

Audio takes off during the pandemic - Axios

[Sara Fischer](#)

The mass adoption of wireless headphones and smart devices, combined with people being home all day and not in public spaces, has created a boom for audio — and every big media and tech company is scrambling to claim a piece of it.

Why it matters: The audio boom is milestone for accessibility and a boon to content creators, but it also presents new challenges for content moderation.

- "The intimacy of audio could be tailor-made for our shelter in place, contact-free lives," says John Lustyan, Founder & Managing Partner of illum, a media consultancy, [told Axios](#).

Driving the news: Almost overnight, audio chat features have become top-of-mind for Big Tech giants, looking to edge out the up-and-coming social chat app Clubhouse.

- Recent appearances from Mark Zuckerberg, Elon Musk and celebrities on Clubhouse are causing an [explosion in downloads to Clubhouse](#).
- Facebook is reportedly in the early stages of [building a](#)

Clubhouse rival.

- Twitter last month [launched "Spaces,"](#) which lets thousands of people listen in on conversations between Twitter users.

Be smart: The [social media audio boom](#) mostly centers around ephemeral conversations. Users can open Clubhouse or Twitter (Spaces) and drop in on conversations that are meant to be casual, and not recorded to be listened to later.

In the workplace, the audio boom looks a bit different.

- Those products, like audio messaging platform [Yac](#), are designed to be asynchronistic, meaning users are meant to listen to pre-recorded messages from colleagues at their leisure.
- **Workplace companies,** like Slack, are trying to figure out ways to integrate these types of audio tools into their mostly text-based products. Most video conferencing companies offer users the ability to dial in without having to use video.

By the numbers: The audio content and software boom is happening as new hardware makes listening and voice commands much easier.

- **For the first time ever,** wireless headphone and earbud shipments surpassed wired headphones and earbuds

last year, according to data from the [Consumer Technology Association](#). Nearly 40% of the U.S. population uses voice assistants, per eMarketer. Roughly a quarter of the adult population [own a smart speaker](#).

- Music, audiobook and podcast services are expected to reach \$10 billion in revenue, up 19% over last year, per CTA. Audiobooks are the [fastest-growing sector](#) within the book publishing industry, according to The Association of American Publishers.
- Spotify says it [now hosts 2.2 million podcasts](#), up from 700,000 in 2019.
- The audio boom has triggered a mergers and acquisitions frenzy, [especially around podcast companies](#).

The big picture: Audio presents enormous opportunities for brands and content creators to reach people in a more accessible way — when they're on-the-go or using their eyes for some other activity. But the scale of audio conversations will make it very difficult to fact-check conversations or stop bullying and harassment in real-time.

- Already, we're seeing some of these issues play out. Clubhouse — which requires an invite to access — is reportedly already being [blocked in China](#), and it's starting to face allegations that the platform isn't

adequately built to stop harassment.

- Facebook said Thursday on a call with reporters that it's exploring ways to monitor audio content, as well as any type of mixed media content, for harmful or illegal things that violate its rules.

Go deeper:

- [Clubhouse gains momentum as Big Tech leaders join](#)
- [Audio social media is the hot new thing](#)