



The Happiness of Reading

In celebration of its ten-year anniversary, GeMS will be presenting at Bookcity a significant new research study conducted by Cesmer/Roma3 University on a sample of the Italian population. The study shows that readers are on average happier than non-readers, in addition to being better at making the most of their free time, and more psychologically prepared for confronting negative emotions

Milan, October 22, 2015 – For the occasion of its tenth year, the editorial group Mauri Spagnol (GeMS, one of the major book publishing groups in Italy) commissioned to Cesmer, Center of Studies of Roma Tre University a research study centered on the relationship between reading books and individual happiness. Through scientific research, the study adds a concrete dimension to this cultural discussion.

The study will be presented to the public during Bookcity Milan on October 24.

BACKGROUND

Are people who read books (either on paper or digitally) happier than those who don't read? Does reading increase one's well-being? These are not easy questions, so much so that no study in Italy until now has tried to answer them. In fact, the periodic surveys on reading tend to leave out these aspects, focusing above all on the number of readers in Italy – which is historically lower than in most western countries – and on its different variations. Meanwhile, **the value of reading on a cognitive and emotional level has gone unknown, until today.** This study wants to fill the gap, following the belief that reading could be better promoted among non-readers if its benefits were quantified.

PRINCIPAL RESULTS OF THE STUDY

1. Readers in Italy are overall happier than non-readers

- The happiness of readers rates higher than that of non-readers (measured using the 1 to 10 scale suggested by Veenhoven). In fact, Italian readers of printed or digital books register a happiness index of 7.44, while non-readers had an index of 7.21, a statistically significant difference.
- Using a different measurement, known as Subjective Well-being – cognitive dimension, (the Cantril scale, from 0 to 10), Italian readers once again averaged a higher level of well-being than non-readers (7.12 vs. 6.29 respectively, still statistically significant).

2. Readers in Italy feel positive emotions more often than non-readers

According to the scale of Diener and Biswas-Diener, which measures how frequently (from 6 to 30) people experience six positive emotions (positive, good, pleasant, happy, joyful, contented) readers have a higher index than non-readers: 21.69 vs. 20.93 respectively (a statistically significant difference). In particular, **readers feel "positive" more frequently than non-readers.**

3. Readers in Italy feel negative emotions less often than non-readers

Readers also fared better on another dimension of the same scale by Diener and Biswas-Diener. This part measures how frequently (from 6 to 30) people recently experienced six negative emotions (negative, bad, unpleasant, sad, afraid, angry). Readers feel negative emotions less frequently than non-readers, with an average score of 16.48, while non-readers have an average of 17.47 (a statistically significant difference). In particular, **readers experience anger less often than non-readers, confirming that reading offers valuable cognitive tools for facing difficult situations.**

4. Readers are more satisfied with how they use their free time compared to non-readers

Following the scale of Van Boven and Gilovich (2003), which measures the happiness generated from people's employment of their free time (from 1 to 9), readers score higher than non-readers (7.59 vs. 7.35 respectively, a statistically significant difference).

5. For readers in Italy, reading is the most important use of their free time

- The survey studied reading's importance in relation to the other cultural activities that people perform in their free time.
- Reading is the most important free time activity for Italian readers (on a scale from 1 to 9, it rates at 7.88); in second place ranks listening to music (7.31); in third, staying informed and keeping up with current events through newspapers and news sites (7.23); and in fourth, physical exercise and sports (7.02). At the bottom of the list ranks playing videogames (3.23).

6. For readers in Italy, reading comes fourth among free time activities for the amount of happiness gained

While reading, as was just noted, is considered the most important free time activity for readers, it is not first in terms of the notion of **generated happiness**. On the 1 to 9 scale developed by Van Boven and Gilovich, readers ranked physical exercise and sports first (7.80), followed by listening to music (7.74) and cultural activities and outings (exhibitions, theater, concerts...), which had a score of 7.52. In fourth place, and still with a high score, comes reading (7.24), followed by informing oneself through newspapers and news sites, playing videogames, going to the movies, and surfing the internet or using social media. At the bottom of the list ranks watching TV.

These are not surprising results: the survey confirms the ability of readers to appreciate their free time, taking advantage of it in manifold ways.

CONCLUSION

On average, readers in Italy face life with a more positive outlook in comparison to non-readers, and they know how to enjoy their free time in a richer and more purposeful manner.

NOTES ON THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

There are many definitions of happiness and subjective well-being in scientific literature, as well as various ways of measuring these concepts. For this reason the study did not limit itself to using just one metric for measuring the differences between readers and non-readers. The fact that the results match for all of the analyzed parameters only makes them more significant. The following methods were used in particular:

1. *The Index of Overall Happiness*, which measures "the subjective enjoyment of one's life as-a-whole" (scale suggested by Veenhoven (2015) and part of the "World Database of Happiness),
2. *Subjective Well-Being – cognitive dimension* ("Cantril's Ladder of Life Scale" developed in 1965 and used in the World Values Survey and in the Gallup-Healthways Life Evaluation),
3. *Subjective Well-Being – affective dimension* (scale of Diener and Biswas-Diener from 2009, which is also widely used).

The research was conducted according to the CATI method (Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing) from May 12, 2015 to June 14, 2015 on a sample group of 1,100 people, which **represented the Italian population** aged 14 years and older, and which was **subdivided into readers and non-readers**.