

4 reasons to put the brakes on social audio

Article

The excitement over social audio is palpable, judging by the number of companies building out apps or features to support it, and by the number of news reports and opinion columns covering it (our own [“Clubhouse and Social Audio 2021”](#) report included). But any marketer that’s active in social media should weigh the drawbacks of entering social audio right now. Here are some key issues to consider before jumping on board.

Scale (in all its forms) is an issue

For all its growth in recent months, Clubhouse had just 12.2 million downloads worldwide through March 9, 2021, per App Annie. There's no guarantee the app will remain as red-hot as it was in February: It was already starting to show signs of cooling down last month, per Sensor Tower. Other buzzy social apps before it—Vine, to name one—have followed a similar hockey-stick trajectory before sliding back down.

Absolute size, as well as other dimensions of scale, will be a major factor for marketers to consider. For now, social audio is a fraction of the size of social networking or podcasting. We estimate there will be 212.1 million monthly social network users and 117.8 million monthly podcast listeners in the US this year.

Another challenge is usage frequency and time spent. Will the average consumer spend significant time listening to social audio—especially after the pandemic ends? Such activity is far more time-consuming and attention-focused than absently thumbing through a feed to kill a few minutes of time.

Early marketing efforts may see only a small payoff

Marketers shouldn't enter social audio in 2021 with the idea of generating a massive return. For one, the environment isn't conducive to doing anything splashy. And given the challenges with scale described above, the end results may be spotty at best.

While it's as easy as tapping a button on a phone screen to start an audio room, it's not so easy to make it successful. Here are just a few areas where the marketing experience on Clubhouse must improve:

- Making sure users find your room
- Communicating with other users
- Reaching users after an event

Measurement is a challenge

There are few ways to measure and track results from social audio efforts at this point. Moderators can see a list of attendees in Clubhouse, but there aren't ways to easily scrape that data into a usable form (and it's questionable whether Clubhouse would condone the practice anyway).

That lack of native metrics has led early experimenters to kludge together their own. "We actually had our agencies record the session on their phones so that we could listen to it later,

because it disappears otherwise,” said Megan Stroud, brand director at spirits marketer Pernod Ricard.

For now, the call to action is to measure what you can. Like any new medium, the metrics are difficult to come by, but marketers can still do the basics, like count the attendees of a room, and add up the number of new followers after an event.

There are brand safety concerns

Even if conversations are moderated, there is no way to know what someone is going to say when they go live. The spontaneity has strong appeal, but being live is “a nervous place for brands to play because it is very easy for that to go very wrong,” said Karen Staughton, West Coast engagement director at digital agency Grow. “If a brand sponsors or shows up in a room, and somehow something happens in that room, the brand will take the heat for not speaking up or doing something.”

Another issue is creating a safe space. Bullying and other negative behavior have taken place in rooms, which can reflect poorly on brands. “Audio [requires] a more cumbersome process to detect harmful content in real time,” said Jessica Dooley, social practice lead at Mindshare. While social listening remains a challenge in social audio, catching instances of bad behavior will be up to the users.

To learn more about how and when to get involved in the social audio trend, Insider Intelligence subscribers can read our recent report:

Report by Debra Aho Williamson Apr 01, 2021

Clubhouse and Social Audio 2021



