

# **Effect of Technology on U.S. Book Consumption**

*Audiobooks Have Become  
a Convenient Alternative to Print and Ebooks*

*Study based on survey of reading behavior in the U.S.*

*April 2019*

**Commissioned By:**

**Rakuten  
OverDrive®**

## Report: Technology's Effects on U.S. Book Consumption

### **Executive Summary:**

Rakuten OverDrive conducted a survey of 734 adults in the U.S. about reading behavior and audiobook usage specifically. The survey was conducted using an online panel in February 2019.

In an oversaturated new media market, one medium is tried and true – books. Contrary to popular belief, technology hasn't hindered a good story. Rather, it has helped an increasingly busy society continue to consume books, in a world full of always-on distractions. Reading technology has given people the option to choose the format that can be seamlessly integrated into their traditional reading habits.

In the survey, Rakuten OverDrive found one in three U.S. adults listen to audiobooks and those listeners are spending at least three hours per week consuming audiobooks, with 23% spending seven or more hours. While most respondents continue to gravitate towards print or ebooks, one third have listened to an audiobook in the last 12 months. Audiobook enjoyment is stronger with younger adults. Listeners tend to multi-task, while print or ebook readers tend to read without doing another activity. With many people constantly connected to their personal devices, it's the ease of use contributed to an uptick in audiobook usage. It's clear that technology has had a profound effect on U.S. book consumption and formats like audiobooks are flourishing.

This report provides data from the survey on how technology is changing the way Americans consume books.

### **Key Findings:**

- One in three readers consumed an audiobook in the past year
- 87 percent of audiobook listeners use audiobooks as a companion while multitasking, with more than half completing activities around the house including cooking and approximately 40 percent driving or exercising
- Millennials and Gen Z are driving the audiobook market with 48 percent selecting audiobooks while 24 percent of Gen X and Baby Boomers select audiobooks
- 33% of audiobook listeners borrow e-audiobooks from their library via mobile device because it's cost-effective, they like to support the local library and it's convenient to borrow books at any time

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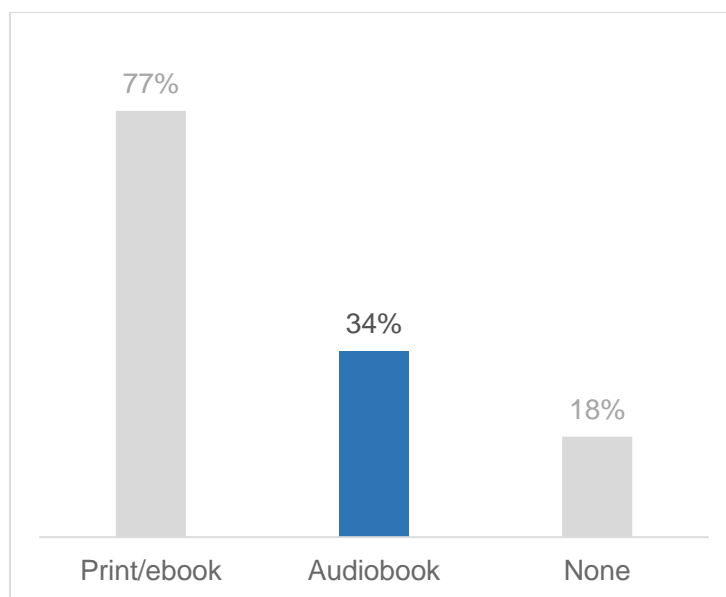
**Figure 1:** Demographics of survey respondents

*The following is a breakdown of the 734 respondents by age group*

Age Groups	Number	% of Total
18-24 years	77	10%
25-34 years	143	19%
35-44 years	162	22%
45-54 years	128	17%
55-64 years	98	13%
65+ years	126	17%
Grand Total	734	100%

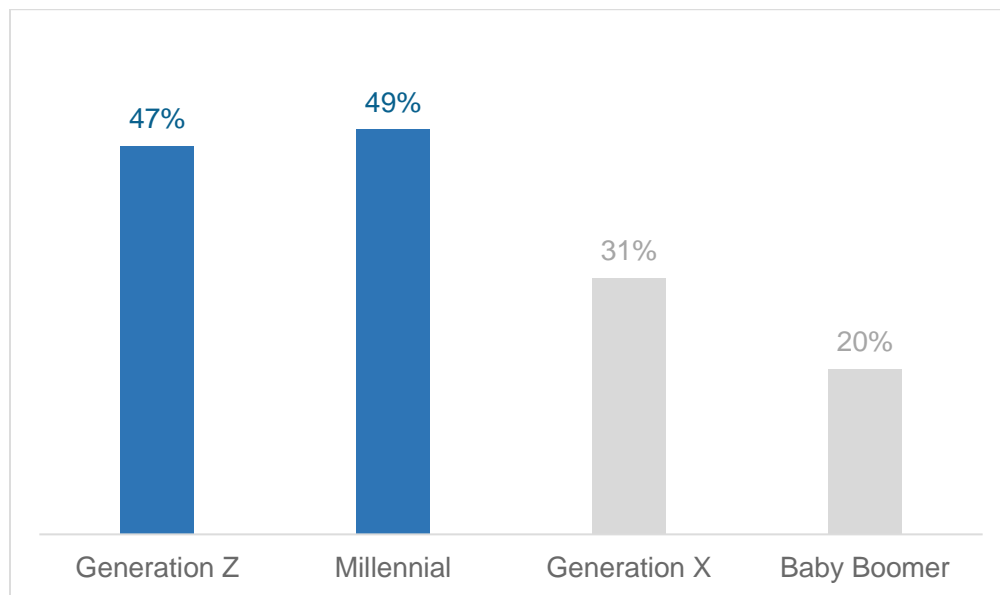
**Figure 2:** One in three consumed at least one audiobook in the past year

*Which of the following book formats have you used in the past 12 months? (Select all that apply)*



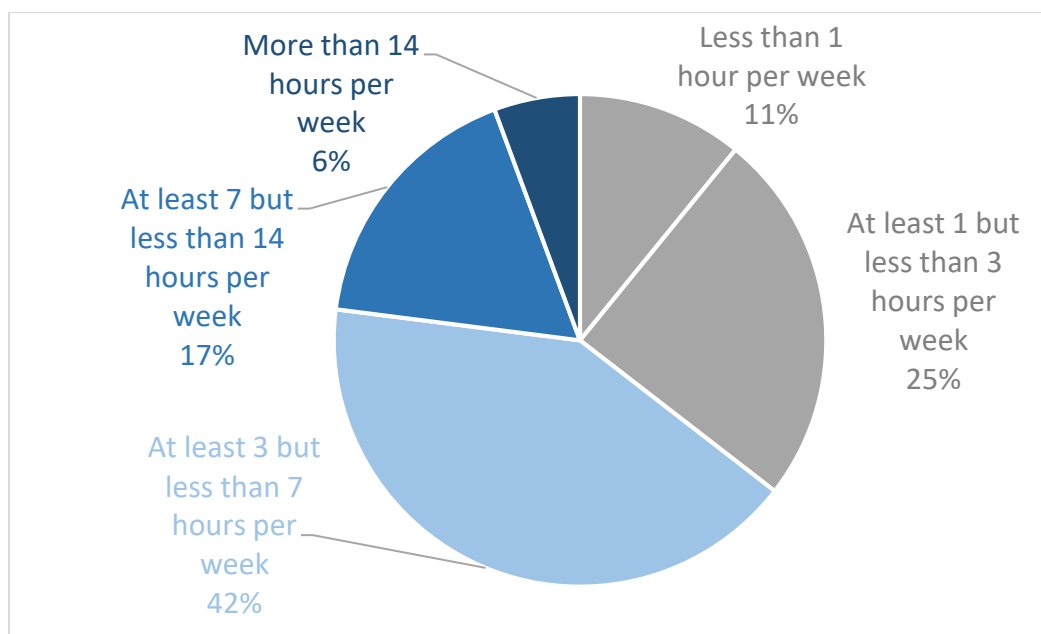
**Figure 3:** Millennials and Gen Z are driving the audiobook market nearly half selecting audiobooks

*Which of the following book formats have you used in the past 12 months? (Selected ( e ) audiobooks)*



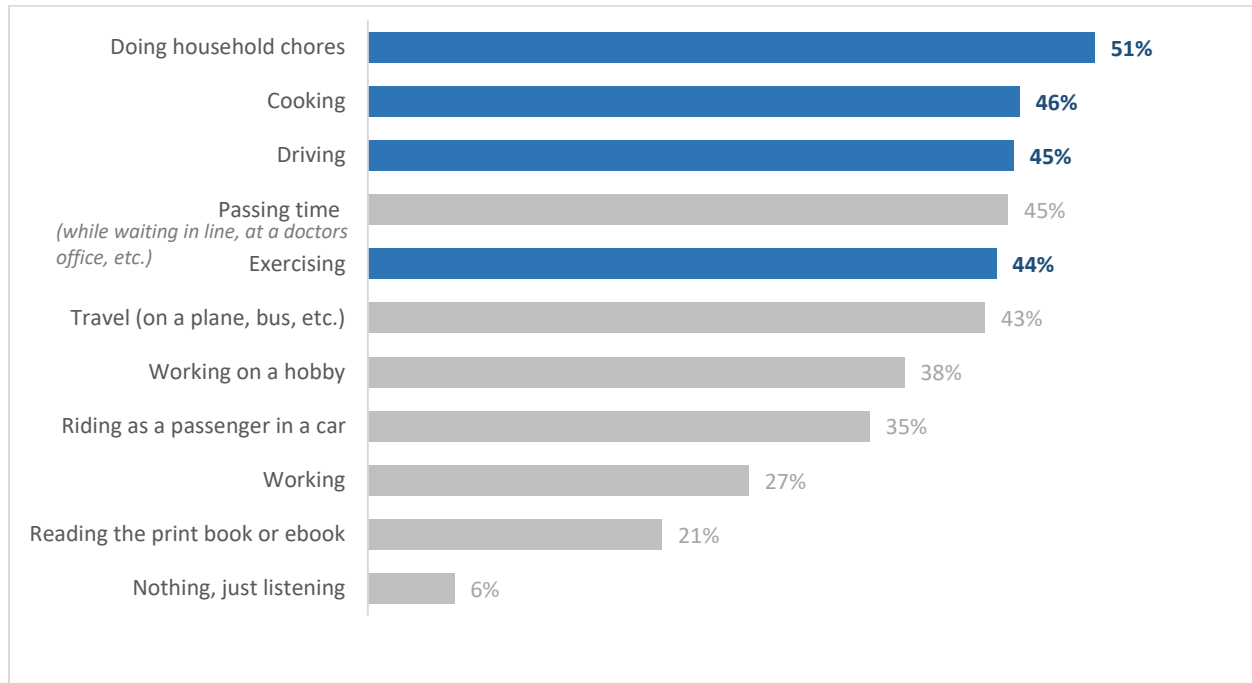
**Figure 4:** Most individuals using audiobooks spend a sizable percentage of their week listening to books

*The last time you listened to an audiobook, how many hours per week did you listen to it?*



**Figure 5:** Most individuals are participating in one of the following tasks while listening to an audiobook

*What other activities are you doing while listening to an audiobook?*

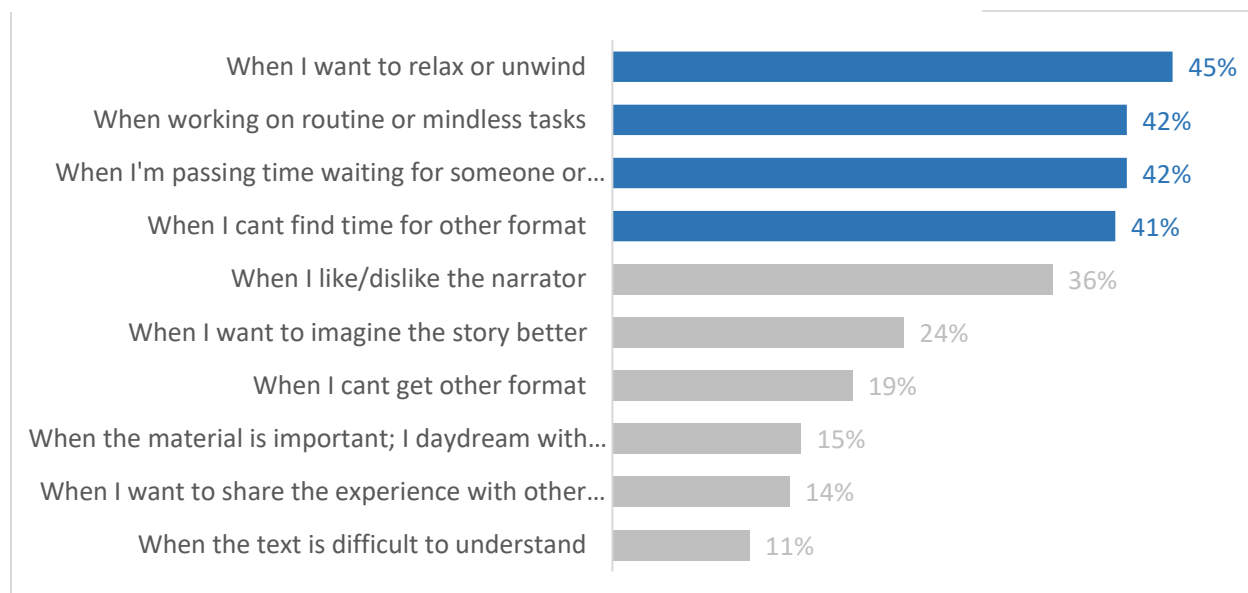


### Technology Has Allowed Reading to Fit Into Every Stage of an Individual's Life

Technology has changed how Americans read – whether browsing catalogs online, downloading ebooks 24/7 or carrying multiple books in a phone or device. As younger consumers have grown up, technology has offered them the ability to integrate reading into their fast-paced lives with audiobooks no matter their gender or age.

**Figure 6:** Most individuals are turning to audiobooks as a more immersive way to read

*When do you choose to listen to an audiobook instead of reading a print or ebook?*



### Conclusion:

Reading has evolved to meet consumers' needs through technology. With the broad adoption of the smartphone, tablets and AI assistants – it's clear why audiobooks have grown in popularity in recent years. Through the rise of audiobooks, consumers have been reconnected with reading because of one major factor – its ease of use. According to OverDrive's survey, respondents have turned to audiobooks because it gives them the ability to read during their busy schedules, is a simpler format to follow along with while multitasking and can be played right off their smartphone.

The rise of digital reading platforms have given consumers a variety of sources they can reference to check out the latest content anytime, anywhere. Even though print and ebooks are still very popular, OverDrive found that these readers are also using audiobooks because it allows them to find time for reading in their daily routine.

As audiobooks continue to gain popularity, other technologies will be implemented to enhance digital reading. From augmented reality to artificial intelligence, emerging technology can create a more immersive reading experience. Such formats have allowed consumers of all demographics to reconnect with endless amounts of content and become a world enlightened by reading.

### About Rakuten OverDrive:

Rakuten OverDrive is the leading digital reading platform for libraries and schools worldwide. Libby, named one of TIME's Best iPhone and Android Apps of 2018, is the "one-tap reading app" for libraries. We are dedicated to "a world enlightened by reading" by delivering the industry's largest catalog of ebooks, audiobooks and other digital media to a growing network of 43,000 libraries and schools in 76 countries. Founded in 1986, OverDrive is based in Cleveland, Ohio, USA, and owned by Tokyo-based Rakuten. For more information visit, [www.overdrive.com](http://www.overdrive.com).