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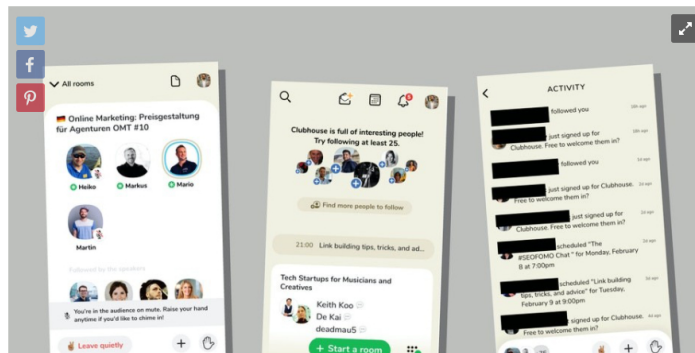
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Can iPhone-only Clubhouse succeed in Android-dominated Asia Pacific?

By Shawn Lim - 02 March 2021 01:00am



APAC has over 80% of phone users on Android so without this feature Clubhouse will stand no chance

The massive presence of mobile in the Asia Pacific region is a big opportunity for marketers to connect with customers through mobile channels. But with the region favoring Android over iOS, will iPhone-only Clubhouse fail to catch on?

Invitation-only Clubhouse's growth has been astronomical, with the audio app downloaded 2.3m times in January 2021.

In Asia Pacific, it has gained momentum with 440,000 downloads in Japan in early February, while in China Clubhouse downloads from the Apple App Store were recorded at 160,000.

The app is still unavailable on Google's Android, which dominates the mobile operating system market in APAC. In January 2021, its market share reached almost 83% while Apple's iOS accounted for just 16.35%.

Despite being unavailable to Android users, Fairil Yeo, the senior vice-president for APAC at Lewis Global Communications, believes Clubhouse's success in APAC will not be driven by device or operating system – at least not yet.

Its present trajectory, he suggests, is down to its ability to hit all the right marks – what he calls “the trifecta of meeting the right consumer habit, exclusivity and pull factor from renowned creators”.

“Users of Clubhouse get to drop into conversations that are exclusive, some of these hosted by titans in the celebrity or business world. Intrinsicly, Clubhouse users get to experience a far closer connection with each other amid what typically would be a crowded social space.”

Benjamin Roberts, the managing partner for APAC at DMCG Global, predicts that it will not be long before Clubhouse rolls out the app on Android. He points out that development has already started and notes how over 80% of phone users in APAC are on Android. Without this feature, he says, Clubhouse stands no chance of getting the traction needed.

“Another issue that will prove tough for Clubhouse is censorship – China has already blocked the app and the Thai government has warned users not to break the law during discussions on it,” he says.

The app's feature of having limited invites (two or three at a time) is “annoying” when you send one to someone who cannot use it as they are on Android, says Darren Woolley, founder and global chief executive officer at Trinity P3.

“The launch phase is very US-centric. The whole joining by invitation strategy is simply to create exclusivity, but already there are considerable complaints about the lack of options outside iOS.”

However, being available to Android users is not the only requirement for it to succeed in APAC says Suzie Shaw, managing director of We Are Social in Australia.

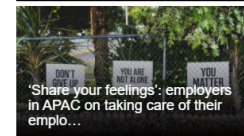
She explains that there is an element of social proofing, and in this case, its importance in driving uptake is further amplified by the app's invite-only nature.

“Ultimately, local relevance will be paramount in driving its success in the region. Involving local hosts

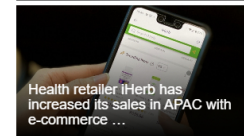
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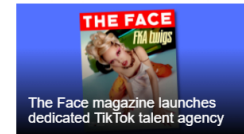
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discussing topics that feel close to home for the diverse population in APAC, and close to their interests, will be crucial to ensure the audience finds value in the conversations happening on Clubhouse, and keeps coming back."

At the end of the day, Asia Pacific carries multiple nuances that make the environment difficult to fully breach, says Yeo. Being audio-first brings Clubhouse a step closer to success as users can utilize time-voids (such as commuting) to enrich themselves or escape.


"While Clubhouse is in its pre-revenue stages now without monetization through ads, this is something it should continue with," he says. "A future focus on a model built on hyperlocal content creators will be its best bet to maintain the high-quality rooms that remain hyper-relevant to users, therefore drawing in more users to sustain its growth."


The app has seen Tesla founder Elon Musk create a chatroom talk about aliens and humans living on Mars, among other things. The room reached a maximum capacity of 5,000 users quickly, causing glitches on the platform. Overflow rooms with Musk's voice were then created.


Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg has also created rooms to talk about augmented reality and virtual reality.

"If Clubhouse could get Jack Ma (Alibaba) or Masayoshi Son (Softbank) to speak openly and wisely on the app, this might have the same effect that it did in the west when Musk appeared and downloads exploded," says Roberts. "That APAC viral moment needs to be created."

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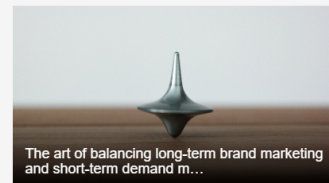
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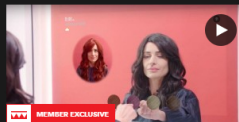
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