Market Research

ICM 500: Fall 2025

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Table of Contents

Introduction

My name is Emily Armbruster, and I've been working as a website designer at a digital marketing agency for almost five years. While my career has kept me close to the online business world, I've also developed personal interests that connect naturally to this project. I've been an avid reader since I was a kid, though I took a break during college. About three years ago, I picked reading back up and it quickly became a big part of my life again. These days, I mostly read romance and fantasy, and I switch between physical books and audiobooks—though audiobooks are definitely the digital product I use the most. The idea of creating a micro digital product really excites me because I've always wondered what it would be like to sell something online. This feels like the perfect chance to combine what I know from my professional background with something I truly enjoy in my personal life.

Product Landscape Summary

I am exploring digital product niches at the intersection of reading, productivity, and community engagement. Specifically, I am researching tools that support individual readers as well as group experiences. These topics will allow for products to help enhance a person or group's overall reading experience.
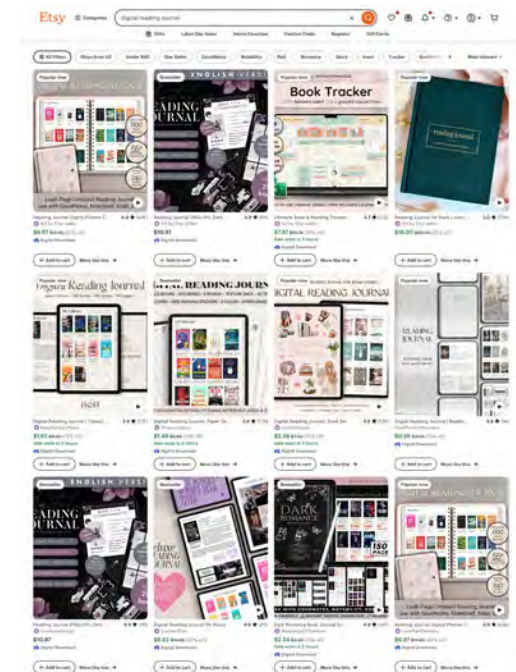
Observed Trends & Recurring Problems

Digital Reading Journals

Digital reading journals are abundant on marketplaces like Etsy. They range from hyperlinked PDFs and GoodNotes templates to digital planners with themes like "Dark Academia" or minimalist aesthetics. Searching "digital reading journal" on Etsy gives multiple pages of results.

Recurring Problems

- **Overwhelming choice:** On Reddit, users feel flooded by the number of templates and options.

- **Handling multiple reads:** Other Reddit users report adding multiple books becomes confusing.

https://www.etsy.com/search?q=digital+reading+journal&ref=pagination&page=1

Observed Trends & Recurring Problems Cont.

Audiobook Companion Tools & Market Behavior

The audiobook market is booming—growing from about $6.96 billion in 2024 to a projected $7.85 billion in 2025, with forecasts reaching $13.08 billion by 2030. (https://www.mordorintelligence.com/industry-reports/audiobook-market)

Recurring Problems

- The Washington Post reports a rise in backlash against AI narration. Consumers are concerned about both a decline in content quality as well as ethical concerns of AI replacing human jobs. Many users have cancelled Audible as they've rolled out AI narration. (https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2025/06/18/ai-pushback-audible-duolingo)

Audiobook Market
Market Size in USD Billion
CAGR 10.76%

USD 13.08 B

USD 7.85 B

2025   2030

Source : Mordor Intelligence

Market Overview

Study Period	2019 - 2030
Market Size (2025)	USD 7.85 Billion
Market Size (2030)	USD 13.08 Billion
Growth Rate (2025 - 2030)	10.76% CAGR
Fastest Growing Market	Asia Pacific
Largest Market	North America
Market Concentration	High

Major Players

Google   Rakuten kobo

audible   🍎   storytel

*Disclaimer: Major Players sorted in no particular order

Observed Trends & Recurring Problems Cont.

Notion Reading Journals & Trackers

Notion is a popular platform for reading journals and book trackers, with free and paid templates available through the official Notion Template Gallery, Etsy listings, and creator marketplaces. Most templates include book libraries, goal dashboards, and sections for notes, quotes, and reviews.

Recurring Problems

- **Overwhelming complexity:** Many templates pack in too many features, which can discourage casual readers.

- **Audiobook underrepresentation:** Most focus on written books; very few provide structured layouts for audiobook timestamps, listening notes, or playback cues.

- **Chapter-level detail gaps:** While some advanced templates allow for deep notes, many only provide high-level reviews and lack systematic prompts for chapter-by-chapter reflection.

https://www.notion.com/templates/category/books
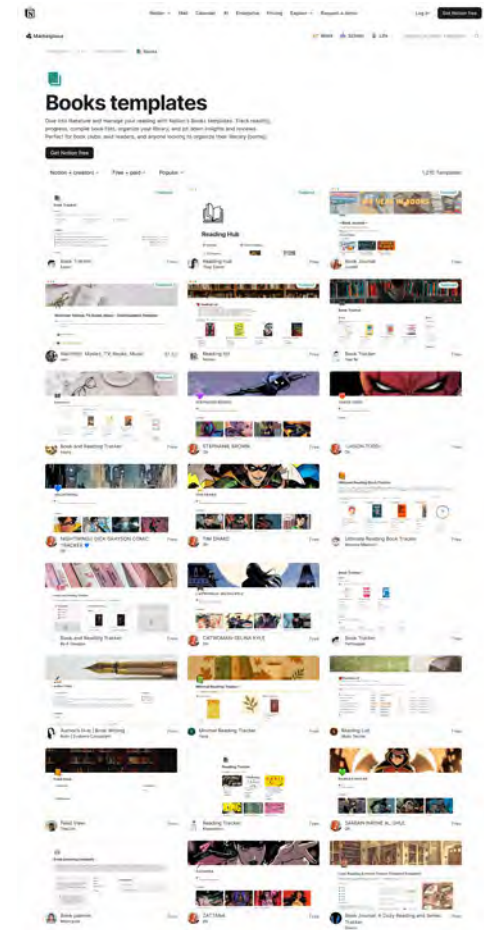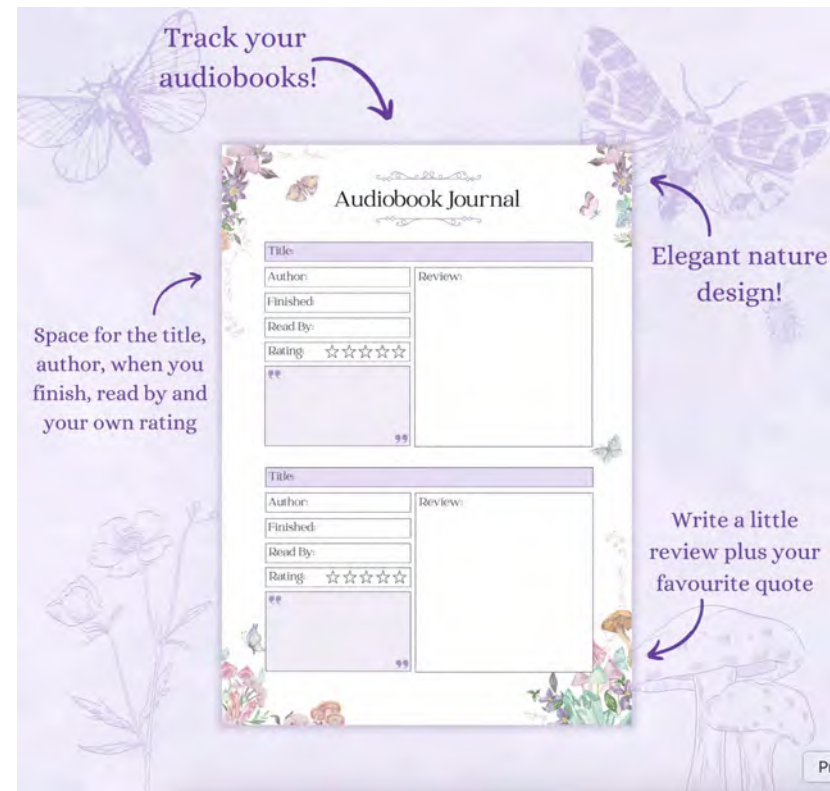
Competitor Analysis

Audiobook Companion Notes

https://www.etsy.com/listing/1698885122/audiobook-journal-printable-pdf?ls=s&ga_order=most_relevant&ga_search_type=all&ga_view_type=gallery&ga_search_query=audiobook+review+template&ref=sr_gallery-1-5&pro=1&dd=1&content_source=6c10be1b-6751-4d87-b773-ffde528b12f6%253A8c9d29676c26ea699951d1abb110589913b2486f&organic_search_click=1&logging_key=6c10be1b-6751-4d87-b773-ffde528b12f6%3A8c9d29676c26ea699951d1abb110589913b2486f

Successes

- Simple design - easy to use for everyone
- Downloadable and printable so you don't have to keep buying
- Inexpensive - $2.47
- Specific to audiobooks only

Improvements

- Very little space to write quotes, takeaways, chapter highlights
- No spot to include book start date
- Need to physically bring it with you in order to use it

Competitor Analysis Cont.
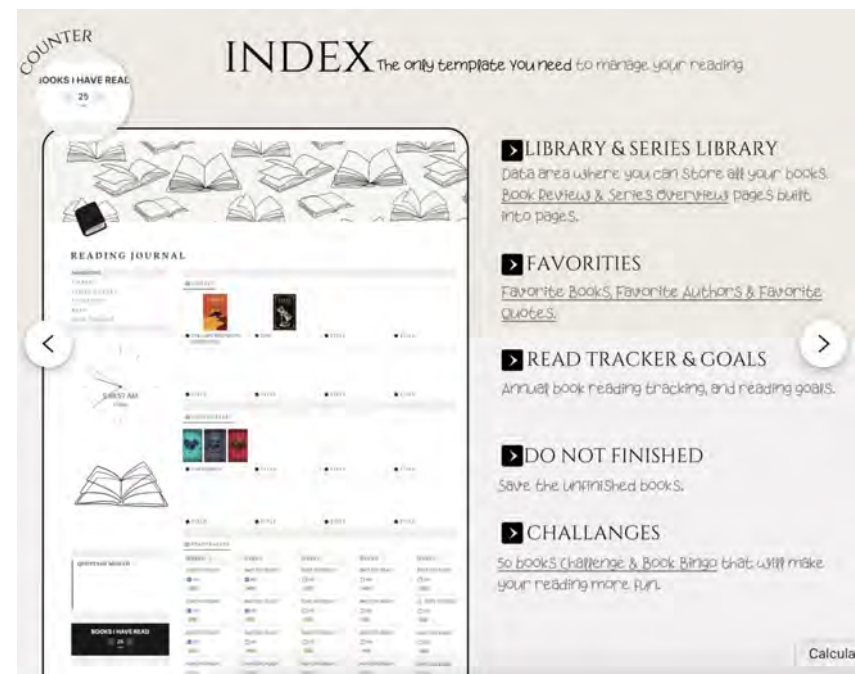
Notion Digital Reading Journal

https://www.etsy.com/listing/1463626986/digital-reading-journal-notion-template

Successes

- Simple minimalist design

- Clean, easy to use navigation

- Inexpensive - $4.49 for the full download

- Multiple functions - add favorites, add library, set goals, add reviews, etc.

- Can be used on phones, computers, and tablets

Improvements

- Need to know how to use Notion

- All of the different features can be overwhelming

Competitor Analysis Cont.

PDF Digital Reading Journal

https://www.etsy.com/listing/1669644555/reading-journal-digital-planner-for-ipad?ls=a&ga_order=most_relevant&ga_search_type=all&ga_view_type=gallery&ga_search_query=digital+reading+journal&ref=sc_gallery-1-1&sr_prefetch=1&pro=1&pop=1&sts=1&dd=1&sei=1&plkey=9e7fec5f8d74a8f18ca5b4a8bcb41abd770d924a%3A1669644555

Successes

- Large space to write reviews
- Ability to record over 240 book reviews
- Monthly and yearly trackers
- Multiple lists and trackers

Improvements

- Need to own an iPad or tablet to use
- Not great for very casual readers
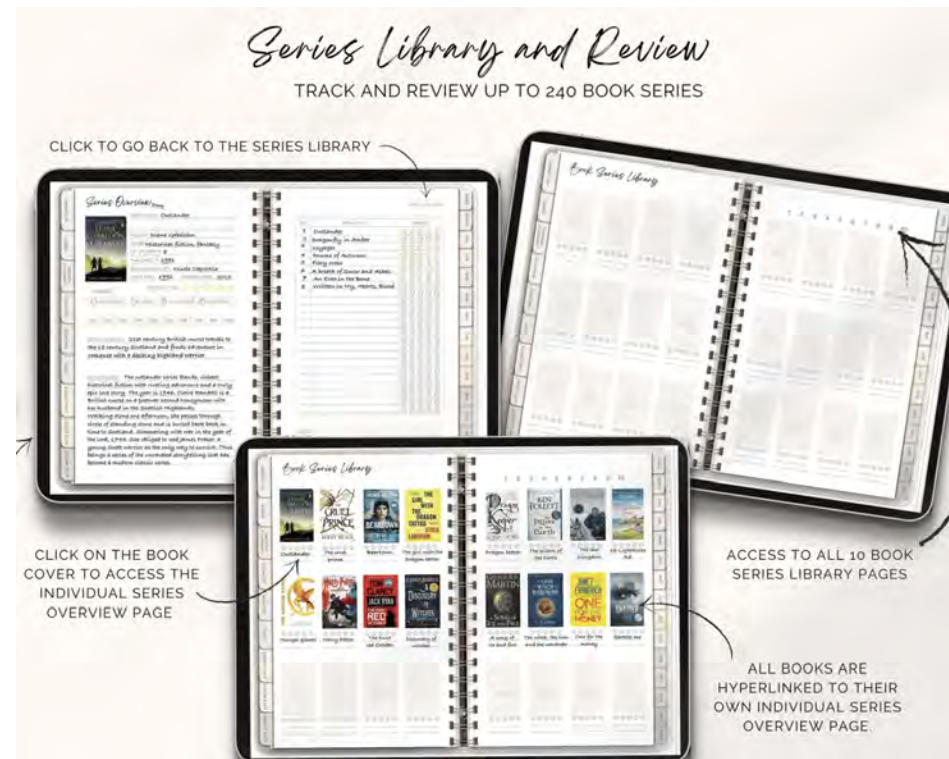
Customer Avatars

Jasmine Patel

- **Age:** 29
- **Gender:** Female
- **Marital Status:** Married
- **Children:** None
- **Location:** Brooklyn, NY
- **Occupation:** Project Coordinator
- **Income:** $62,000
- **Education:** Bachelor's in Sociology

"I love hosting book club, but it's stressful pulling everything together—I just want it to feel fun, polished, and easy."

Challenges

- Feels overwhelmed planning each month's book club
- Many digital kits look too academic, while event planning tools feel too business-like.
- Wants resources that reflect modern, social book club culture

Objections & Roles

- Could think, "Why pay for a toolkit when I could just use Pinterest or Google Docs for free?"
- Primary buyer; motivated to invest in tools that save time and help her create a better group experience.

Goals & Values

- Wants to host engaging, memorable book club sessions
- Values friendship, connection, and cultivating community through books
- Seeks stylish, easy-to-use resources that make her club stand out

Sources of Information

- **Books:** Popular fiction, trending BookTok reads
- **Websites/Blogs:** Goodreads, Buzzfeed Books
- **Magazines:** Bustle, The Cut
- **Influencers:** BookTok creators, Reese's Book Club
- **Other:** Instagram, TikTok trends, Facebook Groups

Customer Avatars Cont.

Sarah Lopez

- **Age:** 38
- **Gender:** Female
- **Marital Status:** Divorced
- **Children:** 1 (age 9)
- **Location:** Austin, Texas
- **Occupation:** Marketing Director
- **Income:** $95,000
- **Education:** Master's in Communications

"I rely on audiobooks to keep learning while juggling work and parenting, but I wish I had a better way to capture the important insights I hear."

Challenges

- Struggles to retain key ideas from audiobooks when listening on the go
- Finds it difficult to reference or share quotes with her team or friends
- Existing solutions feel too unstructured and inconvenient for audio listening

Objections & Roles

- May question whether a companion template is truly different from just using Evernote or Apple Notes.
- Direct decision-maker; willing to pay for a polished, time-saving tool that improves her learning retention.

Goals & Values

- Wants to learn efficiently while balancing career and parenting
- Values continuous self-improvement, time-saving systems, and professional growth

Sources of Information

- **Books:** Business, psychology, productivity
- **Websites/Blogs:** Harvard Business Review, Medium, LinkedIn
- **Magazines:** Fast Company, Wired
- **Influencers:** Brené Brown, James Clear, Simon Sinek
- **Other:** Podcasts, LinkedIn Learning, TikTok

Product Brainstorm

Product 1: Audiobook Companion Notes

A structured, reader-friendly digital template (Notion, PDF, or app-based) designed to help audiobook listeners capture key takeaways, quotes, timestamps, and reflections while listening.

Who is it for?

Busy professionals, lifelong learners, and audiobook enthusiasts who listen while commuting, working out, or multitasking.

Why might someone want it?

They want to retain more from their audiobooks without pausing constantly to take messy notes. Also, it helps them easily recall and share insights from books in personal, academic, or professional settings.

Competitive Edge / Unique Take

- This would be a universal, customizable system usable with any audiobook
- Adds audio-specific features that traditional reading journals don't offer

Minimum Viable Product

A Notion template or printable PDF with sections for title/author info, timestamps, key insights, quotes, a simple progress tracker, and reflection prompts

Product Brainstorm

Product 2: Digital Reading Journal

A digital tool (Notion template, hyperlinked PDF, or GoodNotes file) to track books read, set reading goals, record reviews, and capture quotes or reflections.

Who is it for?

Casual to avid readers (millennials and Gen Z especially) who want a stylish, digital alternative to Goodreads or paper journals.

Why might someone want it?

They want to organize their reading habits visually. It appeals to those who love aesthetic journaling, goal tracking, and reading challenges. They are looking for something thatIntegrates with popular digital tools (Notion, GoodNotes, tablets).

Competitive Edge / Unique Take

- Many digital journals are overloaded or generic. This would be modular and minimalist
- Could stand out by being genre-themed or audio-inclusive

Minimum Viable Product

A Notion template or printable PDF with sections for book library (TBR, currently reading, finished), yearly reading goal tracker, review and rating fields, and a quote capture section

Product Brainstorm

Product 3: Digital Book Club Toolkit

A bundle of digital resources (PDFs, Canva templates, or Notion pages) designed to help book club hosts plan, organize, and run engaging book club meetings.

Who is it for?

Book club organizers (typically women in their 20s–40s, social readers, community-focused groups) who want to make gatherings easier to plan and more enjoyable.

Why might someone want it?

They want to saves hours of prep time while also make book club feel more polished and interactive. They also want to add a social, aesthetic element that resonates with modern book clubs influenced by BookTok and Instagram.

Competitive Edge / Unique Take

- Most current kits are either too educational or too basic
- This product would blend style and function, offering beautifully designed, adult-friendly, editable resources

Minimum Viable Product

A downloadable Canva template with 1 meeting agenda template, 10 discussion question prompts, and editable invitations and social media posts.

Preliminary Validation

Testing so far: I reviewed Etsy reviews, Notion marketplace activity, and Reddit discussions (r/Notion, r/Journaling, r/books) as secondary validation.

Responses Observed

Reading Journals: Popular and well-reviewed, but users feel overwhelmed by too many options and struggle with tracking multiple books.

Audiobook Notes: Clear gap — listeners want better ways to capture insights, but current products are static or book-specific.

Book Club Toolkits: Starter kits sell well on Etsy, but most are too basic or too classroom-like for casual clubs.

Insights Shaping My Direction

- Journals = demand but crowded market

- Audiobook Notes = biggest unmet need, least competition

- Book Club Toolkits = smaller but steady niche.

Conclusion

I am leaning toward developing the Audiobook Companion Notes product because it fills the clearest gap in the market. While digital reading journals are popular and book club toolkits have steady demand, both categories face higher competition, whereas structured tools for audiobook listeners remain underdeveloped.

What's still unclear is the exact features audiobook listeners value most (e.g., timestamps, prompts, or reflection sections). I need to confirm whether users prefer a Notion template, printable PDF, or mobile-friendly format.

My next step is to run a quick validation test by either posting a poll or mock-up on Reddit or Instagram and comparing engagement. This will help me decide which format and features to prioritize for the MVP.