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Is social media really a threat to youths' literacy?

Original paper: Verheijen, L., & Spooren, W. (2021). The impact of WhatsApp on Dutch youths' school writing and spelling. *Journal of Writing Research*, *13*(1), 155-191. https://doi.org/10.17239/jowr2021.13.01.05Link: https://jowr.org/articles/vol13_1/JoWR_2021_vol13_nr1_Verheijen_Spooren.pdf

Project created for the class: Visual Thinking and Composition
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Tilburg University, Department of Communication and Cognition
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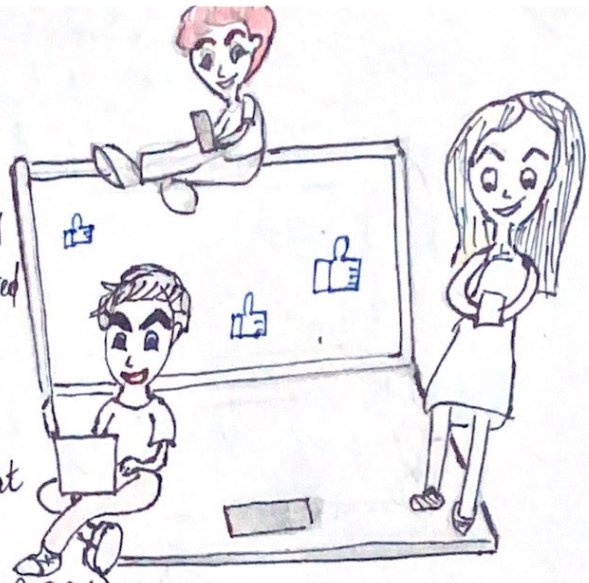
Nowadays, young people are constantly using computer-mediated communications via social media such as WhatsApp, Snapchat Facebook etc.
(Verheijen & Spooren, 2021)



If they get a chance, they also use social media at school. There is popular belief that social media harms their literacy.

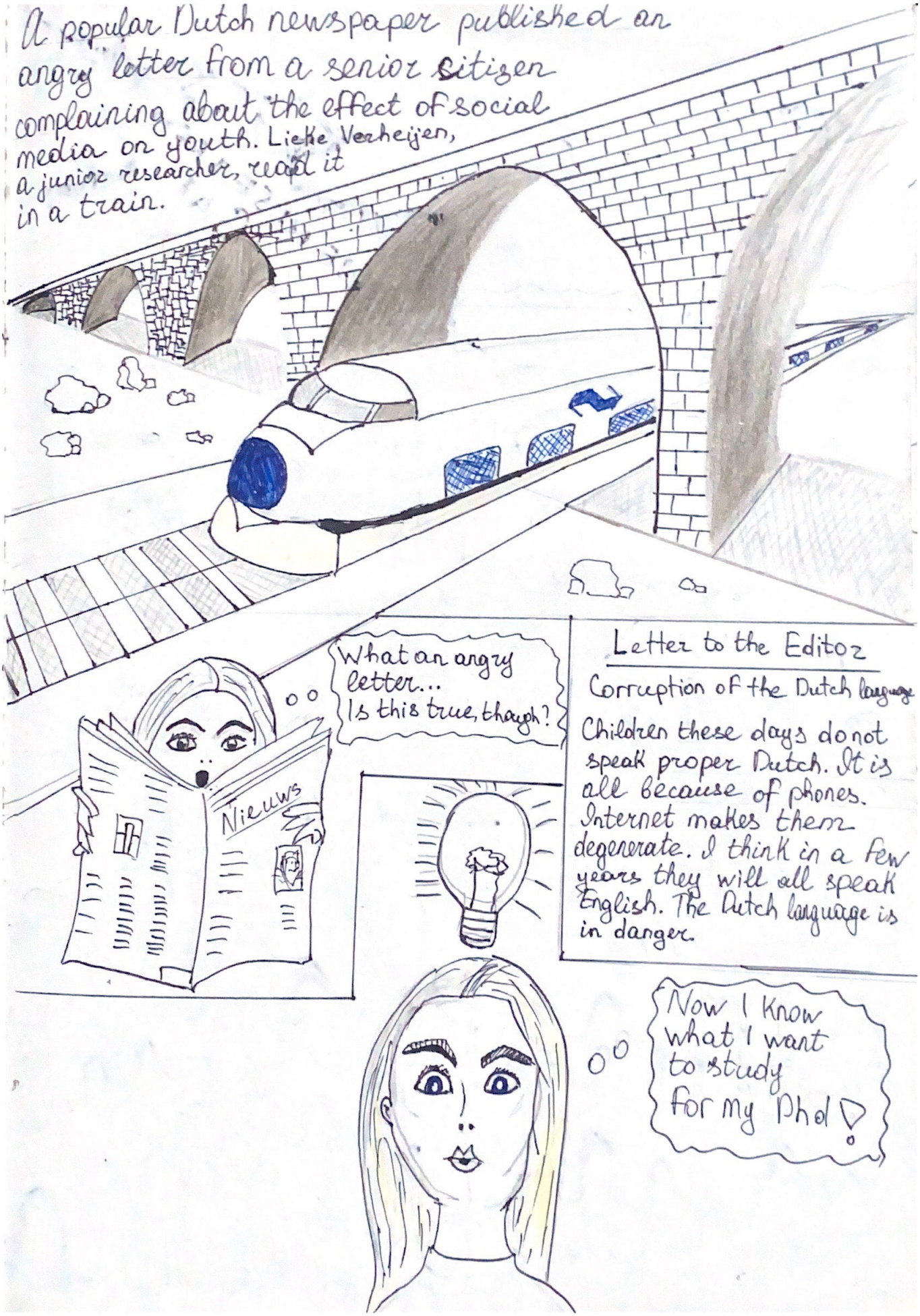
The school policy on mobile phones does not matter

Whether students can use social media at school or not.

Many adults are concerned about this.

Students will still use social media at their free time to send each other informal messages

A popular Dutch newspaper published an angry letter from a senior citizen complaining about the effect of social media on youth. Lieke Verheijen, a junior researcher, read it in a train.



Do young people that are active users of social media write poorly at school?

read

recieved

sent

delievered

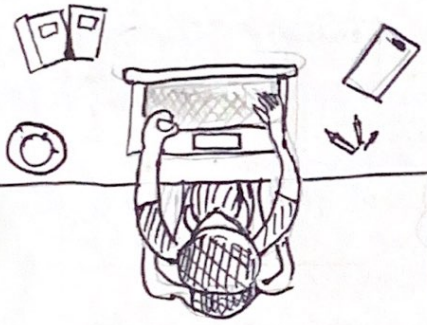
Lieke decided to test this.

First, she identified

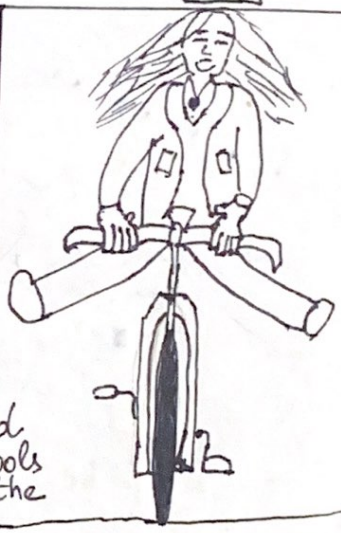
Then she came up with an innovative idea of an experiment.

Lieke decided to ask students to use WhatsApp right before writing a short story.

Lieke contacted school teachers via email.

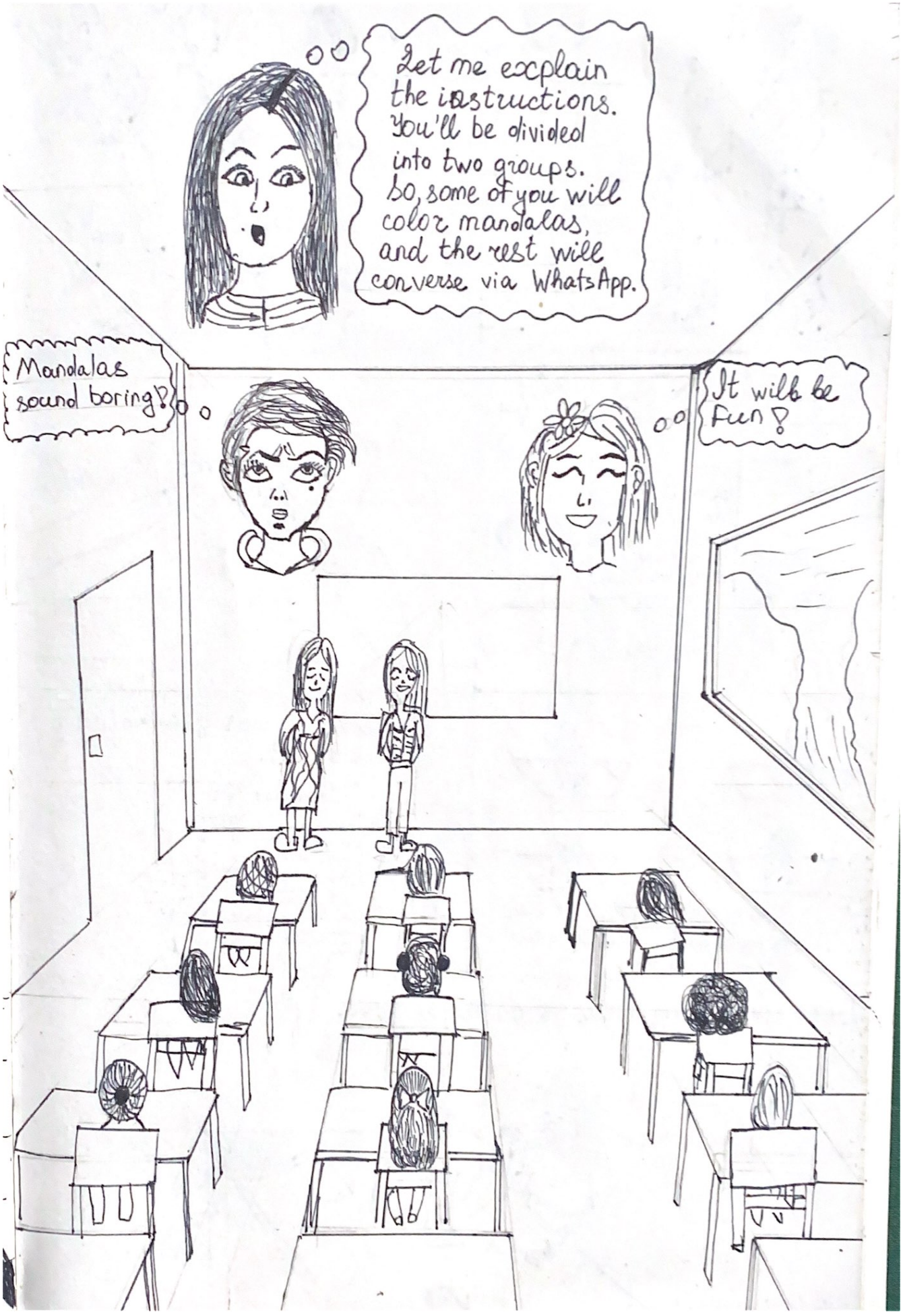


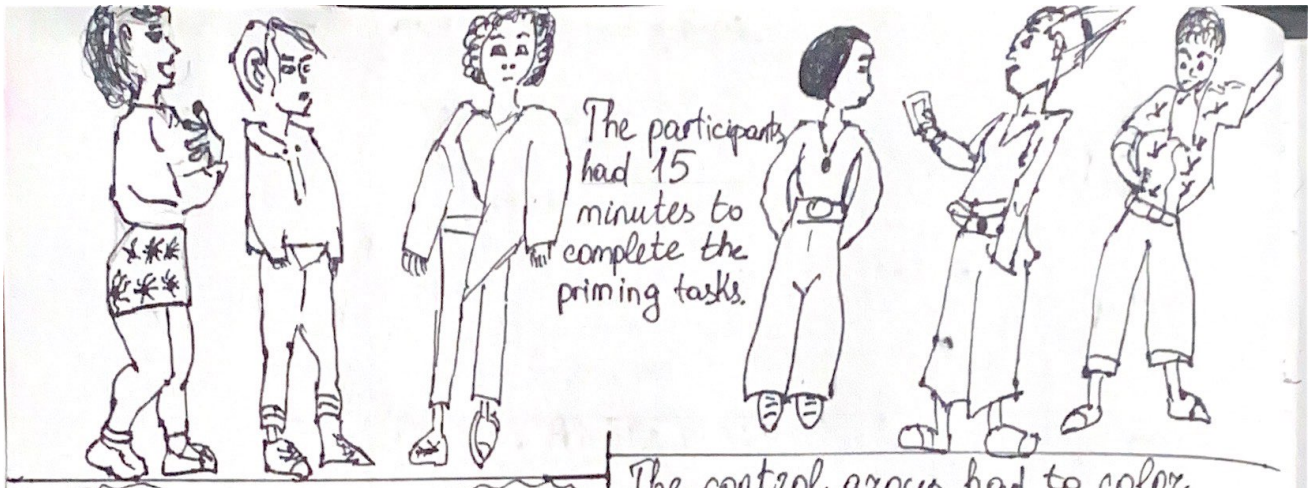
Many of them were very enthusiastic about the experiment.



Lieke cycled to the schools to collect the data.

Overall, 500 young people took part in the study. They were students at either of the included four secondary schools, one vocational school or the one university.


Let me explain the instructions. You'll be divided into two groups. So, some of you will color mandalas, and the rest will converse via WhatsApp.
Mandalas sound boring?
It will be fun!

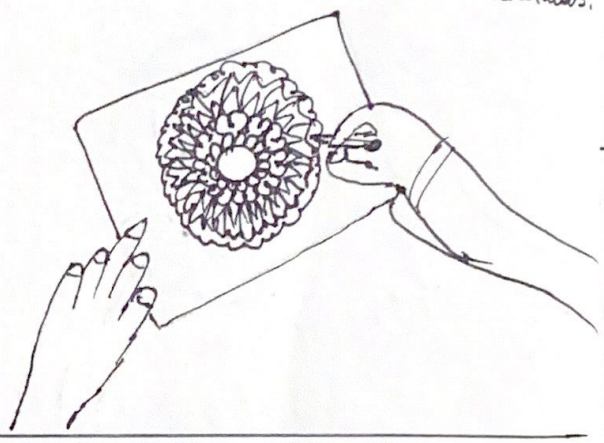


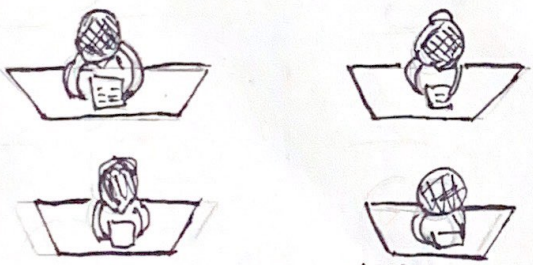
The participants had 15 minutes to complete the priming tasks.

Some of them had to chat via WhatsApp with their peers. There were no pairs, they discussed various topics in groups of three or four.

The texts were not monitored

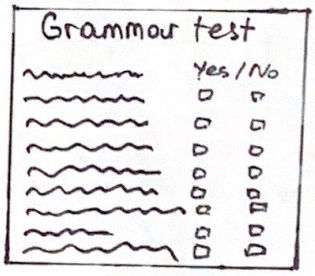
The control group had to color mandalas.





After completing the first task, the participants had to write a short story.

Then they had to judge whether the sentence was grammatically correct or not.



Lieke spent many hours on data analysis.

Main result: WhatsApp does not make young people write more poorly.

Youths in WhatsApp groups made fewer spelling mistakes than those in the control group. My study suggests that active use of social media may actually benefit language development

The study recieved media attention.

And... Lieke got her Phd