



The Rise and Fall of Fansubbing Communities: The Case of Autrjim and Subtitling Social Media

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the development, workflow and institutional structure of Autrjim, a volunteer fansubbing community that subtitles educational YouTube content into Arabic. The study explores how such online communities manage translation projects, engage members and adapt to digital challenges. Situated within the frameworks of institutional translation and communities of practice, the research highlights the significance of fansubbing as a socially driven, collaborative form of user-generated translation in the Arab digital space. A mixed-methods approach was adopted, comprising a structured interview with the project's administrator and a questionnaire completed by 58 members. The findings revealed Autrjim's structured workflow, reliance on digital tools (i.e. Trello, YouTube and Telegram) and a strong sense of shared purpose among members, despite the absence of financial incentives. However, external changes – particularly YouTube's policy shift – led to the discontinuation of the project. The study concludes that while digital platforms facilitate community-based translation, their evolving policies pose critical risks to sustainability. It recommends that fansubbing communities explore alternative tools, diversify platforms and establish contingency plans to ensure long-term viability. This case contributes to a growing understanding of nonprofessional translation practices in under-researched contexts and the challenges they face in an increasingly monetised digital landscape.

KEYWORDS

Crowdsourcing, digital fansubbing, digital translation, practice community, social media, volunteer translation

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1. Introduction

While there is a tendency to focus on studying institutional translation in large organisations, such as the European Union, less attention has been paid to small non-profit organisations. Kang (2019) and Ramos and Guzmán (2021) emphasise the importance of expanding the concept of institutional translation to other modes of translation and to non-European contexts. The influence of globalisation and digitalisation is arguably crucial in redefining institutional translation to include digitally-borne translation communities and projects. Studying online institutions and observing the implementation of their organisational systems has been underrepresented in translation studies (TS). Moreover, audiovisual translation (AVT) and, specifically, nonprofessional practices are less researched in the Arab world (Gamal, 2020). However, Arabic researchers have increasingly realised this shortage in research and started engaging effectively with AVT research (e.g. Al-Adwan and Al-Jabri, 2023; Sahari, 2023; Thawabteh *et al.*, 2022). Yet, fansubbing is not part of these recent developments in the research of AVT in the Arab world. Al-Tamimi and Mansy (2023) analysed the published research of Arabic subtitling in the last 20 years. They concluded that most studies focused on the technical, linguistic, rhetorical and cultural aspects of subtitling. In sum, institutional translation in virtual communities is addressed in this research, focusing on the fansubbing practice in a voluntary collaborative group named *Autrjim*.

This article analyses the processes adopted by the community of fansubbers in Autrjim to manage and carry on their crowdsourced subtitling. It explores the technologies and strategies implemented in their projects. It then investigates various complementary aspects of the project, such as at the institutional (the way the group is managed) and individual (how members interact and act within the group) levels. Thus, the overarching aim is to examine the procedural

and technical considerations followed by Autrjim to facilitate their collaborative subtitling. Overall, this article studies how Autrjim functions and manages its work and how its group members and administration communicate.

The article starts with a review of the literature, introducing the main concepts and relevant studies on fansubbing and crowdsourcing. It provides an overview of the concepts of institutional translation and community of practice, as two analytical concepts. It then introduces the selected fansubbing group, Autrjim, and the research methods. Following this, it provides a detailed analysis of the collected data. The analysis is divided into institutional, procedural and individual aspects of the fansubbing community, Autrjim. The article ends with a reflection on the future of Autrjim and the reasons leading to its discontinuation.

2. Fansubbing and Crowdsourcing

The digital developments in the 21st century have led to an increase in content made and translated by internet users, which is referred to as user-generated translation (UGT) (O'Hagan, 2009). The creation of subtitled audiovisual material by fans has become easier with the introduction of various digital tools for producing, editing and sharing content online. Fansubbing, a form of UGT, has utilised numerous digital tools to (re)produce and share subtitled content online, implementing interesting strategies and practices. The definition of UGT has been influenced by digital media, as social media redefine its parameters and process (Santos, 2022). Video streaming services are also (re)shaping and inspiring the works of fansubbers, as in the example of UGT on YouTube (Lu, 2025). Yet, fansubbing, crowdsourcing and amateur translation are still under-researched in TS as a whole and 'under-represented' in AVT (Pérez-González, 2007). As stated earlier, research on AVT in general, and on subtitling and fansubbing in particular, is still limited in the Arab world. Jacquemond and Selim (2015) argue that AVT has been a 'West-

centred' or 'Eurocentric' case, leading to less attention on the study of AVT in the Arab world. Nonetheless, the sociological perspectives of how fansubbing communities have emerged, developed and managed their translation projects are yet to be thoroughly examined. In light of the infotainment age and the rise of technological tools, it is beneficial to assess the development of fansubbing, crowdsourcing and amateur translation.

AVT has invested in multilevel advances in technology over time. According to Chaume (2018), digital developments have led to the recognition of AVT as a field of its own, leading to the study of how AVT is produced, distributed and consumed. Online websites, smartphones and portable devices are but a few examples of the digital revolution that has widely affected the field of AVT in recent decades. The delivery and projection of subtitled content have changed dramatically due to these digital ramifications. Most importantly, fansubbing and crowdsourcing communities have thrived in light of online facilities and equipment that enable them to acquire subtitles, edit films and distribute audiovisual content. The advent of Web 2.0, which supports user-generated content (UGC) and online collaborative translation (or UGT), has promoted peculiar practices of volunteer and fan translation. The huge shift from an electronic age to a more advanced digital culture has facilitated the proliferation of crowdsourcing and nonprofessional translation (Deuze, 2006). Online communities have been empowered by these technologies to display their linguistic and technical abilities through interventions in editing, producing and distributing translated multimedia content. Social media, video streaming services and artificial intelligence have all influenced the production and distribution of AVT and the engagement of digital users with subtitled content (e.g. Romero Fresco *et al.*, 2024; Striuk and Hordiineko, 2024).

Fansubbing could be regarded as one of the most prominent expressions of AVT resulting from these digital advancements. Fansubbing can be defined as 'the practice of amateur subtitling and distribution of films, TV series and other film extracts online' (Munday, 2016). It dates back to the 1990s, when Japanese anime was translated and made accessible (Díaz Cintas and Sánchez, 2006). The development of fansubbing practice has not been restricted to anime translation but has expanded to cover films and TV series. It has grown exponentially to become an online phenomenon, attracting researchers' attention on TS.

The emergence of online virtual communities and the digital processing of content, along with a globalised world and UGC, results in a mass collaboration between translators benefitting from digital facilities (O'Hagan, 2009). This collaborative translation is often referred to as crowdsourcing, which is defined by Howe (2006) as 'the act of taking a job traditionally performed by a designated agent (usually an employee) and outsourcing it to an undefined, generally large group of people in the form of an open call'. The concept 'translation crowdsourcing' is perceived as a collaborative translation that is adopted by institutions in an online setting, whereby members collaboratively work mostly for non-profit goals (Jimenez-Crespo, 2021).

The traditional process of translation in fansubbing communities manifests in several phases: collecting the audiovisual material, editing and distributing the content. In this process, various people are needed to perform the required tasks, such as raw collectors, encoders, timers, translators and typesetters (Díaz Cintas and Sánchez, 2006). Due to the recent technological advances, some of these tasks are performed by fewer people. For example, one person can execute the encoding, timing and translating tasks alone. The development of collaborative translation platforms has paved the

way for terminology management, the use of translation memory, project management and many other features (Zwischenberger, 2021). The rapid digital changes have (re)shaped the production and distribution of fansubbed content across different media, languages and cultures (Baños and Díaz Cintas, 2023).

3. Fansubbing Institution as a Community of Practice

The definition and adoption of the term *institution* have evolved and been reframed in different fields, specifically in sociology. An institution is 'a form of uniform action governed by role expectations, norms, values and belief systems' (Koskinen, 2011: 54). Institutional translation serves the reputation of the institution in which it is performed. Koskinen (2008) argues that in institutional translation, there is a peculiar genre of translation that makes the translation fully representative of the institution's image and voice to the surrounding society.

Institutional translation is characterised by several general features, which may differ from one institution to another. Initially, consistency in a multilingual document is important, and preserving equivalence is one of the main goals of institutions. Standardisation in vocabulary, syntax and style, along with the support of training sessions, instruction guides and reviewing processes, helps the institution produce accurate and consistent documents (Trosborg, 1997). Online institutions may apply different tasks and adopt varied strategies to manage workflow and monitor the quality of the translated materials. There appear to exist differences between traditional and online institutions in terms of the nature of the text at hand, the type of work, the place of workers and work management and control. These are critical factors that shape an institution's image and its products, which need to be studied in detail, with a focus on digital developments.

Research in institutional translation has yet to include under-researched areas, such as ideological, authorial, structural and procedural aspects. Koskinen (2014) emphasises the need to understand the motivations and goals behind implementing translation in institutions and the reasons behind certain strategies and procedures. Dean (1999) further suggests that research should cover a wide range of aspects, such as administrative affairs, the role of translation, information collection and criteria. Thus, this research studies Autrijm, as a fansubbing online community, and examines the effect of digital advances on the community's form of institutional translation.

As translation institutions, online fansubbing communities are largely built on shared purposes and unified goals. Their driving passion is the base for what is referred to as a 'community of practice'. Wenger (1998) defines the concept of a community of practice as a group of people with a shared passion for something, who try to excel at it through practice and learning gradually. Online fansubbing communities have similar features, as they depend on crowds, have clear purposes and serve as sites of learning and practice for community members. According to Wenger (1998), a community of practice differs from other communities (e.g. neighbourhoods) in that it is characterised by three main aspects: mutual engagement, a joint enterprise and a shared repertoire. Mutual engagement is based on members' mutual interactions and relations. Crowdsourced fansubbing relies heavily on mutual interactions between members and the community's leadership, fostering a community of practice. Such online interaction facilitates the translation process and workflow.

Online communities often experience disagreements, different opinions and negotiations among their diverse members due to their

varied backgrounds. Wenger (1998) refers to this aspect as 'joint enterprise', in which all members try to collaborate and clarify their situation in the community. For any community of practice, it is essential to build and develop a shared repertoire and useful resources to maintain the coherence of a unified and collective group (Wenger, 1998). Proposed guidelines, a list of important terms, online dictionaries, short tutorials and helpful resources are just a few examples that a fansubbing community could use as shared resources. Members' experiences are crucial in developing the community repertoire, and rewards can motivate them to contribute to the organisation and development of this repertoire. In addition, Cadwell *et al.* (2022) reflect on research on community of practice and its relevance to study translators' motivations in sharing knowledge, collaborating to achieve certain purposes and learning new skills. Many scholars have explored the concept of community of practice in different contexts, highlighting its relevance and usefulness as an analytical and conceptual tool in researching this social phenomenon (e.g. Nguyen, 2022; Ruiz Rosendo, 2022). Yet, online communities of practice and fansubbing have yet to be thoroughly explored and studied.

The three concepts of community of practice, institutional translation and translation crowdsourcing inspire the analysis of Autrjim, as shown in the results section.

4. The Rise of the Fansubbing Community: The Case of Autrjim

The digital developments in KSA in the 21st century have increased the production and consumption of UGT and audiovisual content. Therefore, various online translation teams and projects have utilised digital tools and social media to manage their translation projects. Social media has been an essential tool for crowdsourcing, consuming and sharing translated content. For example, social media fansubbing, short clips made by fans and shared on social media, has increased since the beginning of the 2010s in KSA (Altalidi, 2024). Autrjim is an example of such digital engagement and an increase in the UGT and online translation community in this country.

Autrjim was an online fansubbing group (أترجم in Arabic)¹ launched in June 2016 to build an online community of translators to subtitle selected YouTube clips into Arabic. It focused on subtitling certain types of YouTube channels that enjoy a vast viewership, such as the famous educational YouTube channel 'CrashCourse'. Autrjim's mission was to translate educational and informative clips from a variety of fields of knowledge and make them accessible to Arabic speakers (Autrjim, 2019).

Autrjim's community comprised numerous fansubbers who contributed significantly to the team's efforts in subtitling numerous clips from its inception. The number of Autrjim's members and subtitled clips rapidly increased. After 1 month of the team's start, 17 new members joined, and 40 clips were subtitled. Six months later, the team had 87 members, who subtitled 318 clips (Autrjim, 2019). Autrjim was selected to be the case study for this research based on various perspectives. First, the group represents and adopts fansubbing practices that this research aims to investigate. Second, Autrjim presents itself as a team that applies institutional mechanisms in organising and managing the workflow of the subtitling process. Third, the nature of the community stands as a community of practice, as it contains mutual engagement, a joint enterprise, a shared repertoire and various levels of expertise among its members. Fourth, even though Autrjim has temporarily stopped producing translations, its study is still relevant and useful in understanding the workflow and internal characteristics of the online

fansubbing communities as communities of practice. Studying Autrjim highlights how fansubbing communities react, manage and reflect on changing policies and legal aspects of online platforms and digital tools.

5. Data Collection

This research adopted a quantitative methodology to perceive the internal dynamics of the studied case and the fansubbers' opinions towards and engagement with the team's objectives and project. The study focuses on investigating the people involved in this online project as an online community. In other words, the participants and translators (managers or subtitlers) in this community are the focus of research. Thus, the source of data is those involved in the creation, management and production of translated content within the Autrjim community. In addition to studying the agents of translation in this community, understanding the translation process was also important. Therefore, two research methods were adopted and conducted in online settings using internet-mediated tools to investigate the procedural, managerial and personal aspects of Autrjim.

The first method involved an interview with the team's director, comprising several questions on the administrative and organisational aspects. It also included a detailed discussion of the technological and procedural steps adopted in the group. The interview questions were structured and prepared in advance and then shared with the director by email, as agreed and discussed. A pilot interview was conducted to decide the discussed topics and the suitable method of interview, and to agree on the deadlines. The second method was a questionnaire, in which some of Autrjim's members volunteered to participate, answering a list of investigative questions. The questionnaire encompassed a variety of issues related to the members' opinions towards the workflow, the team's management and other translational aspects. The questionnaire was distributed among the fansubbing community, where 58 members participated. The participants were given a month to answer the questions, which were distributed and shared via the Telegram platform. An online data aggregator called SurveyMonkey was used to build the questions, monitor its delivery and produce analytical graphs of the data. A mix of 28 open- and closed-ended questions was designed. This questionnaire included demographic questions, translation-related questions (e.g. selecting videos, problems faced or solutions adopted) and questions on the fansubbers' opinions and reflections on many aspects (e.g. the team's leadership, the translation process and the utilisation of technology).

These two methods provided useful and insightful data to understand how the online fansubbing community manages their projects, adapts to new and changing realities, and ensures the active and effective engagement of their participating fansubbers. Thus, it was important to discuss and analyse these topics in relation to the data gathered from the interview and questionnaire. A thematic analysis was incorporated to organise the discussion of the collected data. The institutional and procedural aspects followed and applied by Autrjim were the two main themes analysed, as inspired by the elicited data.

6. Results and Discussion

The following sections employ a thematic structure in reporting, analysing and discussing the collected data from the interview and questionnaire.

(1) As written and publicised by the team on their blog and social media accounts.

6.1. Autrjim's Institutional Aspects:

Drawing on the concept of institutional translation presented in the literature review above, Autrjim is recognised as an institution characterised by 'assigned material spaces, members and recurrent activities' (Koskinen, 2011: 54). Thus, social needs, support and recognition give rise to this institution and grant it authority and legitimacy to act for the public good through translation. According to Mossop (1990), translation decisions are pre-identified in institutional translation and are manipulated by the main goals of the institution. Autrjim implemented certain strategies and decisions, before, during and after the subtitling process, to comply with the team's intended goal. As a small non-profit institution, Autrjim attempted to publicise its voice through translation and sought support from volunteers in representing that voice. In the following sections, a detailed analysis of the administrative and organisational aspects is provided, inspired by the interviewees' answers.

Autrjim started as an individual project when the team founder learned the possibility of adding Arabic subtitles to YouTube clips, which drove her desire to focus on subtitling clips from the CrashCourse channel, paving the way for the project's expansion in terms of members and the YouTube channels subtitled. As a mission-oriented project, Autrjim explicitly aimed to present accessible content to the Arabic audience (Autrjim, 2019). While collaborative translation is motivated by commercial, social and personal causes (O'Brien, 2011), Autrjim was stimulated by the social cause, made clear in its stated aim. Autrjim aimed to provide both professional and nonprofessional subtitlers with a platform where they can develop their skills and connect with other subtitlers. This idea of a suitable place to practise subtitling could be an effective tool for attracting amateurs to achieve their personal goals.

The institutional system manifested in Autrjim was characterised by several factors. Autrjim had an organisational structure that prepared plans, established criteria, assigned tasks and managed the work of the team. Thus, its board of directors comprised four members, most with assigned tasks. Their roles were managing the workflow, supervising members, assessing the levels of new members and offering support and help. It could be stated that, following the number of members (around 54 as of January 2020), these four directors were able to handle the tasks of observing and managing the workflow. Apart from the board of directors, Autrjim had two units: publishing and organisational. The publishing unit posted subtitled clips on social media platforms and managed the team's blog. It also responded to inquiries from the online audience. The organisational unit provided subtitlers with new clips for translation and responded to their inquiries. Thus, the team had one unit for public purposes and another for internal purposes.

6.1.1. Membership and Incentives

Initially, there were no conditions for joining Autrjim in its first few months, as new members could fill out an application to be contacted and added to the team. However, due to the increase in members, it was necessary to adopt a method to select and add new members. The team used social media platforms (i.e. Twitter and Facebook) to post announcements for registration. New members had to first complete an enrolment application that tests their levels in translation and proofreading. On the translation side, new members were asked to choose one of three English texts (each one around four sentences long) and translate it into Arabic. For proofreading, there was one piece of Arabic text containing errors that needed editing. New members had to provide their personal information, Telegram account and email addresses. After the application was completed, the team's administration assessed the results and assigned tasks to new members accordingly. Those who showed poor

results were given subtitling tasks, while those who demonstrated acceptable results were assigned reviewing and proofreading tasks. These assignments may be problematic since subtitling was given to low-mark holders, undermining the complexity and nature of subtitling. Assigning subtitling to good-mark holders could help ensure the translation quality, making the reviewing process easier.

Volunteer translation, like most volunteer activities, is not a major source of rewards. The absence of incentives may result in issues relating to quality and ethics (O'Hagan, 2009). In other words, members of volunteer communities should be motivated by either monetary or nonmonetary incentives to overcome poor quality and ethical issues. However, small institutions, such as Autrjim, could not afford to provide rewards to their members. These restrictions were acknowledged by the team administration, and thus, affordable alternatives for motivating volunteer translators were being negotiated. Crowdsourced communities usually adopt a 'leaderboard' approach (O'Brien, 2011), by which the best translations or the most active members are rated higher than others. Autrjim announced 'the best member/s of the month' based on the number of translations completed, for subtitlers, or the number of reviewing and proofreading tasks, for reviewers and proofreaders. A member's active role in discussing problems and giving advice to other members was another important factor in deciding 'the best member'.

Moreover, social media may be a self-rewarding tool for members. Autrjim shared the links of subtitled clips via Twitter and Facebook, and the name of the translator was included in each tweet or post. Displaying the members' work on social media may receive social recognition from other digital users, encouraging the subtitlers and appreciating their efforts. For example, the official Twitter account of YouTube in the Arabic world (@YouTubeArabia) commented on Autrjim's efforts and endorsed their subtitling work. MinuteEarth, one of the main channels that Autrjim translated from, thanked Autrjim on Twitter for making Arabic subtitles available. Notably, both YouTubeArabia and MinuteEarth enjoy a huge viewership, so these endorsements may have indirectly helped propagate Autrjim's work and make the subtitlers more visible.

6.1.2. Clips' Selection and Publishing

Autrjim's administration chose specific YouTube channels at the end of every month. Active members were allowed to choose content, which was allowed as a gesture of appreciation for their active presence and work. However, although the process changed, members could suggest channels. Another method is voting, a common procedure in crowdsourced translation, via which multiple versions of translations are judged by votes to determine the best one (O'Brien, 2011). Autrjim followed the same procedure but applied it to select some YouTube channels for subtitling. Voting was conducted through Telegram, where most members were present and could participate instantly.

It was important for the team administration to follow specific criteria when choosing clips for subtitling. Namely, the quality of the clips, the availability of source language subtitles and the clips' suitability for an Arabic audience were three essential factors. Yet, some criteria were relatively ambiguous, such as how to decide whether a certain clip was suitable for the target viewers, as the target audience was not restricted to a particular group. This decision seemed to be left to the subtitlers, as there were no clear guidelines or restrictions for some genres.

After reviewing and approving the subtitled clips, the team published them using four main platforms: Autrjim's blog, Twitter, Facebook and YouTube. Using these digital platforms implies that Autrjim took advantage of translation as 'a means of speaking to a particular

audience' (Koskinen, 2008: 22). That is, Autrjim's voice was heard through investing in online tools to propagate the team's products.

¹ Any user could play the clip on the blog and enable the subtitle option. However, viewing the clips on the blog may be less favoured, and YouTube or social media platforms may be useful alternatives, particularly using smartphones. According to Pérez-González (2007), emerging and developing digital platforms have changed content production and distribution and (re)shaped online users' consumption of audiovisual materials. Consequently, Autrjim were aware of this point and effectively utilised social media for sharing and distributing their products. The team's account on Twitter (@autrjim) promoted subtitled clips through short videos and images. For example, a tweet may usually contain a clip's title, the subtitler's name, a YouTube link and the promoted image or video.

As of 10 February 2020, there had been 2,834 tweets, promoting 1,784 instances of media content.² Facebook had propagated the team's media content through the team's account (@autrjim) since 24 June 2016. As of 10 February 2020, there had been a total of 1,020 images and clips representing media material on the team's Facebook page. Most of the images promote the subtitled clips' links, the subtitlers' names and the clips' titles. Statistically, the Twitter account enjoyed a considerable audience of 12.1 thousand followers, whereas the Facebook page had 3,761 followers. However, both Twitter and Facebook were the main tools for publicising and distributing the team's work. Most importantly, the team director emphasised the effective role of social media, not only for distribution but as an essential instrument to connect with the audience, respond to their inquiries and attract new members to the team. She stated that 80% of the current members joined the team through Facebook and Twitter. Thus, social media plays a vital role in popularising novice projects, attracting new members and enticing the public's appreciation of and communication with such communities.

Another important distribution tool was YouTube. Subtitled clips were organised into 26 playlists, each with a special title and various clips. In most cases, the playlist's name represented the clips' genre or carried the source channel's title. For example, the 'MinuteEarth-Translated/Autrjim Team' playlist contained clips taken and subtitled from the English MinuteEarth channel. Autrjim's YouTube account was created on 13 May 2016, attracting 1,940 subscribers with 1,081 subtitled clips (up to 10 February 2020). Notably, the team's members were not allowed to post their subtitled clips on their own YouTube channels. It was the team's strategy to only propagate subtitled clips using the team's official account on YouTube; this was a critical decision to make the team's products accessible in one place. However, the subtitlers' efforts were appreciated, and their rights to public visibility were preserved; the subtitlers' names appeared in the description section on YouTube as the 'translation creator'.

6.2. Autrjim Procedural Aspects:

The subtitling process in fansubbing communities has gone through various stages, investing in hiring different people, such as raw collectors, translators, timers, editors, typesetters and encoders. However, these roles may not be strictly relevant to digital fansubbing communities because of the changes made by digital advances in terms of subtitling software and management workflows. In Autrjim, the administration chose clips and made them available for subtitling. Raw material in Autrjim involved free, accessible clips on YouTube, which meant no infringement of rights. The subtitling, timing and typesetting phases were performed by one person. One translator handled all these stages through YouTube, where he/she added

Initially, the team posted regular articles on the blog, including subtitled clips with short prologues or descriptions.

subtitles, adjusted timing and applied typesetting styles. The editing process was performed by reviewers and proofreaders. In addition to using YouTube for subtitling and spotting, Autrjim supported its members by investing in and using many free online programs for other supplementary stages.

6.2.1. Using the Management Platform 'Trello'

Autrjim oversaw and managed the subtitling process through Trello, a web-based (and mobile) project management program. Trello's interface is characterised by lists, which represent tasks. These lists contain multiple cards and are given certain names to indicate the progress and workflow of the team. For example, there is a list containing a group of clips from which a subtitler chooses a clip and starts subtitling via YouTube. Trello is used to make the process of assigning tasks and supervising their completion easier and faster. The team also used Trello for monitoring proofreading, reviewing processes, giving feedback and checking deadlines.

The editing process went through three stages: the first review, the second review and the final proofreading stage. Each stage had to be completed before the next and had to be assigned to different members. First, the reviewers worked on editing the subtitlers' work, correcting any mistakes and giving feedback. The reviewer was concerned with mistakes in the translation itself, such as an inaccurate rendering of expressions. Both reviewing stages had the same purpose. The two reviewing stages are arguably based on the expectation that there will be different mistakes made by amateur subtitlers. Reviewers themselves may also vary in expertise and, therefore, may not notice some mistakes in the first review, hence the existence of a second review. There were no criteria for who should work on the first or second review; any reviewer could choose any available clip and start the task. At least two reviewers had to fulfil the task and move the clip to the proofreading stage.

Even though the two reviewing steps seemed effective, the team still imposed a proofreading stage, an important component in addressing the issue of poor quality in nonprofessional translation. The task of proofreaders differed from that of reviewers in that proofreaders were responsible for ensuring the lexical and syntactical accuracy of the Arabic translation. Word order, lexical choices and correct Arabic syntax were among the aspects to be checked in this phase. Even though YouTube facilitates the timing process, it does not help subtitlers detect other spatial and temporal parameters. Such important issues are not part of the reviewing and proofreading processes. Thus, integrating a separate stage to check the accuracy of subtitlers' spatial and temporal conventions was important, which could be assigned to the reviewers or proofreaders. After approving subtitled clips by proofreaders, they were moved to a list named 'Done', waiting for posting on social media and the team's blog.

6.2.2. Using YouTube for Subtitling

After the subtitler chose a clip from Trello, the process of adding subtitles started through YouTube's TimedText service. This allowed a subtitler to select a target language, add subtitles, adjust timing and synchronisation, and submit the task for review. These clear, simple instructions, along with an organised interface, helped amateur subtitlers learn how to subtitle. YouTube allowed users to work effectively, as the clip's timing adjuster and text editor appeared in the main interface. While the subtitler added subtitles in the target language, the source language subtitles could be viewed and checked by playing the clip. Subtitlers could also save the work as a draft and

(1) Autrjim's blog: <https://autrjim.wordpress.com/>

(2) These figures were collected and updated during the team's active period, as they stopped subtitling in 2020 due to YouTube's decision to end its captioning service and community contribution in the same year.

edit it later. These characteristics made YouTube's TimedText an affordable and easy-to-use platform for subtitling, specifically for nonprofessional and amateur subtitlers.

To standardise subtitling and assist new members and amateur subtitlers to at least produce readable subtitles, Autrjim provided some simple guidelines and recommendations. These were not inclusive but were essential for the subtitling process to reduce poor quality. First, a concise list of subtitling conventions was uploaded to Trello, via which subtitling's spatial and temporal conventions were simplified. Another file highlighted the most frequent mistakes made in Arabic writing and syntax to be avoided. While these two files might have not entirely solved readability and quality issues, they did contribute to a greater understanding among subtitlers about the need to minimise and avoid critical errors.

6.2.3. Using the Messaging Service 'Telegram'

Messaging services were important instruments for Autrjim's members to share opinions, communicate with other members and discuss problems and solutions. Autrjim used different messaging services based on their characteristics and suitability for the members. Services such as 'Line' and 'Slack' were used for a short time before members preferred to use 'Telegram' as a chatting and communication channel. Telegram was viewed as a suitable and easy-to-use service, providing a more flexible and comfortable environment than Line or Slack. Telegram allows for the exchange of texts, videos, audios, images and files. These features were effective for both Autrjim's administration and members. Both public and private channels were created for different purposes. The public channel allowed all members to discuss concerns, write suggestions and share and exchange files and resources. One clear advantage was that it allowed the members to feel comfortable discussing their translation problems and seeking solutions from other members. The private channel was restricted to announcements and updates. Most members benefitted from the messaging service not only for communication purposes but also in finding helpful solutions for linguistic and technical challenges during the subtitling process.

6.3. Members' Reflections on Autrjim:

Autrjim members reflected on many aspects, showcasing their opinions, motivations and preferences. Fifty-eight members participated in a questionnaire and provided their insightful points of view. It was expected to find differences between Autrjim's main goal, as a unified community, and the personal goals of the members. However, social motivations prevailed among most of Autrjim's members. Fifty-nine per cent of the members stated that their motive, or at least one of their motives, was to share knowledge. This unified goal, shared by both members and the community, may have helped them collaborate more to achieve this intended goal. Nonetheless, personal goals were prominent among members. Learning new skills, improving English, engaging with experienced members and performing subtitling were some of the personal goals that many members joined Autrjim for.

Any community needs to connect with its members and benefit from their suggestions and recommendations. Autrjim was represented by multinational and experienced members. Thus, it attempted to hear their voices through chatting and messaging services. Reflections on Autrjim's administrative and organisational performances were two critical aspects that the questionnaire focused on to observe the degree of satisfaction among members. As for clip selection, more than 90% of the team members agreed with the selection criteria applied. However, the subtitlers were given the chance to choose clips and subtitle their favourite topics. The subtitlers prioritised clip genre, the availability of original subtitles, conformity with target

culture norms, linguistic simplicity and clip duration. The subtitlers were responsible for choosing clips, ensuring the accuracy of translation as much as possible and meeting deadlines. In terms of translation strategies, it was also the subtitlers' responsibility to translate accurately and adopt suitable strategies, such as condensing, simplifying terms and omitting. Most members preferred to preserve the source text and not intervene, whether by deleting or modifying.

Regarding the rewarding system applied by the team, almost half of the members agreed with the current system and thus acknowledged the nature of the voluntary community as a non-profit institution. However, some members suggested possible ways to reward and motivate members. For example, one suggestion was to allow members to post their work on their blogs or YouTube accounts. This idea was viewed by Autrjim's administration as ineffective since posting clips in the team's public accounts was easily searchable and accessible. Members were always credited and mentioned in the clips' information. In sum, Autrjim's members were satisfied with the application of a wide range of software and services, through which they could work easily and communicate effectively. They also appreciated the use of modern and flexible services that they can access from their smartphones anytime and anywhere. Trello, Telegram, Facebook and Twitter can be accessed from smartphones, which makes the process of communication and managing work easier and more effective.

7. The Fall of Autrjim and Its Implications

The development and change of digital media are predictable, given the many factors influencing their policies and regulations. Many reports have discussed and analysed this change in policies. For example, Stokel-Walker (2024) and Katzenbach *et al.* (2023) reflect on the changing policies of social media platforms, including YouTube, between 2005 and 2021 due to negative news about these media. Relevant to this study, YouTube has frequently updated and changed its policy on using and creating videos on the platform, as explained below. YouTube rebranded its service 'YouTube Premium' in 2018 and announced 'YouTube Music' as a new service, indicating the platform's search for economic capital. In addition, the socio-digital dynamics of social media have impacted users' engagement, manipulated their opinions and influenced their content production and distribution (Ausat, 2023; Meghana and Chavali, 2023; Srikanth *et al.*, 2021).

Thus, online non-profit communities and volunteer teams are expected to encounter various problems, putting their continuity and progress at stake. The constant changes in and development of new laws and policies by digital platforms exemplify the obstacles that online fansubbing and crowdsourced communities may face. In the case of Autrjim, they were dependent on the free and open captioning service and community contribution provided by YouTube. However, in late 2020, YouTube announced its decision to disable community contribution, disallowing YouTube users from adding subtitles to clips. Thus, Autrjim had no alternative and decided to terminate their subtitling project. On contacting Autrjim's administration, they stated that they explored other options, including contacting the creators and owners of certain channels, but to no avail.

The analysis of Autrjim's case could illustrate a number of relevant implications for online fansubbing communities. First, organising translation projects and preserving their continuity is a challenging task. In other words, preserving the members of the fansubbing community and ensuring their effective participation and engagement in a non-monetary activity is an important factor for the survival of such a community. Autrjim succeeded in attracting some

members, but at times, there were only two or three active fansubbers who did most of the translation and editing tasks. Even though the workflow was organised, the rewarding system was not likely sufficient to retain the members. Second, the changing policies and dynamics of social media platforms are other factors hindering online fansubbing communities from producing and sharing content easily and for free. Many social media platforms are transforming into subscription-based tools, requiring users to pay to use tailored services for producing and distributing AVT content. The cases of YouTube and X (formerly Twitter) are but two examples relevant to this study. The outcome of this second factor is the fall of communities that rely on free tools to share AVT content and do not generate money from such activities. The third implication is the legality of creating dedicated websites to showcase the subtitled content of a community such as Autrjim. Not all communities can create such websites for technical and financial reasons, not to mention the possibility of being blocked for infringements of rights.

These implications pose this question: Are the changing dynamics of social media hindering the easy and effective production and distribution of free content made by fans? Arguably, it appears true to claim that the monetisation of social media is forcing users to be less active, creative and willing to share and produce AVT content. This is possibly the simplest and most direct answer to this question, considering the case at hand. However, future research could assess the impact of recent and continuous dynamics of digital media on the free creation of AVT content and UGC.

8. Conclusion

This article investigated the institutional strategies applied by Autrjim, as an online fansubbing community, including the administrative and structural system implemented. It discussed critical points, such as criteria for memberships, enrolment tests, clips selection and publishing, and the reward system. It then analysed the process of managing the crowds, subtitling, reviewing, proofreading and internal communication. The application of digital software and services was highlighted, with emphasis on their effectiveness and important role in facilitating workflow and communication. The article concluded with personal accounts and responses from Autrjim's members, disclosing their opinions and motivations.

Finally, a group of significant remarks can be concluded. Autrjim's work can be viewed as an online institution, which depended on fans who were willing to be part of this voluntary community to achieve both social and personal goals. Autrjim's administration was willing to comply with widely accepted subtitling norms and ensure the quality of the subtitled clips through filtering tests, a list of simplified guidelines and strict editing stages. This remarkable effort could not have been achieved without the use of efficient technologies, which helped the subtitlers during the subtitling process, provided the administration with tools for managing and controlling the crowd, and promoted internal and external communication within the community and with the public. It is essential to acknowledge the community's wide dependence on social media platforms that propagate their work, engage with society through advertisement and ultimately increase their visibility as a collective entity and individual subtitlers. It is also important to note the mutual relationship among the community members and their high degree of satisfaction towards the team's administrative decisions and criteria. This could be regarded as a sign of mutual understanding, effective regulations and constant communication via voting and discussing. Another important outcome was the sudden policy change of YouTube, which led Autrjim to terminate their useful project. Autrjim did not expect such an abrupt development, which

may suggest that such online communities need to be alert and prepared for similar changes. Plans and alternatives should be discussed and implemented whenever possible and affordable.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author.

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