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## Exploring Greek and Dutch Reading Cultures: A Comparative Study Based on Goodreads Reviews

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### Citation

Menexi, T. (2024). *Exploring Greek and Dutch Reading Cultures: A Comparative Study Based on Goodreads Reviews*.

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

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**Note:** To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Exploring Greek and Dutch Reading Cultures: A Comparative Study Based on  
Goodreads Reviews

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Master Thesis

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12/8/2024

17.197 words

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## **Abstract**

This thesis explores the differences in the reading cultures of Greece and the Netherlands, as they can be observed through user-generated reviews on Goodreads. The study integrates both qualitative and quantitative analyses to reveal key differences and similarities in how Greek and Dutch users of Goodreads engage with reading, and which factors influence their reading behaviors. Cross-cultural implications of reading, as well as the impact of digital media on reading habits are analyzed. Greek and Dutch reading cultures are compared, revealing distinct preferences influenced by historical and socio-economic, educational factors.

# Exploring Greek and Dutch Reading Culture: A Comparative Study Based on Goodreads Reviews

## 1. Introduction and Research Question

Reading has perpetually encompassed various forms of close engagements with texts, ranging from the individual act of selecting a book to the more communal structures of participating in book clubs.<sup>1</sup> The advent of new media has notably influenced the levels of privacy and sociality within these engagements.<sup>2</sup> Online platforms, such as Goodreads, that give readers the ability to rate books, write reviews and engage in online discussions, have emerged and gained popularity in recent decades.<sup>3</sup> Readers who write online reviews contribute to constitution of a specific literary culture and offer others insights into their reading habits, which were previously inaccessible to researchers.<sup>4</sup> Investigating these online reviews can shed light on the overall reading culture, which serves as a reflection of societal changes, interests and trends, as well as social participation.<sup>5</sup> The study of reading habits, as well as cultural differences that have an impact on these habits has long been a subject of academic interest and prompted interest for this research project.

The objective of this thesis is to explore the differences –or potential similarities– between the reading cultures in Greece and the Netherlands. The source of motivation behind choosing these two specific nationalities lies with both personal and academic interests. Being a Greek student living in the Netherlands, I have encountered the cultural distinctions and resemblances between these two countries. Hence, this personal connection coupled with academic interest serve as the foundation for this study, which seeks to fill the gap in knowledge concerning how cultural, historical, and societal factors impact reading habits and preferences. The aim is to contribute to a more profound comprehension of cross-cultural literary consumption. This will be accomplished by examining users' reviews drawn from Goodreads. The latter serves

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<sup>1</sup> Beth Driscoll and DeNel Rehberg Sedo, 'Faraway, So Close: Seeing the Intimacy in Goodreads Reviews', *Qualitative Inquiry*, 25.3 (2019), p. 248 <<https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800418801375>>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 248.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 250.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 250.

<sup>5</sup> Wendy Griswold, 'The Ideas of the Reading Class', *Contemporary Sociology*, 30.1 (2001), 4–6, p. 4 <<https://doi.org/10.2307/2654314>>.

as a window onto literary consumption patterns by offering specialized web services centered around books, including membership options and the ability to review and star rate books.<sup>6</sup>

This study is designed to explore the following research question: How do the reading cultures of Greece and the Netherlands differ, as reflected in Goodreads reviews, and what factors contribute to these differences? Sub-questions that will be addressed and will complement the main research question include cultural and educational backgrounds that influence the reading behaviors in the two countries, as well as the ways in which digital technology has impacted these reading habits. Additionally, the comparison of the two respective countries will offer useful insights into initiatives that can be taken to promote reading. For this to happen, notable trends in sentiment, along with the cultural, societal, and historical influences that might explain the variations between the two reading cultures will be discussed upon. User activity and average ratings, as well as distinctive language nuances and word frequency found in Goodreads reviews will also be examined.

Although this study will focus on Goodreads reviews, book blogs and other book-centric platforms will offer discussions of literature. The existing literature will help us explore three principal themes, namely reading habits, cultural studies, and digital humanities. Cultural influences will be thoroughly investigated through the lens of cultural identity, representation, and heritage, drawing from relevant theoretical frameworks. Furthermore, within the domain of digital humanities, the role of digital platforms in shaping literary consumption patterns, as well as the evolution of literary criticism in the digital age will be comprehensively discussed. The gap in our understanding of cross-cultural reading cultures, along with the transformative impact exerted by digital platforms on the consumption of literature, will be addressed. Consequently, by building across existing literature, the primary aim of this research is to make a valuable contribution towards attaining a more profound comprehension of the complex interplay that exists between cultural, societal, and digital factors in shaping reading cultures.

In chapter two, the reading cultures will be analyzed. For this to happen, two main terms, naming reading culture and literacy, will be explored. Reading cultures

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<sup>6</sup> Mike Thelwall and Kayvan Kousha, 'Goodreads: A Social Network Site for Book Readers', *Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology*, 68.4 (2017), pp. 972-73 <<https://doi.org/10.1002/asi.23733>>.

from Greece and the Netherlands will be compared on many levels, such as reading habits, preferences and practices. Additionally, the social and cultural implications of reading along with factors affecting literacy rates will be discussed upon. Digital media and their impact on reading habits and preferences will also be analyzed. Finally, this chapter will focus on Goodreads and its implications for reading cultures.

Chapter three will thoroughly investigate the reading cultures of Greece and the Netherlands, focusing on literacy rates, programs set up to promote reading, and core themes in Greek and Dutch literature. The ways in which the reading cultures of the two countries differ will be hypothesized in this chapter.

In chapter four, the methodology of the research will be discussed. The data collection process and the techniques' analysis will be examined. The findings will be discussed upon, along with a comparative analysis based on readers' demographics. In addition, the results will be visualized in charts, aiming at a better comprehension of the findings. The interpretation of the findings will also be explored in this chapter. For this reason, theoretical frameworks from cultural studies and literary sociology will be investigated. Historical, societal, and cultural factors that shape the reading cultures of each country, as well as the educational systems, publishing industries, and government policies related to literature and reading promotion in the two countries will be discussed. Finally, a sentiment analysis will be applied aiming at exploring the cultural influences on reader perception. Challenges concerning the data collection process and the effectiveness of the techniques used will be discussed. Additionally, limitations regarding language and cultural nuances, as well as generalizability will be addressed. In the discussion chapter, the interpretation of the findings will be explored, along with implications for cross-cultural understanding.

In the final chapter, the study will conclude with reflections and suggestions for future research. The hypothesis will be evaluated, and the results of the case study will be discussed, focusing on whether they were formed as expected. New information and insights concerning the reading cultures of Greece and the Netherlands will be explored in this chapter.



### *1.1 Gaps and Contributions*

Despite the commonly held view of reading as an individual pursuit, the prevalence of reading communities indicates that reading is fundamentally a communal activity.<sup>7</sup>

Engaging in dynamic online conversation among dedicated readers can unveil valuable insights into how individuals select and react to books, and how they determine the significance of reading for pleasure in their lives. Additionally, they can help us to understand how readers exchange opinions on literary works and how such interactions can enhance the reading experience, thus influencing our lives.<sup>8</sup>

Exploring the differences and potential similarities between diverse reading cultures is an important point for cross-cultural research. This research contributes to our understanding of cross-cultural studies, as well as the ways in which online platforms, like Goodreads, can shape or influence reading trends and preferences. Additionally, digital humanities can serve as a discipline which can provide both a theoretical framework and a practical methodology for our research. To my knowledge, there is limited research which directly compares the reading cultures of Greece and the Netherlands, as well as research using sentiment analysis and data-driven methodologies to compare the reading cultures. This study may fill these gaps by providing a comparative analysis of the reading cultures in Greece and the Netherlands, focusing on the factors that contribute to their differences and addressing a gap that exists in cross-cultural literary research. By employing a mixed method approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative analyses, the study aims to offer a comprehensive examination of reading preferences and habits among the two countries.

The findings of this study can be useful to publishers and policymakers of the two countries, who can utilize them in order to apply strategies for promoting high-quality reading habits. Additionally, literary trends and the ways in which online platforms, like Goodreads, may be influencing them, can be studied, offering valuable contributions to the fields of literary and cultural studies, along with digital humanities.

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<sup>7</sup> Barbara Fister, “‘Reading as a Contact Sport’: Online Book Groups and the Social Dimensions of Reading”, *Reference & User Services Quarterly*, 44.4 (2005), pp. 303–9, p. 303.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 304.

## 2. Reading Cultures

### 2.1 Terminology: Reading Culture and Literacy

Reading is regarded as a cultural and intellectual practice primarily established as a routine from early childhood, needed to extract knowledge and information from texts. It holds significant importance as it embodies a fundamental aspect of human existence.<sup>9</sup> Access to knowledge is crucial for both human and educational advancement, and reading has the ability to stand out as a primary means of acquiring knowledge.<sup>10</sup> It can be described as the cornerstone upon which educational and intellectual competencies are constructed, and plays an important role in enhancing human productivity, enriching vocabulary, and improving language skills.<sup>11</sup> Reading provides individuals with the ability to self-educate, learn, comprehend their experiences, and make new discoveries.<sup>12</sup> Textuality, referring to the inherent qualities, structure, and attributes of texts, is equally important, since it holds a considerable influence over readers, shaping their reading habits despite their level of engagement.<sup>13</sup> Textuality is the essence that defines a text in a specific manner, renouncing its identity by encompassing the construction of texts and their linguistic aspects.<sup>14</sup> With that being said, it becomes apparent that the individual act of reading plays a vital role in shaping the overall reading culture, which goes hand in hand with the very culture of a society.

The acts of reading and writing are essential for citizens to partake in society and to gain intellectual access to a region's textual heritage. These skills are also crucial for a well-functioning democracy.<sup>15</sup> The origins of reading can be traced back to the invention of writing itself in ancient Mesopotamia around 3500 BCE. This marked the beginning of the oral period, with oral texts coexisting with oral traditions. Then, the manuscript period followed, and hand-copied texts were the primary means for

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<sup>9</sup> Adeyemi Adewale Akinola, 'Promoting Reading Culture, the Role of Stakeholders and ICT for Societal Development', *IP Indian Journal of Library Science and Information Technology*, 6.1, 4–8, p. 4 <<https://doi.org/10.18231/j.ijlsit.2021.002>>.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>13</sup> Robert Darnton, 'What Is the History of Books?', *Daedalus*, 111.3 (1982), pp. 65–83, p. 79.

<sup>14</sup> Hugh J. Silverman, 'What Is Textuality? Part II', *Phenomenology + Pedagogy*, 1986, pp. 54–61, pp. 54–55, doi:[10.29173/pandp15010](https://doi.org/10.29173/pandp15010).

<sup>15</sup> David R. Olson, *The World on Paper: The Conceptual and Cognitive Implications of Writing and Reading*, pp. 2–5, (Cambridge University Press, 1996).

preserving information and knowledge. The invention of the printing press by Johannes Gutenberg, the German printer who revolutionized the dissemination of printed words, transitioned society from an oral and hand-written tradition to a dynamic world of printed materials.<sup>16</sup> Since 1972, UNESCO, an international organization dedicated to children's educational development, has been at the forefront of promoting reading culture, and has designated April 23 as World Book Day to raise awareness and emphasize the significance of books, particularly encouraging young individuals to discover the joy of reading.<sup>17</sup> Additionally, the disparity between developed and developing countries is often attributed to the cultivation of reading habits among their citizens.<sup>18</sup> This information suggests that reading plays a crucial role in shaping both individual lives and society as a whole.

The process of how readers derive meaning from the symbols presented on the printed page and the societal implications of such an experience may pose intriguing questions.<sup>19</sup> Reading in general involves decoding symbols in order to construct meaning. When it comes to literary reading –as a specific form of reading– literature can be seen as an interactive endeavor involving the interpretation of meaning within a framework of communication, rather than a fixed collection of texts.<sup>20</sup> The nature of reading itself has become different over time, with past practices including communal or solitary readings, as well as secretive engagements characterized by an intensity that may be challenging for contemporary readers to envision.<sup>21</sup> Across early modern Europe, readers from diverse backgrounds actively extracted significance from texts rather than merely deciphering them underscoring the passionate relationship between readers and written material long before the romantic era.<sup>22</sup>

As society has progressed towards modernity, entertainment has become a universal aspect of life, thus influencing nearly every aspect of existence.<sup>23</sup> In this context, culture has evolved from merely reflecting social life to actively shaping it.<sup>24</sup> This evolution of culture, affected by modernity, has an impact on literacy and reading habits. Modernity, a process marked by technological, social, and cultural changes,

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<sup>16</sup> Akinola, p. 4.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>19</sup> Darnton, p. 78.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 78.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 78.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 79.

<sup>23</sup> Les Back and others, *Cultural Sociology: An Introduction* (John Wiley & Sons, 2012), p. 11.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

continuously reshapes the ways in which people engage with text and information.<sup>25</sup> Along with culture and society, reading culture also changes, in an effort to keep up with the newer trends and social norms. Consequently, literacy in the modern era encompasses a broader range of skills needed by individuals when engaging with the act of reading. In the digital age, reading culture is increasingly dependent on modern technologies, such as scanning, online storage and the ability to download texts, which have transformed the way we access and engage with literary texts.<sup>26</sup> Despite these advancements, it is also important to recognize that the foundation of this reading culture stems from the early nineteenth century. During this period, reading was viewed as a means of self-improvement and personal transformation.<sup>27</sup> These ideas were later influenced by late twentieth century concept of self-actualization, which involves the pursuit of personal growth through the act of reading.<sup>28</sup> In essence, the art of literary reading is shaped not only by contemporary information technologies but also by evolving perception of identity and shifting notions of what is considered aesthetically valuable in literature.<sup>29</sup> For instance, digital access has democratized the availability of texts. However, the ways in which these texts are perceived and engaged, remain shaped by historical and cultural factors, leading to a complex yet dynamic landscape of literary reading. Nowadays, books are delivered to us through a thriving popular literary culture, which assigns a diverse range of values to the literary text, regardless of whether it is experienced in its traditional printed form, or on a screen.<sup>30</sup>

Reading culture can only be fully understood if we closely examine the delivery systems and platforms that facilitate access to literature it in the first place.<sup>31</sup> It is important to note that these delivery systems –including traditional print media, digital formats, and online platforms– not only provide access to books, but also serve as platforms for discourse, fostering a sense of belonging within a community of readers.<sup>32</sup> This highlights the social function of reading, which explains how it is used

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<sup>25</sup> Back, p. 12.

<sup>26</sup> Jim Collins, *Bring on the Books for Everybody : How Literary Culture Became Popular Culture* (Duke University Press, 2010), p. 10  
 <<https://directory.doabooks.org/handle/20.500.12854/78217>> [accessed 12 March 2024].

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

in society, showcasing that individuals who join book communities have the ability to foster a safe and sharing environment for themselves and others with the same interest, that of reading.

According to Farr, literacy refers to the ways in which ‘people from different cultures and societies use written language for their own purposes’.<sup>33</sup> In order for individuals to be considered literate, they must acquire the basic abilities of decoding meaning from a text and being able to write.<sup>34</sup> To further this definition of the term, critical thinking is added as a fundamental aspect of being literate.<sup>35</sup> Thus, drawing from these two aspects of literacy, we can discuss about functional literacy and cultural literacy respectively. According to Kirsch and Guthrie, functional literacy emphasizes ‘adequate performance on reading tasks directly related to real world experiences.’<sup>36</sup> This means that a literate individual possesses the capability to comprehend and interpret the entire range of written materials that are commonly encountered in everyday activities.<sup>37</sup> Cultural literacy is a way of interacting with social issues through using literary thinking.<sup>38</sup> In other words, a culturally literate individual is someone who is able to make sense of a text by combining previous knowledge while using their ability to critically think.

A third type of literacy, emerging as an outcome of the modern online world, is the digital literacy. This includes the individuals’ capacity to navigate content in digital formats, while critically evaluating online information. Additionally, the shift towards digital literacy goes hand in hand with the emergence of online platforms, such as Goodreads, which offer easy access to a wide range of book collections, as well as the option of creating digital book clubs with the aim of discussing and sharing recommendations of textual content.

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<sup>33</sup> Marcia Farr, ‘Literacy Ideologies: Local Practices and Cultural Definitions’, in *Latin American Literacy Studies Seminar, CREFAL, Pátzcuaro, Mexico*, 2008, p. 1, <[https://www.academia.edu/download/5244079/Literacy\\_Ideologies2010.pdf](https://www.academia.edu/download/5244079/Literacy_Ideologies2010.pdf)> [accessed 11 August 2024].

<sup>34</sup> Farr, p. 2.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>36</sup> Irwin Kirsch and John T. Guthrie, ‘The Concept and Measurement of Functional Literacy’, *Reading Research Quarterly*, 13.4 (1977), pp. 485–507, p. 488, doi:[10.2307/747509](https://doi.org/10.2307/747509).

<sup>37</sup> Kirsch, Guthrie, p. 488.

<sup>38</sup> Naomi Segal, ‘From Literature to Cultural Literacy’, *Humanities*, 4.1 (2015), pp. 68–79, p. 71, doi:[10.3390/h4010068](https://doi.org/10.3390/h4010068).

These three types of literacy are essential to individuals not only for being able to fully participate in society but also for achieving social development while having the capacity to successfully comprehend and navigate the digital era.

## 2.2 Cross-cultural Research on Reading Cultures

The consideration of various cross-cultural interpretations in literary studies has often been overshadowed by other areas of inquiry.<sup>39</sup> However, it is important to note that understanding how different cultures approach and engage with reading is crucial for a comprehensive analysis of global reading cultures. Despite the abundance of literary works and data about readers' habits, in-depth cross-cultural analyses of reading practices remain relatively scarce.<sup>40</sup> A common endeavor in literary scholarship is to investigate how literature engages with other literary works and cultural practices, when, for instance, authors are influenced by other literatures and cultures while writing a text.<sup>41</sup> Hence, it is important to investigate how these influences shape the way readers from different cultures perceive literature. This approach helps in comprehending the global reading practices and how they contribute to the broader concept of world literature.<sup>42</sup>

The field of digital humanities is endeavoring to introduce innovative methods such as distant reading to manage the vast corpus of literary texts.<sup>43</sup> The adoption of computer-based techniques and an increased emphasis on modeling and systematization have spurred a methodological transformation within academia.<sup>44</sup> The internet offers access to unprecedented numbers of resources for expansive cross-cultural investigations, since readers extensively document their reading experiences, with many evolving into fanfiction authors themselves.<sup>45</sup> In the digital era, reading practices are not confined by national or linguistic boundaries, enabling scholars to gain deeper insights into evolving literary concepts and the adaptation of narratives

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<sup>39</sup> Yehong Zhang and Gerhard Lauer, 'Introduction: Cross-Cultural Reading', *Comparative Literature Studies (Urbana)*, 54.4 (2017), pp. 693–701, p. 693, doi:[10.5325/complitstudies.54.4.0693](https://doi.org/10.5325/complitstudies.54.4.0693).

<sup>40</sup> Zhang, Lauer, p. 693.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 694.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 695.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 695.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 695.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 695.

across diverse cultural contexts.<sup>46</sup> By utilizing new computer-based research tools, scholars can enhance their comprehension of the ways text is transposed into different cultural milieus.<sup>47</sup>

Various studies on distinctions in reading behaviors are predominantly conducted between individuals from Eastern and Western regions.<sup>48</sup> The outcomes indicate the varying interpretations of narrative space among readers of diverse cultural backgrounds, and the aesthetic preferences that diverge based on cultural heritages.<sup>49</sup>

Except disparities, literature from various cultural spheres exhibits a fundamental likeness, evolving universally through narratives.<sup>50</sup> Henry Jenkins highlights the coexistence of old and new media in a synergistic manner. Instead of being displaced, old media undergo a shift in their functions and status upon the development of new technologies.<sup>51</sup> This phenomenon is particularly relevant to the popularization of literary reading.<sup>52</sup> The convergence of antique and emerging notions of access, artistic genius, reading pleasure, and personal taste plays a fundamental role in shaping the reading culture of today.<sup>53</sup>

### *2.3 Social and Cultural Implications on Reading Cultures*

Reading plays a fundamental role in the process of acquiring knowledge and information that guides individuals in decision-making.<sup>54</sup> Throughout history, the ability to read has served as a crucial indicator of functional literacy and community engagement.<sup>55</sup> The advancement of technology and the digital realm has broadened the scope of reading opportunities, leading to different experiences which are primarily linked to the demographic characteristics of communities, such as the age, distribution, educational levels, and household incomes.<sup>56</sup> Additionally, language and

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<sup>46</sup> Zhang, Lauer, p. 695.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 695.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 696.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 696.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 697.

<sup>51</sup> Collins, p. 13.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>54</sup> Carolyn Miller, Kristen Purcell, and Lee Rainie, *Reading Habits in Different Communities*, (Pew Internet & American Life Project, 2012), p. 2.

<sup>55</sup> Miller, et al., p. 2.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

socio-economic status should not be overlooked as factors that affect reading habits and preferences of individuals.

The division of cultural preferences based on social class was apparent in earlier periods of modern history.<sup>57</sup> Despite a substantial transformation in the nature of popular culture in the initial half of the twentieth century in Western Europe, distinction between class-based cultures persisted, with the middle and upper classes largely monopolizing high culture and the discernment of refined taste.<sup>58</sup> This could be the case in the twenty-first century, as well, since the ‘elites’ are the ones who can always afford refining culture. They are usually the ones who set and safeguard cultural norms and, when feasible, they make them accessible to those less privileged.<sup>59</sup> Hence, one could argue that reading culture is the outcome of the elites’ reading preferences, which then become the norm, or the standard, for the less advantaged audience. In addition, as language may also affect reading habits, Greek readers might tend to prefer Greek authors or literature about their very history and society, or mythology. On the other hand, Dutch readers, mostly being fully proficient in English might be selecting books from a diverse range of genres and not focus their interest only on books authored by Dutch writers, but international as well.

Regarding the socio-economic status of readers, surveys conducted by the Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Project have unveiled intriguing disparities among communities in their reading habits and utilization of reading-related technologies and establishments.<sup>60</sup> For instance, urban and suburban populations exhibit higher rates of book reading, with a similar frequency of books being read across rural regions.<sup>61</sup> The motivations behind reading may also vary, with pleasure being the predominant reason across all community types, particularly among suburban readers.<sup>62</sup> Moreover, as individuals with higher levels of education tend to engage more in cultural pursuits compared to those with lower levels of education,<sup>63</sup> it becomes apparent that education plays a profound role in shaping reading habits and preferences of individuals. Hence, educational systems and the

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<sup>57</sup> Back, p. 12.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>60</sup> Miller, et al., p. 2.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>63</sup> Gerbert Kraaykamp and Katinka Dijkstra, ‘Preferences in Leisure Time Book Reading: A Study on the Social Differentiation in Book Reading for the Netherlands’, *Poetics*, 26.4 (1999), pp. 203–34, p. 239, doi:[10.1016/S0304-422X\(99\)00002-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0304-422X(99)00002-9).



promotion of reading culture at schools and public libraries serve as the agents that can expose individuals to reading as a leisure time activity. Attention towards promoting reading has marginally risen in the Netherlands in the last decades, with an increased effort by parents and government-led programs to promote reading.<sup>64</sup> Subjects such as modern languages, social studies, and history now focus on enhancing students' cultural competencies and nurturing their interest in culture.<sup>65</sup>

A significant relationship between socio-economic status and reading habits is apparent. Hemmerechts<sup>66</sup> and Chen<sup>67</sup> demonstrated that lower socio-economic status is linked with lower reading literacy, along with lower children's academic achievement. From this we might assume that, since in Greece economic challenges have impacted the publishing industry, Greek people may read less than the Dutch. In the Netherlands, a higher standard of living does exist, making reading for pleasure a leisure time activity for more individuals.

The intersection of book publishing and consumption and digital media technologies and frameworks mirrors the broader trends referred to by Henry Jenkins as 'convergence culture'.<sup>68</sup> Although Jenkins primarily focuses on popular culture and larger media franchises, many of the developments he describes can be observed in a somewhat similar fashion within the realm of books. The internet plays a transformative role in shaping interactions between consumers and between consumers and producers. According to Collins, literary reading and its popularization rely heavily on shifts in cultural authority, as well as changes within culture industries.<sup>69</sup> Additionally, according to research conducted in 1995, educational background plays a pivotal role in shaping reading preferences, with highly educated individuals displaying a preference for sophisticated literary works.<sup>70</sup> Studies have shown that both education and race can serve as predictors for reading patterns, hence

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<sup>64</sup> Kraaykamp, p. 256.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 256.

<sup>66</sup> Kenneth Hemmerechts, Orhan Agirdag, and Dimokritos Kavadias, 'The Relationship between Parental Literacy Involvement, Socio-Economic Status and Reading Literacy', *Educational Review*, 69 (2016), doi:[10.1080/00131911.2016.1164667](https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2016.1164667).

<sup>67</sup> Qishan Chen and others, 'Effects of Socioeconomic Status, Parent-Child Relationship, and Learning Motivation on Reading Ability', *Frontiers in Psychology*, 9 (2018), doi:[10.3389/fpsyg.2018.01297](https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.01297).

<sup>68</sup> Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York University Press, c2006) <<https://hdl.handle.net/2027/heb05936.0001.001>> [accessed 12 August 2024].

<sup>69</sup> Collins, p. 19.

<sup>70</sup> Kraaykamp, Dijkstra, p. 228.

leading us to question whether there is something about the lifestyles or cultures of individuals that encourages them to use the reading process in a certain way.<sup>71</sup>

#### *2.4 Impact of Digital Media on Reading Cultures*

Technology changes reading and the way it occurs over time. Nowadays, in the digital realm, texts are available to be read online and they might include audiovisual media, resulting in a rather different experience than the traditional one of reading a physical book. This transformation to digital and the use of digital media in reading habits may potentially enrich or diminish the reading experience, depending on how well the reader adapts to the changing environment.

New technologies are altering the processes of reading culture by influencing how writing, reading, publishing, and handling books are carried out.<sup>72</sup> Many refer to the current generation as the ‘digital natives’ due to their adeptness in utilizing ICT (Information and Communication Technology) tools.<sup>73</sup> Specifically, ICT has played a crucial role in revitalizing education in contemporary times, serving as a medium for teaching aids, instructional resources, and electronic libraries to enhance the reading culture among students.<sup>74</sup> The significance of ICT in fostering a reading culture among young individuals cannot be overstated, as it acts as a catalyst for educational progress.<sup>75</sup> Equipping schools and households with ICT tools is of high importance since they serve as a medium for teaching aids, instructional resources, and electronic libraries;<sup>76</sup> thus, contributing to the development of a reading culture.

Traditional book culture has undergone fundamental adaptations to thrive in digital environments. This term ‘not only means the use and dissemination of printed books but also the transmission and circulation of written texts [...] through the archive into public collection in book format.’<sup>77</sup> The internet has emerged as an extensive archive, providing storage and access to countless books through platforms such as Project

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<sup>71</sup> Alice M. Scales and Ock Rhee, ‘Adult Reading Habits and Patterns’, *Reading Psychology*, 22.3 (2001), pp. 175–203, p. 198, doi:[10.1080/027027101753170610](https://doi.org/10.1080/027027101753170610).

<sup>72</sup> Anne-Mette Bech Albrecht, ‘Amazon, Kindle, and Goodreads: Implications for Literary Consumption in the Digital Age’, *Consumption Markets & Culture*, 23.6 (2020), 553–68, p. 553 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/10253866.2019.1640216>>.

<sup>73</sup> Akinola, p. 5.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>77</sup> *Oral Tradition and Book Culture*, ed. by Pertti Anttonen, Cecilia af Forselles, and Kirsti Salmi-Niklander (Finnish Literature Society / SKS, 2018), p. 10, doi:[10.21435/sff.24](https://doi.org/10.21435/sff.24).

Gutenberg and Google Books. This adds to the accessibility of literature, making books available in nearly every part of the world, thus, encouraging more frequent reading. Additionally, the business of bookselling has increasingly shifted to the online realm, primarily dominated by the e-commerce giant Amazon and bol.com in the Netherlands. Simultaneously, book reviewing has witnessed an unprecedented increase by readers who use Amazon or Goodreads. The internet is teeming with ‘bookish’ websites and sub-communities, which are often referred to as the ‘booknet’ by book enthusiasts and some members of the publishing industry. Book clubs continue to serve as a favored method for individuals who enjoy exchanging their thoughts and opinions.<sup>78</sup> The shift to the digital realm means that book clubs are no longer confined to in-person gatherings, allowing participants from various locations, even globally.<sup>79</sup>

Moreover, the power dynamics within the relationship among author, critic, and reader have changed in the new bookish era, becoming a more triangular one.<sup>80</sup> This shift has introduced new possibilities for readers to engage with literature and shape their own interpretations and experiences. Readers have the potential to become authors themselves and produce their own reading pleasure<sup>81</sup> when for example, they create fanfiction narratives. Consequently, the formation of reading communities does not simply occur without cause; rather they are formed when readers want to identify worthwhile literature and engage in discussions about it.<sup>82</sup> The community itself is not just an audience, but rather an intricate network of individuals who have found books that resonate with them; thus, shaping the reading culture.<sup>83</sup> Therefore, any examination of such a community, like Goodreads, can provide valuable insights not only into reading culture, but also into the role of digital platforms in shaping literary consumption patterns in the digital era.

However, certain concerns that may arise due to the impact of digital media on reading cultures should not be overlooked. An aftereffect, which seems to follow due to the plethora of online content, is readers’ shorter attention span.<sup>84</sup> Constant

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<sup>78</sup> Fister, p. 303.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p. 303.

<sup>80</sup> Collins, p. 28-29.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, pp. 44-45.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>84</sup> Kalpathy Subramanian, ‘Myth and Mystery of Shrinking Attention Span’, volume 5 (2018), 1–06, p. 2.

notifications, hyperlinked texts, and multimedia can potentially affect readers' attention and engagement in deep reading. Furthermore, individuals without access to the internet or digital devices due to, for instance, political or economic reasons, might be excluded from the benefits that digital media offer to the reading culture.

## 2.5 Goodreads and its Implications for Reading Cultures

Goodreads, recognized as the largest social book cataloging platform globally, is explicitly structured to enrich the social dimensions of reading and reviewing books.<sup>85</sup> The platform's primary feature is a live update stream where users can view updates such as books added and reviewed by other users who they follow.<sup>86</sup> Goodreads provides readers with easily accessible tools and communication channels in order for them to discuss their reading preferences while sharing their reviews and activities.<sup>87</sup> Additionally, readers have the ability to see what their friends read and recommend, a function that adds to the social aspect of the platform. By rating and reviewing books, users of Goodreads actively engage themselves in conversations and can potentially function as a deterrent for others to read a book, or the opposite. Indeed, in recent decades, the prevalence of digitization and the rapid advancement of social media platforms have transformed the act of reading into a significantly more socially engaging endeavor, particularly facilitated by the Internet.<sup>88</sup> Online platforms, such as Goodreads, serve as virtual spaces where individuals worldwide convene to express their passion for literature.<sup>89</sup> Users of such platforms engage in dialogues regarding their literary consumption, assess the quality of various works, offer recommendations, and even experiment with creative writing.<sup>90</sup> Scholars have coined various terms to describe this phenomenon within the academic community, including online book discussions, online reading and writing, and (online) social reading.<sup>91</sup> The evolution of readers into 'wreaders' and 'prosumers' on the Internet has led literary

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<sup>85</sup> Albrechtslund, p. 557.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 557.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p. 554.

<sup>88</sup> Simone Rebora and others, 'Digital Humanities and Digital Social Reading', *Digital Scholarship in the Humanities*, 36. Supplement\_2 (2021), ii230–50, p. ii231 <<https://doi.org/10.1093/llc/fqab020>>.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p. 231.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., p. 231.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p. 231.

scholars to acknowledge their pivotal role in the global literary landscape.<sup>92</sup> This means that readers become writers as well, providing their reviews and recommendations to fellow book lovers. In a way, they shape the reading culture by influencing other individuals reading –or not reading– a book, curating content and creating new trends. Hence, since anyone on the internet is able to provide a review based on their own perspective, one could talk about democratization of the process – a shift towards a user-centric approach that allows for innovation and flexibility in the digital landscape.<sup>93</sup>

This perfectly aligns with Amazon's recommendation-driven business model<sup>94</sup> and Goodreads, being a part of the huge company's ecosystem since it was purchased by it, works in the same manner. Current media usage is situated within a new 'media matrix' dominated by the digital realm, fostering novel consumption and production methods that existing media must adapt to and evolve within.<sup>95</sup> Reading culture may be influenced by the interaction between emerging reading technologies, novel business models, and evolving user-producer dynamics.<sup>96</sup> In this new digital era, readers have the ability to engage with authors and fellow readers, sharing their thoughts and reading experiences<sup>97</sup> – sometimes even considered both the producers and the consumers of the product, as mentioned before. Positive reviews can boost a book's visibility, leading to higher sales. This makes Goodreads a powerful tool for both authors and publishers who can utilize the data offered by the platform to promote their products and maximize their sales.

Goodreads also facilitates advertising and data collection efforts by publishing companies and booksellers in a manner that was previously unprecedented.<sup>98</sup> Thus, one could argue that readers who use such online platforms may be influenced by recommendations and trap themselves in 'echo chambers' in such a way that their reading preferences can be considered biased, rather than spontaneous. As data collection and algorithmic personalization come hand in hand with the increasingly digitalized and datafied reading culture, it can be used to gain insights into readers'

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<sup>92</sup> Rebora, p. 231.

<sup>93</sup> Paul Mihailidis and James N. Cohen, 'Exploring Curation as a Core Competency in Digital and Media Literacy Education', 2013.1 (2013), p. 4, <<https://doi.org/10.5334/2013-02>>.

<sup>94</sup> Albrechtslund, p. 557.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., p. 559.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., p. 559.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., p. 559.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., p. 554.

preferences and habits. Utilizing the platform's algorithmic features, members can receive book recommendations based on others' collections and connect with like-minded users, thus promoting a trend towards detailed self-identification.<sup>99</sup> In the online realm, one's literary persona can essentially be constructed through the books they engage with.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Simone Murray, 'Reading Online: Updating the State of the Discipline', *Book History*, 21.1 (2018), pp. 370–96, p. 373.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 373.

### 3. Reading Cultures of Greece and the Netherlands: A Historical Overview

The investigation of the history of the book can be labeled as the social and cultural history of communication through textuality, and its primary objective is to comprehend the transmission of ideas via print and the impact of exposure to printed material on human thought and behavior.<sup>101</sup> The field is open to various extensions and expansions, with a predominant emphasis on books since the Gutenberg era.<sup>102</sup> This realm of study has rapidly evolved in recent years, positioning itself to be recognized alongside disciplines such as the history of science and art in academia.<sup>103</sup> The evolution of book history reveals the capability of the field to establish a unique scholarly identity over time, with historians, literary experts, sociologists, and librarians interested in studying the historical influence of books.<sup>104</sup>

Robert Darnton's model of the communication offers a holistic approach that views the book as a whole and cares about its production, distribution, and reception. Hence, readers are actual agents of the book, who deserve credit since they are the ones who shape the reading culture. Economy, politics, and society influence the ways books are produced and received by the audience. Thus, books are cultural products that are to shape society and culture. Authors, publishers, booksellers, and readers form a circuit that influence the way books are consumed and perceived, and by it 'running full cycle,'<sup>105</sup> reading preferences are formed and the spread of ideas is facilitated.

The historical study of reading practices must consider both the ways in which texts restrict readers and the liberties readers take with texts.<sup>106</sup> Book historians' research tends to be highly fragmented, even within the scope of a particular country's literature, making it appear daunting to envision book history as a unified field of study that can be examined from a comparative standpoint across various historical disciplines.<sup>107</sup> Nevertheless, books do not adhere to boundaries, whether linguistic or national, as they are frequently authored by international writers, printed by individuals who do not necessarily operate in their native language, distributed by

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<sup>101</sup> Darnton, p. 65.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., p. 65.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., p. 65.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., p. 65.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., p. 67.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., p. 79.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., p. 80.

booksellers who transcend national borders, and read in language different from that spoken by the readers and the authors.<sup>108</sup> In both Greece and the Netherlands, readers' preferences have been influenced by historical events and literary traditions.

### *3.1 Greece: Literacy Rates, Core Themes in Greek Literature, Programs to Promote Reading*

According to recent statistics,<sup>109</sup> the literacy rate in Greece reached 99.3% in 2021. This is an outcome of the country's improved education over the years. However, the interest in reading books is declined despite the high literacy rate.<sup>110</sup>

Seeking a comprehensive overview of Greek literacy and literate behaviors might be alluring.<sup>111</sup> However, the nature and fascination that Greek literature has held for scholars has not remained constant throughout history.<sup>112</sup> At certain points, a newfound admiration for classical texts was noticed and later, Greek literature evolved into the discipline of philology.<sup>113</sup> Despite its extensive historical background Greek literature displays a significant level of anthropocentrism, focusing on aiding individuals in comprehending themselves and adapting to the challenges presented by the world.<sup>114</sup> From the era of Solon to the reign of Alexander the Great, any citizen who refrained from engaging in public affairs was deemed worthless, with writers viewed as fulfilling a particularly crucial societal role.<sup>115</sup> Even later, alongside the emergence of Rome and the introduction of Christianity, the development of Greek literature displays a consistent pattern; and regardless the changes, it retains elements of the old while embracing the new.<sup>116</sup> Greek reading culture is deeply influenced by

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<sup>108</sup> Darnton, pp. 80-81.

<sup>109</sup> 'Literacy Rate in Greece (2010 - 2021, %)'

<<https://www.linkedin.com/company/globaldataplc/>> [accessed 12 August 2024].

<sup>110</sup> 'Archive:Culture Statistics - Frequency and Obstacles in Participation'

<[https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Archive:Culture\\_statistics\\_-\\_frequency\\_and\\_obstacles\\_in\\_participation](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Archive:Culture_statistics_-_frequency_and_obstacles_in_participation)> [accessed 12 August 2024].

<sup>111</sup> Rosalind Thomas, 'Writing, Reading, Public and Private "Literacies": Functional Literacy and Democratic Literacy in Greece', in *Ancient Literacies: The Culture of Reading in Greece and Rome*, ed. by William A. Johnson and Holt N. Parker (Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 13-45, p. 14, doi:[10.1093/acprof:osobl/9780199793983.003.0002](https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:osobl/9780199793983.003.0002).

<sup>112</sup> Moses Hadas, 'Chapter 1. THE NATURE OF GREEK LITERATURE', in *Chapter 1. THE NATURE OF GREEK LITERATURE* (Columbia University Press, 2019), pp. 1-7, p. 3, doi:[10.7312/hada90094-002](https://doi.org/10.7312/hada90094-002).

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., p. 6.



ancient times and owns its existence to philosophy, drama, and epic poetry. The publishing industry in Greece is influenced by global trends but primarily displays characteristics shaped by the country's language and location.<sup>117</sup>

Various initiatives, including Biblionet, a comprehensive database that has been documenting Greek publishing output since 1998, support the culture of reading in Greece.<sup>118</sup> This platform not only benefits professionals in the book industry but also acts as a gateway to the realm of Greek literature, providing free access to extensive bibliographic resources. The establishment of the Thessaloniki International Book Fair serves as a key milestone that further enriches reading culture, being a point for cultural trade between Europe, the Balkans, and the Mediterranean.

### *3.2 The Netherlands: Literacy Rates, Core Themes in Dutch Literature, Programs to Promote Reading*

Regarding the Netherlands, its literacy rate is among the highest in the world, with nearly 100% of the population being literate.<sup>119</sup> This rate is an outcome of a well-organized educational system and promotion of literature and reading materials.

In the Netherlands, reading books is a widely popular recreational activity, which mirrors global trends and exhibits distinct social stratification based on genre preferences.<sup>120</sup> The Dutch reading culture has been shaped by several factors, including the development of the educational system, the high literacy rates, and the overall level of welfare in the country, combined with the devotion of leisure time to reading. Literary tradition refers to the specific body of literature produced in a region, and changes within it go hand in hand with changes in the reading culture. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Dutch literature was influenced by the French literary tradition.<sup>121</sup> Later, the Netherlands, emerging from its cultural seclusion in the fourteenth century, produced literature that reflected various aspects of the

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<sup>117</sup> Petros A. Kostagiolas, Christina Banou, and Stelios Zimeras, 'Management and Organisation of the Publishing Companies in the Knowledge Age: Statistical Analysis from the Greek Publishers', *International Journal of Knowledge and Learning*, 5.5/6 (2009), pp. 472-489, p. 474, doi: [10.1504/IJKL.2009.031510](https://doi.org/10.1504/IJKL.2009.031510).

<sup>118</sup> 'The World of Books – Hellenic Foundation for Culture' <<https://hfc-worldwide.org/the-world-of-books/>> [accessed 12 July 2024].

<sup>119</sup> 'Literacy Rate By Country 2024' <<https://www.datapandas.org/ranking/literacy-rate-by-country>> [accessed 12 August 2024].

<sup>120</sup> Kraaykamp Dijkstra, p. 227.

<sup>121</sup> Reinder Meijer, *Literature of the Low Countries: A Short History of Dutch Literature in the Netherlands and Belgium*, (Springer Science & Business Media, 2012), p. 3.

contemporary political and economic landscapes.<sup>122</sup> These reflections are predominantly evident in form of chronicles; works that embodied the didactic legacy that held considerable influence throughout the fourteenth century.<sup>123</sup> In the seventeenth century, the Netherlands entered into a Golden Age, which influenced literary themes and genres, as well as art.<sup>124</sup> Later, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, social changes impacted literature literary studies which went hand in hand with the increasing emphasis on national culture and literature.<sup>125</sup> New genres, including comics and thrillers were introduced.<sup>126</sup> In contemporary society, the public's consumptions habits are not solely shaped by established high culture, but rather by personal preferences, whether they pertain to high or popular culture.<sup>127</sup> Nowadays, public libraries in the Netherlands have increasingly shifted their focus to the user,<sup>128</sup> promoting literature and fostering a vigorous reading culture. Dutch libraries are engaging in a variety of activities aimed at inspiring children; thus, leading to a higher tendency to read later in life.<sup>129</sup>

Education plays an important role in shaping the way individuals think and behave. It is known that in the Netherlands, the educational system promoted open discussion and critical thinking – factors that undoubtedly influence the way Dutch reviewers star rate and critique books. Furthermore, the Netherlands had a well-established publishing industry, with book publishers being present in nearly every city, regardless of its size.<sup>130</sup>

Well-organized national programs in the Netherlands play a crucial role in shaping the reading culture of the country. 'The Art of Reading' is an initiative, funded by the Ministry of Education, Culture, and Science, which is designed to promote reading, as well as enhance language skills and reduce low literacy rates.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Meijer, p. 26.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>124</sup> Helmer J. Helmers and Geert H. Janssen, *The Cambridge Companion to the Dutch Golden Age* (Cambridge University Press, 2018), p. 3.

<sup>125</sup> G. J. Dorleijn, *New Trends in Modern Dutch Literature* (Peeters Publishers, 2006), p. xiii.

<sup>126</sup> Dorleijn, p. xiv.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., p. xiv.

<sup>128</sup> Paul Schneiders, 'Libraries in the Netherlands', *IFLA Journal*, 24.3 (1998), pp. 145–56, p. 156, doi:[10.1177/034003529802400302](https://doi.org/10.1177/034003529802400302).

<sup>129</sup> Kraaykamp, p. 238.

<sup>130</sup> Barbara Heebels and Ron Boschma, 'Performing in Dutch Book Publishing 1880–2008: The Importance of Entrepreneurial Experience and the Amsterdam Cluster', *Journal of Economic Geography*, 11.6 (2011), pp. 1007–29, p. 1008, doi:[10.1093/jeg/lbq048](https://doi.org/10.1093/jeg/lbq048).

<sup>131</sup> Adriaan Langendonk and Kees Broekhof, 'The Art of Reading: The National Dutch Reading Promotion Program', *Public Library Quarterly*, 36.4 (2017), pp. 293–317, doi:[10.1080/01616846.2017.1354351](https://doi.org/10.1080/01616846.2017.1354351).

Programs like this cater to foster a passion for reading to the population, from an early age; thus making it rather important for the establishment of a strong reading culture in the country.

### *3.3 Hypothesis: How do Greek and Dutch Reading Cultures Differ?*

The decision of individuals to spend their free time reading is generally influenced by educational achievements and the cultural environment, including family and peers.<sup>132</sup> In addition, beyond preferences and desires, an individual must have the means to access literature.<sup>133</sup> Hence, reading should align with the individual's financial possibilities and the access to libraries.<sup>134</sup> Thus, social as well as economic factors play a major role in shaping reading behaviors.

It is hypothesized that there will be significant differences in reading consumption and preferences between Greek and Dutch cultures mainly because of their unique characteristics regarding societal values, norms, education, as well as economy. Greek readers are expected to exhibit preference for genres such as classic literature, mythology, and historical fiction due to their interest in history and ancient Greece. Dutch users of Goodreads might be more interested in crime fiction, novels, and non-fiction books. Additionally, when it comes to book reviews, Greek readers are expected to use more enthusiastic and emotional language, whereas Dutch readers are expected to provide thorough reviews with a more eloquent writing style.

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<sup>132</sup> Victor Fernández-Blanco, Juan Prieto-Rodríguez, and Javier Suarez-Pandiello, 'A Quantitative Analysis of Reading Habits in Spain', *International Journal of Arts Management*, 19.3 (2017), 19–32, p. 19.

<sup>133</sup> Fernández-Blanco, et al., p. 19.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

## **4. Exploration of Reading Cultures on Goodreads**

### *4.1 Methodology*

This research article discusses the differences between Greece's and the Netherlands' reading cultures and the reasons why these differences exist. This is partly accomplished by examining Goodreads reviews written by Greek and Dutch users. The methodology section of this thesis outlines the steps we took to investigate and compare the differences between the reading cultures of the two countries. A combination of quantitative and qualitative analyses is utilized in order to provide us with a comprehensive understanding of the ways in which culture plays a critical role in actively shaping reading habits and preferences among diverse individuals. The research design, data collection methods, as well as the analysis techniques will be detailed in the following sections.

The methodology applied for this research, which is outlined in this section, presents a thorough approach to comparing the reading cultures of Greece and the Netherlands, based on user-generated book reviews on Goodreads. The thorough processes of collecting data, preprocessing, and analysis techniques can guarantee the validity of the results, providing us with valuable insights into the domain of cross-cultural studies.

This methodology may also serve as a basis for further research to construct upon. Studying how cultural factors influence the literary inclinations among diverse people from different countries is of high importance. By persisting in investigating the convergence of culture and literature, scholars can discover new manners in which cultural surroundings affect individuals' reading habits and preferences.

#### *4.1.1 Research Design*

The research of this thesis is designed to be part of a framework for comparative cultural analysis. This framework facilitates the exploration of differences as well as similarities between reading cultures across countries by examining user-generated content in the form of book reviews on an online platform, that of Goodreads. Emphasis is placed on reviews composed in English by users who reside in Greece and the Netherlands, in order to establish a shared linguistic basis for a fair comparison.

The research design encompasses a series of pivotal stages. First, we needed to identify a suitable online platform where users from Greece and the Netherlands write book reviews in English. Goodreads was selected since it is a rather popular platform with more than 150 million members worldwide,<sup>135</sup> which is used by a diverse audience, and focuses on readers themselves, and their experiences and perspectives when it comes to the act of reading. Our next step was to gather data about the identified users and about the reviews that have written. The collected data additionally needed to be cleaned to be ready for analysis. In this research, two separate types of analysis were performed. One analysis focused on the texts of the reviews. The focus was on the language of the reviews, as well as the length of sentences and the common words. Moreover, average ratings of the reviews are examined, along with the named entities and sentiments that users indicate in their critiques. A second strand of analyses concentrated on the characteristics of the users. User activity was analyzed by examining the number of friends users have, as well as the number of reviews they compose. The analyses entailed data processing, utilizing computational and linguistic methods to unveil underlying patterns and themes on reading preferences. Finally, validation checks were applied in order to confirm the accuracy and dependability of both the data and the analytical outcomes. For this research various tools and libraries were utilized, including Python serving as the primary programming language for data processing and analysis. For text processing and tokenization, The Natural Language Toolkit (NLTK) was used. VADER, Stanza, Matplotlib and Seaborn were utilized for sentiment analysis, named entity recognition, and data visualization, respectively.

#### *4.1.2 Data Collection: User Identification and Sample Selection*

In order to secure a representative sample, specific parameters were taken into account. First, we wished to identify users hailing from the Greek and Dutch demographics, so they were singled out based on their profile information. By utilizing the Goodreads API and using web scraping techniques we identified users from the two countries. For this to happen, we manually curated a list of ISBNs corresponding to literary works written by Greek and Dutch authors. This strategic

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<sup>135</sup> ‘How to Reach More Readers on Goodreads | News for Authors’  
<<https://authornews.penguinrandomhouse.com/how-to-reach-more-readers-on-goodreads/>>  
[accessed 10 August 2024].

choice was predicated on the notion that a certain level of convergence exists between the country of origin of the writer and the demographics of the readership. For each of the selected ISBN, we retrieved the users who had written reviews. The profiles of these users contain a ‘location’ field in which users can specify their place of residence. Using the Goodreads API, users were selected who had either used the word ‘Greece’ or ‘Netherlands’ in this location field. This profile information enabled us to identify users who have indeed written reviews and who have explicitly indicated their residency in either Greece or the Netherlands within their respective profiles. Metadata also included review content, dates, and ratings, which were then organized in a structured format to facilitate subsequent processing.

By following these steps, a total of 252 Greek and 173 Dutch users were selected. These users collectively composed 5.335 reviews in the English language, which constituted our comprehensive dataset.

#### *4.1.3 Textual analysis of the reviews*

The full texts of the reviews written by all of the selected users were downloaded as a next step. The unprocessed reviews contained – as expected – superfluous text and inconsistencies that needed to be cleaned in order for our analysis to be precise. For this reason, we filtered out irrelevant content, we converted text to lowercase and removed extra whitespace. Finally, we removed common stopwords (words that are so commonly used that they carry very little significant information) and punctuation marks, since they would not add any meaning to the content, and we rather cared for focusing on more significant words. The automation of these processing tasks was facilitated through Python libraries.

Given that our emphasis was on reviews posted in English, we used language detection algorithms to ensure the uniformity of the dataset. The `langdetect` library was utilized to identify and then eliminate non-English reviews, ensuring the linguistic consistency in English reviews, which was imperative for a comparative analysis. The next step was tokenization, the segmentation of text into discrete words or tokens. Additionally, lemmatization reduced words to their base or root form. By doing so, text was standardized, which enabled more precise frequency and sentiment analyses. To allow for a fair comparison of the two subcorpora, we selected reviews in such a way that each subcorpus contained about 300,000 words.

Frequency analysis was conducted in order to pinpoint the most prevalent words and phrases used in the reviews written by Greek and Dutch readers. For this to happen, we included term frequency calculation, namely counting the instances of each word in the dataset. After that, we contrasted the frequency of common terms between Dutch and Greek reviews. Python was instrumental in executing these calculations. In addition, visualizations that highlighted the results, were generated using Matplotlib and Seaborn.

Sentiment analysis was utilized in order to evaluate the emotional content of the collected reviews. For this to happen, we selected the VADER lexicon (for Valence Aware Dictionary for sEntiment Reasoning), which is a rule-based sentiment analysis tool that performs exceptionally well in the social media domain.<sup>136</sup> This process included the assignment of sentiment scores to each review depending on positive, negative, or neutral sentiments. The sentiment scores ranged from -1 to 1. Then, we found the average sentiment score for Greek and Dutch reviewers and compared it to each other. Stacked bar plots were used to visualize the sentiment distribution, making the results clearer. Having done that, we were provided with insights into the emotional involvement and general sentiment of the reviews from individuals from each country. Emotions hold significant importance for readers and serve as evidence on how reviewers articulate their sentiments and reflections.<sup>137</sup>

Thematic analysis was also carried out in order to recognize common themes and subjects discussed in the reviews from the two cultural groups. This process involved both topic modeling and manual coding. More specifically, methodologies like Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) were used to uncover hidden topics within the text, coupled with the assessment of a subset of reviews to manually recognize recurring themes, so that the outcomes of the topic modeling could be validated.

The linguistic analysis was concentrated on examining the stylistic and linguistic characteristics of the reviews. For this to happen, we included part-of-speech tagging, in order to identify syntactical and grammatical structures and patterns existing in the reviews. Additionally, collocation analysis was utilized to identify frequent word pairings and expressions to grasp the context in which specific words were employed.

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<sup>136</sup> C. Hutto and Eric Gilbert, 'VADER: A Parsimonious Rule-Based Model for Sentiment Analysis of Social Media Text', *Proceedings of the International AAAI Conference on Web and Social Media*, 8.1 (2014), pp. 216–25, p. 216, doi:[10.1609/icwsm.v8i1.14550](https://doi.org/10.1609/icwsm.v8i1.14550).

<sup>137</sup> Driscoll, Sedo, p. 249.

By doing this type of analysis, we managed to recognize the linguistic preferences and stylistic tendencies of the two groups of reviewers.

Another question that we wished to answer was to do with the average length of reviews in each language. After that, we compared the average length in Greek and Dutch reviews. For this to happen, we counted the number of words in each review and created bar plots visualizing the average review lengths for the comparison to be easier. In a similar way, we counted the average sentence length in Greek and Dutch reviews and visualized the results creating bar plots in order to examine the differences between the two groups.

Named Entity Recognition was employed in our research in order to identify and classify proper nouns in the reviews. These included names of works of art, organizations, and locations. For this to be achieved, we employed the Stanza NER tool for the extraction of named entities from the textual content of the reviews and we assigned the named entities to the three beforementioned categories. Then we counted the occurrences of each category within Dutch and Greek reviews and depicted the frequency of named entities through bar plots.

For the visualization of the results –which was an important part of the comparative analysis of the linguistic and thematic characteristics in Greek and Dutch Goodreads reviews– we used various types of plots. We included bar plots, histograms, boxplots, and stacked bar plots.

#### *4.1.4 Statistical Analyses of Users*

To analyze the reading behaviors of Greek and Dutch users on Goodreads, we employed a comprehensive statistical methodology. We chose a total of two hundred users from each group, with a constraint that the quantity of reviews per user did not surpass the number of 1.000. This way, we managed to uphold a focus on active – but not extreme – users. Data was obtained through XML files linked to the users' profiles, including information on number and language of reviews, friends and average ratings. Then, histograms and box plots were designed to illustrate the distribution of these variables among Greek and Dutch reviewers and identify any noticeable distinctions between them. The languages used in the reviews made by the two groups were exhibited using bar graphs, showcasing the preferred languages employed by Greek and Dutch reviewers and providing us with insights into their linguistic preferences.



#### 4.1.5 Validation and Reliability

Both the data and the results needed to be validated. For this reason, numerous validation methods were utilized, including manual verification, inter-rater reliability, and cross-validation. First, some of the reviews were manually inspected to authenticate the accuracy of language detection and sentiment analysis findings. For the thematic analysis to be checked, a sample of reviews were independently coded to evaluate the consistency of theme identification. Finally, findings from frequency and sentiment analysis were compared with those from similar studies and existing literature in order to cross-validate the results. By applying these methods, the reliability of the conclusions was boosted.

#### 4.1.6 Ethical Considerations

When conducting research that utilizes user-generated content, it is important to take into account ethical standards and comply with careful planning.<sup>138</sup> For this study, privacy of the users was ensured, by refraining from disclosing any personally identifiable information. While user data are publicly accessible on a GitHub repository, we did not include sensitive personal details, such as contact information that could compromise users' privacy. It is important to be noted that Goodreads users, when signing up on the platform and agreeing with terms and conditions, consent to their publicly available data, such as name and reviews, being used for research purposes. Hence, explicit consent from users was not required.

However, ensuring that the gathered data was securely stored and solely used for our research, was of high importance. Web scraping techniques were used to collect data from Goodreads, raising legal and ethical considerations. Currently, the absence of specific legislation directly addressing Web Scraping means that individuals involved in such activities operate within a legal environment marked by uncertainty.<sup>139</sup> According to Krotov, Johnson, and Silva, a researcher should constantly prioritize the identification of potential harm to individuals and entities stemming from their project and implement appropriate measures to prevent such

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<sup>138</sup> Marcelle Cacciattolo, 'Ethical Considerations in Research', in *The Praxis of English Language Teaching and Learning (PELT)*, Critical New Literacies (BRILL, 2015), pp. 55–79, p. 56, doi:[10.1007/978-94-6300-112-0\\_4](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-6300-112-0_4).

<sup>139</sup> Vlad Krotov, Leigh Johnson, and Leiser Silva, 'Tutorial: Legality and Ethics of Web Scraping', *Faculty & Staff Research and Creative Activity*, 2020, pp. 555-581, doi:<https://doi.org/10.17705/1CAIS.04724>.

harm.<sup>140</sup> In this study, careful attention was given to these ethical considerations by respecting the terms of service of the Goodreads platform. Our goal was to research the respective topic by gathering data that could provide valuable information while ensuring respect for user privacy and terms of service of the platform.

## *4.2 Results*

In this section, the findings from the analysis of the collected data are presented. First: a discussion of user data. Secondly, in section 4.2.2, the discussion of the analysis of the full texts of the reviews. The interpretation of the results will follow in section 4.2.3, focusing on the ways in which cultural environments can have an impact on reading habits and preferences among Greek and Dutch users of Goodreads.

### *4.2.1 Analysis of Goodreads users*

The dataset included reviews written on Goodreads by individuals who had indicated that they located either in Greece or in the Netherlands – assuming that most of them will be natives. The analysis covers several aspects, including user activity when it comes to the number of reviews they post, as well as with how many friends they interact on Goodreads. As mentioned above, we selected books written by authors from these two countries to identify Greek and Dutch users, and then extracted their reviews for these books. After that, user information was retrieved based on the location specified in their profiles. Through this process we became able to identify 377 Greek and 345 Dutch users.

First, user activity was compared by randomly choosing two hundred reviews written by Greek and Dutch users, to ensure that the user groups could be compared fairly. For the Greek reviewers, the histogram (fig. 1) shows that the majority of them have written fewer than two hundred reviews. A similar pattern applies for the Dutch users, who might be sharing slightly more reviews than the Greek ones (fig. 2).

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<sup>140</sup> Krotov, Johnson, Silva, pp. 555-581.



Figure 1: Number of reviews posted by Greek users.

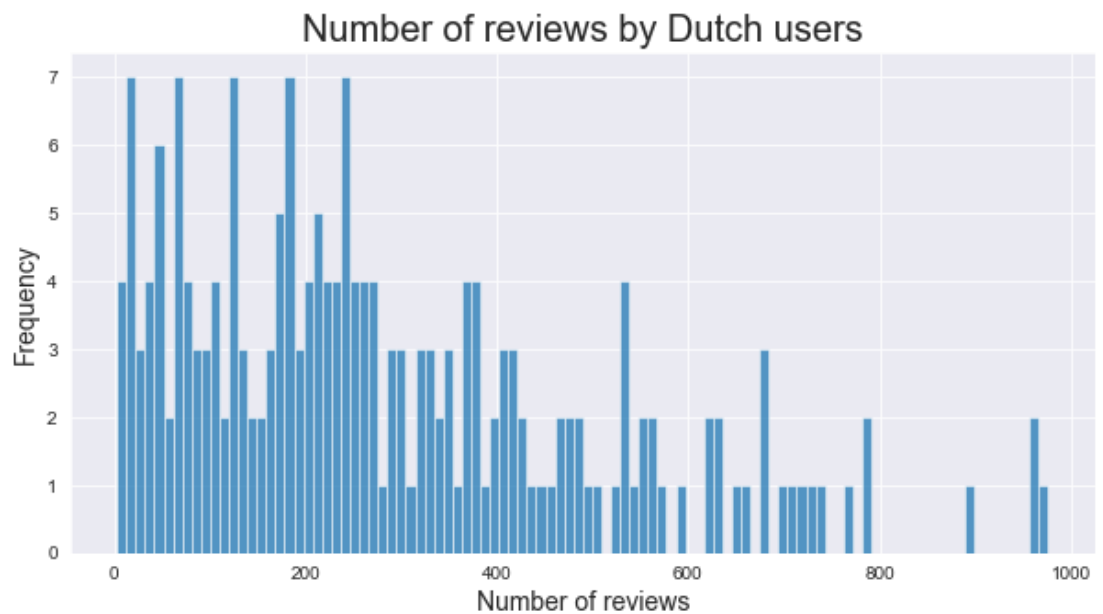


Figure 2: Number of reviews posted by Dutch users.

In analyzing the social aspect of Goodreads and its users, we examined the number of friends they have. The boxplot (fig. 3) reveals that Greek users tend to have more friends with whom they share their reading experiences on Goodreads, compared to their Dutch counterparts. Dutch users have 33.77 friends on average, and the median is 20.0. Greek users have as much as 173.30 friends on average, and the

median value is 61. This finding suggests that Greek users have a stronger urge to form a community around books.

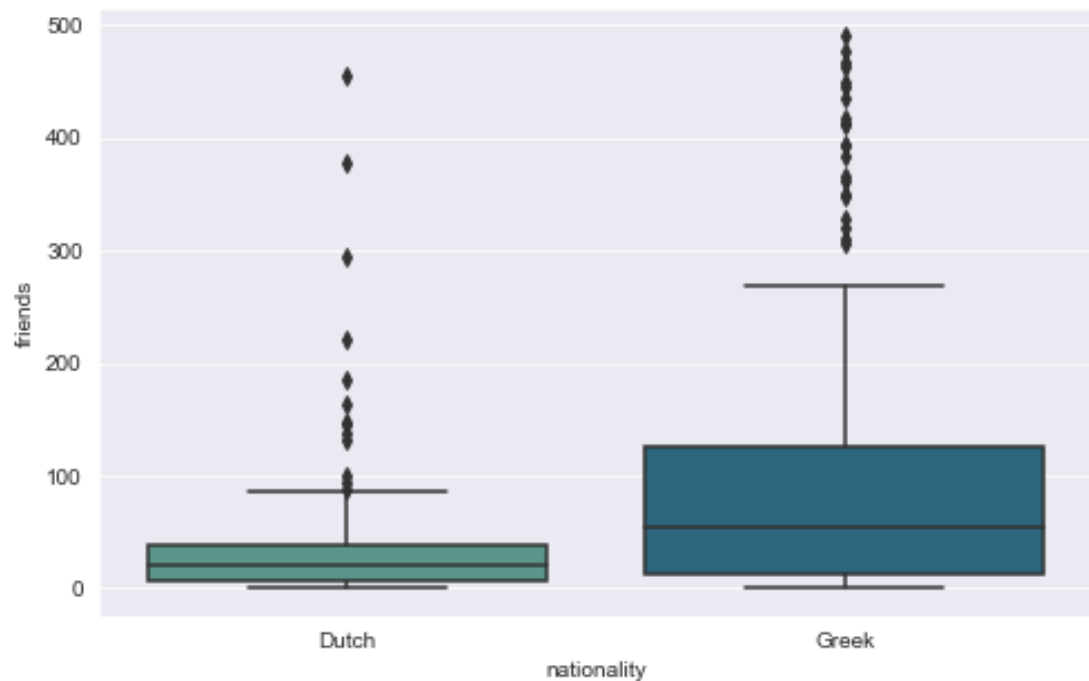


Figure 3: Number of friends that Greek and Dutch users have on Goodreads.

Then we analyzed the language that the 400 selected reviewers use in order to comprehend their linguistic preferences. The data analyzed and depicted in a bar chart (fig. 4) shows that Greek users prefer using English or Greek for their reviews. An interesting finding is that Greek users also write reviews in Dutch. This might be a result of multilingual individuals residing in Greece. Additionally, as the data about the users were saved in one shared directory, the dataset contains a quite large number of Dutch individuals living in Greece and writing about Dutch authors in their native language. This explains why the Dutch language is used in reviews written by users who reside in Greece. Reviewers who reside in the Netherlands (fig. 5) prefer Dutch or English for their contributions to Goodreads, followed by a smaller percentage of other languages.

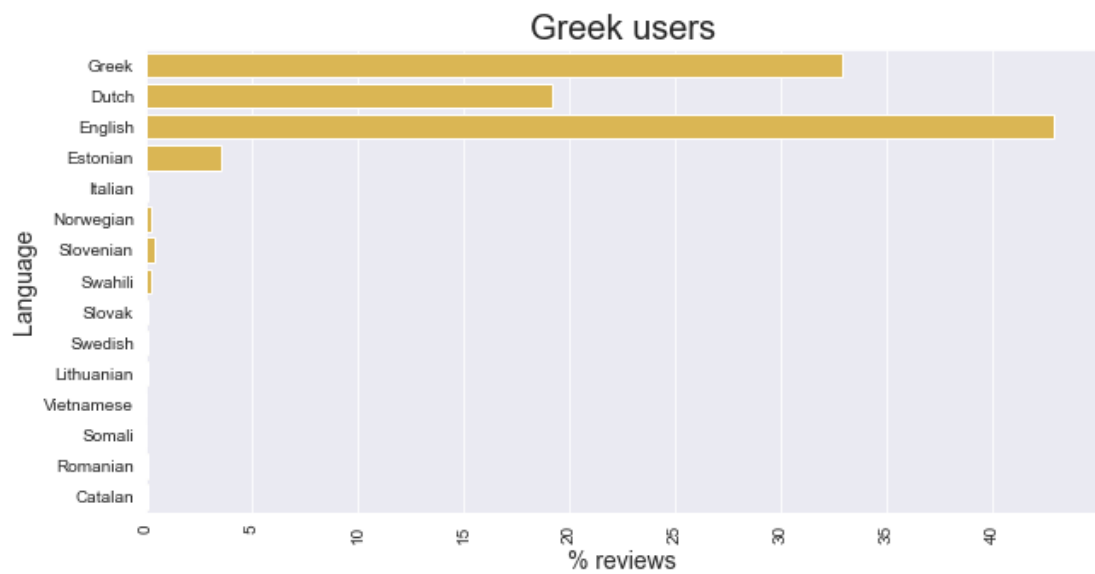


Figure 4: Languages that Greek reviewers mostly use for their critiques.

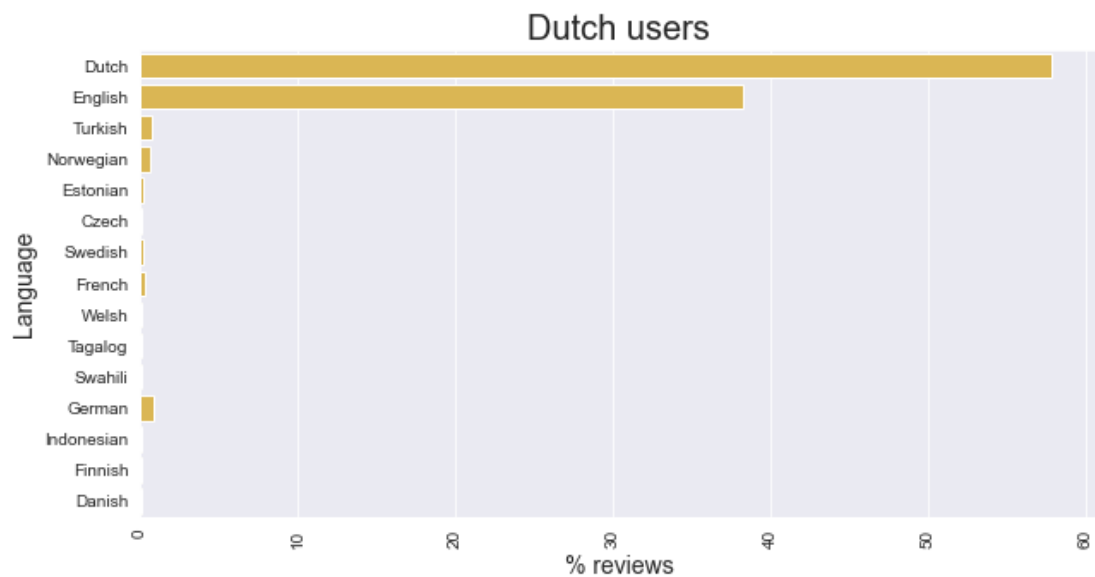


Figure 5: Languages that Dutch reviewers mostly use for their critiques.

The average ratings given to books by individuals of the two countries were also compared. The boxplot (fig. 6) reveals that the median ratings by the two nationalities are quite similar, with Greek users being slightly more positive when it comes to their book ratings.

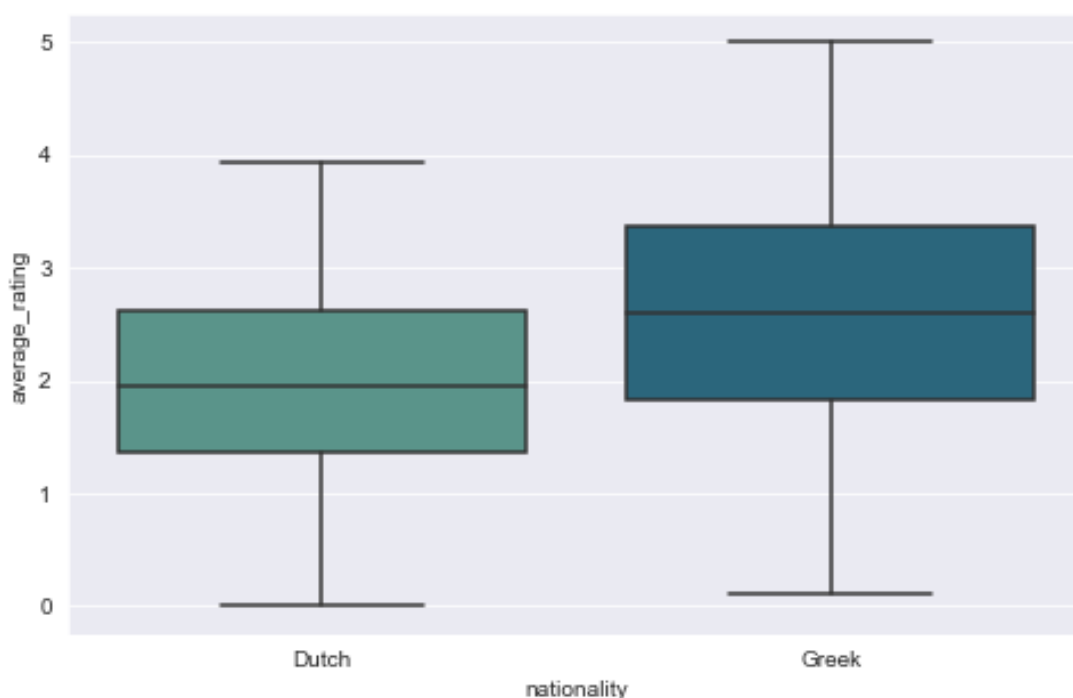


Figure 6: Book ratings given by Dutch and Greek reviewers.

#### 4.2.2 Textual analysis of the reviews

The full texts of the reviews were compared by firstly creating two subcorpora: (1) reviews in English written by Dutch users and (2) reviews in English written by Greek users. Since the original reviews contained superfluous texts, we filtered these to keep the relevant review content only and saved them in a directory named ‘Cleaned\_reviews’. Then reviews were tokenized into words, and stopwords and punctuation were removed in order for the analysis to focus on words with meaning. Two subcorpora were created – both containing 300.000 words. The sizes of these subcorpora were harmonized in order to compare the frequencies of terms using equal criteria. In this way, we managed to identify the correlation between the frequency of words that are used by the two groups of reviewers. In figure 7, we can see the frequency of words used in reviews by Greek and Dutch individuals – leaving out common words like ‘book’ or ‘read’ for clarity. The visualization of the results shows that both Greek and Dutch reviewers use words related to ‘bookishness’, such as ‘reading’, ‘writing’, or ‘story’, at a similar frequency. However, there are other words that are mostly used by one of the two groups. Such words are ‘love’ or ‘loved’, which for instance are mostly used by Greek reviewers, or ‘live’ and ‘world’ which

are mostly used by the Dutch ones. These differences in word choices and sentiment might reveal unique cultural preferences among the two groups when it comes to expressing thoughts or feelings about books. Greek reviewers appear to focus on personal connection to the books they read, using emotionally charged words, such as ‘love’, as mentioned above. On the other hand, frequent terms, such as ‘live’ and ‘world’, used by Dutch reviewers, may be indicative of an inclination to relate their reading experiences to the broader world and contextualize them within social environments.

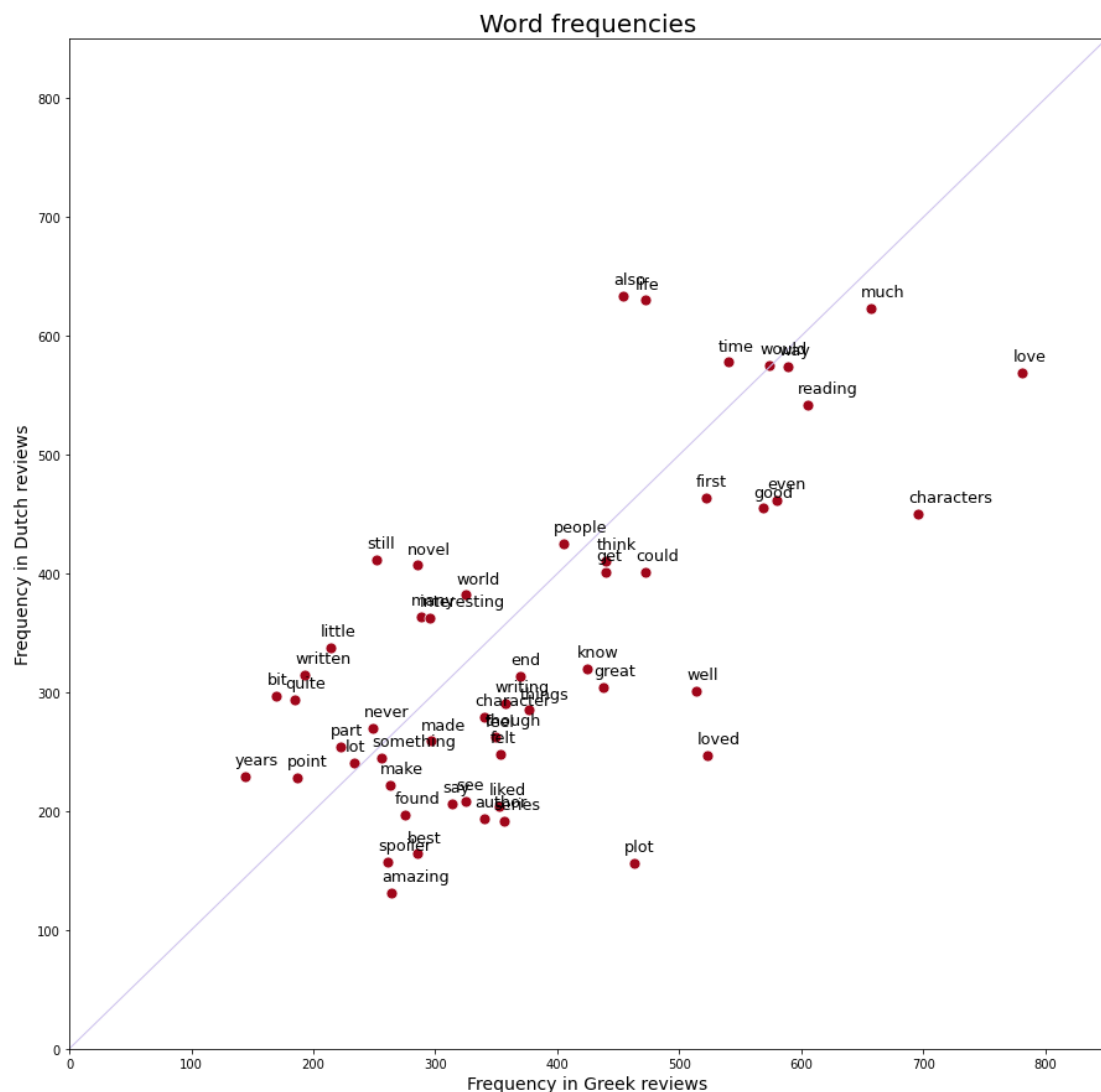


Figure 7: Frequency of words used by Greek and Dutch reviewers.

Another aspect of the reviews examined is their average length. As can be observed in figure 8, Dutch readers write slightly longer reviews. Additionally, the length of the sentences in the reviews was measured. As depicted in figure 9, Greek

users tend to write typically longer sentences when reviewing a book, despite composing shorter reviews than these of the Dutch users.

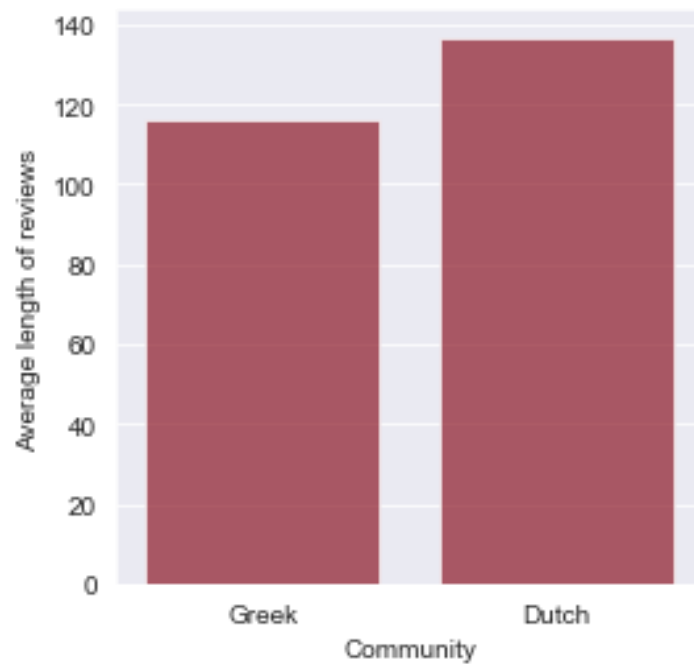


Figure 8: Average review length by Greek and Dutch users

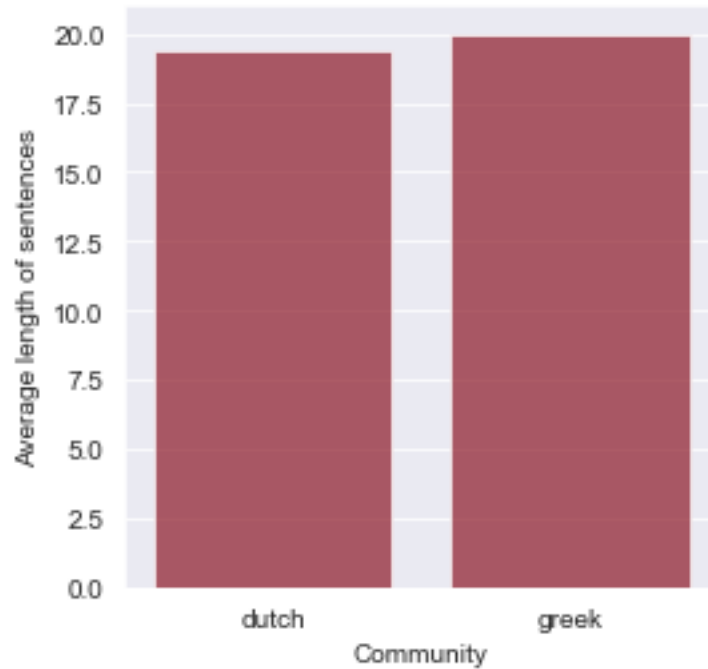


Figure 9: Average length of sentences in reviews by Greek and Dutch users



Sentiment in reviews was also examined in order to comprehend the differences between Greek and Dutch users when it comes to expressing emotions. In figure 10, it can be observed that Greek reviewers use slightly more emotional language than the Dutch reviewers, so their sentiment scores for positive reviews are of more considerable size.

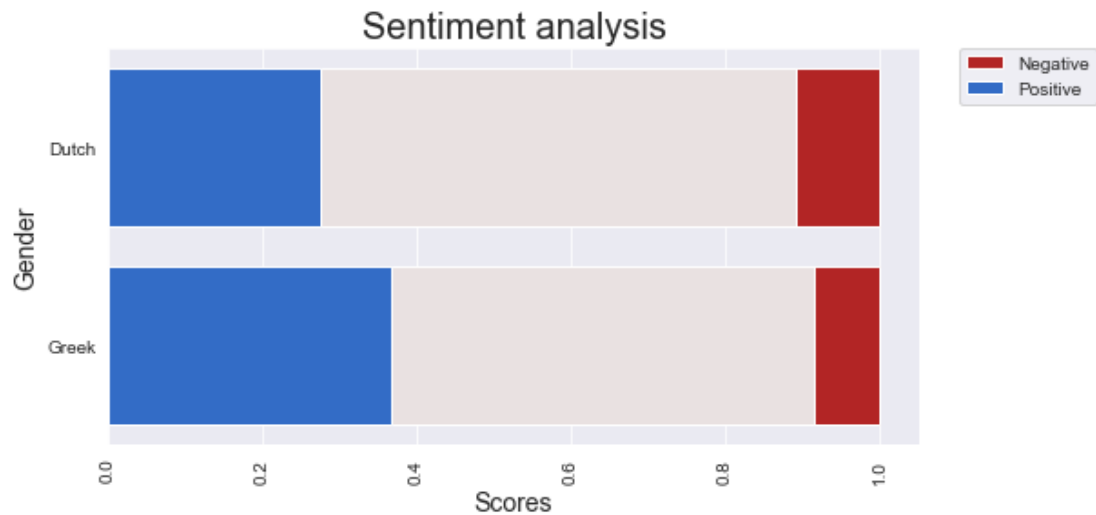


Figure 10: Sentiment analysis of reviews by Greek and Dutch users

Finally, we examined Named Entity Recognition (NER) results, focusing on the frequency of references to organization, works of art, and locations within the Greek and Dutch reviews. Our findings are presented in the form of bar plots (fig. 11, fig. 12) and reveal distinct differences in the types and frequencies of named entities mentioned by the two groups of reviewers. As depicted in the bar plots, Greek reviewers made fewer references to organizations compared to their Dutch counterparts. References to works of art were of great number in both groups' reviews. Specific locations were frequently mentioned in Dutch reviews. However, locations were not that popular in the Greek ones.

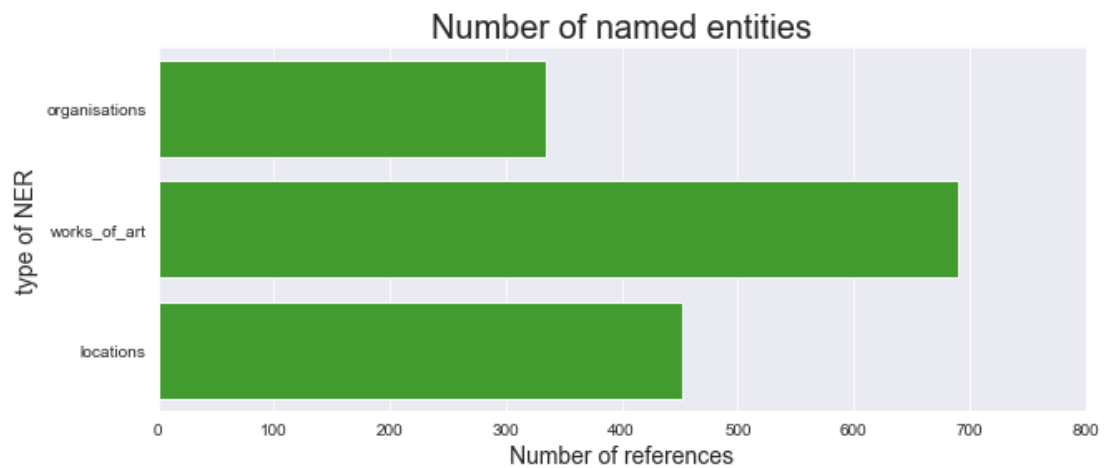


Figure 11: Distribution of named entities in reviews by Greek users.

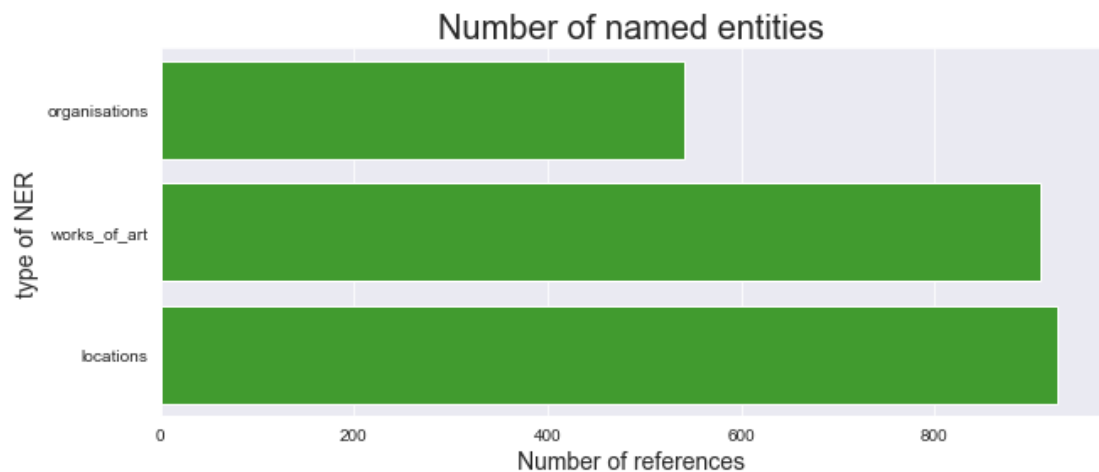


Figure 12: Distribution of named entities in reviews by Dutch users.

#### 4.2.3 Interpretation of the Results

This study of Goodreads reviews has provided valuable insights into the Greek and Dutch reading cultures, as well as the user interaction on the platform and the language preferences of each group. The results can be examined focusing on how culture can have an impact on reading habits and preferences among Greek and Dutch book reviewers on Goodreads. This analysis provides valuable insights into the ways in which cultural environments shape reading cultures and the ways diverse individuals comprehend, analyze, and critique books.

In analyzing word frequency in the reviews examined, distinct linguistic patterns are revealed when comparing Greek to Dutch reviewers. This can reveal notable

discrepancies in word usage and can aid our understanding of the factors which shape the ways diverse individuals communicate their thoughts about books.

Words like ‘characters’, ‘people’, ‘think’, ‘love’, ‘word’, and ‘reading’ seem to be prominent in both Greek and Dutch reviews. This might mean that emphasis is placed on character development and emotional involvement in literary works, as well as on the transmission of ideas and thoughts about them. Hence, commonalities in literary assessment criteria do exist among the two groups. However, differences yet exist. In Greek reviews, words like ‘love’, ‘good’, and ‘characters’ showed the highest frequency. This implies that Greek reviewers focus on character-oriented stories and use emotional language to analyze a book. On the other hand, Dutch reviewers mostly used words like ‘time’, ‘life’, ‘much’ and ‘word’. This suggests that they place emphasis on a more comprehensive book analysis, without using such emotionally charged words, compared to their Greek counterparts. Disparities in word frequencies may exist not only because of the linguistic choices in English language that differ among Greek and Dutch speakers, but also due to their cultural differences. Based on our findings, Greek users tend to be more emotional when reviewing a book and may focus on narrative structure and character development. On the contrary, Dutch reviewers tend to lean towards more detailed analysis, reflecting an inclination towards explicit communication.

Our findings show that Dutch reviews tend to be longer on average compared to the ones posted by Greek users. The latter focus on to-the-point communication and are usually direct and honest as a community.<sup>141</sup> This is reflected on their linguistic preferences, as well as their reviewing style, providing a clear opinion and an in-depth analysis of the object examined. On the other hand, Greek reviews are typically shorter, with an average of 116 words per text compared to Dutch reviews with an average of 137 words per text. This might suggest that Greek readers place more emphasis on emotional communication, rather than composing thorough critiques and providing elaborate analysis.

The average sentence length in reviews composed by the two groups also varies. However, the difference is not substantial. In this case, Greek reviews demonstrate longer sentences, 19 words on average, while Dutch reviews have an average sentence

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<sup>141</sup> Geert Hofstede, *Culture's Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions and Organizations Across Nations* (SAGE Publications, 2001), p. 14.

length of 18 words. This similarity between the reviews of the two groups suggests that despite the overall review length being different, the sentence construction remains consistent, proving that the complexity of information conveyed in individual sentences is indicative of a shared standard.

In analyzing sentiment in reviews, we can gain a deeper understanding of the emotional undertones present in reviews written by Greek and Dutch individuals. Emotions hold significant importance for readers and serve as evidence on how reviewers articulate their sentiments and reflections.<sup>142</sup> Our findings revealed that reviews shared by Greek users exhibit a higher proportion of positive sentiments compared to Dutch readers. The latter exhibit a more balanced distribution of positive, neutral, and negative sentiments. This information suggests that Greek reviewers express their emotions with greater intensity, whereas their Dutch counterparts seem to convey their opinions with moderate emotional intensity. This mirrors the Greek cultural inclination towards strong emotional expression, highlighting the readers' deep engagement with the book and the cultural norm of passionate communication. On the other hand, Dutch culture places more emphasis on rational thought and constructive criticism without extreme emotional displays.

Our findings for the number of named entities revealed how proper nouns are distributed within reviews. The categories examined are to do with organizations, works of art, and locations. These findings can provide valuable insights into the topics and references that seem to be important for Greek and Dutch readers.

In the realm of Greek reviews, there is more frequent mention of works of art, rather than organizations and locations. The works that Greek readers mostly refer to are '*Goosebumps*' and the 'Young Adult' book genre. Dutch reviewers commonly refer to organizations but show greater engagement with literary works and locations. Specifically, they mostly refer to '*Dog Soldiers*' and the '*Bible*'. The emphasis on these types of named entities mirrors the cultural impacts on what the two groups of readers consider notable when it comes to their reading encounters.

Dutch users seem to be more analytical and when it comes to reviewing a book, they also comment on the author's writing style. This might be reflecting their comprehensive approach to reading. Additionally, when we examined the frequency of the words that Dutch reviewers use, words like 'story', 'character development'

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<sup>142</sup> Driscoll, Sedo, p. 249.

and ‘historical context’ appeared, indicating their focus on the ways a story is presented and a book is structured. This means that Dutch readers tend to concentrate more on their own experience of reading and communicate their personal reflections and connections with a book.

On the other hand, Greek reviewers seem to be more emotionally engaged to the book, caring about characters’ relationships and plot twists. Some of their frequently used words were ‘love’, ‘plot’, ‘characters’, and ‘emotional’, showcasing their focus on feelings, as well as the emotional impact of the story. Greek readers seem to focus more on underlying messages and themes, reflecting a cultural emphasis on discussion and communication.

#### *4.2.4 Conclusion*

This comparative examination of reviews composed by Greek and Dutch users of Goodreads provides insights into the substantial influences on reading patterns and reviewing styles of the two groups. Greek readers proved to be emotionally charged when composing their reviews, leading to detailed, expressive texts that communicate their passion for literature. Dutch readers, on the other hand, post more balanced reviews, focusing on comprehensive analysis and personal reflections.

Critiques posted on Goodreads establish connections with readers, authors, characters, and individuals in the reviewers’ social circles, thus forming intricate social webs centered around reading.<sup>143</sup> For this reason, our findings and Goodreads itself can aid authors and publishers to adjust their marketing strategies in order to better align with the expectations of their target audiences. Promoting materials to Dutch users should be articulate and focused, while elaborate descriptions and emphasis on the book’s thematic depth will appeal to Greek readers.

In the discussion (section 4.4), we will further investigate the implications of these findings, aiming to connect them with the existing literature. Our goal is to explore how the disparities in review activity and language use on Goodreads mirror broader cultural, social, and educational differences between Greece and the Netherlands. Finally, in the following chapter, we will consider the limitations of the study regarding both the methodology and the implications of the results, proposing potential directions for future research.

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<sup>143</sup> Driscoll, Sedo, p. 254.

### *4.3 Challenges and Limitations*

In the context of this thesis, several challenges and limitations have been identified. When it comes to analyzing data that can be interpreted subjectively, specifically when complex factors are involved, such as cultural and societal ones, it becomes almost impossible to not introduce interpretation bias, although efforts were made to prevent it.

#### *4.3.1 Methodology*

Regarding the methodology applied for this study it provides a comprehensive strategy for investigating cultural impacts on reading habits and preferences. However, there are certain limitations that need to be addressed. First, language detection algorithms may prove to be inaccurate in some cases. In addition, the sample of reviews may not entirely mirror the broader populations of Greek and Dutch readers, since there are many more reviews on Goodreads that we did not utilize, as well as readers from the two countries who do not use the platform in any manner. Another potential issue of this methodology is that we worked with residency, which does not always equal nationality. However, by securing a sufficient number of reviewers, we aimed for our sample to be representative of the reading cultures in both Greece and the Netherlands. Finally, bias or a level of subjectivity may characterize the thematic analysis when it comes to recognizing and categorizing the themes of reviews. However, efforts were made to ensure consistency. Further research could address these limitations by integrating more sophisticated language processing techniques. Furthermore, the sample size can be broadened, and supplementary qualitative methodologies could be employed.

#### *4.3.2 Cultural and Contextual Differences*

One of the primary obstacles encountered involves the inherent cultural and contextual differences between the two countries studied, thus affecting their reading cultures. Greece and the Netherlands are two distinct nations with unique characteristics when it comes to historical, social, and educational factors that shape their culture. As a result, however valuable cross-cultural studies may be, they should be approached with caution, mainly when results are analyzed based on ‘fluid’ or subjective factors, such as culture itself. Researchers in cross-cultural studies have

long stress the importance of being cautious about the challenges of achieving stimulus equivalence when comparing evaluations across different cultures.<sup>144</sup> Acknowledging these challenges underscores the need for a nuanced interpretation of our findings in order to draw meaningful insights from the comparative analysis.

#### 4.3.3 Language Issues

To ensure fair comparison of the reviews, we only considered those written in English. However, neither Dutch nor Greeks are native English speakers. This might affect their linguistic choices, leading to usage of non-standard idioms and phrases. This might result in language detection algorithms being inaccurate in certain cases. Normally, people who speak more than one language identify their first one as their most emotionally charged language.<sup>145</sup> However, the sentiment analysis model was not adjusted in a different way to consider the potential differences between how emotions are expressed by native and non-native speakers. Also, while sentiment analysis proves to be efficient, rapid, and broadly accurate, it can be rather rudimentary and necessitates complementing with human interpretation.<sup>146</sup>

#### 4.3.4 Dataset and Goodreads Limitations

The dataset for this research is of moderate size. As mentioned earlier in the methodology section, 377 and 345 users having posted reviews were identified, residing in Greece and the Netherlands, respectively. However, it must be stressed that Goodreads users do not represent the broader population of the two countries. Additionally, users who write reviews may have different reading preferences compared to people who do not use Goodreads or to the ones who do not wish to contribute with reviews.

#### 4.3.5 User-Generated Content Bias

Another limitation concerns user-generated content and bias in the collected data. Complete honesty and truthfulness in reviews and statements made by users on an online environment, should not be presumed. In some cases, for instance, reading

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<sup>144</sup> Catherine L. Harris, Jean Berko Gleason, and Ayşe Ayçiçeği, '10. When Is a First Language More Emotional? Psychophysiological Evidence from Bilingual Speakers', in *Bilingual Minds* (Multilingual Matters, 2006), pp. 257–83, p. 269, doi:[10.21832/9781853598746-012](https://doi.org/10.21832/9781853598746-012).

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., p. 273.

<sup>146</sup> Driscoll, Sedo, p. 257.

positive reviews might affect one's original opinion about a book, then wishing to also offer a positive review. Additionally, users may write more favorable reviews when they feel that they might be judged if doing otherwise. Hence, inaccurate information may interfere with our findings and interpretations.

#### *4.3.6 Temporal and Spatial Limitations*

The collected data, as well as the literature reviewed, span different time periods, with some sources being more current than others. However, educational policies, economic circumstances, and cultural trends change rapidly over time, and they can yet influence reading habits and preferences. Hence, older data or literature can be proved irrelevant.

Another possible limitation for this project is that the accuracy of location cannot be guaranteed in all cases. Some users may use false information to not reveal their actual location. As a result, since users manually update their location, its accuracy cannot be verified, potentially affecting the selection of users for analysis.

#### *4.3.7 Recommendations for Future Research*

Future research should strive to tackle these challenges and limitations. First, developing culturally specific frameworks and employing mixed methods approaches in research can aid in gaining a more holistic comprehension of how cultural influences shape reading trends and patterns. Additionally, sentiment analysis models specifically trained on multilingual datasets and non-native language use, can be developed and utilized. Beyond Goodreads, additional platforms and sources can provide data, including national library archives and educational institutions. Furthermore, cross-verification techniques can be utilized in order to compare user-generated content with official book sales, for instance, while also ensuring that data is updated or, in case it is older, that it is contextualized within the cultural and socio-economic condition of the time.

#### *4.3.8 Conclusion*

Acknowledging the challenges and limitations of this study is crucial for comprehending the complexities involved in cross-cultural examinations. Comparing and contrasting the reading cultures of Greece and the Netherlands respectively



should be done meticulously and involve the use of reliable tools. By addressing the abovementioned limitations future research will contribute to a more refined understanding of the cultural impacts on reading habits and preferences.

#### *4.4 Discussion*

The discussion section of this thesis aims to elucidate our findings and connect them with the existing literature. Our aim is to highlight the most significant findings and discuss their broader implications.

##### *4.4.1 Cultural and Textual Differences*

The findings of this study revealed distinct differences in the respective reading cultures of Greece and the Netherlands. The thematic discussion of the reviews examined is usually different, with Greek reviewers being more expressive regarding sentiment, while Dutch focusing on more comprehensive analyses. This disparity among the two groups underscored the significant role that cultural contexts possess in shaping reading habits and preferences.

Hofstede describes the concept of learning how to be part of a society as a ‘collective programming of the mind’.<sup>147</sup> As ‘culture presupposes collectivity’, it becomes apparent that decision-making is affected by values that are shaped in groups and communities and are then inherited to individuals.<sup>148</sup> Creating a circular dynamic, individual values are shaped and, once internalized, they form hierarchies from which the broader meaning of culture is formed. These values play a crucial role in shaping the ways diverse individuals participate in reading cultures, as culture itself encompasses structured patterns of cognition, emotion, and response.<sup>149</sup> Hence, people from the same country or region are expected to present similar patterns in the ways they behave or respond to specific matters. As culture functions for a human collectivity in a manner akin to how personality functions for an individual,<sup>150</sup> it can be presumed that the overall society is made of shared characteristics that individuals ‘built’ within it.

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<sup>147</sup> Hofstede, p. 4.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

#### 4.4.2 *The Role of Literary Education*

The role of literary education serves as a catalyst for enhancing cultural literacy within society.<sup>151</sup> Thus, individuals exposed to complex literature during their formative years are expected to prefer intricate texts in later life.<sup>152</sup> Reading complex and prestigious books may serve as an alternative means to attain social status.<sup>153</sup> A reader's social circle also plays a role in book genre preferences, as individuals with highly educated friends show a stronger inclination towards complex genres compared to those with less educated friends.<sup>154</sup>

#### 4.4.3 *Influence of Social Networks and External Attributes*

Social networks within a country, tend to be homogenous in terms of lifestyle features such as book preferences, as well as socio-economic aspects like education and social standing.<sup>155</sup> This homogeneity, although not directly shaping reading behaviors, contributes to the development of mutual reading practices. Other external attributes of reading materials, including author popularity, promotional activities, or literary reviews<sup>156</sup> are also important when it comes to reading preferences. These factors highlight the interplay between social influence and individual choice in shaping reading habits.

#### 4.4.4 *Exploring Inequality in Reading Habits*

Exploring inequality in reading habits, especially between different countries, can offer insight into status group differentiations concerning cultural norms and behaviors within a sizable portion of the population;<sup>157</sup> since reading is a common leisure time activity that attracts a considerable amount of audience. The value of reading is widely acknowledged; nevertheless, it is challenging to envision a governmental directive that limits public freedom in the name of promoting reading.<sup>158</sup> The multiple factors contributing to the decline in reading for pleasure are

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<sup>151</sup> Kraaykamp Dijkstra, p. 228.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., p. 228.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., p. 228.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., p. 228.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., p. 228.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., p. 229.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., p. 229.

<sup>158</sup> Wim Knulst and Gerbert Kraaykamp, 'Trends in Leisure Reading: Forty Years of Research on Reading in the Netherlands', *Poetics*, 26.1 (1998), pp. 21–41, p. 39, doi:[10.1016/S0304-422X\(98\)00008-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0304-422X(98)00008-4).

likely to persist, and isolated efforts to encourage reading are unlikely to be effective.<sup>159</sup>

#### 4.4.5 Language and Sentiment Analysis

Examining the emotional aspects of language becomes crucial when analyzing reviews and sentiments. In this research, the reviews in question were made by individuals who reside either in Greece or in the Netherlands –so they are most likely to be Greek or Dutch– making English their second language. Typically, individuals’ first language elicits greater emotional arousal compared to their second language.<sup>160</sup> Thus, it becomes apparent that reviewers might use English in a less emotional way than when writing in their native language. Grammatical or syntactical errors might occur sporadically, but they usually do not interfere with the meaning of a sentence. Nevertheless, it can be assumed that individuals who prefer using their second language to review a book –although having the choice of using their first language– are confident enough in doing so; very likely being proficient English users. Hence, this leads us to research like this, and the ways they can contribute to digital humanities studies. NLP models can be trained to better understand and process non-native English, while also improving text analysis when they handle texts written by non-native speakers with errors occurring in them.

Language is essential for the transmission of culture, with efficiency being enhanced by shared historical periods and geographical locations.<sup>161</sup> Thus, language serves as both the medium and subject of much cross-cultural inquiry.<sup>162</sup> It stands out as the most identifiable aspect of culture and has been the most amenable to systematic examination and theoretical development.<sup>163</sup> Language, however, is not a neutral tool, as individuals’ thought processes are influenced by the linguistic categories and vocabulary that are available in a specific language,<sup>164</sup> in which they have learnt to think and describe their sentiments. As a result, during interactions, individuals might prioritize either the context of communication or the content of the

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<sup>159</sup> Knulst, Kraaykamp, p. 39.

<sup>160</sup> Harris, Gleason, Ayçiçeği, p. 257.

<sup>161</sup> Harry C. Triandis, ‘Individualism-Collectivism and Personality’, *Journal of Personality*, 69.6 (2001), pp. 907–24, p. 908, doi:[10.1111/1467-6494.696169](https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-6494.696169).

<sup>162</sup> Hofstede, p. 21.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

message.<sup>165</sup> Dutch users of Goodreads, focusing on content analysis, might be more direct when it comes to reviewing a book; they emphasize clarity. On the other hand, Greek reviewers, use a more expressive type of language, focusing on their emotional experiences, rather than a comprehensive analysis of a book. This means that Dutch users might care more about the literal message that is conveyed by their reviews, while Greek users might care a bit more about the way in which this message is conveyed.

#### 4.4.6 National Identity and Literature

An understanding of cultural distinctions necessitates an examination of historical contexts.<sup>166</sup> The idea that a population possesses traits that are shared among individuals dates back to the inception of populations themselves.<sup>167</sup>

There are several characteristics shared among individuals who live in the same country, that form stereotypes. For instance, Dutch can be considered direct and honest as a community.<sup>168</sup> It can also be argued that there are cultures that are considered neutral, and others that are considered emotional when it comes to relationships with people.<sup>169</sup> In such case, the Netherlands – being part of the northwest Europe – can be considered a country with neutral orientation,<sup>170</sup> focusing on clear communication. On the other hand, southern countries, including Greece, can be regarded as emotional oriented cultures,<sup>171</sup> building relationships emphasizing on communicating sentiments and emotions.

#### 4.4.7 Greek Culture

Greece has survived various cultural and socio-political eras, including prehistoric, archaic, classical, Roman, Ottoman, Greek, occupied by the Nazis, and becoming Greek again.

The era of Turkish rule wielded a significant impact on the development of Greek society, leading the Greek world to be detached from major historical movements like

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<sup>165</sup> Triandis, p. 916.

<sup>166</sup> Hofstede, p. 12.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>169</sup> Charles Hampden-Turner and Fons Trompenaars Hampden-Turner Charles, *Riding the Waves of Culture: Understanding Diversity in Global Business* (Hachette UK, 2020). Page number not mentioned.

<sup>170</sup> Hampden-Turner C., Hampden-Turner F.

<sup>171</sup> Hampden-Turner C., Hampden-Turner F.

the Renaissance, the Reformation, the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century, the Enlightenment, as well as the French and Industrial Revolutions which greatly influenced the historical progression of Western Europe.<sup>172</sup> The arbitrary nature of Ottoman governance and the absence of a strong legal framework played a pivotal role in molding the fundamental principles of Greek society and shaping attitudes towards the government and authority that endure to this day.<sup>173</sup> Religion also played a crucial role in shaping norms and values of the Greek society. Throughout this period, the borders of the Ottoman Empire in Europe closely mirrored the division between Orthodoxy and Catholicism.<sup>174</sup> Greece followed the conservative Orthodox Church, which was compounded by an anti-Western sentiment. The Greek population is also characterized by its diasporic nature, beginning under the Ottoman rule, and persisting into contemporary times.<sup>175</sup>

Geographically, Greece is situated both in the Balkans and the Mediterranean, resulting in being influenced by the two regions simultaneously. Its proximity to the sea has facilitated increased interaction with the Western nations.<sup>176</sup> However, due to the Orthodox and Ottoman influences in Greece's heritage, the country remained somewhat isolated from the predominant narratives of European history over many centuries.<sup>177</sup> The ambiguity surrounding Greece's European identity came to an end when it accessed the European Community in 1981, confirming its 'Europeanness' - apart from enjoying economic and political advantages.<sup>178</sup> Greece's inclusion as a full member of the European Community was significant because of its unique blend of Orthodox Christian heritage, Ottoman legacy, and distinct historical trajectory, setting it apart from the existing members.<sup>179</sup>

#### 4.4.8 Greek Publishing Industry

The book functions as an educational product, a medium of communication, a source of information and knowledge, an object of aesthetics, a piece of art, as well as a

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<sup>172</sup> Richard Clogg, *A Concise History of Greece*, Cambridge Concise Histories, Third edition. (University Press, 2013), p. 3, doi:[10.1017/CBO9781139507516](https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139507516).

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

commodity for trade.<sup>180</sup> Consequently, the publishing sector is considered a ‘creative’ field.<sup>181</sup>

The publishing industry in Greece, despite being interconnected with global trends, displays distinct characteristics primarily influenced by the country's language and geographical location.<sup>182</sup> As a result, major foreign publishing companies do not engage extensively in operations within Greece, allowing traditional ‘family’ publishing enterprises to persist.<sup>183</sup> Consequently, in Greece, publishing houses commonly operate as family-owned businesses where leadership is passed down through generations; thus representing a market characteristic of smaller publishing environments.<sup>184</sup> Additionally, due to factors such as the lack of specialized libraries and information services, publishers and bookstores play a vital role in disseminating scholarly content.<sup>185</sup> This means that Greece is regarded as a rather small publishing industry compared to international markets. As put by Christina Banou in 2013, ‘The Greek publishing industry today may resemble the British industry as it was in the 1940s’.<sup>186</sup> The market’s demands, along with publishers’ inclination towards innovation, and global influences have had a modest impact on the Greek market, primarily due to linguistic constraints and the need for redefining book market opportunities.<sup>187</sup> Some Greek publishing houses focus on releasing popular titles, whether authored by Greek writers or translated from foreign languages, which are distributed through various channels such as bookstore, supermarkets, and airports.<sup>188</sup> These publishers prioritize book marketing and strive to engage directly with the audience and foster reading communities.<sup>189</sup> It becomes also evident that Greek publishers try to maintain quality standards, ensure profitability, and adapt to the evolving global publishing landscape, by strategically selecting texts for publication.<sup>190</sup> An additional challenge faced by commercial publishers is catering to a

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<sup>180</sup> Kostagiolas, et al., p. 474.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., p. 474.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., p. 475.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid., p. 475.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., p. 475.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., p. 475.

<sup>186</sup> Christina Banou, ‘The Organization of Book-Publishing Houses in a Changing Era’, 2013, p. 36, doi:[10.1163/1878-4712-11112010](https://doi.org/10.1163/1878-4712-11112010).

<sup>187</sup> Kostagiolas, et al., p. 488.

<sup>188</sup> Banou, p. 37.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>190</sup> Banou, p. 37.

diverse audience with varying preferences.<sup>191</sup> The existence of the latter becomes apparent when examining the secondary data, earlier presented in the results section. Within the Greek publishing sector, the ongoing economic challenges resulting from the financial crisis have intensified the need for strategic decisions and a reassessment of policies and functions.<sup>192</sup> Factors such as financial constraints, reductions in library budgets, constraints on consumer purchasing power, declining book sales, and the closure of certain bookstore chains have collectively contributed to a decrease in the annual production of publications.<sup>193</sup> Undoubtedly, the ongoing economic crisis in conjunction with the proliferation of new technologies will instigate significant shifts that will influence the trajectory of the publishing realm in Greece.<sup>194</sup>

#### *4.4.9 Dutch Publishing Industry and Popular Culture*

The Amsterdam region appears to have enticed most of the Dutch book publishers.<sup>195</sup> Emerging publishing enterprises might view being situated in Amsterdam as essential, given the city's renowned status in the publishing realm.<sup>196</sup> The Dutch book trade has its roots dating back to the sixteenth century when the emergence of urban centers gave rise to printer-merchants who engaged in the printing and trading of books on a commercial scale.<sup>197</sup> In the seventeenth century Leiden and Antwerp were also important centers of book production. Book publishing as a distinct economic activity came into being in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and prior to this period, the book market primarily centered to a small privileged group capable of both reading and affording books.<sup>198</sup> The early twentieth century witnessed significant growth in the book market due to high population expansion rates and increased disposable income, further boosted by the establishment of the first public libraries around 1900.<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> Banou, p. 37.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>195</sup> Heebels, Boschma, p. 1014.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid., p. 1025.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid., p. 1014.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid., p. 1014.

<sup>199</sup> Heebels, Boschma, p. 1014.

Popular culture serves as a crucial lens through which individuals shape their identities, comprehend, and navigate the world around them.<sup>200</sup> In the Netherlands, in the 1950s, influential social and political figures, along with experts in psychology, advocated for ‘guided’ or ‘controlled’ self-improvement to encourage individuals to strive for their utmost potential within existing social and economic frameworks.<sup>201</sup> Later, by the mid-1960s, the norm shifted towards ‘spontaneous self-development’, which meant that individuals were encouraged to freely express their emotions in order to reveal an ‘authentic self’.<sup>202</sup> Thus, it can be argued that the political sphere and other domains, such as popular and reading cultures, are closely linked and influenced by one another.

#### *4.4.10 Promoting Reading Culture*

Educators should regularly assess their students’ reading proficiency and guide them from basic levels to a point where reading becomes a pleasurable leisure activity for them.<sup>203</sup> Additionally, initiatives such as establishing reading clubs where interesting materials are provided for collective reading and discussion can significantly help to foster a love for reading among students.<sup>204</sup> Reading competitions with prizes can also be arranged in order to motivate students to prioritize reading in their daily routine.<sup>205</sup> Teachers, from their part, should participate in conferences focused on reading and be encouraged to engage with Reading Associations at both national and international levels to stay abreast of the latest trends and advancements in the reading field.<sup>206</sup> Schools hold a crucial position as key stakeholders in advancing literacy practices and should not be underestimated for the sake of national development.<sup>207</sup> Unfortunately, many educational institutions fail in providing adequate resources for their students due to insufficient financial support from the government and a shortage of qualified personnel to address students’ educational needs.<sup>208</sup> Consequently, the obstacles that

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<sup>200</sup> Harm Kaal, ‘Popular Politicians: The Interaction Between Politics and Popular Culture in the Netherlands, 1950s–1980s’, *Cultural and Social History*, 15.4 (2018), pp. 595–616, p. 596, doi:[10.1080/14780038.2018.1492787](https://doi.org/10.1080/14780038.2018.1492787).

<sup>201</sup> Kaal, pp. 595–596.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid., p. 596.

<sup>203</sup> Akinola, pp. 5–6.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>208</sup> Akinola, p. 6.



students are to encounter in cultivating a reading culture at the high school level can be attributed to the inadequate support and infrastructure provided by schools and governments.<sup>209</sup> Programs aimed at motivating students to read should be incorporated in educational institutions.<sup>210</sup> Schools need to strategically develop and implement initiatives such as book exhibitions, creative writing sessions, book discussions led by school media personnel, establishment of book clubs, and promotion of mobile reading platforms.<sup>211</sup> Also, designating a specific time for reading within the school timetable could be beneficial as a reading routine will be established among students.<sup>212</sup> Schools should view reading as a fundamental practice that plays a pivotal role in nurturing their students.<sup>213</sup> In addition, collaboration among parents and teachers can be instrumental in laying a solid foundation for the development of a reading culture among students.<sup>214</sup>

Libraries serve as vital educational resources for both teachers and learners.<sup>215</sup> Their significance cannot be overstated as they form an essential component in the educational ecosystem.<sup>216</sup> It is essential for libraries to curate their collections by selecting materials that align with the interests of their target audience, rather than only providing materials for assignments and exam preparation.<sup>217</sup> Therefore, conducting surveys to identify materials that resonate with students is of great importance.<sup>218</sup> Establishing readers' clubs within libraries where students can immerse themselves in motivational, inspirational and historical literature during their leisure time is another effective strategy to promote reading.<sup>219</sup> To ensure the provision of quality library services, it is imperative for the government, parents and other individuals, to allocate resources for libraries to acquire essential materials that facilitate students' knowledge acquisition.<sup>220</sup> Continuous efforts should be made to expand the presence of school libraries in primary and secondary educational

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<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid.

<sup>220</sup> Akinola, p. 6.

institutions nationwide, as well as public libraries in all local government areas, to enhance access to educational resources for all.<sup>221</sup>

Parents should not delegate the responsibility of educating their children solely to teachers, since cultivating a reading culture should be a habitual practice within the home environment from early childhood and continuously nurtured into adulthood.<sup>222</sup>

#### *4.4.11 Conclusion*

As people formulate things differently, they also read and grasp the meaning of a book differently; with culture playing a crucial role in the ways individuals perceive and respond to various stimuli. In examining the extent to which culture influences reading habits and preferences, it is important to utilize cross-cultural studies and theories. Cross-cultural investigations require a systemic methodology, indicating that any component of the overall cultural framework should be open to analysis.<sup>223</sup>

Culture and language-specific findings of this research can be linked to anthropological and sociolinguistic studies, while cross-cultural findings can contribute to theories concerning cognitive and physiological processes.<sup>224</sup>

By understanding the factors that influence reading habits and preferences, stakeholders, including governments, public libraries, educators, and parents can develop effective strategies to promote reading and enhance literacy in diverse contexts.

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<sup>221</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>223</sup> Hofstede, p. 19.

<sup>224</sup> Harris, Gleason, Ayçiçeği, p. 278.

## 5. Conclusion

According to Darnton, books resist being confined within a single academic discipline when approached as subjects of analysis.<sup>225</sup> Thus, the study of book history must encompass an international scope and employ an interdisciplinary approach.<sup>226</sup> However, this does not imply a lack of conceptual cohesion, as books are part of communication circuits that follow consistent patterns, no matter how intricate they may be.<sup>227</sup> By uncovering these circuits, book historians can demonstrate that books do not merely narrate history; they actively shape it.<sup>228</sup> Hence, the study of books and literary consumption can improve our understanding of history and the trends observed when it comes to reading preferences. Consumption practices within the context of reading culture have consistently evolved throughout history, influenced by advancements in media technology, genre evolution, and increasing levels of literacy.<sup>229</sup> Consequently, Goodreads is not the mere platform that shapes readers' preferences, but can undoubtedly assist in our comprehension of what individuals read and why. It has become apparent that reading has become deeply intertwined with digital culture, a trend expected to persist throughout the twenty-first century.<sup>230</sup> One could argue that Goodreads serves as the ideal of a community of book lovers as creating a utopian and democratic space, as envisioned by Virginia Woolf.<sup>231</sup>

Research focusing on reading platforms and readers themselves, including their personal libraries and social connections, has become increasingly numerous.<sup>232</sup> Despite the prevailing view among researchers that online book reviews are inferior to professional literary criticism, there is the notion that lay reviews offer a more authentic reflection of the reader's experience with a book, unconstrained by the need for objectivity.<sup>233</sup> The term 'reading-oriented research' denotes scholarly inquiry into the process, lived experience, and consequences of engaging with written texts.<sup>234</sup> It explores the impacts of different reading mediums, or focuses on analyzing reviews

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<sup>225</sup> Darnton, p. 81.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid., p. 81.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid., p. 81.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid., p. 81.

<sup>229</sup> Albrechtslund, p. 559.

<sup>230</sup> Murray, p. 389.

<sup>231</sup> Dorothee Birke and Johannes Fehrle, '#booklove:: How Reading Culture Is Adapted on the Internet', *Komparatistik Online*, 2018, 60–86, p. 72.

<sup>232</sup> Rebora, p. 231.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid., p. 231.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid., p. 234.

on texts to gain insights into the nuances of the reading process, potentially considering factors like genre, historical context, or authorship.<sup>235</sup> Nonetheless, within the domain of reading-oriented research, the primary focus often remains on the very act of reading itself, rather than on the interactions between readers, the broader societal implications, or the evolving landscape of digital reading platforms.<sup>236</sup> However, the ability to access and scrutinize readers' subjective experiences of reading, highlighted through their reviews, offers a distinctive understanding of the art of reading.

This paper did not deal with reading as a professional or academic activity, but it rather focused on reading as a leisure activity. The rationale behind individuals choosing to spend their free time reading reveals potential factors that might influence this choice, including educational achievements and the cultural environment's level, for instance, family and peers.<sup>237</sup> Since virtual book clubs facilitate a more refined form of literary discussion<sup>238</sup> where participants can share their thoughts about specific titles, they may provide insights into how literature is consumed and received in the digital world.

For this research project, reviews composed by users of Goodreads who reside in Greece and the Netherlands were utilized to investigate how the reading cultures of the two countries differ from each other. It was hypothesized that they would differ in terms of genre preferences, as well as language use and expression of sentiment. Based on the findings, this study highlights how cultural backgrounds influence the reading and reviewing practices of the two groups. Qualitative and quantitative types of analysis of user-generated content were combined to offer insights into language use and sentiment, along user activity on the platform. The initial hypothesis was confirmed. Greek reviewers tend to focus on the emotional elements of books, using language that shows a strong personal connection to characters and stories. Additionally, they tend to have a stronger urge to form a community around books, appearing more 'socially' active on Goodreads, interacting with five times more friends on the platform than that of their Dutch counterparts. On the other hand, Dutch

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<sup>235</sup> Rebora, p. 234.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid., p. 234.

<sup>237</sup> Fernández-Blanco, Prieto-Rodríguez, Suarez-Pandiello, p. 19.

<sup>238</sup> Murray, p. 372.

users often take a more analytical approach, paying attention to themes, historical context, and the author's style.

The study also unveiled that reading culture is not a simple, but a rather multifaceted concept, influenced by a variety of factors, including historical, societal, and technological ones. Thus, because of all these complex factors, cross-cultural comparisons must be approached with caution. The progression of digital media and its implications on reading behaviors will continue existing, making studying online platforms, such as Goodreads, important, as they can enhance our comprehension of the ways text is transposed into different cultural contexts.

## Appendix: Resources for Reproducibility

The following links provide access to notebooks and data files used to create the visualization and analysis presented in this thesis.

### Notebooks

1. This notebook analyzes the behavioral data of Goodreads users from Greece and the Netherlands:  
[https://github.com/FeniaMenexi/goodreads\\_readingculture/blob/main/Analysis%20of%20goodReads%20Users.ipynb](https://github.com/FeniaMenexi/goodreads_readingculture/blob/main/Analysis%20of%20goodReads%20Users.ipynb)
2. This notebook contains the scripts used to download ratings and author information from Goodreads:  
[https://github.com/FeniaMenexi/goodreads\\_readingculture/blob/main/Download%20Ratings%20and%20authors.ipynb](https://github.com/FeniaMenexi/goodreads_readingculture/blob/main/Download%20Ratings%20and%20authors.ipynb)
3. This notebook is used to download user reviews from Goodreads for analysis:  
[https://github.com/FeniaMenexi/goodreads\\_readingculture/blob/main/Download%20user%20reviews.ipynb](https://github.com/FeniaMenexi/goodreads_readingculture/blob/main/Download%20user%20reviews.ipynb)
4. This notebook processes and analyzes the Goodreads user data:  
[https://github.com/FeniaMenexi/goodreads\\_readingculture/blob/main/Goodreads\\_users.ipynb](https://github.com/FeniaMenexi/goodreads_readingculture/blob/main/Goodreads_users.ipynb)
5. This notebook conducts a textual analysis of reviews left by Greek and Dutch users on Goodreads:  
[https://github.com/FeniaMenexi/goodreads\\_readingculture/blob/main/Textual%20analysis%20of%20reviews.ipynb](https://github.com/FeniaMenexi/goodreads_readingculture/blob/main/Textual%20analysis%20of%20reviews.ipynb)

### Text Files

1. The text corpus containing Dutch reviews used in the analysis:  
[https://github.com/FeniaMenexi/goodreads\\_readingculture/blob/main/Corpus/dutch.txt](https://github.com/FeniaMenexi/goodreads_readingculture/blob/main/Corpus/dutch.txt)
2. The text corpus containing Greek reviews used in the analysis:  
[https://github.com/FeniaMenexi/goodreads\\_readingculture/blob/main/Corpus/greek.txt](https://github.com/FeniaMenexi/goodreads_readingculture/blob/main/Corpus/greek.txt)

3. A dataset of Dutch Goodreads users included in the study:  
[https://github.com/FeniaMenexi/goodreads\\_readingculture/blob/main/dutch\\_users.txt](https://github.com/FeniaMenexi/goodreads_readingculture/blob/main/dutch_users.txt)
4. A dataset of Greek Goodreads users included in the study:  
[https://github.com/FeniaMenexi/goodreads\\_readingculture/blob/main/greek\\_users.txt](https://github.com/FeniaMenexi/goodreads_readingculture/blob/main/greek_users.txt)

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