

The New Audiobook Industry: Digitizing Reading Through Hearing

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ABSTRACT :

Technological developments have changed how people communicate and read, especially audiobooks. Initially, audiobooks were aimed at helping people with special needs and reading difficulties. However, with digitalization, audiobooks are becoming a more popular format and have platforms with subscription services. This research aims to explore recent developments in the audiobook industry and re-evaluate the concept of reading by ear in the digital era. This research uses a literature review method by collecting and analyzing various library sources relevant to audiobooks. The audiobook industry is experiencing rapid growth as digital audiobooks become increasingly popular. Audiobooks are an alternative to printed books and an independent medium that offers a different reading experience. Audiobooks have also been shown to improve general literacy skills, positively impact older people's mental health, and improve sleep quality and meaning. The development of the audiobook industry has revolutionized how humans consume literary content, opening a new window into the world of stories and knowledge through hearing. The development of the audiobook industry influences how people read literature by making access more accessible, increasing engagement, and enriching the reader's experience. This shows the importance of adapting to technology in forming new ways of reading and listening to literary works. Audiobooks also have a role in various aspects of human life, such as education, literature, entertainment, and health.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Submitted: 04 April 2024
Revised: 16 May 2024
Accepted: 19 May 2024

KEYWORDS

audiobook industry; digital literacy; mobile reading; new digital audiobook; reading and listening; trends and role of audiobooks

INTRODUCTION

Media digitalization has changed how people read and listen to literary works, especially audiobooks (Have & Pedersen, 2021; Elislah & Irwansyah, 2022). Initially, it was only intended as a tool for blind people and victims of World War I and World War II, but now audiobooks are available to readers of all levels (Rubery, 2008). Remediation of audiobooks followed by innovation in audio technology allows audiobooks to become a means of communication that provides meaningful online audio content experiences according to preferences (Wallin, 2021; We Are Social, 2024).

Digital audiobooks are present in the digital era, making it easier for high-mobility users to consume audiobooks (Have & Pedersen, 2021). In addition, audiobooks offer different reading options and experiences that are atmosphere or atmosphere-oriented and content-oriented so that people feel that their free time is well utilized (Have & Pedersen, 2021). Flexibility, ease of access, and cost have caused audiobooks to become increasingly popular in recent years and have become part of the daily routine for many people (Have & Pedersen, 2020; Wallin & Nolin, 2020). The increased number of people listening to audiobooks because digital technology is widely available shows that audiobooks can improve literacy skills in general (Rubery, 2008).

The audiobook industry is experiencing rapid growth because it allows people to listen to books while doing other activities. The presence of audiobooks on various streaming and subscription-based platforms has made it easy for readers to enjoy books (Elislah & Irwansyah, 2022). Since 2012, audiobook downloads have experienced continuous growth; from January 2020 to September 2020, audiobook sales revenue jumped by 17.6% compared to the same period in 2019 (Fisher, 2021). Mobile digital audiobooks have opened up new ways of reading activities, especially regarding time flexibility (Wallin, 2021).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the audiobook industry continues to show its flexibility in the market (Snelling, 2021). In addition, sales of printed books have shifted to digital format during the pandemic (Elislah & Irwansyah, 2022). Apart from being a learning medium, in Indonesia, based on data from Digital Indonesia 2024 from We Are Social, there was a 6.8% increase in the percentage of online audio content consumption via the internet in listening to audiobooks after the pandemic.

The trend in the development of digital audiobooks is seen as not just a remediation of print media but an independent medium that makes the method of reading by listening increasingly common and is an expanded form of literary reading (Wallin & Nolin, 2020; Have & Pedersen, 2021). For teenage readers, audiobooks increase fluency, expand vocabulary, activate previously held knowledge, develop understanding, and increase motivation to interact with books. In contrast, advanced readers have the potential to build comprehension skills and strategies in critical and creative thinking (Wolfson, 2008). In addition, the social dimension of digital audiobook cultural consumption has reflected modern participatory culture, just as social media and online forums allow users to interact with each other (Linkis, 2021). Even today, Wallin & Nolin (2020) found that audiobook subscription services are an alternative to closing the gender gap between men and women in readers. In addition,

subscription-based streaming services influence people's perceptions of audiobooks, so there are differences in writing styles between popular print books and popular audiobooks in the top commercial segment of the book trade (Berglund et al., 2021). However, in the audiobook publishing industry, audiobooks still depend on traditional publishing and small independent press companies (Have & Pedersen, 2020).

Reading through hearing in the digital era has become a method to enrich knowledge and meaning. By involving the senses of hearing, sight, and other body movements, reading audiobooks provides a non-monotonous and entertaining experience. The increasingly popular style of using audiobooks is when they are available on various digital platforms, such as subscription-based streaming (Have & Pedersen, 2021; Berglund et al., 2021; Wallin & Nolin, 2020). Not only do they play a role in literary and educational aspects, but audiobooks can also be helpful in health aspects (Poerio & Totterdell, 2020; Chen & Wang, 2023; Mermer & Arslan, 2024). The development of audiobooks has offered various possibilities for revisiting how to understand sight reading while listening. Based on the findings above, this literature review wants to re-explore the latest developments in audiobooks and re-evaluate the experience of reading through hearing. Therefore, the question in this article is how the latest developments in audiobooks produce new reading methods by hearing in the digital era.

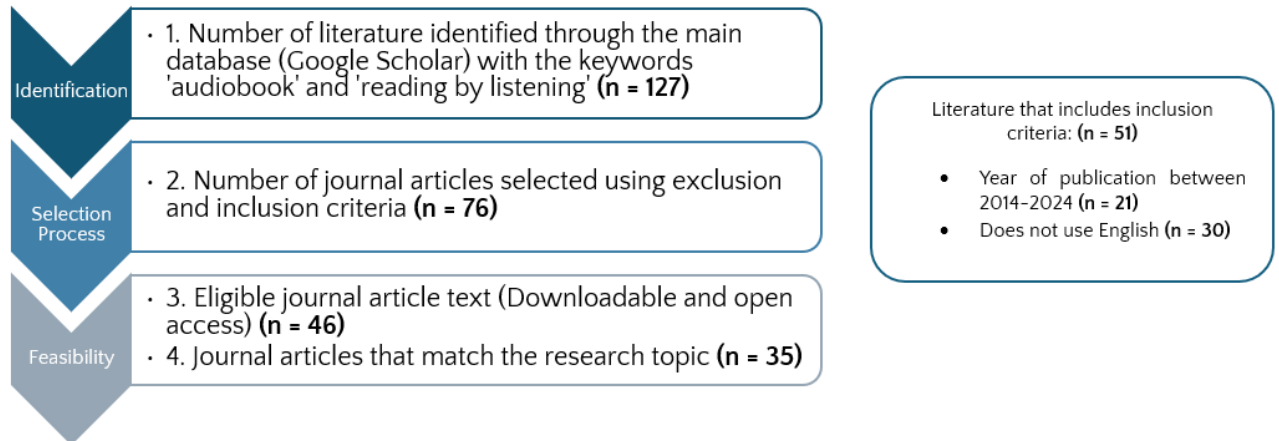
RESEARCH METHOD

The method used in this research is a literature review carried out by collecting and analyzing various library sources relevant to the research topic. Literature reviews in empirical studies aim to utilize existing research methodologies to answer current research questions and set the stage for future studies (Irwansyah, 2023). This research seeks to identify previous findings and combine them with current research regarding the past and current development of audiobooks, the concept of reading by hearing, and the role of audiobooks. The keywords used in the search were audiobooks, audiobook industry, digital audiobooks, audiobooks in Indonesia, and audiobooks during the pandemic.

Systematic reviews seek to produce transparent study identification reports, providing clarity to review stakeholders about what has been done to identify studies and how the review findings are situated within relevant evidence (Cooper et al., 2018). Collecting research and then summarizing the best of it is the essence of systematic review (Grant & Booth, 2009). This research seeks to explore the topic of audiobooks and provide a helpful overview and integration in the field of research regarding the audio industry in developing audiobooks (Elislah & Irwansyah, 2022).

The literacy selection process in this research adopted the thematic analysis method and PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis) 2020. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting meaning patterns (themes) in qualitative data (Clarke & Braun, 2006). Clarke & Braun (2017) say that themes provide a framework for flexibly organizing and reporting researchers' analytical observations. The 2020 PRISMA Method consists of reporting guidelines that reflect updates in methods for identifying, selecting, appraising, and synthesizing studies (Page et al., 2021).

An initial search using the keywords audiobook and reading by listening resulted in 127 articles on Google Scholar. Figure 1 explain process by applying inclusion and exclusion criteria, 76 articles were obtained. Then, a thematic analysis was carried out based on the suitability of the title, abstract, and theory formulation; the results obtained were 35 articles that were considered suitable for full-text analysis. After obtaining the data, the researcher analyzed each finding into three categories, including practices and experiences of reading and listening to audiobooks, past and present trends in the development of audiobooks, and the role of audiobooks in various aspects of life.



Source: (Researchers, 2024)

Figure 1 Research process

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Practice and Experience of Reading and Listening to Digital Audiobooks

The internet has produced abundant text information spread in various formats, which has changed the digital era's reading paradigm. This phenomenon also challenges the old-style traditional practices of reading books, writing with stationery, and typing on laptops. The development of the ICT industry, which has led to the introduction of the terms new media and converged media, has changed the style of delivering messages from the same content. Content is the only aspect that remains the same in the remediation of printed books to ebooks or audiobooks (Wallin, 2020). Digital audiobooks provide a literary experience that is different from sight-oriented reading. Listening to audiobooks can be considered a reading experience that focuses on atmosphere and content and builds on the specific experiences found in audiobooks (Have & Pedersen, 2021). Switching between music, audiobooks, and podcasts (MAP Switching) reflects users' listening needs. It shows that audiobooks require high focus and attention because they have sophisticated prose and literary structure (Wallin, 2021).

Users' mobility and reading ability on the go fit modern lifestyles (Have & Pedersen, 2020 & 2021). Audiobooks and ebooks can create mental images by identifying words in the text (Have & Pedersen, 2021). Reading and listening practices can also be seen as new literary experiences (Have & Pedersen, 2012; 2020). Historically, literary experience has been thought of as one limited to the imagination, where vision is tied to writing on the page. Audiobooks open new dimensions in the reading experience by combining visual and audio aspects and

enabling multimodal interactions involving sound waves, hearing, and body movements (Have & Pedersen, 2012).

Advances in audio technology can change the perspective and practice of reading, whereas digital audio can turn readers into listeners and narrators (Ruberry, 2008). Copyright issues, such as free digital copies, streaming services, and incentives for content creators, are essential concerns from an audiobook, music, and podcast publishing industry perspective. Audiobooks are positioned between the audio recording industry and the publishing industry, but their existence still depends on existing book production structures (Ruberry, 2008; Have & Pedersen, 2020). Nevertheless, the role of the digital publishing industry is to disrupt traditional publishing structures with different cultural values (Have & Pedersen, 2020).

Listening allows for creating momentary and changing feelings about a place (Have & Pedersen, 2012). Sound effects and music in audiobooks add a new dimension that can enrich the experience, almost similar to a radio drama (Wallin, 2020). The concept of "commuting space" is essential for audiobook readers because it allows them to enjoy commuting time more pleasantly (Have & Pedersen, 2012). Horton and Wohl's (1977) parasocial relationship theory states that the sounds in audiobooks can create feelings of friendship and comfort. Most audiobook listeners do not replace printed books but instead see them complementing text-based visual reading (Mediatore, 2003; Have & Pedersen, 2012). Listening to audiobooks can provide an experience similar to listening to the radio, where the body and vision are free to move and create a feeling of comfort (Have & Pedersen, 2012; 2020).

Trends in the Development of Audiobooks Past and Present

Audiobooks have been around for over a hundred years and have experienced many developments (Wallin, 2021). In the past, audiobooks began with the discovery by Thomas Edison in 1877. Edison initially designed the concept of the phonograph as a tool for listening to stories to create literary works that could be enjoyed by every individual in their home (Rubery, 2008). Later, during the 20th century, the atrocities of World Wars I and II resulted in increased use of phonographs by visually impaired people. Books recorded on phonograph discs provided an alternative for them to enjoy books without looking. In the 1970s, audiobooks were rejuvenated into a cassette format, making them easier to use in more places than bulky phonograph players (Rubery, 2017)

In the 1930s, novel-length tapes began to be produced in the United Kingdom and the United States as a service created for blind people, including soldiers returning from World War I with eye injuries and reading difficulties (Rubery, 2011). Then, in 1935, a charity in England, the Royal National Institute of Blind People, presented its first audiobook for blind people. The service expanded from 12-inch diameter discs to digital recordings in 2002. Over nearly 75 years, RNIB has published over 75 million audiobooks for over 2 million people. This shows how vital audiobooks are for people with various conditions, including soldiers injured or disabled during the war (Rubery, 2008).

The current trend in audiobook usage shows a significant increase. Moyer, (2012) found that libraries worldwide have offered digital audio services to their visitors. This reflects

technological advances that allow audiobooks and other materials to be presented in digital format and accessed online. Digital audiobooks allow users to listen to books and other materials more flexibly anytime and anywhere with an internet connection (Elislah & Irwansyah, 2022). This practice differs from traditional reading practices, which are more static (Wallin & Nolin, 2020). Digital audiobooks continue to grow and are predicted to become increasingly popular with the advancement of more sophisticated smartphone technology (Snelling, 2021), where audio and OKs can have commercial value (Wallin & Nolin, 2020).

The use of audiobooks in Indonesia also shows an increase. (Sumarni et al., 2024) They explained that the Spotify application can be a storytelling medium for children's literacy development. This research reflects a new way for children to access and enjoy stories through digital media, which is by reading and listening. The use of Spotify as a platform for listening to fairy tales brings two main elements, namely reading in the traditional sense, where children consume the story by listening to the narrative, and listening, where they interact with the sounds, music, and sound effects used in the fairy tale. Furthermore, research by (Meiristiani et al., 2022) shows that increasing public literacy is driven by government support and productivity in creating literary works. However, the use of digital technology still needs to be improved. UPS Tegal collaborated with Poddium to develop audiobooks and podcasts as literacy tools, involving 17 lecturers, 70 students, and two literacy communities. This collaboration resulted in 20 audiobooks and 50 podcasts available for free to the public via the application. With full support from the government through the Directorate General of Higher Education's Kedaireka Matching Fund grant in 2021, the literacy of the people of Tegal City can continue to increase.

Savitri & Munir (2022) recently preferred to read online using mobile technology through the Xreading application, a platform developed in Indonesia that presents various books in digital format and audiobooks. Through this Xreading subscription, teachers and students can improve their reading and grammar skills through audiobooks. With distribution via streaming and subscription platforms, digital audiobooks are no longer considered an additional medium for reading books but have become the primary medium as an alternative for readers who want to read by listening.

Berglund et al. (2021) found that book production and distribution have shifted to digital formats and channels in recent decades. Initially, digital sales platforms for printed books emerged, changing book distribution. Furthermore, literature began to be consumed in digital book format as ebooks, but recently, more and more people are consuming it as digital audiobooks. Nowadays, audiobooks are mostly enjoyed through online streaming platforms like Audible and Storytel. Audiobook streaming has become an increasingly important format for fiction consumption, significantly impacting business models (Berglund et al., 2021). With a convenient platform and instant access to various audiobooks offered through various subscription services, this activity (reading by listening) is becoming more popular (Wallin, 2021).

Wallin (2021) states that subscription services for digital audiobooks also change the type of media associated with books. Subscription-based audiobooks are closer to other

media distributed via the Internet and cloud computing, consumed with the help of screens, speakers, headphones, headsets, and earphones. Therefore, audiobooks can be connected to various digital platforms or streaming subscription services. These technical and commercial innovations can change how reading practices and books are understood as objects. Reading can be done with other forms of text than those found in books, such as newspapers or magazines, both in print and online, or various other forms of text found online and read on screen, such as fanfiction or other texts on social media or websites.

The Role of Audiobooks in Various Aspects of Life

Conceptualizing audiobooks as reading and listening activities is the same as understanding how they provide meaning in human life. The presence of audiobooks in daily routines provides pleasure, complements other activities, becomes valid, and even produces friendship and comfort with the narrator (Have & Pedersen, 2012; 2020; 2021; Wallin, 2021). In addition, audiobooks are considered suitable for modern life (Have & Pedersen, 2020; 2021; Linkis, 2021).

Wallin's research (2021) found that reading by listening to audiobooks improved the social well-being of young adults, such as listening to reduce stress, substitute for social life, relax, and stimulate drowsiness for sleep. Reading and listening to audio also appear when young adults' static reading and moving reading overlap with listening to music and podcasts (Wallin, 2021). In Indonesia, audiobooks are often used in education as alternative learning media. A study by (Meiristiani et al., 2022) found that the transformation of literary works and texts from the community were transformed from text to audio formats, such as audiobooks and podcasts, to develop digital literacy media for language and literature education for the community. (Pratiwi et al., 2022) said that the implications of audiobooks affect students' ability to become more fluent in reading. The application of Storynory audiobooks in teaching reading narrative texts shows a good response from students and teachers where they enjoy and easily understand the text, can help students in pronunciation of words, and can introduce and increase students' vocabulary or foreign words in the text (Tsany, 2021). Another research contribution from Marchetti and Valente (2018) shows that combining audiobooks and interactive games with students' learning contexts in studying a foreign language supports new learning experiences and complements students' visual information. In streaming and subscription-based audiobook services, Spotify and Audible contain audiobook content that can create exciting and enjoyable audio stories (Elislah & Irwansyah, 2022). Still, in Korea's education world, teachers use e-audiobooks for the teaching and learning process and to increase students' understanding (Kim, 2021).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the role of audiobooks has increased in various aspects. Research by Kovač and Gudinačius (2020) found that the lockdown due to COVID-19 decreased sales of printed books. However, sales of ebooks and audiobooks increased slightly. Digital format audiobooks are a relaxation method for a comfortable escape during the pandemic at home because they are easy to obtain and purchase from smartphones (Snelling, 2021). Audiobook cultural content during the pandemic shows the social dimensions of

reading culture consumption, which produces a virtual community, namely a social listening space about feeling isolated at home (Linkis, 2021).

Technological advances have led the audiobook industry to contribute to fields beyond education, literature, and entertainment. Research by Chen & Wang (2023) found that there is a positive mediating role of social adaptation in the relationship between audiobook use and the mental health of older people. Other research from Poerio & Totterdell (2020) also shows that audiobook content containing fiction and non-fiction can increase a person's involvement and appreciation for these two things so that it can be an effective way to gain potential benefits for well-being and a sense of meaning in life in adults. Old. Another benefit of audiobooks is that they can improve sleep quality and as a parameter of life in the intensive care unit (Mermer & Arslan, 2024). This shows the benefits of audiobooks in the world of health.

The various roles and benefits provided by using audiobooks as a 'routine' media make this media valuable and worthy of consideration in future research. Starting from media aimed at people with special needs, it has become a much-needed 'tool' to complete human life. The audiobook industry and its development will continue to be fertile research objects for improving the quality of human life.

CONCLUSION

The development of the audiobook industry has revolutionized the way humans consume literary content. In the past, reading was limited to observing the words in books, but now, hearing has become a new window to the world of stories and knowledge. With greater availability of titles, streaming and downloading technology that makes access easier, innovations in formats that make the listening experience more engaging, and higher production quality, audiobooks have changed how people read in this digital era.

The presence of new platforms and applications such as Audible and Google Play Books provides more accessible and more convenient access for users to enjoy audiobooks. Audiobooks are also increasingly connected with other technologies, such as virtual assistants and smart speakers, which further increases user involvement in listening to audiobooks. The audiobook industry has also built an active fan community, enriching the listening experience through discussions, reviews, and recommendations. Thus, this development not only makes the method of reading by ear more accessible but also more attractive and allows more people to enjoy the benefits of audiobooks.

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