

Acquiring Social Media Influence: A Clubhouse Study

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Abstract

The most mentioned person on social media (SM) in today's marketing is the social media influencer (SMI). They have been able to create an industry valued at \$216 million within another (advertising). However, almost no attention has been paid to the process through which they achieve their status. This article adopts descriptive analysis to reveal how some Nigerian Clubhouse SMIs acquired influence/followership. The SMIs' were observed for 6 months. The study revealed a well-planned logical process for acquiring influence, not just content creation posited by many scholars.

Keywords: Celebrity capital, Clubhouse, moderator/influencer, SM, and SMI.

DOI: 10.7176/EJBM/14-10-10

Publication date: May 31st 2022

1. Introduction

There is a dearth of research on how SMIs/influencers acquire influence, despite being the most talked about people in today's marketing industry. Many researchers point to the quality of content they create. This article observed some Nigerian influencers on Clubhouse, to discern how they acquired influence. It focused on some of the most popular clubs and moderators.

According to Hund (2019), SMI or influencer is the industry lingo for bloggers, Instagrammers, etc. She described them as SM users who have been able to cultivate and nurture a niche despite prevalent economic and professional uncertainty. They produce curated content for audiences and make proceeds from brands' patronage. She ascribed the following characteristics to the phenomenon:

1. Individuals who want to be renowned as persuasive online,
2. Advertisers now focus their budgets on SM ads, because influencers' original personality-inflected content is effective for sales.
3. SM firms, whose tools and regulations can improve and/or hinder these activities.
4. Marketing/talent agencies, trend predictors, etc., create appraisal platforms to assess influence, pick influencers for ads, negotiate agreements between influencers and brands, and adopt the various advantages of articulating oneself online, in alliance with brands.

Freberg et al. (2011, p. 90) describe SMIs as a novel type of independent third-party endorsers who influence audience's attitudes via blogs, tweets, and other SM avenues. Some scholars deem them only as a subgroup of endorsers, who address an audience on behalf of a brand. SMIs usually integrate upbeat messages about brands into their own SM content, instead of just taking part in ads. For instance, an influencer may show an Instagram photo with a caption stating that the brand "made my day" (Breves et al. 2019). Thus, SMI messages are a hybrid of earned and paid publicity. Another way to consider influencers is as electronic word of mouth (eWOM) merchants. Influencers narrate their views of brands to audiences, who then share their own version of it with others (Eunjin et al., 2021). There is broad evidence that eWOM commands the power of interpersonal interaction in marketing (Cook 2017).

The Influencer industry was valued at \$148.04 million in 2019 and is projected to reach \$404.84 million by 2027, with a CAGR of 13.4 percent (The Insight Partners, 2022). A new strategy of employing SMIs to boost corporate reputation emerged in the 2010s (Dijkmans et al., 2015). The rapid progress of the young SM industry around these activities has channeled billions of dollars into its economy and initiated a chain reaction that is basically altering the creation of culture (Hund, 2019), where emphasis on quantity and SM metrics progressively decide which individuals and products have power.

Clubhouse

Paul Davison and Rohan Seth launched Clubhouse in March 2020. It became popular in late 2020. It is an audio-based SM app, similar to live audio or large conference calls. It is the buzziest place for the titans in tech, and

entrepreneurship, alongside millions of individuals (Socolich, 2021). Users speak to each other in chat rooms by finding, listening, and contributing to their topics of interest. Chat rooms can accommodate about 5,000 people at a time. The app has been used by renowned personalities like Elon Musk and Mark Zuckerberg in 2021. Many entrepreneurs said that they saw direct ROI after speaking engagements (Socolich, 2021). *Clubhouse can be time-consuming* because it may be long before one can speak in a full room, especially if you don't personally know the moderator. You have to raise your hand, hope you are picked and wait your turn to speak as hours go by. The major benefit of speaking is networking. Speakers may become mutually-beneficial new friends, and audience members often approach them afterward. Speakers receive many direct messages (DMs) in their backchannel.

Clubhouse is a new frontier and early adopters have built a sizable audience, which is now harder to do (Socolich, 2021). Users join rooms with acquaintances, friends, and strangers, who discuss topics like diets, cryptocurrency, politics, etc. Each room has three categories of people— *speakers*, *listeners*, and *others*. The speakers are hosts/moderators and other speakers on stage, listeners are people being followed by the speakers, and others are often visitors/strangers. The moderators maintain decorum, *pass the mic*, and pick listeners to join discussions (Huest & Ford, 2021). However, unlike other SM platforms, followership is not everything, you can speak to anyone without any. Promotion is unconventional because people abhor sales pitches, but rather welcome a conversation. Speakers can tailor their profiles to their audiences, unlike permanent profiles on Twitter/Instagram.

Moderating can be difficult depending on a room's population, so several moderators (have green badges) are sometimes necessary. Besides picking speakers from the audience, a competent moderator ought to keenly steer the discussion— which gets problematic in rooms with a dozen speakers or more. "A great moderator keeps the conversation brisk and moving forward," (Kataoka as cited in Socolich, 2021), a frequent moderator on Clubhouse. Slow or easy rooms are small rooms. This is why moderating is often shared by several people. Kataoka advises teaming up with trusted people, who are decisive and clear roles should be assigned before discussions. Moderator #1 is the *host*. Moderator #2 controls speaker relations, guiding bigwig speakers and seeking out both planned and unplanned speakers. Moderator #3 should maintain decorum (*a bouncer*), remove speakers (*done*) from the stage, and mute speakers creating audio disruptions with their unmuted mics. Moderators can also coordinate through the backchannel (a direct messaging feature). It is good practice for the host to *reset the room* every 30 minutes. This is Clubhouse's lingo for restating the discussion topic in a sentence or two, to inform the new listeners who have no context, as they join a room. If they are puzzled, they will leave.

Listeners can raise their hands to join the conversation, and speak if the moderators permit. Clubhouse rooms are more civil than other SM apps because users get instant responses to comments. Disagreements do break out and there are several rooms devoted to unpleasant political or controversial topics. There are also calm rooms like entrepreneurship, cryptocurrency, etc. It is important to treat events like client meetings, speakers are literally pitching. Timing is key on Clubhouse, since knowing when the target audience is online is vital for engagement. Clubhouse's features can be used creatively, e.g., the hand-raising button can be used for audience feedback instead of speaking. Conversations last between hours and days, with participants from all over the world. Frequent users describe it as a genuine, intimate space where anyone can speak to and hear from people whose insights are innovative. The rest of the article includes a literature review, the adopted methodology, data/results, and a conclusion.

2. Literature Review

Katz and Lazarsfeld's (1955) initiated the study of influence, who can influence, and how in the communication field. They defined their two-step flow model of communication, where *opinion leaders/influentials* sieve information from the mass media to their acquaintances/friends. However, their work has since been adopted and challenged by various research viewpoints (Hund, 2022). Their concept of influentials (today's influencers), individuals having a superficially quantifiable impact on their listeners/followers, is more significant in the digital age than before (Hund, 2019). Regular people's interactions with influencers steer how they form

opinions. Clubhouse is making a new type of star because it functions differently from other SM apps. Speaking well in a room full of people can earn a speaker huge followership and influence.

High followership, leading to SM stardom signifies influencer culture (Brooks, 2021). The digital age initiated new pathways for regular individuals to attain fame, and commercialize it like celebrity endorsements. This sociocultural currency is celebrity capital (Carrillat et al., 2019). Celebrity capital is swapped within the field of celebrity endorsement— assumed as accrued media visibility via regular media engagements (Driessens, 2013). Popular celebrities swap their celebrity capital for financial gains and social capital. Research shows that the effectiveness of celebrity endorsements mainly targets celebrities who acquired celebrity capital via recognized intermediaries like movies, music, sports, and television (Carrillat et al., 2019). SMIs obtain fame without such intermediaries (Gräve, 2017), they are famous online for being famous online (Khamis et al., 2017). SMIs are mostly self-made.

Celebrity capital life cycle (CCLC) differentiates SMIs from traditional celebrities. CCLC is a model developed to appraise the *fluctuation of endorsers' efficacy* over time (Carrillat & Ilicic, 2019). Traditional celebrity fame is tied to individual achievements (in entertainment, inventions, sports, etc.) free of endorsement deals, while SMI fame is tied to endorsement activities like haul videos, and product reviews (Harnish & Bridges, 2016). This fundamental difference makes it vital to know exactly how SMIs acquire initial celebrity capital, and how the advertising agents affect the process. It is vital because just anyone can attain SMI status today. Thus, academics and influence professionals can stay ahead by studying SMIs and their influence attainment process.

2.1 Influencer Celebrification in the Digital Age.

Brooks et al. (2021) coined the term *influencer celebrification*, a process by which SMIs obtain celebrity capital within a connected SM ecosystem. They presented a conceptual framework of influencer celebrification and the impact of advertising agents in it. The empirical findings reveal three distinct practices in the process.

1. Generative practices (attention-seeking and platform skepticism);
2. Collaborative practices (audience movability and creative deliberation); and
3. Evaluative practices (community-centered KPIs and content rebuttal).

These are presumed as recurring practices in the influencer celebrification process. Advertising professionals act as talent hunters, inventive custodians, and influence analysts in the process. The process represents a mutual manner of obtaining celebrity capital, where the total impressions across all practices are greater than the summation of individual impressions on any of them. Hence, the research emphasized content and community-focused interdependent effects within influencer celebrification.

Brooks et al. (2021) used the concept of celebrification, or the creation and recreation of celebrity (Driessens, 2013). The process includes delegated interactions and negotiations between celebrities, their management, several media platforms/institutions, and fans/followers. Celebrity capital can be lost, de-celebrification (Mortensen & Nete, 2020). Thus, celebrification is not a status, but rather a process (Jerslev & Mortensen, 2016). The traditional celebrification process was ruled by the gatekeepers (e.g. brands, paparazzi) of media visibility. SM changed this by providing ample attention opportunities for all, creating a viciously competitive attention economy where anyone could become celebrified (Driessens, 2013). Access, creation of authenticity, and a consumable personality are typical of celebrification in the digital age, as we see it trickle down (Jerslev & Mortensen, 2016). Celebrity is no more dualistic, i.e., it is a continuum and no longer— one is or is not a celebrity.

Most studies focus on how celebrification unfurls, like becoming *Instagram famous* (Marwick, 2015), *YouTube famous* (Jerslev, 2016), *Twitter famous* (Olausson, 2018), or *Clubhouse famous*. The digital routes for celebrification are now diverse and overlapping since different SM platforms are connected. New SM platforms emerged (TikTok, Clubhouse), some advanced (Facebook, YouTube), and others failed (Google+, Vine). Some platforms evolved from text-only blogs to more transient, visual, vocal, and sought-after content production areas. Influencers and ad agents must traverse the complex, lavish and perilous digital ecosystem used to evolve

from micro-celebrities to influencers or greatly branded SM stars. This is why Brooks et al. (2021) examined how SMIs attain celebrity capital.

According to Hund (2019), academic interest in influence and its social effects can be traced back to ancient Greece, when persuasion and rhetoric were examined and practiced as an art, before evolving into devices for social unrest. Academics have since continued to study these arts of influence and associated themes, but empirical interest in influence flourished in the twentieth century along with propaganda concerns, and the growth of the mass media. Hence, making several disciplines engage in influence as an emphasis of academic study, underscoring its diverse psychological and social elements and their link to culture. However, how SM influence is acquired and nurtured remains largely unknown. Today, influence is a product nurtured by individuals, measured by organizations, and used for material benefit and personal fulfillment.

2.2 Influencers and CCLC.

Celebrity is both commodity and employee, message and messenger in advertising (Brooks et al., 2021). Celebrities advance brand awareness via their media visibility size, recognition, and personality (Turner, 2013). Initial celebrity theorists posited that celebrities are not born, but rather socially made by interaction with audiences (Marshall, 2014). It is an economic condition that is both a product and a productive person (Hearn & Schoenhoff, 2016, p. 196). The value of a celebrity lies in the ability to draw extensive attention, by transforming fame into sociocultural currency (Brooks et al., 2021) or celebrity capital. Celebrity capital is the accrued media visibility via repetitive media representations or general recognizability, which is mobile across social fields (Driessens 2013, p. 18).

The Bourdieu-derived concept of celebrity capital prepares the understanding of how celebrity can be converted into other forms of capital and resources (Stewart, 2020). It is a creative revision of celebrity to depict its conversion into an economic resource, especially via endorsements (Stewart, 2020). McCracken (p. 310, 1989) initiated the definition of celebrity endorsers as individuals who possess public recognition and use it to promote consumer goods/services. Previous studies present a celebrity endorser as an individual who has previously accomplished extensive fame, neglecting how the fame/celebrity capital was attained. A celebrity is both an individual and a concept.

Attaining celebrity capital is a vital stage in the 4-stage CCLC: *acquisition, consolidation, abrupt downfall/slow decline, and redemption/resurgence* (Brooks et al., 2021). Most researches focus on the consolidation stage, the peak of a celebrity's fame (Carrillat & Ilicic 2019, p. 64). Research on this stage only examines celebrity endorsers who have attained high socioeconomic capital and media visibility. There is scanty research on the acquisition of celebrity capital—a critical stage for examining influence (Carrillat & Ilicic, 2019). The acquisition of celebrity capital has become important because SM made celebrities of everyday people, without recognized intermediaries (like movies, music, sports, etc.).

Influencers emulate traditional celebrities as they have a *distinct selling point* or a *public identity* that is utterly charismatic and receptive to target audiences (Khamis et al., 2017, p. 1). Conversely, traditional celebrity is restricted by much supervised media (entertainment, print, etc.) landscapes (DeCordova, 2007). SM heralded a new age of celebrity, where regular do not require the traditional agents (Marwick 2015, p. 139). Influencers toil to create a form of celebrity capital by nurturing as much attention as possible while shaping an authentic personal brand on SM (Hearn & Schoenhoff, 2016, p. 194). Carrillat and Ilicic's (2019, p. 64) study urges academics and professionals to focus on the efficacy of influencers as endorsers, recognize potential stars to leverage, and analyze the role of agents in managing and improving celebrity capital

2.3 Expanding on SMIs: Originality, authority, and influence.

Recent research on SMIs portrays them as effective due to their sincerity and appeal (De Veirman et al., 2017). The theory is emerging on the various facets of SMIs and the influencers' campaigns that inspire their effectiveness. These include the platform type, campaign intent, SMI's characteristics, match between an SMI and brands, SMI's audience size, etc. (Eunjin et al., 2021). SM has been so impactful that organizations adopt it to surmount consumer distrust and resistance (Schouten et al., 2020). SMIs have been gradually trendy among brands for connecting with their audiences, mostly Millennials and Generation Zers who use SM the most.

According to Schouten et al. (2020), traditional celebrity endorsers and SMIs share some similarities. Researchers and professionals established some core differences between both, namely:

- 1) Mode of emergence.
- 2) Integrity and originality.
- 3) Rapport with fans/followers.
- 4) Expertise.
- 5) Targeting.
- 6) Identification.

The SMIs' endorsements are viewed as more reliable and original than traditional celebrities' because the former is flawlessly incorporated into their daily self-produced content (De Veirman et al., 2017), while the latter does not create any content, their brand managers do. This difference clarifies the obviously paid nature of celebrities' relationships with brands. Traditional celebrities have limited interaction with fans, while SMIs have profound relationships with their audience from daily personal interactions (Breves et al., 2019). SMIs also have some expertise in the brands they represent, unlike celebrities. Brand knowledge and opinion leadership of SMIs is deemed more sincere than traditional celebrities'. Though, celebrities reach a wider, more diverse audience because of their broader appeal while SMIs often focus on niche audiences.

According to Weber (1946), *charismatic authority* is an influence created socially and culturally. It is critical to understand what influence is, who has it, how it is used, and its effects. He examined the economic and political conditions that produce influential leaders. He posited that "in times of psychic, physical, economic, ethical, religious, or political distress," leaders who possess remarkable qualities often become influential (p. 245). However, it is their apparent originality that makes them flourish. Such leaders reject economical gains accrued systematically and rationally, regarding them as improper. They demonstrate their ability by proving their claims, instead of relying on expertise or training. Thus, a vital social relationship is established between such a leader and their followers, creating communities around herself /himself to inspire reaffirmations of originality.

The rise of fascism and WWII in the 1930s and 1940s roused pervasive fear about propaganda and totalitarianism. The Nazi propaganda and the panicky Orson Welles' 1938 radio broadcast of the War of the Worlds also gave credence to this theory (Hund, 2019). A period that stirred the interest of researchers in the dynamics of public opinion. A dominant idea was that messages composed fittingly might wield influence over their receivers. This is known as the *magic bullet* or *hypodermic needle* theory. It essentially states that an intentional message is promptly and wholly accepted by its audience (Nwabueze & Okonkwo, 2018). SM messages could be figuratively input into the minds of their target audience to stir a uniform reaction. Further study revealed that the influencer-audience relationship is not so plain, several factors impact, interrupt and modify it.

Similar to the hypodermic needle figure of speech, some researchers have described this model of transmission as *virality*. Berger (2013) described the six STEPPS to make a message viral: it must possess *social* currency, naturally *trigger* discussion and *emotions*, be *public*, have *practical* value, and be wrapped in a *story*. He posited that business management and marketing's fundamental question is "how can we design products, ideas, and behaviors so that people will talk about them"? Instead of making critical insight into the current systems of influence. Research shows that influence is measurable, some individuals are more influential than others, and technology democratizes the entire process (Schaefer, 2012). However, literature on influence has been

determined and assimilated by organizations and trendy marketing dialogue. Popular authors theorize this agenda for consumer culture.

2.4 Persuasive Expertise of SMIs.

Industry practitioners project a 40 percent growth in corporate spending on influencers in the next 3 years (Schomer, 2019). Marketers also state that influencer marketing is several times more efficient than traditional ads (Schouten et al., 2020). Research on SMIs is relatively new since there is no precise theory that describes how it functions. Eunjin et al. (2021) stated that influencers are successful because their persuasion comes with less observed manipulative intent. De Veirman et al. (2017) asserted that SMIs function similarly as opinion leaders since they are able to simply speak about brands/issues to the audiences' advantage. The SMIs' originality and accessibility create less resistance to persuasion, while traditional celebrities are perceived as superficial and aloof.

2.5 The SMI economy.

Individuals have successfully self-published ideas on an infinite number of subjects since the dawn of the internet in the 90s. Some initial users of email used newsletters before blogs exploded as an avenue to merge text, images, and videos to articulate ideas and dispense information. During the first decade of the 2000s, there was an increase in the number of bloggers and readers annually, yet, relatively low compared to all internet users (Nielsen, 2012). Pew Research Center's (2018) study showed that just 5 percent of American adults used the SM platform(s) in 2005 and over 70 percent in 2015. The first decade of the twenty-first century ushered in a perfect explosion of cultural, economic, industrial, and technological factors that grew SM exponentially via self-publishing (Hund, 2019). Then Facebook and Twitter emerged, innovating information sharing that permeated the entire populace unprecedentedly.

2.6 Methodology.

Brooks et al. (2021) adopted the grounded theory approach, using in-depth interviews. This constructivist grounded theory methodology requires an interpretive (not objective) reflection of certainty via theoretical analysis (Charmaz, 2005). The iterative process of changing from an inductive analysis of their data to a deductive analysis of the existing literature created the conceptual framework of influencer celebrification. They conducted 40 in-depth interviews across 7 cities. They interviewed 5 high-profile influencers; 7 agents from renowned talent agencies, 5 executives from multinational brands, 17 practitioners from global public relations/digital analytics agencies, and 6 other experts in the influencer industry (e.g., reporters). The exploratory research's initial goal was to broadly understand influencer advertising strategies and practices. The sample was chosen to offer diverse expert views on this topic. In qualitative research, research questions often develop from the empirical phenomena, either from precise contexts or types of behaviors (Brooks et al., 2021). Thus, the research questions developed via repetitive data gathering and analysis, while interviewing presented an avenue for theoretical sampling. They concluded that traditional celebrity capital is obtained from accrued media visibility, while SMIs are able to simultaneously obtain celebrity capital from content and community.

Eunjin et al.'s (2021) focus group compared the effect of traditional commercials with SMIs posts. Some respondents who saw only the commercials got notably higher scores on the ad recognition measure. The results showed that the commercial alone resulted in less favorable message attitudes, less positive corporate reputation, and greater persuasion knowledge (PK) response. PK fully mediated the effects and the respondents were more resistant to the traditional ads on traditional media outlets (TV, radio, and print). Conversely, the respondents reacted better to influencers, due to their originality and personal touch.

3. Methodology.

Descriptive analysis was adopted for this study. It is a methodology that relies on a researcher's ability to articulate observations of a situation in a dependable way (Stone, 1992). From the name, it depends on measurement and quantification (Sidel et al., 2018). Some of the objectives of descriptive analysis are:

- Presenting a scientifically thorough procedure with measurable outcomes.
- Producing generalizable outputs.

- Being cost-effective.

It requires a factual reflection of reality through observation and quantification. By consistently monitoring the Clubs, rooms, moderators, and followers, descriptive quantitative data was extracted to reveal how influencers attained their influence. Clubhouse was specifically chosen because of the Nigerian Twitter ban ((The Guardian, 2021), after its president's abusive and violent tweet was deleted. This increased usage of other SM platforms.

3.1 Research goals, aims and objectives, questions, and hypotheses.

The goal is to examine how some Nigerian SMIs achieve influence on Clubhouse. Previous studies point toward content creation, however, Clubhouse is different because it is a voiced platform.

The aims of this research include:

1. Investigating the intentional steps SMIs take to achieve influence.
2. Their reasons for pursuing influence.
3. Comparison to previous literature.

The research objectives include:

1. Quantitative appraisal of researched clubs, moderators, and Clubhouse.
2. Patterns identification from data analysis.

The following research questions should be answered:

- RQ1. Who is a Clubhouse influencer?
- RQ2. How do Influencers acquire influence?
- RQ3. Why do they acquire influence?

The following hypotheses were proposed:

- H1. Influencers are logical and strategic in acquiring influence.
- H2. There is a practical, step-by-step method for acquiring influence.
- H3. Content creation is not the only requirement for becoming influential online.
- H4. Influencers acquire influence for socioeconomic gains.

3.2 Data Collection.

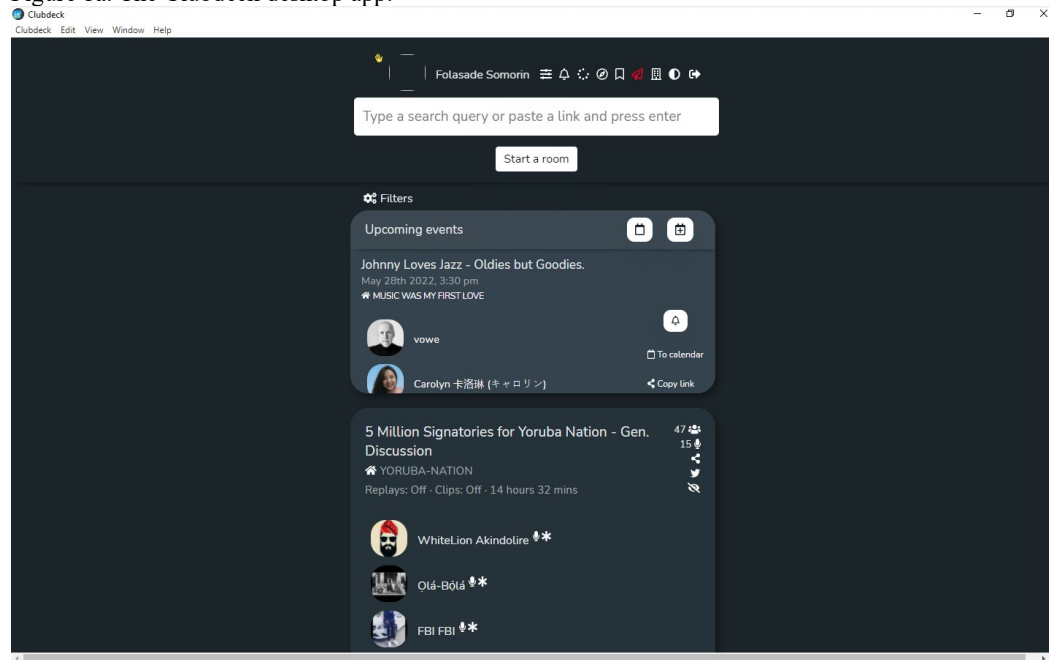
10 Nigerian Clubhouse clubs were monitored for 6 months (October 2021 to March 2022). They were selected to provide as diverse SMIs as possible. As is often the case with quantitative data, the numbers can be cumbersome and difficult to analyze. To capture the influencer side of the moderators, the article targeted clubs that open 10 to 25 rooms weekly to monitor and observe daily. This sample is quite essential because the moderators/SMIs already campaign for some consumer brands, especially on Instagram. The following data was gathered:

- The date moderators joined Clubhouse.
- The number of moderators per club and their followers.
- Members of the club at the beginning and end of the research.
- Other SM platforms attached to the Clubhouse's accounts.

3.3 Clubhouse Apps.

All data were retrieved from Clubhouse using both the mobile and desktop apps. The author is an expert navigator of both. The [clubdeck.app](#) is a desktop app that gives more options to its users than the mobile. However, the mobile app is more reliable for personal use while the desktop app is better for research. Figures 1a and 1b below show some of the features and appearance of the desktop app. Figures 2a and 2b show the mobile app. The Hallway is the first page seen after logging in, it has the main feed of all live rooms and followers online. There are 3 roles in each room: moderator, speaker, and listener.

Figure 1a. The Clubdeck desktop app.



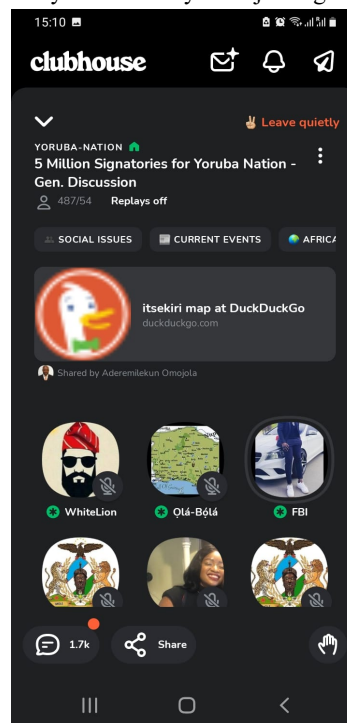
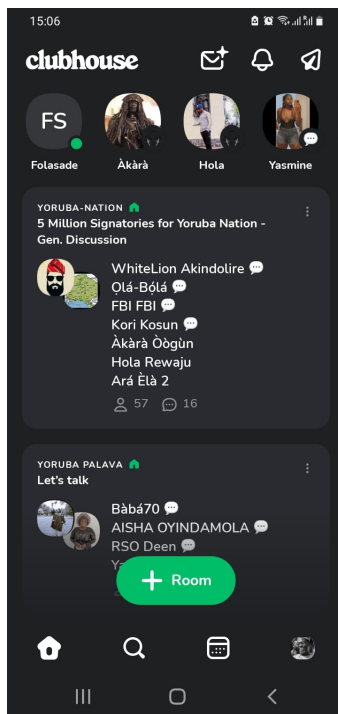
Source: Clubdeck, (2022).

Figure 1b. The Clubdeck desktop app.

- 🎧 Use a professional microphone or sound card to maximise audio quality. You can even reroute audio through software like Loopback or Blackhole! Possibilities are endless.
- 🎵 Music mode: stream in stereo, 48kHz and 128kbps - no special cables required.
- 🎶 Play custom sounds and jingles, from local files or directly from YouTube.
- 🌟 Apply real-time audio effects (voice changer, room reverb).
- 📺 Record a Clubhouse room, restream it to 30+ social networks (YouTube, Facebook, Twitter etc.).
- 💬 Manage your room chat like you've done it all your life.
- 📹 Record highlights of your room in real-time (short video clips that you can share on social media).
- 🏠 Manage your clubs and set up events in one click. Save templates for recurring events.
- 💬 Set up a backchannel chat to coordinate live with co-moderators.
- 💡 Find key people to invite on stage by browsing your audience's bios in a breeze.
- 🔔 Ping multiple people to your room with ease.
- 📄 Browse rooms, events, clubs and people to follow, from the comfort of your Mac or PC.
- ⌨ Use shortcuts to navigate and moderate Clubhouse like a boss.
- 🔍 Search rooms, users, clubs, events... anything.
- 📌 Pin room searches to columns, apply custom highlighting and notification filters: marketing experts, this is for you!
- 📌 Pin links at the top of your room, easily copy / paste from your browser.
- 🗨 Add a live transcript at the top of your room with our Otter.ai integration.
- 📺 Manage your Clubhouse replays in a few clicks.
- ☀ Pick your favorite light, dark or system theme.

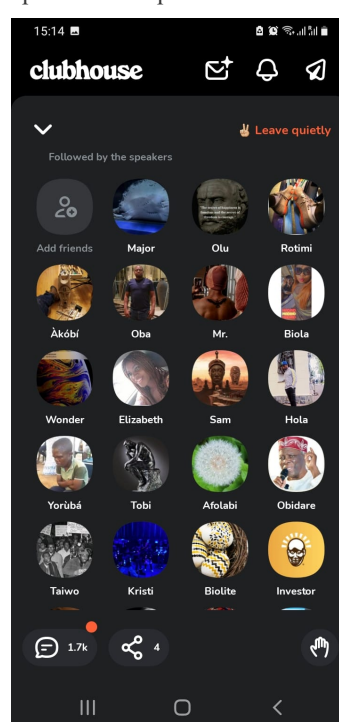
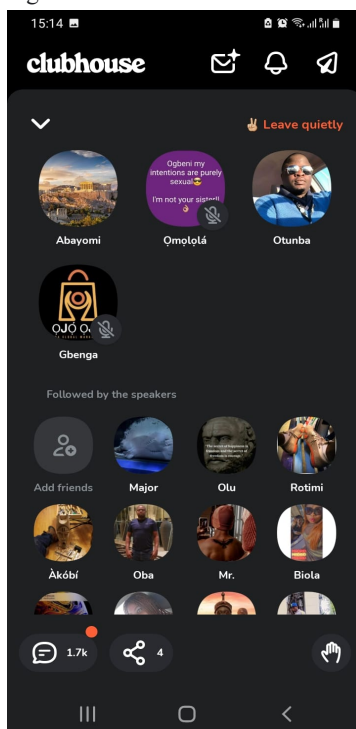
Source: Clubdeck, (2022).

Figures 2a and b. The clubhouse mobile app: The Hallway and Hallway after joining a room.



Source: Screenshots by the author (2022).

Figures 3a and b. Rooms. A room showing the Stage/speakers and speakers and others.



Source: Screenshots by the author (2022).

4. Results and Data Analysis.

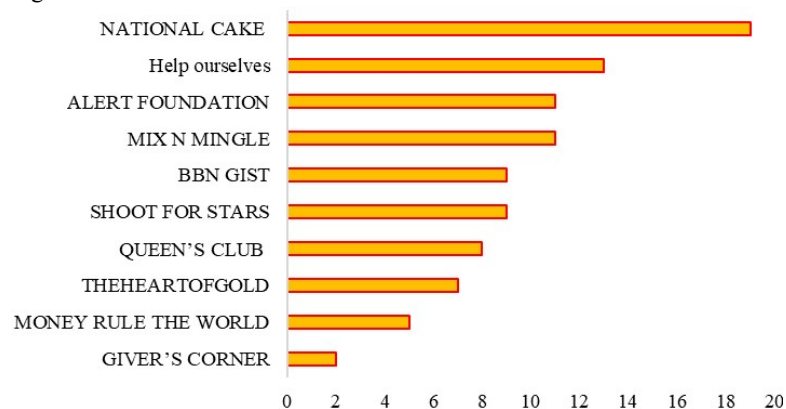
The 10 clubs observed were social clubs, where people advertise and discuss trendy topics. They are mostly Millennials and Generation zers. They offered different forms of assistance (financial, free ads/promotions,

advice, etc.) in exchange for followership. For instance, students were asked to state their challenges to others in the room, others were given money because of the Covid-19 pandemic and/or other challenges. This helps came with a clear condition, to follow all the moderators and/or the donators/volunteers on the stage. This was an intentional act to acquire influence. The moderators also asked people to click links (to fill surveys, drive traffic to a site, etc.). This is different from actually buying followers (bots) because the followers in this case are real people that spoke. Moreover, this does not end on Clubhouse, many moderators have their Instagram and Twitter handles on their profiles. They asked users to follow these handles. This is inter-SM influence acquisition (ISIA) — influencers leveraging their popularity on one platform to gain popularity on another.

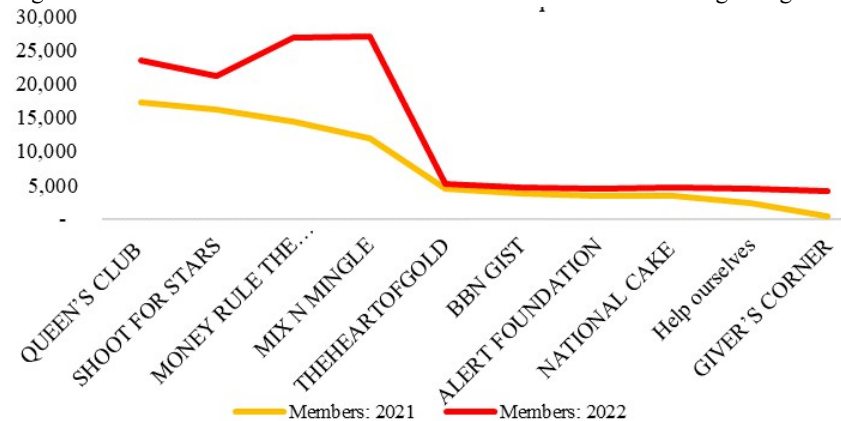
4.1 Followership

Moderator is used interchangeably with influencers /SMIs. Figures 4a and 4b show that the clubs’ moderators ranged between 2 to 19 and averaged 9. The clubs averaged 7,723 members in October 2021 and 12,600 in April 2022. GIVER’S CORNER had the lowest with just 328 members in October 2021 and grew to 4,100 in March 2022. The clubs had an average member increase of 300 percent. THEHEARTOFGOLD had the lowest increase, 16 percent, while GIVER’S CORNER had the highest increase, 1,250 percent. MIX N MINGLE had the highest number of members in March 2022, 27,000. GIVER’S CORNER still had the lowest in 2022, with 4,100.

Figures 4a. Clubs moderators.



Figures 4b. The number of club members at the beginning and end of the research.

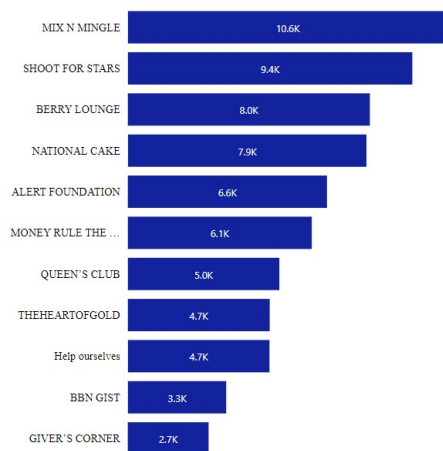


4.2 The Moderators

There were 30 male and 42 female moderators. They had a total of 293,9226 followers in October 2021 and 486,444 followers in April 2022 as shown in figure 5a, signifying a 65 percent increase. From figure 5, moderators from the clubs with the largest memberships had the highest followers, while the number of

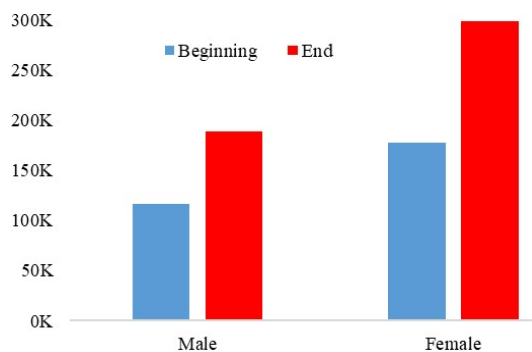
moderators had no bearing on the club’s membership. Thus, the higher a club’s membership is, the more followers its moderators had.

Figures 5. The average number of moderators’ followers at the end of the research.



From figure 6, the moderators had an average of 6,949 followers. The males had an average of 3,887 followers and 6,282 followers in 2021 and 2022 respectively. This signifies a 62 percent increase. The females had an average of 4,222 followers and 7,095 followers in 2021 and 2022 respectively. This signifies a 68 percent increase. The women had 52 percent more followers than men at the beginning and 58 percent more at the end of the research. This means women’s followers grew at a net rate of 6 percent more than men’s, making the former more influential.

Figure 6. Moderators’ followers by gender.



Overall, the moderators had an average of 4,082 followers in October 2021 and 6,756 followers in April 2022. These followers each had at least 100 followers of theirs. Moderators/influencers have an influence multiplier effect because they work in sync. Clubhouse has a pinging option that allows users to invite others into a room in session. When a room starts, each moderator pings in their followers who also do the same. The summation of these several followers is the actual influence multiplier effect on Clubhouse. Moderators having over 1,000 followers often had between 200 to about 5,000 people present, all having a possibility of speaking. The strength of Clubhouse is actually in eWOM propagated by its users and not just the number of followers. Thus, influencers who are able to pack their rooms regularly can create an exponential influence effect that is quite difficult to track. Clubhouse’s audio properties might just have increased its influence outside the app.

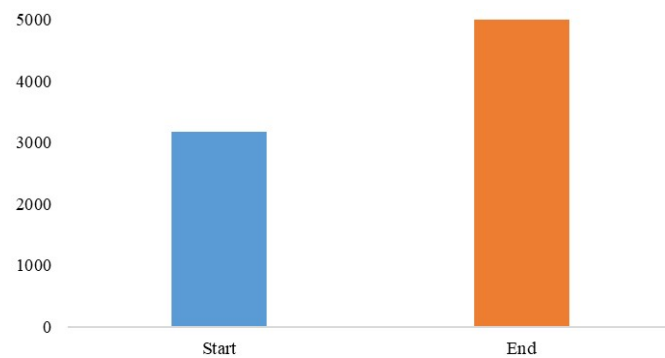
From figure 7, the moderators all joined Clubhouse between December 2020 and October 2021. Their follower growth shows that followership is independent of how long one has joined Clubhouse. Some moderators that joined in December 2020 and October 2021 had a similar number of followers. Whereas, moderators that joined

in January, March, April, and July of 2021 had the highest follower growths. Thus, there are other factors that determine followership besides duration of use. Those factors are probably beyond the scope of this article.

Figure 7. Followers' growth from joined date.



Figure 8. Moderators' Instagram users.



37 (53 percent) of the moderators had their Instagram handles on their Clubhouse profiles. They increased their Instagram followers as their Clubhouse influence grew. They averaged 3,169 followers on Instagram by October 2021, which grew to 5001 by April 2022. The average increase was 175 percent, the least increase was 129 percent and the maximum was 355 percent. Most of the moderators had no Instagram standing initially but were able to gain some followers within 6 months. Instagram avails the moderators with pictures and videos of ads ran on Clubhouse.

4.3 Clubhouse Influencer

An influencer on Nigerian Clubhouse may be described as a user with about 1,000 followers, though users with fewer followers could also be very influential, especially on political and/or controversial topics. Only 6 moderators had less than 1,000 followers in October 2021 and just 3 in April 2022. Influence on Clubhouse is quite different from other SM platforms because of the voiced conversations and the strength of the eWOM. In the course of this research, discussions between 2 moderators or speakers generated about 20 to 528 listeners. As listeners are invited on stage, the total number of people in the room increase because the new speakers ping in their followers to hear them speak and also join the discussion. Moderators often had at least 5 percent of the number of their followers join a room in session, and at most 12 to 13 percent. Influence on Clubhouse is a combined effort of Club moderators and members/followers, rather than just individual competence.

5. Conclusion.

Clubhouse's popularity and influence are not in doubt. The observations led to the following conclusions:

1. RQ1 may be answered by describing a Clubhouse influencer as a user with about 1,000 followers, often having the moderator's badge in one or more clubs. No particular expertise is required, being able to hold long discussions is enough most times. The 70 moderators/influencers observed increased their followership by an average of 175 percent. However, some of their followers were similar. This similarity ranged between 24 to 49 percent, depending on how large the moderators' following is.
2. SMIs/moderators acquired their influence through intentional practical acts. They were honest, direct, and not great content creators, they just sought to engage others. They also asked people to follow them in order to get notifications whenever they went live. Thus, RQ2 is answered because the moderators acquired influence simply by asking for it through cash and gifts. They did not need to create any content, they were the content. This means H1 is accepted, as stated by previous literature since the moderators are honest, logical, and practical about acquiring influence. H2 is also accepted because the moderators had a practical step-by-step method they used to increase their followership and influence. In addition, H3 is accepted because the moderators did not create much content to gain followership. This slightly negates De Veirman et al. (2017) and Brooks et al.'s (2021) importance attached to content creation by SMIs. SMIs do not really need to be creative to gain influence, being accessible and philanthropic was enough.

However, about 75 percent of the moderators were located outside Nigeria. They spent more time online in order to build their profiles. The female moderators had more followers and influence than the male. They also got more Instagram followers than the male, about 81 percent of the 37 moderators that got Instagram followers were female. In this research, female influencers were more popular and influential than males.

3. Influence on Clubhouse extends beyond it. The influencers do not only advertise goods and services, but they also asked their followers to visit business links/sites. This was quite effective because they monitored immediate visits. The reasons for acquiring influence varied, from self-esteem and bragging rights to economics (brand ambassadorship). This answers RQ3. H4 is rejected because not all the moderators grew their followership for economic benefits. It was mainly personal and social for some, they just wanted to have an audience and be cheered. Thus, some influencers just wanted to be famous for being famous. Influence acquisition is not totally dependent on duration. The oldest Clubhouse users did not acquire the most followers, other factors besides the duration of use affected follower/influence acquisition.

5.1 Limitations.

The research was limited to just 10 clubs, though there were more. It was quite difficult tracking them all because several rooms ran for several hours or days. These limitations need further clarity to compare other clubs' modes of influence acquisition.

5.2 Implications

The findings show that good speakers can easily become influencers on Clubhouse and probably other SM platforms, without particular content creation. Random consistent conversations and philanthropy were enough to gain influence. Thus, marketing professionals can inform their decisions better, knowing how SMIs operate.

5.3 Future research

Future research should investigate influence acquisition and trend-setting on other SM platforms. This is to determine if the findings of this article are the same on other SM platforms.

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