

No evidence for decline in reading

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A three-year investigation by a team at The University of Manchester (UK) has shown that contrary to popular expectation, Brits spent more time reading in recent times than they did in the 1970s.

The findings contrast with the United States where book reading declined markedly during a similar period.

However, the number of Brits reading newspapers and magazines declined - though those people who read newspapers and magazines devoted more time to it.

The unexpected findings were uncovered by a team of sociologists at the School of Social Sciences who compared the records of thousands of people between 1975 and 2000 - the latest figures available.

They looked at data from France, Holland, Norway, the UK and the USA amid rising concerns about the state of British literacy.

Among the results are:

- In 2000, Brits read on average for five more minutes each day than they did in 1975.
- In 1998 Americans read on average for nine minutes less each day than they did in 1975.
- The increase in the UK was greater for women than it was for men.
- Of those Brits that read, a greater number read for one hour or more than did in 1975.

The findings contrast strongly with fears about the nation's declining love of books marked by Victoria Beckham's 2005 admission that she has 'never read a book in her life'.

Research commissioned by the National Reading Campaign in 2001, found a quarter of adults had not read a book in the previous 12 months also fuelling worries.

Dr Dale Southerton, from the School of Social Sciences was on the research team.

He said: "People commonly perceive that we read less in the UK than we did in the past.

"But in fact, according to the figures - which are the latest ones available - the opposite is true and that is rather surprising, especially given that it is book, rather than newspaper and magazine, reading that has increased.

"But one common assumption which does hold is that we like books more than our counterparts in USA where there has been a massive decline.

"We examined 10-15,000 people in each country and research on this scale has not been done before so it's pretty significant."

He added: "I think the misconceptions can be explained by the changes in how we as a society organise time.

"One of the key challenges in our daily lives is coordinating our schedules with other people - and the difficulty of being in the right place at the right time leads to a feeling of being harried.

"However, in trying to meet this challenge we find plenty of 'gaps'

during the day - such as waiting for a train, a partner, or one's children - and reading is an activity entirely suited to filling those gaps.

"We're more tied to our diaries and that can lead to the perception that we have less time to do things we enjoy like reading.

"But our study shows that in reality, the opposite is in fact true."

Source: University of Manchester

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