but is doing so in a way that inspires viewers to be entertained rather than be incited toward action.

Although TikTok is a video hosting app, the trend where the creator, although seen, is secondary to the text they put on the screen has been important to understanding how written critique can be softened by language and visual comedy. However, not all creators using the elements of this trend to discuss Elizabeth Truss lean on an entertaining background to soften their critique. Instead they rely entirely on their word choice to communicate a humorous interpretation of real criticism for Elizabeth Truss. Creator @joshlunchbox posted a video where the central focus is on the text overlay with music in the background. He can be seen in the video, staring over the camera, with the text overlay: “Only get voted in by .1% of the country, queen d*es, the day after you meet her, bricked the U.K economy, fired all your friends, got outlasted by a lettuce. Godspeed, Liz. The greatest girlboss in history.” @joshlunchbox is listing out, as if he were speaking to Elizabeth Truss, all the things he believes she has done wrong as the Prime Minister.

When looking at the structure of the list, the context of @joshlunchbox’s critiques on Elizabeth Truss are clear. The “.1%” of the population voting Elizabeth Truss in refers to the leadership contest where the only voting members are the Party Members in the House of Commons. His second item in the list, where he alludes to Elizabeth Truss’ responsibility in the death of the Queen is one of the most popular recurring critiques by young people on TikTok, creating a connection between Elizabeth Truss’ ascension to office and Queen Elizabeth II’s imminent death. Although he says these events only took place a day apart, the Queen died two days following Elizabeth Truss’ appointment. Being factually accurate is less important in a

video than to create a humorous point. “Bricked” is a slang term used when someone messes something up beyond repair – resulting in something becoming as useful as a brick (Urban Dictionary, 2007). When @joshlunchbox includes Elizabeth Truss firing her friends, he is referring to the ousting of Kwasi Kwarteng over the mini-budget plan which took place in the last ten days of Elizabeth Truss’ time as Prime Minister. Many creators referred to Elizabeth Truss being “outlasted by a lettuce.” The *Daily Star*, a British tabloid paper, had a livestream of a head of iceberg lettuce in a blonde wig whose express purpose was to see if Elizabeth Truss could last longer in office than the time it would take for the lettuce to rot. Each of these criticisms refer to major events in Elizabeth Truss’ short time in office, and it is through knowing the greater context of these list-items that viewers are meant to see the absurdity of Elizabeth Truss in an easy-to-read, comedically shown list. When placed all together, @joshlunchbox is showing how ridiculous Elizabeth Truss’ time in office was.

The final “sign-off” from @joshlunchbox is the most obviously satirical statement in his video. “Godspeed” is typically associated with respect, but in no way is @joshlunchbox in admiration of all of the things he listed earlier in the text. Instead, it is understood as more of an acknowledgement of all the ways, many of them comedic in how unexpected they were, Elizabeth Truss went wrong in such a short period of time.

A popular aspect of a text-heavy video on TikTok involves the creator typing out a sentence as if it were a list they have compiled and are now delivering to the public or, as in the case of @joshlunchbox, to the person they are criticizing. All of these videos communicate information regarding events which unfolded during Elizabeth Truss’ time in office. Each creator makes the large text-overlay on their videos the central focus and where the majority of information is shared. @staceymukoyi and @glow_with_ola add to the comedic factor through a

combination of visual entertainment (via exaggerated acting and dance) while @joshlunchbox relies more on his written message to communicate satire. All of the creators whose videos rely primarily on their written message depend on the knowledge of the audience to know which events they are referring to, the meaning of the words they use, and the messages they are trying to convey with a veneer of comedy.

Referencing Elizabeth Truss' past

When Elizabeth Truss was selected as the new Prime Minister in September 2022, people on social media platforms began to dig into her political career prior to becoming the PM. Several popular speech recordings of Elizabeth Truss at various speaking engagements became viral sound-bites and points of discussion. Many of these videos and statements resurfaced as ways of making jokes and participating in critiques of Truss.

A 2014 speech given by Elizabeth Truss, then Environmental secretary, at the Conservative Party conference became a popular clip to critique her on TikTok. In the speech, Elizabeth Truss said: "we import two thirds of our cheese. That is a disgrace" and "in December, I'll be in Beijing, opening up new pork markets." Her stilted, awkward delivery of these lines resurfaced in the days following her appointment to the Prime Ministership, but it had also been a popular soundbite in 2014 when YouTube users began making joke videos using the clips of her speech.

As a means of providing evidence for Elizabeth Truss' incompetence, creators began to use edited clips of this 2014 speech and lip sync to her words with exaggerated mouth, face, and arm motions. Lower effort videos showed clips from these speeches with text overlay insulting Elizabeth Truss' speech, intelligence, and behaviors. Creator @alan_law1, in his upload of Truss' 2014 speech, has a text overlay reading: "Miss tea sock." He makes no deeper analysis of

her speech than his insult. The creator is referencing Elizabeth Truss' mispronunciation of the Irish word "Taoiseach" as "tea sock" in July of 2022 (Leebody, 2022). He is mocking her intelligence. This is not unique when it comes to creators referencing these speeches in their content. Creator @greysaswaggomy uploaded the same clip from 2014 of Truss' speech with the text overlay reading: "Everybody, our new Prime Minister..." The ellipses indicate a sense of disbelief that the same Elizabeth Truss to deliver this speech is the one to become Prime Minister. Both creators are essentially calling Truss unintelligent and therefore undeserving to be Prime Minister. Creators believe that they need not add anything to the existing clips because the comedy is so obvious in the original source material.

Not only did creators mock the intelligence of Elizabeth Truss, they used these videos as evidence of her ridiculous way of speaking and behaving. Creators like @fredasquith and @ainjielshaolee opted to lip sync the words to these speeches. In both their videos, each creator exaggerates the facial expressions of Elizabeth Truss while lip syncing the speech, adding a greater sense of body comedy to Truss' words and making the speeches into something (more) ridiculous. They stretch their mouth and make facial expressions that dramatize the actual mannerisms of Elizabeth Truss. Body comedy is a very popular medium for satire, and it has been an important aspect of TikToks comedic culture. These creators are using exaggeration to drive home their point that Elizabeth Truss is a ridiculous figure.

Simplification

Satirical criticism of Elizabeth Truss did not rely on supporting or critiquing her political or party allegiances, rather, their focus was on the personal aspects of Elizabeth Truss. In a departure from the majority of videos, creator @leontruss uploaded a video that has nothing to do with critiquing Elizabeth Truss' appearance, policies, or history. However, their content

follows the pattern of expressing the creator's feelings towards Elizabeth Truss while ignoring her political beliefs and allegiances. In their video, the text overlay reads "Liz truss entering the House of Commons knowing everyone hates her but it's fine bc she ran that place for 44 days 🗣️." The video shows a paparazzi video taken of Elizabeth Truss as she walks around a corner and to her car. The sound clip is taken from another creator, @apofenja, which combines Gimme More by Britney Spears and Poker Face by Lady Gaga. It follows the beat of Elizabeth Truss' walking, creating a powerful effect. @leontruss' video makes Elizabeth Truss' exit from the Prime Ministership seem like her choice or something she had planned all along. This is achieved by using a video of her walking away smiling from 10 Downing street accompanied by an empowering beat. Strangely, @leontruss acknowledges that Elizabeth Truss is hated, but they have the remainder of their video demonstrate her power and the creator's support of her. Their wording of the text overlay makes it difficult to parse whether their support is genuine or if their praise is ironic. The editing, combined with the text saying "she ran that place for 44 days," demonstrates the creator's support of Elizabeth Truss and belief that her resignation was something that increased her social and political power. Although @leontruss' praise, whether satirical or otherwise, of Elizabeth Truss stands out from every other creator, they too avoid explicit praise for her party, beliefs, or policy actions.

For creators who participated in satirical critiques, many also ignored policies they disagree with in favor of more personal attacks on Elizabeth Truss. @chantayyjayy posted a video pushing back against the urge to label Elizabeth Truss as a feminist icon because of her gender rather than for her policy choices. In surveying videos on TikTok, only @leontruss appeared to explicitly endorse Elizabeth Truss and make her out to be a strong feminist figure.

But the creation of a straw man or the concerns of gendered-praise occurred in critiques of Elizabeth Truss and her supporters. In her video, @chantayyjayy says:

“Listen everyone, listen. Truss being the new prime minister is not a win for women. Any of the demogorgons from that party are terrible leaders, okay? And I don't care if it's a demogorgon in a Vivienne Westwood skirt. Honey, this is not good. You know, people are about to girlboss the hell out of Liz Truss and I'm absolutely not here for it.”

Interestingly, she is directing her critiques at people who *support* Elizabeth Truss. Her tone is one of telling off the viewer or reprimanding those who would support Elizabeth Truss solely because she is a woman – a woman the creator sees as a monster in an expensive outfit. Although she is lodging very serious critiques, she is choosing to do so in a way that makes humorous pop culture references meant to elicit laughter before outrage.

The other form of humorous criticism of Elizabeth Truss tended towards short, ludic interpretations of her brief time in office. These videos also avoided serious political discussion, and kept their critiques short and simple. The use of a list is the most common way to see a humorous summary of Truss' time as Prime Minister – as seen in @staceymukoyi and @joshlunchbox's videos. Similarly, creator @lampshadeskitkat made their video with a photo of the door at 10 Downing St. accompanied by a green screen sticker of Roger Cleye⁸ singing, and the text overlay: “Liz Truss after the slaying the queen, the pound, and the shortest prime minister term record 🍷” (See Figure 6). The creator is purposely oversimplifying Elizabeth Truss' forty-four days in office to emphasize the ridiculous nature of the events listed.

A key aspect of simplifying political critique is the deliberate use of popular, powerful terms. “Slay” is a word with dual meanings. It can mean, in the traditional sense, to have killed something violently, or, as is more popular online, it can mean to have succeeded. @lampshadeskitkat is using both in their short text. They are implying that Elizabeth Truss

⁸ Roger Cleye is a 58-year old TikTok creator known for his viral videos of him singing. People tend to cut out his image in his singing videos and edit them into photos for their own content creation.

murdered Queen Elizabeth II – successfully. They are also blaming Elizabeth Truss for the “murder,” or decreased value, of the pound and the economic crash that was experienced during Elizabeth Truss’ short tenure. Slaying “the shortest prime minister term record” is both succeeding in becoming the shortest serving Prime Minister in the UK’s history and the shame that comes with that record. These hyperbolic and dual uses of the term slay demonstrate the ways creators keep their critiques short and light. They are not seeking to insight debate through verbal and visual provocation.

These posts illuminate the preference of young TikTok creators to keep their videos – whether praise or criticism – simple. Although Elizabeth Truss’ political ideologies and policies had serious implications for the British economic, climate, and social policies, people still chose to construct their critiques in simple terms and often ignored more serious issues. The Independent Resolution Foundation calculated that Elizabeth Truss’ mini-budget cost the Treasury £30 billion. Many videos pin the financial crisis that was gripping the United Kingdom in the fall of 2022 on Elizabeth Truss, but they refrain from going further than light jabs – like her decreasing the value of the £1 or “slaying” the pound.

According to *the Guardian*, Elizabeth Truss was a strong supporter of the Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Bill which would automatically delete 570 environmental laws the UK inherited from the European Union without any immediate replacement plans (O’Carroll, 2022). Interestingly, no creators made mention of this bill. Creators were more interested in Elizabeth Truss’ relationship with oil companies like Shell, her former employer, than they were real-world policy actions. Creator @lornaregionaltransport’s two viral “Day in the Life of Elizabeth Truss” videos included a scene of her walking by a green screen of an oil drill with the text overlay: “Good morning frackers” (See Figure 4). Creator @feelingpeachygreen’s post had

the text overlay reading, “Liz Truss looking @ fossil fuels even though other options are available,” as she lip syncs to a sound that says: “Burn it. Did I say stand there and look stupid? I said, burn it.” Both videos imply Elizabeth Truss’ relationship to fossil fuel use, but do not elaborate.

These videos highlight the desire of young Britons to participate in political discourse without dragging their content towards serious, solemn journalism. TikTok’s format encourages oversimplification because videos that do well are short and consumable. However, TikTok, like other social media platforms, lends itself to public debate through easily uploaded content, comment sections, and its own unique features which allow creators to stitch or duet with other creators.⁹ Young British creators who are making satirical videos discussing complex issues related to Elizabeth Truss in single sentences are participating in public discourse without requiring the same nuanced interpretations professional journalists or scholars have.

Another theme raised by these posts is the shifting practices around expertise and authority. When someone is trying to make themselves appear as an expert, they tend to cite their sources on TikTok – this is manifested in showing a news article behind them as they speak or telling people directly their relevant education and/or occupation. Creator @thechampagne_socialist, in a video discussing Elizabeth Truss’ economic plans used a screenshot from a Sky News article whose caption reads “Truss admits her tax cuts will disproportionately benefit the rich.” By placing the screen shot of the article behind himself as he speaks, @thechampagne_socialist is implying that he is pulling his facts from the article. However, there is another option which allows creators to avoid claiming expertise or admitting

⁹According to the TikTok help center, a Stitch “is a creation tool that allows you to combine another video on TikTok with one you’re creating. If you allow another person to Stitch with your video, they can use a part of your video as a part of their own video” and a Duet allows you to post your video side-by-side with a video from another creator on TikTok. A Duet contains two videos in a split screen that play at the same time.”

ignorance – humor and simplification. By maintaining a tone of humor and simplifying potentially complex ideas, young people are able to engage in ridicule without projecting an authority or claiming expertise on issues that could garner serious backlash.

Conspiracy Theory: Liz Truss Killed the Queen

Conspiracy theories have become a popular, if not dangerous, part of social media culture – and Elizabeth Truss became associated with one within the first week of her time as Prime Minister. When Queen Elizabeth II died two days after Elizabeth Truss’ meeting Truss for her appointment to the office of the Prime Minister, people began to speculate on whether the Queen’s death was because of Elizabeth Truss. Creators tend to demonstrate through their tonal choices whether their engagement with a popular conspiracy theory is playful in nature or part of a serious accusation. Engagements with this conspiracy theory demonstrated a range of perspectives, both satirical and serious, from young British creators.

Especially popular as “evidence” for Elizabeth Truss killing the Queen was a reference to the 1994 interview where a young Elizabeth Truss called for the end of the monarchy. Creator @ursoftblood used a sound clip that says “slay” over and over as the creator lip syncs with a text overlay reading: “liz truss saying abolish the royal family in 1994” before cutting to the creator covering her mouth in faux shock and the text overlay reading “the queen dying 2 days after liz becomes PM.” In a nearly identical video, @taltakingpics is seen looking around as if trying to solve something in their mind where the text over their head reads: “Liz Truss, who’s spoken out about the monarchy is elected prime minister,” “Has first official appointment as pm with the queen” “doctors are called to Buckingham Palace concerned about the queen’s health.”¹⁰ In the same vein, @smellenglamner’s video shows her also exaggeratedly pondering with the text

¹⁰ Interestingly, the doctors would have been called to Balmoral Castle in Scotland where the Queen stayed until her death

reading: “nobody else think it’s suspicious that liz truss wanted to abolish the monarchy? Who did she meet on tuesday?? and how’s she doing now???” (See Figure 5). All of these videos are not explicitly meant to be understood as humorous in text, but are made so only by the exaggerated motions of the creators.

Some creators, on the other hand, were very explicitly humorous in their text. Creator @mywifetooktehkids shows a video of themselves vogueing with the text overlay reading: “Liz truss after *unaliving* the queen and resigning.”¹¹ The video is explicitly humorous in nature – implying that Elizabeth Truss killed the Queen and then vogueed, or celebrated, following her death. Likewise, creator @obamasmilliondollaputhay’s text overlay of a soldier dancing reads: “liz truss after abolishing the monarchy on her 3rd day 🤔👉🐱💖💋🍷🌟🇺🇸.” They too, are implying that Elizabeth Truss danced with joy after murdering the Queen. Both are making Elizabeth Truss out to be ridiculous (dancing and vogueing with joy) and malicious (killing the Queen). Neither of these creators is making a serious accusation, rather, they are playing with and poking fun at the circumstances.



Although rare, some creators engaged with the conspiracy theory in a way that could easily be interpreted as serious speculation. In a video by @chriscork89, he is seen saying:

“Guessing we've all seen this video of Liz Truss yesterday at the queen's funeral. She was seen talking, and when the camera spotted her, she looked away, smile off, said something to the guy, and then he laughed it off. Now, I've got a ??? (beat second??) lip reading. I think I know what she says, but anybody else think they know what she's saying. Here, have a look at this. Sees the camera, absolutely shits it. He sees it, ooh just laugh it off ha ha ha. She's going to bend us over and have our pants down. every single one of us. do not trust her at all.”

His tone of voice is speculative, and he is seen rubbing his chin and speaking in a low voice as if sharing controversial information to the viewer. Where the previous videos were easily understood as satirical, this creator’s tone lacks any sense of satire. He uses a video broadcasted

¹¹ Due to the community policies of TikTok, it is popular for creators to say “unalive” instead of kill/murder

from the Queen’s funeral which shows Elizabeth Truss whispering to the person next to her during the procession. From this clip, the creator is extrapolating that their exchange was something of a confession by Elizabeth Truss to murdering Queen Elizabeth II.

The conspiracy theory that Elizabeth Truss was involved in the death of the Queen, like other conspiracy theories, had a wide range of participants. When creators referred to Elizabeth Truss killing the Queen, they often included it in a list of other “crimes” committed by Truss, giving only brief attention to the idea. Creator @staceymukoyi included “maybe   Queen Lizzy” as part of her summary of Elizabeth Truss’ time in office. Similarly, @lampshadeskitkat’s text overlay said “Liz Truss after slaying the queen,” and @foss8’s read: “In 44 days Liz Truss managed to k̄ll both the Queen and the economy.” These creators are not centering the theory that Elizabeth Truss killed the Queen, but by including it, they are signaling that they are stretching the truth for the sake of humor. Playful engagement in a theory that has the potential to become a serious indictment is an interesting aspect of young British satire on TikTok as it indicates a comfort with engaging in a contentious conspiracy.

Cross-party Criticism

Where did these videos fall amid political parties? No creators in the videos used for this research identified themselves as a Conservative or Labour party supporter. Few lodged criticisms at the Conservative party, but at the same time, no one praised the Labour party. Of the videos collected, few mention the Conservative party more generally or direct their criticism of it separately from Elizabeth Truss. The overwhelming majority of videos under the #liztruss tag makes no mention of her political party in the actual content of their videos nor in the text of their captions. When discussing Elizabeth Truss, creators tended towards discussing or critiquing

her apart from her political party affiliations. However, seven videos included a tag mentioning Conservative or Conservative party and eighteen included a tag mentioning Tory or Tory party.¹²

When discussing Elizabeth Truss, it makes sense that creators would generalize their criticisms to the whole Conservative party. Despite her video concerning solely Elizabeth Truss' resignation and the Taylor Swift *Midnights* Album release, @lisassversion's video caption reads in all capital letters "FUCK THE TORIES AND STREAM MIDNIGHTS." She is at once acknowledging that she is a Taylor Swift fan, like Elizabeth Truss is known to be, but that she recognizes that her fandom does not excuse Elizabeth Truss from being a member of a political party she despises. This creator's caption seems to serve as a reminder to the viewer that, although she is making a light hearted video about Elizabeth Truss' enjoyment of Taylor Swift, she feels that she needs to separate herself from Elizabeth Truss' politics and party affiliation. Similarly, @rustyskywalker's caption read "bloody conservatives," but the content of their video only discusses Elizabeth Truss – they entirely ignore any visual or verbal queues that they not only disliked Elizabeth Truss but the entire Conservative party. Both of these creators refrain from elaborating on their vitriol for the party.

In a few instances, creators did address Elizabeth Truss' affiliation with her party, and made it an opportunity to criticize both the politician and her party. Creator @leftbrainuk, said in a video about an interview Elizabeth Truss did on the topic of Shell and BP shareholders:

"Liz Truss is just chatting shit. Do not let the Conservative party narrative fool you into thinking that the profits these companies are making is a good thing cause it's all benefitting our pension schemes. These obscene profits are half the reason our bills are so high. And these companies cannot be allowed to carry on profiting off the country's suffering."

By mentioning the Tory/Conservative party, these creators are demonstrating that they see Elizabeth Truss and her political party as inextricably tied. In lodging their criticisms of

¹² The higher use of Tory over Conservative indicates the persistence of the name "Tory" despite it not being the official party name

Elizabeth Truss, they are expanding that criticism to include the entire party and everyone who considers themselves a part of it.

While attitudes about Elizabeth Truss' party were occasionally made clear, no videos collected discussed the Labour party in any language that would indicate positive or negative feelings from the creator. Six videos included Labour or Labour party as a part of their video hashtags. No videos included strong negative or positive associations with the Labour party, often ignoring its existence entirely even if they include the party name in their video tags. One video which attempted to explain the "chaos" in the House of Commons from creator @politicshomeuk, a young digital journalist, discussed the Labour party in relation to events which unfolded in a house vote on the ban of fracking in the UK. Her video stands out not only in its mention of the Labour party, but she also balances her humor with a much more informative tone and format of sharing. However, she makes no comments throughout the video to indicate her positive affiliation with either the Labour or Conservative party.

Creators often named both parties in their video captions regardless of if the parties were mentioned at all. One reason to include the name of the British political parties in their tags is to increase the likelihood that people who typically search those tags would come across their video about Elizabeth Truss. Tags are useful to make associations about topics, so it is not surprising to see a video which only discusses Elizabeth Truss also include #labour, as in the case of @joshlunchbox and @huwviews.

Girlboss and Girly

Language on social media platforms like TikTok require viewers to understand the meaning of popular terms, like girlboss, as they are changed and shaped on the internet. Media scholars, Vijay and Gecker, coined the term "ludo-literacy" to describe the knowledge required

by viewers and content creators to understand and engage with playful, humorous aspects of social media. Nearly 11% of videos included the term “girlboss” at least once in their video, dialogue, or caption. The girlboss hashtag has more than 12.4 billion views. The term “girlboss” is a neologism that was first coined by entrepreneur Sophia Amoruso in 2014 (Anderson, 2020). The term was meant to be aspirational and denote a woman who was able to climb the corporate and social ladder. It took less than half a decade before the term became another tool for oppression, essentially becoming the opposite of what its original intention was. Women began to see the term as infantilizing, and another way for people to subtly undermine the achievements the term was supposed to promote. Calling someone a girlboss is now an easy mode of poking fun at women who endorse capitalism and success at the expense of others. Essentially, it is another way of saying a woman is trying too hard (usually to impress men). It can be shorthand to say that a woman is selfish and is excessively competitive. When viewers come across the term “girlboss” in connection with Elizabeth Truss, they can assume the creator is insulting Elizabeth Truss’ personality in connection to her sex.

The adoption and adaptation of terms like girlboss can take many forms, and was seen across a wide variety of videos concerning Elizabeth Truss. Creator @leontruss’ caption reads: “Definition of girlbossed too close to the sun.” This is a popular adaptation of the saying “flew too close to the sun.” Girlboss is commonly adapted to be a verb, especially when someone experiences the consequences of their actions. Even when it initially appears to be a compliment, a phrase which includes the term girlboss is meant to be understood as ironic. Creator @lampshadeskitkat’s caption reads: “45 days, girl boss 🙌🙌🙌” (See Figure 6). Girlboss is not just about attitude, but about how that attitude drives a woman to behave. Creators commented on Elizabeth Truss’ short tenure as a result of her being a “girlboss.” Similarly, @htmljones’

caption of a video clip of Elizabeth Truss' resignation speech has the caption: "another girlboss taking up space and breaking records 🗳️." This is meant to be shaming Truss for holding the record of shortest serving Prime Minister in the UK's history. They are implicating Elizabeth Truss' personality and gender as a part of her failure as Prime Minister.



The term girlboss can also be used to insult a woman who came to her position of power without qualification. Creator @comradeclownery demonstrates her belief that Elizabeth Truss' success at becoming Prime Minister has nothing to do with her qualification or competence. In her video, the text overlay reads: "When Liz Truss low key advanced gender equality by showing that incompetent women can also fail upwards like incompetent men have been doing for centuries." @comradeclownery is insulting Elizabeth Truss not by just calling her incompetent, but by putting her in the same category as successful, but incompetent, men.



Elizabeth Truss, like Hilary Clinton and Jacinda Ardern, experienced an almost immediate label of girlboss when she ascended to Prime Minister. The term is not specific to conservative or liberal leaders, but it is deeply gender specific. Gendered phrases like "girly girl" as seen in @ellie_rudy's caption and @evermirrorball's caption: "liz truss: my favorite ig it girly," are important misogynistic terms. These creators are popularizing a gendered form of shaming. Terms like "girly" are in relation to girlboss in that they are meant to infantilize and denounce women, especially women who are in positions of power. The term is often used to "call out" the blunders of women.

Interestingly, the majority of videos which used these terms were created by women. There appeared to be a tone of women speaking to another woman, essentially saying that Elizabeth Truss being the same gender as them gave the creators the authority to call out Truss' poor behavior and policies. Although "girlboss" and "girly" are misogynistic terms, they are

ones that young British women feel comfortable using as an insult toward other women. Previous research shows that women who achieve a high status in politics are more likely to receive uncivil messages than their male counterparts (Rheault, Rayment and Musulan (2019)), but they did not consider the likelihood of other women participating in misogynistic insults towards women leaders. When young women are referring to Elizabeth Truss with terms like “bbe” (@feelingpeachygreen), girly girl (@ellie_rudy), or calling her “Lizzy” (@graceywilliamscomedy), they are feigning familiarity with her as a means to express how unserious and ridiculous they consider Truss to be. Essentially, they are reprimanding Truss for making women look bad. By using a demeaning term to reference Elizabeth Truss as a woman, they are able to communicate that they do not feel Elizabeth Truss is an authority who is capable of making intelligent decisions and therefore must be reprimanded.

Emoticons

It is not just phrases that viewers need to know to understand a creator’s critique of Elizabeth Truss. The meaning and use of specific emoticons helps communicate the tone and purpose of many creators’ commentary on Elizabeth Truss. Thirteen, or 14%, of videos use the nail painting emoticon [] as a feature of their caption or text overlay. The colored nail polish being applied to finger nails is often associated with communicating indifference (“ Nail Polish Emoji” n.d.). However, the emoticon has taken on a variety of meanings, especially when talking about politics.

When a creator is talking about someone doing something bold, controversial, or sassy, they will tack on the nail painting emoticon to the end of whatever they are saying. This is demonstrated by creator @lampshadeskitkat’s whose caption reads: “45 days, girl boss  ” (See Figure 6). They are complimenting Elizabeth Truss for her bold choice to resign in just

forty-five days, thereby becoming the shortest serving Prime Minister in the UK's history. Similarly, creator @leonstruss's text overlay reads: "Liz truss entering the House of Commons knowing everyone hates her but it's fine bc she ran that place for 44 days 🙌," and in another video, their caption calls Elizabeth Truss "The Sunak slayer 😞🙌." They are complimenting how bold it is for Elizabeth Truss to still be smiling (as seen in the background video) when she is widely unpopular with even her own party. When they are calling her the Sunak slayer, referring to Rishi Sunak who Elizabeth Truss beat out for Prime Minister, the creator is saying that it was a bold and powerful move on Elizabeth Truss' part. The emoticon connoting boldness on Elizabeth Truss' part, however, is not complimentary. Similar to terms like "girlboss," the nail painting emoticon connotes a sense that the creator is laughing at Elizabeth Truss for being unduly smug in the midst of failure.

Liz Truss + Instagram

Elizabeth Truss' Instagram activity was rapidly co-opted by news media and young TikTok creators to demonstrate her under-qualification for the Prime Ministership. Sky News published an article the day after Elizabeth Truss' appointment to office (September 7, 2022) titled "What Liz Truss's Instagram account reveals about her" where they called the PM "Instagram obsessed" and report that her Aides at the Department of International Trade joked that they, "worked for the 'Department for Instagramming Truss'." The *Evening Standard*, a conservative newspaper out of the UK, made similar remarks about Elizabeth Truss' love of Instagram and said she was "not shy of a photo-op."

Social media has allowed for British youth to engage with their local and national politicians, political groups, and each other in ways that were virtually impossible prior to the advent of social media. Previous generations, like those living through the Thatcher

administration in the 1980s, did not have access to her personal life outside of what tabloid magazines like *The Mirror* would reveal. Even then, British tabloids were notorious for stretching truths to entertain, and this information almost never came from the politician themselves. It is important to note, however, that neither TikTok content creators nor politicians uploading to their personal accounts are required to be truthful. However, Instagram pages offer up the opportunity for political leaders to post visuals of themselves in their downtime and to write captions that did not have to be communicated through several parties before becoming public.

Elizabeth Truss' Instagram has become a popular profile for people to use as a means of talking about her behavior and downtime separate from the policies she subscribes to. The first photo uploaded to Elizabeth Truss' personal profile dates to October 13, 2017, while she was an MP and secretary of state for justice and lord chancellor in the First May Ministry.¹³ This first photo shows a sunset in Shouldham, England. Her profile, as of December 4 2023, has 492 posts, 162k followers, and she follows 375 other profiles. Her account follows mostly other British MPs. Her profile reads "Former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. MP for South West Norfolk" with a link to her website. Older posts, those which date at and before 2019, show more personal content – photos highlighting her outfits, her at the beach, and even her at-home baking. Although these posts tend to be more personal in nature, there are lots of photos with fellow MPs, former Prime Minister Boris Johnson, and her presence at various public events. In 2021, a large number of her posts feature her with global leaders (including Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada on November 1, 2021), and her

¹³ She was the first woman to be appointed as lord chancellor of the first May ministry in the history of the UK

many international visits acting as the International Trade secretary and Foreign Secretary.¹⁴ In July 2022, she began making a number of campaign posts, advertising her presence at political rallies and announcing her platform to run as the next Prime Minister of the UK. Only 15 posts were made during the time she became Prime Minister on September 6, 2022 until her resignation on October 25, 2022. Since her resignation, there has only been one post, which was made on April 16, 2023.¹⁵

Young Britons who view her personal social media pages, like Instagram and X (formerly Twitter), gain access to her in a way that can simulate a sense of familiarity. The Instagram pages of political leaders, especially the Prime Minister, are curated with a public relations staff and are carefully designed to present an image. Elizabeth Truss' Instagram page projects a constructed image of herself, especially during her time immediately leading up to and acting as Prime Minister. Older posts, those dating to the time prior to 2022, were more popular for TikTok creators because they were far less curated. These posts showed a more personal side of Elizabeth Truss, especially the low quality photos that were clearly taken by her of activities she was partaking in, like baking in her home or going on family vacations. An example of one of these more obviously self-made posts is a March 18, 2020 image of a homemade birthday cake for her child's fourteenth birthday with a caption that reads: "You can't stop progress...#fourteen #takingthebiscuit #smartcookie." Young British creators used these older posts because of their authenticity to who Elizabeth Truss is, and they found her older posts to be more useful to paint her as a ridiculous character.

¹⁴ Elizabeth Truss was international trade secretary from 2019-2021 and foreign secretary from 2021-2022

¹⁵ It is interesting how much her social media activity on Instagram has dropped since her resignation from the office of the Prime Minister

One sports-related post gives a sense of typical reactions from young people to her Instagram page. An Instagram post of Liz Truss in July 2018, then an MP, bouncing a soccer ball off of her knee, became the center of attention for young British sports fans. The post shows Elizabeth Truss in a red dress and sneakers as a soccer ball is being bounced off of her knee and towards the person taking the photo (See Figure 7). The caption reads: “Keeping my hopes up...#neverstoppedmedreaming #feverpitch #itscominghome.” The tags are all related to slogans used for the England soccer team. The photo is meant to show her support for England’s 2018 bid for the World Cup finals. Creator @finnbest22 uploaded the TikTok on September 6, 2022 – the day Elizabeth Truss was selected as the next Prime Minister. He used a screenshot of this Instagram post accompanied by a sound clip of *Red* by Taylor Swift, with the text overlay: “liz was definitely blasting this on repeat all day.” The creator is referring to Elizabeth Truss being a fan of Taylor Swift, and likely used this specific Instagram post because of her dress being red. He makes no reference to Elizabeth Truss’ policies, politics, or party.

Similarly, another creator used a screen shot from Elizabeth Truss’ Instagram for their TikTok video. The screenshot shows a post made by Elizabeth Truss in February 2019 where Elizabeth Truss took a “selfie” with Taylor Swift at the Grosvenor House Hotel in London (See Figure 8). The caption of this photo reads: “Look what you made me do, Taylor...#squadgoals #swiftwork #trouble #baftadinner.” A TikTok uploaded by @l3min shows the creator, a green screen background of the Instagram post, and text written over the video reading: “My guess is that Liz Truss resigned so she could fully commit herself to listening to Taylor Swift's new album which releases on october 21st.”

Another creator, @evermirrorball, used the same screenshot of Elizabeth Truss with Taylor Swift, but she also used six additional Instagram posts from 2018-19 as background green

screen photos. A May 2018 post shows a photo taken by someone else of Elizabeth Truss holding a red folder as she holds up her phone to take a photo; the caption reads: “Handling a red folder and curating your insta is tricky dontchaknow...#pappedintheact #downingstreetdrama.” A February 2018 post shows a selfie of Elizabeth Truss lying in the snow with ski goggles and her skies behind her back; the caption reads: “Snowflake? More like #flakedout. #creamcracked” (See Figure 9). A September 2018 post shows a photo of Elizabeth Truss outside of the Home Office with a caption that reads: “Where’s my bodyguard? #holdingoutforahero #homeofficealone.” A photo from March 2018 shows Elizabeth Truss at a public ice skating rink; the caption reads: “Preparing to go into the triple axel. #I[heart emoticon]Tonya #icequeen.” An April 2018 post shows Elizabeth Truss on a zipwire and the caption reads: “Bid for Foreign Office coming along nicely. #hirewireact #norfolkbroads.” The final post used by the creator is from June 2018. It shows a photo Elizabeth Truss took in the side mirror of a truck with the caption “Trailer for sale or rent...truckulent #highwayhog #queenoftheroad.” The creator reads out the captions of each of these photos, including the hashtags, in a mocking tone. Their critique is directed entirely at the choices Elizabeth Truss made to both keep these posts public following her appointment as Prime Minister and the actual content of the Instagram posts, especially the captions.

In the same vein, creator @carspolitics uploaded a video whose only written content reads “the UK’s new Prime Minister.” The video proceeds with a video slideshow to the sound of *Bad Habit* by Steve Lacy. The slideshow is photos taken from Elizabeth Truss’ Instagram, repeating many of the same photos used in other videos. The photos include the image of Elizabeth Truss ice skating, the selfie with Taylor Swift, a photo of her in a pink dress on vacation in Elba in 2018, the World Cup photo, a photo from a 2018 Halloween party where

Elizabeth Truss dressed as Dracula, a photo of Elizabeth Truss holding a golf club, a photo of Elizabeth Truss wearing sunglasses and lying in the sand, and the photo taken of herself in a truck side mirror. The creator has no caption, no tags, and makes no other commentary. They are communicating that these photos are humorous in and of themselves, and make Elizabeth Truss out to be ridiculous without the need to explain why.

These types of TikTok videos using screenshots of Elizabeth Truss' Instagram became an avenue to point out that Liz Truss has cultural tastes, and to critique her photo and caption choices. None of these posts echo support for Elizabeth Truss' politics, but do show positive feelings for her enjoyment of Taylor Swift and English soccer. @l3min, @evermirrorball, and others, commented on these Instagram posts that conveyed their non-support for Elizabeth Truss, using the content of her Instagram to make her out to be a ridiculous figure.

Instagram provides a casual look into Elizabeth Truss as determined by herself and her PR team, but it also provides young people with the opportunity to engage with Elizabeth Truss individually. The comments section and the direct message (DM) feature is where young people can attempt to engage one-on-one with Elizabeth Truss. Creators @ceejaybcm, @joshuagadget, and @momorant all made TikToks using the video upload feature showing their voice-memos to Elizabeth Truss' DMs. Creator @joshuagadget voice memo said:

“Liz Truss, you see I don't care. you have trust in your name! You have tr-- I don't trust you with a fiber of my being or my soul. I don't believe you! I believe you are a fraud you. I prefer Donald Trump to rule the UK over you and you've not even ruled for 30 minutes. You've not ruled for 30 minutes. but I prefer Donald Trump! Bruh. You switch parties. You went from lib dem to conservatives. What are you, a chameleon? Do you change your colors in the middle of the night? You said wha, do.. please. Please leave this office! You see how Priti Patel vacated her position. Vac-ate with speed! With speed today! Wow! Damn! ah! What of UK's hopes, our visions, our futures broke down going down the drain. The gutter! The sewage system!”

The creator is speaking directly to Elizabeth Truss, directing his anger as if he were in an active conversation with her. Had he not uploaded the audio of the DM to TikTok, it would have been a private, one-sided conversation.

This form of political engagement may seem inconsequential in the greater scheme of political discussions, but in the construction of a politician, Instagram shows the more mundane aspects of a politician's personal life and gives the illusion of accessibility. Young Britons used Instagram as a means of showing Elizabeth Truss as a ridiculous character. By sending private DMs, none of these creators are under the illusion that Elizabeth Truss will respond, but that she may potentially see the messages and their ridicule will be intimate.

British youth on social media are using the social media outputs produced *by* Elizabeth Truss to form a part of their opinion about her. Individuals have begun to feel closer to the "human" aspects of Elizabeth Truss because they can see the casual outputs she publicizes on personal social media accounts. These creators have taken advantage of the visuals and captions provided by Elizabeth Truss in order to acknowledge certain aspects of her behavior and to make critiques of her in their content.

Inappropriate behavior

Creators expressed a high level of comfort in policing and noting behaviors exhibited by Truss that they believed to be inappropriate for her position of power. Elizabeth Truss' alcohol use, although not a prominent topic, came up in several videos which engaged with her political beliefs and personal habits. In a video uploaded in September 2022 by @lornaregionaltransport, the creator acts out a skit that is meant to emulate a *day in the life* of Elizabeth Truss. In the video, the creator – dressed as caricature of Elizabeth Truss – mocks the PM's facial expressions (making her appear dumb by having her mouth open with her tongue slightly protruding), her

way of walking (showing a walk akin to a waddle), and her intelligence (infantilizing her speech). The creator walks through their humorous interpretation of the daily activities of Elizabeth Truss. The first frame shows the creator ‘waking up,’ with a bedspread green screen photo; the second frame shows the creator mimicking drinking using an unopened rose bottle with a green screen background of a bedroom; the third frame as the creator walking away from the door of 10 Downing st; the fourth frame shows a photo of an oil drill as the creator walks by waving; then the creator is seen in an alley in the London Tower area, as the Gherkin building is visible in the background. At this point, the creator bends down to pick up a £10 note. The video cuts to a photo of a ‘little orphan boy’ holding out a bowl, then a stock image of a man holding a bunch of \$100 bills and smiling, then an NHS nurse with their head in their hands, then another stock image of the same man with the stack of bills, then the back of an old man in a wheelchair, and then another photo of the same stock image man licking his stack of dollar bills. The creator is seen surrounded by question marks in the same alley as earlier before cutting to the stock image of the man with the dollars as she throws the £10 at him. In the final few seconds of the video, she is asleep and begins to toss and turn before the screen cuts to an up close green screen photo of a £10 note and the creator is seen air punching the image of Queen Elizabeth II. Throughout the video, the creator is using the voice over feature to narrate the events, saying:

“Good morning Liz / Is that a bottle of Lambrini? / Good morning frackers! / Oh what have you found? Wow it's your lucky day. But who you gonna give it to? / The little orphan boy / or the man with lots of money? / The care home resident / or the man with lots of money? / What's it gonna be Liz? / It's the man with lots of money! / Good night Liz / Oh no, are you having a nightmare? / Are you dreaming about killing the Queen again? / it's all just a nightmare. Don't worry, it's all just a nightmare.”

The narrator asks, "Is that a bottle of Lambrini?" as the creator is seen enthusiastically mock drinking from a wine bottle. Lambrini is a cheap pear wine whose motto is “Lambrini Girls Just Want to Have Fun.” The beverage has associations with women who enjoy partying, and has

come to have negative associations with women who enjoy drinking it (Urban Dictionary, 2013).¹⁶ By implying that Elizabeth Truss would be drinking Lambrini early in the morning, the creator is alluding to the cultural implications of a woman who drinks Lambrini and the social unacceptability of heavy drinking.

This same creator made another ‘day in the life’ video making a joke about Elizabeth Truss having a “cabinet meeting.” In the video, the creator used the green screen effect again to show herself dressed as Liz Truss interacting with various types of furniture cabinets. The first green screen photo is of a wooden filing cabinet, and the creator, once again dressed as Elizabeth Truss is seen waving at it. The text overlay reads “no not that one Liz.” The second green screen photo shows a large, wooden, free standing cabinet. The creator is seen horizontally shaking her pointer fingers at the cabinet, and the text overlay reads “or that one, but you sure told it off.” The third cabinet is a fully stocked liquor cabinet featuring bottles of whiskey and wine and the text overlay reads “that’s the one.” The creator shows herself, still dressed as Elizabeth Truss, enthusiastically mock-drinking from a wine bottle. The voice over narrator, who is also the performer in the video, says “that's the one! Good girl. Get the business done.” The creator is implying that Elizabeth Truss has a drinking problem, with the final scene showing her “passed out” beside the liquor cabinet (See Figure 10).

These posts respond to a rumor and association of Elizabeth Truss’ drinking habits that had some corroboration in current events. In January 2022, while Elizabeth Truss was Foreign Secretary, she was questioned by the Trade Department after spending over £2000 on a 3 day trip to Japan. Truss and her companions drank two measures of dry gin; three bottles of Pazo Barrantes Albariño, a Spanish white wine, costing a total of £153; and two bottles of the French red Coudoulet de Beaucastel, costing a total of £130, it was reported (Quinn, 2022). Although no

¹⁶Cultural context and definition sourced from Urban Dictionary

creators refer directly to this incident, it is possible that they expect audiences to be aware of it as they view content about Elizabeth Truss. Outside of this incident, there were no publicly circulated news stories which made mentions of Elizabeth Truss' alleged drinking habits. This rumor being almost entirely borne out of TikTok content creation is an interesting departure from critiques rooted in greater evidence, and shows an emphasis on policing *perceived* misbehavior.

Clothing + Appearance

One recurring theme in the research findings was Elizabeth Truss' dress choices and general appearance. In a 2021 TikTok video uploaded by @bahram.yara, he rates various outfits worn by Liz Truss that have been uploaded to the internet, many of which on her own Instagram account. In one portion, this creator used the green screen effect to show a photo of Liz Truss uploaded in June, 2018 to her Instagram account. His caption reads: "What do you think?" inviting viewers to participate in responding to his outfit ratings in the comments. He can be seen speaking to viewers in the lower corner of the video, pointing to different aspects of the green screen photos, as he rates the various outfits.

Commentary on Elizabeth Truss' appearance was put in relation to her behavior, making the connection between physical appearance and moral failings. In one post, Liz Truss is seen in a green dress laughing at something off camera. In the video, @bahram.yara says bluntly: "I presume she is not in a 100% sober state in this picture. Um, I hate the choice of heels. I hate the choice of a bag. I am a bit confused about the fit of the dress and the stains. There are some stains on the dress. I don't know if it's like a champagne stain or, but, yeah, it's not giving" (See Figure 11). There is no confirmation if she was actually intoxicated or if the stains were the result of alcohol spilling onto her dress. His comments focus primarily on her appearance and clothing choices, but this particular comment shames Liz Truss for her choice to upload a photo

where, from @bahram.yara's perspective, she appears to be intoxicated enough to have stains on her dress. Although @bahram.yara's video is meant to be rating Elizabeth Truss' outfits, his comments on this post are comments about her behavior. This is the only instance in the research findings which tie her clothing to substance use. This creator is participating in a form of public shaming, and directs the viewers' attention to the politician's choice to upload a photo of them visibly intoxicated.

Multiple creators make the clothing and appearance of Elizabeth Truss a part of their satire. Although creator @chantayyjayy's central critique is of Elizabeth Truss as a poor example of a strong woman because of her policy beliefs and political party, the text overlay on her video reads: "Liz Truss is a demogorgon in a Gucci skirt 🤢." She is noting that Elizabeth Truss is essentially a monster in an expensive skirt. By calling out Elizabeth Truss' appearance and expensive clothing, @chantayyjayy is associating her poor appearance with her poor political beliefs.

Not only was Elizabeth Truss compared to a monster, but she was also compared to a supervillain. Creator @alecjacko uploaded a slideshow video to TikTok with the text overlay: "why she look like every Joker 🧟." The creator uses photos from a 2019 Daily Mail feature, shot by Elizabeth Hoff. The photos feature Elizabeth Truss in various photos against a neutral background. One photo shows her in an all-blue pantsuit with a green shirt, with her hands on her thighs as she leans forward on a stool. Another shows Elizabeth Truss laughing in an all-pink ensemble, and another with a full-red pantsuit (with matching shoes) with her sitting with her hand on her hip, legs crossed, and looking dubiously at the camera. Creator @alexjacko juxtaposed these photos with photos of the Joker, the DC Comic villain in the Batman franchise. After every photo of Elizabeth Truss, is a photo of a Joker from various eras, played by different

actors. The creator visually compares Elizabeth Truss to these different Jokers – either she nearly replicated their outfits, position in a photo/film still, facial expression, or some combination thereof. The creator is making the association of the appearance, and therefore the personality, of Elizabeth Truss to a notable villain. Creators made the connection between appearance and morality as a means of demonstrating the visual signs of Elizabeth Truss’ maliciousness.

Conclusion

This research examined the ways TikTok is being used by young Britons to engage in public political discourse, highlighting how social and political norms of behavior are enforced in the context of social media. Creators demonstrated a comfort with adapting existing trends on the app and simplifying potentially complex issues for their satirical critiques. Interestingly, terms associated with demeaning women were often espoused by other women creators when talking about Elizabeth Truss. Terms like “girlboss” and “girly” were used frequently to diminish the power of the Prime Minister and to apprehend her behavior. These terms, often in tandem with the nail painting emoticon, were frequently used in video captions, indicating that the creators found demeaning and ridiculing Elizabeth Truss an easy task. They used popular jargon with the implicit expectation that viewers would understand their meaning and context. When creators opted to play *as* Elizabeth Truss, they performed as visual caricatures of her, serving in place of the tradition of performances done on British television. These creators were, in part, taking inspiration from this comedic style by mimicking her documented appearance and behaviors, often by reference recordings of speeches dating back over twenty years. Creators opted to ridicule behavior, appearance, and perceived moral failings like greed, pride, and drunkenness over policies. These findings are evidence that young British creators are more concerned with the behaviors of Elizabeth Truss than with her policies or political affiliations.

The use of demeaning language, accusations of stupidity, and the desire to police personal choices demonstrates that young Britons are perpetuating gendered stereotypes and participating in the reinforcement of social norms for their political leaders.

Additionally, findings showed that creators were comfortable referring to visual aids (like LT's instagram posts and news article screenshots) as evidence for the claims being made in their videos. Several creators levied Elizabeth Truss' personal instagram against her as evidence for her ridiculous nature, drinking habits, and poor fashion choices. A large number of videos referenced her past actions, demonstrating a desire to remind viewers of Elizabeth Truss' history as a political figure. The desire to use evidence in a large number of videos demonstrates some inclination towards creating humorous critiques grounded in real-world evidence. Although this was not a universal pattern of behavior, its emergence does demonstrate a level of knowledge, interest, and research (even if brief and undetailed) into the life of their Prime Minister.

The attitudes and behaviors of young people, although often overlooked, are indicative of shifting norms within a nation. The way young people speak publicly influences their own cohort, spurring on ideological trends which have potential consequences on major institutions of government. As young people begin to enter public spaces through the workforce, higher education, voting, and public office, their ability to warp those spaces and change the existing relationships within them becomes more evident. Although only comprising a small percentage of the overall population and often identified as the least likely to engage in voting, young people are not excluded from mass mobilization (as seen in the 1968 Vietnam war protests and 2010 UK student protests) and forcing change through forceful resistance.

Understanding *how* and *why* young people feel disenfranchised, enraged, or empowered is indicative of how a nation is functioning to serve its next generations. If young people feel

engaged in the policy outcomes of their government, they are more likely to begin to vote if and when they are eligible and contribute to their communities in meaningful ways. If young people feel enraged, they are more likely to retaliate through public and private networks of retaliation. For democracies, understanding if young people are interested and what they are doing with that interest speaks to the health of that nation.

The use of TikTok as an avenue for political critique and discussion is not limited to the United Kingdom nor to young people, and its platform may provide insight for political and social norms in regions where the app is widely used. Globally, roughly one billion people use TikTok. For nations where freedom of expression is legally protected, as in the United Kingdom, social media platforms like TikTok are a useful tool to examine the state of public discourse in different age, race, and gender cohorts. In nations and regions where TikTok is readily available and widely used, it can provide important information on the attitudes of citizens about the state of their government and society. TikTok's design makes it easy to use, and its algorithm's tendency to give its users region-specific videos, makes it useful to examine both national and localized issues – and highlights what topics are on the minds of regular citizens who are engaging with content on the app. Tracking what topics are emerging and popularizing on the app can be an indicator of what issues are being prioritized by traditional media and citizens. Additionally, the way people are discussing topics (and how popular their interpretations are) can be useful to understand citizen interpretations of issues, and how information is molded to reflect how citizens feel about a person, event, or idea.

However, TikTok users in some countries, especially non-democratic regimes may be more difficult to study as they may face legal and social repercussions for expressing their ideas. TikTok has been a controversial app for different governments across the globe for several years.

In 2020, India banned TikTok citing that it was a national security threat (Murray, 2023). Similarly, the Taliban banned the use of the app in Afghanistan in 2022 because the app's content was "not consistent with Islamic laws"(Najafizada, 2022). Even in democratic nations, TikTok has become an important subject for dangerous political discourse and personal information security. In the United States, arguments have been made that the app is beholden to the Chinese government, and therefore poses a legitimate threat to the safety of Americans (Reuters, 2023). However, no federal bans currently exist for the app's use by American citizens. In Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, and several other democracies, TikTok has been banned from government devices – indicating that government's feel the app could pose a potential security threat.

This research study was only able to collect a limited number of videos for analysis, thus limiting the scope of diverse content that exists on TikTok about Elizabeth Truss. Further research would allow for a greater number of video analysis which could identify more patterns of LT related content creation. Additionally, geographic and cultural restraints make the interpretation of norms and language limited to an outside perspective.

Due to the nature of TikTok, creators can delete a video anytime after its creation. Even if another creator stitches or duets the original video, it will be deleted if the original video is deleted. If a creator deletes their account, all of their videos are immediately removed from the platform. TikTok's user guidelines will retroactively delete videos from the past in the event that their guidelines are updated and the video becomes in violation, making the deletion of videos common. The popularity of a video does not shield it from being deleted by the App. As a result, lots of the content that was created during Elizabeth Truss' short tenure discussing her, is likely gone forever.

Further studies should be conducted to understand how many times a piece of information, either factual or fabricated, needs to be reproduced on TikTok before it becomes a common belief among a meaningful cohort.

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Appendix

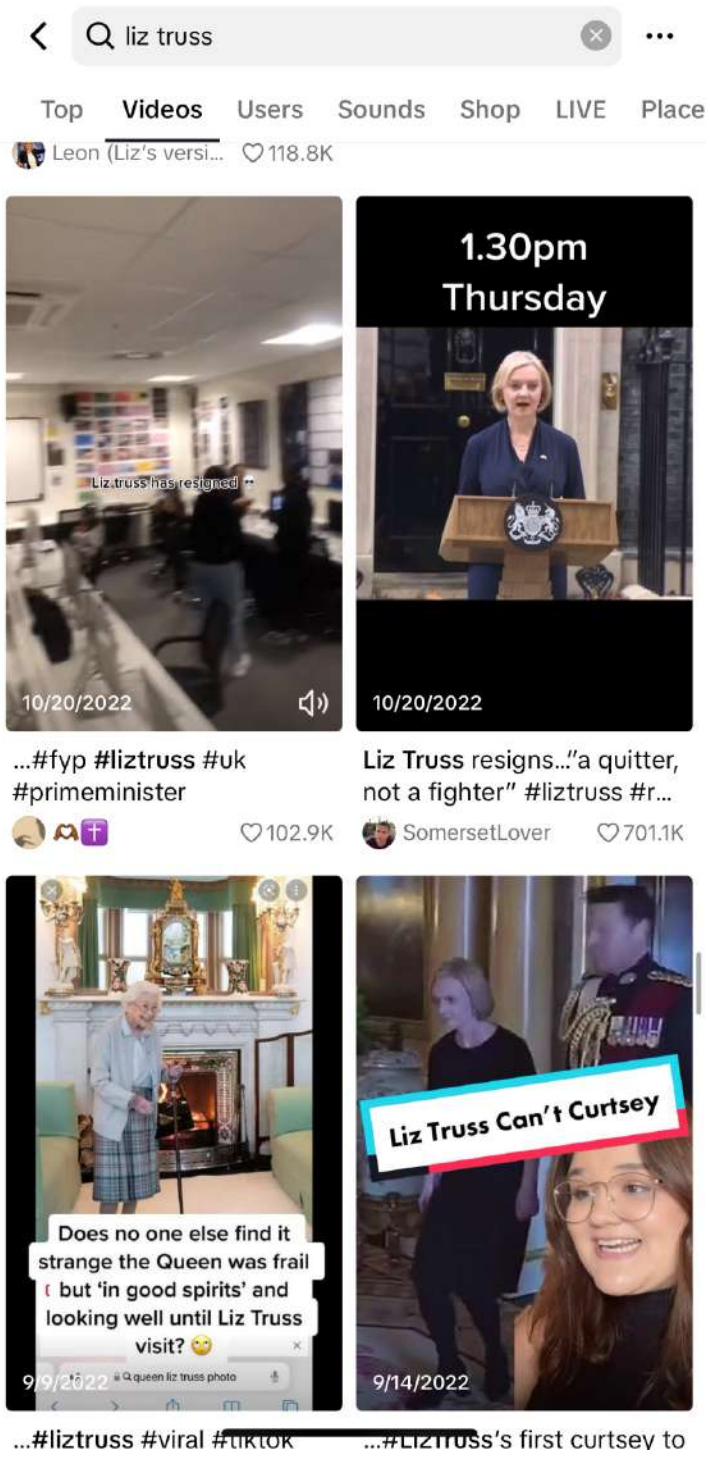


Figure 1: Screenshot of a portion of the #liztruss feed on TikTok

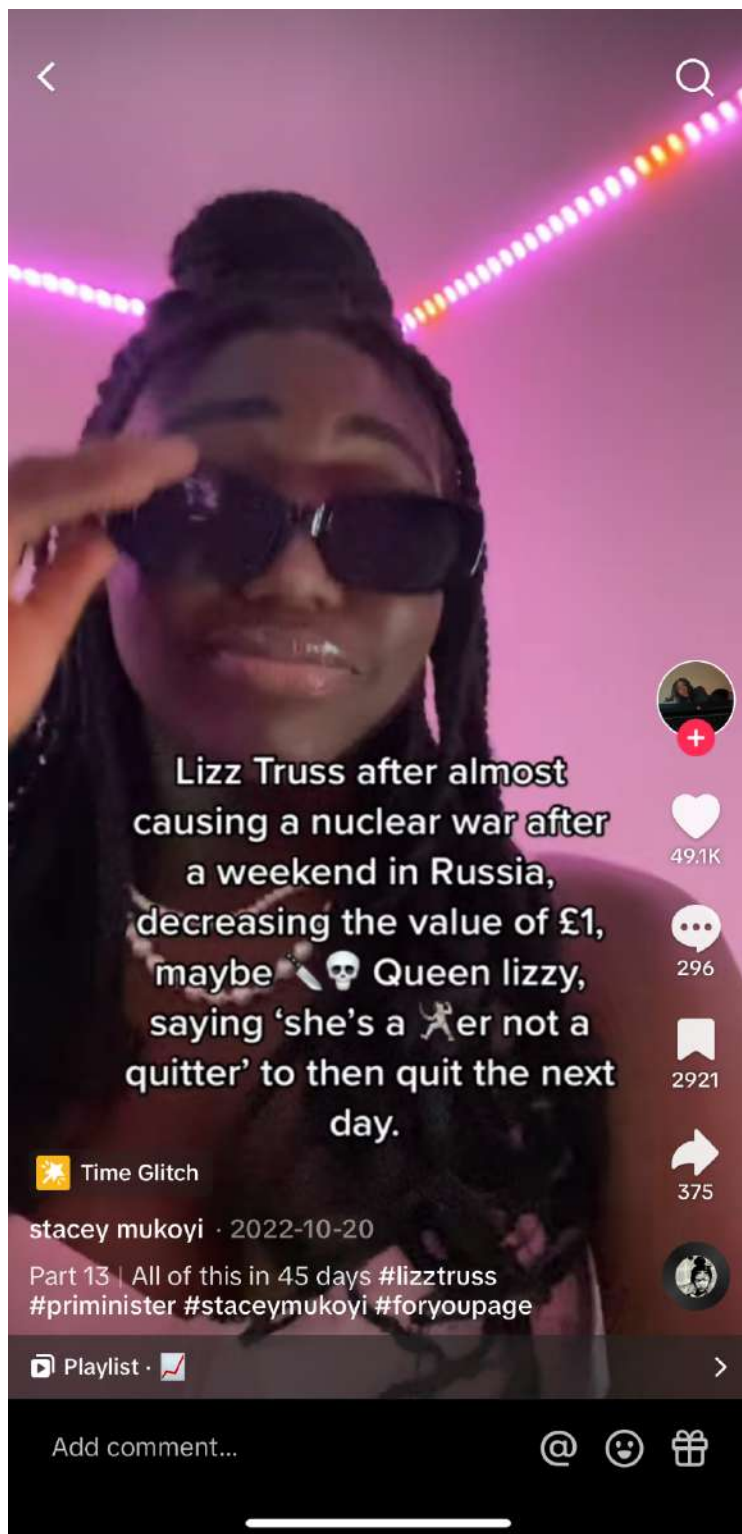


Figure 2: Screenshot from a video uploaded by @staceymukoyi

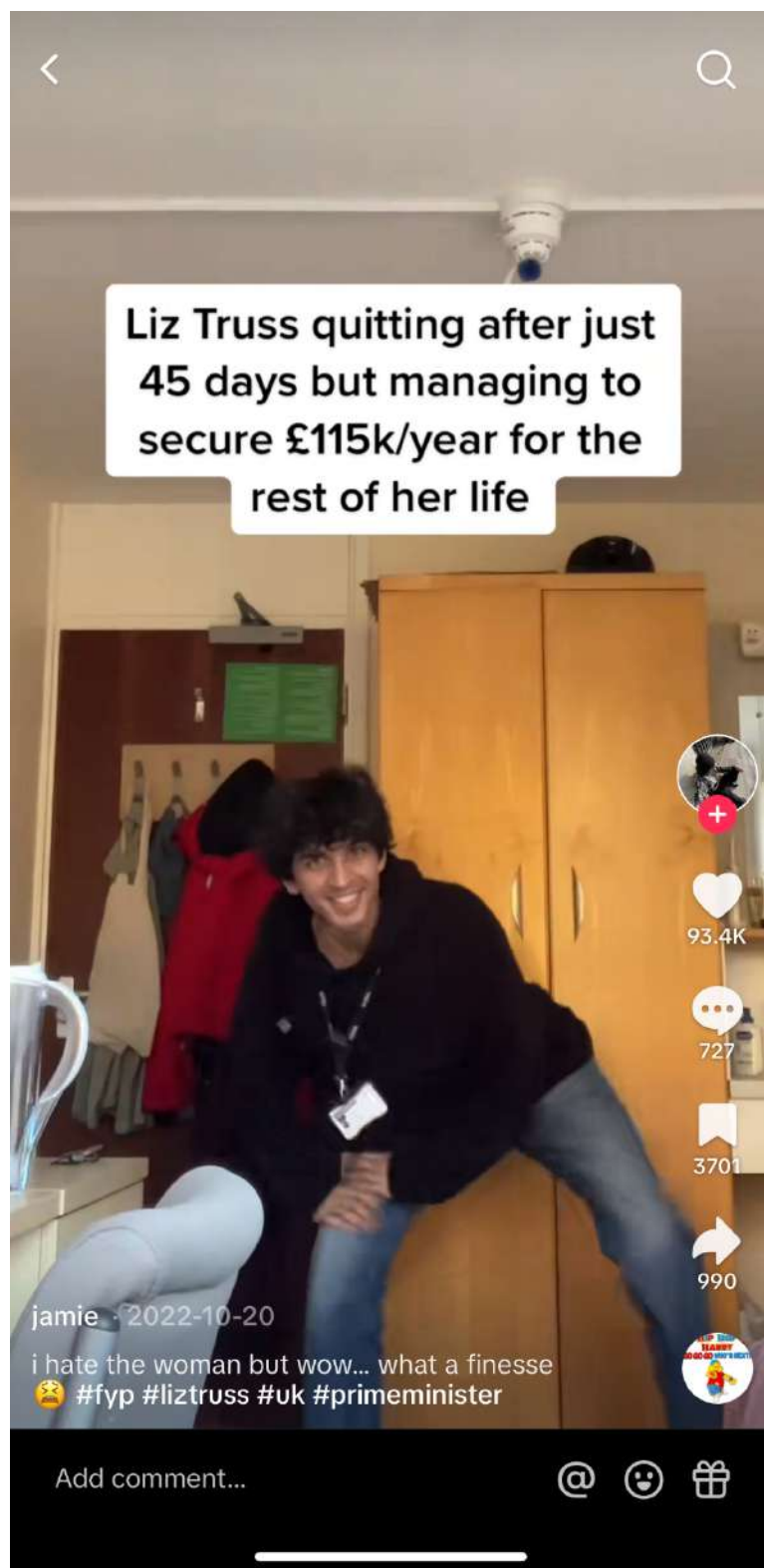


Figure 3: Screenshot from a video uploaded by @jamielii

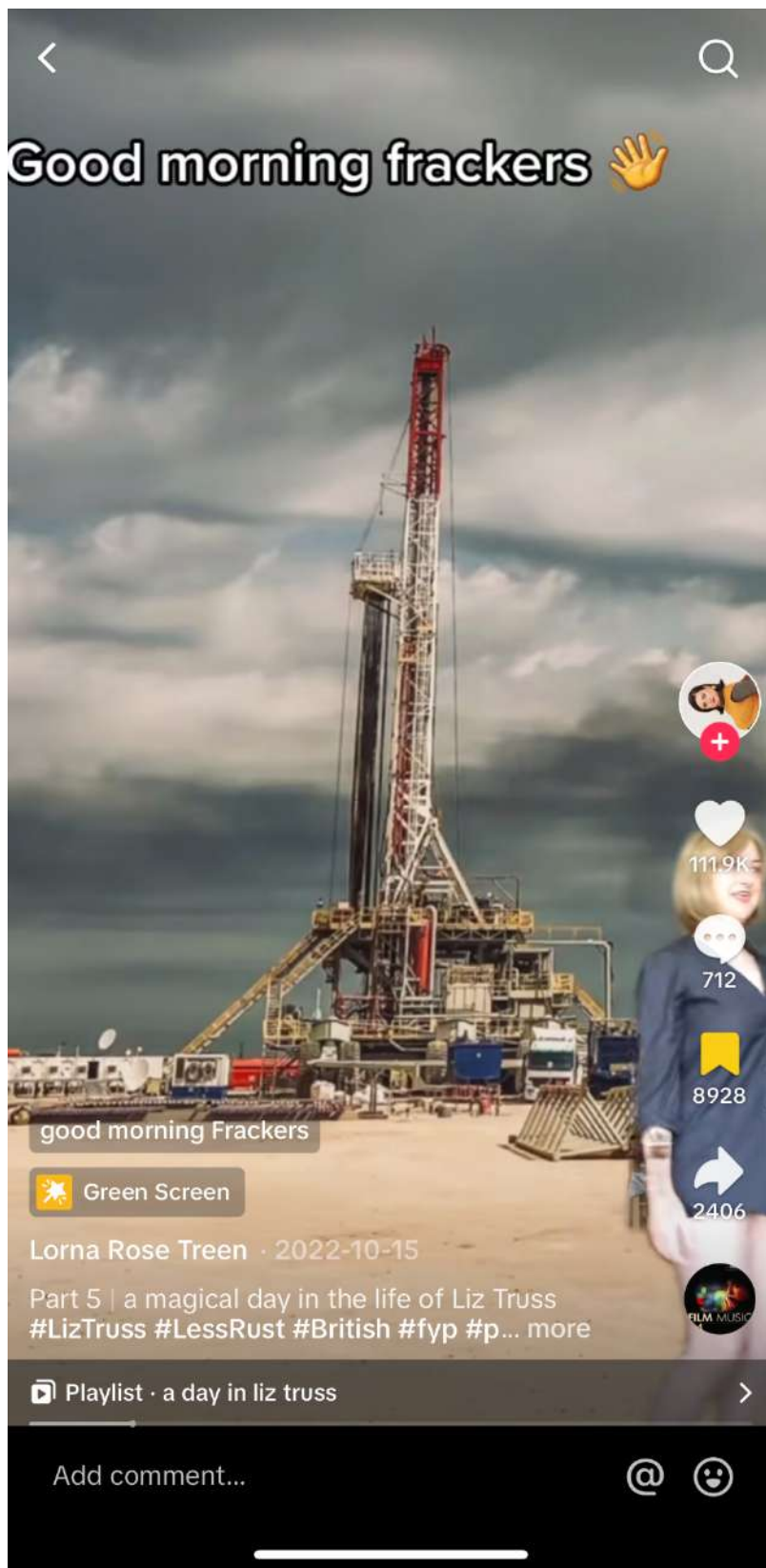


Figure 4: Screenshot from a video uploaded by @lornaregionaltransport

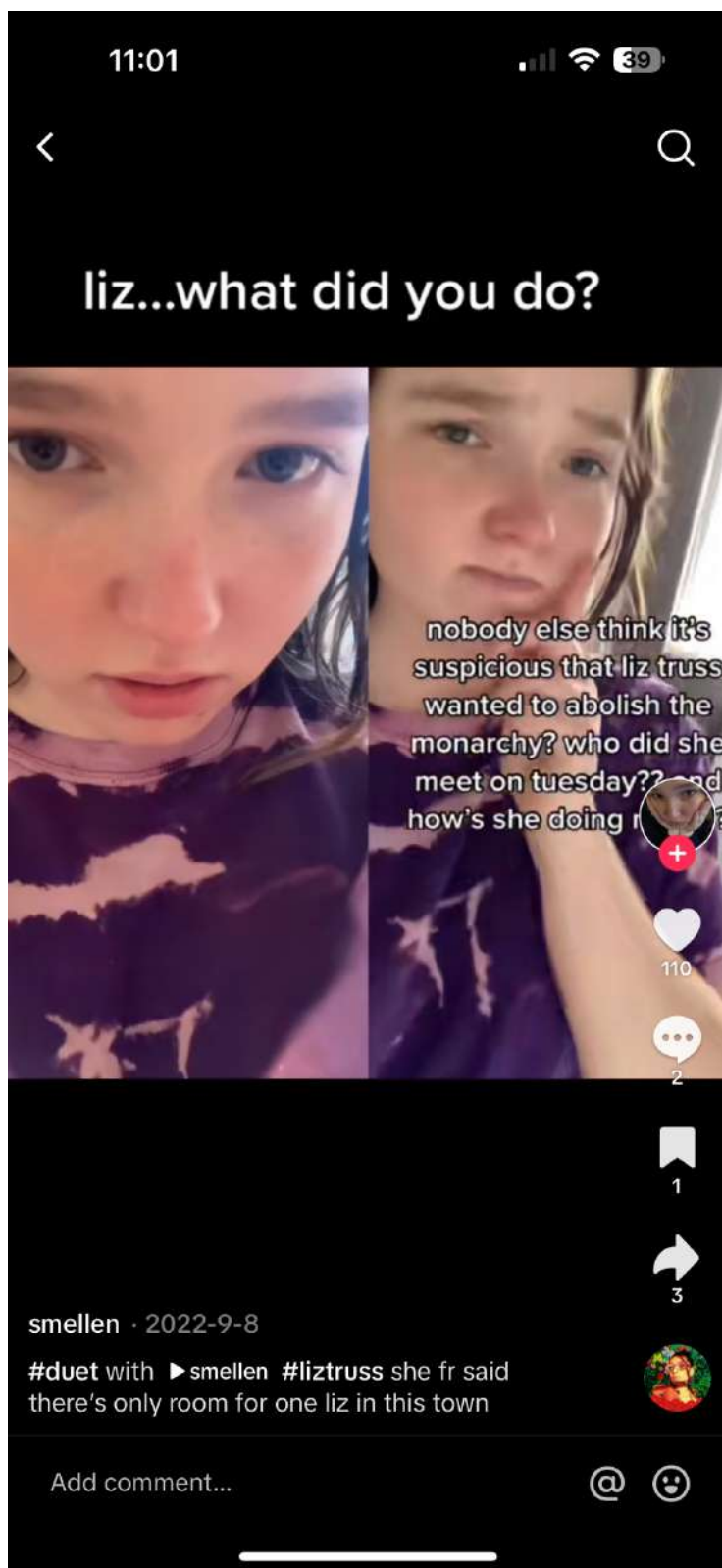


Figure 5: Screenshot from a video uploaded by @smellenglamner



Figure 6: Screenshot from a video uploaded by @lampshadeskitkat



Figure 7: Screenshot from Elizabeth Truss' personal Instagram account (@elizabeth.truss.mp)



Figure 8: Screenshot from Elizabeth Truss' personal Instagram account (@elizabeth.truss.mp)



Figure 9: Screenshot from Elizabeth Truss' personal Instagram account (@elizabeth.truss.mp)

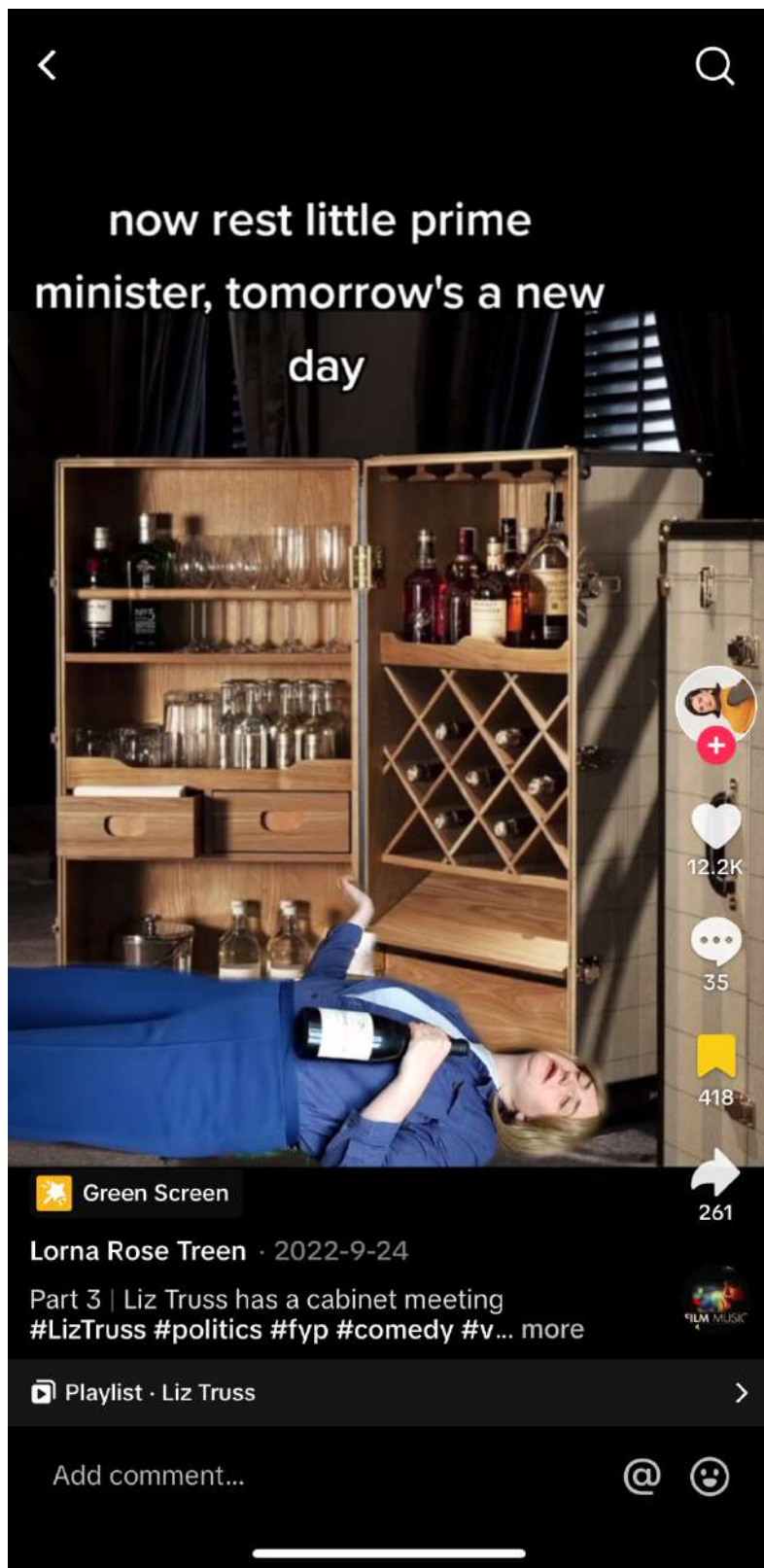


Figure 10: Screenshot from a video uploaded by @lornaregionaltransport

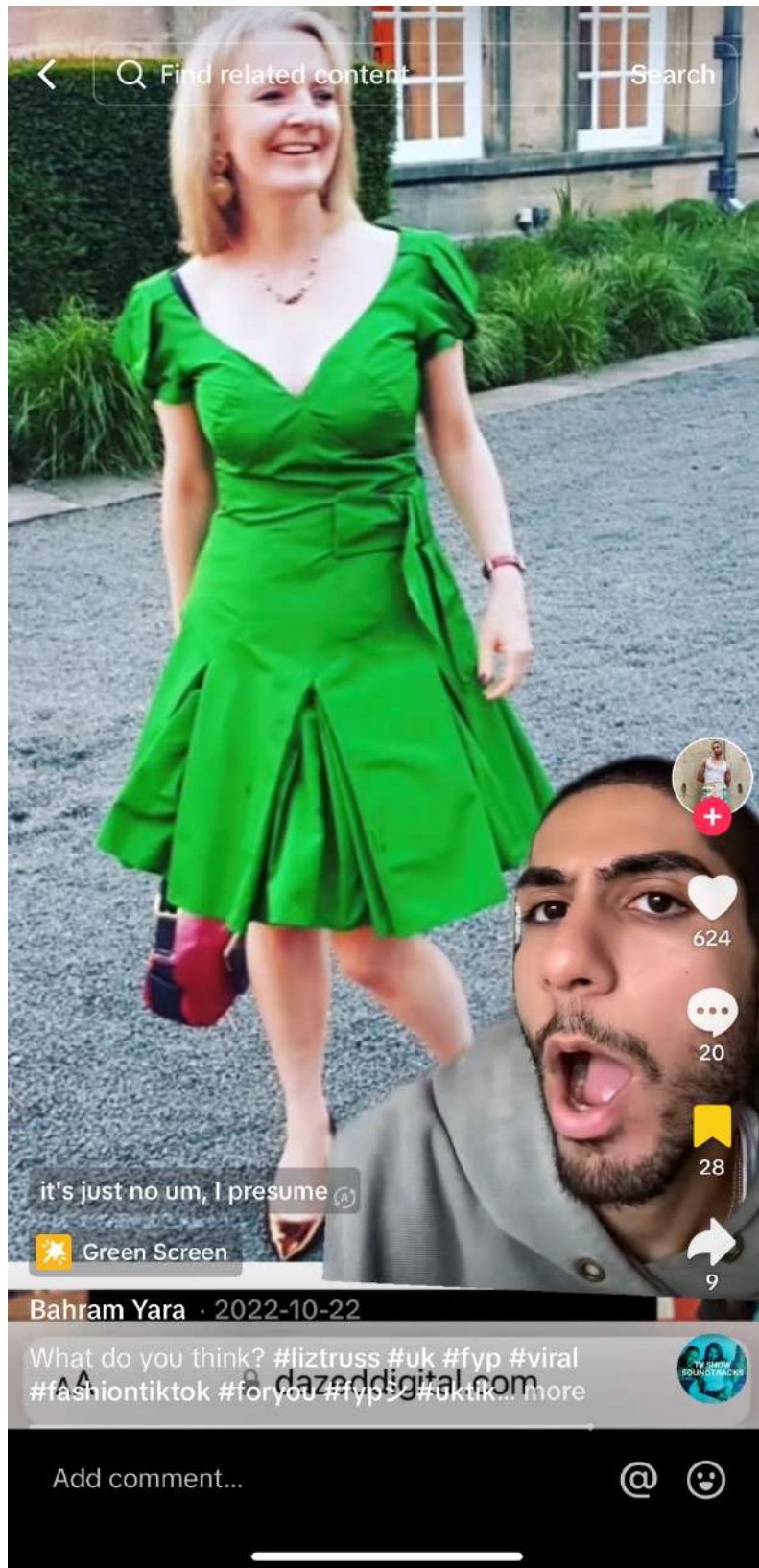


Figure 11: Screenshot from a video uploaded by @bahram.yara