The Socio-digital manifestations of subtitling COVID-19-related clips on social media platforms in Saudi Arabia: The case of social media (fan)subtitling on Twitter.

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This paper examines how digital users in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia responded to the COVID-19 pandemic via engaging with crisis translation by subtitling COVID-19-related videos. It explores two aspects: (1) how did social media during the pandemic encourage subtitled videos? and (2) how were these clips distributed and received by social media users? It is argued that during the pandemic, social media facilitated the production and circulation of user-generated content by both individuals and institutions to subtitle global news and other genres. To understand the socio-digital dynamics of (fan)subtitling, this article analyses the subtitled clips posted on Twitter by the Saudi Ministry of Health (MoH) and 17 fansubbers during 2020. Subtitling is considered crucial in spreading accurate information to KSA people in time for them to take precautions against the pandemic in 2020. Another relevant factor is the developed technological infrastructure in KSA and the increased digital practice of Saudi Arabians using social media. Following the analysis of 175 clips from the 17 chosen fansubbers and 255 clips from the MoH, it was discovered that social media increased the visibility of COVID-19 clips with subtitles. There was an apparent competition among the fansubbers to accumulate social capital (social media capital), which gave rise to social media fansubbing, a form of non-professional subtitling produced by social media users. The subtitled clips were accompanied by various digital parataxis that

supports the analysis and examination of social media fansubbing and crisis transition on Twitter[1].

1. Introduction

The world has experienced a severe crisis that has affected nations' economies, education, and health systems and changed people's behaviours, activities, and habits. People had to search for effective ways to respond to the pandemic. One way of preventing transmission was by delivering precautionary guidelines in a simple, fast and approachable manner. As most global information about COVID-19 was probably in English, translation needed to play a vital role in conveying and disseminating crucial information in a language suitable for the target audience. Using English as the official language of international humanitarian and health organisations caused a problem and solved another. In other words, using English as a tool, for instance, may deliver relevant information in a unified, instant and accurate form, but it may prevent the target audience from understanding the intended messages, considering the presumed competence levels among non-English speakers. Thus, translation is needed, which, in turn, may complicate the process of delivering critical information in time. Even assuming in specific contexts that audiences have a competent level of English, that might

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have delayed responses to crises (Crowley and Chan 2011; O'Brien 2019). For example, Saudi official institutions tend to produce documents, reports, guidelines and audio-visual content in Arabic despite the significant number of foreign residents in the KSA.

Crisis translation has become necessary for responding to and engaging with crises and pandemics, such as COVID-19. Crisis translation is conceptualised in this paper as "a specific form of communication that overlaps with principles of risk management… as much as with principles of emergency planning and management" (O'Brien 2019, 130). Although translation is useful in crisis management, some factors may hinder the instant delivery of much-needed information. These factors include a lack of sufficient linguistic and cultural awareness, lack of access to information, lack of effective participation and lack of trained and qualified linguists and translators (Field 2017; Grin 2017; Federici and Cadwell 2018; O'Brien and Cadwell 2017; O'Brien 2019). In such an unstable context, the emergence of non-professional translators as mediators, producers and creators of user-generated content (UGC) was expected. Digital media facilitate the visibility of content produced by fans and unqualified ordinary citizens. However, the urgency of crises may unveil the value of fansubbers and amateurs (especially those who present themselves as influencers and celebrities), who invest in their digital skills and capital to circulate user-generated translations (UGT) using digital platforms.

This paper examines crisis translation within the context of the KSA by analysing how social media users, content creators, and fansubbers engaged and circulated UGT-related clips on social media. Crisis translation is also investigated according to a socio-digital approach in which the engagement of official health institutions in the KSA is tested, and their translation efforts are highlighted. This paper explores how professional and non-professional agents (institutions and individuals) engaged with the pandemic to understand how both sides compete over available resources and forms of capital conceptualised by

Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice. However, due to time and space constraints, this paper will only focus on the KSA's Ministry of Health (MoH) and 17 Saudi fansubbers. This paper adopts the following definition of fansubbing:

> Subtitles produced by fans, with little or no professional training or experience, carried out without pecuniary remuneration and normally without the consent of the copyright holders of the source text (Pedersen 2018, 51).

With this definition in mind, I propose a new type of fansubbing—social media fansubbing (SMF). SMF involves the (re)production of usually short clips, posting them on social media platforms, allowing instant engagement by online users and recirculating them using other digital means. SMF shares many similarities with Pederson's conceptualisation of fansubbing, but it may differ considering its technical and digital-related aspects. In other words, the design of Twitter tends to amplify the spread of SMF, attract more attention to it, help in building a network or community around it, and offer spontaneous and instant feedback from the users of Twitter. Also, Twitter's design implements some distinctive settings in terms of the clip's duration, length of tweets, posting of sensitive content and downloading content, which may restrict or expand the reach of SMF. After all, SMF was a valuable and effective tool used in combatting COVID-19 in the KSA, which is discussed later in this paper.

2. Context: Responding to COVID-19 in the KSA

The KSA seemed to have managed the spread of COVID-19 well by being prepared even before its arrival. The KSA had a population of 35 million in 2020, with 38% of different foreign nationalities (Aljaber, 2021). These figures are important when discussing topics such as tackling the pandemic, managing people's daily lives and labour affairs, circulating regulatory information and guidelines and providing vaccines, masks and medical equipment. Another relevant factor is the number of non-Saudi residents and non-Arabic speakers who may need a specific method of communication and translation. According to some reports,[i] the top five nationalities in the KSA in 2013 were Indians, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, Egyptians and Filipinos (Alshalhoob, 2014). They formed 73% of the foreign nationalities residing and working in the country. Other recent reports have mentioned that the number of foreign workers in the KSA has reached around 10 million, dominating some businesses and professions (Aldubais, 2017). These statistics highlight the large number of non-Saudis, but neglect the languages of these residents, such as Hindi, Urdu, Bengali and Tagalog. Their competence in speaking and understanding Arabic and literacy levels are unknown but could be regarded as low and may hinder communicating information during crises. English is presumably not among their spoken languages, as they have minimal education and are mostly menial workers and labourers, which complicates the situation and makes translation even more necessary.

The first COVID-19 case in the KSA was recorded and announced by the MoH on March 2, 2020. Following that and in response to the pandemic, local flights were suspended, schools were shut, and a lockdown was implemented from March 23, 2020. Other early precautions started in January and February 2020, such as regularly checking international passengers arriving in the KSA, suspending travel to and from China except for returning

Saudi citizens and initiating the Control Operation Centre. The MoH published a full report on the pandemic and how it tackled it, highlighting the efforts and procedures followed before and during the spread of COVID-19. The report emphasised the importance of communication and social participation during crises. It stated that:

تـم إنجـاز مهـام اسـتراتيجية وفعالـة بالتعـاون مـع الجهـات المعنيـة للتواصـل مـع المجتمـع وإشـراكه بقيـادة وزارة الصـحة، والتـي تتمحـور حـول طـرق التواصـل التقليديـة عبـر أجهـزة التلفـاز والراديـو واسـتخدام الرسـائل النصيـة وصـولاً إلـى التكنولوجيـا والصحـة الرقميـة، عـن طريـق الاسـتخدام الأمثل لوسـائل الإعـلام بنشـر أبـرز المسـتجدات عـن الجائحـة وتطويـر حمـلات إعلانيـة هدفهـا نشـر التوعية بين المجتمع.

This translates as:

> Effective and strategic tasks have been achieved by cooperating with other respective authorities to communicate with society under the leadership of the MoH. These tasks involved using traditional media, such as TV, radio and text messages, but also include new digital technologies like social media, WhatsApp and other mobile applications, to circulate health updates and promote commercials to raise awareness in society (Ministry of Health 2020, 37; my translation).

The MoH used traditional and new media communication, including social media, commercials and campaigns, social participation and digital health, to combat the pandemic and prevent its spread. Using these strategic procedures, the MoH circulated audio-visual content to disseminate relevant guidelines, updates and important instructions to the public (Ministry of Health 2020).

The MoH invested in technology to reach the residents of the KSA and maximise society's engagement and participation through published materials and content. The MoH dedicated a website for COVID-19 awareness and made it available in seven languages:

English, Urdu, Indian, Tagalog, Bengali, Indonesian and Pashto.[ii] The website includes visuals, infographics and dubbed clips in these languages. Some clips were originally produced in these languages. No subtitles were provided for these clips, even though some clips were in Arabic. Thus, translation was slightly used by the MoH as a strategy for communication, subtitling was included in few clips. The MoH introduced a WhatsApp chatbot service for chatting and providing help available in Arabic only. According to the MoH, more than 6.6 billion text messages were sent to this chatbot service, and more than 150 million views were received for the posted clips online. In addition, there were more than 15 million visits to the website and more than 4 million followers to the MoH's Twitter account (@SaudiMoH937) (Ministry of Health 2020, 39). The MoH seemed to partially acknowledge the relevant role of translating into the most spoken foreign languages, in KSA, over the early stages of the pandemic, but it may fail to implement it effectively. Statistically, the number of the MoH's translated material is unknown, and the distribution of this translated content across the target languages is not specified.

The MoH has prioritised social media as the main platform for communicating and circulating information and content. Presumably, the digital culture and infrastructure in the KSA facilitated this digital participation by both the MoH and Saudi society in sharing and disseminating COVID-19-related content. The MoH utilised Twitter, in particular, to interact with online users and receive their opinions on its different campaigns and measures during the outbreak. For instance, the MoH shared the wide positive responses of Twitter users to the implemented measures and campaigns, such as the Saudi government's efforts to suspend travel and the application of testing schemes (Ministry of Health 2020, 40). Twitter users launched a hashtag الحجر_المنزلي_واجب_وطني# (#HomeQuartineIsaNationalDuty) during the lockdown to actively engage with the pandemic, support each other, and encourage people to stay home.

The campaign to manage COVID-19 in the KSA could be divided into three different stages. The pre-COVID-19 stage (precautionary stage), the post-first-case stage (controlling and communication stage) and the normalisation stage (after introducing vaccines and lifting the lockdown). All these stages were accompanied by extensive media coverage and digital participation. One of the substages was the implementation of field screening and public surveying to "allow experts to observe the developments of the pandemic and determine suitable measures" (Ministry of Health 2020, 43, my translation). In its first part, this substage targeted the residential areas of labourers, who were mostly non-Arabic speakers. Communication and translation are expected to be critical in supporting this task, informing the workers about the guidelines, testing procedures and publicising the campaign on digital media. The MoH did not specify the communication procedures for this task.

In sum, the KSA probably succeeded in responding to the outbreak of COVID-19 in its early stages and even before the discovery of the first case in March 2020. The efforts made by the MoH, the main institution responsible for planning and managing the crisis, were exhaustive. Different strategies and plans were implemented to prevent and control the spread of the outbreak. One of these strategies is communication and social engagement. The MoH attempted to circulate important guidelines, promote campaigns and actively engage with digital communities in the KSA via social networks and other electronic means. Even though it was not largely employed, translation was essential to the communication process. Subtitling and dubbing were also used in some languages. However, the MoH was not the only institution translating during the COVID-19 outbreak. Other government institutions occasionally translated clips and posted them on YouTube and social media. For instance, the Saudi Centre for Government Communication subtitled a few clips during 2020 about governmental efforts and other COVID-19-related topics in Arabic.

Most importantly, SMF played a vital role during this crisis and provided online users with news, stories and updates from different cultures and languages in Arabic. Moreover, SMF offered some local news in English, which might have helped non-Arabic speakers understand the procedures and measures applied during the outbreak. Due to time and space constraints, this paper only focuses on observing the subtitling efforts made by the MoH and SMF on Twitter during 2020. The following section expands on the selected case studies and data collection before reporting the results.

3. Data and methodology

The first positive case of COVID-19 in the KSA was announced in March 2020. Before that, the Saudi government and the MoH released preliminary guidelines for managing the COVID-19 crisis. In 2020, multiple strategies and developments shaped how the MoH responded to and managed the outbreak. For communication purposes, the MoH harnessed technology effectively to reach the public and circulate crucial information promptly. Text messages, TV coverage and social networks were the most vital tools for communication and social reach. Thus, 2020 witnessed the start of the pandemic in the KSA, its peak, the lockdown, the normalisation period and the testing and vaccination schemes. This timeframe facilitates the collection of specific data when observing the digital participation of the MoH and selected fansubbers.

The Twitter profiles of the MoH (@SaudiMoH937) and 17 fansubbers were observed from January to December 2020 to explore COVID-19-related topics, examine the subtitling activity of these social agents,[iii] determine the strategies and motivations shown by these translations and illustrate the social role played by these agents and the interactions they

received. The data collection went through three stages. The first stage involved searching Twitter, using the advanced research feature, which optimised the search by setting specific timeframes and choosing the media type. The search aimed to collect only posted videos that were playable immediately on Twitter without the need to watch them on other platforms, such as YouTube. Engagement with these clips', such as likes, retweets and comments, were also collected and compared.

After this initial search, the elicited data was inserted into an Excel sheet in chronological order with relevant information, including the clip's date, the number of replies, retweets, likes and views, the genre or theme of the clip, the source and target languages, the hashtag used, and any other paratextual features and notes. This process took a long time, considering the number of tweets that included COVID-19 (and any related topic) and the manual collection and verification of tweets and clips. Twitter does not have a feature for recognising translated clips. Therefore, the author had to resort to a tweet-by-tweet scrutinising process to ensure that the clips were subtitled and relevant to this study.

The final stage included analysing the collected data and examining the emergent themes and tendencies shown by the selected agents. Part of this stage involved visualising and preparing the data to be presented and reported in a concise and clear style. Regarding the selected cases, one institution and 17 individuals were identified based on their active social and digital participation in subtitling or providing audio-visual translations during the outbreak. More importantly, these agents were chosen based on two elements. The first element is the role that subtitlers (both professionals working for the Saudi government and non-professionals volunteering and helping the community) played in promoting and circulating translated content on COVID-19 to help manage the crisis, despite its quantity and quality. The focus here is on these agents' social agency and digital participation. The second element pertains to the competition and struggle between professional institutions and non-

professional individuals and among the non-professional individuals themselves. The aim to explore the dynamics of subtitling in terms of seizing available opportunities, competing for social or digital capital, and visibility. Translation is perceived in this context as social practice, not only for crisis and humanistic purposes but also for social recognition, personal gains, visibility and capital accumulation.

The MoH was selected as an institutional agent who actively engaged with the pandemic on Twitter by regularly posting audio-visual content on COVID-19. In 2020, the MoH posted 255 clips on Twitter, regardless of genre or theme. These clips tackled issues related to COVID-19. Most of the clips were originally in Arabic with no subtitles. Some clips were provided with Arabic subtitles or with sign language interpreting only. The remaining few clips were subtitled from Arabic to English. Some clips were non-verbal, with no dialogue and only visuals and sounds. One clip was in English, with no subtitles. The following chart illustrates the activity of the MoH during 2020 in terms of posting clips and the number of subtitled content released.
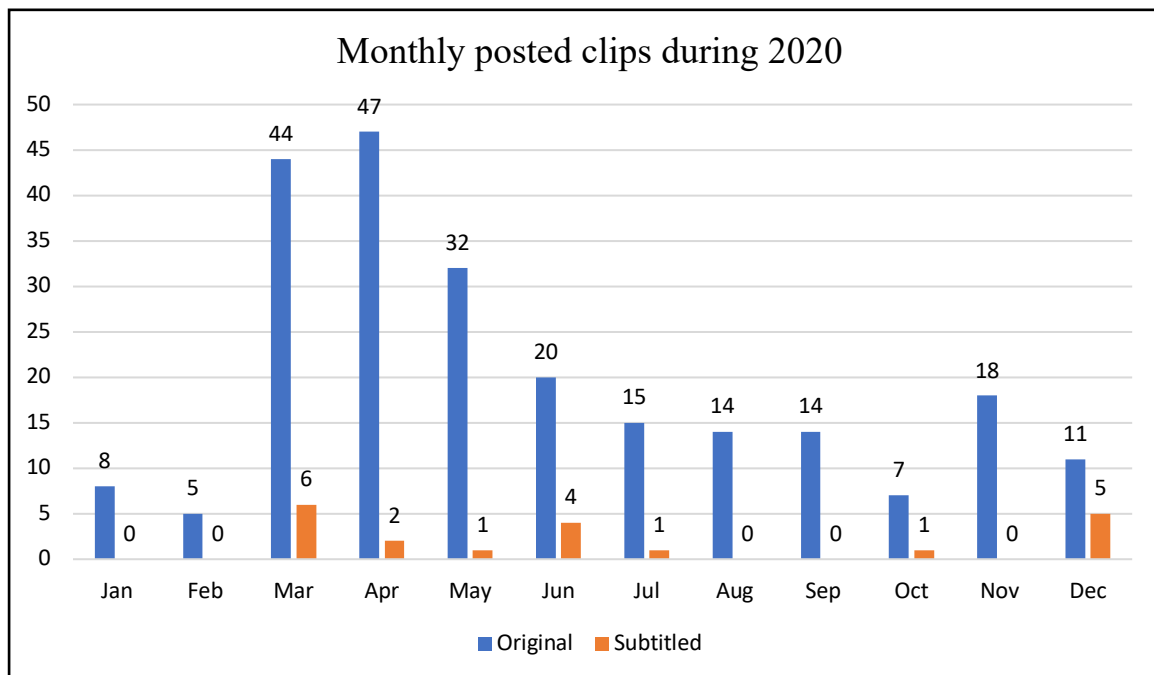

Figure 1. The MoH audio-visual content for 2020 by month

Meanwhile, the 17 individuals selected in this paper were non-professional subtitlers or fansubbers who showed a history of subtitling activities before 2020. Some of them started their subtitling journeys in 2015 and 2016. They were selected based on the number of subtitled clips related to COVID-19. Collecting their posted subtitled clips on Twitter was similar to the MoH's process. These fansubbers subtitled 175 clips in total during 2020, excluding the non-subtitled clips they posted on Twitter. Most of these clips were subtitled into Arabic, and a few were subtitled into English. However, the number of subtitled clips per individual varied, and some fansubbers were more active than others. In total, these fansubbers subtitled 175 clips related to COVID-19 out of the 1,015 subtitled clips in 2020. The remaining 840 clips covered different topics irrelevant to COVID-19. Most of these clips were subtitled from English to Arabic, with a few in other languages such as French, Turkish and Italian. A few clips were subtitled from Arabic into English. As illustrated in Figure 2, most of the subtitled clips on COVID-19 were produced and circulated on Twitter during the first three months (March–May), since the first positive case was recorded in the KSA.
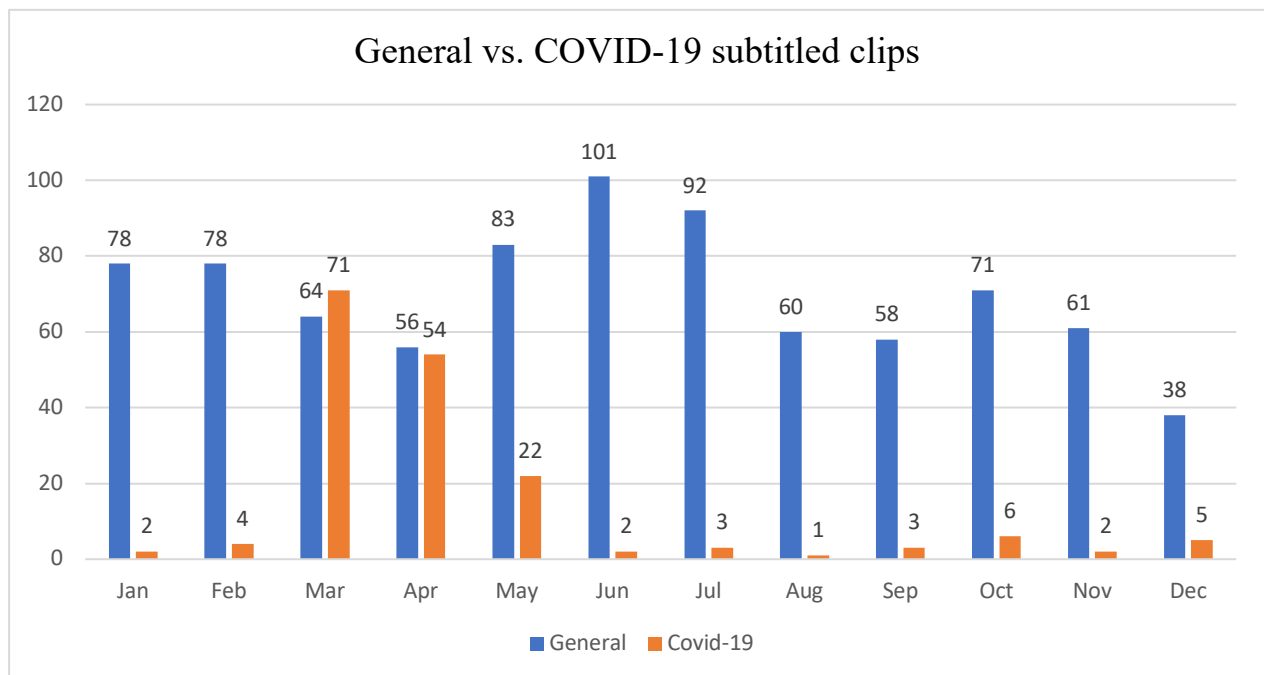

Figure 2. Fansubbers' subtitling activities on Twitter during 2020

In summary, this paper adopts a mixed-methods approach to data collection. From observation and data gathering to categorisation and examination of the outcomes, the data collection process revolved around these practical and necessary steps. The implementation of a mixed-methods approach was based on the research questions and objectives but also on the principle that "the use of quantitative and qualitative approaches in combination provides a better understanding of research problems than either approach alone" (Creswell and Plano Clark 2007, 5). The cases selected in this paper serve as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context" (Yin 2009, 18).

The data analysis was inspired by sociological and digital studies and insights that deepened the understanding of the case study and its context. Aside from the concept of crisis translation, Pierre Bourdieu's sociology was a critical analytical tool. Following Bourdieu's sociology, SMF is perceived as a social activity influenced and (re)shaped by sociological aspects and motivated by varied forms of capital that the fansubbers, as agents (see notes for definition), attempt to accumulate. Therefore, the fansubbers' acts are predetermined by certain forms of capital who try "to make a name for themselves" (Bourdieu 1993, 58). It is the notion of capital that this study emphasises as it explains the personal motives of the fansubbers and explores the various forms of capital they try to achieve, beyond the economic capital (wealth or property rights). Another relevant concept was the notion of digital paratexts (Batchelor 2018; Gray, 2010). Thus, examining the forms of capital was not only based on an observational process of the online subtitling activities during Covid-19 but also on their accompanying digital paratexts on Twitter (see Bourdieu 1986 for more on capital).

The paratexts of audiovisual content "play a critical role in meaning-making for the films and other media products" (Batchelor 2018, 58). These paratexts support the text or the

film and may extend its social reach, visibility, or popularity among viewers and users of social media, for example. The list of digital paratexts is not exhaustive (see Batchelor, 2018 for some examples), but 'fan-created paratexts' are of considerable relevance to this study (Mittell, 2015), as they highlight other digital features implemented by fansubbers such as the usage of hashtags & logos, clips' duration and using links or URLs. Moreover, this study was generally aligned with the works of O'Hagan (2009; 2021) on user-generated content and user-generated translation and studies on translation and social media (such as Desjardins 2017). These concepts presented the researcher with a wider understanding and deeper analysis of the case study. In the following lines, the subtitling of COVID-19-related clips is explored according to a thematic discussion inspired by the abovementioned concepts.

3. Crisis translation for Pre-COVID-19 outbreak

The Saudi government implemented proactive and preventive measures during the first months before the announcement of the first COVID-19 case in the KSA in March 2020. For example, tourist visas and travel to China were suspended. The MoH provided guidelines on travel-related issues during January and February 2020. Twitter was the main platform for sharing audio-visual content containing these guidelines, which were recirculated on YouTube and other platforms. Thirteen clips were posted on Twitter during this period. However, translations were not included in these clips.

In contrast, SMF showed a slight interest in participating in subtitling early news and stories on COVID-19. Understandably, COVID-19 was not yet a relevant or worth-subtitling topic for fansubbers at this stage. The fansubbers subtitled 6 out of 156 clips on their respective Twitter accounts. These few clips showed the role of SMF in highlighting the various aspects of COVID-19 and foregrounding fansubbers' orientations and motivations.

The topics discussed in these clips were the origin of the virus, news about Wuhan and wearing masks. However, one of the fansubbers addressed the spread of COVID-19 in Iran while considering the political tension between Iran and the KSA. Two outcomes arose from subtitling activities during this period. First, the MoH and SMF did not invest much in translation as a means of communication, despite the COVID-19 urgency level and the need for translation. While this was true for the MoH, fansubbers displayed flexibility and a tendency to act rapidly and respond to breaking news and trendy events. Moreover, even though translating COVID-19-related materials is a humanitarian and voluntary task, some fansubbers exhibited a degree of ideological orientation in their subtitling activities.

The subtitling efforts of fansubbers during the pandemic were perceived as voluntary and altruistic "without receiving direct financial benefits" (Olohan 2013, 19). Nonetheless, subtitling as a social practice insinuates the involvement of its agents in internal competition over various forms of non-monetary benefits or capital. As translation is usually understood as the main source of cultural and symbolic capital rather than economic capital (Buzelin 2012), fansubbers aspired to accumulate social and symbolic capital by subtitling clips. The two forms of capital were achieved through social relationships and positions within Saudi society and the online community. Fansubbers' digital skills could also produce digital capital. Moreover, the fansubbers' participation in social media generated a form of social media capital as a "meaningful benefit from engagement in social media" (Saxton and Guo 2020, 2). Therefore, fansubbers subtitled COVID-19-related clips not only for altruism but also to "make a name for themselves" (Bourdieu 1993, 58) and accumulate a form of capital. This interest in capital accumulation and increased social visibility was clearer as the spread of COVID-19 cases and death rates surged in March and the following months of 2020.

4. Subtitling during the crisis

Since the first positive case of COVID-19 in the KSA was recorded, audio-visual content on both the MoH and fansubbers' Twitter accounts increased. This signified the situation's urgency and the need for audio-visual material to communicate information. Subtitling clips during this critical time was perceived as a tool for "reducing vulnerabilities and providing efficient communication" during "recovery, reconstruction and preparation," which were part of emergency planning (O'Brien and Federici 2019, 138). The MoH acknowledges this strategy and emphasises the importance of harnessing TV and social media to deliver "recorded videos on the guidelines" and "summarising relevant scientific data and presenting it using the most common languages among the residents in KSA" (Ministry of Health 2020, 37–38).

However, the MoH did not implement subtitling effectively despite the increased number of posted clips during March and April. Figure 1 shows that only eight clips were subtitled, with the remaining 91 in Arabic. Considering the urgent situation, some useful and important clips needed to be translated. For example, the MoH posted more than 14 frequently asked questions (FAQ) clips that included essential guidelines and answers to common questions and concerns from the online community. However, none of them was translated, subtitled or dubbed. This audio-visual activity shown by the MoH during the early months of the COVID-19 outbreak solved a problem but caused another. It solved the lack of tools and content but caused an attainability problem. Non-Arabic speakers residing in the KSA could not access these clips and, therefore, could not engage with them, an example of when "crisis communication does not work, especially when communication is in a second or third language" (O'Brien and Federici 2019, 134). By observing the digital engagements of the Twitter community with the clips posted by the MoH during the early months of the crisis (March–May 2020), subtitled clips attracted significant social interaction. For example, the

most viewed clip in 2020 was a speech by the MoH's minister urging citizens to stay home. This clip received 14.6 million views, as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3. MoH's minister addressing the citizens of the KSA

In addition to the time of this tweet and its message, the inclusion of subtitles probably facilitated the spread and attraction of more audiences, but it seemed to neglect the needs of those who did not understand Arabic or English. Other clips received increased attention but less than this subtitled clip. The second most-viewed clip was also a message from the minister on government efforts and guidelines, which attracted 7.8 million views. This social and digital interaction with the MoH's posted clips proved the effectiveness of social media in providing relevant and timely content in a reachable way. Moreover, it shows the significance of translation and the need for suitable communication strategies that consider the target audience and their characteristics.

While the MoH's subtitling activity was limited, fansubbers were active in subtitling COVID-19 clips mainly into Arabic and English to some extent. SMF plays a vital role in facilitating global communication and the exchange of news and stories from different languages. As shown in Figure 2, Saudi fansubbers invested in subtitling COVID-19 clips and shifted their subtitling activities toward this purpose. March and April 2020 witnessed

the highest number of subtitled clips on COVID-19 (125) compared to available subtitled content on other topics. Unlike the MoH's clips, which were related to other health topics, Saudi fansubbers were seemingly inclined to intentionally select COVID-19-related themes. Their purpose was to share their agendas, accumulate social capital and compete with other fansubbers over subtitling COVID-19 clips on time. Some fansubbers also did this for content diversification, a strategy to cover different topics and themes in their subtitling and clip selection.

Three main themes were apparent in the fansubbers' selected COVID-19 clips. First, many clips discussed Covid-19 from an ideological and political stance or at least perceived COVID-19 from a globalised perspective. For instance, some clips highlighted the death rates and cases in some countries that were considered by the fansubbers as rivals of the KSA at the time of the crisis, such as Iran, Turkey and Qatar. There was a specific focus on these countries more than others. Other clips mentioned news reports on healthcare and updates from countries like China, Italy, the United Kingdom and the United States. COVID-19 was also discussed from human rights perspective and political tension between the United States and China. Second, the economic impacts of COVID-19 were included, considering their relevance to the global economy and people's daily lives. Topics on shopping, the US economy, the Saudi economy, and oil prices were the most prevalent themes in the subtitled clips. Third, most subtitled clips highlighted people's lives during the COVID-19 pandemic, like stories of patients, health workers and citizens from different contexts. COVID-19 symptoms, some safety tips and guidelines were also selected. Few fansubbers opted for less-discussed topics such as the psychological impacts of COVID-19 and the environmental outcomes of the lockdown in some countries.

The active participation of social media fansubbers in subtitling and circulating COVID-19 clips indicates their purposeful engagement with this event and interest in

fostering social visibility and social media capital. Arguably, the MoH's lack of interest in subtitling COVID-19 clips motivated fansubbers to fill the gap and provide reachable content for those who needed it. Regarding digital interaction with fansubbers' clips, the most viewed clip was a report by MSNBC on the increase in oil prices and the role of Russia and the KSA in this matter. This clip attracted 1.1 million views and was posted on March 12, 2020. However, some fansubbers received more attention and interaction with their subtitled content than others, considering their subtitling history, visibility on Twitter, social capital (and social media capital) and the number of followers they had. It is implausible to compare the interaction they received with the MoH, for example, given that the MoH enjoyed a wider audience and followers on Twitter and was the official source of health-related advice and information on COVID-19. The MoH had 5.8 million followers, while the highest fansubber had 2.8 million followers (as of May 2022).

However, the amount of audio-visual content, health advice provided by the MoH and the subtitled content offered by the Saudi fansubbers indicated the importance of early communication in managing the pandemic. In other words, both the MoH and fansubbers played a vital role in raising people's awareness of the nature of this novel disease and provided them with necessary guidelines. Surprisingly, the flow of audio-visual content posted by the MoH and fansubbers decreased over the following months. Even though COVID-19 peaked during June and July 2020, the volume of the published clips did not match the urgency of this stage.[iv] Moreover, a partial lockdown was imposed on some big cities and the most infected areas from the end of April until late July 2020 (Ministry of Health 2020, 80). Therefore, the peak of the pandemic and the lockdown were two relevant themes that needed some attention from the MoH and online users.

During the lockdown and peak of the pandemic, the MoH posted 40 clips, with only four clips subtitled into Arabic and one into English. These clips promoted important

information on different topics, such as instruction on social gatherings and home quarantine, wearing face masks and shopping. During this period, the MoH introduced mass testing schemes and new digital mobile applications for booking tests. Of course, these clips were available to Arabic speakers on different platforms, from TV and YouTube to social media. However, whether these clips were reachable to non-Arabic speakers in the KSA remains. Arguably, the MoH did not consider the languages these residents spoke (i.e., Urdu, Bengali, etc.) and their digital access in terms of the devices they used or access to the internet. This digital divide is relevant in such contexts, as a gap exists "between those who do and those who do not have access to computers and the Internet" (van Dijk 2005, 1). Unequal opportunities appear in such a divide, and certain digital skills are not obtainable for everyone. What might have increased this divide is the developed digital culture in the KSA and the significant shift towards a more digital government under the influence of Saudi Vision 2030, which was announced in 2016.

Considering the role of the MoH in providing Arabic content with limited subtitling, the fansubbers provided non-Arabic content and subtitled it into Arabic. They aimed to foreground some international news and stories and kept the Arabic speakers connected with these updates and reports. For fansubbers, subtitling for non-Arabic speakers probably seemed less interesting to them, or they did not appreciate its importance. This could be ascribed to the central and global position of English, as a lingua franca (Arabic may take a peripheral position in term of power and cultural production), and to the fansubbers' personal motivation and forms of capital they are pursuing. It may not be beneficial to them, neither socially nor economically. Moreover, SMF is usually based on personal interest, audience needs and capital building, even though the crisis may be driven usually by altruistic motivations. The total subtitled clips declined significantly during June and July 2020, and fewer fansubbers remained active. Only 5 of 193 clips were subtitled by 3 of the 17

fansubbers. Compared to previous months, this drop was significant and indicated that fansubbers' interest and motivation in crisis translation were waning. This change does not neglect their social roles but rather gives an idea of the socio-digital dynamics of SMF. The themes discussed in these five clips differed from those covered by the MoH, as usual. These clips mentioned the announcement of a new vaccine in the United Kingdom, misinformation in the United States, and the safety of wearing masks. The fansubbers chose global news and stories rather than health tips and measures. They might have opted for this approach, given their previous experience in SMF or their understanding of their followers' needs and tendencies. Therefore, the fansubber's Twitter activity could result from these aspects. Subtitling COVID-19 clips was significantly reduced after the lockdown was lifted and the peak curve was overcome.

5. Subtitling post-COVID-19 peak

By July 2020, the Saudi government announced the total lifting of the lockdown in all cities and resuming businesses (Saudi Press Agency 2020). This decision was a step toward going back to normal or living with COVID-19, but it also came as an antecedent to the arrival of vaccinations a few months later. The MoH's minister announced on December 16, 2020 that the first batch of the COVID-19 vaccine had arrived and would be administered for free to all residents of the KSA in the following three days (CNN Arabic 2020). From August 2020 onward, the number of posted clips started to drop gradually due to the normalisation period and the lifting of the lockdown. The MoH started discussing various topics in the published clips instead of focusing solely on COVID-19. For example, there were multiple clips on cancer, stress, seasonal flu, diabetes and similar health concerns.

However, the MoH started retweeting some clips originally posted in the previous months. Specifically, the MoH retweeted some of the most viewed clips on Twitter that attracted millions of views. For instance, in November 2020, the MoH retweeted 9 of 18 clips, 5 of which received more than one million views per clip. Of course, COVID-19 clips were still relevant, so the MoH continued to post original or retweeted clips. Notably, the social engagement of MoH's clips on Twitter decreased after the peak of COVID-19, which might indicate that people in KSA felt safe and did not need to consult MoH clips regularly. In addition, during the lockdown, most people used digital platforms for entertainment and news, which explained the high volume of social engagement with MoH's clips during certain months.
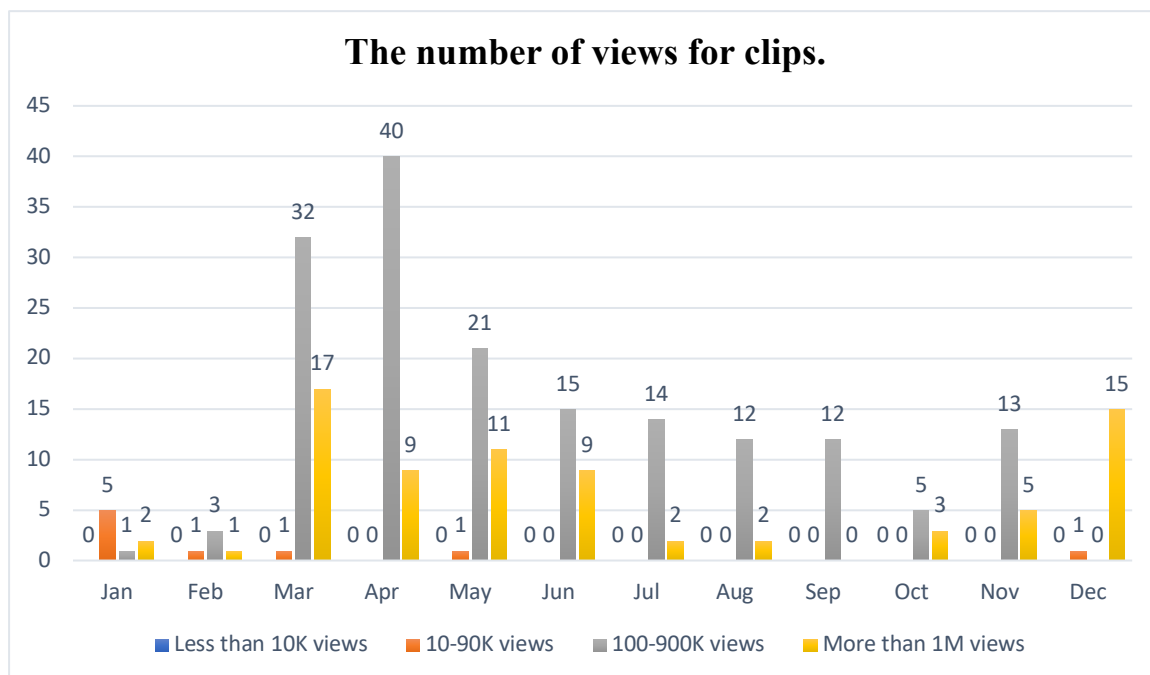

Figure 4. The number of views per month for the MoH's clips on Twitter (2020)[v]

Figure 4 shows that the first four months of the pandemic (March–June) obtained a high social interaction given several factors, such as the discovery of the first case, the peak of COVID-19, the lockdown, etc. After the lockdown was lifted in July 2020 and the daily cases

decreased, a low level of social interaction was observed. Similarly, the number of subtitled clips has been significantly reduced since August 2020. From August to December 2020, six clips were subtitled, five with intralingual subtitling into Arabic and one from Arabic into English.

Meanwhile, Saudi fansubbers were more active in subtitling COVID-19-related clips after the lockdown, even though this content was incomparable, in number, to the other subtitled clips during this period. As shown in Figure 2, 17 of 288 clips were COVID-19-related during Aug-Dec, which was still more than the MoH's subtitling activity. Notably, 80% of these clips were subtitled by one fansubber, which also showed that some fansubbers invested in this situation and continued providing useful content and social benefit. The fansubbers offered multiple aspects of COVID-19. Some clips focused on the virus mutation, healthcare, and health reports from Australia and the United States. In contrast, others highlighted COVID-19 effects on the Saudi economy and Trump's speech after testing positive for COVID-19.

December 2020 saw the first vaccination program in the KSA. Therefore, the audio-visual content posted during this month by both the MoH and the fansubbers reflected the criticality of this period. The MoH posted 16 clips, of which 12 promoted the vaccination program in the KSA and presented some facts about the vaccines. In a separate tweet, one clip was subtitled from Arabic into English and into Arabic. The most viewed clip was a news report on the first Saudi female to receive the vaccine on December 17, 2020, which attracted more than 650K views on Twitter. As shown in Figure 3, the subtitled version in English received less interaction.

Figure 5. English (left) vs. Arabic (right) subtitles for the same clip

Meanwhile, as observed in previous months, the fansubbers were less active in producing COVID-19-related clips compared to their active roles during April and March, despite the relevance and importance of vaccination as an emergent topic on social media. Only five clips were subtitled during December; two tackled the vaccination, while the remaining three highlighted the news of a new variant and a patient's story. The subtitling of the new variant clip received more digital interaction (223K) than the clip on the vaccination (124K).

6. Media-related paratexts on twitter

While the subtitling of clips on COVID-19 served a humanitarian purpose, some digital paratexts features reinforced the social and digital visibility of the subtitled content and its producers. Digital paratexts offer multiple perceptions considering the diversity of social media platforms and how content is circulated and perceived, making paratextual features important components of subtitling and sharing. Twitter promotes "user-generated paratexts" (Batchelor 2018, 61) and displays two forms of paratexts concerning subtitling clips during

the pandemic in 2020. MoH's subtitling activity on Twitter showed a form of "official paratexts," while the fansubbers depended on "fan-created paratexts" (Mittell 2015, 262).

The functions of these forms of digital paratexts varied depending on the clip's purpose, timing, and intended audience. More importantly, the genre of the clip, as filmic material, can display a form of intangible paratextuality (Gray 2010). Therefore, subtitling COVID-19 clips served as a user-generated paratext. Moreover, the MoH's posted clips suggest that the MoH restored obvious tangible paratexts to foreground the criticality of the crisis and the importance of the clips' messages. For example, the MoH's clips used persuasive language and were accompanied by certain slogans on the clip or within the tweet's text. Common slogans included "we are all responsible," "stay home," "we return with caution" and "live well." These slogans usually appeared at the end of the clips. The frequent use of hashtags also allowed more visibility for some subtitled content and promoted certain social campaigns and events. For instance, the two most popular hashtags were #كورونا (#Corona) and #أسئلة_كورونا (#Corona_Questions). The implementation of this strategy varied depending on the current theme in the KSA during the pandemic. During the lockdown, the hashtag #خلك_بالبيت (#stay_home) was visible, while during local cultural events, such as Eid al-Fitr, a hashtag like #عيّد_بصحة (#Celebrate_safely) was trendy on Twitter. MoH's official paratexts were relevant to COVID-19 and health measures.

In contrast, fan-created paratexts exhibited different approaches, even though the fansubbers used similar paratexts as the MoH. The genre and themes selected by the fansubbers presented a different case. As discussed earlier, some fansubbers discussed COVID-19 from political and economic perspectives. Therefore, the function of these paratextual features is central to the clips, and it could even "overtake and subsume" the media text (Consalvo 2017, 155). As a result, the paratext is no longer peripheral but becomes a key and central feature of the clip's visibility. The genre of the clip may direct the

viewer's behaviours and "grab the viewer before he or she reaches the text" or watch the subtitles (Gray 2010, 23).

The temporality of the subtitles offers a paratextual aspect and helps (or hinders) viewers' digital interaction with the clips, which may lead them to (dis)like the clips afterward. The subtitles' presentation, colour, font, size and position on the screen also act as a prominent fan-created paratext. Regarding hashtags, most fansubbers used their names, surnames or titles in the hashtags. The hashtags also included translation-related words, such as "#translated_by_," "#translation_of_," or "#creative_translation." For example, if the subtitler's name is Ahmed, he may use a hashtag like #translated_by_Ahmed. Every fansubber has a different approach to using hashtags. Some prefer to use self-identified hashtags, while others prefer trendy hashtags at that moment. The latter strategy is probably useful for making content more visible. This practice may solve the issue of access to content, as not all Twitter users can access some content unless they are following the content creator. In other words, it is likely that "we're all getting potentially really different experiences of texts and of the textual world based on what the various algorithms around us think they know about us" (Brookey and Gray 2017, 104). Notably, some fansubbers used the same hashtags used by the MoH. Others resorted to using hashtags related to the clips' themes, messages or content. For example, if a clip talks about the death rates in the United States, it may use hashtags like #theUS, or if a clip discusses a new variant, it may use a hashtag like #Corona_New_Varient. Likely, the fansubbers implemented such paratextual elements to be more visible and to compete with other subtitling institutions or fansubbers. Their main goal was to accumulate digital and social media capital.

7. Conclusion

Subtitling COVID-19 clips on social media foregrounded multiple aspects of crisis translation on digital platforms. First, certain audio-visual translation modalities (subtitling and dubbing) were essential for MoH's communication and digital media plans. Even though subtitling clips were few, the social and digital interaction with the MoH's subtitled content on Twitter indicated the importance of subtitling as a tool for crisis management and communication. However, the MoH did not invest much in subtitling despite the audio-visual content they produced during the pandemic and the number of non-Arabic speakers residing in the KSA who might have needed translations of Arabic content. Second, the active engagement of Saudi fansubbers in subtitling COVID-19-related clips proved the significance of SMF during the pandemic. SMF on Twitter involves competition over available forms of capital, and Fansubbers have attempted to accumulate social media and social capital. Moreover, the fansubbers showcased different political, altruistic, sociocultural and economic orientations through their subtitles. Third, fansubbers helped provide public and timely content to non-English speakers, informing them of global news and updates. Some fansubbers subtitled a few clips from Arabic into English, highlighting the health situation in the KSA during the pandemic and the efforts exerted by the Saudi government and the MoH in managing the crisis.

In addition, translation paratexts added extra value to the visibility of subtitled content by both the MoH and fansubbers. The MoH acted formally and implemented some official paratexts that included persuasive language and encouraging messages promoted through various clips and hashtags reflecting the criticality of the situation and the intended audience. The MoH's paratexts were informative and avoided any ideological elements. In contrast, Saudi fansubbers adopted fan-created paratexts with intentionally selected genres and varied subtitling strategies. The fansubbers showed a degree of manipulation, considering their

obvious ideological tendencies. They also used self-identified hashtags that referred to the subtitler's identity and facilitated the subtitler's visibility.

In sum, using digital media to circulate subtitled COVID-19 content highlighted some interesting aspects. More importantly, social media facilitated visibility and access to this content promptly and easily. SMF was not solely altruistic during the pandemic; it was a multifaceted digital practice with various purposes and opinions. Arguably, the MoH could have cooperated with fansubbers to produce subtitled content and ensure its quality and availability to all target audiences. Audio-visual translation should be included more effectively in future crisis management strategies and communication plans, given its likely digital presence and the availability of digital tools that could promote circulation.

Notes

[i] The specified figures on the residing nationalities in Saudi Arabia are not well recorded. The reports published by the KSA's General Authority Statistics (GAS) have ignored such details and recorded the overall number of non-Saudis. Since 2018, the GAS has not recorded the number of non-Saudis in its published reports (Aljaber, 2021).

[ii] The website is https://covid19awareness.sa/

[iii] Agent is perceived sociologically as both an institution or individual "endowed with agency" and the "ability to exert power in an international way" (Buzelin 2011, 6). Translators, as social agents, tend to be "heavily involved in the dynamics of translation production" (Khalifa 2014, 11).

[iv] For a full timeline of the pandemic in KSA, you may refer to the Ministry of Health's reports and website (i.e., Ministry of Health 2020, 24).

[v] For clarity, K refers to thousands, and M refers to millions.

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