

Audiobook routines: identifying everyday reading by listening practices amongst young adults

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Abstract

Purpose – This article explores, identifies and conceptualises everyday audiobook reading practices amongst young adults.

Design/methodology/approach – Semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten Swedish audiobook users aged 18–19. The material was analysed using qualitative content analysis and focused on their audiobook use during an average weekday, as this was the time that they listened the most. The theoretical framework consists of theories on practice, time and everyday routine.

Findings – Five timespaces emerged when audiobook practices were most prevalent: morning routines, commuting routines, school routines, after school routines and bedtime routines. Within these timespaces, several practices could be identified and conceptualised. Three mobile practices were commute listening, exercise listening and chore listening while more stationary practices were homework listening, schoolwork listening and leisure listening. An unexpected finding was how audiobooks routinely were used to aid respondents' wellbeing. This wellbeing listening was used to alleviate stress, loneliness and help listeners relax or fall asleep. Furthermore, respondents switch between Music, Audiobooks and Podcasts, which is conceptualised as MAP-switching.

Originality/value – There is a scarcity of research on audiobook use, and this paper contributes with new knowledge on audiobook reading practices, how audiobooks fit into everyday routine and provides concepts to aid further research on audiobook practices.

Keywords Audiobooks, Reading practice, Reading by listening, Everyday routine, Young adults, Digital books, Audio book, Subscription service, Streaming

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

This article explores everyday audiobook reading practices amongst young adults. Audiobooks have been rising in popularity in recent years and are becoming part of everyday routines for many people (Have and Stougaard Pedersen, 2020; Tattersall Wallin and Nolin, 2020). In Sweden, where this study is set, there has been an increase in audiobook use amongst young adults aged 16–29. Young adults are some of the most avid readers of audiobooks, together with people aged 30–49 (Wallin *et al.*, 2021). The most common way of accessing audiobooks are subscription services for digital books, but they can also be downloaded from libraries and online bookshops (Wallin *et al.*, 2021). Access to Internet connection and use of Internet services and digital technology is very high among the



Swedish population, and along with its Nordic neighbours the country has one of the more advanced digital economies of the EU (European Commission, 2020). Furthermore, several of the internationally active audiobook subscription services are Swedish. Use of various streaming and subscription services is widespread, and 70% of Swedish households have access to streaming services for music and film and 21% have a subscription service for audiobooks and e-books (Nordicom, 2021). Young people exceed the national average, with 31% of people aged 15–19 having access to an audiobook subscription service (Nordicom, 2021).

In lives experienced as harried, finding time for recreation and relaxation is often talked of as quality time (Pentzold *et al.*, 2020). Just like watching films or listening to music, book reading can be quality time for some as it offers a break from busy lives and the chance to concentrate continuously on something disconnected from everyday work (Pentzold *et al.*, 2020). However, a lack of time may impact how, when and if leisure reading is carried out. Choosing a different type of text, such as comics instead of books, can make reading possible in busy lives (Cedeira Serantes, 2016). Similarly, a different format, such as audiobooks or e-books, can work better in some contexts (Kampen Kristensen, 2019). Audiobook technology has been continuously developed over the century (Colbjørnsen, 2015). Now, audiobooks are used with devices like smartphones and headphones (or earbuds) and are available in conjunction with an array of other activities, at various times and places. Audiobook use may offer a different level of mobility, compared to traditional reading practices which may be more stationary (Tattersall Wallin and Nolin, 2020; Tattersall Wallin, 2021). Unlike many other technologies, the smartphone is not bound to a particular place or time and can be used virtually anywhere and at any time. Therefore, well-established everyday routines such as household chores, exercise and leisure activities can be combined with audiobooks. Listening simultaneously with other activities can be a way of making use of time already occupied, such as on commutes (Have and Stougaard Pedersen, 2016).

Previous studies have shown that reading by listening creates a shift into how books are read. In a study based on logs from an audiobook subscription service, temporal patterns revealed that audiobook listening was more common on weekdays compared to weekends (Tattersall Wallin and Nolin, 2020). During an average day, listening appeared to be associated with the work or school day and to bedtime, with audiobook use decreasing during the typical leisure time of late afternoon and early evening. A significant amount of time was spent on audiobooks each day, with young women listening on average 90 min and young men on average 100 min (Tattersall Wallin and Nolin, 2020). In addition to audiobooks, Swedish young people spend a considerable amount of time on other audio media, with 15–24-year-old spending 147 min listening to music and 74 min listening to podcasts on an average day (Nordicom, 2021). It is possible that audiobooks are used in similar ways to music and podcasts. In an interview study with four adult audiobook users (Have and Stougaard Pedersen, 2016), it was found that the respondents listened to books during work when suitable, and during daily commutes between work and home. Respondents noted that audiobooks provided entertainment and aided their personal development (Have and Stougaard Pedersen, 2016). This indicates that audiobooks may be an important part in some peoples' lives. However, there is still a scarcity of contemporary qualitative research on audiobook reading practices.

The purpose of this article is to identify and conceptualise young adults' audiobook reading practices and explore how audiobooks fit into everyday routines. By conceptualising these routine reading practices, the ambition is that they will become visible and that the concepts can facilitate further research on this topic. In this article, audiobook listening is studied as a form of reading and is conceptualised as *reading by listening*, following the suggestion by Tattersall Wallin (2021). The focus is specifically on digital audiobooks used via subscription service apps. The empirical material of this article consists of interviews

with ten Swedish 18 and 19-year-old in upper secondary school, all avid audiobook users. Young people are chosen as their audiobook use has been increasing in recent years, as noted above. Although some everyday routines are specific to this age group, such as those relating to school, many other activities identified in this material will be prevalent across different user groups. Therefore, the concepts introduced in this article can be useful for studies on audiobook reading practices in general.

The article is structured as follows: the theoretical framework will be outlined in the next section, followed by the methods for data collection and analysis. The results of the interview study are then presented, with the identified practices conceptualised in the discussion. The article ends with a conclusion.

Practices and daytime routines

Practice theory includes a number of approaches which can be used for understanding everyday routine. In this article, a practice is understood as “organized human activities” (Schatzki, 2005, p. 471). Activities which make up a practice are performed in time and space with material tools and amid objects (Schatzki, 2009). The materiality of objects will dictate how they can be used while various temporal and spatial settings both indicate and influence what practices are typically performed therein. The times and spaces where practices are performed can both be understood separately, not only as objective time and space but also as unified timespaces which are inherently part of activities (Schatzki, 2009). Practices may interweave as separate activities are performed together (Schatzki, 2009). For example, activities belonging to both commuting practices and reading practices may be done simultaneously within the same timespace.

Most of the practices in contemporary societies are organised around clock time, where time is measured in seconds, minutes, hours, weeks, months and years (Adam, 2006; Southerton, 2020). Without the use of clock time, most societies would come to a standstill (Southerton, 2020). There are also numerous other terms used in everyday life, which help characterise different categories of time as well as the cyclical motions of practices related to them. For example, terms like weekday, weekend, morning and night are all related to different clock times and associated with the performance of certain types of activities. The temporal concepts of *daytime*, *weektime* and *yeartime* can also be used to understand a particular category of time wherein certain practices assemble (Tattersall Wallin and Nolin, 2020).

The focus in this article is on daytime, specifically on weekdays, and the audiobook practices routinely carried out within this time. Daytime is cyclical in nature, with a morning and a night, which forms the natural beginning and end to the cycle. Human lives are arranged around the routines of going to bed, being asleep and waking up. In between these sleep-related activities, there are certain established daytime conventions. The routine activities of everyday life make up personal practices and are part of collective or societal rhythms (Gram-Hanssen *et al.*, 2020; Shove, 2009; Southerton, 2013). Patterns of peak use of resources like energy, water, public transport and roads can provide insight into such collective rhythms (Shove, 2009; Southerton, 2013).

For young people, weekdays are of course dominated by school. Related to this, a portion of the day is also typically spent getting ready to go to school, travelling to and from school, and doing homework. This leaves a varying amount of time during the day for other activities. In the interviews, five timespaces emerged where routine daytime audiobook practices assembled for the young people in this study. These timespaces also correspond with findings in previous research on everyday routines and understandings of societal rhythms. The routine timespaces which emerged from the empirical data are:

Morning routines

These routines are typically performed in the home and include waking up and getting ready for the day, this may include activities like eating breakfast, brushing teeth and putting on makeup (Ehn and Löfgren, 2009). Taking a shower is part of some people's morning routines, whilst others wash before going to bed or after exercising (Gram-Hanssen *et al.*, 2020).

Commuting routines

If sleep and sleep-related activities are the anchor of the day, commuting is often ingrained in daily life as an interlude and link between other activities (O'Dell, 2009). For different individuals, commuting can entail walking, cycling, driving, using public transport, or a combination of these. Some may have different routines for mornings compared to afternoons and commuting during different times of day could therefore occasionally be understood as separate routines. The activities carried out during the journey are also affected by whether the commute is done alone or with family or friends. Individual activities may include catching up on work or engaging in leisure activities such as listening to music or audiobooks (Have and Stougaard Pedersen, 2016; Olsson *et al.*, 2013).

School routines

School days are typically made up of different lessons, shorter breaks and a lunch break. The routines at school are mainly set by teachers, heads of schools and policies. There is, however, some autonomy to the establishment of personal routines during the school day, within the set boundaries of any particular school.

After school routines

After school routines may include many different activities, which can be understood as separate routines in themselves, but which are connected as they typically are performed in the timespaces of the afternoon or early evening after school, many of them at home. Examples of after school routines include homework, exercise, chores and meals. There are also numerous leisure activities, e.g. hobbies, activities involving others, entertainment and weekly scheduled activities like choir, band, dance or sports practices. Leisure activities and household chores not only follow some level of uniformity across different groups but are also organised in various ways depending on social and family situations (Southerton, 2006). Mealtimes and the duration of meals vary across different cultures and influence everyday temporal rhythms (Alonso-Dominguez *et al.*, 2020).

Bedtime routines

Many bedtime routine activities are similar to morning routine activities. Instead of getting ready for the day, these routines revolve around getting ready for bed: winding down, washing, doing skincare, brushing teeth and putting on pyjamas. The category also includes routines before going to sleep, such as reading a book in bed, setting an alarm or checking social media on a smartphone.

These five timespaces of everyday routines can be used to understand and categorise audiobook reading practices. The timespaces can reveal the context, characteristics and scope of activities (Schatzki, 2009).

Methods for data collection and analysis

Semi-structured interviews were carried out to explore the temporal and spatial routines of audiobook reading practices among ten Swedish young adults. As demarcation for the study,

the following criteria for participation had been set: interview respondents needed to be frequent readers of audiobooks using a subscription service and students in upper secondary school aged 18–20.

The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic impeded the recruitment of the interview respondents. Instead of the author performing classroom visits to find respondents, school librarians and teachers at upper secondary schools across Sweden were asked to post information about the study on their virtual school learning platforms. Out of over 100 contacted schools, 38 agreed to spread information about the study. Many who were unable to help gave the pandemic as reason. Additionally, posters with information about the study were displayed in at least 50 public libraries across Sweden and in a few youth clubs. Furthermore, notices were posted by the author on three Swedish social media forums for audiobook listeners.

Despite these extensive attempts at recruitment, only 15 people responded. Out of these, ten fitted the criteria for participation. The interviews were carried out via video call between May and November 2020 and lasted on average 30–45 min. The interview guide consisted of open questions, such as “At what times and places do you listen to audiobooks the most?”, and, “Could you describe an average day of audiobook listening?” Although the study was carried out during the COVID-19 pandemic, the focus was predominantly on their regular routines. However, some material on how the pandemic changed their audiobook practices was also collected. The interview audio was recorded and later transcribed by the author. After their interviews the respondents were given a film gift certificate as a token of appreciation.

Given the difficulty recruiting respondents, it is worth considering whether this limited group of ten people can be understood as representative of young audiobook users. There are many young audiobook users within the context of the study, and the activities of individuals will differ. However, the narratives from these ten respondents provides a valuable and rich material from which it becomes possible to identify some audiobook practices that are existing among young people today. There were not only some evident demographic similarities across all respondents but also some differences. Eight of them were young women, while only two were young men. At the time of the interview, respondents were 18 or 19 years old, and students enrolled in upper secondary school. In Sweden, upper secondary school is typically attended by youths aged 16–19. Unlike the compulsory primary and lower secondary school, these three years are voluntary, and students can choose a programme of study which is either academic, in preparation for higher education or vocational, preparing for direct entry into employment. Though the study was advertised to students in both types of programmes, only students from academic programmes participated in the study.

The respondents were from different parts of Sweden, and some lived in cities or towns while a few resided in the countryside. Most were from middle-class backgrounds. Two of them had either moved to Sweden as children or parents born in another country. Eight of them lived at home with their families while two resided in student accommodation during the week, travelling to their parental home at weekends. This is an ordinary set up for students whose schools are too far away from their family home for a daily commute. For the eight individuals living at home full time, their daily journey between home and school took between 20 min and over an hour each way. It is possible that longer commutes may have played a part in the development of audiobook routines.

All of them listened to audiobooks regularly using either *Storytel*, *BookBeat* or *Nextory*, which are the three largest subscription services for digital books in Sweden. The respondents thus had the financial means to subscribe to an audiobook service (which costs around 10–20€ per month). However, some shared access to one user account in the family. In most households at least one other family member listened to audiobooks. Several respondents had started using audiobooks following encouragement by parents or another

adult. Notably, one respondent became an audiobook user to negate reading difficulties caused by dyslexia, preferring them to talking books. All respondents owned the devices necessary to listen, i.e. smartphones and either headphones or earbuds, and a few also had Bluetooth-speakers. Many had several listening devices which they switched between for different situations.

The transcribed interviews were analysed using qualitative content analysis. The analysis was carried out manually using spreadsheet and word processing programmes. First, the material was condensed and coded thematically. The transcripts from each respondent were examined and every audiobook activity which could be identified in their material was coded into the spreadsheet. Then, the findings were combined at a group level to detect common patterns. After this reductive stage, accounts from the respondents were delved into again to gain a deeper understanding of the identified practices. The theories on practices and routines were especially present during the final stages and the writing up of the findings. It emerged that weekdays were the most common time for audiobook reading. All of the ten respondents listened regularly on weekdays and only three or four listened occasionally on weekends. This is also in line with the findings of Tattersall Wallin and Nolin's study (2020) on temporal audiobook patterns, which showed that listening was much more common on weekdays compared to weekends. The analysis therefore focused on the times and places of audiobook activities during an average school day. Consequently, the limited data on reading routines on weekends are not discussed in this article.

The respondents are presented using pseudonyms (P1-P10) and their interview material was anonymised during the transcription process. Examples of anonymisation include removing the names of their schools and hometowns and excluding other information which could help make them identifiable. The interview study was approved by the Swedish Ethical Review Authority. All data have been handled in accordance with the European General Data Protection Regulation.

Results

The results of the interview study will be presented in this section. The focus is on audiobook reading practices during school days. As noted in the section on practices and daytime routines, the school day consists of five different routinised timespaces that allows for separate forms of activities. Some of these timespaces can be understood as main categories, wherein several subcategories of timespaces belong. These five timespaces, and their subcategories, will be presented sequentially as they occur during an ordinary school day.

Morning routines

Of the respondents in this study, only two frequently listen to audiobooks in the morning at home, with another two listening occasionally when they are very absorbed in their book. For the remaining respondents, mornings are too hectic, and they explain they do not have the time or energy for audiobooks before leaving the house.

For the respondents who frequently listen in the morning, the audiobook appears to have a soothing and steadying effect during the morning routine. P6 listens nearly every morning, often switching between different devices for different spaces. She explains that she usually turns on the book as soon as she wakes up, connecting her phone to Bluetooth-speakers in her room. She then gets dressed and ready for school while listening to the audiobook. However, on mornings when she is very tired, she prefers music as it helps her wake up more. As P6 is ready to leave her room, she connects the smartphone to her headphones so that she can continue to listen while moving around the house. P6 also proceeds to listen as she leaves

home in the morning, also using her headphones. Another respondent who regularly listens in the mornings is P1, she explains her routine as follows:

Usually, on a school day, I start it [the audiobook] in the morning. When I go to make breakfast, I put my headphones on, it's almost the first thing I do in the morning. And later I will sit down and do my makeup and get ready, and then I usually have the book on, but not with the headphones. Then I have it playing out loud [from the smartphone]. (P1)

Just like for P6, switching between listening devices for different activities and spaces is clearly an established practice for P1. Switching from the headphones to the smartphone speakers in her bedroom is a way of aiding her morning routine. It is easier to put on makeup and do her hair without the headphones getting in the way. Using headphones or earbuds in the kitchen is a must for most of the respondents, even those who do not listen during their morning routines. Whether doing the washing up, preparing breakfast, making a cup of coffee or cooking dinner, most kitchen activities tend to be noisy. If they listen using the smartphone speakers, they will not hear the book as well as when using headphones. Similarly, playing the book out loud could disturb family members using the kitchen at the same time.

Having the right device can be important to aid listening in different situations. P7 explains that there was a period when she wanted to listen to her audiobook during every available minute as she was so engaged in the book. She then tried to listen in the shower, but as she did not have waterproof earbuds, she used the phone speakers to play the book out loud from outside the shower cubicle. However, she found that she could not hear the book very well and therefore stopped trying to listen while showering. P7 now rarely listens to audiobooks in the mornings at home.

Commuting routines

Commuting between home and school is the most common activity to combine with audiobook use among the interview respondents. Eight of them frequently listen to audiobooks on their commute. Most travel by bus or train to get to school, but one drives a car, and a couple of them can walk or cycle the whole way. Many have commutes that include several modes of transport, where they first walk or cycle to their local train station or bus stop and from there take a bus or train, a journey lasting between 15 minutes to an hour before they get to the station in the city. They then either walk or catch another bus to get to school. Most respondents listen during their entire journey between home and school. P10, however, will typically only turn on the audiobook once she has got on the bus and found a seat. She then listens until the bus pulls into the city station, only occasionally listening to the audiobook all the way to school. P10 explains that she does not like to listen in the city as there is a lot of traffic, and if she listens to the book, she will get immersed in that and not pay attention to her surroundings.

Some respondents routinely listen both in the morning and afternoon, but a few of them only listen in the afternoon on their way home, as explained by P3:

An average day I wake up at six, which is awful. I walk to the bus at a quarter past seven, and then I'm too tired to listen. Also, I have a friend who takes the same bus, so we usually sit and talk. It would be rude to sit and listen [to the audiobook] then. Some mornings when he's been ill and not there I have not listened to the book, in those cases I might listen to music. In the afternoon, at around three I'll go to the bus station, and if I'm not walking with someone to the station, perhaps three days out of five I will walk with someone, but if I do not, then I'll put on the book before I leave. So, then I walk 15 minutes from school to my bus and will be 15 minutes into the book when I step on the bus. (P3)

This quotation by P3 exemplifies how audiobook reading activities can be adjusted to the social context and, obviously, activities involving others are prioritised. All respondents say

that they would never listen whilst they are with friends or doing activities with their families. While P3 regularly listens on the afternoon journey, it has become routine to not listen in the morning. This is partly because P3 always catches the bus with a friend, and partly because he is too tired that early in the morning to concentrate on a book. He occasionally listens to music if he is riding the bus on his own but finds that audiobooks demand too much focus during the morning commute. However, P3 explained that during a period when they had online school at home because of COVID-19, he started listening to audiobooks in the mornings. Without his daily commute, he had extra time in his day and on sunny mornings he would go on walks in nature, listening to a book.

Many of the respondents alternate between listening to music, audiobooks and podcasts in similar settings. For some of the respondents these three audio media are interchangeable, but for others they serve different purposes. P1, who does not listen to audiobooks on her commute, says she prefers to listen to music when she is walking or on the bus. She notes that music affords her introspection, whereas audiobooks are more immersive and “like stepping into another world” (P1). P9 listens to audiobooks most days in his car to and from school, but one day a week he will listen to podcasts instead. As a follower of a weekly sports podcast, P9 always listens to it the day the new episode is released, forgoing his book. P1, P2 and P6 say that podcasts are something they primarily choose when they are in between audiobooks and will then listen to them in the same situations as audiobooks. P2 points out that podcasts are shorter narratives which take up the duration of a commute, which is good when she does not want to commit to a long book. P5 used to be a frequent podcast listener but mostly replaced them with audiobooks after her mother encouraged her to try out an audiobook subscription service.

School routines

Tattersall Wallin and Nolin’s (2020) study on temporal patterns of audiobook reading revealed that young people between the ages of 18 and 20 listened to audiobooks during traditional school hours. In this interview study, four of the respondents listen during the school day. P5, who also listens during her hour-long commute to and from school, frequently listens whilst in school. She explains:

I often listen right until the first lesson starts, as a relaxing thing. I also sometimes listen during breaks; it depends on the day and if I have company. I feel calmer when I listen to an audiobook, and less stressed. (P5)

For P5, listening during breaks can be either because her friends are not with her and she wants something to do, or if she needs to unwind until her next lesson. Audiobooks are evidently a way to alleviate the stress that P5 associates with school. Several of the other respondents also express how audiobooks make them feel calmer and less stressed about schoolwork. Although they do not all listen whilst in school, listening to audiobooks after school or at bedtime still benefits their wellbeing. Another respondent, P9, says that he at times listens during his lunch break. There is a café nearby his school where he sometimes sits and listens to the audiobook before the afternoon lessons begin. P7 has occasionally listened during breaks, but it is not something she does often. If they have a school assigned novel, she sometimes reads it as an audiobook, and if they need to get to a certain chapter before the lesson, she might use the breaks to catch up. Reading school novels as audiobooks is something several of the respondents talk about, and the practice is also encouraged by some of their teachers. P9 says that if they have a particular book to read, his teacher is happy for them to listen to it in audio format. The teacher has said that audiobook reading is just as good as reading in print, with the only exception being that it might not help with spelling skills. P3 on the other hand says they are not encouraged by their teachers to use audiobooks,

and that they are expected to read in print in class. For many, reading assigned books as audiobooks is something they do during their free time rather than at school. P6 is the only respondent who talks about listening to audiobooks during lessons. She says that during art and design lessons the students often work on their own projects, and most of her classmates will have headphones on during those classes. P6 often uses that time to read audiobooks while she is working on her creative projects. Sometimes, they are also allowed to wear headphones when working on their own tasks in other subjects, such as maths. This illustrates how the school routines of different young people are governed by rules set by teachers or influenced by common practices at individual schools. While it is the norm at some schools to wear headphones during certain lessons, this practice is not allowed at other schools. Likewise, some teachers and other school staff actively encourage the students to listen to audiobooks while others solely promote the reading of printed books. For example, a member of school staff encouraged P4 to try audiobooks after she found that print reading became a chore instead of a pleasure.

During online school, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all of the respondents experienced changed school routines, as they spent their school days at home attending lessons on their laptops rather than in the classroom. This led to changes in audiobook routines as well. Some started listening to audiobooks during breaks between lessons, a time they normally spent with friends. A few of them would lie down on their bed and listen for 15 min until the next lesson. This was a calming activity which offered them a respite from schoolwork and constant screen time. Several of them also started listening to audiobooks during their lunch break, while preparing or eating their meal. Audiobooks then functioned as company, as they were apart from their friends. This shows that neither practices nor routines are fixed. If societal rhythms change, such as they did during the COVID-19 pandemic, personal practices and routines will also be adjusted.

After school routines

The afternoon after school is the most common time of day for the interview respondents to listen to audiobooks. Aside from listening on the commute home, which most of them do, all of them also listen at home after the school day is over. Several of them describe the need to unwind and de-stress when they arrive home, and will listen to audiobooks then, often while eating a snack. Aside from relaxing, after-school routines consist of a wide range of different activities. These can be understood as separate routine activities that are interwoven with audiobook activities during the after-school time period. However, these are also connected as they are performed in the same timeframe and often within the home, and as such they occupy the same or similar timespaces.

Homework routines. For a few of the respondents it has become routine to read audiobooks while doing certain types of school assignments. P6 and P7 both talk about listening whilst doing their maths homework. P6 says that she can concentrate on both the book and the maths problems at the same time and is able to keep them apart. P7 points out that she only listens to audiobooks if she is working on formulas or equations with which she is already familiar with, for example when preparing for a test. If she is working on new types of maths, then she cannot combine it with audiobooks. Both these respondents say that the audiobook brings a sense of enjoyment to the maths homework, which furthers their wellbeing. P6 also combines audiobook reading with assignments for her art and design classes. P5 says she occasionally listens while doing schoolwork, but that she has realised it does not work when writing essays. As mentioned previously, several of them will also read assigned novels as audiobooks when they are able to but usually combine this homework with another after school activity.

Exercise routines. Various exercise activities are part of the after-school routines for respondents. Both P3 and P9 listen to audiobooks while working out at the gym, clearly

preferring books to music during those activities. P9 stops at a gym after school a few days a week before driving home, while P3 has a small home gym where he lifts weights several times a week. However, P3 shares the audiobook subscription account with his mother. Sometimes he will be unable to listen to audiobooks during his workout, as she might use the account on her commute. P3 then resorts to listening to podcasts instead. Sharing accounts with parents is mentioned by others as well, who note the resulting need to negotiate in the family concerning who can listen when. This affects when they are able to listen to their audiobooks. However, most have figured out a system where both parent and child can listen when they want.

Listening while going for a walk or run is also a popular activity and mentioned by five of the respondents. A few also play sports or go to activities like dance class every week, and although they do not listen to audiobooks during practice, they occasionally listen as they are walking or cycling to and from those activities.

Chore routines. Different household chores are mentioned by most of the respondents as something they combine with audiobook reading. P1 says she likes to put on an audiobook when she comes home, to do her chores, before she turns it off again for homework. P10 notes that besides commuting, cooking and cleaning are the most common activities for her to combine with audiobook reading. P10 also mentions listening to audiobooks when it is her turn to walk the family's dogs. Other respondents mention doing laundry, washing dishes and tidying up their bedrooms as things they do in conjunction with listening to an audiobook. Combining audiobooks with chores makes these activities more enjoyable according to the respondents, and sometimes even more efficient.

Leisure activity routines. Several of the respondents have hobbies which they combine with audiobook reading. Drawing, painting and doing crafts are activities P2, P5, P6 and P8 all like to do while listening to audiobooks. Most of them like to use their hands, eyes or bodies in some way while listening to their book rather than just sitting still and doing nothing else. Some combine audiobooks with other activities on their smartphones, like checking social media while listening. However, this can result in them losing focus and needing to pause and rewind the book.

P9 enjoys playing computer games and says he sometimes combines it with audiobooks. He explains how he will first put in his earbuds and connect them with his phone to listen to the book, before placing his larger gaming headphones on top of the earbuds to hear the sound from game. As he plays a lot of strategy games which demand attention from the player, this is not always possible, but he finds that he can combine some aspects of the video games with audiobook reading:

I've played over 3,000 hours on CS [Counter-strike] and then you do not need to focus to know what you're doing. You can practice shooting at the same time as listening to an audiobook. It is easy to spend an hour just clicking, shooting, it's muscle memory training and then you can listen to a book at the same time. (P9)

Several of the other respondents' mention playing simpler games on their smartphones in conjunction with listening to audiobooks. However, P9 is the only one who combines listening with computer games requiring this high level of interactivity with the player. While activities that demands the use of their eyes, hands and bodies are very common, activities that also requires headphones are rare to combine with audiobook listening. P9 explains that he is very busy with school, a part-time job and other responsibilities. Interweaving activities from two separate practices, audiobook listening and computer game playing, means that he can do two leisure activities that he enjoys, at the same time.

P4 likes to read the printed version of the book while listening to it in audio. The leisure activity interwoven with audiobook reading practices for P4 is therefore reading by seeing. While all of the respondents combine audiobook reading with other types of activities, P4 is

the only one to combine audiobooks with another book format at the same time. She started doing this after finding it harder to motivate herself to read books, something she used to love to do. She now sits down a few times a week and listens to the audiobook using her wireless earbuds and with the printed book in her hand. P4 mostly sits in her bedroom, but on a sunny day she might sit outside on the terrace. Compared to the other respondents, who listen at different places in conjunction with several types of activities, the timespaces for P4's audiobook reading practices are much more fixed. However, just like many of the others, P4 has found that reading directly after school helps her get her mind off school-related worries. She said that audiobooks were especially invaluable during the period of online school, as they helped her unwind after lessons.

Bedtime routines

Reading a book at bedtime has long been a common activity using printed books. Audiobooks are part of several of the respondents' bedtime routines. Two of them, P2 and P5, explain that they regularly listen after dinner in their bedrooms. Although they tend not to listen at their actual bedtime, listening slightly earlier in the evening is an important part of their wind down routines that later enable them to sleep. Another four of the respondents routinely listen to audiobooks in bed as they are about to go to sleep. P8 says that even if she does not listen at any other time during a day, she will always listen at bedtime. Explaining how she began using audiobooks, P8 says:

It started because I was struggling to fall asleep, so I started listening to old CD-books I had listened to as a child, when I was in bed. Then I saw an offer to try out this subscription service for free for a month. And it worked so well to listen to audiobooks when I was about to sleep, so I've continued since then. That was about a year ago. I always listen those 15 minutes in bed. Usually I fall asleep before it [the sleep timer] stops, but sometimes I will hear it stop just as I am about to fall asleep. (P8)

Audiobooks have added to P8's wellbeing, since they help her relax and fall asleep. P1, P6 and P7 also use the sleep timer found in the subscription service apps to aid their sleep-routines. Like P8, P1 sets the timer for 15 min and listens using the smartphone speakers. P6 and P7 both like to listen a little longer before falling asleep. P7 explains that she usually listens for half an hour, but if she finds the book very intriguing, she will extend the timer and listen for up to an hour. P6 usually has one audiobook that she only reads at bedtime, with another one for daytime listening. The bedtime book often has a slower pace, and she does not mind if she falls asleep before the book stops, simply rewinding it the next day.

Night-time in the bedroom stands out amongst the timespaces of audiobook listening activities. While other places may be busy, crowded or even governed by other people, the bedroom is the respondents own domain. It is a place where they can be free from other impressions and set their own rules. Furthermore, many of the other activities performed in conjunction with audiobook listening often require some sort of effort or attention. With the two interwoven activities of relaxing in bed and listening to an audiobook, bedtime reading appears more straightforward and easier to navigate.

Discussion

The routinised practices identified in the interview material will be highlighted and conceptualised in this discussion. A range of everyday practices were found in the empirical material, and the concepts provided here will help make these audiobook reading practices visible. Furthermore, the concepts can be used in further research.

Tattersall Wallin and Nolin (2020) found that young audiobook users spent a significant time listening each day, with 90–100 min on average. These numbers are derived from user transaction logs from an audiobook subscription service. For comparison, a study on daily

media usage among the Swedish population show that young people aged 15–24 spend 147 min listening to music, 74 min listening to podcasts and 57 min reading printed books during an average day (Nordicom, 2021). These figures are estimated averages provided by users of these different media, so while not completely comparable, these two studies demonstrate that audio media are popular amongst young people today. The reading practices emerging in this study show that individuals combine their audiobook listening with an array of activities. This finding may help explain how users spend over an hour and a half listening to audiobooks during an average day, and how audiobooks fit into everyday routines.

An overarching concept that can facilitate understanding of audiobook practices is *Music, Audiobook and Podcast Switching* or *MAP Switching*. Smartphone users have a choice of listening to different types of content all through the day. Choosing which media to listen to depends not only on the situation and interwoven activity but also on the individual user and on their energy levels. These three media require different levels of focus from the listener. Audiobooks require the most attention due to the sophistication of prose and the structure of literature. The audiobook experience will not be engaging if the listener loses track of the narration. The time-related investment of the audiobook listener is also usually longer, compared to the other two media forms. Audiobook recordings will often be at least around ten hours long, although the length of a novel or non-fiction book varies. Meanwhile, podcasts may be easier to follow due to the colloquial language and conversational style. Furthermore, a typical podcast episode is significantly shorter than an average audiobook. Finally, with music, there is no requirement to listen attentively to the lyrics. Music can provide enjoyment even without the listener creating meaning from the text, as it is as much about the melody and the feeling it provides to the listener. As seen in the results, music provides the respondents space for contemplation or can help them feel more energised. Audiobooks are more immersive, and podcasts are often used as a replacement when users are between books. MAP switching occurs several times during the day, reflecting both the situated needs of the user and the context of listening.

Previously, switching between content has been an established practice amongst television viewers using a remote control to flip through the channels. Similarly, radio listeners could use the dials to switch the station. Now, with the Internet and smartphones, such switching practices have changed. Users are no longer tied to one type of media in the same device, as different types of content are accessed in similar ways in smartphone apps. Furthermore, with these changes, the user is in full control over the content they engage with. Previous switching practices were about finding a radio station or television channel playing something the user would enjoy. Now, the user can decide exactly which song, podcast or audiobook they want to listen to in that moment. The findings suggest that listening practices are related as the media are used in similar ways, while practices differ for content used with the sense of seeing. Switching between apps for music, audiobooks and podcasts is easily done. Some platforms now even supply all three types of content in one app. With the increasing availability of digital media content on mobile devices like smartphones, MAP switching is likely going to continue to become more common.

In a previous study, it has been suggested that the flexibility of digital audiobooks enables reading in mobile situations, unlike more stationary traditional reading practices (Tattersall Wallin and Nolin, 2020). Three of the most visible audiobook practices in this material are mobile. The first of these is here conceptualised as *commute listening* which is the practice of listening to audiobooks on a journey between places, such as from home to school or work. These are routinised activities which typically take place every weekday. Audiobooks are possible to combine with any mode of transport, as the listener does not need the use of their arms or eyes for reading. In the interview material, this practice can be seen amongst individuals who drive, cycle and walk to school, as well as those who take a bus or train.

Combining commutes with audiobooks clearly provides individuals with enjoyment. Previous studies have also found that listening to audiobooks or music can turn commutes into quality time (Olsson *et al.*, 2013; Have and Stougaard Pedersen, 2016). Another practice which involves moving around is *exercise listening*, which may entail activities such as listening to audiobooks while lifting weights in a gym or going for a run outside. Furthermore, *chore listening* is a mobile practice typically performed in the home, such as in conjunction with activities like cooking, doing laundry or tidying up. Aside from being mobile, all three concepts outlined here highlight practices where audiobook listening provides enjoyment in situations which are more or less necessary in everyday life. While different individuals will enjoy activities like cleaning and exercising to different degrees, audiobooks appear to make these activities more pleasurable for all users. Furthermore, MAP-switching occurs in these mobile practices, just like in some of the more stationary audiobook practices outlined below.

Three stationary audiobook practices emerged in the material. These tend to be performed while the listener is seated and using their hands or eyes. The first stationary concept is *homework listening* which is the practice of listening to audiobooks while doing assignments for school. For example, maths assignments were combined with audiobook listening by a couple of the respondents in this study but also other types of homework. Some respondents also occasionally use audiobooks to complete assigned reading, choosing to listen to novels in audio-format. Related to homework listening is *schoolwork listening*, this concept relates to the practice of listening to audiobooks while in lessons at school. This can primarily be seen when the listener performs individual work in class, such as an art project. What becomes visible in relation to these two practices is the role adults play in young people's reading practices. Teachers or other school staff who sanction audiobook use have an impact on aspects such as where and how much young people listen to audiobooks. Similarly, parents also play a role in encouraging young people to become users of audiobooks. While some individuals would have listened to audiobooks regardless, the recommendation and permission of adults appears to have an impact on young adults' audiobook use and their perception of this as a legitimate reading practice. The third of the more stationary practices is conceptualised as *leisure listening*, and this includes audiobook use in conjunction with all types of leisure activities. Respondents in this study combine audiobook listening not only with doing arts and crafts but also with playing computer games, checking social media or doing other activities on their smartphones. One respondent also combined audiobook listening with reading the printed version of the book at the same time. This is a broad concept and for other groups of audiobook users this practice may include many other types of leisure activities.

As it becomes clear where the subscription-based audiobook becomes easy to use, it also becomes evident where listening is not performed because of various obstacles. For example, weekday mornings often come with a fixed deadline, such as needing to leave the home at a specific time. Typically, certain activities need to be performed before that deadline. Routine morning activities are performed in several different types of spaces and tend to incorporate several rooms in the home. These can in themselves be understood not only as different timespaces but also as part of the timespace of the home in the morning. For instance, waking up usually happens in the bedroom, showering in the bathroom and breakfast is prepared in the kitchen. Furthermore, there is often movement back and forth between these spaces, as many activities are done in particular sequences and belong to specific rooms. For those who live with others, as most young people in this study do, there is also a need to negotiate the morning routine around other individuals. Some of the spaces used in the morning are private, while others are shared. Moving quickly between different types of spaces and activities may create a hectic environment, and despite the mobility of the audiobook, it does not appear to be conducive with morning routines for some individuals. At the same time, a

few respondents appear to use audiobooks in the morning to alleviate feelings of stress associated with morning routines.

The most unexpected finding in this study was how audiobook listening is used as a wellbeing routine. While many routines are established to aid wellbeing and to form structure in hectic times, audiobooks are routinely used as a form of medicinal tool which is employed when individuals are experiencing negative emotions. This *wellbeing listening* practice has four subcategories: *de-stress listening* is when audiobooks are used to ease feelings of stress. For instance, schools are in different ways a stressful environment and audiobooks help individuals alleviate this stress, both when audiobooks are used at school and in the afternoon or evening on weekdays. This may explain why young people listen significantly more during school days, compared to the weekends, as found both in this study and by [Tattersall Wallin and Nolin \(2020\)](#). *Social substitute listening* is a wellbeing practice performed when respondents are alone, as a replacement for human company. Audiobooks can also be used to avoid social interaction or to ease feelings of loneliness in a crowd. In situations when an individual is excluded or wishes to retreat, audiobook listening becomes a private and sheltered timespace in which they can immerse themselves. Furthermore, *unwinding listening* is when audiobooks are used to help the listener relax, such as when respondents have come home after school. This practice helps them clear their minds of impressions and thoughts of the day. It can also be used in the evening to help listeners wind down before getting ready for bed. Finally, *sleep-inducing listening* is primarily related to bedtime reading. Listening to audiobooks helps some individuals relax, which in turn makes it easier to fall asleep. For those struggling with sleep, this significantly helps their wellbeing. Audiobooks may also provide a feeling of calm and safety, reminiscent of being read to as a child at bedtime. Several of these wellbeing practices not only are related or overlap somewhat but are also defined practices in themselves.

The impact of reading on mental health has previously been studied in bibliotherapy research. Bibliotherapy initiatives may involve the reading of self-help books prescribed by primary-care physicians or reading and discussing fiction in a bibliotherapy reading group ([Brewster et al., 2012](#); [Pettersson, 2018](#)). [Pettersson \(2018\)](#) found that participants in a bibliotherapy group experienced increased wellbeing and even found everyday chores easier and more pleasurable to perform after taking part in the initiative. This is similar to the impact audiobooks have on the wellbeing of the respondents in this study. However, instead of being prescribed literature, these young people are choosing audiobooks to read based on their own interests and for their own pleasure. Previous studies on leisure reading have also found that reading can reduce feelings of stress and help young people relax or pass the time in a pleasurable way ([Rothbauer, 2011](#)). The findings in this article therefore connect to research in other fields and may be of interest for researchers with different approaches. Here, audiobook use has been studied with a practice theory approach, and it was highly unanticipated to identify several practices where audiobooks were routinely used to support the wellbeing of the listener. Future studies may explore this topic further and build on these findings.

Conclusion

The purpose of this article was to identify and conceptualise young adults' audiobook reading practices, as well as to explore how audiobooks fit into their everyday routines. This was explored with the help of semi-structured interviews with ten young Swedish people aged 18–19, all frequent users of audiobooks through a subscription service. With ten interviews, the empirical material for this article is limited but can still help identify emergent practices. Several concepts were introduced in this article. Aside from providing insight into how audiobooks are used by young people in Sweden, it is suggested that these concepts will be useful for further research discussing audiobook routines among different user groups.

Five routinised timespaces emerged from the interview material and correlated with previous research, namely morning routines, commuting routines, school routines, after school routines and bedtime routines. These timespaces allow for different types of activities. Several practices could be identified and conceptualised. Three typically mobile practices were *commute listening*, *exercise listening* and *chore listening* while more stationary practices were *leisure listening*, *homework listening* and *schoolwork listening*. In several of these practices, respondents alternated between listening to music, audiobooks and podcasts and this practice was conceptualised as *MAP-switching*. An unexpected finding was how audiobooks routinely were used to aid the respondents' wellbeing. This practice of *wellbeing listening* was made up of four subcategories: *de-stress listening*, *social substitute listening*, *unwinding listening* and *sleep-inducing listening*. These wellbeing listening practices were often combined with the practices outlined above.

There is a need for more research on this topic as this material shows that there appears to be changes in everyday routines. Here, these changes are related to the use of audiobooks, but they also overlap with other listening practices such as using music and podcasts. This is a finding which could be explored further. Additional studies on audiobook practices could also include other user groups or more respondents. Furthermore, the wellbeing practices identified here could be explored in future studies.

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