Preferences and attitudes of audiobook users in Sweden: Surveying Swedish audiobook groups on Facebook

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The main objective with this Master's thesis is to better understand the preferences and attitudes of audiobook users in Sweden who are also members of Swedish Facebook audiobook groups. In recent years audiobooks have risen to prominence, although their previously inferior status is still evident in the lack of available research. Development of digital technology together with our busy modern lives have facilitated this rapid growth. The data gathering method used was a self-completion questionnaire distributed via Swedish audiobook Facebook groups. I endeavored to answer the following research questions: Why, how and to what extent do members of Swedish Facebook audiobook groups consume audiobooks? What attitudes do these users exhibit towards audiobooks’ affordances? Uses and gratifications theory and McLuhan's laws of media were used as a theoretical framework. The study both supports and challenges previous findings. Users primarily audio read because they can do other things at the same time; thriller/suspense/mystery are the most popular genres; many listen to podcasts and read print books, but a substantial number also exclusively listen. The study also found that most audio read quite a lot and prefer to do it at home, while the car is not such a common location. The narrator is overall important, but not when one chooses an audiobook. Though most subscribe to a streaming service, a substantial number of users borrow from a local library.

Digital audiobook, audio reading, Facebook group, subscription service, remediation, uses and gratifications theory, McLuhan's laws of media
# Table of contents

1. **INTRODUCTION**
   - 1.1 Problem description ........................................................................................................... 1
   - 1.2 Goal and research questions .............................................................................................. 2
   - 1.3 Limitations .......................................................................................................................... 3
   - 1.4 Outline of the thesis ........................................................................................................... 4

2. **LITERATURE REVIEW**
   - 2.1 The audiobook – definition and history .............................................................................. 5
     - 2.1.1 The definition – is audiobook a book and does one read it? ........................................ 5
     - 2.1.2 A brief history of the audiobook .................................................................................... 7
   - 2.2 Common objections to audiobook listening ......................................................................... 8
     - 2.2.1 Passivity and distractedness ....................................................................................... 8
     - 2.2.2 Abridgments, pace and narrator ................................................................................. 10
   - 2.3 Recent research .................................................................................................................. 12
     - 2.3.1 Research into the audiobook phenomenon .................................................................. 12
     - 2.3.2 Research on e-books in Sweden ................................................................................... 13
   - 2.4 Audiobook usage worldwide and in Sweden ..................................................................... 15
     - 2.4.1 Worldwide ................................................................................................................... 15
     - 2.4.2 Sweden ....................................................................................................................... 16

3. **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**
   - 3.1 Affordance and remediation ............................................................................................... 18
   - 3.2 McLuhan’s laws of media or media effects ......................................................................... 19
   - 3.3 Uses and gratifications theory (UGT) ................................................................................ 21

4. **METHODOLOGY**
   - 4.1 Choice of method ................................................................................................................ 24
   - 4.2 Data collection .................................................................................................................... 24
   - 4.3 Facebook as a sampling frame ........................................................................................... 26
   - 4.4 Data analysis ....................................................................................................................... 27
   - 4.5 Validity and reliability ......................................................................................................... 27
   - 4.6 A few caveats ...................................................................................................................... 28

5. **RESULTS**
   - 5.1 Survey participants .......................................................................................................... 29
   - 5.2 Choosing audiobooks ......................................................................................................... 32
   - 5.3 Audiobooks in everyday life ............................................................................................... 34
   - 5.4 Attitudes towards a-books’ affordances ............................................................................ 37

6. **ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**
   - 6.1 Research question one: Why, how and to what extent do members of Swedish audiobook Facebook groups consume audiobooks? ........................................................ 43
     - 6.1.1 Reasons for choosing a-books ....................................................................................... 44
     - 6.1.2 Locations where a-book consumption takes place ....................................................... 46
     - 6.1.3 Preferred genres ............................................................................................................ 47
     - 6.1.4 Usage of other book formats and podcasts ................................................................. 49
     - 6.1.5 Factors relevant when choosing a particular a-book .................................................... 51
     - 6.1.6 How much users listen ................................................................................................ 52
     - 6.1.7 Relevance of local libraries for a-book provision ....................................................... 53
   - 6.2 Research question two: What attitudes do members of Swedish Facebook audiobook groups exhibit towards audiobooks’ affordances? .................................................... 54
     - 6.2.1 Common objections to a-book listening: passivity and distractedness ..................... 54
     - 6.2.2 Common objections to a-book listening: existence of narrators, abridgments and a set pace ....................................................................................................................................... 56
List of figures

Figure 1: McLuhan’s tetrad. Laws of media or media effects ...................... 20
Figure 2: Participants by gender ...................................................... 30
Figure 3: Participants by age .............................................................. 30
Figure 4: Participants by educational level ........................................ 31
Figure 5: Streaming providers used by the participants ....................... 32
Figure 6: Reason for listening to audiobooks .................................... 32
Figure 7: Preferred audiobook genres ............................................. 33
Figure 8: Factors for choosing audiobooks ....................................... 34
Figure 9: Yearly audiobook usage .................................................. 34
Figure 10: Monthly audiobook usage ............................................... 35
Figure 11: Daily audiobook usage ................................................... 35
Figure 12: Use of other book formats and podcasts ......................... 36
Figure 13: Most common places for audiobook listening .................... 36
Figure 14: Common objections to a-book listening: passivity ............ 37
Figure 15: Common objection to a-book listening: less engaging ........ 37
Figure 16: Common objection to a-book listening: requires less concentration 38
Figure 17: Common objection to a-book listening: the narrator/speaker interferes with the reception of the text .......................... 38
Figure 18: Common objection to a-book listening: the pace cannot be controlled .............................................................. 39
Figure 19: Common objection to a-book listening: abridgments .......... 39
Figure 20: Presence of music in an a-book ....................................... 40
Figure 21: Multitasking as the primary benefit of a-books ............... 40
Figure 22: Importance of the narrator/speaker ................................ 41
Figure 23: Choosing different books based on format ........................ 41
Figure 24: Resurrecting the sound of literature as an important contribution of a-books .............................................................. 42
1 Introduction

Audiobooks (or a-books for short) are on the rise. They have been growing tremendously in popularity for the past few years. Following the rapid development of technology, especially the widespread use of smartphones, and coupled with our busy modern lives so demanding of multitasking, audiobooks have become mainstream. Good e-reader’s global audiobooks report reveals that audiobooks are the fastest growing format in digital publishing (Kozlowski, 2019). While other forms of reading are on the decline, audiobook listening is conspicuously not a part of that trend (Rubery, 2016; 2011; Wikberg, 2018b; 2019). Despite the popularity, this phenomenon is still largely under-investigated (Rubery, 2016; Have & Stougaard Pedersen, 2017). The lack of research can be attributed to the fact audiobooks have historically been considered inferior to printed books and ignored by the critics (Rubery, 2016). The debate about a-books’ standing in the literary world today and in our culture in general is an ongoing one. Questions raised at the end of the 19th century, when Edison invented the phonograph – effectively inventing talking books – are still to be discussed and answered in-depth. Is talking book a book? Is listening (as good as) reading? How will this technological novelty affect our experience of (written) texts? There is no doubt that audiobooks are profoundly affecting the publishing world, literature itself and the act of reading (Pennlert, 2018a).

This thesis aims to add to the body of knowledge about this global phenomenon by investigating one of the strongest markets – the one in Sweden. Audiobooks are very popular in this Scandinavian country. This is evident in the fact of their continuous presence in the press as well as the rising number of users subscribing to one of the unlimited streaming services available, such as the world known Storytel (Wikberg, 2018a; Williams, 2019a; Lenas, 2019). Although comparatively a small country, quite a lot of people are audiobook consumers – according to a recent study, 30% of the population in Sweden (Wallin, Tattersall Wallin & Gunnarsson Lorentzen, 2019). The three largest subscription services for a- and e-books, Storytel, BookBeat and Nextory, represent notable actors in the Swedish book market. Users tend to prefer such services to other ways of acquiring digital content (Wikberg, 2019; Wallin et al., 2019). In fact, subscription services have almost completely taken over audiobook sales specifically (Wallin, 2019). Public libraries in Sweden are also offering audiobooks and they do so free of charge and in a similar manner as in the case of aforementioned subscription services. In fact, it is these companies that have adopted and adapted the library model. They offer access to all of their materials, but only to read and loan, not own – the difference being, of course, that they do so for a monthly fee – but a reasonable one, we might add (Wallin et. al. 2019). Libraries are, among other things, dedicated to offering free access to knowledge and information in every form, including digital (Svensk biblioteksförening, 2015). Moreover, they are meant to be tailored to the needs of the patrons (Svensk biblioteksförening, 2015), so they greatly benefit from knowing them – and also from understanding current trends in the publishing world, which is what my study contributes to by investigating audiobook users in Sweden.
My goal is to map audiobook user preferences and attitudes towards audiobook associated issues in order to better understand and serve user needs. For this I have decided to use Facebook as a sampling frame, due to its popularity and widespread use. Swedish Facebook audiobook groups are quite large and active and seemed as an appropriate survey sample since I expected to be reaching frequent audiobook users, which was my goal. What initially sparked my interest in this topic was the fact that I myself, a passionate reader, turned to a-books after I realized that the time I used to have for reading had diminished so much it barely existed. Audiobooks greatly contributed to me being able to (audio) read much more than it would be possible otherwise, in different circumstances and time of day, for example while commuting or before going to sleep. At the time I was working in a public library and came across some quite enthusiastic audiobook users – and some patrons that were extremely negative towards a-books. After realizing that a-books are becoming increasingly more popular in Sweden and around the world, I decided to endeavor to explore this topic and gain a deeper understanding of what audiobooks are all about.

1.1 Problem description

The audiobook boom can partly be explained by advanced technology making it possible to stream and listen to a-books whenever and wherever; partly because it enables multitasking: partly because human beings love stories in every shape and form. A-books are a complex phenomenon yet to be examined from all of these angles, as well as the underlying questions of their influence on storytelling, literature in general, the act of reading and culture itself. As has been mentioned, research on audiobooks is still quite limited (Rubery, 2016; Have & Stougaard Pedersen, 2017). This is now changing since a-books have become so popular and such a big part of the publishing market (Kozlowski, 2019; Wikberg, 2018b). My assumption is that understanding and knowing the users better will shed light on this phenomenon as a whole and consequently yield proper assessment and improvement of services that offer audiobooks (Snow et al., 2008; Seadle, 2000). In accordance with Uses and gratifications theory, users are seen as active participants in their choice of media and capable of accurately informing researchers of their preferences and attitudes.

Books and reading are an important research area for Library and Information science (LIS) and this includes a-books, as they are considered and treated as books by experts, libraries, publishers and users alike (Kovač, Phillips & Wischenbart, 2019; Rubery, 2016; Have & Stougaard Pedersen, 2017; Svensk biblioteksförening, 2015). The book market is rapidly changing as books go digital, effecting every aspect of the book world, from production to distribution, promotion and reading as a phenomenon (Wallin, 2019). Changing technology continues to challenge libraries and it impacts them directly as the words “reading” and “book” take on new meanings. Libraries’ central mission of facilitating democratic access to information in every shape and form obviously includes digital material, i.e. e- and a-books (Svensk biblioteksförening, 2015; Rubin, 2016), hence it is relevant for them to know more about this still emerging user group. The focus of this thesis is user perspective, specifically what preferences users have in relation to this particular medium and how they perceive audiobooks and their media specific attributes or affordances (Norman,
I was interested primarily in what users themselves have to say about why and how they consume audiobooks and what they think about a-books’ affordances.

1.2 Goal and research questions

The main goal of this thesis is to gain a better understanding of the preferences and attitudes of audiobook users in Sweden who are also members of Swedish audiobook groups on Facebook. Such an investigation will assist in better understanding and meeting the needs of current users, which can potentially also lead to improving the quality of the existing services offered to them, and the development of new and more advanced services (Snow et al., 2008). In order to achieve this goal, the following research questions have been formulated:

1. Why, how and to what extent do members of Swedish Facebook audiobook groups consume audiobooks?
2. What attitudes do members of Swedish Facebook audiobook groups exhibit towards audiobooks’ affordances?

1.3 Limitations

My research has been limited to Sweden and investigating adult Swedish audiobook users who consume digital audiobooks – whether they subscribe to one of the streaming services or borrow them digitally from a local library – and listen to them on their smartphone. The term “audiobook” includes any sound recording of a printed book read aloud verbatim by a narrator/audiobook speaker (Rubery, 2016; Have & Stougaard Pedersen, 2017). Here I will include born audio since they require a written template to read from and the targeted users will not distinguish between born audio and not. DAISY, talking books for people with print disabilities (“DAISY”, 2017) are also included, since today they can be borrowed and used in a similar manner as commercial a-books (“Appen Legimus”, 2019).

The most evident limitation of my research is the lack of probability sampling. Since it was impossible to employ any other sampling method, I decided on a convenience sample – my target groups became Facebook groups of Swedish audiobook consumers. This issue will be expanded upon in chapter 4: Methodology. In conclusion, though the findings might not be generalizable in a wider context, they should still be of interest to those exploring the a-book phenomenon and using Facebook to conduct research.
1.4 Outline of the thesis

This introductory chapter is followed by literature review which includes a brief history of the audiobook together with a short exposition of the relevant philosophical and social issues connected with the phenomenon and an overview of recent research on the topic. This chapter is followed by a theoretical framework section where I discuss the concepts of remediation and affordance, McLuhan's tetrad (laws of media or media effects) and Uses and gratifications theory. After that follows the methodology section in which online questionnaires and their application on social media are considered. Next the results of the questionnaire are presented, followed by analysis and discussion. Lastly, conclusion and summary and given.
2 Literature review

Firstly, I will present a brief history of the audiobook and clarify which definition will be used here – there is definitely a need to do so, as will be made obvious in the following subchapter. Secondly, common objections to audiobook listening will be discussed, as some of them are included in my research. Thirdly, recent research on audiobooks and users will be discussed. Lastly, a short overview of a-book usage worldwide and in Sweden is given. This background information is important in order to have a better understanding of this rapidly changing and growing phenomenon that requires more studying, and to properly frame my own research.

2.1 The audiobook – definition and history

2.1.1 The definition – is audiobook a book and does one read it?

Different terms were originally used for sound recordings: phonographic books, talking books, books on tape, audiobooks. There was no agreement until 1994 when the Audio Publishers Association (APA) decided on the term “audio book” as the industry’s standard (Rubery, 2016). Today it is mostly spelled without the space, i.e. as one word: audiobook. We can see that on APA’s official website (www.audiopub.org). This broad category includes quite different subcategories. Talking books for blind people can differ substantially from its commercial counterparts. On the one hand, talking books for the blind entail complete faithfulness to the original print book, reading verbatim even appendices; on the other, commercial audiobooks may (but not necessarily) incorporate sound effects, full casts, abridgements (Rubery, 2016). Not to mention the phenomenon of born audio books that have no print version, or the possibility of books with no narrator – or better said, no real person who narrates, but a machine. And this is just the start, since the technology enabling us to listen to audiobooks keeps evolving and opening new possibilities.

Here we can briefly address the long debated questions: are audiobooks even books and does one read them? Rubery (2016) posits that they simultaneously are and are not books. They are books because they contain the same words as printed books, the same content: if it is Dostoevsky who wrote the story in question, it will be his name on the cover, no matter print or audio. On the other hand, the method of delivery is radically different, affecting reception and interpretation. A book is read, and reading is generally thought of as making sense out of written symbols, in which case an audiobook could not be considered a book. However, it is not easy to define what a book is in the first place. During the centuries, it underwent substantial changes, from clay tablets, scrolls, manuscripts, codices to computer screens. As Rubery (2016) notes, The Oxford Companion to the Book defines the term as “shorthand for any recorded text” - thus allowing us to put audiobook within that definition. Without a doubt, a-book’s development is and was historically dependent on the printed book. Rubery (2016) argues that “the talking book developed both as a way of
reproducing the printed book and as a way of overcoming its limitations” (p. 3). Audiobook therefore can be conceptualized as a remediation of the printed book – hence a different kind of book, an audiobook. Remediation in this context means “representation of one medium in another”, as defined by Bolter & Grusin (1999, p. 45). However, the affordances that the new medium brings, could and/or do make it into something different. The use of the voice, or voices, music, sound effects, abridgements, etc. make the a-book more similar to, for example, radio drama. As Rubery (2016) puts it, one can either emphasize “talking” (i.e. audio) or “book” (p. 3).

Another important question, linked to the previous one, is whether we read or listen to an audiobook. If asked in a conversation about literature and books, I think most would say that they have read it, just as a blind person would describe reading a book in Braille as reading, not touching or something of that sort. The definition of reading should therefore be expanded to mean not only the decoding of visual symbols, but also the “decoding of mediated oral narration” (Have & Stougaard Pedersen, 2017, p. 149). It should be duly noted that the debate is still ongoing concerning both the abovementioned questions. However, in the public eye audiobooks seem to be considered books. This is evident in the fact how print books and audiobooks are frequently juxtaposed – in research, newspapers or a personal conversation. Historically (and to some degree this applies even today, but less) a-books have been considered unworthy imitators of real books and ignored by the critics. As Rubery (2016) points out: “Listening to books is one of the few forms of reading for which people apologize” (p. 1). However, as much as these questions are both interesting and important, they are not the focus of this research, hence will not be dealt with in-depth.

In line with popular perception, in this thesis the audiobook will be considered a book and the act of listening will be considered reading – although a different kind of book and a different kind of reading compared to the printed book – the fact this is not the only way an audiobook can be conceptualized notwithstanding (Rubery, 2012; 2016; Have & Stougaard Pedersen, 2012; 2017). The audiobook will be seen as the printed book remediated, i.e. a book in audio format. In a sense, digital books (both e- and a-books) are book offspring: they retained or discarded some characteristics of the printed book, or added some new, but they are nonetheless the same genus (Kovač, Phillips & Wischenbart, 2019). The implication that this decision has on the study at hand is that a-books are connected to and compared to other forms of books, and not, for example, with listening to music or radio. The only exception is the use of podcasts, which has a historically visible connection with a-book use (Audiobook Publishers Association, 2019; Kozłowski, 2018). Moreover, it implies that the content is still of dominant importance, that is, what the users wish is to read books: the format matters, but only in so far as it enables or makes the act of book reading easier or better in some way. For the purposes of this research, the audiobook will be defined as a sound recording of a printed book read aloud verbatim by a narrator/audiobook speaker (Rubery, 2016; Have & Stougaard Pedersen, 2017). Here I will include even born audio, since the narrator has to have a printed template to read from – the fact it is not available to be read in print notwithstanding. DAISY books for people with reading disabilities will also be included. The act of consuming an audiobook will be referred to either as listening or audio reading.
2.1.2 A brief history of the audiobook

The history of the audiobook is the history of the technology behind it. Rubery (2016) distinguishes three phases in the historical development of the audiobook: experimental phonographic books, talking books for vision impaired and commercially oriented audiobooks. The audiobook has a longer history than one would imagine. It can be traced to the second part of the 19th century – to 1877 when Thomas Edison invented the phonograph. One of the first works recorded on the device was the nursery rhyme “Mary Had a Little Lamb” (Rubery, 2012; 2016). However, the ability to record whole novels was still decades away since phonograph cylinders could hold only very short voice recordings. It was in the 1930s that the first recordings of unabridged novels – in Britain and the USA – were produces. It started as a response to the need of soldiers with eye injuries who returned from the First World War and others visually impaired and unable to read Braille (Rubery, 2011; 2016). The first talking book library was established in the US in 1934, followed by the one in Britain in 1935. A novel of average length would need around twenty or thirty records (Rubery, 2016). The whole endeavor raised a lot of questions about the nature of reading, whether a talking book is even a book, how to read aloud etc. The idea of “straight reading” arose in an attempt to preserve the page (Rubery, 2016). There was a substantial amount of opposition, even by the famous Helen Keller; talking books were considered a lazy and passive way of reading (Rubery, 2016). Despite that, by 1954, talking books became an important social good (Rubery, 2016). However, they also became inextricably linked to disability – a link that commercial audio publishers have been trying to undo ever since (Rubery, 2016).

Caedmon Records, established in 1952, was one of the first to focus completely and solely on audiobooks. One of the most popular spoken word recordings in the 20th century was made by Caedmon: Dylan Thomas’ “A Child's Christmas in Wales” that has since been attributed with establishing the audiobook industry (Rubery, 2016). The success of Caedmon can be attributed to technological development: LP (long-playing) vinyl records became available in 1948, followed by the magnetic tape recorder in 1949 (Rubery, 2016). Abridgments, adaptations, enhancements with sound effects and a dramatic cast were often a part of the process, and, as a result, the reputation of audiobooks suffered (Rubery, 2016). The next big technological advance was cassette tapes. Tired of long commutes, Duvall Hecht founded BOT (Books on tape) in 1975 that went on to become one of the largest audio publishers (Rubery, 2016). They were the first to focus on unabridged audiobooks. In 1980 came one extraordinary novelty: the Sony Walkman. It became very popular very fast – it was portable and it could give privacy to the user virtually anywhere – with the use of headphones. Together with the development of technology, the number of audiobook users grew. In the mid 1980s, as the profit from taped books increased, major publishers such as Warner Publishing, Random House and Simon and Schuster entered the market (Rubery 2016). In the late 80s, compact discs entered the stage. Fear of the demise of books that arose already with Edison's phonograph, proved to be unfounded. Audiobook users were often themselves avid readers who used books on tape as a complement and not a substitute for books; book sales did not suffer – on the contrary (Rubery, 2016). Taped books also attracted new users, those who read little or not at all.
By the 1990, audiobooks were not a novelty anymore; as mentioned, in 1994 APA agreed on the term audiobook; same year appeared the first website, Audiobooks.com, selling recorded books (Rubery, 2016). Audible, now the world's biggest audiobook retailer, started promoting a-books apart from printed books, as a distinct art form (Rubery, 2016). It was bought by Amazon in 2008. With the advent of the Internet and digital technology, it became possible to download files right to your hand-held device. After cassettes and compact discs, came downloadable files and MP3-CDs and other hybrid formats. Despite there still being a large number of consumers who prefer physical CD format (Have & Stougaard Pedersen, 2017; Rubery, 2016), the move towards digital is apparent. Today we live in a society centered on digital media (Finnemann, 2011) and the audiobook is experiencing a “digital renaissance” (Have & Stougaard Pedersen, 2017, p. 4) coupled with the advent of smartphones and online streaming services. Converging media have enabled new combinations of sound and text – multimedia books, enhanced audiobooks, hybrid formats like music books or audiobooks with PDF files, games and hyperlinks, computer generated audiobooks – making it even more difficult to maintain boundaries between books, audiobooks and other media (Rubery, 2016).

2.2 Common objections to audiobook listening

Listening to a-books was looked down on and treated suspiciously from the beginning. It has generally been considered inferior to reading print books – a perception that persists to this day. In the introduction to the book Audiobooks, Literature and Sound Studies (2012), Rubery lists eight common objections to audiobooks. I have decided to address the following five in my research. Audiobook listening is often considered to be a passive activity, one which, compared to printed books, does not require the same level of concentration. Abridgments often associated with audiobooks are viewed as something that distorts the original narrative. Furthermore, the listener cannot control the pace of the a-book, and the audiobook speaker/narrator interferes with the reception of the text.

2.2.1 Passivity and distractedness

Critics generally regard a-book listening as a passive activity. The listener is bereft of the ability to himself construct the author's voice and hence he becomes a passive consumer of something pre-interpreted for him (Rubery, 2012, 2016; Bednar, 2010). But the truth is that such claims are yet to be examined by literary critics, as Rubery points out (2012). This complaint is reminiscent of discussions amongst literary scholars about high brow and low brow, i.e. popular literature (fiction). To this day, there is a persistent negative view of popular literature as cheap and useless, even harmful, despite no concrete evidence (Swirski, 1999). Moreover, as Sarrimo (2018) reminds us, the novel – which is today praised – was once considered a low form of literature. Novelties of any sort almost always bring about suspicion and questions of their potential negative effects on artefacts they immediately impact and on society in general.
There is a reason for that, but it us mostly not based on evidence, but perhaps a fundamental fear of the unknown manifesting itself in generalizing and exaggerating (Carleton, 2016a; 2016b). In any case, audiobook phenomenon should be examined in its entirety without passing value judgments, especially before relevant research has been done.

Audiobooks are also looked down on as a “semi-attentive” or distracted way of reading one engages in while doing other things – ignoring the fact that concentrated listening or deep listening is very much a possibility (Rubery 2012, 2016; Irwin, 2009). Granted, it would seem that a-books are very often used in timespaces (times and spaces) were one is not able to be fully concentrated on the content of the audiobook (e.g. while driving or doing housework). However, it is simply not intrinsic to the medium to require or invoke less concentration – that depends solely on the user. Accusations of passivity and/or lack of concentration can be leveled at other media too, including printed books. Just as one can simply passively absorb sounds in a state of distraction, one can read words without much thought and reflection in a noisy and disruptive environment. This distinction between close and distracted listening can be juxtaposed with close and hyper (also called digital) reading. Sosnoski (1999, p. 167) coined the term “hyper-reading” and defined it as “reader-directed, screen-based, computer-assisted reading”. It includes Google searches, filtering by keywords, skimming, scanning, hyperlinking, etc. (Sosnoski, 1999; Hayles, 2010). Simplistically said, it can be viewed as distracted reading. “Digital devices inherently provoke distraction”, says Baron (2015, p. 211), since they usually offer access to the Internet and to a myriad of diversions available out there. Hyper-reading fundamentally differs from the practice of close reading and there are voices warning of its possible negative influence on our reading and attention (Carr, 2010), but also voices stressing that such a way of reading has its benefits and a rightful place in our digital culture (Baron, 2015; Hayles, 2010). Hayles (2010) points out that hyper-reading and close reading each have distinct advantages and disadvantages and they should be made to act synergistically, for example when “hyperreading is used to identify passages or to home in on a few texts of interest, whereupon close reading takes over” (p. 74). Baron (2015) generally defends the printed word, but also acknowledges that digital reading has benefits, for example, convenience and portability. Just as it does not seem that printed books will be substituted by e-books (or a-books for that matter), so hyper-reading and distracted listening need not be seen as a substitute for close reading and close listening, but a complement – each strategy used in its appropriate context. Hyper-reading, Hayles (2010) claims, is a necessity of our digital age – it cannot be avoided in certain instances, and perhaps it should not be. Rather, it should be incorporated and developed as a useful reading strategy when confronted with the rubble of digitally accessible materials. Similarly, distracted listening has its place, for example when we cannot escape the task at hand and just listen but must have our eyes and hands occupied.

Furthermore, some newer research points to a-book listening being, not only active, but more similar to traditional reading than we thought. One such study claims that listening to audiobooks is more engaging than watching movies (Richardson et.al., 2018). Participants in that study listened to famous novels and watched video adaptations of the same, while wrist sensors were measuring their heart rate, electrodermal activity and body temperature. The results showed
that the physiological responses were stronger when the story was listened to compared to watching a video, despite the participants themselves reporting higher rate of involvement for video. The findings were interpreted as evidence that listening to an audiobook elicited greater emotional and cognitive engagement than watching a movie. As the authors note, this could be because listening to a story “is a more active process of co-creation” (Richardson et al., 2018, p. 2). When listening to a story, one’s imagination is free to wander and wonder, invoking unique mental images of the things heard, bringing our own understanding of the story to life; conversely, audio-visual content has it pre-made for us and served, simply to be consumed, with little room for our own imagination and interpretation. It requires less work, so to speak. This is very interesting in the light of digital a-books often being compared in Swedish media to movies and streaming services such as Netflix (Pennlert, 2018a). This implies that a-books are understood more as entertainment akin to watching movies than to reading a book: a notion which this research would seem to contradict. Moreover, recent neuroscience research suggests that the brain processes spoken and written information similarly, making reading and audio reading more alike than was previously thought (Deniz, Nunez-Elizande, Huth & Gallant, 2019). Scientists in this study used fMRI to record brain activity of participants who were either listening or reading the same stories and they came to the conclusion that both activities engage the same brain parts. However, some studies came to the opposite conclusion, so the science is far from settled in this matter (Rubery, 2016). Despite more research of this sort being needed, these studies made a valuable contribution to questioning, maybe even dispelling some prejudices about audiobooks – namely, that they are a passive way of reading that does not require much attention and that they are not really books, that is, that they offer an inferior experience compared to reading a physical book.

2.2.2 Abridgments, pace and narrator

The issues of abridgments and the pace of the a-book are less of a problem today than they were just a couple of years ago, due to the rapid technological development. Abridgments in the past were often made from necessity, in order to lower the cost of production and make the endeavor more profitable and the act of listening more convenient. That is mostly not needed anymore. Though abridged books exist, users tend to prefer unabridged ones (Rubery, 2016; N. Clark, 2018). Furthermore, it is not an intrinsic characteristic of audiobooks. Printed books can be abridged as well. The fact that the pace of the audiobook cannot be controlled by the listener is only an objection when one compares it with reading a book, which is obviously done very differently. A reader reads focused on the symbols on a page, he/she can go back, go forward, re-read or skip whatever he/she wants. The pace of an audiobook is set and it is quite difficult to go back and re-listen a part one has missed or did not understand. On the other hand, one can conceive of some benefits stemming from the narrator’s pace: one can skim a printed page, but skimming is impossible when read aloud (Rubery, 2012). The pace forces the listener to keep up. One can argue that audiobooks are not for those easily distracted. But listening as well as reading is a skill that can be honed with time. That said, a-book listening applications today often include the possibility to listen at higher or lower speeds and have timeskip buttons, greatly contributing to the listener having more control over the pace. However, the listener does not have complete control as in the case of a reader
reading a book. Considering timespaces a-book listening is often done, it is hard to imagine the user would find it convenient to frequently adjust the speed or timeskip and even if he/she did, I would imagine it would make it difficult or unpleasant to follow the story.

Looking into the history of the talking book as well as the research, we discover that the speaker/narrator of the audiobook is a crucially important factor of the audiobook's success (Rubery, 2016; Bednar, 2010). A book can be narrated by the author himself, a professional voice actor, a celebrity, an amateur and a full cast of actors in some instances (Rubery, 2012). The complaint often heard is that having a story read aloud by someone else is a major drawback. The fear is that the narrator in some way stands between the listener and the author, meddles with the reception and the interpretation of the text. The narrator undoubtedly influences the reception of the text through e.g. accent, inflection, pronunciation, emphasis etc. These “sonic details” are important since reading aloud is an act of interpretation (Rubery, 2016; Bednar, 2010). However, interpretation we talk about in this context is minimal (provided we have a good narrator). A good narrator will be able to sustain a sufficient level of neutrality as to not intrude into the story. As Irwin (2009) points out, his reading of The Brothers Karamazov is impoverished much more by the fact he could not read it in Russian, than the fact he audio read it. Again, the objection seems to focus mostly on the comparison with printed books. Almost all readers report that they understand identical texts differently depending on the mode of reception, written or spoken (Rubery, 2012). This points to non-identical literary experiences, not necessarily to one being inferior to the other. Resurrection of the sound of literature is arguably one of the most important affordances of the audiobook. The fact that it has a narrator can enhance a text. A skilful narrator can bring to life different accents or foreign words, for example, unknown to the listener. In spoken narration, the sensuousness of language can come fully to light (Rubery, 2012).

In conclusion, what primarily seems to be the problem is that audiobooks have been continually compared with books from a point of view of what the (printed) book can or has, and the audiobook cannot or does not have. This is mostly due to the fact that audiobooks are perceived as mere literal remediation of the printed book. However, remediation is always transformative. New media refashion old media (Bolter & Grusin, 1999). The audiobook has new affordances (and lacks some that the print book has). To use Shokoff’s (2001) metaphor: nobody expects for grapefruits to taste like oranges nor does one complain about that fact, even if one prefers oranges. Have and Stougaard Pedersen (2012; 2013; 2017) challenge the notion of an audiobook as an alternative way of reading a book, and conceptualize it as a part of the digital, mobile audio culture, a special form of mobile listening that has more in common with music or radio listening. The authors call for a new theoretical framework within which the audiobook phenomenon would be studied. Their conclusion is that the experience of “reading” an audiobook is very different, but not inferior, to the experience of reading a printed book (Have & Stougaard Pedersen 2012; 2017). Whether we approach the audiobook as a remediation of printed books or as a new phenomenon, our a priori conclusion should not be its inferiority – there is simply no firm evidence for that.
2.3 Recent research

Most of the literature on the topic in question deals with the relation of audiobooks to technology and printed books. It investigates the underlying philosophical question about what audiobooks are and often contends with its sub-literary status. Most of the articles are quite old, so I decided not to include them, given the focus is on digital audiobooks the use of which has been growing substantially only for the past few years. Two newer books will be examined, one recent article about a-book usage in Sweden and a study conducted for a Bachelor's thesis, in Sweden as well. These resources assisted me in identifying the most relevant aspects of the audiobook phenomenon as well as to choose my theoretical perspectives and adapt them to my study.

2.3.1 Research into the audiobook phenomenon

The most thorough examination of the audiobook phenomenon so far seems to be Matthew Rubery's 2016 The Untold Story of the Talking Book. It chronicles the history of spoken word recordings coupled with the technology behind it, addressing in the process the philosophical issues and the social impact audiobooks had on society. Rubery gives a compelling case for taking audiobooks seriously, as a valuable art form, closely connected to the printed book but distinct from it. The book attempts to answer the question “what difference does it make whether we read a book or listen to it?” (Rubery, 2016, p. 1) and it does so by looking at the historical development of a-books and through it, discusses issues such as audiobook's reception, whether it is a book or not and whether listening to a-books is reading or not. Overall, it is mostly a historical account from which the conclusion can be drawn that audiobooks have had an important place and a distinct societal role from their inception, but have generally been considered a lesser form of literature compared to printed books – a notion which has largely been assumed, but not really investigated. Antagonism towards audiobooks does not seem to stem from preferring print; it is of a moral nature, not aesthetic, Rubery posits. It “has as much to do with our identities as readers as with the vanishing line between book and other forms of entertainment” (p. 25). The author lays out all the objections usually leveled against a-books and scientific evidence on the matter, but the conclusions are far from straightforward. Every objection has its valid counterpoint (they have been previously discussed, so I will not repeat them here). Audiobooks have developed “both as a way of reproducing the printed book and as a way of overcoming its limitations” (p. 3). In that sense, they both are and are not books. Whether audio reading is reading or not is also a complex question, one that Rubery does not give a definitive answer to, but seems to lean in the direction that it is, concluding that “reading can be done well or badly in any medium” (p. 19). There does not seem to be any actual evidence testifying to audiobooks’ inferior status in relation to printed books: but there are indications that the literary experience is quite different depending on the medium, perhaps even fundamentally different. Detailed and abundant in references, Rubery's book is a valuable and, I would argue, essential guide for anybody wanting to gain a broader and deeper knowledge of the history and nature of audiobooks.
In Digital audiobooks, first published in 2016, the authors Have and Stougaard Pedersen (2017) give a Danish perspective of the experience and use of audiobooks. Their main goal was to “challenge the historical notion of audiobook listening as a compensatory or second-rate experience and instead examine the use of audiobooks as a contemporary first-class listening experience” (p. 5). Based on a phenomenological framework, the authors use an interdisciplinary approach, analyzing digital audiobooks from an aesthetical, technological and sociological point of view. Audiobook listening is conceptualized both as a remediation of a printed text, and as an everyday experience that brings about different kind of reading practices and is inextricably tied to audio mobile culture. The book summarizes empirical data available from the APA of the American market and data from Danish and Scandinavian sources. To these quantitative surveys, they add their own qualitative research based on interviews with four Danish audiobook consumers. The book focuses on user perspective and audiobook experience, which was also my starting point, in addition to focusing on digital a-books. Their research into use and experience reveals that a-book listening can be a deep and rich experience, one that is not inferior to reading print. Additionally, the authors conclude that mobility is the essential affordance of a-books, connected to the observation that their use is common in vehicles. Many a-book users are readers of traditional books, but new users are emerging thanks to specific a-book affordances provided by technology.

### 2.3.2 Research on a-books in Sweden

In an article titled *Time to read: Exploring the timespaces of subscription-based audiobooks*, the authors, Tattersall Walllin and Nolin (2019), present their research carried out on a large dataset acquired from the Swedish audiobook subscription service BookBeat. They investigated the changes in timespaces – i.e. when and where – which occur when reading is done by listening and not by seeing. They examined three comparative issues: whether there is a difference in listening patterns between young adults and the general population, between men and women and between young adults based on gender. The study looked at the daily, weekly and yearly listening. The focus was the temporal aspect, because the spatial aspect could only be inferred and not directly observed from the data they had available. The results showed that users listen quite a lot and quite evenly during the day, which would imply that a lot of audio reading occurs during the typical work or school time. This is further backed up by a decline in reading during the evening and weekends, which we usually consider leisure time. Authors conclude that reading so much during the day and through the day implies that reading by listening might enable an increase in daily reading time, and this could be contributed to the extreme mobility of the subscription services. There were some differences in reading patterns observed between different groups, but nothing particularly striking, except that younger people listen considerably more during summer. There was no significant difference between men and women, which the authors interpret as evidence that this mode of reading could serve to close the gender gap so evident in traditional reading. However, BookBeat's users are predominantly women (Sandin, 2018), and as far as we know, audiobook users in Sweden are mostly women (Ahlström, 2019). What this finding seems to point to is that, although men in
general audio read less, those that do, do it as much as women or even slightly more. No research has been previously done inquiring specifically when and how much audiobook users consume audiobooks. As this question is relevant for the understanding of general consumption and user activity, it was included in my research as well, hence this study was of great value to me, especially since it gave me a point of reference, data with which I could compare my findings and place a-book usage in a broader digital landscape.

Hanner and O'Connor's research done for their Bachelor's thesis with the title *Audiobooks speak for themselves* (2019) was, similarly to mine, but from the point of view of economics, a quantitative study of consumer behavior and attitudes. Their investigation centered around Swedish book and audiobook consumers, who they are and the factors that correlate with their attitudes and intentions to use a-books and a-book subscription services. As in my case, the authors used social media for data collection, resulting in a convenience sample and a possible sample bias, effecting generalizability. Nonetheless, their study is very interesting and the results both support and contradict available data. The participants were mostly women in their forties, educated and with a salary higher than the average, and readers of all book formats: a picture of an average audiobook user encountered before. More than half were subscribed to a digital streaming service. Concerning behavior and attitudes, the results indicated that the only relevant factor for positive attitude towards audiobooks is the need for companionship. Despite the fact that the need for company is mentioned in the literature as a contributing factor to audiobook use (Rubery, 2016; Have & Stougaard Pedersen, 2012). I doubt anyone would have predicted that it would be so important. On the other hand, polychronicity (preference for multitasking) turned out to be of little importance to frequent users, and more important for infrequent users. Additionally, need for time use efficiency (i.e. using time in the best possible way) also seemed to not be very important to the participants in regard to subscription services. This contradicts previous research which suggests that the ability to multitask is an important, if not the most important, a-book affordance. Other relevant factors in relation to subscription services were perceived usefulness and preference for trialability. Though portability was also deemed relevant, it turned out to not be as important as the two previously mentioned factors. This research was done with the thought of how it could be practically applied to the growing audiobook industry in Sweden specifically, but perhaps also in a broader context. The focus was consumer behavior and how the knowledge gained from understanding it can be practically applied by companies to target consumers and market their products efficiently. Although libraries have a different approach and mission than economically driven companies, they can benefit from the knowledge of the broader digital market and even from adapting and applying some of the strategies typically associated with profit driven companies. Obviously, libraries are not sellers, but they are promotors and hence their role in society is active – they do not simply store knowledge and information and make it accessible, they are also obliged to, in accordance with LIS values and philosophy (Rubin, 2016) and often national legislation (Biblioteksförening, 2015) to seek out ways to make it visible and hence usable – and utilized – to the benefit of the patrons.
2.4 Audiobook usage worldwide and in Sweden

2.4.1 Worldwide

Contemporary explosion of audiobook listening originated in the early 1980s in the USA. One reason for this has already been mentioned. The advances in technology made it easier to listen to them: cassette tapes were portable and more practical than anything before. On the other hand, as Kozloff (1995) points out, some large-scale changes in people's lives also contributed in making audiobooks more appealing. In the US, the interest in exercising increased; many audiobooks were tie-ins to movies and TV; and more and more people were commuting. By the mid 1980s, 60% of households had a car with a cassette player (Rubery, 2016). Audiobooks were a perfect choice for people who had their hands and eyes occupied (by driving, exercising, doing housework), but had their mind free. The ability for audiobooks to alleviate boredom, entertain and enrich (while e.g. commuting) was evident. As subsequent research shows and experience supports, the ability to multitask while using audiobooks is one of their greatest advantage that fits well with our modern busy lives (Kozloff, 1995; Rubery, 2016; Have & Stougaard Pedersen, 2017; Irwin, 2009). Kozloff (1995) references a consumer survey done by the APA in the mid 1990s. Unfortunately, this consumer survey is not available online. Kozloff mentions in her article on page 8 that it was made recent, so that would mean in the mid 1990s. This survey reported that the average audiobook consumer was older (average age of 45), upper-class, affluent and well educated. Research done by Aron (1992) pointed to the consumers being very well educated and avid readers of printed books. Kozloff (1995) also claims that research revealed 69% of users were female and that half of the time audiobook listening occurred while driving, half of the time while doing housework (ironing, knitting, exercising etc). Unfortunately, it is unclear from the article where the author got the statistics from. APA's consumer research from 2006 (Audio Publishers Association, 2006) pointed to similar conclusions, except concerning gender. Users were found to be on average 45 years of age, educated, financially well off, evenly split between male and female and most had children. They also bought and read more printed books than non-listeners. The most common reason for choosing the format was to have entertainment on a trip. This was followed by a recommendation from a friend, something to do while commuting and doing other things like exercising. APA's consumer research from 2010 (Audio Publishers Association, 2010) indicated that the trends continued. It also revealed that as many as 43% used audiobooks at home, though the car was still the most common place (52%). The median age was slightly higher than before (48), but still lower than with non-listeners (51). Almost a quarter of those between 18 and 24 years of age were found to be consumers, showing that audiobooks appeal to younger generations as well. Kozlowski's report from 2018 indicates the same trend (Kozlowski, 2018). There is a growing youth movement with 48% of users being under the age of 35. The same report shows the home taking the first place of audiobook listening, and the car being the second most mentioned location. The three most important reasons why users listen to audiobooks are: 1) they can do other things while listening; 2) audiobooks are portable and people can listen wherever they are; 3) they enjoy being read to (Kozlowski 2018, p. 2-3). The newest APA's report from 2019 (Audio Publishers Association, 2019) shows that audiobook listening is continuing to grow.
According to the survey, half of the American population has listened to an audiobook, compared to 44% the previous year. Slightly more than half of listeners are under the age of 45; around half of frequent listeners are between 18 and 44 years old. Slightly more than half also listen to podcasts, which is a common occurrence among audiobook users. Car again took the first place as the preferred location, second being home. Unfortunately, APA's annual consumer reports no longer seem to include a gender breakdown. However, research from 2016 done by Pew Research Center shows that while women read more print books, when it comes to digital formats (e-books and a-books), the divide is equal, favoring neither gender (Perrin, 2016). Some other data suggest women read e-books more (Ballard, 2018; Flood, 2016). Fiction is by far the most popular genre. According to APA’s survey from 2010, mystery/suspense/thrillers was on the top of the list with 31%, followed by bestsellers with 21%, general fiction 20% and history 15%. In 2019, mystery/suspense/thrillers are still on the top, followed by history/biography/memoirs and humor.

BookNet Canada report for 2018 offers a detailed view of the most important information about the audiobook market and users in Canada (BookNet Canada, 2018). In it, the average user is presented as female between ages 25 and 34, educated and financially affluent. The largest age group is 25-34 which comprise 31% of users, the second 35-44 which comprise 25% of users; 65% are female and 31% of them are in their late twenties/early thirties. Although multitasking is considered an important facet of audiobooks, many decide to only listen. Four main activities while listening to an audiobook were: only listening, doing housework, commuting and working on a hobby. More than half prefer to use their phone. Adult fiction is the preferred genre with 70%; sci-fi, mystery, thrillers and detective stories being the most popular. Adult non-fiction follows with 52%; biography autobiography being on top of that list.

2.4.2 Sweden

Audiobooks are a well-established format on the Swedish market today. In July 2019, newspaper Dagens nyheter published an article sketching the most important information on the users and usage of audiobooks (Ahlström, 2019). Among other things, we find out that almost half of the users (46%) are between ages 25 and 44, while the second biggest age group (37%) is those between 45 and 64 years of age. Women listen more – 68,5%; the most popular genre is thriller (44%), followed by general fiction (25%). The report also shows that print book sales have been going down and audiobook sales going up since 2010. A report commissioned by the Swedish Booksellers Association and the Swedish Publishers Association covering 2016 and 2017 reveals that book sales in Sweden have seen growth only due to audiobooks sold on a subscription basis (Wikberg, 2018a). Another report by the same two actors for the first part of 2018 shows the same. Sales of physical books has declined by 5,2% in that period, while the sales of digital audiobooks available through one of the subscription services increased by 37,2% (Wikberg, 2018b). The same report for the first part of 2019 (Wikberg, 2019) shows a similar pattern: sales of physical books declined, digital subscription services sales increased, though not as much as in the previous period. In 2018 a pilot study was conducted at the University of Borås on the potential and limitations of audiobooks. The goal of the research
was to analyze audiobook user data from the streaming giant Storytel, focusing on Born audio books made for the so-called Storytel Originals (Pennlert, 2018b). The results of the study are, unfortunately, not yet available.

In addition to subscription services, public libraries in Sweden are also experiencing a growth of audiobook loans. From 2017 to 2018, the digital audiobook loans in public libraries doubled (Lenas, 2019). From 2017, they have been using the app Biblio, which is the third most used app for audiobooks in Sweden, with 70 000 users (Lenas, 2019). This, in my opinion, contributed greatly to increased use: up until then, one could not listen to a-books on a smartphone through the library; in order to avail themselves of that convenience, the consumer had to turn to one of the subscription services. The introduction of the Biblio application leveled the ground in relation to access, but not the selection. Subscription services still have a larger offer compared to libraries, due to the economic complexities of acquiring digital material (Wallin et.al., 2019; Bergstrom et.al., 2017). This economic restraint would partly explain why so many choose to turn to a paid service, despite the library offering a-books for free. Additional contributors are a reasonable monthly fee and the fact Swedes seem to be used to subscribing to online streaming services, such as Spotify or Netflix (Wallin et.al., 2019; Davidsson, Palm & Melin Mandre, 2018). The Swedish audiobook market is thriving though there are indicators that it will soon reach its peak and the growth will slow down (Williams, 2019b; Wikberg, 2019). The unlimited subscription model offered by all the streaming services seems to be well loved by the users. Despite the relatively small market - after all, Sweden has only around 10 million inhabitants - it is extraordinary how many listen to a-books. Eva Houltzen, CEO of Axiell Media said in a press release that there is no country where we listen to audio books as much as in Sweden, if you look at both commercial players and libraries (Lenas, 2019).
3 Theoretical framework

In this thesis the audiobook is conceptualized as a remediation of the printed book (Bolter & Grusin, 1999), i.e. a book in audio format. As such the a-book is at the same time similar to and different from its print counterpart. Some characteristics, i.e. affordances (Norman, 2013) are shared, some are not. McLuhan’s laws of media are used to establish the unique affordances of the medium in question. As an additional theoretical starting point, Uses and gratifications theory (UGT) is used. Possible reading motivations are considered, and users are seen as active and not passive consumers of media. UGT focuses on why a certain medium is used and what it is used for and provides a useful framework to investigate behavior and motivations of users (West & Turner, 2010). However, the theories themselves will not be tested here, but used only as a theoretical framework helping to guide the research and the analysis.

3.1 Affordance and remediation

As I was interested in gaining knowledge about what users think about specific issues typically associated with a-books, I decided to focus on two things. On the one hand, common objections to a-book listening and, on the other, a-book specific affordances. Affordances are fundamental properties, actual or perceived, of an object that indicate how it could be used (Norman, 2013). I decided to inquire about the attitudes of survey takers taking into account five (out of eight) objections commonly leveled against a-books which M. Rubery discusses in the introduction to the book Audiobooks, Literature and Sound Studies (2012). These are: listening to a-books is passive and/or less engaging, it requires less concentration than printed books, abridgments distort the original narrative, lack of control over the pace of the story is problematic and the speaker/narrator interferes with the reception of the text. All of these objections deal with some specific aspect of the a-book phenomenon so if we leave out the value judgments, they can be rephrased and acknowledged as affordances. The supposed passivity and lack of engagement/concentration is quite hard to turn into something neutral: perhaps it could be translated into “different to consume than print, a way of consuming which requires less active involvement of the eyes and hands, offering a different literary experience compared to traditional reading. Other objections can be translated to the following affordances: a set pace and the existence of abridgments and narrators. Other affordances are: presence of music in an a-book, ability to multitask, importance of the narrator/audiobook speaker in finishing an a-book, choosing different books based on different book formats and resurrecting the sound of literature.

In this thesis, as has already been mentioned, the audiobook is conceptualized as the printed book remediated: it is a book in audio format. Remediation as a concept applied to audiobooks means that they remediate written books – retain some components of the older medium while adding new (Bolter & Grusin, 1999; Bednar, 2010). Words of the book are the same, but the mode of delivery is different. This concept can also imply restoration: “Audiobooks rehabilitate texts that have been frozen on the page, bringing them back to life through
dynamic sound” (Bednar, 2010, p. 80). The development of a-books is and was historically dependent on the printed book and many listeners are also avid readers extending their book reading habits into spaces and times when and where books could not have previously been read. On the other hand, the process of remediating print into sound is transformative and the audiobook offers new affordances, thus distinguishing itself from printed books and reaching new users, for example, those that are not so interested in reading print. Audiobooks therefore can be investigated both as a part of the book phenomenon and apart from it, as a separate medium as Have & Stougaard Petersen (2012; 2017) suggest, one that has more in common with listening to the radio or music.

A-books can be viewed as a new medium and a-book use as a new way of storytelling – or a very old one (Rubery, 2016). In the article Audiobooks and the reassertion of orality from 2010, the author Lucy Bednar poses the question: are a-books ushering in a new age of orality and how would that influence the way we experience texts? The author examines what certain scholars had to say about the millennia-old shift from orality to literacy and the recent shift from print towards orality. She suggests that the written word had a profound effect on our consciousness and the way we think, and so could the shift back to the oral word – with the advent of a-books. Their use falls under Ong’s term secondary orality – a new orality supported by electronic devices and dependent on the written word (Ong, 1982). Our experience of listening to an a-book is different from reading a print book: it requires different skills, the obvious one being to know how to listen; it occurs primarily in time, it is more immediate since we do not control the pace completely (Bednar, 2010). A-books are essentially a fusion of two ways of experiencing a text: written and oral, Bednar (2010) argues. The medium matters and we ought to investigate in what ways and how does this affect users and use of a certain medium. When talking about digital reading, Hayles (2004) stresses the importance of media-specific analysis. E-books and a-books have some different affordances compared to physical books and that presumably affects use. A-books are and are not books (Rubery, 2016) and this dichotomy needs to be taken into consideration. So what affordances do audiobooks have?

### 3.2 McLuhan’s laws of media or media effects

Laws of media or the four effects elaborated in *The laws of media* by Marshall and Eric McLuhan (1992) pose four questions that can be applied to any medium: What does it enhance? What does it make obsolete? What does it retrieve that had already been obsolesced earlier? What does it flip into when pushed to extremes? These four questions present four essential dimensions of any medium. In a sense, there are no wrong or right answers to McLuhan’s questions. The tetrad is a dynamic tool and serves as “a means of focusing awareness of hidden or unobserved qualities in our culture and technology” (McLuhan & McLuhan, 1992, p. 128). It encourages a creative approach to any human artefact and opens doors to new discoveries (Sandstrom, 2012). As seen in Figure 1, the tetrad consists of two areas (ground and figure) and each has two parts. They constitute the four effects which every human artefact possesses: enhancement, retrieval, obsolescence, reversal. First two are figure qualities, the last two, ground qualities. The order is not important since they are meant to be applied at the same time. Since figure (the medium) and ground (the context) are
related and interdependent, McLuhan considered important to examine both: the characteristics of the medium and the historical and present context in which the medium exists (Adam, 2016).

If we conceptualize the audiobook as a book in audio format consumed on a smartphone in order to fulfil a certain need, the tetrad for audiobooks could be imagined the following way. Audiobooks enhance the accessibility and convenience of reading literature. By adding another dimension to our reading experience, a certain written text becomes available in audio format in addition to being available as print and e-book or some sort of hybrid medium. Moreover, listening to audiobooks on a smartphone, makes the activity extremely convenient. There is no official definition of a smartphone; it can be defined as a mobile phone with similar functions to that of a computer, providing access to Internet and capable of running all sorts of applications (Adam, 2016). It seems to be needless to mention the ubiquity and pervasiveness of today's smartphones – they have indeed become the extension of ourselves without which modern day existence would be (almost) unimaginable. It is no wonder that, with the advent of this technology, the number of audiobook listeners grew immensely and is still growing. A-books obsolesce the need to be stationary and have one's eyes fixed on words on a page. One can listen in almost any context, provided one has a smartphone and earphones and is not engaged in some activity that requires full cognitive attention. A-books retrieve the sound of literature. Resurrecting the sound of literature is an important contribution of audiobooks that could have a deep and lasting influence on many aspects of our culture. The last question is the most difficult to answer. Bednar (2010) suggests that the reversal potential of a-books would be the disappearance of printed texts. However, that is highly unlikely and to some degree a misunderstanding of the question. The four questions are meant to be applied simultaneously and be inherent in the medium itself (McLuhan & McLuhan, 1992). Reverse means the medium reverses its original features, often bringing to light something negative. In that sense, since reversal is a ground quality (i.e. related to context) and its complement is retrieval (i.e. sound), it could mean: the advent of some new technology, some sort of augmented reality, which would incorporate e.g. visual

![McLuhan’s tetrad](image)

*Figure 1: McLuhan’s tetrad. The image is a visual representation of the concept of the laws of media or media effects presented in the book The laws of media (McLuhan & McLuhan, 1992). Copyright 2019 by Martina Dakic*
stimuli (pictures, moving images, written words) making a-books depart completely from the idea of a “book”, in the process making the possibility of multitasking impossible (which is one key feature of a-books). Further departure from the idea of a book would be allowing the user to be an active participant in the story, to some degree making the story as it unfolds (like in a game). This dimension I will call “hybridization”. The negative connotation in this scenario would be the fact that literature would cease to exist in the sense we know it.

To summarize, the four dimensions of audiobooks can be envisaged as: accessibility and convenience, mobility, sound and hybridization. Where a-books and smartphones intersect the most vividly is the dimension of mobility and accessibility/convenience. This could be considered the most important features of audiobooks. Especially mobility, or better said, the ability to multitask, could be considered to be the unique affordance of a-books contributing greatly to their popularity. This is, of course, coupled with the notion of remediation: audiobooks are the only types of books one can consume while, e.g. driving or doing housework. One can, for example, also listen to the radio or podcasts while engaged in such activities – but those are not books. The medium does matter – but not necessarily more than the content.

Common objections to a-book listening rephrased as affordances and some other affordances mentioned before and addressed in this study can be subsumed under these four dimensions. Additionally, seen through the lens of UGT, we can look at some of them as potentially revealing underlying needs of the users and why they choose this particular medium. For example, the fact a-books are seen as passive and requiring less engagement and/or concentration, can be interpreted as offering a different experience (a “sonic” experience of literature), one that does not require us to actively engage our eyes and hands. This could in turn, be seen as an underling need: a need for a literary and/or a sonic experience (dimension of sound) or the need to be mobile (dimension of mobility). The existence and importance of a narrator would also fall under the dimension of sound, while the incorporation of music into a books could be considered a part of the dimension of hybridization, where we see first instances of the departure from the notion of an audiobook being a book.

### 3.3 Uses and gratifications theory (UGT)

The beginnings of UGT can be traced to the 1940s, but it was Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch (1974) who presented it thoroughly in a book called *The Uses of Mass Communications: Current Perspectives on Gratifications Research* in the 70s. The main tenet of UGT is that media users are active and actively seek to achieve certain gratifications when using media. This was in direct contradiction to contemporary communication theories which considered the audience to be passive. As Katz summarized it, the classical approach asks “what media do to people”, while UGT asks “what do people do with media” (Katz, 1959). This does not mean, however, that users are completely free from the influences of the culture within which they are embedded. We are dealing with a delicate interplay. The world around the consumers shapes them as well as they shape it; the use of media and the gratification they seek from it are intertwined with the world people live in (Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch, 1974). The basic underlying
assumptions of UGT are that the audience is active and goal oriented in their use of media and users are the ones that take the initiative in connecting need gratification with a medium; furthermore, the audience is sufficiently self-aware of its motives and media use to provide a valid picture of it (Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch, 1974). Both UGT and LIS see the audience/patrons as active, as oriented towards a goal (information seeking), towards gratifying some need they have (information need). UGT stems from a socio-psychological communication tradition, has a positivistic approach to knowing and focuses on mass media (West & Turner, 2010). It is an extension of Maslow's theory of human motivation which posits that there is a hierarchy of needs which people actively seek to fulfil. In the most recent stage of UGT development, researchers have been investigating the reasons for media use and their connection to variables such as needs, goals, consequences of media use and personal factors (West & Turner, 2010). Many studies used this theory to explore the use of TV and Internet. To my knowledge there are no studies which attempted to use UGT on audiobooks. There are a few which applied it to books (Gerlich, Drumheller & Sollosy, 2011; 2012) and e-books (DeFosse, 2012; Shin, 2011; Ho & Wang, 2011). Since I will not be testing UGT in this study, there is no need to further elaborate the intricacies of the theory. I am only using it as a theoretical framework, a starting point for my research and subsequent analysis. With that in mind, I am considering my target audience to be active, goal-oriented and able to provide me with an accurate image of why and what they want in relation to the topic.

Researchers formulated typologies representing the reasons people use media (West & Turner, 2010). For example, Rubin (1983) identified motivations for watching television as learning, passing time/habit, companionship, escape, arousal and relaxation. Gerlich, Drumheller and Sollosy (2011; 2012) adapted Rubin's scale and applied it to books. Four factors emerged as relevant reading motives for avid readers: relaxation, passing time, escape and sharing/learning, with the first two being the most relevant. Relaxation refers to reading during one's leisure time, while passing time refers to alleviating boredom, pointing to reading being dependent on the situation (Gerlich et al., 2011; 2012). It is interesting to note that reading compared to, for example, watching television is much more intentional and purposive, as it takes more conscious effort than passively changing channels (Gerlich et al., 2011; 2012). This is reminiscent of how users are perceived in LIS and corresponds to the basic premise of UGT about audience activity. For example, Wilson (2000) describes information seeking behavior as a “purposive seeking for information as a consequence of a need to satisfy some goal” (p. 49). As audiobooks are viewed as books and offer content identical to other forms of books (print and e-book), albeit in a different medium, I would imagine this reading scale would to a large degree reflect even motives of a-book users. It would be interesting to see this scale adapted specifically to audiobook users in a future research, but for now we can consider this a workable approximation. These four motivations can be considered the core, while the affordances of a certain medium (print, e- or a-book) then make up for the decisive factors. In relation to the e-book, the research suggests that portability and convenience (DeFosse, 2012), usability and perceived usefulness and ease of use (Shin, 2011) are the most important reasons for choosing this format. In the case of audiobooks, it is the four dimensions of McLuhan's tetrad: accessibility/convenience, mobility, sound and hybridization. Perhaps, in addition to the four motives mentioned above, we should add another one for a-
books which we see in Rubin's (1983) television motives scale and Hanner and O'Connor's study (2019): need for companionship which is intimately connected to the affordance of sound. Since Facebook was used as a sampling frame, it is also beneficial to note that the motivations for the use of social media to a certain degree correspond with the reading motivation scale. Whiting and Williams (2013) detected 10 uses and gratifications for the use of social media, of which the first five were: social interaction, information seeking, passing time, entertainment and relaxation. UGT and McLuhan's tetrad for the audiobook will be applied in this study by assuming that the user is active and oriented towards fulfilling a need, and that there are five basic audio reading motivations/needs (relaxation, passing time, escape, learning/sharing and companionship) which are connected to the four dimensions/affordances of audiobooks (accessibility/convenience, mobility, sound and hybridization) – and together they contribute to the final audiobook use patterns among different users.
4 Methodology

This study was investigating preferences and attitudes of audiobook users who are also members of audiobook Facebook groups, hence those Facebook groups constituted the sampling frame. A quantitative approach in the form of an online questionnaire was used in order to reach the target group. The research is partly descriptive, partly exploratory in nature and focuses on an under-researched area, therefore the use of a convenience sample can be justified. The questionnaire was made by using the online survey software SurveyMonkey (www.surveymonkey.com). It includes GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) compliant features (“SurveyMonkey and GDPR”, n.d.). UGT and McLuhan’s tetrad were used as a theoretical frame within which the survey items were constructed and the results interpreted.

4.1 Choice of method

In order to answer my research questions about user preferences and attitudes, I decided to use a quantitative approach in the form of a survey, more specifically, a self-completion questionnaire administered online. Reasons why this approach seemed appropriate are the following. Surveys are often used for different research scenarios within LIS (Wildemuth, 2017). They are generally cheap, fast and easy to administer (Bryman, 2012). These are important factors considering my limited resources and the fact the participants would most likely be scattered around the country and there was no other way of reaching them. I decided to use only close-ended questions since they are generally easier to answer and keep the questionnaire as short as possible to avoid “respondent fatigue” (Bryman, 2012). I believed this to be important especially in the light of the fact that my participants were Swedish and the questionnaire was in English. By employing close-ended clear questions, I desired to avoid any language problems which might have arisen if the respondents were expected to answer questions in a language which is not their native. With the exception of one, all the questions in section one and two had the option “other (please specify)”. Section three contained 11 Likert-scale questions.

4.2 Data collection

The questionnaire was posted in four Swedish Facebook audiobook groups which together at that time had more than 20 000 members. Since then, all of the groups have grown in number and one has changed its name slightly (see Table 1). By far the largest group is called Snacka om ljudböcker! and is hosted by Storytel. At the end of October (31/10, at 17:00 o’clock) it had exactly 16 237 members. It has marked a significant growth since July 2019. Other three groups are much smaller; two of them exhibit a significant growth as well. The group named Storytel – vi som gillar ljudböcker cut its ties with Storytel and changed the name to only Vi som gillar ljudböcker. The questionnaire was posted on July 16th, 2019 and closed on August 8th, 2019 in which time I gathered 284
responses with a completion rate of 87% (246). However, only 230 people answered every question, making up for an 80% completion rate. Although we know how many members each group has, many (maybe most) could be a part of all of those groups. Moreover, it is impossible to ascertain how many are, at least occasionally, engaged in some group activity and at least read posts and how many are maybe officially members but rarely use Facebook. For those reasons, the response rate was not possible to calculate, but overall it does not seem to be high. The questionnaire took approximately five minutes to complete and it consisted of 23 questions divided into four sections. Appendix A contains the whole questionnaire. The first three sections corresponded to my research questions:

- section 1 and 2: information about audiobook usage
- section 3: attitudes towards audiobooks’ affordances
- section 4: classification questions section

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facebook group name (July 2019)</th>
<th>Number of members (July 2019)</th>
<th>Number of members (October 2019)</th>
<th>Additional information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Snacka om ljudböcker</td>
<td>~15 000</td>
<td>~16 200</td>
<td>Hosted by Storytel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Storytel – vi som gillar ljudböcker</td>
<td>~2 800</td>
<td>~3 500</td>
<td>New name: Vi som gillar ljudböcker; no longer linked to Storytel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vi som älskar ljudböcker</td>
<td>~1 500</td>
<td>~2 500</td>
<td>Hosted by a known Swedish writer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vi lyssnar på böcker, vår bokcirkel</td>
<td>~1 900</td>
<td>~1 900</td>
<td>The only group that did not grow significantly; hosted by an unknown a-book user</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Facebook groups used for the distribution of the questionnaire.

Before I posted the survey in the groups, I contacted the administrators of those groups, explained who I was and asked for their permission to post. I received positive responses. Together with the link to the questionnaire, I then posted a short explanation of who I was and what the purpose of my study was, asking the members to fill in the questionnaire and contact me in case something is unclear. See appendix B for the Facebook post. The questionnaire itself was prefaced with a short introduction. It included a thank you note, explanation of the goal of my research, how long the survey will take and a statement of confidentiality. My post on Facebook and the introduction to the survey were written in Swedish. The bulk of the responses (170) came in the very first day. The second day I received only 33 responses, and only 6 on the third day. At that time, I decided to engage with the members in the comment section of my post, thanking them for taking the survey and/or answering their questions and commenting on their comments in order to push the post up so it would be more visible. The last response was recorded on the 30th of July. I closed the survey on the 8th of August, despite my original intention to keep it open for full four weeks. After a week of zero responses, I concluded there is no more interest and that the odds of gaining a more significant amount of responses was low.
4.3 Facebook as a sampling frame

Facebook is the biggest social network and over 60% of Sweden's inhabitants use it (“Number of monthly active Facebook users”, 2019; “Facebook users in Sweden”, n.d.). Its popularity and the existence of Facebook groups connecting people with shared interests – in this case, audiobooks – spurred my interest in using it as a sampling frame. This seemed particularly interesting since I noticed (myself being a member of those groups) that one of those audiobook groups had over 15 000 members (in the summer of 2019) and the group was extremely active and dynamic in posting, asking questions, giving advice and recommendations as well as discussing different aspects of audiobooks. Writers were also using this as a platform to promote their audiobooks. Facebook is hugely popular and widely used around the world, but it is rarely used as a sampling frame (Brickman Bhutta, 2012; Roberts, 2014). Social media in general is being used more and more as a research platform (Couper, 2017) and, though Facebook can be a viable option for social science research, its potential is still underutilized (Kosinski, Matz, Gosling, Popov & Stillwell, 2015; Rife, Cate, Kosinski & Stillwell, 2016).

Since the topic of audiobooks is itself scarcely researched and using Facebook in this manner rare, the nature of my research is primarily exploratory. In this context, a convenience sample can be considered appropriate (David & Sutton, 2011). Brickman Bhutta (2012) capitalized on the Facebook groups feature and managed to recruit over 4000 participants for her social research in a short time and with a small cost. Her conclusion was that Facebook can be a valuable tool for exploratory work, especially for surveying elusive populations. Her conclusion was further backed up by the fact that her data preserved relevant correlations between variables of interest, despite being biased in certain ways. Brickman Bhutta's positive experience encouraged me to use Facebook in a similar manner as she did. However, I was not able to recruit nearly as many participants as she did. This was also the experience of another researcher (Roberts, 2014) who adopted a similar approach. The reasons could be many, such as the topic, the target group, changed Facebook features etc. One Facebook feature that might have been crucial in Brickan Bhutta's study (2012) no longer exists – the ability of administrators to message all members if the group does not exceed 5000 members. I suspect the response rate would have been much greater if such an option existed; in the absence of it, however, the users had to be on Facebook and see the post with the link to the survey, so many probably missed it.

My sample is by no means a representative sample of audiobook users in Sweden. Whether it is a representative sample of those audiobook users who are members of audiobook Facebook groups, would need to be researched further. Research shows, for example, that Swedish women spend significantly more time on Facebook than men and that they are more engaged and active (Denti, 2012). This is reflective of my respondents as they were predominantly women. However, non-random samples may not preserve important correlations of interest (Best et al., 2001) as they did in Bhutta's case (2012). In this study, such correlations will be difficult to ascertain due to the lack of available information for the moment, but perhaps some interesting insights might be gained from such an attempt. Considering the importance of social media and the impressive size and activity of the groups in question, I believe a more in-depth research
would be useful for anybody with a vested interest in the audiobook phenomenon: users, publishers and libraries alike.

4.4 Data analysis

Data analysis was executed partly using SurveyMonkey (www.surveymonkey.com) software and partly using SPSS. Data were exported from SurveyMonkey into MS Excel and then imported to SPSS. SurveyMonkey standard pricing plan that I had offers frequency tables and charts to display results of the survey. SPSS was used to generate descriptive statistics as a starting point for understanding and communicating the findings (Wildemuth, 2017). No interesting correlations were discovered. Due to the low number of male participants and younger participants, an analysis along the lines of gender and age was not attempted. Statistical analysis presumes randomness of the sample hence it is important to emphasize that my sample is not representative of the entire population, but it could be representative of the subset of audiobook users who are members of audiobook Facebook groups. Though it is hard to ascertain exactly, my sample could be biased in several ways. It seems to be biased in favor of older women; however, this could be a reflection of a predominant group of users who are a part and active in the Facebook groups surveyed. The sample could have excluded those that do not know English or do not feel comfortable answering a questionnaire using English. Furthermore, the overall response rate, though not calculable, was apparently not high. Though lack of a probability sample might affect the generalizability, the results can still be considered relevant since non-random samples often preserve important correlations (Best et al., 2001) and the area under question is still unexplored and a study like this (a preliminary study) will offer some invaluable insights to those that will conduct a more in-depth research after me.

4.5 Validity and reliability

Questionnaires are prevalent in social science research. They are tools designed to hopefully collect accurate and useful data. Validity and reliability are thus important to consider, especially in quantitative research. Validity refers to the issue of whether the measure devised for a concept actually measures that concept and reliability to the issue of whether the measure is consistent and stable, i.e. are the results of a study repeatable (Bryman, 2012). A measure must be reliable in order to be valid. There are different ways of measuring reliability and validity. At the very minimum, Bryman (2012) suggests that it should be established whether a measure has face validity. In the absence of any other option, this is the approach I undertook. I asked several people to take a closer look at my questionnaire and report whether it seemed coherent to them. Afterwards, I made small adjustments based on their input. I consider this approach to be justified for two reasons. First, in many if not most such research cases, measures are asserted and not tested – minimal steps are taken in order to ensure the reliability and/or validity of a measure, such as face validity (Bryman, 2012). It is not uncommon in quantitative research to not include reliability and validity testing, for the obvious reasons of it being costly and time consuming.
Second, my study was exploratory in nature and dealt with a phenomenon still largely under-investigated. Despite these issues, I believe it can still bring to the table valuable insights and act as a springboard for future research.

4.6 A few caveats

I am acutely aware of the shortcomings of this study. Considering the questionnaire, the questions were designed with the help of other studies and relevant literature (Have & Stougaard Pedersen, 2017; Rubery, 2012) with my research questions in mind. I constructed a new instrument which seemed appropriate for the exploratory design of this study. However, it was only a collection of questions that appeared to me to fit well together, which is a major drawback of new survey instruments (Litwin, 1995). In retrospect, I discovered a few problems with the survey questions, including typographical errors and ambiguousness in the way some questions were phrased. Despite some of the questions not being clear or phrased in such a way that it made it difficult to compare with results of other studies, I believe it was still possible to derive some interesting and valuable conclusions from the results. Some other issues came to light after the distribution of the questionnaire, such as the language issue. The decision to distribute the questionnaire in English was made for three reasons: firstly, this thesis was to be written in English; secondly, Swedes are known for their good command of English; thirdly, I deemed my knowledge of Swedish insufficient to attempt to construct it in that language. However, in this manner I introduced a variable the impact of which is now difficult to assess. I noticed some users did not (fully) understand some questions. The question about education was not adapted to the Swedish educational system, hence rendering the question to a certain degree useless. For example, though I considered the term “high school” to be interchangeable with the Swedish “gymnasium”, some of the participants did not share my view. One respondent wrote “spänningsromaner” (suspense novels) under the option “other” when answering the question about preferred genres. Whether (s)he missed that there was the option thriller/suspense/mystery or did not know that the word “spännning” means “suspense” is impossible to ascertain. This instance raised the question of whether there were some other questions that were misunderstood or not understood at all. Research on this topic indicates that questionnaires should be designed in the native language of the participants. Language impacts the way people respond to questions and may obscure important national differences (Harzing, 2005). This is particularly evident in questions related to cultural values, but same seems to apply for neutral questions as well (Harzing, 2005). I can be reasonably sure that no serious misunderstanding occurred, since those who do not known English simply would choose to opt out of the questionnaire. However, this raises two more problems. Firstly, it makes the sample biased in favor of those who know English or at least think they do. Secondly, I believe the response rate would have been much higher if the questionnaire were in Swedish. One indicator of this is the comments of some potential participants who wrote precisely that in the comment section of my post which contained the link to my survey.
5 Results

Firstly, I will report on the demographics of the survey, and then the survey items will be presented in three sections corresponding to the questionnaire sections: choosing audiobooks, a-books in everyday life and attitudes towards a-books’ affordances. Charts will be used to display the results.

5.1 Survey participants

The classification questions section contained four questions: gender, age, current highest educational qualification and streaming providers used. The last question was included since I suspected I might have a bias towards Storytel users, which proved to be the case. This was most likely due to the two of the four Facebook groups being connected to Storytel. The fact that Storytel is the biggest and most popular provider probably played a part as well. As mentioned in the Methodology chapter, the question about education was not properly adapted to the Swedish educational system, resulting in confusion among some of the respondents. Nonetheless, the results will be displayed followed by a brief explanation.

Of the 284 participants, 230 submitted the questionnaire with every question answered. Response rate was 80%. Those who completed the questionnaire (16 participants) but skipped some questions, were not included in the analysis. If applicable, questions had the option “other (please specify)”. There were a couple of occurrences that participants chose this option despite having a similar answer already available. This can be attributed mostly to the participants not being entirely satisfied by the possible answer and wanting to share more about their personal context. A negligible amount of written responses in English were unintelligible; Swedish was mostly used if the option “other” was chosen.

Participants were predominantly female (93%) with a negligible part being male (6.5%); only one participant ticked the box “other” (Figure 2). The largest age group (Figure 3) was 45-54 (37.4%), the second largest 55-64 (25.6%), followed by 35-44 (19.6%). Those who were 65+ constituted 11.3% of the respondents, and those between 25 and 34 – 5.2%. There were only 2 respondents between the ages 18 and 24, and none under the age of 18.
Because of the evident connection between reading and a higher level of educational attainment (Perrin, 2016; 2019; Antoni, 2006; Höglund & Wahlström, 2018; Wallin et al., 2019), I considered the question about education to be important to include (Figure 4). Considering the results, there were slightly more participants with a high school degree (33.5%) than those with a Bachelor’s degree (32%). Master’s degree was chosen by 25.6% of participants and three participants (1.3%) had a Doctorate. The option “other” was chosen by 7.3%. The 17 participants who opted for the last option revealed that there was a problem in the perception of the labels. They did not quite reflect the state of the Swedish educational system, though I believed the approximation was close enough. I was mistaken. In any case, out of the 17 people who chose the “other” option, five of them wrote “gymnasium” which would be high school or upper secondary school would have been more exact (Skolverket, n.d.); ten of them had some sort of a university degree; two answers were unclear. Despite this issue, we can see that the participants are on average quite educated, with at least
59% of them holding some sort of a university/college degree (excluding the ten participants mentioned above).

The findings seem to indicate that the survey participants are generally better educated than the average. In 2018 in Sweden, 28% of the population held at least a Bachelor's degree, and 43% had some sort of education beyond high school (“Utbildningsnivå i Sverige”, 2019). Findings of previous research also point to audiobook listeners being better educated than the average, which is in turn connected to a-book users often themselves being avid readers that read books in different formats (Rubery, 2016; Audio Publishers Association, 2010; Hanner & O’Connor, 2019). However, young people who presumably are (still) studying are under-represented in this study, so this might have skewed the results. On the other hand, it is possible that there are not that many young people overall in the Facebook groups surveyed. Although Facebook is still the biggest social network in Sweden, it seems to be appealing more to the older, while losing the younger to some newer networking sites such as Instagram or Snapchat (Nordicom, 2019).

**Figure 4: Participants by educational level**

By far the most popular streaming provider among the respondents is Storytel (Figure 5). This no surprise since it is the biggest and the most popular and two of the four Facebook groups were connected to it. The local library was the second most popular with 14.3%, followed by Nextory and BookBeat which both had about 11%. The category “other” had 11 responses: Legimus and iBooks accruing more than once. Legimus is an online library of Myndigheten för tillgängliga medier (Agency for available media) where people with reading disabilities can borrow talking books (DAISY; see www.legimus.se for more information).
Choosing audiobooks

Two most important reasons why users choose audiobooks are directly linked to audiobooks’ prominent features: the ability to multi-task and convenience (Figure 6):

- I can do other things while listening (63%)
- They are portable and I can listen wherever I am (20.4%)

Based on the activity of the Facebook groups surveyed, there is a visible amount of those who have some sort of reading disability. Considering that, it is not a surprise that the third most common reason was linked to that, though it refers only to slightly less than 7% of the respondents.

Q1 What is the primary reason you listen to audiobooks?
By far the most popular genre is thriller/suspense/mystery chosen by 80.4% of participants (Figure 7). This is what research both worldwide and in Sweden indicates. Second most popular is historical fiction (38.7%), followed closely by biography/memoir (36%). General fiction (33%) and romance (32%) are also quite popular. Other genres that have a significant amount of listeners include science-fiction/fantasy (26.5%), nonfiction (16%) and self-help/personal growth (10.4%). Other genres had each less than 10%. One genre which was not on the list but deserves mentioning is the “feel-good” genre. Under the “other” option, 6 out of 9 respondents mentioned it. At first feel-good genre applied to films and encompassed filmic modes such as comedy and drama and genres such as romantic comedy, sports films, sci-fi and fantasy (Brown, 2015). The label spread to include books and is quite popular in Sweden (“Feelgood romanen mår bättre än någonsin”, 2018). As the name suggests, a feel-good novel should make the reader feel good, which usually includes a happy ending and a story not burdened with too many negative things (Bäfving, 2015).

Q2 What genres do you prefer? Select all that apply.

![Figure 7: Preferred audiobook genres](image-url)
According to the survey (Figure 8), audiobooks are mostly chosen on the basis of genre (41.3%). Recommendation is the second most important reason (27.8%), and author the third (21.7%).

**Q3 How do you most often choose an audiobook?**

![Figure 8: Factors for choosing audiobooks](image)

### 5.3 Audiobooks in everyday life

The second section shows results of how much users listen to audiobooks, if they listen to podcasts and read books in other formats, and where does the audiobook listening take place. As Figure 9 shows, most of the respondents listen to more than 20 books a year (65.2%). Under the “other” option, some claimed to have audio read between 50 and 500 books in the past year, which is quite remarkable.

**Q4 How many audiobooks have you listen to in the past year?**

![Figure 9: Yearly audiobook usage](image)
Figure 10 shows that most audio read 3-5 (43%) or 6-10 (24.3%) books per month, with only 14.7% who audio read 1-2 books per month.

Q5 How many audiobooks do you listen to per month?

Figure 10: Monthly audiobook usage

Considering the respondents audio read so many book yearly and monthly, it is to be expected they listen to them often during the day (Figure 11): 44.7% listen to a-book more than 2 hours per day and 31% between 1 and 2 hours per day.

Q6 For how long do you usually listen to an audiobook in a day?

Figure 11: Daily audiobook usage
Research on the subject shows that audiobook users are often avid readers of printed books and that they often listen to podcasts. Whether my findings support that conclusion, will be discussed in the next chapter (Figure 12): more than half (53.4\%) read print books and 43\% listen to podcasts. A significant number only listens to a-books (26.5\%). E-book are read by 22\% of participants.

Q7 Besides audiobooks, do you also (select all that apply):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Read print books</td>
<td>53.46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read e-books</td>
<td>22.17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listen to podcasts</td>
<td>43.04%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I only listen to audiobooks</td>
<td>26.52%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 12: Use of other book formats and podcasts

Q8 Where do you most often listen to audiobooks?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Home</td>
<td>53.04%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Car</td>
<td>13.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public transportation</td>
<td>6.09%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outdoors (walking...)</td>
<td>15.22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work</td>
<td>6.09%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gym</td>
<td>0.43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>7.83%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 13: Most common places for audiobook listening

More than half of the participants (53\%) listen to a-books at home (Figure 13). Second most common place is outdoors (15.2\%) and the third car (11.3\%). Public transportation and work share the forth place with 6\%. Those that chose the “other” option, mostly wrote something along the lines of “I listen everywhere, wherever I am”.

36
5.4 Attitudes towards a-books’ affordances

I inquired about respondents’ attitudes towards audiobook’s affordances. Specifically attitudes towards some common objections to audiobook listening (which can be viewed as affordances) and some other relevant affordances of audiobooks. Considering common objections to a-books, results were the following. Asked whether they think listening to a-books is a passive activity (Figure 14), the greatest number of participants either chose the neutral option (neither agree nor disagree; 31,3%) or they disagreed (31,7%). However, a significant amount agreed with the statement (22%).

**Q9 Listening to an audiobook is passive activity.**

![Bar chart with the following distribution:
- Strongly agree: 6.09%
- Agree: 22.77%
- Neither agree nor disagree: 31.30%
- Disagree: 31.74%
- Strongly disagree: 8.70%

Figure 12: Common objections to a-book listening: passivity

Similarly to the previous question, when asked whether print book are more engaging (Figure 15), 30% neither agreed nor disagreed, 31,7% disagreed and 20% agreed.

**Q10 Reading a print book is more engaging that listening to an audiobook.**

![Bar chart with the following distribution:
- Strongly agree: 3.48%
- Agree: 20.00%
- Neither agree nor disagree: 30.00%
- Disagree: 31.74%
- Strongly disagree: 14.78%

Figure 13: Common objection to a-book listening: less engaging
Next question (Figure 16) inquired whether a-book listening required less concentration than print books; an equal amount of respondents, i.e. 32%, agreed and disagreed, while 19.5% neither agreed nor disagreed.

Q11 Listening to an audiobook requires less concentration than reading a print book.

![Bar chart showing responses to Q11](image1)

Figure 16: Common objection to a-book listening: requires less concentration

Q12 The audiobook speaker interferes with the reception of the text.

![Bar chart showing responses to Q12](image2)

Figure 17: Common objection to a-book listening: the narrator/speaker interferes with the reception of the text

Figure 17 shows the results of the question whether the narrator interferes with the reception of the text. Almost 37% neither agreed nor disagreed with that statement, while 28.7% agreed and 17.8% strongly agreed.
Considering the lack of control over the pace of the a-book being a major drawback (Figure 18), most (44.3%) chose the neutral position; 28.7% disagreed and 14.3% agreed. Whether or not this issue poses a problem today (considering it is now possible to control the pace to some degree) will be discussed in the following chapter.

Q13 Lack of control over the pace of the audiobook is a major drawback.

![Figure 14: Common objection to a-book listening: the pace cannot be controlled](image)

Q14 Any sort of abridgment distorts the original narrative.

![Figure 15: Common objection to a-book listening: abridgments](image)

More than half (58.7%) neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement that abridgements distort the original narrative (Figure 19). However, 22% agreed and 9.5% strongly agreed.
Considering music as a good addition to a-books (Figure 20), most disagreed: 30.8% strongly disagreed and 29.5% disagreed. Middle option was chosen by 23% of participants.

Q15 Appropriate music is generally a good addition to an audiobook.

![Bar chart showing responses to Q15](image)

**Figure 16: Presence of music in an a-book**

Q16 Primary benefit of audiobooks is the ability to multi-task.

![Bar chart showing responses to Q16](image)

**Figure 17: Multitasking as the primary benefit of a-books**

As expected, the following question (Figure 21) reinforces the notion that a-books’ main affordance is the fact one can do other things while listening. A total amount of 80% (equally split between agree and strongly agree) concurred with the statement that multitasking is the primary benefit afforded by audiobooks.
Research shows the narrator is an important part of the audiobook, including whether the listener will listen to the whole book (Figure 22). More than 85% agreed or strongly agreed with that statement.

**Q17 The audiobook speaker plays an important part in whether I will finish a book.**

![Figure 18: Importance of the narrator/speaker](image)

Considering whether users choose audiobooks which they would not or do not have time to read in print, the distribution of the answers looks like a bell curve (Figure 23). Middle option, neither agree nor disagree, was chosen by 30%; 26% disagreed and 24.7% agreed; 10% strongly disagreed and 9% strongly agreed.

**Q18 I usually choose audiobooks that I would not or don't have the time to read in print.**

![Figure 19: Choosing different books based on format](image)
The last question, whether resurrection of the sound of literature is an important contribution of audiobooks, yielded the results visible in Figure 24. Majority neither agreed nor disagreed (62%); 29% agreed and 6% strongly agreed.

Q19 Resurrecting the sound of literature is an important contribution of audiobooks.

In conclusion, most of the participants were women between the ages 35-64, well-educated and users of Storytel. The results suggest that users predominantly choose audiobooks because they can do other things while listening. Thriller/suspense/mystery are by far the most popular genres. The analysis indicates that a large proportion of the survey takers listens quite a lot. Surprisingly, location where most of the audio reading takes place is the home; listening in a car or while commuting does not seem to be very common. The audiobook speaker/narrator is an important factor for finishing an a-book but not for choosing it in the first place; presence of music is generally not desired. The findings seem to confirm that many listen to podcasts and read print books, but they nonetheless call into question whether a-book listeners are avid readers of print books; in fact, there is a substantial number who exclusively audio reads. The results also show that the local libraries are a relevant source of audiobooks.
6 Analysis and discussion

In this chapter I will present the analysis and discussion of the results. The main focus of this thesis is exploring the preferences and attitudes of members of Swedish audiobook user groups on the topic of audiobooks, especially how and why they use audiobooks, how they incorporate them in their daily lives and what they think about a-books’ affordances. A-books can be considered one relevant manifestation of new technology application on a very old human artefact – the book. One premise that was my starting point was that an audiobook is a book – remediated – that is, a book manifested in a different medium. From UGT springs the understanding of users as active seekers of a-books capable of accurately assessing their needs. Five possible uses and gratifications (relaxation, passing time, escape, learning/sharing and companionship) coupled with McLuhan's tetrad of audiobook affordances (accessibility/convenience, mobility, sound and hybridization) were used as a theoretical framework within which the results are placed.

6.1 Research question one: Why, how and to what extent do members of Swedish audiobook Facebook groups consume audiobooks?

According to APA, technology is the driver behind audiobook usage (Audio Publishers Association, 2019). Without a doubt, technology development is what is enabling the audiobook rise. And even though one can imagine that audiobooks would be listened to even if hard to acquire and cumbersome to consume – as each medium has its users – it is highly unlikely they would have ever become so popular. For anything to become popular and mainstream, it has to have the capacity to appeal to a very large and, therefore, a very diverse crowd. Convenience and easy and fast access is what every consumer prefers, his/her idiosyncrasies notwithstanding. Smartphones are as convenient an accessory as one can imagine, especially because they can be used in so many ways and for so many different things. They are extremely convenient for audio reading. The trend is clearly favoring smartphones as the number one device for downloading and streaming a-books, though other devices are also used, such as CD players, Desktop and Laptop computers and tablets (Have & Stougaard Pedersen, 2017; BookNet Canada, 2018; Watson, 2019). This is most certainly the case in Sweden, where the subscription based model is the norm. A subscriber downloads an application to his/her phone, which is then used to download or stream a-books. Officially 99% of Swedes own a smartphone (Davidsson, Palm & Mandre, 2019). The dominance and widespread use of smartphones (in the developed world) can be traced back roughly to the year of 2012 (Reisinger 2012; Svensson, 2013). Since 2017, smartphones have been the most used device for a-book listening in the US (Watson, 2019).
6.1.1 Reasons for choosing a-books

According to the research presented in this thesis, people choose audiobooks primarily because they can do other things while listening. This was chosen as the number one reason by 63% (145) of survey takers. Over 80% (186 out of 230) agreed (40%) or strongly agreed (40%) with the statement that the primary benefit of a-books is the ability to multitask. Second most common reason was a-books’ portability/ability to listen wherever chosen by 20% (47) of participants. Almost all of the available literature points to this direction: audiobook listeners choose audiobooks because they allow for another activity to be done simultaneously (Kozlowski 2018; Have & Stougaard Pedersen, 2017; Audio Publishers Association, 2019). McLuhan's tetrads (or in this case, triad since only three main characteristics are relevant) predicts this conclusion. The main characteristics of a-books – namely, accessibility/convenience, mobility, sound – is what enables multitasking and draws people to audio reading. The medium leaves our eyes and body mobile, and the smartphone technology makes a-books easily accessible and convenient to use in many and different timespaces. Users intuitively recognize a-books intrinsic affordances and choose them as the best medium to fulfil their needs. Though other media and digital formats, such as e.g. e-books, can claim accessibility and convenience, no other book format can claim (successful) multitasking (dimension of mobility) as its innate affordance.

However, a new study by Hanner & O’Connor (2019) points to another direction. In this study, the ability to do multiple things at the same time (e.g. drive a car, clean or exercise) turned out not to be a relevant factor, at least in the case of regular a-book users. In fact, what turned out to be the most significant factor was the need for human company. This does indeed emerge as one of the uses and gratifications in our theoretical model; however, the mobility aspect can be connected to the four remaining uses and gratifications and should be much more important, as the literature generally indicates. Companionship gratification is intrinsically connected to the affordance of sound, while the mobility affordance can greatly facilitate the gratification of the need for relaxation, passing time, escape and sharing/learning by expanding the medium use to almost every time and space where one has its hands free and is not burdened by an overly complicated mental task. The need for human company, for comfort and connection, surfaces as a motivation to use other media as well, such as television or radio (Cooper, 2015; Have & Stougaard Pedersen, 2012; Rubin, 1983) and applies to all audio and audio-visual media to some degree. Hence, the need for company could not, I believe, account for the steady rise of audiobook popularity. My assumption is that if people were first and foremost looking for a feeling of companionship, they would turn to television, Netflix or something similar. APA’s consumer report from 2018 suggest that more than half of the users choose an a-book “when they want some time to themselves” (Audio Publishers Association, 2018). This would imply that human company is exactly what they do not want. In any case, what the results overall seem to suggest is that audio reading (and reading in general) is a complex phenomenon and that we are most likely dealing with a delicate interplay between technology, a-book’s affordances and different user profiles.
The insight about multitasking does not preclude the possibility of only immersing yourself in an audiobook, and many actually do, at least sometimes. In an attempt to keep my survey as short as possible and thus increase the response rate, I did not explicitly ask respondents this question. However, some insight can be drawn from other responses and I believe this is important to consider since it directly ties into the first research question. The majority of the respondents (53%) listen at home and the percentages for other locations is significantly lower. It is safe to assume that at least sometimes users only listen, without engaging in another activity. This could depend on how much free time they have during the day and/or what book they are listening to and to what purpose. Generally the majority of the survey participants either have no opinion or do not agree that a-book listening is passive, less engaging or requires less concentration than reading a print book. From this observation one might infer that in some cases, listening only would be preferred if it was thought that multitasking would interfere with the narrative or information absorption. Statistics for Canada, for example, reveal that more than half (54%) of consumers only listen (BookNet Canada, 2018). Similar information about Sweden is not yet available, but we can guess there is a substantial amount of users who only listen – at least at some point in the day, for example, at bedtime. This is a very plausible conclusion considering that, according to Ahlström (2019) and based on the numbers available from Storytel and BookBeat, most users in Sweden listen around 10 p.m. Similarly to printed books, many might turn to them at the end of the day, when duties and distractions of everyday life are finally silent. The existence of a sleep-timer in virtually every a-book app further backs this up. Such a sleep-timer allows for a user to set a time when the book will automatically stop playing, thus avoiding the book continuing to talk after we have fallen asleep.

A very small number of my survey participants choose either “I enjoy being read to” (4%) or “helps me finish more books” (2%) as the primary reason for listening to a-books. The enjoyment of being read to can be connected to the desire for company, so this result might further strengthen the assumption that companionship is not a factor more relevant than mobility. Nevertheless, literature supports the conclusion that these are not negligible factors in the decision-making process, even though they are not the most relevant. After the two listed above, Kozlowski (2018) states that the third reason for choosing a-books was the enjoyment of being read to. According to the APA (Audio Publishers Association, 2019), many agree that a-books help them finish more books and that audio is the format preferred when one wishes to finish books quickly. Research mentioned by Have & Stougaard Pedersen (2017) reveals that more than half of respondents choose a-books because they can listen to a book in their car. This can be considered multitasking hence reinforces our first conclusion. The issue of where the audio reading takes place will be discussed shortly.

Though only 7% (16 participants) in my survey choose “difficulty reading print” as the primary reason for listening to a-books, I would argue this is still significant. Technology has advanced to the point that many disabled people can today almost fully participate in every activity. Talking books for the vision impaired have their place, but those that have e.g. a reading disability (like dyslexia) or only diminished sight, can today use commercial a-books. Facebook groups I used as a sampling frame ask their members to provide a written text in
addition to a picture, so those that need it can use voice reader text-to-speech software to understand what the picture is about. My impression is that there is a substantial number of those with some sort of reading disability active in Swedish audiobook Facebook groups and active as commercial audiobook listeners. More research would be needed to find out more about this sub-group of users.

### 6.1.2 Locations where a-book consumption takes place

Let us turn to the issue of where users listen and what other things they do while listening. Though the latter is not directly addressed by any of the survey items, it is relevant because it is connected to the question of where a-book listening takes place and consequently, how. Furthermore, since time and space are connected and we tend to do certain activities at approximately the same time and place, *when* users listen will also be mentioned (Tattersall Wallin & Nolin, 2019). Results concerning the location of audio reading were surprising to a certain degree. More than half of users (53%) most often listen at home. This is followed by outdoors (walking, jogging, cycling etc.) with 15%, and car on the 3rd place with only 11%. Public transportation and work, which each got 6%, were on the 4th place. According to APA, 74% of users in America listen to a-books in their car, and 69% at home (Audio Publishers Association, 2019). Car is the number one location in the US where audio reading takes place. Conversely, my data suggests that, in the Swedish context, listening in a car is not that common at all. According to Gallup (Brenan, 2018), 83% of adult Americans drive a car at least several times a week and 64% drive every day. Comparatively it would seem that Swedes drive less than Americans, despite the fact Swedes are driving more than before (DiLallo, 2018; Trafikanalys, 2018). Contributing factors to these differences are probably mostly geographical and cultural in nature. Gender probably plays a part too, as well as age. Though a bit old, one study from 2005 shows that women in Sweden drive a car significantly less than men (Cedersund & Lewin, 2005). Similar situation is in America. Women on average drive less and less frequently and enjoy it less (Brenan, 2018). However, in America there seems to be no gender gap in a-book usage (Perrin, 2016), while there appears to be one in Sweden. Data from Canada also points to a gender gap, with 65% of Canadian users being female (BookNet Canada, 2018). UK, on the other hand, has more male users according to Sandin (2018). One of the major subscription services in Sweden, BookBeat, claims that 75% of its subscribers are female (Sandin, 2018). Data for Storytel, although a couple of years old, are almost identical, with 78% of listeners purportedly women (Dahlgren, 2016). Similarly, Ahlström (2019) writes that 68.5% of a-book listeners in Sweden are female. Results of my survey support this conclusion, though the proportion of females is much higher. Among my participants, 93% are female. Such a high number can partly be explained by use of Facebook as a sampling frame. According to Denti (2012), women in Sweden spend significantly more time on Facebook than men and, moreover, they are more active and engaged. Considering this claim, it is possible that members of the Facebook groups I surveyed are dominated by women – and not only by sheer numbers, but also by involvement (e.g. posting more, commenting more etc.) which would also make them more likely to see my post with the link to the survey and more prone to actually take the survey. In addition to everything mentioned so far, women still do much more housework compared to men –
even in Sweden, one of the countries with the highest rate of gender equality (Stanfors, 2018). Considering this, it is quite possible that a great deal of the audio reading in Sweden is done by women at home while they are doing housework. All five reading motivations (i.e. uses and gratifications for audio reading) can blend and merge with the first three parts of McLuhan's tetrad in order to make such a context into a perfect audio reading situation.

All of the 7% of participants who choose the “other” option in the survey concerning where they listen, did not offer an alternative location where they mostly consume a-books, but wrote something along the lines that they listen wherever they are. This of course makes sense, since one of the most important reasons people choose a-books is precisely because they can be used anywhere. The 2nd most common location (after home) in my research was listening outdoors (walking, jogging, cycling or similar). A certain number or people seem to prefer to audio read while outside and/or exercising. However, this does not include exercising in the gym, perhaps due to too many distractions like people or loud gym music. After the location “car” which has already been discussed, an equal amount of respondents (6%) chose public transportation and work as the primary location for a-book use. This finding is quite interesting. I expected for public transportation to be more important as a place for listening to a-books, especially more important than work. For comparison, some of the most cited multitasking activities in the US include housework, baking, exercising and crafting (Kozlowski, 2018) and in Canada housework, commuting, working on a hobby and exercising/running/walking outside (BookNet Canada, 2018). Data for Canada (BookNet Canada, 2018) also suggests that a substantial amount of people listen at work (18%), though more read while commuting (29%). Recent new study on BookBeat’s Swedish users (Tattersall Wallin & Nolin, 2019) reveals that a-book listening is evenly distributed throughout the day with a small decline between 5 p.m. and 9 p.m., exactly when we would expect just the opposite. The data implies that users listen most during the day, i.e. while a large number will be working. This might mean that they listen during breaks or lunch or have jobs that allow them to listen to a-books at the same time (Tattersall Wallin & Nolin, 2019). Besides that, it could point to a spreading modern trend of working online and/or at home, blurring the line between work and private life. Data shows that majority of the workers in Sweden mix their job and personal life with the help of Internet, by working from home or using the Internet at work for personal matters (Davidsson et.al., 2019). With that in mind, perhaps it should not be surprising that many listen to a-books during their working hours. It is imaginable that, in such a scenario, users are looking mostly for relaxation, and a-book's tetrad of affordances makes consumption possible even in such a context.

### 6.1.3 Preferred genres

Concerning what the users audio read, genres thriller/suspense/mystery are by far the most popular. For 80% (185 out of 230) of respondents these genres are the ones preferred. Statistics available for the US, Canada and Sweden point to a similar conclusion (Audio Publishers Association, 2019; BookNet Canada, 2018; Ahlström, 2019), though distinctions among some genres is not completely clear and categorizing certain books is not easy. However, since this is not our focus, there is no need to go deeper into the problematics of genre theory and genre-
bending books. Suffice it to say it is an issue to have in mind. Now, possible confusion aside, we have a pretty good picture of what a-book lovers like to listen. To a certain degree, it corresponds to the print book market (Audio Publishers Association, 2010). What sells most is fiction. At the top of print book sales in the US are, roughly speaking: crime, mystery, romance, science fiction and fantasy novels, with religious/inspirational as the top nonfiction genre (Herold, 2019). Situation is similar with audiobooks: mystery, thrillers, suspense, science fiction, fantasy and romance are the leading genres (Herold, 2019). The second most read genre in my survey is historical fiction with 38%, followed closely by biography/memoir, general fiction and romance which all gained over 30%. In the newest APA report (Audio Publishers Association, 2019) history/biography/memoir and humor follow after mystery/thriller/suspense, corresponding partially to my findings. Humor was one genre that was not included in my survey and, since only one participant mentioned it, probably is not (yet) very popular. It is interesting to note that humor as a genre is barely present as print, but somewhat popular in e-book format (Hoffert, 2018).

For Sweden, Ahlström (2019) puts general fiction on the 2nd place (after suspense) with other genres, including biography (5%), far behind. This contradicts my findings since they indicate that the nonfiction genre of biography/memoir is quite popular together with historical fiction as its fiction counterpart. Relatively recent data from American libraries shows a growing popularity of biographies/memoirs both in print and e-book format (Hoffert, 2018; Collins, 2019). Considering my data, this trend seems to apply to audiobook format as well. The 6th most read genre proved to be sf/fantasy, which gained 26.5% of the votes. Though generally popular compared to other genres, sf/fantasy appears to be much more popular as both e-book and a-book (Hoffert, 2018; Collins, 2019; Herold, 2019). Self-help/personal growth is somewhat popular with 10% of respondents choosing it. Though it is a bit problematic to compare, the category self-help/psychology is in the top 5 nonfiction genres in both print and e-book format and slightly more read as the latter (Collins, 2019; Hoffert, 2018). Conversely, there are indications that in a-book format it is not nearly as popular (Herold, 2019. Have & Stougaard Pedersen) which my research also points to. Self-help books on tape were quite common in the 80s and 90s (Rubery, 2016; Kozloff, 1995), but that connection might be a thing of the past. Children's literature was chosen by 7.8% of participants whose children presumably listen to a-books. Concerning book sales, children's literature generally fares well both in America and Sweden (Kirch, 2019; Wikberg, 2019). This should reflect the state of a-books as well, as children's literature is in the top 10 most profitable audiobook genres in the US (Herold, 2019). Health/fitness gained 6.5% of votes and inspirational/faith based 6%. Concerning the former, there is not much to compare this result to; concerning the ladder, this category's popularity in the US can be contributed to a much higher level of religiosity among Americans compared to Swedes. According to Pew Research Center, Americans are much more religious than Western Europeans (Evans, 2018), and Swedes are the least religious of all Westerners, according to Gallup (Smith, 2018). Erotica as a genre had 4%. Again, a comparison is difficult to make, since sometimes erotica is counted together with romance and in than case it would appear to be audio read much more than my results indicate. Suffice it to say it has its readers.
The least preferred genres were language instruction and business which each got only 1%. Interestingly a-books are obviously not often used as a means to learn or practice a foreign language, despite the fact it could be convenient for exactly that purpose. Business a-books received little interest and this seems to contradict the available information. According to Herold (2019), business a-book genre is among the top 10 most lucrative. Unfortunately, available data does not let us compare print vs e-book vs a-book in order to see what genres are preferred in each format and to what extent. However, the available data does imply that there is a noticeable difference between what is more read in print vs e-book and that the differences in the nonfiction category are even more prominent than in the fiction category (Hoffert, 2018; Collins, 2019). These trends vary over time and are dependent on many factors, hence I did not attempt to explore this issue in-depth. My interest was primarily to ascertain whether preferred audiobook genres correspond to other book format preferred genres. My major impression (with the lack of actual data in mind) is that it does. Genres are similarly popular across book formats, but with relevant discrepancies worthy of deeper research.

6.1.4 Usage of other book formats and podcasts

The question of how audiobooks are used is also interesting to explore from a comparative perspective concerning the usage of other book formats and podcasts by audiobook listeners. Of all the respondents, 43% listen to podcasts. Connection between podcasts and a-book listening has already been well established and almost all distributors see podcasts as a gateway to audiobooks (Audiobook Publishers Association, 2019; Kozlowski, 2018). More people listen to podcasts than to audiobooks in the US (Edison Research and Triton Digital, 2019b; Perrin, 2019). Similarly, slightly more people listen to podcasts (9%) than a-books (7%) daily in Sweden (Davidsson et.al., 2019). Though arguably still a large percentage, I expected more than 43% of a-book listeners to be podcast listeners. Unfortunately, it is difficult to truly compare these results because it was not explicitly stated in my questionnaire whether the question refers to weekly/monthly usage, though regular usage was implied. With this caveat in mind, the conclusion drawn from the results is that a-book listeners consume podcasts significantly more than the average population. According to a recent digital media consumer behavior research in America, 22% of the entire US population listens to podcasts on a weekly basis (Edison Research and Triton Digital, 2019b). Comparatively, approximately 12% of the Swedish population does it weekly (Davidsson et.al., 2018). As expected, a-book listeners listen to podcasts more frequently: survey in Canada reveals that 58% listen to podcast, with 26% listening weekly (BookNet Canada, 2018). Americans seem to listen more than Swedes, but there is no gender gap in Sweden unlike the US, though it has shrunk over the years (Davidsson et.al., 2018; Edison research, 2018; Edison Research and Triton Digital, 2019b). Moreover, podcast listeners tend to be younger in age. In Sweden, those between 16 and 35 listen the most, though a sharp decline in listening we actually see only after 55 years of age (Davidsson et.al., 2018). It is similar in America (Edison Research and Triton Digital, 2019b). These are important insights to mention, given that a large majority of my respondents are older female and it is important to explore in which ways my sample could be biased and how that might have effected the results. Those who were 55+ constituted a notable amount of survey participants, namely 37%.
Those between 25-44 constituted 24.7% of the survey participants, which is roughly the age bracket of those listening to podcasts the most (Davidsson et.al., 2018). Large amount of older respondents compared to young ones probably skewed the results. Nonetheless, the results support the existence of a link between podcasts and a-book use, if the result of 43% is interpreted as monthly usage.

Concerning other book formats, more than half of survey takers read print books (53%), 22% read e-books and 26% do not read books in any other format except audio. At the moment, a-books are more popular than e-books in Sweden (Nordicom, 2019; Davidsson et.al., 2019). Approximately 20% of people in Sweden reads e-books (Bergström et.al., 2017), though there has been a significant rise recently connected with the fact that subscription services offer both e-book and a-books (Wallin et.al., 2019). The fact more people use a-books than e-books could be pointing to the affordance of "accessibility/convenience" (connected to portability) not being as important as "mobility". This assumption is further backed up by the results on reasons for listening: portability is the 2nd most cited reason, however, not as nearly so prevalent as the ability to multitask. As mentioned before, these results are, unfortunately, difficult to compare with others and place in a wider context due to the survey item's ambiguousness. If we suppose the percentage refers to a relatively regular usage (monthly), this results would seem to contradict previous research. Generally the literature suggests that a-book listeners are avid readers and read more print books than the average person (Audio Publishers Association, 2010) which would indicate that they use a-books as a complement and not a substitute for print books (Rubery, 2016; Have & Stougaard Pedersen, 2017; Hanner & O'Connor, 2019). According to the APA (Audio Publishers Association, 2018), 83% of frequent audiobook listeners have read a print book in the past year and 79% an e-book, while according to Pew Research (Perrin, 2016), 65% of Americans have read a print book in the past year. This supports the conclusion that frequent a-book users read more books in any format than the average. Mediebarometer (Nordicom, 2019) reports that approximately 58% of Swedes read a book in any format weekly, and 72% monthly. Though these percentages do not distinguish between different book formats, the portion of a- and e-book users is not that high. For example, 39% of Swedes read books daily, of that 32% read paper books, 6% listen to a-books and 3% read e-books (Nordicom, 2018). From these data a conclusion can be drawn that the respondents in my survey do not read more books in other mediums (print and e-books) than the average. Perhaps they even read less. Comparatively, there are slightly more users (26%) who exclusively listen than those that use e-books (22%). The fact that approximately 1 in 4 only listens is very interesting and raises the question of why it is so. In fact, according to the data we have, it is quite uncommon (Höglund & Wahlström, 2018). We already know that 7% of the participants have difficulty reading print, but what about the other 19%? They might not have time for other forms of reading (so utilizing the "mobility" characteristic of a-books to the fullest) or they prefer to listen or be read to – for them the "sound" characteristic could be the most important one. Perhaps this is the segment of users whose need for the sense of human company motivates them the strongest to choose this particular medium.
6.1.5 Factors relevant when choosing a particular a-book

Now we turn to what factors are the most relevant for users when deciding on a certain audiobook. Genre turned out to be the most important factor with 41% of participants listing it as the number one reason, while author is on the third place with almost 22%. Recommendation is a very important factor with almost 28% of votes, taking the 2nd place. Speaker/narrator was the most important factor for only 4%. Most of the 5% who chose the option “other” wrote either “all of the above” or something similar. Though genre and author are connected since many authors stick to one genre, the results suggest that people are more willing to venture into reading new authors if they write within the genre one prefers, than read everything by a certain author, even those books which are of a different genre. There is very little comparable data specifically for a-book users, but if we look at factors for choosing books in general, it partially reflects my findings. A somewhat older study from Canada and the UK showed that readers preferred choosing their books based on a recommendation by a friend and by their favorite author the most, while library recommendations were not very relevant (Rehberg Sedo, 2008).

However, some differences are to be expected due to the changed book landscape and the advent of digital books. One relatively recent unofficial poll shows similar results to mine, genre being the most important reason followed by author (C. H. Clark, 2018). Considering a-book users specifically, research from Canada suggests users most often find new books by browsing by genre/subject or by reading a book review or by recommendation (BookNet Canada, 2018). The fact recommendation is a relevant factor has important implications for both libraries and subscription services. Especially libraries should invest more into reaching patrons through not only the library's website, but, more importantly, social media. Though the number of people physically coming to public libraries and borrowing books in Sweden has been reducing over the years, loaning of e-books has increased this past year (Kungliga biblioteket, 2018). The same has been happening with a-books: we know that from 2017 to 2018, digital audiobook loans in public libraries doubled (Lenas, 2019). Furthermore, there is an evident increase of people doing library-related errands online (Walllin et.al., 2019). Current trends would suggest libraries should focus equally on their social role and material materials as on their digital materials.

Concerning other preferences when choosing a-books, the speaker/narrator of the audiobook is not the most important factor for many. This is quite interesting as it partially contradicts the impression one gets from, for example, the Swedish media and some research that there is a larger number of users choosing on the basis of the narrator first (Perdahl, 2019; Perfekt, 2018; Imberg & Petersson, 2016). Imberg and Petersson (2016) findings suggests that for Swedish users of Storytel, the narrator is much more important than the author in the choice of a-books. An article from 2016 claims that 8% of Storytel’s users choose an a-book based on who is the narrator (Dahlgren, 2016). This is arguably not a large number, and my study would suggest that it is even much less than that (only 4%). Conclusion that can be drawn is that the overall importance of the narrator gets fused with actually choosing a-books by who the narrator is – which, I think, is an important distinction since it points to the author, genre and content.
being more important than the narrator, i.e. the nuances of the voice and the performance. This would also imply that reading motives associated with mobility are more salient that those associated with sound; i.e. relaxation/passing time/learning is more important that companionship. However, when it comes to continuing to listen and finishing an a-book, the speaker/narrator seems to be crucial: 45% agreed and 42% strongly agreed with that statement. Moreover, a significant number agreed or strongly agreed (altogether around 46%) that the narrator/speaker interferes with the reception of the text, stressing the importance of choosing the right narrator for a particular a-book. These findings reflect previous research (Rubery, 2016; Bednar, 2010).

6.1.6 How much users listen

Concerning how much users consume audiobooks, the findings indicate that a large majority are heavy users: 65% has audio read more than 20 books in the last year, and 67% read between 3 and 10 books a month. This seems to indicate users listen much more than other research would suggest. In the latest APA's report, a-book listeners listened to an average of 6.8 books in the past year (Audio Publishers Association, 2019). Data for Canada shows that more than half of a-book users audio read 5 or less books over the past year and a quarter read 6-10 (BookNet Canada, 2018). Conversely, according to my research, in Sweden the number seems much higher, on average between 16 and 20 books listened to the past year. This is even more amazing if we consider that only 15% reads one or two books per month and a staggering 85% reads between 3 and more than 20, which would indicate that a majority listens to at least 36 books per year – at least! If we assume that the users are reporting their activities correctly and are not exaggerating, these numbers are quite astonishing. Perhaps the difference in book length plays a huge part in this. An average unabridged a-book is around 10 hours long, but there are a-books much shorter than that. For example, Storytel has a category “snabbllyssnat”, where one can find books as short as 15 minutes. This category also includes books one can finish listening in under an hour or under five hours. Most of the respondents in my survey are Storytel users and they might be accustomed to audio read shorter stories, as they are entertaining and easier to digest on the go or while multitasking and they would still count them as books. If we assume that listeners audio read around the same amount each day (approximately one and a half hour), it is quite possible to read 36 books or much more a year, if most of the books are less than five or less than an hour long.

However, this discrepancy could also be reflecting the bias in my sample in favor of extremely heavy readers. Older women with a higher educational level are over-represented in my sample, which is generally the type that reads more (Nordicom, 2019). The relatively low response rate might have skewed the results as well, as those less active in the Facebook groups surveyed were less likely to take the survey.

Per day, 76% listen to a-books more than an hour. More specifically, 31% listen between one and two hours per day, while 45% listen more than 2 hours daily. On average, participants in my survey reported to audio read 60-90 minutes per day. There has been only one study specifically inquiring into how much time actual audiobook users spend listening to a-books. Tattersall Wallin & Nolin's
(2019) investigation into BookBeats users revealed that they audio read approximately 90-100 minutes a day, which is similar to my findings. Comparatively, an average person in Sweden on an average day spends only 5 minutes on audiobooks, 20 minutes on print and/or e-books, 53 minutes on social media, 115 minutes listening to music and 120 watching television (Nordicom, 2019). When it comes to leisure activities, watching tv is what usually occupies the most time, roughly 2-3 hours per day (Nordicom, 2019; U.S. Department of labor, 2018). However, Tattersall Wallin & Nolin's (2019) research shows that the users listen quite evenly during the day on weekdays and less during evenings and weekends, suggesting that a-books are not used during what could be considered typical leisure time, but quite the contrary – during the typical work/school time. This could be due to the existence of subscription based services and the nature of digital audiobooks, especially their mobility, making it easy and convenient to audio read in timespaces one previously could not, or in timespaces one cannot do anything else. Furthermore, Tattersall Wallin & Nolin's (2019) found that daily and weekly patterns of audio reading across different groups (male/female, younger/older) were quite similar. Unfortunately, because of the small number of both male participants and younger participants, I was unable to perform a gender and age analysis.

According to the APA, many users are finding more time to audio read and subsequently audio read more and being able to digitally access books is an important factor in this (Audio Publishers Association, 2019). The Swedish business model of offering unlimited access for an extremely reasonable monthly fee seems to be a winning combination, perhaps encouraging subscribers to audio read even more. Public libraries seem to have a firm place here too, as we shall soon see. More research is, however, needed in order to ascertain how do timespaces change based on audiobooks’ nature and other factors and how do different subscription models affect the use of audiobooks.

6.1.7 Relevance of local libraries for a-book provision

The results of my study also indicate that a substantial number of the survey takers borrow from a local library. The largest number of participants were Storytel subscribers (84%), but the 2nd choice was the local library (14%), followed by the other two major subscription services, BookBeat and Nextory, with 11%. This is quite exciting, especially in the light of indications that the distribution of digital books through traditional channels, such as the library, has decreased somewhat, as more and more people are attracted to subscription services (Walllin et. al., 2019). These services offer access to sizeable collections of both a- and e-books for an affordable fee of approximately 149-169 SEK (Walllin et.al.), while the local libraries have a smaller selection due to the prices and thus probably cannot meet the needs of the patrons. Up until this moment the aggregator Axiell Media has basically had monopoly over the provision of e-books to public libraries; this could change with Overdrive entering the scene and a new deal the public libraries have with this company (Wallin, 2019). Hopefully, the prices will decrease and enable the libraries to offer a larger selection to its patrons. In any case, a viable solution has to be found as it is curcial for libraries to keep up with societal changes and be able to stay relevant for the users whose needs consist of acquiring digital material, whether it be e- or a-books. What is also important to consider is: who borrows
from libraries? Perhaps this can be connected with the fact that a majority of the participants have a university/college education, so it is more likely that they are familiar with what the library has to offer and are more accustomed to using its resources, both physical and digital. And/or maybe those that read less are actually more likely to borrow from the library – as paying to read only one or two books a month might not seem cost effective. Those that read less might find that the library's current available titles are enough to satisfy his or her audio reading needs. It should also be mentioned that people with reading disabilities can acquire free talking books through the library: they can be used similarly as commercial audiobooks, i.e. one downloads an app and listens on his/her smartphone. The difference between a commercial audiobook (“ljudbok” in Swedish) and a talking book for the blind or those with a reading disability (“talbok”) is purely of a legal nature (Dahlgren, 2019). My contribution in this matter consists of the fact I decided not to separate these two kinds of a-books, precisely because of the similarity that was just mentioned. I believe this was the right choice which is supported by the results: there were at least 7% of respondents who have a reading disability and in addition to 14% who use the local library (libraries distribute talking books), there were participants who specifically mentioned Legimus.

6.2 Research question two: What attitudes do members of Swedish Facebook audiobook groups exhibit towards audiobooks’ affordances?

Two sub-questions related to the main research question were identified as: to what extent do users agree or disagree with some common objections to audiobook listening and what do users think about some a-books’ affordances. Five common objections were addressed as listed by Rubery (2012): listening to audiobooks is passive and/or less engaging, it require less concentration than printed books, abridgments distort the narrative, lack of control over the pace of the story, the speaker/narrator interferes with the reception of the text. Second sub-question included questions about: presence of music in an a-book, multitasking as the primary benefit, how important is the speaker/narrator in finishing an a-book, whether users choose a-books which they would not or do not have the time for to read in print form, resurrection of the sound of literature as an important contribution of a-books.

6.2.1 Common objections to a-book listening: passivity and distractedness

Considering that participants were frequent audiobooks users, it was expected that they will have favorable attitudes towards various aspects of the a-book phenomenon and that the a-books affordances would be relevant for them. The findings indeed support this assumption but give a very nuanced outlook on the issue. For example, while most of the respondents do not think that listening to audiobooks is a passive activity, still there is a substantial amount of those that
do think that: 39% disagree or strongly disagree, while 28% agree or strongly agree. Despite the fact that most of the participants do not consider a-book listening to be passive, there is still more that 1 in 4 that does; moreover, 31% neither agree nor disagree with that statement. Similar results were gained when participants were asked whether they think reading print books is more engaging than listening to a-books: 30% neither agreed nor disagreed, 45% (strongly) disagreed and 23% (strongly) agreed. Generally, a-book users do not think a-books are less engaging than print books, but there is still almost 1 in 4 that does not share that opinion. This would be very interesting to investigate further and discover why this is so, whether these users derive this opinion from personal experience or what they hear and read about a-books from critics. Perhaps they prefer to read print books but are for some reason forced to choose a-books, whether because of a reading disability or lack of time. Especially noteworthy results were reached when the question of the amount of concentration needed for reading vs audio reading was asked. In this case, almost an equal amount considered that a-book listening requires less concentration (39%) and that it does not (41%), while 19.5% were neutral. Literature posits that, though audiobooks use is very often carried out as a complementary and hence a semi-attentative activity, it does not preclude the possibility of concentrated or deep listening (Rubery 2012, 2016; Irwin, 2009). Perhaps this difference between a-book listening while engaged in another activity versus exclusively listening is what my results are reflecting. The users recognize that audio reading while e.g. doing housework is possible, however, being fully concentrated on the content is not possible. Hanner & O'Connor's (2019) study suggests that a-books require less concentration, however, the negative correlation between need for cognition (tendency towards activities that require more thinking) and attitudes towards a-books was quite small. As Have & Stougaard Pedersen (2012) write: "The practice of listening to an audiobook seems concentrated, yet also distracted" (p. 93).

This situation, I believe, calls for distinguishing between two modes of listening: distracted and concentrated. The parallel between close and hyper (digital) reading, and concentrated and distracted listening has already been talked about in the Literature review section. Reading on screens is still a relatively new phenomenon that we do not know much about. A recent meta-study came to the conclusion that the benefit from reading print over digital exists, but it is small (Clinton, 2019). How the tendency to read digital (and now to audio read distracted, i.e. while engaged in another activity) will affect reading habits and reading in general remains to be seen. There is, however, another way of looking at this situation. To some degree, it could be compared to normal reading versus speed reading. In fact, many apps today have the option of speeding up or slowing down the recording. However, it is hard to imagine that this would not negatively impact comprehension. Research done on reading books shows that there is a trade-off between speed and accuracy and that increasing speed of reading inevitably decreases comprehension (Rayner et.al., 2016). It is logical to assume that increasing distraction level (by multi-tasking) will affect the comprehension level in a negative manner (Varao-Sousa, Smílek & Kingstone, 2018). Only "lighter" literature, mostly audio read for entertainment, can suffer such a loss without it seriously impairing our ability to enjoy, understand and remember what we are listening. As already mentioned, the possibility for deep or close listening exists, but to what degree is it utilized? Based on McLuhan's tetrad, the dimension of mobility is important, perhaps even decisive in the act.
of choosing a medium: many people will choose audiobooks because of the ability to multitask, hence engage in distracted audio reading.

6.2.2 Common objections to a-book listening: existence of narrators, abridgments and a set pace

The importance of the audiobook narrator/speaker is clearly established by previous research and experience (Rubery, 2016; Bednar, 2010; BookNet Canada, 2018). This conclusion is strongly reflected in my research: 86.5% of participants (strongly) agree that the narrator is an important part in whether they will finish a book. Only 10% were neutral and for only 3% it was not a relevant factor. Data from Canada reveals that 46% of users agreed or strongly agreed that they would not continue listening to an a-book if they did not like the narrator's voice (BookNet Canada, 2018). That voice in the earphones, the way it sounds and the way it tells the story and makes us feel matters. Have & Stougaard Pedersen already in 2012 proposed that listening to a human voice in one's ear could invoke feelings of parasocial company and comfort. Perhaps this factor matters more than we previously thought, as Hanner & O'Connor (2019) posit. In any case, the role of the a-book narrator is salient. This is further confirmed by the fact that most, i.e. 46.5% (strongly) agreed that the audiobook speaker interferes with the reception of the text, though many, i.e. 37%, were undecided. Granted, it was not specified what exactly is meant by narrator interference, so it was left to the survey taker to interpret it in accordance with his/her understanding. However, at the very least, it means that the narrator, from the user perspective, is not a negligible factor in the audiobook experience.

Question of pace and abridgments didn't yield any major insights, apart from that those issues seem to not be relevant anymore, or at least not something that an average audiobook listener thinks about these days. Most respondents (44%) didn't express an opinion on whether lack of control over the pace of the a-book is a problem, and 38% (strongly) disagreed. This was not a surprising result, as technology rapidly develops and this seems to not be an issue which could inconvenience the users anymore. A-book apps nowadays offer the option of speeding up or slowing down, they include a chapter disposition, bookmarks, sleep timer, timeskip buttons etc. In conclusion, the pace can be controlled by the users to some degree: the user can speed up or slow down the recording. Similarly, abridgments no longer pose a problem because they are not necessary to make the endeavour more convenient, affordable and profitable as it was in the past. Moreover, available information indicates that audiobook users are generally not fond of abridgments in the first place (Rubery, 2016), which is reflected in the declining sales of abridged books in the US for example (N. Clark, 2018). A notable number of participants (strongly) agree that abridgments distort the original narrative, while only 9.5% (strongly) disagree. These findings indicate that many users do not like abridged books. On the other hand, most (58.7%) neither agreed nor disagreed with the above mentioned statement, perhaps because they have no opinion and may have never even thought of books being abridged. After all, the genres which are read most – fiction, mystery and thrillers – are really abridged; genres that are most commonly
abridged include children’s literature, business, self-help, religion, business and biographies (N. Clark, 2018).

6.2.3 A-books’ affordances: music, reading across book formats, multitasking and sound

Interestingly, majority of participants prefer not to have music incorporated into an audiobook. Around 60% do not consider appropriate music to be a good addition to an a-book, 16.5% have the opposite opinion, and 23% no opinion. Canadian users seem to be more interested in background music: 43% was interested, 31% not interested, and 25% neutral (BookNet Canada 2018). This issue would need to be studied further to reveal how much of an interest there really is in music and/or background sounds. It should be mentioned that audiobooks with music and sound effects exist. This insight further supports my assumption that audiobooks are seen as books – the users do not want e.g. random music they did not choose intruding into the reading experience.

It has already been established that what is being audio read and read in print corresponds to each other to a certain degree. The discrepancies could possibly be attributed to the greater variation in a-book user types, but that is only speculation. Connected to this issue of what people (audio) read, the participants were asked whether they listen to a-books which they would not or do not have the time to read in print, and the results were fascinating. An almost equal number (strongly) agreed and (strongly) disagreed: 36%; while 30% neither agreed not disagreed. This implies that frequent audiobook user groups could be very different fundamentally. On the one hand, we have a group of users who we could call “enthusiastic readers”. They tend to read in every format and everything in every format. They probably prefer to audio read when they need to multitask, but might also audio read in different circumstances, e.g. in bed. On the other hand, we have a group of users who we could name “enthusiastic listeners”. They prefer to only listen to a-books; they are potentially the ones that are motivated by the sound of voice and comfort it brings and probably often only listen, without doing something else at the same time. A third group might consist of users who audio read only when they cannot read print (or because they cannot read print) and tend to choose different books to audio read than when they read print. This group could be named “reluctant listeners”. A forth group, the “reluctant readers” would be the ones not particularly interested in either reading or audio reading, but in qualifying the time spent driving, commuting etc. These users would be prone to also listen to music or podcasts or do some similar activity comparable to a-book listening, and a-book use could be not only for entertainment, but also for personal development or similar. They would use a-books almost exclusively because the ability to multi-task. This is, of course, only conjecture, but could be an interesting suggestion for future inquiry.

The idea of multitasking being the primary benefit that audiobooks bring has been discussed previously. According to my survey, roughly 81% (strongly) agree that multi-tasking is the primary benefit of a-books, from which we can conclude that that is one of the most important reasons why users choose a-books. However, it should be mentioned that, though that might be the reason
for choosing them in the first place, does not necessarily mean that that is the reason people continue to listen or that users never only listen. This is supported by Hanner and O'Connor's (2019) research that shows that polychronicity (preference for multi-tasking) is a significant factor for infrequent audio readers, but not very significant for frequent audio readers. Ability to multi-task could be the initial reason people choose a-books, but perhaps stops being so important once one has developed the habit and concluded one simply likes to audio read. Or perhaps we are starting to take our technology for granted, not considering anymore that not so long ago, a-book were not so accessible and convenient.

As a last issue, I included resurrecting the sound of literature as an important contribution of audiobooks. The results were not impressive, with 62% neither agreeing nor disagreeing with the statement; 35% (strongly) agreed and only 2.6% (strongly) disagreed. I expected many more to agree since, to me, it seems like such an obvious truth. However, many participants apparently did not agree, choosing to stay neutral, whether they never thought about it, didn't have an opinion or something similar, depending how the middle point of a Likert scale is interpreted (Nadler, Weston & Voyles, 2015). But if we put aside the majority that chose not to express an opinion, most of the rest did agree.

6.2.4 A glimpse of a Swedish way of consuming a-books?

After considering everything so far, a rough sketch of audiobook use by members of Swedish audiobook groups emerges. Women audio read more; they tend to be better educated than the average and subscribe to a digital streaming service, although there is a significant number who borrow a-books from the local library. Fiction is read the most, especially thrillers and similar genres like suspense and mysteries, which can be connected to the uses and gratifications of relaxation, passing time and escape. The dimension of mobility could be essential for preferring to audio read: this is what the users themselves say and it is further backed up by the fact that users consume quite a lot of a-books and listen to them a lot during the day, which presumably would not be possible with a print or e-book in hand. There are users for whom the dimension of sound is important as well, possibly connected to the underlying need for company. Most listen at home and the car is not a very common location, nor is a-book listening while commuting. Most users do not like music present in an a-book. The two insights mentioned last could be pointing to a specific way a-books are consumed in Sweden compared to other countries.
7 Conclusion

This thesis endeavored to explore the audiobook phenomenon from the perspective of the users. The findings both support and contradict previous research and they illuminate this phenomenon further and offer a deeper understanding of a certain user group, namely, Swedish Facebook audiobook group members. Mobility or the ability to multitask proved to be the most relevant a-book affordance and the number one reason why the respondents choose this book format. Fiction, especially the genres thrillers/suspense/mysteries are the most read, and a-books are chosen mostly on the basis of genre and recommendation. The majority audio read quite a lot, and predominantly at home. There is a significant number of those who only listen, although many also read print books and listen to podcasts. Narrator plays an important part in whether one will finish an a-book, but not in the process of choosing it in first place. Music is generally not desired in an a-book. There is a substantial number of respondents who borrow from the local library.

The findings could also be indicating that people read similarly across different book manifestations, that is, the a-book market reflects the overall book market, with some differences which would be interesting to investigate. Have media specific affordances been over-emphasized? In the end, is it not the content that matters most? People just want to read and do so in the format that best suits them or is best suited in a specific timespace. The technology is undeniably important for the rise of the audiobook, but it has also become such an extension of ourselves that we hardly notice it and take it for granted.

The popularity of a-books is challenging and changing the book market and affecting reading habits and user preferences and behavior in ways that need to be investigated, since these changes affect every involved party in a certain way, from libraries to publishers, teachers, writers etc. Reading is incredibly important in a technologically advanced culture such as ours and the ways that digital books and digital reading are incorporated into the existing system will have a lasting effect that will spread far outside the sphere of academia. Can libraries, as promoters of reading and literacy, facilitate the translation of digital reading practices into an increased reading ability and comprehension, can they contribute to teaching these new digital reading strategies (Hayles, 2010)? My contribution consists of investigating one aspect of the reading experience, from user perspective – the users of audiobooks in Sweden active in Swedish Facebook audiobook groups.

7.1 Validity and limitations of the study

As has already been mentioned, due to the nature of the sample, it is unlikely the results can be generalized to the whole population, i.e. audiobook users in Sweden, which results in low external validity of the study. However, a convenience sample is suitable for an exploratory study such as this, as the results still offer important insights into an under-researched phenomenon and its users. It is not possible to ascertain whether the findings accurately reflect the targeted user sub-group. i.e. members of Swedish audiobook groups. However,
there are indications that certain groups are over-represented, namely, older women. Men and respondents younger than 35 (and especially those under 25) seem under-represented, even in the light of the fact that available research suggests that overall older women are more likely to be not only a-book users in Sweden, but also active on Facebook. Facebook appeals more to that demographic, so the sample could be reflecting that. The questionnaire was in English which might have further affected the sample, making it biased in favor of those who know English. Moreover, the overall response rate was not particularly high, which might have skewed the results.

7.2 Relevance for LIS

Audiobooks, whether seen as a remediation of printed books or a new phenomenon more connected to mobile practices of listening to music or podcasts, are a relevant research topic for LIS since LIS centers around information – every aspect of it, from creation to use – regardless of the format or context (Rubin, 2016). An a-book incapsulates the same information as an equivalent paper or e-book (simplistically speaking), despite a different mode of mediation, i.e. sound. Reading could not exist without speaking, without words – they are intrinsically connected and arguably inseparable. Reading and literature are complex phenomena studied by many disciplines including LIS – they can be considered the heart of public libraries and their services. Although analogue materials are still seen as the defining aspect of libraries, the development of digital services seems important for public libraries’ legitimacy (Michnik, 2018). In order to better meet the needs of their patrons, including those using digital a-books, libraries must first know them better, which is what my study contributes to.

The findings of the study reveal that local libraries in Sweden have a place in a-book provision, despite the success and affordability of subscription services. Furthermore, there is a possibility that commercial a-books (in addition to a-books specifically made for people who have difficulty reading print and are provided free through the library) are quite important for that group of users – patrons with print disabilities – which is also one group public libraries in Sweden are especially focused on (Svensk biblioteksförening, 2015). This study thus illuminates which sub-group of a-book users could be particularly interested in libraries’ offer of digital a-books and perhaps what segment of the users should be focused on and further investigated in a specifically library context.
7.3 Suggestions for further research

Reading is a complex activity and an interdisciplinary perspective to studying it, which is already a characteristic of LIS (Chang, 2018; Prebor, 2010), would yield the best results. Since there are indications that the audiobook use reflects the book market as a whole, it would be very interesting to test UGT and adapt the reading motivation scale for a-books specifically. In this way, we might gain a better understanding of the differences between print, e-book and a-book use and user types. It would also be beneficial to test McLuhan's tetrad of a-books’ affordances as conceptualized in this thesis and see does it correspond to user perception or not, and what affordances are indeed the most relevant from user perspective. For libraries specifically it would be important to research further how the different business models of subscription services affect public libraries and a-book acquisition and use in general, in Sweden and worldwide. My research points to a number of a-book users borrowing from the library, but further research is needed to ascertain who these users are and whether there are many who have some reading disability and use talking books as well as commercial audiobooks. Certain findings point to a specifically Swedish way of consuming a-books and they could be used as a starting point for researching it more in-depth and/or researching to what degree a-book consumption differs across countries. Since the a-book Facebook groups surveyed in this study are sizeable and active, making them a center of a future study could yield some interesting results, by perhaps using different, i.e. qualitative, methods and considering how libraries could use social media to promote their content and services better. It would also be interesting to see a study similar to mine carried out on a larger, more representative sample, and see whether similar results would be reached.
Summary

The aim of this study was to gain a better understanding of the preferences and attitudes of members of Swedish Facebook audiobook groups on the topic of a-books. A-books have become very popular, but there is still a visible lack of research and a lingering notion of their inferior place in comparison to printed books. The focus was on digital a-books streamed on or downloaded to a smartphone. Under the term “audiobook” commercial audiobooks, including born audio, and talking books for people with print disabilities were included as they can be used in an almost identical manner today. A quantitative approach in the form of an online questionnaire was used, deemed to be the best way to reach the users. Due to the lack of previous research, the study was mostly exploratory in nature and based on a convenience sample. The following research questions were formulated:

- Why, how and to what extent do members of Swedish Facebook audiobook groups consume audiobooks?
- What attitudes do members of Swedish Facebook audiobook groups exhibit towards audiobooks’ affordances?

The audiobook was conceptualized as a book in audio format, i.e. remediation of the printed book. The act of using an a-book was referred to as either listening or audio reading. Uses and gratifications theory and McLuhan's tetrad of audiobooks’ affordances, i.e. fundamental properties (as conceptualized in this thesis), were used as a theoretical framework and applied by assuming that the user is active and goal oriented and that there are five basic motivations for a-book use (relaxation, passing time, escape, learning/sharing and companionship) and four dimensions/affordances (accessibility/convenience, mobility, sound and hybridization) which together form factors decisive to a-book usage among different user types. However, the theories themselves were not tested here.

The results both confirmed and challenged previous findings. The participants in this study were predominantly older women, better educated than the average and had a subscription with one of the Swedish streaming services. Fiction is the most popular genre, with genres thrillers/suspense/mysteries on top. Users mostly choose their a-books based on genre and recommendation. A great majority consumes quite a lot of a-books, yearly, monthly and daily. Most listen at home; no other location was nearly as common. The most relevant affordance of the audiobook turned out to be mobility, i.e. the ability to do other things at the same time. The narrator was a very important factor in whether one finishes an a-book, but not many choose an a-book based on the narrator. Although many read print books and listen to podcasts, there is a substantial number of participants who exclusively audio read. Most users do not like when music is present in audiobooks. One of the most important contributions of this study is the fact that it reveals that the Swedish libraries are relevant for a-book provision, despite the huge success of subscription services. Additionally, this research could be giving us a glimpse of a specifically Swedish way of consuming audiobooks: mostly done at home while engaged in another activity, listening quite a lot on a daily basis, preference for not having music present.

62


Number of monthly active Facebook users worldwide as of 2nd quarter 2019 (in millions). Retrieved from


Appendix A: The questionnaire

Välkommen till den här audiobokundersökningen!

Tack för din medverkan! Dina åsikter och erfarenheter är mycket viktiga för mig och kommer att användas till min avhandling.
Syftet med denna forskning är att bättre förstå beteende och åsikter hos audioboksanvändare, särskilt de som regelbundet konsumerar sådana böcker.
Det tar mindre än 5 minuter att slutföra undersökningen.
Dina svar är konfidentiella och ingen identifierande information som ditt namn, din e-postadress eller din IP-adress kommer att samlas in. Resultaten kommer endast att användas för vetenskapliga ändamål.

SECTION 1
Why and what kind of audiobooks you listen to and how do you choose them?

1. What is the primary reason you listen to audiobooks?
I can do other things while listening
they are portable and I can listen wherever I am
helps me finish more books
I enjoy being read to
I have difficulty reading print
other (please specify)

2. What types of books or genres do you prefer (select all that apply)
thriller/suspense/mystery
science fiction/fantasy
historical fiction
general fiction
nonfiction
biography/memoir
romance
self-help/personal growth
business
health and fitness
language instruction
inspirational/faith-based
children's literature
erotica
other (pls specify)

3. How do you most often choose an audiobook?
By author
genre
speaker/narrator of the audiobook
recommendation
other (pls specify)

SECTION 2
What place do audiobooks have in your everyday life?

4. How many audiobooks have you listened to in the past year?
   one
   less than 5
   between 5 and 10
   between 11 and 20
   more than 20
   other (pls specify)

5. How many audiobooks do you listen to per month?
   One
   less than 5
   between 6 and 10
   more than 10
   other (pls specify)

6. For how long do you usually listen to an audiobook in a day?
   Less than 30 min
   between 30 min and an hour
   between one and two hours per day
   more than 2 hrs per day
   other (pls specify)

7. Besides audiobooks, do you also often (select all that apply):
   read print books
   read e-books
   listen to podcasts
   I only listen to audiobooks

8. Where do you most often listen to audiobooks?
   Home
   Car
   Public transportation
   Outdoors (walking, jogging, cycling, etc.)
   Work
   Gym
   Some other location (pls specify)

SECTION 3
What general attitudes do you have towards audiobooks?
Choose to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statement
(5 point Likert scale)

9. Listening to an audiobook is a passive activity.
10. Reading a print book is more engaging than listening to an audiobook.
11. Listening to an audiobook requires less concentration than reading a print book.
12. The audiobook speaker interferes with the reception of the text.
13. The lack of control over the pace of the audiobook is a major drawback.
14. Any sort of abridgement distorts the original narrative.
15. Appropriate music is generally a good addition to an audiobook.
16. Primary benefit of audiobooks is the ability to multi-task.
17. The audiobook speaker plays an important part in whether I will finish a book.
18. I usually choose audiobooks that I would not or don't have the time to read in print.
19. Resurrecting the sound of literature is an important contribution of audiobooks.

SECTION 4
Classification questions section

20. What gender are you?
   Male
   Female
   Other

21. What age are you?
   Under 25
   26-35
   36-45
   46-55
   56+

22. What is your current highest educational qualification?
   High school
   Bachelor's degree
   Master's degree
   Doctorate
   Other (pls specify)

23. Which of the following audiobook streaming providers do you use (select all that apply):
   Storytel
   Nextory
   BookBeat
   Bokus Play
   Audible
   my local library
   other (pls specify)
Appendix B: The message posted in Facebook groups

Hej alla! Ni kommer att hjälpa mig mycket om ni tar lite tid (mindre än 5 minuter) för att slutföra denna enkät. (OBS den är på engelska eftersom jag skriver min uppsats på engelska). Syftet med min forskning är att bättre förstå beteende och åsikter hos audioboksanvändare. Mitt namn är Martina Dakic – jag är student vid Högskolan i Borås och själv en ivrig läsare och lyssnare av ljudböcker och valde därför dem som mitt avhandlingsämne. Kontakta mig gärna om ni har några frågor eller om något i enkäten är oklart. Tack för er tid!