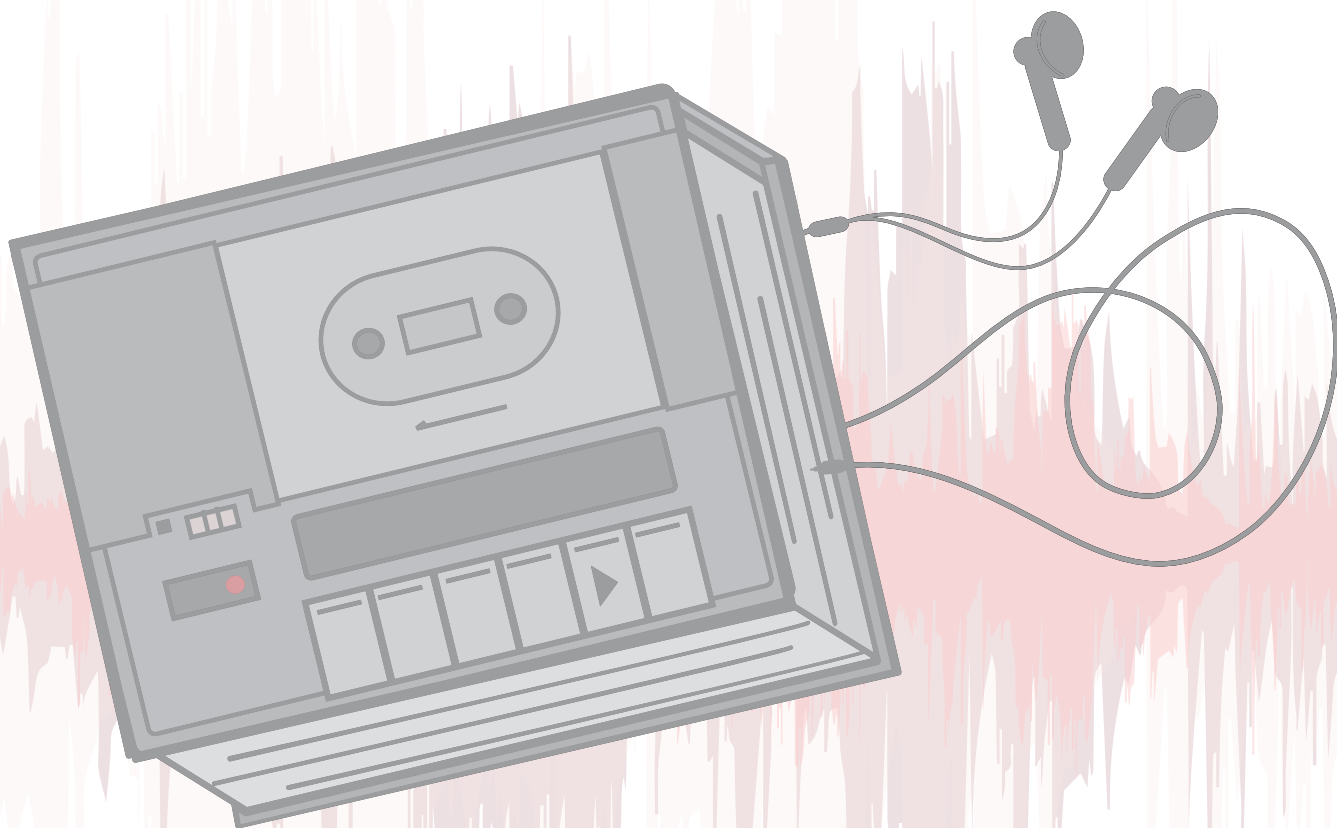


Listening In: Audiobook Use in Canada **2021**



**BOOKNET
CANADA**

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Introduction

In our 2020 study [Press Play: Audiobook Use in Canada 2020](#), we reported that audiobooks were on the rise, with a 38% increase in audiobook purchases between 2018 and 2020. One year later, are Canadians still consuming audiobooks?

Listening In: Audiobook Use in Canada 2021 continues to monitor the growing interest of Canadians in purchasing, borrowing, streaming, and listening to audiobooks.

Methodology

This study incorporates data from our annual publications the [Canadian Book Consumer Study 2021](#) and [Canadian Leisure & Reading Study 2021](#). This study relies on both published and unreleased data from these consumer surveys.

The *Canadian Book Consumer Study 2021* includes results from quarterly surveys of Canadian book consumers about their book acquisition behaviour during April, June, September, and December 2021. The 2021 edition of this study contains data from 10,218 Canadians, 2,065 of whom were considered book buyers.

For the purposes of this study, 1,396 Canadians surveyed for the *Canadian Book Consumer Study 2021* were considered audiobook consumers, having purchased, borrowed, or accessed an audiobook for free in 2021.

The *Canadian Leisure & Reading Study 2021* presents data from a survey of Canadians about how they spend their leisure time in 2021, with a focus on reading. The 2021 edition of this study contains data from 1,282 Canadians, 1,000 of whom were considered readers.

For the purposes of this study, 445 Canadians surveyed for the *Canadian Leisure & Reading Study 2021* were identified as audiobook listeners, having listened to at least one audiobook in 2021.

Listening In: Audiobook Use in Canada 2021

For both the *Canadian Book Consumer Study 2021* and *Canadian Leisure & Reading Study 2021*:

- Respondents were English-speaking Canadians, 18 years of age or older, located throughout Canada, and representative of the Canadian population based on age, gender, and geographical region.
- The survey was fielded online and limited to those with internet access who were able and wanted to participate in our panel in exchange for incentives.
- There is a margin of error of ± 3 percentage points at the 95% confidence level, meaning that statistics for this group could fluctuate about 3% in either direction if the survey was fielded to the entire Canadian population.
- The data is unweighted to represent the behaviours and habits of individual Canadians.

This study was prepared by BookNet Canada staff.

Highlights

- In 2021, audiobook consumers and audiobook listeners were consistently younger and more likely to live in a city or urban area than all Canadian book consumers and readers.
- Out of all audiobook buyers in 2021, 68% purchased an audiobook on its own and 46% subscribed to an audiobook subscription service.
- In Canadian libraries, digital audiobook loans increased 156% from 2017 to 2021, according to OverDrive.
- The biggest portion of audiobook consumers in 2021 streamed and downloaded audiobooks for free (43%).
- Almost half of all Canadians were audiobook listeners in 2021 (45%).
- Most Canadian audiobook listeners listened to between one and five audiobooks (48%) on their smartphone (42%) in 2021.

Audiobooks in Canada

The audiobook market in Canada has changed drastically over the last decade. Audiobook consumption has only increased since our first audiobook-focused study in 2015 and Canadians now have more access to audiobooks than ever before with online sales, subscriptions, digital library platforms, and streaming services as vital parts of the audiobook landscape.

A recent [2022 study released by the Audio Publishers Association](#) reveals that American publishers' audiobook revenue grew 25% in 2021, marking the tenth year of double-digit growth for the American audiobook market.

What role did audiobooks play in the Canadian book market in 2021?

The following sections explore in-depth the ways that Canadians engage with audiobooks, from their acquisition to listening behaviours.

Buying audiobooks

According to data collected for the *Canadian Book Consumer Study 2021*, 19% of all Canadian book buyers bought an individual audiobook or accessed an audiobook through a subscription service in 2021.

These audiobook buyers and subscribers were on average seven years younger than all Canadian book buyers, at 40 years old, and were 5% more likely to identify as a man — 52% identified as a man, while 48% identified as a woman. Canadian audiobook buyers and subscribers were also 9% more likely to identify as belonging to a non-dominant, poorly represented, or not advantaged group in Canada than the average book buyer.

Compared to the average book buyer, audiobook buyers and subscribers were 14% more likely to live in a city or urban area, 6% more likely to have a graduate or professional degree and 11% more likely to have full time employment. In their personal lives, audiobook buyers and subscribers were 11% more likely to be single than the average Canadian book buyer, but those who live with others were 13% more likely to live with a child under the age of 18.

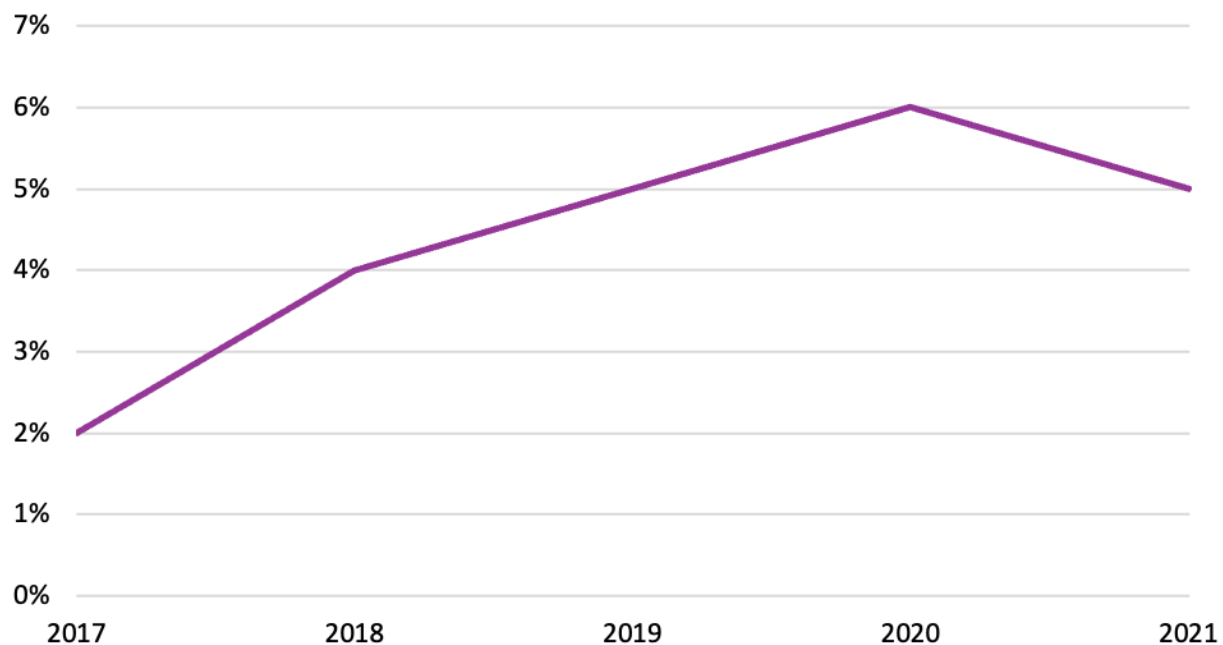
Listening In: Audiobook Use in Canada 2021

Of these audiobook buyers and subscribers, 68% had purchased at least one audiobook on its own, while 46% had accessed their audiobook(s) through a subscription service.

All told, audiobooks accounted for 12% of all purchases by book buyers reported in the *Canadian Book Consumer Study 2021*. The average number of audiobooks purchased by Canadian book buyers in a single month was two — the maximum number of audiobooks purchased by a book buyer was 13, while most purchased only one.

In the *Canadian Book Consumer Study 2021*, book buyers were able to provide us with more detail for up to six book purchases each quarter in 2021. Of these tracked book purchases, 5% were audiobooks. The graph below shows the number of tracked audiobook purchases in the annual *Canadian Book Consumer Study* over the last five years. This number steadily increased 231% from 2017 to 2020, dropping 34% in 2021. Overall, from 2017 to 2021 the number of tracked audiobook purchases increased 118%.

Percentage of tracked audiobook purchases, 2017–2021



Listening In: Audiobook Use in Canada 2021

In 2021, 88% of audiobooks were purchased through an online channel, with 12% being purchased in-person. Compared to 2020, the number of in-person purchases increased 5%. Regardless of where they were purchased, the majority of these audiobooks were either bought at full price (35%), as part of a subscription (26%), or on sale (20%) for an average price of \$13.43.

For those with subscriptions, 50% were subscribed to Audible, 33% to Amazon Prime or Kindle Unlimited, and 13% to Audiobooks.com.

Audiobook buyers chose to shop at a particular place because of its prices (27%), selection of audiobooks (19%), subscription account or loyalty card (18%), or easy checkout process (18%). These reasons are slightly different from the ones chosen by all Canadian book buyers. In 2021, the top reasons for purchasing a book at a specific shop were convenience (32%), prices (31%), and that the books were available immediately (31%).

Compared to all Canadians book buyers, audiobook buyers were also:

- 18% more likely to pre-order or buy books pre-sale (73% of audiobook buyers vs. 55% of all book buyers).
- 13% more likely to pay for a bundle of content rather than buying one single item (77% of audiobook buyers vs. 67% of all book buyers); and
- 10% more likely to add books to their online cart to get free shipping (77% of audiobook buyers vs. 67% of all book buyers).

Buying behaviour of audiobook buyers compared to all book buyers, 2021



Borrowing audiobooks

Many Canadians also accessed audiobooks through their public library instead of buying them. In the *Canadian Book Consumer Study 2021*, 18% of all Canadian library books borrowers borrowed an audiobook in 2021.

Similar to audiobook buyers, audiobook borrowers were on average six years younger than all Canadian book borrowers, at 48 years old. Yet unlike audiobook buyers, audiobook borrowers were 3% more likely to identify as a woman than all borrowers — 63% identified as a woman, while 37% identified as a man. Canadian audiobook borrowers were 4% more likely to identify as belonging to a non-dominant, poorly represented, or not advantaged group in Canada than the average book borrower.

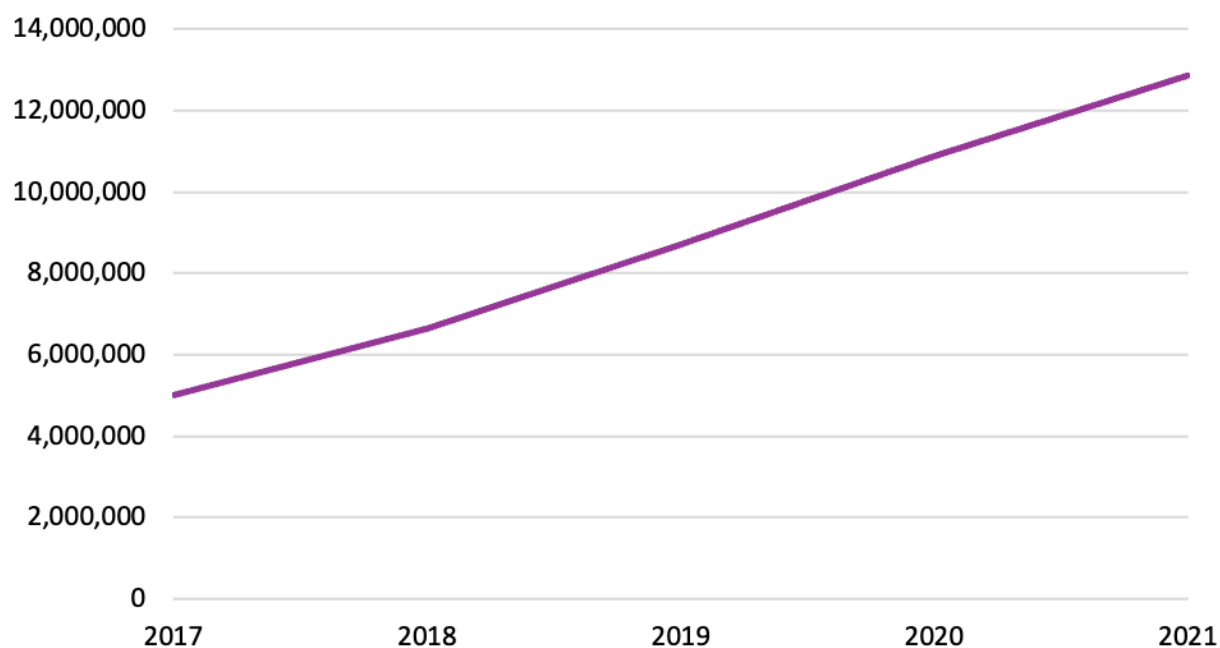
Compared to the average book borrower, audiobook borrowers were 5% more likely to live in a city or urban area, 6% more likely to have fulltime employment, and 10% less likely to be retired. In their personal lives, audiobook borrowers were 8% more likely to be single than the average Canadian book borrower, although 47% were married.

Listening In: Audiobook Use in Canada 2021

According to data collected by the *Canadian Book Consumer Study 2021*, 9% of all library loans in 2021 were audiobooks. On average, Canadian audiobook borrowers borrowed two audiobooks in a single month.

Year over year, however, this number has been growing. The graph below shows the total number of digital audiobook loans in Canadian public libraries from 2017 to 2021, as reported by OverDrive, the world's leading digital reading platform for libraries and schools.

OverDrive digital audiobook checkouts, 2017–2021



The number of digital audiobook loans steadily increased 156% between 2017 and 2021, seeing an increase of 18% between 2020 and 2021. According to OverDrive, 30% of all digital library loans in 2021 were audiobooks, up 4% from 2020. This is consistent with the data presented by the *Canadian Book Consumer Study 2021*. While the *Canadian Book Consumer Study 2021* doesn't differentiate between physical and digital audiobook loans, audiobooks did account for 27% of non-print book loans in 2021.

Listening In: Audiobook Use in Canada 2021

In 2021, 41% of all library loans by Canadian audiobook borrowers were audiobooks, but they do not only access audiobooks at the public library. Audiobook borrowers also took print books and ebooks out on loan in 2021, at 32% and 28% of all loans by this group.

Compared to all Canadian library book borrowers, Canadian audiobook borrowers were 15% more likely to borrow something other than a book from the library, such as a magazine (15%), movie (14%), DVD (13%), or CD (13%). Audiobook borrowers were also 22% more likely to take a book out on loan for someone else. They were 3% more likely to take a book out on loan for someone 18 years or older and 19% more likely to borrow for someone under the age of 18, even though they were 2% less likely than the average book borrower to be living with someone in that age group.

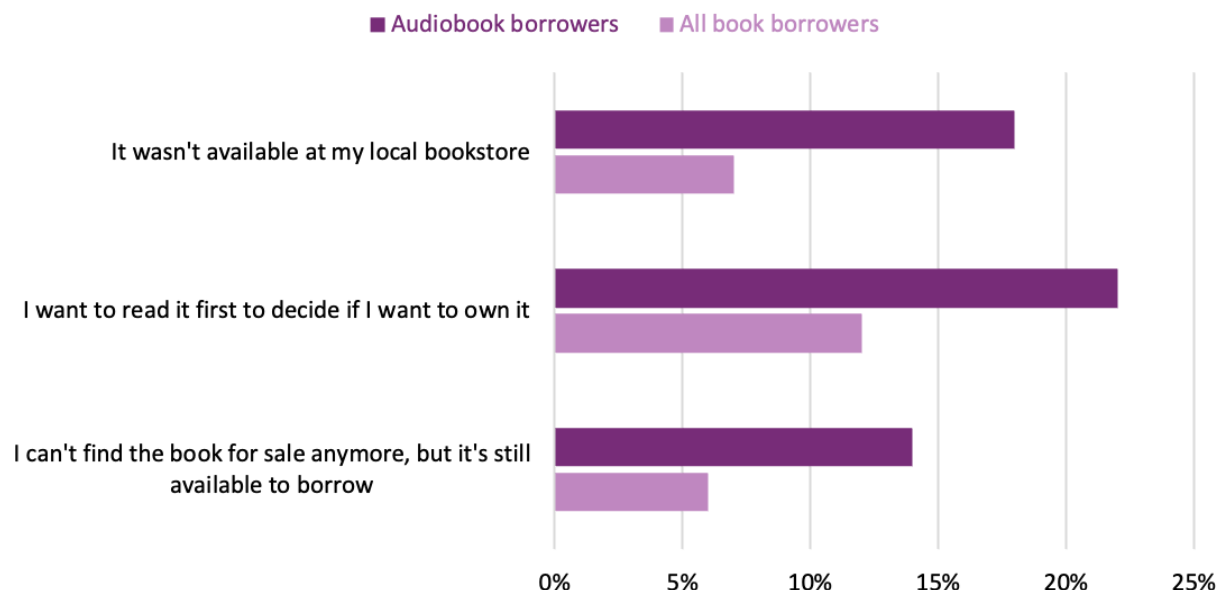
Why do audiobook borrowers borrow from the library, rather than purchase their own copy? Audiobook borrowers share the same top three reasons as all Canadian book borrowers:

- 46% borrowed books to save money (vs. 47% of all book borrowers);
- 34% did not want to spend money (vs. 41% of all book borrowers); and
- 27% wanted to read the book but did not want to own it (vs. 34% of all book borrowers).

However, other reasons for borrowing books were more popular among audiobook borrowers than all book borrowers in 2021. Audiobook borrowers were also:

- 11% more likely to borrow a book because it was not available at their local bookstore (18% of audiobook borrowers vs. 7% of all book borrowers);
- 10% more likely to borrow a book because they wanted to read it first to decide if they wanted to own it (22% of audiobook borrowers vs. 12% of all book borrowers); and
- 8% more likely to borrow a book because they could not find the book for sale anymore (14% of audiobook borrowers vs. 6% of all book borrowers).

Why audiobook borrowers borrowed compared to all book borrowers, 2021



Streaming and downloading audiobooks

The most popular way Canadian audiobook consumers accessed audiobooks in 2021 was through streaming or downloading. According to data collected for the *Canadian Book Consumer Study 2021*, 43% of audiobook consumers streamed or downloaded audiobooks in 2021. This percentage is down 18% in 2021 from 2020, but flat looking from 2019 to 2021.

Just as for audiobook buyers and borrowers, audiobook streamers and downloaders were on average nine years younger than all Canadians surveyed, at 45 years old. Similar to audiobook buyers, audiobook streamers and downloaders were 4% more likely to identify as a man than all Canadians — 51% identified as a man and 48% identified as a woman, while 0.3% identified as non-binary and another 0.3% did not share their gender identity. Canadian audiobook streamers and downloaders were 10% more likely to identify as belonging to a non-dominant, poorly represented, or not advantaged group in Canada than all Canadians.

Compared to the average Canadian, audiobook streamers and downloaders were 11% more likely to live in a city or urban area, 7% more likely to have a graduate or professional degree, and 12% more likely to have fulltime employment. In their

Listening In: Audiobook Use in Canada 2021

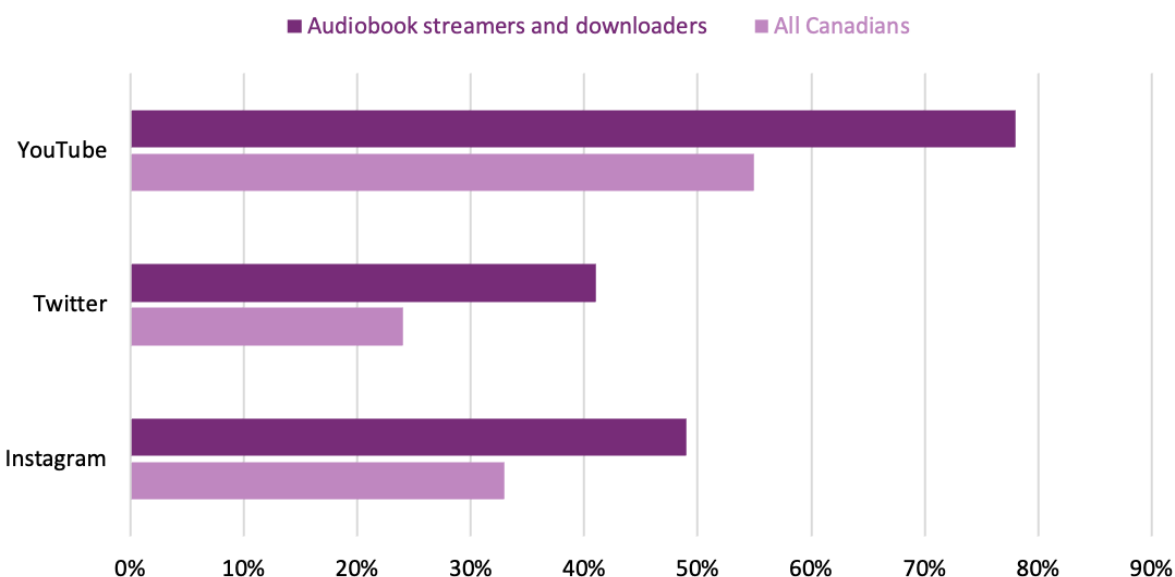
personal lives, audiobook streamers and downloaders were 9% more likely to be single than the average Canadian and slightly less likely to be married, separated, or divorced. That being said, they were also 6% more likely than all Canadians to live with someone else and 5% more likely to live with someone under the age of 18.

Audiobooks streamers and downloaders accessed audiobooks in other ways in as well 2021. Overall, 20% were also audiobook borrowers, accounting for 34% of all audiobook borrowers. Another 7% were audiobook buyers, making up 9% of all audiobook buyers.

Where audiobook streamers and downloaders differentiate themselves the most is in their online presence. Compared to all Canadians, audiobook streamers and downloaders were:

- 23% more likely to participate in YouTube (78% of audiobook streamers and downloaders vs. 55% of all Canadians);
- 17% more likely to participate in Twitter (41% of audiobook streamers and downloaders vs. 24% of all Canadians); and
- 16% more likely to participate in Instagram (49% of audiobook streamers and downloaders vs. 33% of all Canadians).

Online participation of audiobook streamers and downloaders compared to all Canadians, 2021

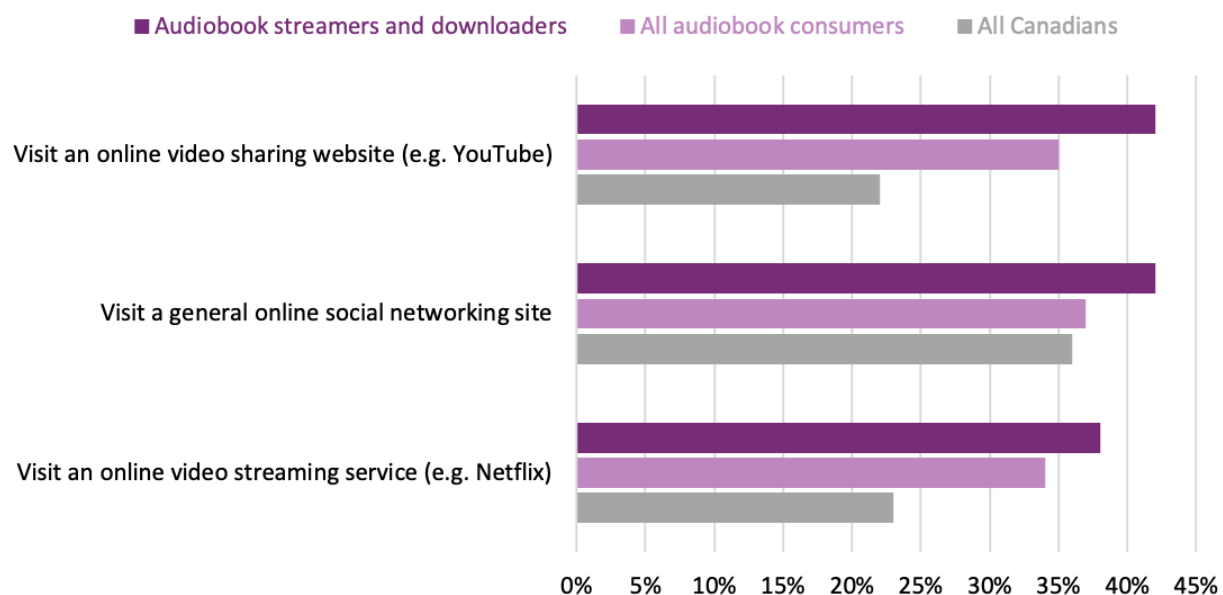


Listening In: Audiobook Use in Canada 2021

Even compared to all audiobook consumers, audiobook streamers and downloaders were:

- 7% more likely to visit an online video sharing website daily (42% of audiobook streamers and downloaders vs. 35% of all audiobook consumers);
- 5% more likely to visit a general online social networking site daily (42% of audiobook streamers and downloaders vs. 37% of all audiobook consumers); and
- 4% more likely to visit an online video streaming service daily (38% of audiobook streamers and downloaders vs. 34% of all audiobook consumers).

Daily behaviour of audiobook streamers and downloaders compared to all audiobook consumers and all Canadians, 2021



Listening to audiobooks

As shared in the *Canadian Leisure & Reading Study 2021*, 45% of all Canadian readers were audiobook listeners in 2021, consistent with 2020.

Like audiobook consumers, audiobook listeners were younger than all Canadian readers being 10% more likely to be aged 18–29 and 8% more likely to be aged 33–44. Audiobook listeners were 7% more likely to identify as a man than the average reader — 52% identified as a man, 47% identified as a woman, and 1% did not

Listening In: Audiobook Use in Canada 2021

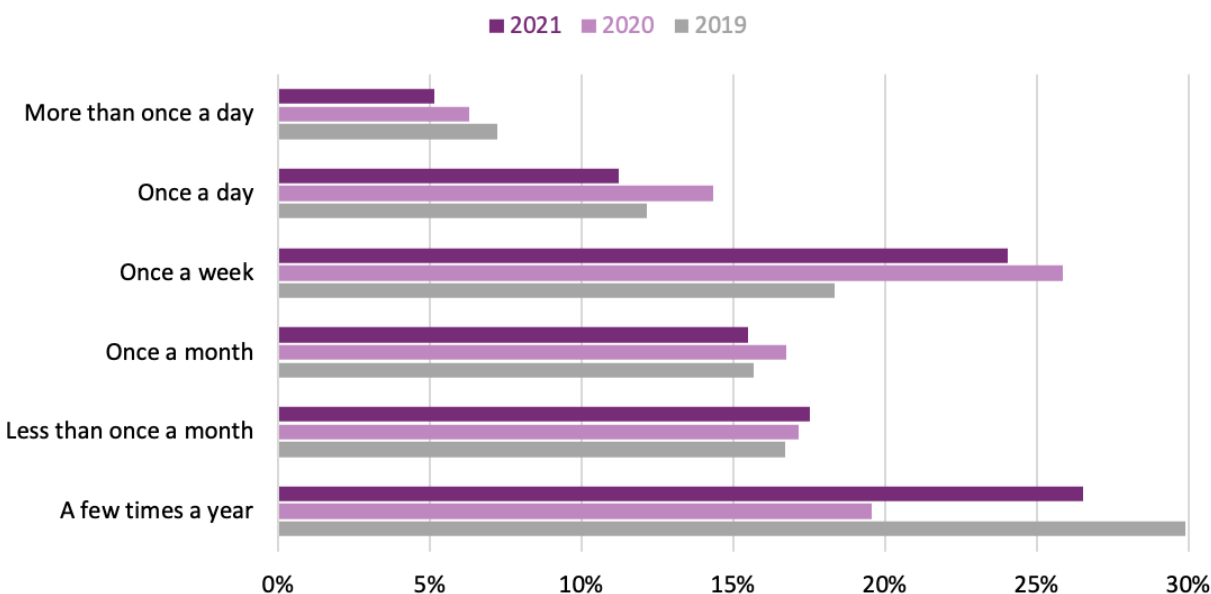
share their gender identity. Canadian audiobook listeners were also 11% more likely to identify as belonging to a non-dominant, poorly represented, or not advantaged group in Canada than all Canadian readers.

Consistent with findings in the *Canadian Book Consumer Study 2021*, audiobook listeners were also 7% more likely to live in a city or urban area and 3% more likely to have a graduate or professional degree than the average Canadian reader. In their personal lives, audiobook listeners were 7% more likely to be providing care for someone, either a parent or elder, child or young adult, or someone else.

In 2021, the majority of audiobook listeners listened to 1–5 audiobooks (48%). Another 30% listened to 6–11 audiobooks, 17% listened to 12–49 audiobooks, and 6% listened to 50 or more audiobooks.

The frequency with which audiobook listeners listened to audiobooks in 2021 varied, with most either listening a few times a year (27%), once a week (24%), or less than once a month (18%). However, these listening rates are consistent year over year, shown in the graph below.

Frequency of audiobook listening, 2019–2021



In 2021, 50% of audiobook listeners felt that the amount of time they had to listen to audiobooks was the same as in 2020, while 28% felt that they had more time.

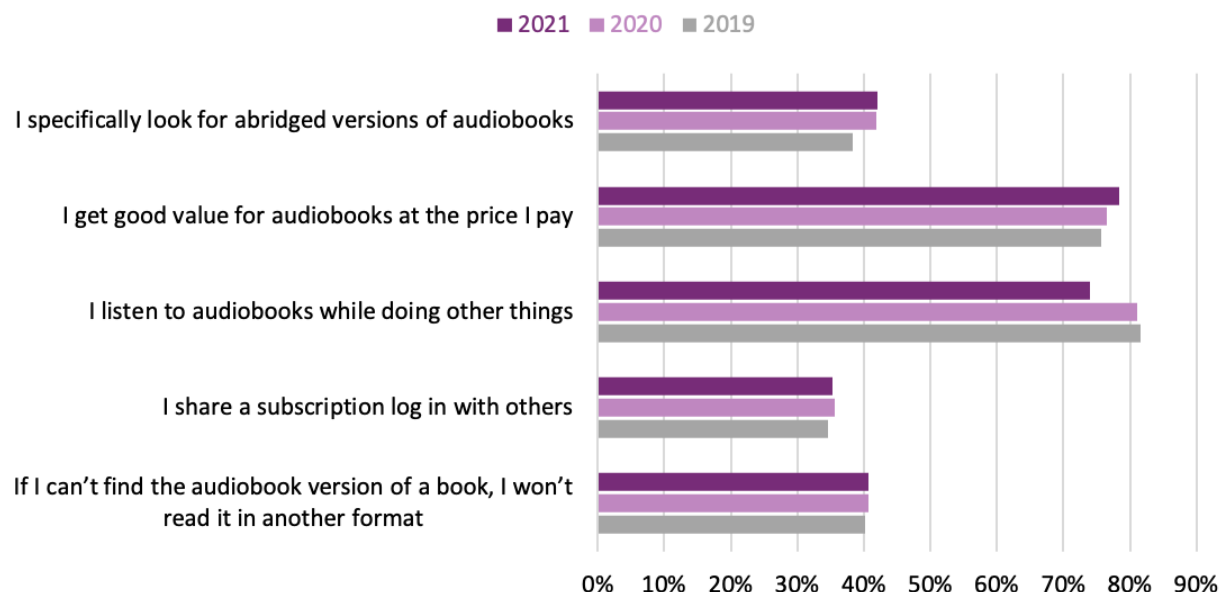
Listening In: Audiobook Use in Canada 2021

Increasingly, audiobook listeners listen to audiobooks on their smartphones (42%), up 17% since 2019. Canadian audiobook listeners also used a tablet (21%) or computer (16%) to listen to audiobooks. In 2021, most audiobook listeners accessed audiobooks through YouTube (29%), Audible (21%), or Kindle (18%).

From 2019 to 2021, audiobook listeners were:

- more likely to look for abridged versions of audiobooks (42% of audiobook listeners in 2021 vs. 42% in 2020 vs. 38% in 2019);
- more likely to feel that they get good value for audiobooks at the price they pay (78% of audiobook listeners in 2021 vs. 77% in 2020 vs. 76% in 2019);
- less likely to listen to audiobooks while doing other things (74% of audiobook listeners in 2021 vs. 81% in 2020 vs. 82% in 2019);
- equally likely to share a subscription login with others (35% of audiobook listeners in 2021 vs. 36% in 2020 vs. 35% in 2019); and
- equally likely to not read another format of a book, if they could not find the audiobook version (41% of audiobook listeners in 2021 vs. 41% in 2020 vs. 40% in 2019)

Listening behaviour of audiobook listeners, 2019–2021



Listening In: Audiobook Use in Canada 2021

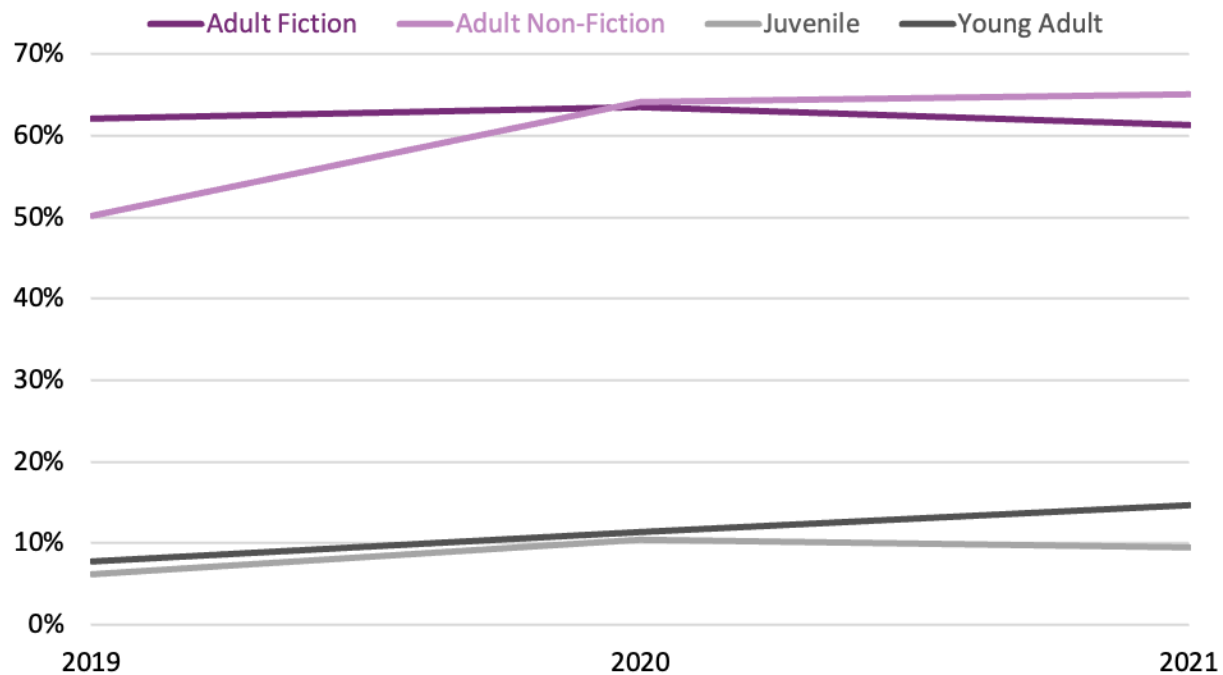
While 41% of audiobook listeners will not read a book in another format if an audiobook is not available, no audiobook listeners in 2021 identified audiobooks as their preferred reading format. This is in contrast with 17% of audiobook listeners who said audiobook were their preferred format in 2020 and 16% who did so in 2019. Audiobook listeners in 2021 were 19% more likely to not have a book format preference at all compared to 2020.

Even though audiobook listeners did not prefer audiobooks over other book formats, they did participate in other audio-related activities every day more than the average Canadian reader in 2021. Compared to all readers, audiobook listeners were:

- 12% more likely to listen to podcasts daily (28% of audiobook listeners vs. 16% of all readers);
- 5% more likely to listen to music daily (70% of audiobook listeners vs. 65% of all readers); and
- 2% more likely to listen to the radio daily (35% of audiobook listeners vs. 33% of all readers).

Which subjects did audiobook listeners listen to in 2021? In 2021, Canadian audiobook listeners listened to Adult Non-Fiction titles the most (65%), up 19% from 2019 to 2021, shown in the graph below.

Audiobook subjects for audiobook listeners, 2019–2021



The book subject with the biggest increase of audiobook listeners in 2021 was Young Adult. Read by 15% of audiobook listeners in 2021, the Young Adult subject category increased by 71% between 2019 and 2021. Adult Fiction titles were also popular among 61% of audiobook listeners in 2021, even though listening in this category has decreased 9% over the last three years. Juvenile titles were the least popular subject for audiobook listeners in 2021, at 9%. For Juvenile titles, audiobook listening is down by 13% between 2021 and 2020 but up by 40% overall since 2019.

The most popular Adult Non-Fiction subjects for audiobook listeners in 2021 were History (31%), True Crime (28%), and Self-Help (27%). For Adult Fiction subjects, audiobook listeners listened to Mysteries or Thrillers (25%), Science Fiction (16%), or Romance (13%) the most.

Listening In: Audiobook Use in Canada 2021

Looking across audiobook listeners and consumers alike, Canadians' engagement with audiobooks has undoubtedly increased over the last number of years. While audiobook sales, downloads, and streams are slightly lower in 2021 than 2020, 2021 did see a consistent number of Canadian listeners and continued growth for digital audiobook loans in Canadian libraries. Considering the upwards trajectory of audiobooks over the last decade, it is worth keeping an ear to the ground as the success of this book format is expected to continue in the Canadian market.

About BookNet Canada

BookNet Canada is a non-profit organization that develops technology, standards, and education to serve the Canadian book industry. Founded in 2002 to address systemic challenges in the industry, BookNet Canada supports publishing companies, booksellers, wholesalers, distributors, sales agents, and libraries across the country.

BookNet Canada acknowledges that its staff, board, and partners work upon the traditional territories of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation, Anishnawbe, Haudenosaunee, and Wendat Indigenous Peoples, the original nations of this land. We endorse the Calls to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada and support an ongoing shift from gatekeeping to spacemaking in the book industry.

The book industry has long been an industry of gatekeeping. Anyone who works at any stage of the book supply chain carries a responsibility to serve readers by publishing, promoting, and supplying works that represent the wide extent of human experiences and identities, in all its complicated intersectionality. We, at BookNet Canada, are committed to working with our partners in the industry as we move towards a framework that supports "spacemaking," which ensures that marginalized creators and professionals all have the opportunity to contribute, work, and lead.

BookNet Canada's services and research help companies promote and sell books, streamline workflows, and analyze and adapt to a rapidly changing market.

Listening In: Audiobook Use in Canada 2021

BookNet Canada sets technology standards and educates organizations about how to apply them, performs market research, and tracks 85% of all Canadian English-language print trade book sales through BNC SalesData.

BookNet Canada has extensive research available on our [website](#), both free and for purchase.

- [Must-Watch, Must-Read: Book-to-Screen Adaptations in the Canadian Book Market 2022](#): data on the impact of book-to-television and book-to-film adaptations on Canadian book sales and library circulation.
- [Canadian Leisure & Reading Study 2021](#): insights into how Canadians are spending their leisure time and the behaviours of Canadian readers in 2021.
- [Canadian Book Consumer 2021](#): results from our quarterly surveying of Canadians about their book buying and borrowing habits in 2021.

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Industry-led and partially funded by the Department of Canadian Heritage, BookNet Canada has become, as *The Globe and Mail* puts it, “the book industry’s supply-chain nerve centre.”

Learn more at booknetcanada.ca.