

Kiwis, Aussies care more about Kobe Bryant, loo paper than Covid-19.

Astoundingly, the happiness levels of New Zealanders and Australians do not seem to be impacted significantly by the COVID-19 outbreak. This is the finding of Dr Stephanie Rossouw (Auckland University of Technology) and Prof Talita Greyling (University of Johannesburg) who in collaboration with Afstereo launched the countries' respective Happiness Indexes in May 2019. The Happiness Index measures the sentiment levels of New Zealanders and Australians on a scale from zero 😞 to 10 😊 with 5 being neutral (neither happy nor unhappy). According to the team, the Happiness Index for New Zealand was lower on Friday 28 February, (day one of COVID-19), compared to the average level of happiness for Fridays (6.99 compared to 7.36). However, this relatively minor fall did not last, and happiness levels picked up again to its 'before Corona' levels. That was, until the announcement of the second confirmed case on 4 March when happiness levels plummeted to 6.43 (see figure 1). Since then, New Zealander's happiness has picked up again and by 11 March we are back to 'before Corona' levels.

What is interesting is that up and till the low of 4 March, the lowest recorded happiness for New Zealand was on 27 January when news broke of Kobe Bryant and his daughter, Gigi's, death. That 'Black Monday' happiness level fell to 6.43 – the same as for Corona's low of 4 March.

Figure 1: Happiness levels before and after Corona

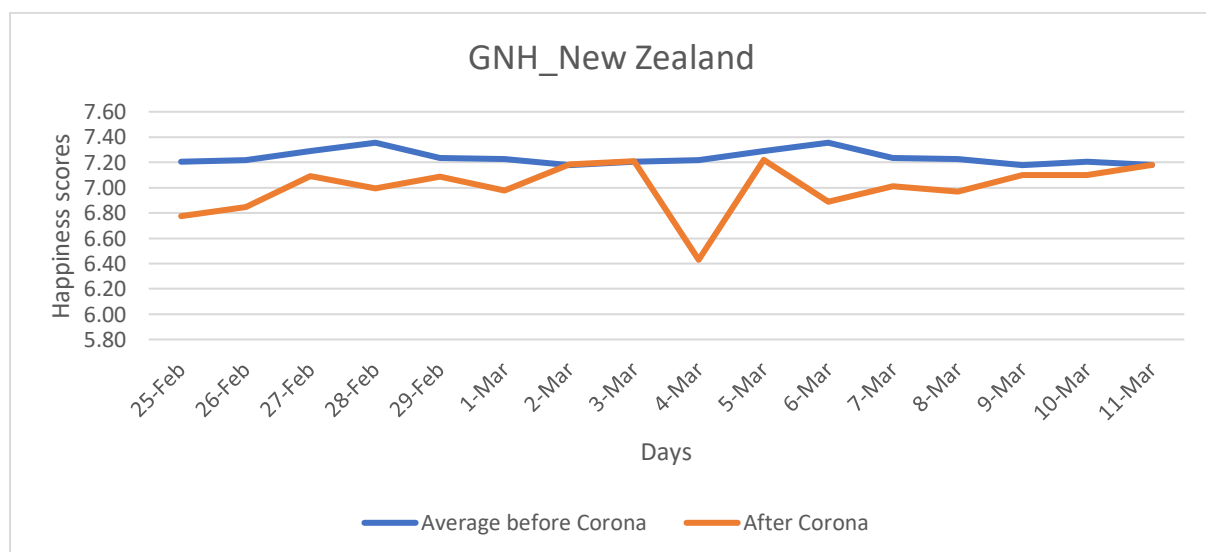
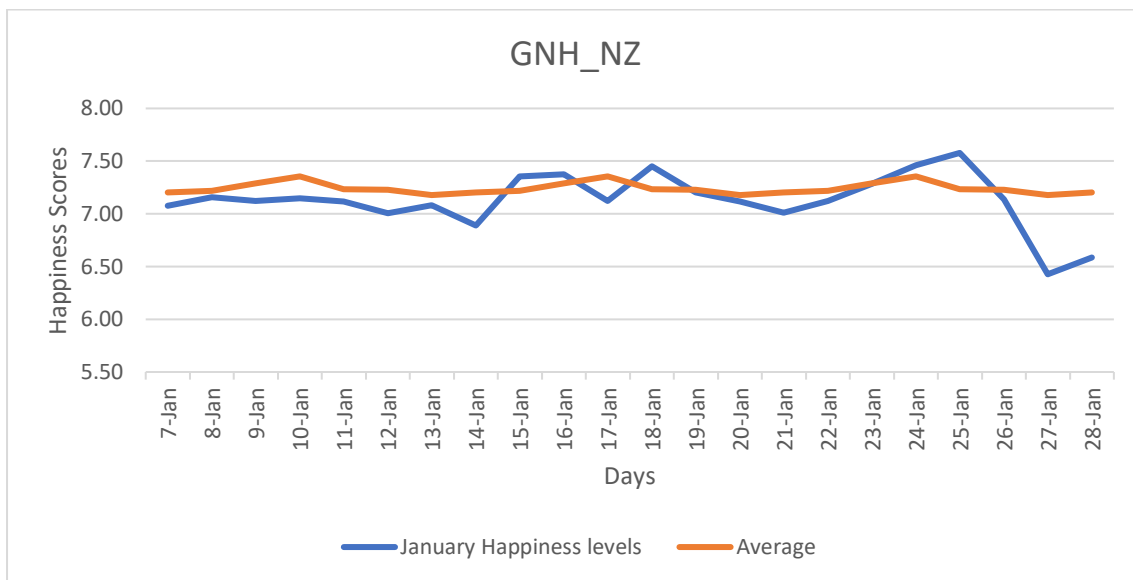


Figure 2: Happiness levels in January 2020



What about our fellow brothers and sisters across the ditch? Australia’s first case of Coronavirus was confirmed on 25 January which had no effect on their happiness level at all (see figure 3). But when we look at 27 January, Kobe’s death caused (the only) significant fall in their happiness levels! And thereafter, in the midst of people dying of the Coronavirus, no lasting effect whatsoever (see figure 4)! The only other blip was caused by the “Toilet paper crisis of 4 March” when Australians expressed overwhelming negative sentiment over the idea of running out of this white gold 😊

Figure 3: Happiness levels before and after Corona

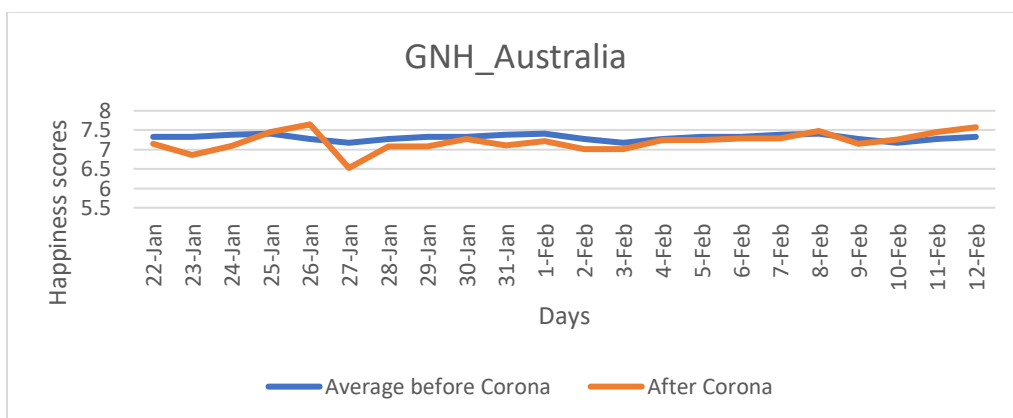
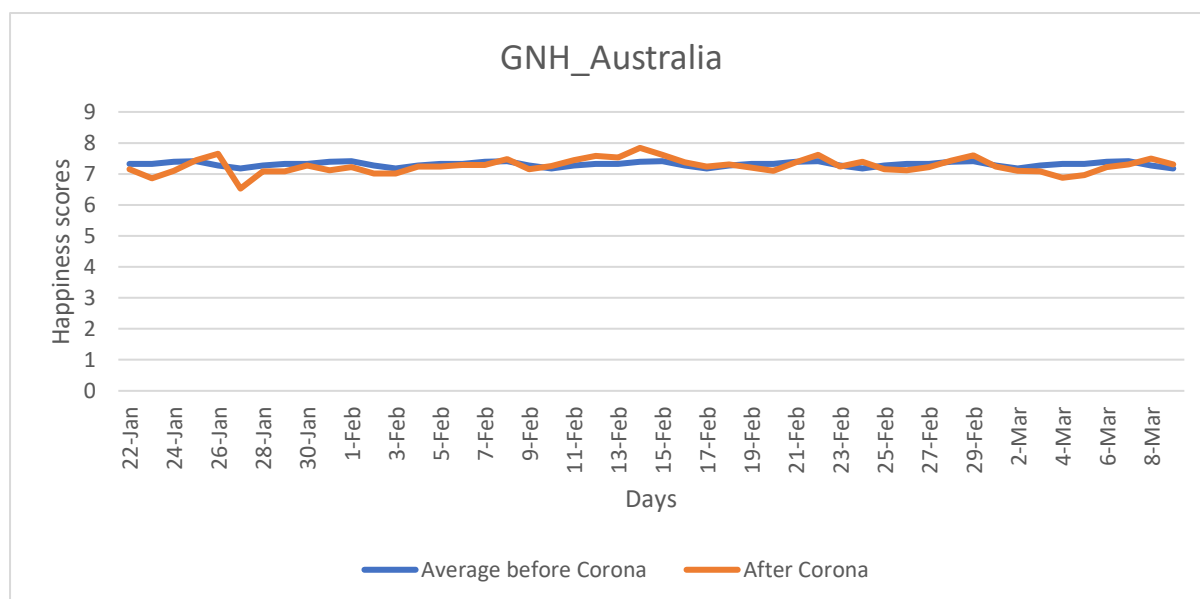


Figure 4: Happiness levels for Australia until 9 March



What does this imply about New Zealanders and Australians sentiment, related to the Coronavirus? Are we indifferent to the global health pandemic that has infected more than 125 000 people and claimed nearly 5000 lives thus far? Upon further investigation, it seems as if Kiwi's and Aussie's '*she'll be right mate*' attitude is keeping the impact of this pandemic at bay. Additionally, it is not that we do not care *per se*, but any negative sentiment expressed because of the Coronavirus is negated by the positive sentiment expressed about other events. We seem to 'overreact' when we are happy and lean towards impassiveness (underreact) when we are unhappy.

For Kiwis, they expressed positive sentiment about the New Zealand Golf Open and the release of the BTS album "Map of the Soul 7". While the Aussies favoured the Australian Tennis Open. What we have learned from previous analyses, and is once again confirmed here, New Zealanders and Australians are moved in mighty ways when it comes to their sports!

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