

Listen-in social network Clubhouse readies for the masses

January 26 2021



The audio-based Clubhouse social platform is gearing up to open to a wider audience after months of testing

Invite-only audio social network Clubhouse is readying to let in the masses with the help of a fresh funding round reported to value it at

nearly a billion dollars.

Clubhouse has gained allure since its release early last year in a private testing format, putting a podcast spin on [social networking](#) by letting members listen in on conversations taking place in online "rooms" and chime in with comments if they wish.

"Our focus now is on opening up Clubhouse to the whole world," Clubhouse founders Paul Davison and Rohan Seth said in an online post Sunday.

"With that goal in mind for 2021, we have secured a new round in funding."

The amount of cash prestigious Silicon Valley venture capital firm Andreessen Horowitz (a16z) is putting into Clubhouse was not disclosed, but the valuation was reported to be about a billion dollars.

Clubhouse has grown from a single "room" where the founders could usually be found for conversations to being used by nearly two million people weekly, according to Andrew Chen of a16z, who joined the startup's board of directors as part of the deal.

"The initial trial users started inviting more people and the Clubhouse community swiftly encompassed a burgeoning and diverse set of people and conversations," Chen said in an online post.

"Groups quickly began to form around hobbies, cultures, careers, and curiosities."

He contrasted the conversational, audio-only format at Clubhouse with social networks that require users to focus attention on display screens.

"Clubhouse lets users communicate nuanced, detailed ideas in conversation," Chen said.

"It's the opposite of a video clip or a short post because it rewards discussion and exploration."

He described creators who organize and manage virtual rooms as the heart of Clubhouse, and said the team is working on tools to help them moderate conversations as well as make money.

In coming months, Clubhouse will test ways for people managing rooms to be paid direct through features such as tipping, tickets, or subscriptions, according to its co-founders..

"I love that this orientation contrasts with the typical ad-based business model that has supported social networks in the past," Chen said.

"This centers the experience around community and quality, rather than clicks and volume."

Clubhouse now has more than 180 investors, according to its founders.

Uses for money from the investment round led by a16z will include server capacity to keep the service running and creation of a version of the app for Android-powered smartphones, the founders said.

Clubhouse is currently available on [mobile devices](#) powered by Apple software.

As it prepares to open to the masses, Clubhouse is also working on ways to deal with the kinds of abuse and misleading behavior that have plagued rivals such as Facebook and Twitter.

"The team is committed to rethinking the ways we communicate with one another online and is working to build a trusted, safe space for people to be heard," Chen said.

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Citation: Listen-in social network Clubhouse readies for the masses (2021, January 26) retrieved 21 September 2023 from <https://techxplore.com/news/2021-01-listen-in-social-network-clubhouse-readies.html>

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