



Audio in Everyday Life: A Generational Ethnography

The Authoritative Source for Consumer
Technology Market Research

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AUGUST 2026



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Research Objectives

CTA's *Audio in Everyday Life: A Generational Ethnography* was co-sponsored by CTA's Audio Division to better understand the broader, behavior-led view of audio in everyday life and explore how it shows up across routines, contexts, devices and life stages.

It examines the choices and tradeoffs consumers make across performance, convenience and ecosystems, while identifying unmet needs, friction points, upgrade opportunities and meaningful generational differences.

Specifically, this research aims to:

- 1 **Identify** how audio shows up across daily routines and devices used
- 2 **Investigate** how consumers balance performance, convenience and ecosystems
- 3 **Uncover** consumers' unmet needs and friction points
- 4 **Detect** when consumers become open to upgrading, switching or expanding setups
- 5 **Contextualize** generational differences that shape use, adoption, trends and values

Methodology

This qualitative study was conducted as a seven-day online diary (i.e., ethnography) on a mobile-friendly platform among 45 U.S. adults spanning the following age cohorts:

Cohort	Ages	N
Gen Z ➤	18–29	14
Millennial ➤	Younger 30–37	9
	Older 38–45	9
Gen X ➤	46–61	13

Participants were screened to meet the following criteria:

- **Influence:** Have at least some decision-making influence on the technology devices, media and content that get purchased or installed in their home.
- **Engagement:** Listen to audio content (e.g., music, podcasts, audiobooks, etc.) on one or more device at least 4 hours per week.

Fieldwork ran from June 1–7, 2026, and captured listening activities across both weekday and weekend routines.

Participants completed structured activities and daily listening logs through a mobile-friendly research platform, documenting their experiences through written responses, photos, videos and collages. Moderators reviewed submissions and used follow-up probes to clarify and deepen responses.

Important Notice:

This study is based on qualitative research and is intended to provide directional insight into consumer behaviors, experiences and expectations. Participant responses and images may reference specific products or brands; their inclusion does not imply endorsement by the Consumer Technology Association.

CTA designed this study in its entirety and is responsible for all content contained in this report. CTA is a member of the Insights Association and adheres to research and analysis guidelines set forth in the Insights Association Code of Standards and Ethics.

Key Findings

1



Audio is used to create a desired state

People use audio to shape how different moments feel and function across the day.

2



“Good” sound is expected and should feel effortless

Listeners describe clear, balanced sound as the baseline, but their definitions of quality extend into the broader listening experience.

3



Consumers want flexible phone friendly setups

Despite the many ways to access media, the phone remains the most common.

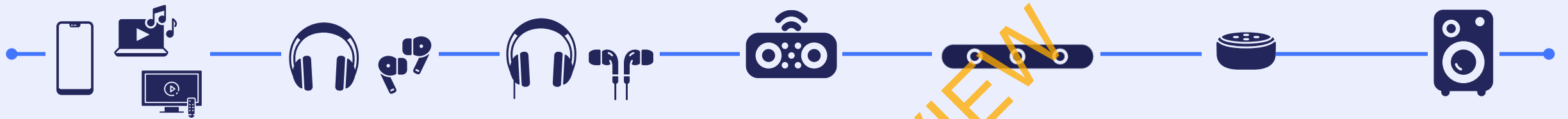
4



Friction starts when listeners must manage their device

Disruption shows up when devices interrupt comfort, continuity or immersion.

Each device solves a different playback/listening need



Smartphone, TV and Laptop

Smartphones, TVs and laptops are **the access points or hubs** that connect to other audio devices like earbuds and home speakers.

Wireless headphones/earbuds

Listeners use them when they want **audio to stay private and personal, move with them, or create a bubble** in public, at the gym, during errands or while working.

Wired headphones/earbuds

Wired options show up as **a fallback when people want fewer battery, pairing or lost-earbud issues**, though cords and compatibility create their own friction.

Portable wireless speakers

Listeners use them to **shape the atmosphere**, bringing sound into chores, cooking, shared moments or spaces where they want music without being physically tethered to a device.

Soundbars

Soundbars connected to TVs and computers support **stationary, screen-based listening** where sound needs to feel fuller, more immersive or closer to a theater experience.

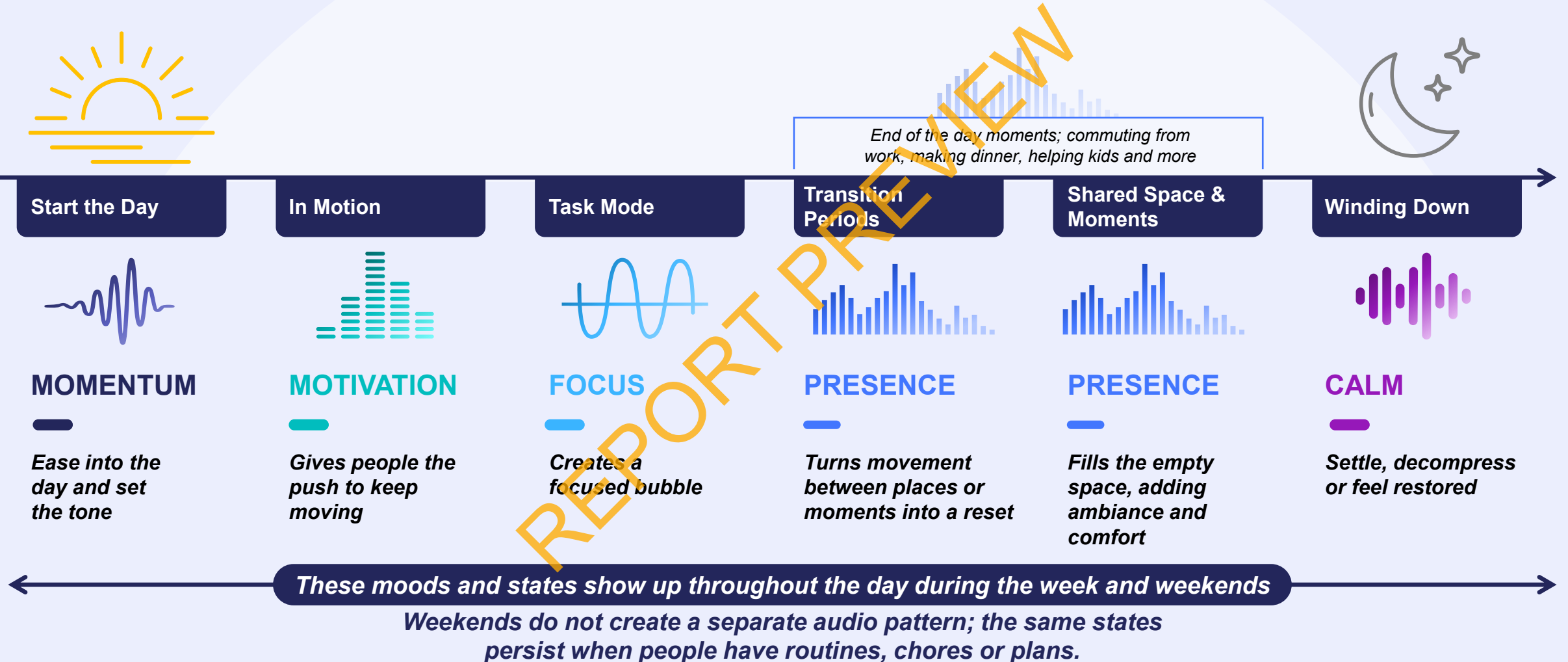
Smart speakers

Smart speakers are used for **background sound, routines, voice control and shared spaces** where audio should be easy and always ready.

Home Speaker

Stationary speakers **support fuller, room-based listening when portability is less important**. They bring consistent sound to shared spaces, but fixed placement and cords restrict flexibility.

From wakeup to wind down, **audio is key** in supporting the mood states that listeners desire



MOMENTUM

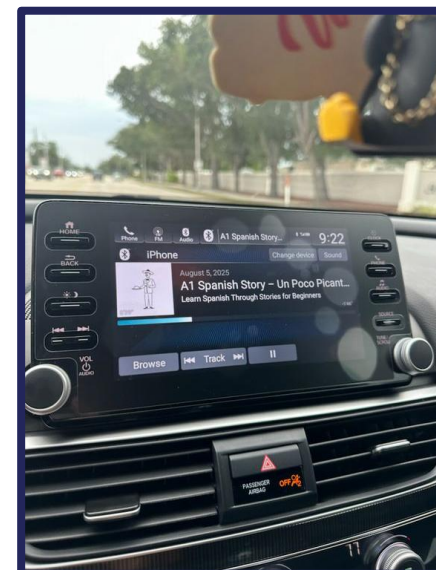
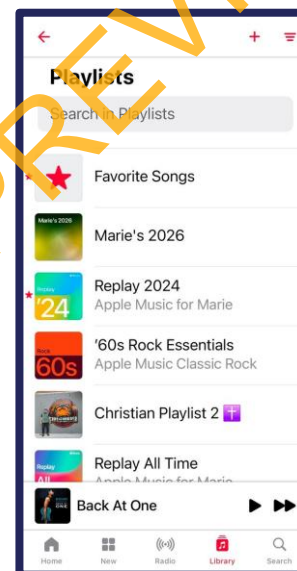
sets the tone/pace for the day

Adding energy to routine moments like cooking, cleaning, getting ready or driving

“

Today, I listened to my soft rock playlist, which is not shown in the screenshot. I was the only one listening because I was the only one in the car. I'm listening to music as I drive my car. It helps make the drive to work go a little faster and gives me some motivation for the day.

-- Gen X, Female, NV, \$75-99K, Employed Full-Time



In this moment, I am listening to a podcast. I find listening to music in the morning to be a bit overstimulating, so I opted for something more productive.

-- Gen Z, Female, FL, \$75-99K, Employed Full-Time

”

Access points that support momentum:



Devices that support momentum:



The phone is the most common access point within a broader audio ecosystem



While laptops, televisions and other interfaces can serve the same role, the **phone** often anchors media apps, playlists and controls

“

“The device that I like best all around is probably my phone, because it does everything and works really well... [I am] most connected on my phone because I use it in the car, I use it with my TV sometimes, and I can use it with earbuds. I can use it for anything.”

-- **Gen X**, Female, OR, \$15-25K, Unemployed

“I listen to the app on my phone because my phone is always on me and it takes less steps to open the app on my phone versus on my laptop or with a Bluetooth speaker.”

-- **Gen Z**, Female, MD, \$50-75K, Employed Part-Time

”



Friction most often arises around **devices that support multiple moments** throughout the day

Handoff Friction

Delivery Friction



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CTA Market Research publishes consumer technology studies addressing the U.S. and international markets using the full spectrum of quantitative and qualitative techniques. Topics range from the emerging technologies to in-depth examinations of consumer behavior related to tech. For more information, contact Steven Hummel: shummel@CTA.tech.



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