

THE HAPPINESS OF READING

A study by Gruppo Mauri Spagnol with Cesmer (Centro di Studi su
Mercati e Relazioni Industriali dell' Università di Roma Tre)

October 24th, 2015



For its **ten-year anniversary**, **GeMS**, which works for books with passion, wanted to find out if this passion corresponds to a positive effect for its readers.

We didn't want to limit ourselves to considering the satisfaction of the consumer as such; rather, **we pushed ourselves to question whether books better the lives of readers as people.**

We trusted this survey to Cesmer, Center of Markets and Industrial Relations of Roma Tre University. The results are glaring and extremely encouraging.

The assumptions we make in our dedicated work proved themselves to be true, as we were presented with an image of the reader that is far different from the stereotypes.

The Happiness of Reading

Introduction

The study: project and objectives (1/2)

- **Research objective:** To understand how and to what extent reading books in one's free time impacts a person's general happiness.
- **Complexities of the study:** The conducted study is particularly complex for two reasons:
 - (1) there is no previous knowledge of what value reading has on a person's life;
 - (2) there are many different definitions of happiness and well-being in scientific literature, as well as many different ways of measuring these concepts;
- **Concept:** By happiness we mean “**an enduring psychological feeling of being in a state of contentment**” (Frey and Stutzer, 2002) and subjective well-being signifies “an umbrella term for the different valuations people make regarding their lives, the events happening to them, their bodies and minds, and the circumstances in which they live” (Diener 2006).
- The measures we used are:
 1. *The overall happiness index, which measures the “subjective perception of fulfillment regarding one's life as a whole” (Veenhoven, 2010);*
 2. *Subjective Well-Being: cognitive dimension, which measures the overall subjective evaluation of one's life (Ladder of Life Scale; Cantril, 1965)*
 3. *Subjective Well-Being: affective dimension, which measures the frequency of positive and negative emotions (Scale of Positive and Negative Experience; Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2009).*
- **Context:** The impact of reading was measured not only on its own, but in a larger context, as it was compared to other cultural activities performed in people's free time, as well as to other pastimes (sports, browsing the web, television, etc.). Reading was examined in terms of its level of importance, the amount of time dedicated to it and, above all, the amount of happiness generated by it.

The study: project and objectives (2/2)

- **Research methodology:** a telephone survey was conducted with a sample group representing the Italian population aged 14 years and older. It was conducted from May 12 to June 14, 2015, and followed the CATI method. First, the population was divided into two macro-groups – readers and non-readers – and these two subpopulations were then balanced in terms of geographical area, gender and age group. The resulting representative sample was made up of 1100 individuals. For the complete methodology, see the appendix;
- **Motivation for the study:** the latest available information on reading in Italy is fairly disheartening. The Istat Report from 2014 estimated that 58,6% of Italians over the age of 6 had not read even one book in the previous 12 months. This trend is growing (the number of non-readers in 2013 was at 57%), so the situation does not seem to be getting better with time.
- **Usefulness of the study:** today, moreover, the helpfulness of reading on a cognitive and emotional level for the reader is unknown. If the benefits that reading provides for single individuals could be quantified, then the activity could also be better promoted among non-readers. The usefulness of reading, not only in an educational environment, but also in terms of a person's well-being, is still an unanswered question. The study aims to gauge if reading is able to create real value for the reader and to compare the happiness and the well-being of readers to that of non-readers.

The Happiness of Reading

Key Results

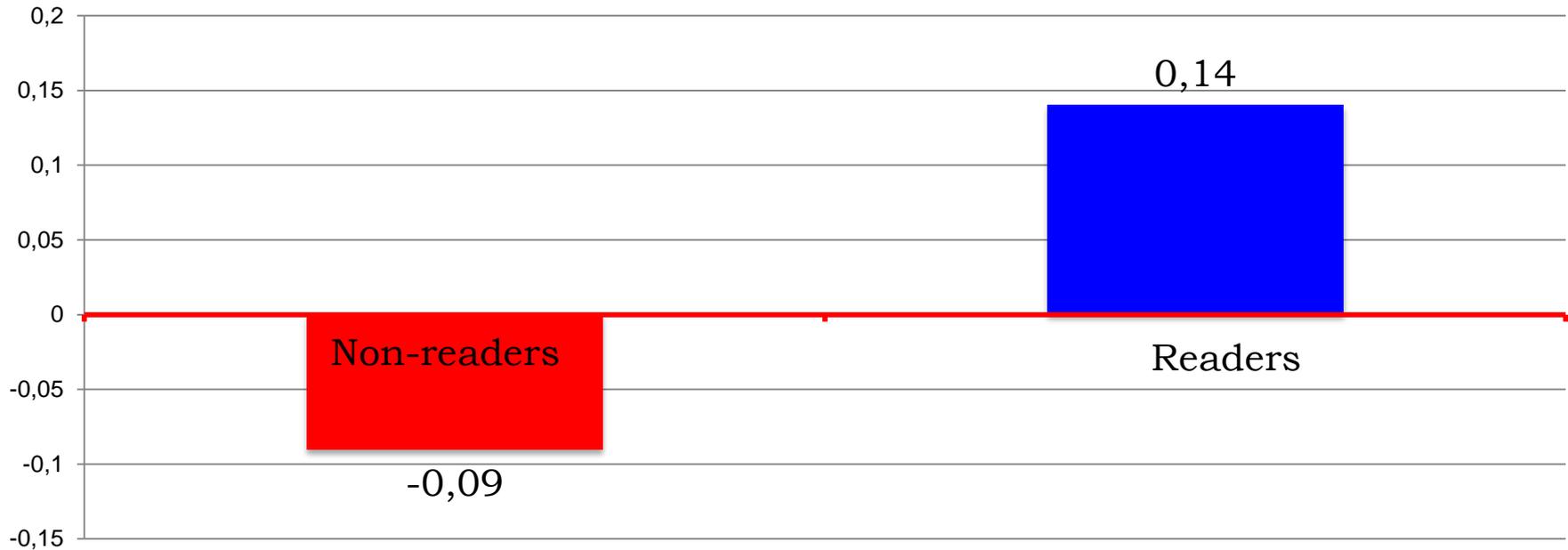
The overall happiness index: readers vs. non-readers



Readers in Italy are happier overall than non-readers

The overall happiness index was measured with the scale suggested by Veenhoven (2010): “Taking all things together, how happy would you say you are you with your life as-a-whole these days?” (scale 1-10 where 1=“completely unhappy” and 10=“completely happy”).

Happiness index. Comparison of readers and non-readers. Variance from mean



Average for the population(*) = 7.3

Average for non-readers = 7.21

Average for readers = 7.44

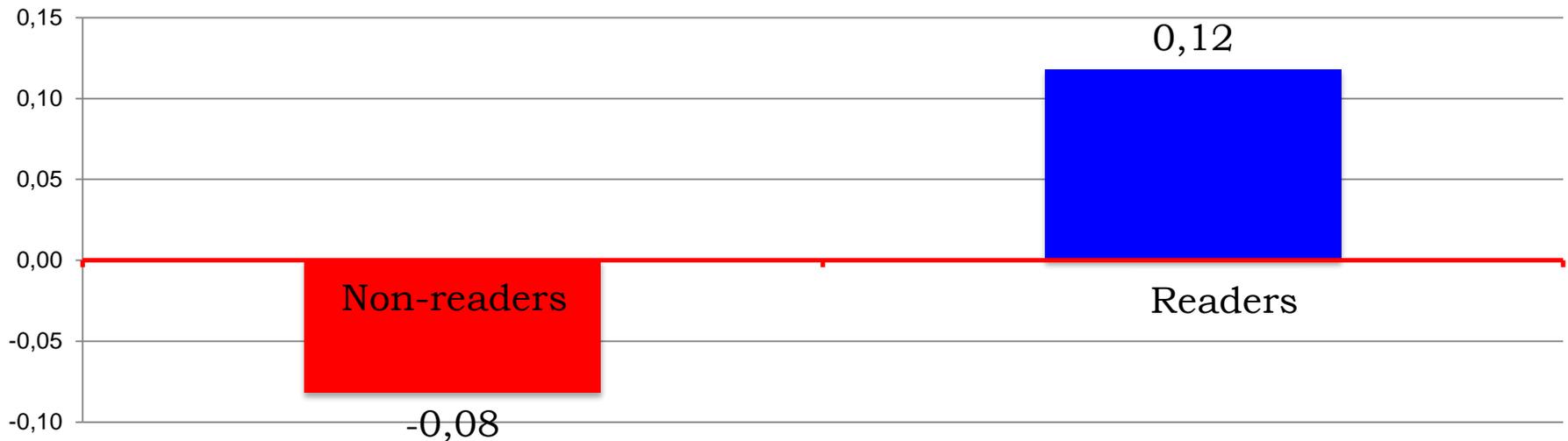
(*): The value for the whole population was weighted based on the statistics of ISTAT

Subjective Wellbeing, cognitive dimension; readers vs. non-readers

→ **Readers in Italy have a higher level of subjective cognitive well-being than non-readers**

The Subjective Wellbeing index: the cognitive dimension uses the Ladder of Life Scale developed by Cantril (1965). The Cantril scale asks individuals to assess the extent to which their life coincides, both as-a-whole and at the present time, to the best life possible. The scale provides 11 different responses (0=“coincides with the worst life possible”; 10=“coincides with the best life possible”).

The Cantril Ladder. Italian readers vs. non-readers. Variance from mean



Average for the population(*) = 7.00

Average for non-readers = 6.92

Average for readers = 7.12

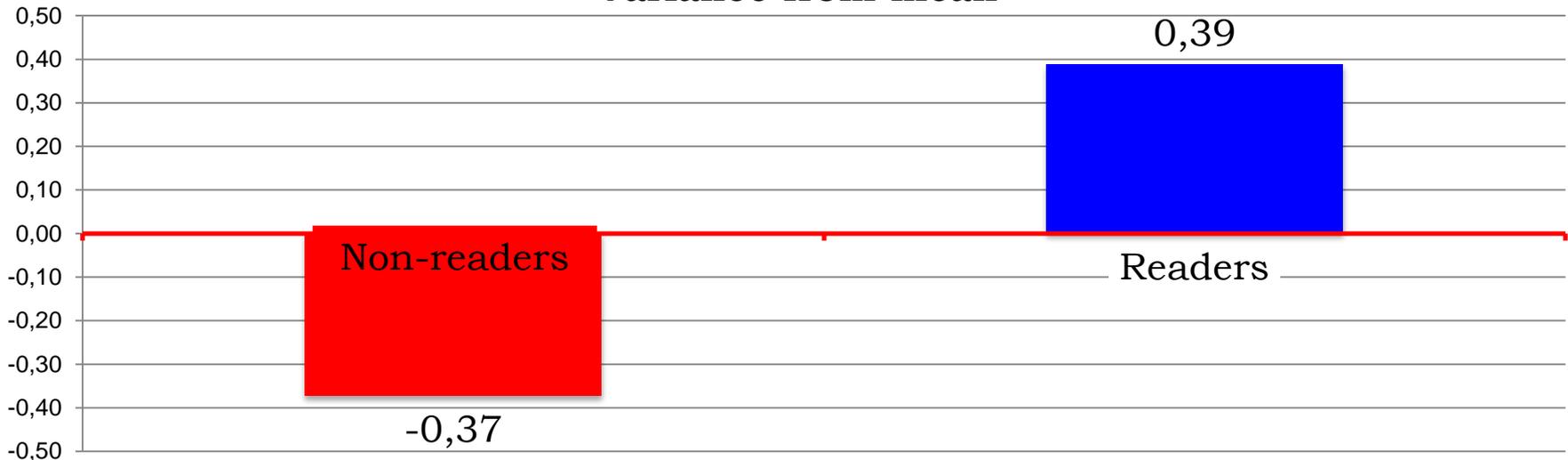
(*): The value for the whole population was weighted based on the statistics of ISTAT

Subjective Wellbeing, affective dimension: Positive emotions; readers vs. non-readers

➔ **Readers in Italy experience positive emotions more often than non-readers**

How often (on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1="never or very rarely" ; 2="rarely"; 3="sometimes"; 4="often"; 5="very often or always") the person has experienced 6 positive feelings (positive, good, pleasant, happy, joyful and contented) in the 4 weeks leading up to the survey (Scale of Positive Experience, Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2009). The index is the sum of the scores and ranges from 6 to 30.

Positive emotions. Comparison of readers and non-readers. Variance from mean



Average for the population(*) = 21.30

Average for non-readers = 20.93

Average for readers = 21.69

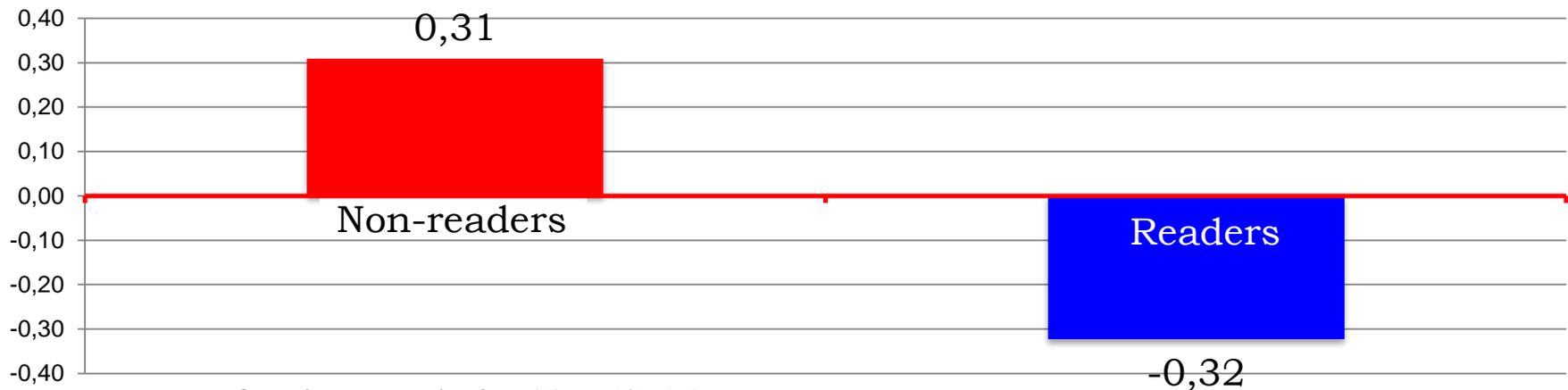
(*): The value for the whole population was weighted based on the statistics of ISTAT

Subjective Well-Being, affective dimension: Negative emotions; readers vs. non-readers.

→ **Readers in Italy experience negative emotions less frequently than non-readers**

How often (in a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 = “never or very rarely” ; 2 = “rarely”; 3 = “sometimes”; 4 = “often”; 5 = “very often or always”) the individual experiences 6 negative feelings (negative, bad, unpleasant, sad, afraid, and angry) in the four weeks leading up to the survey (Scale of Negative Experience, Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2009). The index is the sum of the scores and ranges from 6 to 30.

Negative emotions. Readers vs. non-readers. Variance from mean



Average for the population(*) = 17.16

Average for non-readers = 17.47

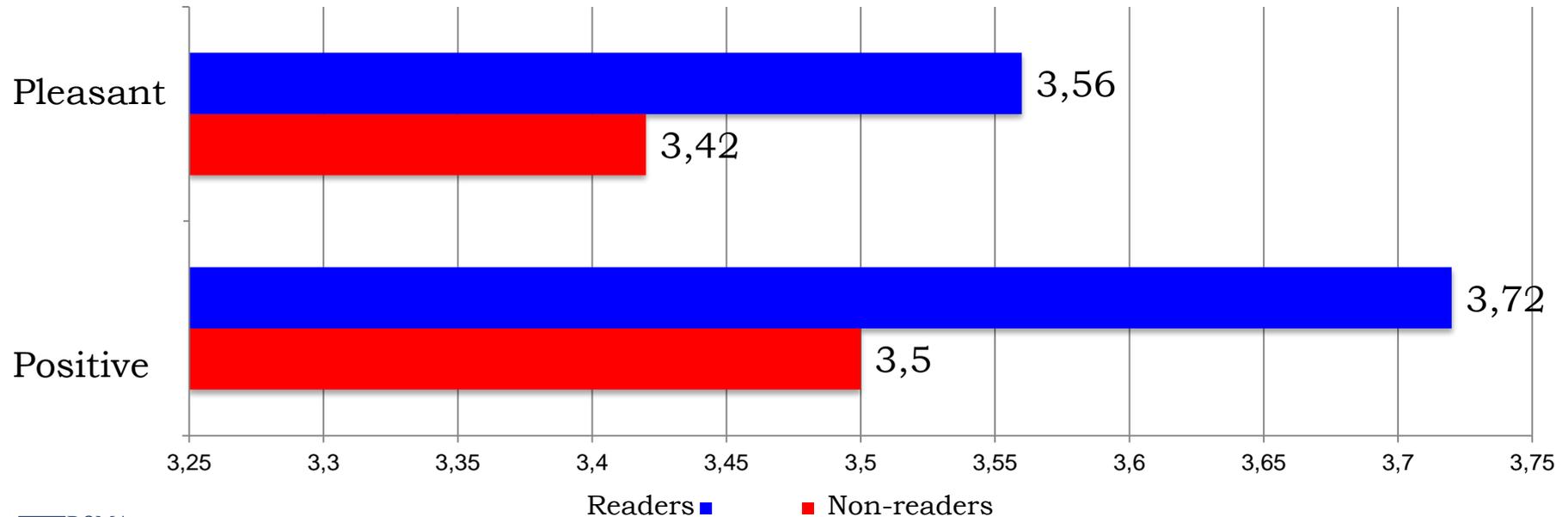
Average for readers = 16.84

The different positive emotions of readers and non-readers

→ **Readers in Italy are positive and feel good more often than non-readers**

We enquired about 6 positive emotions through the Scale of Positive and Negative Experience, Diener & Biswas-Biener (2009). In general, each positive emotion was experienced more frequently by readers than non-readers in Italy. In addition, for 2 of these emotions – pleasant and positive – the difference found between readers and non-readers was statistically significant, having passed the F test, and can therefore be extended to the entire population.

Pleasantness and positivity. Readers vs. non-readers

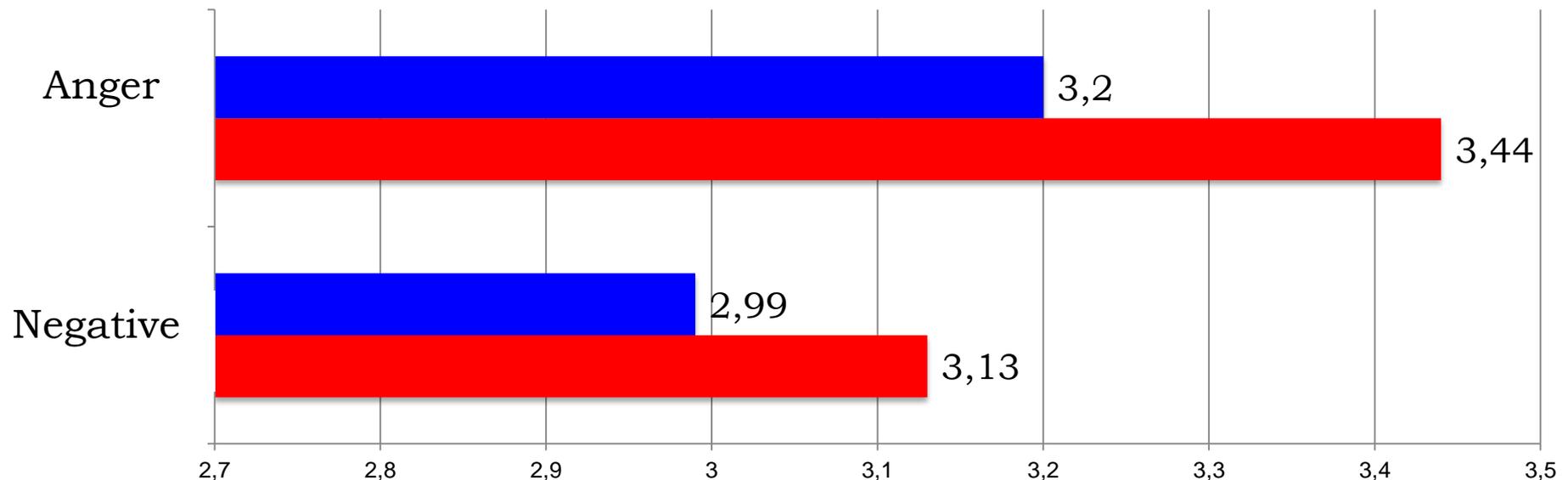


The different negative emotions of readers and non-readers

→ **Readers in Italy are negative and get angry less frequently than non-readers**

Also for the 6 negative emotions examined using the Scale of Positive and Negative Experience, Diener & Biswas-Diener the differences between readers and non-readers in Italy suggested a better situation for readers, who in fact had lower scores. In addition, two of the negative emotions – angry and negative – passed the F-test and, having shown statistically significant differences between readers and non-readers, could be extended to the entire population.

Anger and negativity. Readers vs. non-readers

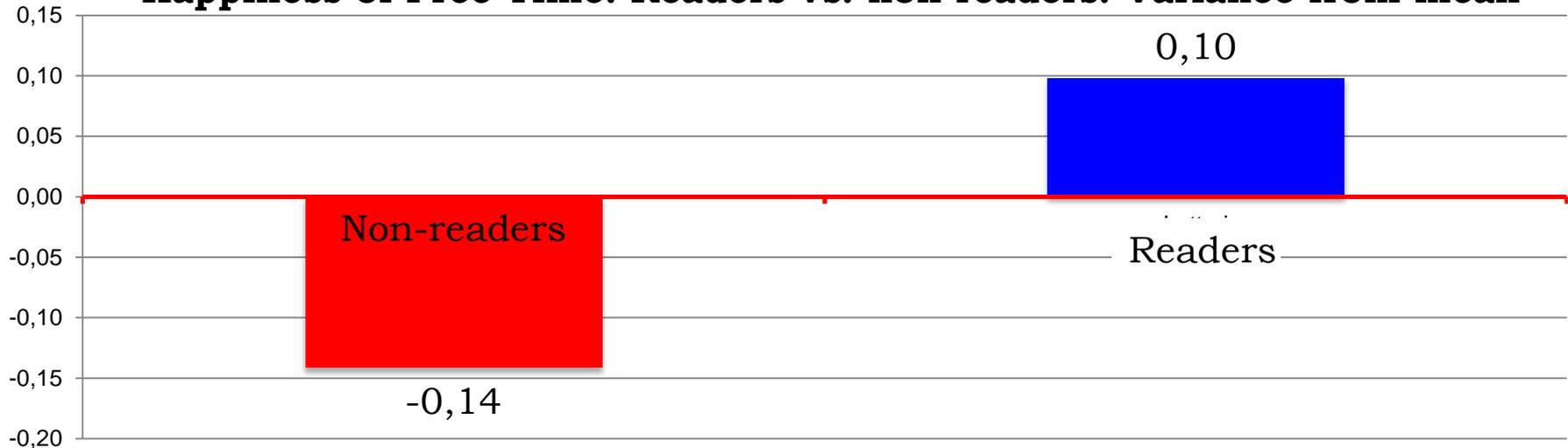


The happiness of free time index: comparison of readers and non-readers

➔ **Readers in Italy are happier with how they spend their free time overall than non-readers**

The happiness of free time index was made applying the happiness scale developed by Van Boven and Gilovich (2003). The survey asks people to rate the overall use of their free time from 1 to 9. This assessment is made on three dimensions: (1) how much the activity contributes to their happiness in life; (2) how meaningful it is; (3) how personally fulfilling it is.

Happiness of Free Time. Readers vs. non-readers. Variance from mean



Average for the population(*) = 7.49

Average for non-readers = 7.35

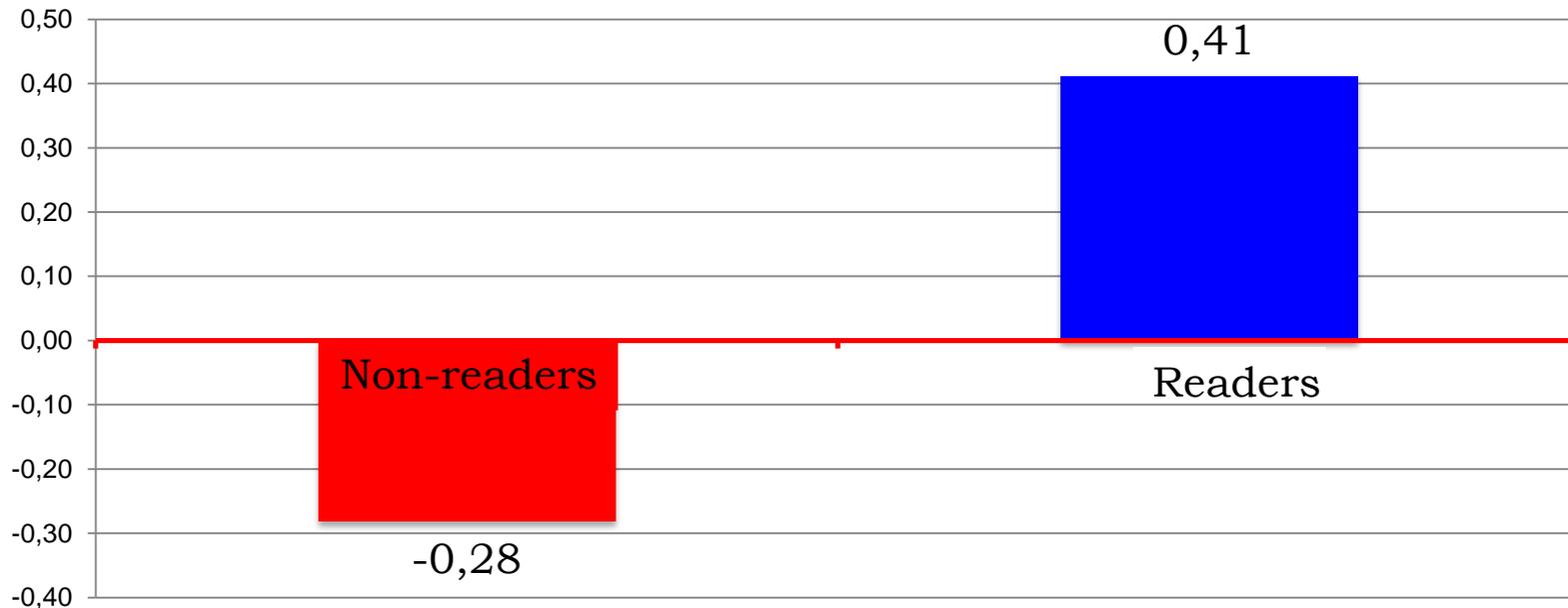
Average for readers = 7.59

(*): The value for the whole population was weighted based on the statistics of Istat

Average importance attributed to activities carried out in free time

➔ **On average, readers in Italy attribute a greater importance to the activities performed in their free time**

On average, Italian readers attribute a greater importance to the activities performed in their free time. Interestingly, there is no statistically significant difference in terms of the amount of time dedicated to these activities between readers and non-readers (general average of time spent = 21.86; $p=NS$).



Average for the population(*)=6.03

Average for non-readers=5.75

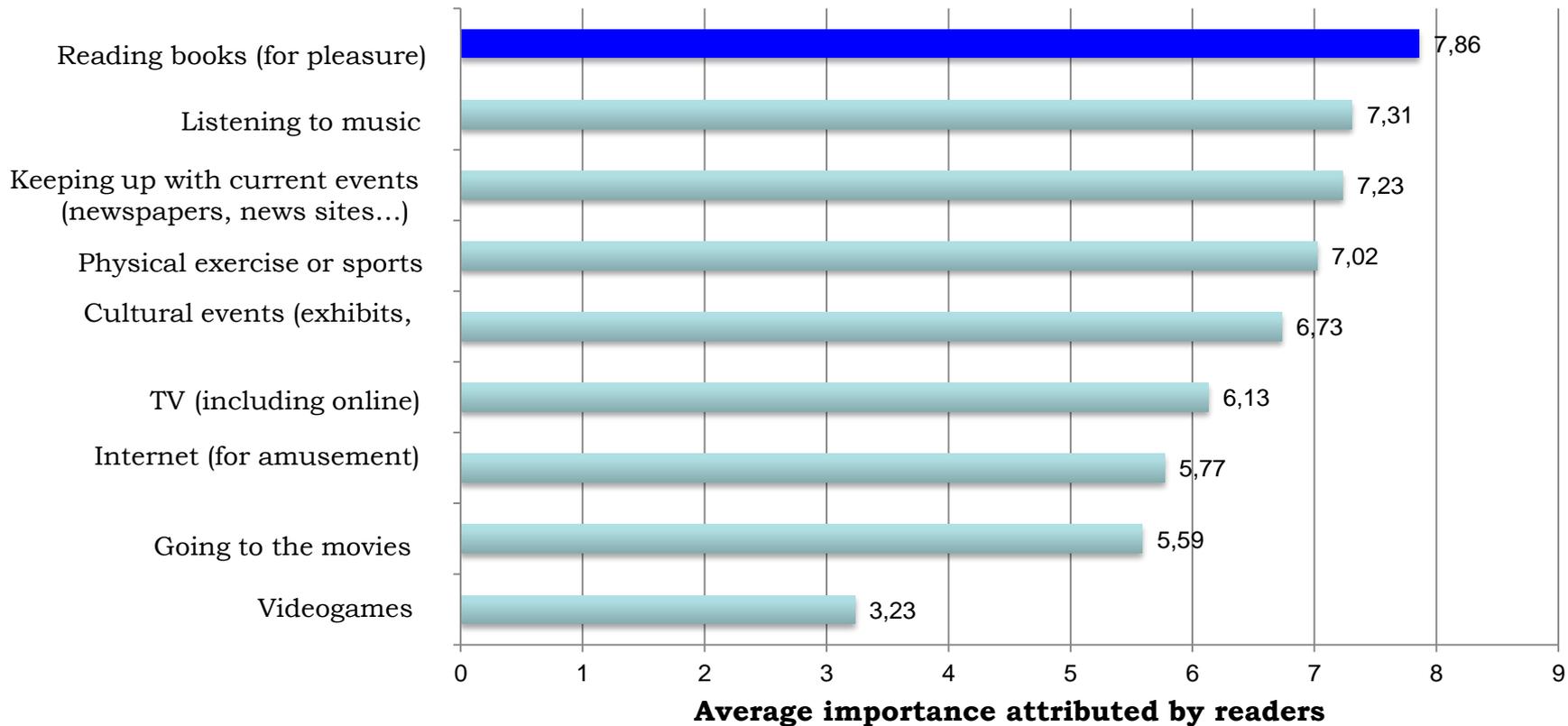
Average for readers=6.44

(*): The value for the whole population was weighted based on the statistics of Istat

Importance attributed by readers to their free time activities

➔ **For readers in Italy, reading is the most important use of their free time**

Average of the importance attributed by Italian readers to their different free time activities. Importance valued on a 1-9 scale (1= “not at all important”; 9= “extremely important”).

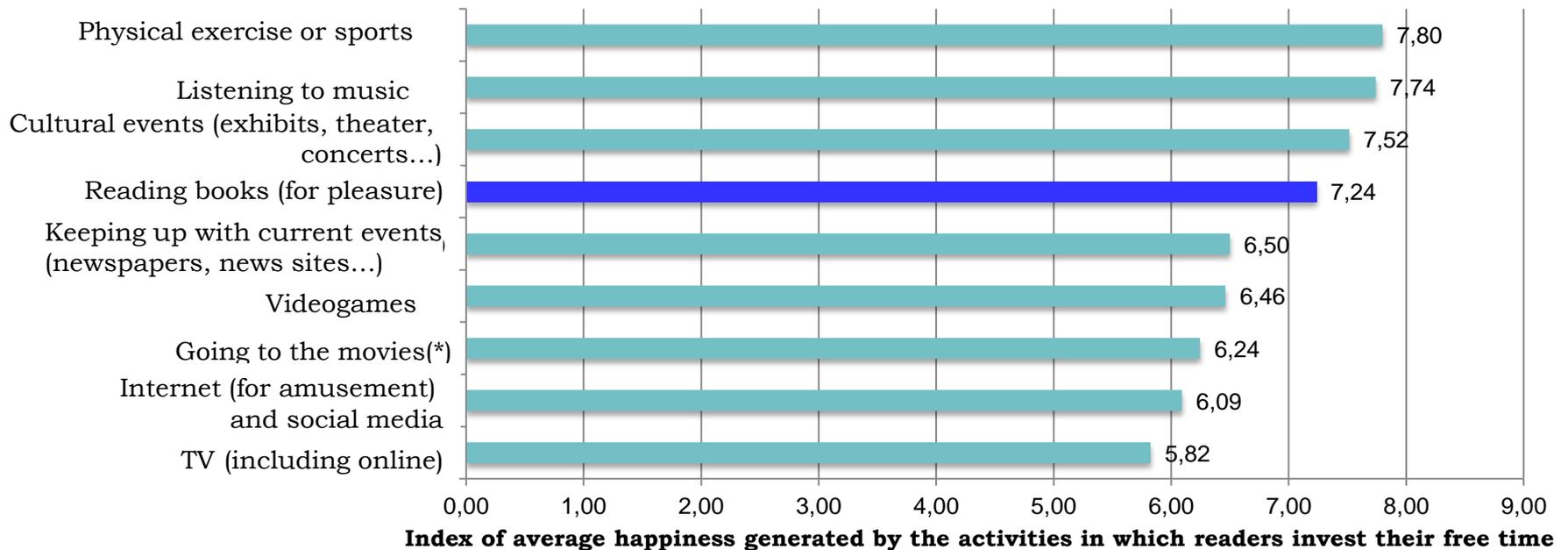


Oddity: many non-readers also attribute a great importance to reading (24.3% of non-readers attributes reading a 9 for highest importance).

Index of average happiness attributed by readers to main free time activities

➔ **For readers in Italy, reading is the fourth ranked free time activity for generated happiness. The first is working out or playing sports**

We compared reading with the other activities in which readers in Italy invest the majority of their free time (the first 3 activities besides reading) in terms of the amount of happiness generated (Van Boven and Gilovich, 2003). The scale asks the individual to judge on a 9-point scale the overall use of their free time in terms of 3 dimensions: (1) how much it adds to their happiness in life; (2) how fundamental it is; (3) how personally fulfilling it is. The graph is taken from the average of all of the assessments on each of the 3 dimensions.



Note: the data on “going to the movies” is based on an extremely reduced number of cases; it should not be considered reliable.

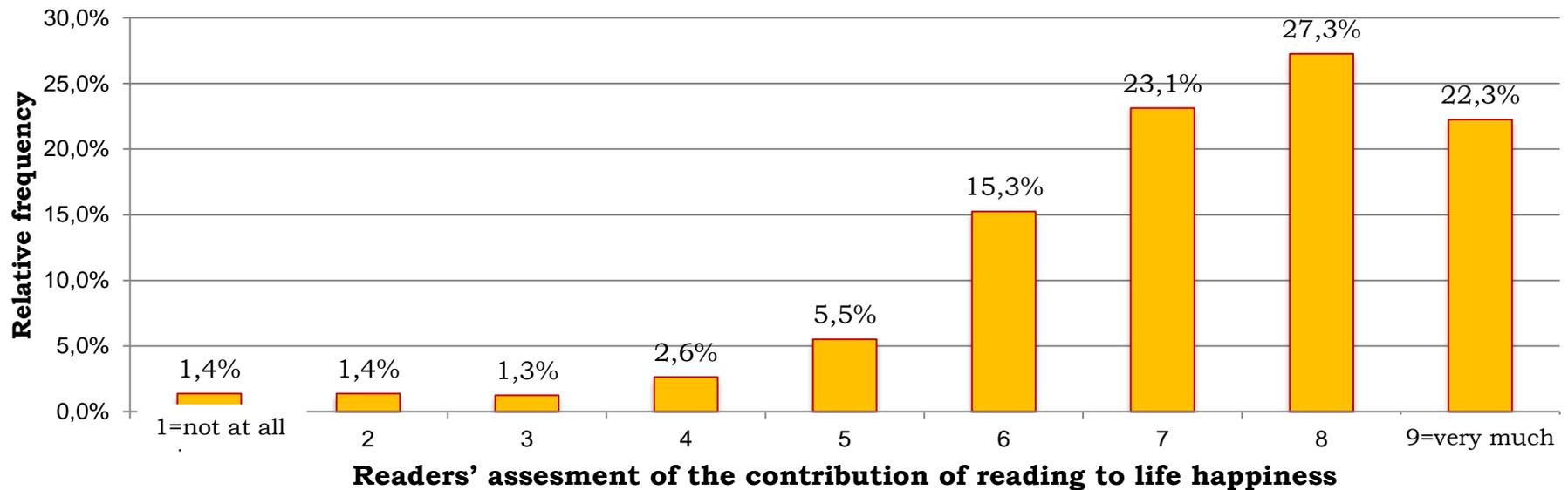
Reading's contribution to a happier life for readers.

Frequency distribution of readers

88% of readers in Italy state that reading helps to make their life happier by a high margin (from 6 to 9 on a 1-9 scale)

The index of happiness generated by reading asks individuals to rate reading on three dimensions (Van Boven and Gilovich, 2003): (1) how much it adds to their happiness in life; (2) how fundamental it is; (3) how personally fulfilling is it – on a 9-point scale (1=not at all; 9= very much).

The following graph reports the distribution of Italian readers' assessment of the first dimension.

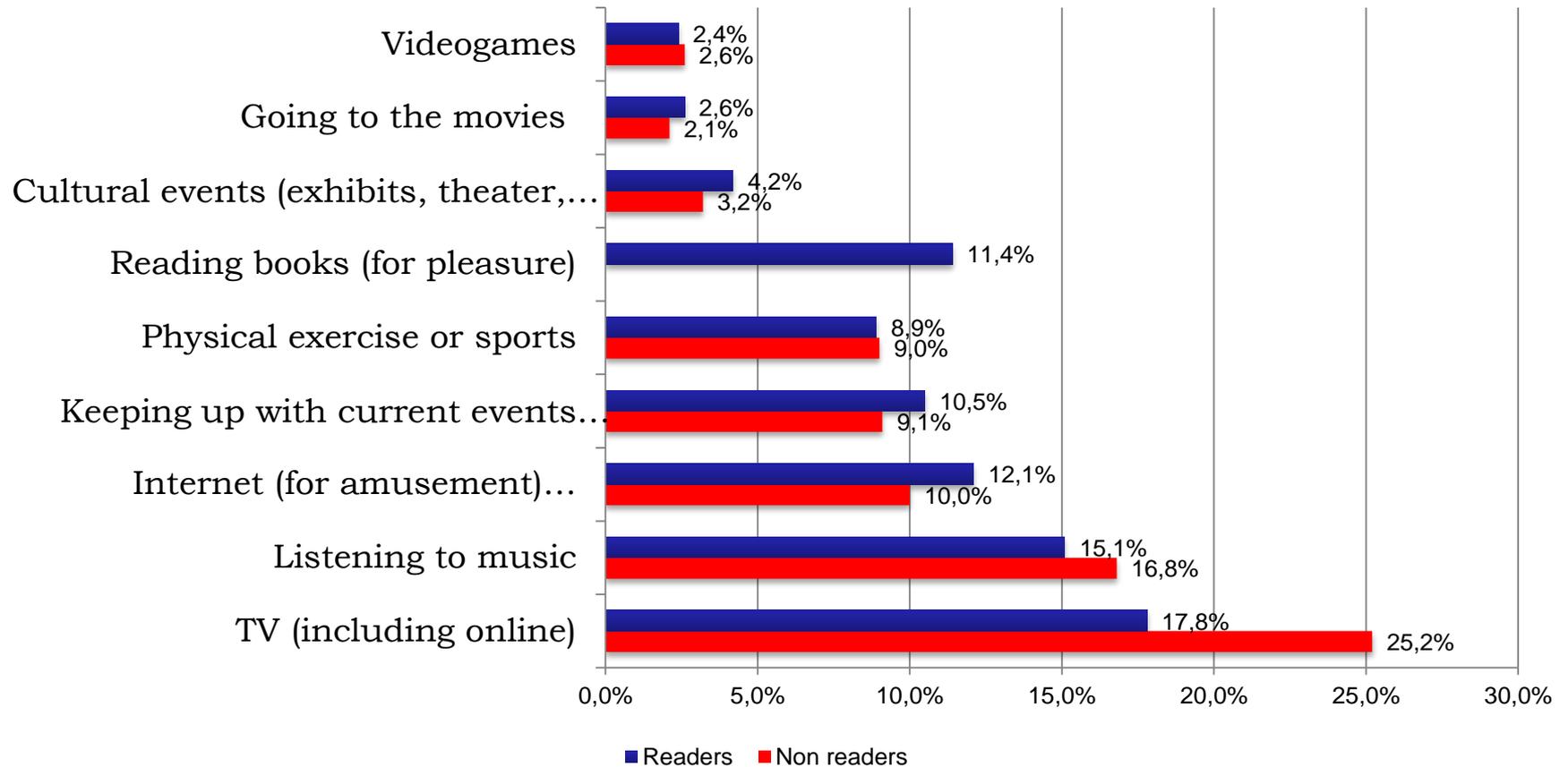


The other two dimensions show very similar distribution results.

The Happiness of Reading

Points of interest

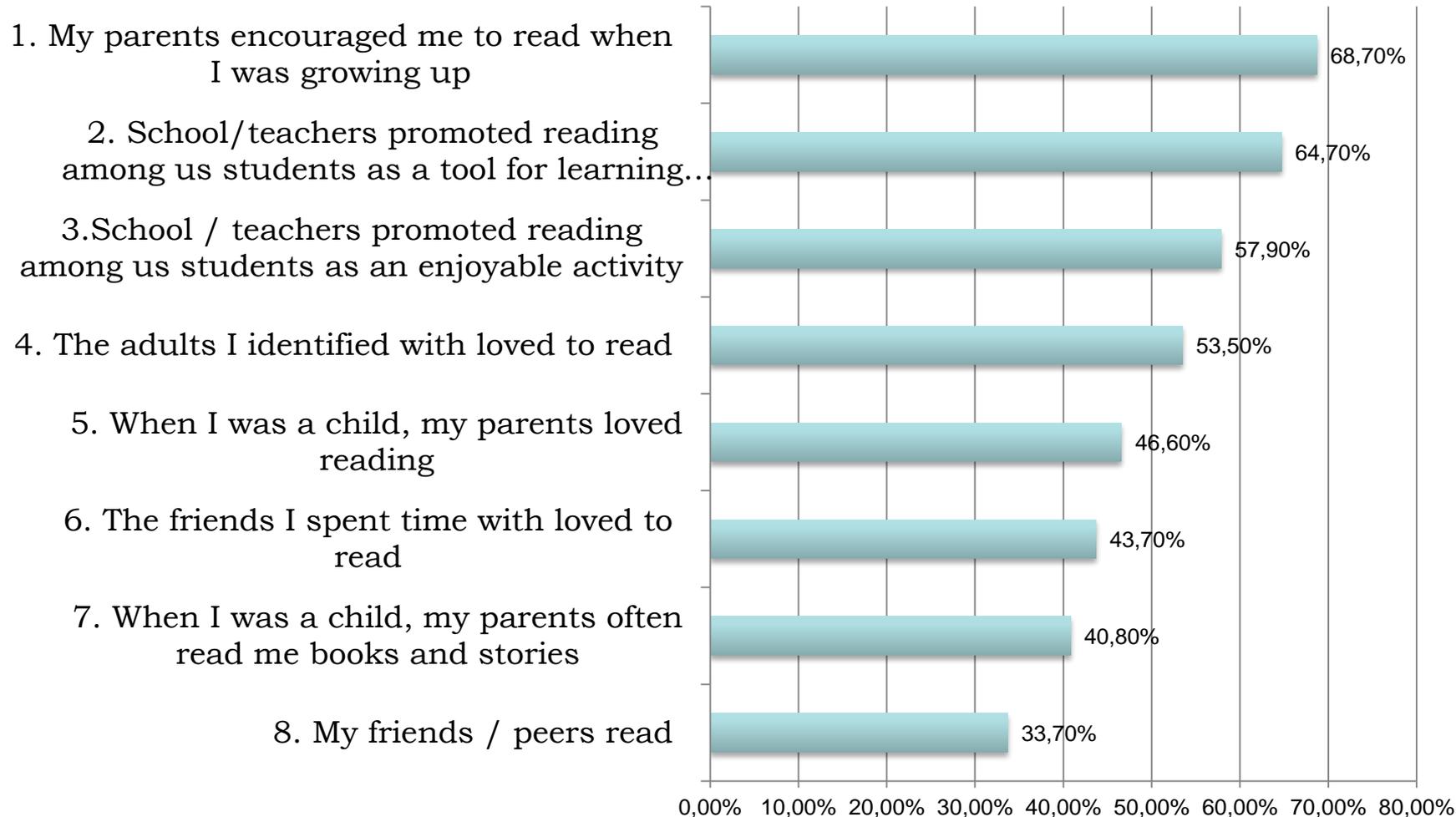
How readers and non-readers spend their free time?



Note: Others activities complete data till 100% both for readers and non readers.

Reading history: were people who read “taught” to become readers?

Readers (%) who strongly and somewhat agree with the following statements



The Happiness of Reading

Methodology Appendix

The study took place in 2 phases:

- 1) Analysis of reading to define the nomological network of happiness and well-being and the framework of the study. The suitable scales for the measurement of the relevant concepts were chosen through an analysis of studies in psychology, sociology, and the extensive research conducted by the major national and international research institutes that deal with happiness.
- 2) Survey of a representative group of the Italian population aged 14 years and older, conducted according to the CATI method (Computer Assisted Telephone Interview) from May 12 to June 14, 2015. This phase took place over 4 steps:
 - a) the selection of the sample group on which to collect the data;
 - b) the composing of the questionnaire;
 - c) the carrying out of the interviews;
 - d) the analysis of the data.

Survey approach

- The main focus of the research were the readers, but non-readers were also of interest for the goals of the study. For this reason, the population was first divided into 2 macro-groups – readers and non-readers – and then balanced between the two subpopulations:
 - The subpopulation of readers was balanced by geographical area, gender and age group;
 - The subpopulation of non-readers was balanced by geographical area, gender and age group.
- For both of the macro-groups, the individuals were selected with the same probability of inclusion in the study. This made the weighing of data in the analysis stage unnecessary.
- The size of the total sample group guarantees, with a probability of at least 95%, that the absolute margin for error is not superior to 3%.
- The total sample group was divided into the two macro-groups as follows:
 - Readers: 800 individuals (approximately 72% of the sample);
 - Non-readers: 300 individuals (approximately 28% of the sample).
- The sample group of the population was imbalanced regarding the proportion of readers to non-readers because:
 - 1) readers are more important for the analysis of the data;
 - 2) the relevant variables observed among readers are different from those observed among non-readers.
- Inside every reference subsection, the two sample groups (readers and non-readers) were balanced.
- Readers and non-readers were identified by a preliminary question:
 - readers: those that claim to have read at least one book – not in connection to work or study – in the period of 1/4/2014-31/3/2015;
 - non-readers: those that claim not to have read a book – not in connection to work or study – in the period of 1/4/2014-31/3/2015.

Thanks for your attention

