Article

Mapping Subtitling in KSA in Relation to Saudi Vision 2030: A Sociological and Historical Analysis

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ABSTRACT

The production and consumption of subtitled content in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) have undergone various developments, experiencing periods of both progress and decline. However, this topic is largely ignored and insufficiently researched. Consequently, this paper addresses this lack of detailed socio-historical research into the cultural production of subtitling in KSA. It therefore traces the trajectories of subtitling as a social practice, examining the external and internal factors that (re) shape its dynamics since the 1950s. Inspired by technological and socio-cultural developments, subtitling is analysed in this paper as a social field, inhabited by various agents who deploy different strategies to accumulate capital. Adopting a qualitative approach and building on the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu, this paper analysed the subtitling field according to three historical periods. Following this thematic and periodisation analysis, each period documents the external factors influencing the development of the field and identifies the main agents along with their motivations and position-takings. To ensure the reliability and validity of research, triangulation of data sources and methods is adopted. Data are collected from archival sources, observation, published reports, audiovisual content and previous studies. The application of this sociological analysis provides an in-depth understanding of the evolving nature of the subtitling field concerning the concept of power. More importantly, the study of this social field assesses the influence of Saudi Vision 2030 (SV2030) on the cultural production in KSA, including subtitling. This paper concludes that the socio-cultural developments promoted by SV2030 have been crucial in restructuring the field's dynamics, leading to significant changes in audiovisual production and consumption. The analysis suggests that 2016 marked a distinctive era for subtitling in KSA, compared to previous periods and developments. The paper contributes to the ongoing discussion on sociological approaches in translation studies by focusing on the application of Bourdieu's theory to audiovisual translation. It extends the application of this theory to the digital forms of translation, emphasising the usefulness of Bourdieu's sociology to digital fields.

I. INTRODUCTION

Audiovisual production and distribution in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) have been influenced by numerous developments and factors. Since the introduction of the first television in the 1950s, subtitling has been an integral part of the broadcasting, distribution, and consumption of audiovisual content in KSA (Al-Dawsary, 2005; Alsobaihi, 2011). The proliferation of subtitling has faced various challenges and has been (re)shaped by multiple national, regional, and international developments. Several eco-political, socio-cultural and religious factors have influenced the progress of audiovisual production

in KSA, including subtitling. More importantly, the influence of technological advancements on subtitling has significantly raised the consumption of subtitled content and supported the involvement of various agents producing and broadcasting this content. It is essential to clarify that KSA has been a conservative nation, upholding Islamic values, cultural traditions, and translation norms (doxa, as discussed below). The broadcasting, distribution, and consumption of audiovisual materials have had to adhere to the country's religious and cultural norms, imposed and monitored through dedicated official institutions such as the Ministry of Media, the Ministry of Culture, and the General Commission for Audiovisual Media. The reception and engagement of the Saudi audience with media developments have witnessed diverse viewpoints and changes, mostly (re)shaped by the religious and social stance of the field of power, specifically the field of religion (Al-Garni, 2000; Campbell, 2007; Al-Khudair, 2019).

The development of Audiovisual Translation (AVT) in KSA has remained largely understudied, except by a few scholars who have examined the status of AVT in the Arab World as a whole. Although there has been growing interest in AVT in the Arab World, this interest remains superficial and scattered. Gamal (2019) highlights how AVT is still marginal in academic programmes and research agendas across the region. Similarly, Al-Adwan (2019) points to the slow and uneven development of AVT research, which often focuses narrowly on linguistic or cultural challenges. Studies that explore subtitling in particular (e.g., Khuddro, 2000; Gamal, 2008; Thawabteh, 2013; Al-Adwan, 2015; Al-Adwan and Yahiaoui, 2018) tend to prioritise issues of language transfer, humour translation, and audience reception, while neglecting the broader sociological dimensions of subtitling as a cultural practice. In the Saudi context, a noticeable absence remains in the studies that investigate the historical development, institutional dynamics, or power relations underlying subtitling production and consumption. Moreover, other AVT modes such as dubbing, SDH, and audio description are similarly underexplored. This paper addresses that gap by offering a socio-historical analysis of subtitling in KSA through the lens of Bourdieu's field theory, thereby contributing a new dimension to the limited body of AVT scholarship in the region.

Mapping the history of subtitling in KSA necessitates an examination of its early stages, considering the numerous developments that have led to its progress and evolution. Such sociological inquiry is needed to understand the external factors influencing the subtitling field in KSA, which have not been comprehensively documented. Although a number of studies have examined the broader different fields of translation as cultural production in Saudi Arabia—often from institutional, ideological, or socio-cultural perspectives (Alkhamis, 2012, 2019; Alsairy, 2016; Alshehri, 2019, 2020)—none have focused specifically on subtitling as a structured and historically evolving field. In parallel, the development of Saudi cinema, television, and audiovisual production more generally has been well documented (e.g., Almakaty, 1995; Al-Dawsary, 2005; Alsobaihi, 2011; Alastaa, 2013; Al-Dhuwaihy, 2014; Almadi, 2015; Alsayed, 2020; Al-Madani, 2022), yet the role of subtitling within this ecosystem remains curiously absent from scholarly attention. This is particularly striking given that subtitling is the most widely used form of audiovisual translation in the Arab World, including in KSA (Gamal, 2020). By foregrounding subtitling as a social field, this study addresses that scholarly omission and situates it within the wider socio-historical dynamics of audiovisual production in Saudi Arabia.

To map the history of subtitling in KSA, this study employs a sociological inquiry into subtitling practice in KSA. It adopts Bourdieu's theorisation of social fields which requires tracing their existence and historical trajectory and identifying their dynamics and structure. Many scholars have written extensively on the sociology of translation, addressing different sociological approaches including Bourdieu's theory of social practice (see for example, Hanna, 2005, 2006; Wolf and Fukari, 2007; Buzelin, 2011, 2013; Angelelli, 2014; Khalifa, 2017, Sapiro, 2014, among others). A field, in Bourdieu's sociology, refers to socially structured spaces that have specific boundaries, and varying degrees of autonomy and homology (Bourdieu, 1991). In other words, a field is 'a network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 97). Thus, fields are bounded social spaces whose autonomy is (re)shaped by external factors such as the field of power (i.e., politics, religion, or economy). A field is relatively autonomous and shares homologous relations with other fields

(Bourdieu 1988). The field of translation in KSA, for example, has homologous relations with the fields of publishing and of cultural production, and is influenced by the field of power.

A social field is a field of '*forces* but also a *field of struggles*' which shape the objective relation between the field members (i.e., agents) and inform their strategies considering their positions in the field (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 30, italics in original). In a given field, there are positions (vacant roles), which the field agents strive to occupy using their position-takings (forms of strategies) to secure central or peripheral positions in the field. The outcome of this competition and struggle informs the internal structure of the field, rendering it dynamic and amenable to change. The competition over different forms of capital results in dominant or dominated agents in the field that try to preserve or change their positions based on their position-takings and habitus. Both capital and habitus are integral components for the field's operation and activity. The position-takings are significantly influenced by agents' habitus, dispositions and social experiences. Consequently, agents are motivated to accumulate, expand, or preserve certain forms of capital, or forms of resources. Bourdieu (1986, p. 241) emphasised that capital is 'accumulated labour', highlighting its historical merit and the need for long competition and struggle to gain capital, which are necessary elements for the field operation and dynamic structure.

Bourdieu refers to three main forms of capital: economic, cultural, and social. He speaks of symbolic capital which other forms ultimately adopt, and which can conditionally provide economic returns (Bourdieu, 1987, 1993). Under certain circumstances, any form of capital is transferable in the long run into economic capital. In social fields, there is an important element called doxa, which could be defined as 'generally accepted opinions or commonly shared beliefs and knowledge' (Khalifa, 2017, p. 64). Bourdieu emphasises the importance of the doxa in any field referring to it as 'system of presuppositions inherent in membership in a field' (Bourdieu, 2005, p. 37). Doxa represent the implicit 'rules of the game' (Maton, 2008, p. 54) that agents follow (un)consciously. Doxa could be explained as 'fundamental beliefs' that do not require explicit assertion as 'self-conscious dogma' (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 166). It refers therefore to the process of naturalising of everything in a field which social agents do not question or express (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 166).

Therefore, this paper traces the historical trajectory of the emergence and evolution of subtitling in KSA since the 1950s. It portrays subtitling as a social practice that has demonstrated a shifting structure and that has been occupied by various social agents. Thus, this paper recognises subtitling in KSA as a social field, (re)shaped by numerous external factors leading to its change and development and informing its internal dynamics and relations with other social fields. The subtitling field in KSA is therefore examined and analysed following a sociological framework which helps in understanding the field's dynamics and structure over designated periods. The significance of this paper lies in the documentation of a less studied topic, and in the analysis of the field considering the impacts of SV2030, a national transformational policy, on the field's development. The following sections will explain the theoretical framework and methodology implemented and provide in-depth analysis of the field's dynamics before and after 2015, which marks the announcement of SV2030 and the beginning of a new era in KSA.

II. METHODS

Study Design

This study implements a qualitative approach to map and trace the trajectory of the studied social field. In particular, it adopts a sociological and historical mapping and tracing of the subtitling field through the lens of sociological inquiry and observation. The sociology of Bourdieu and his notion of 'field' guides and inspires the analysis and discussion of the collected data.

Sources of data

This study derives its data from qualitative and observational sources. It is designed to answer sociological phenomena and provide interpretation to the practice of the subtitling in KSA. Following the theoretical framework, this paper adopts Bourdieusian sociology as a methodological and analytical tool. In particular, the main foci of this study are the analysis of the field of subtitling in KSA and the identification of its main agents and dynamics. Thus, the studied subjects are the field, as a structure, and its members or agents. The

trace of the field facilitates the identification of the observed agents, as participants. It is important to note that the agents operate in the field and therefore have a direct relation to the cultural production in KSA. In other words, they are (re)shaped by the Saudi culture and social norms. In discussing the field, it is necessary to discuss the forms of capital observed and accumulated by its agents. This paper emphasises the importance of presenting a detailed and comprehensive sociological analysis of the field of subtitling in KSA. However, due to the spatial constraints and scope of the study, this paper will focus primarily on the main characteristics of the field and the critical developments that (re) shaped its trajectory and structure. Therefore, it is essential to foreground the boundaries of the field and the scope of analysis. This study asserts that the 1950s marked the emergence of the subtitling field in KSA in line with the introduction of TV and cinema and other forms of audiovisual production in subsequent years. To validate the data and to develop a comprehensive understanding of the subtitling field in KSA, this study triangulates data from different resources and in various forms, as shown in the previous section.

Data collection

The boundaries of the field under discussion are therefore from the 1950s until 2023, as per the data collection timeframe and the received grant. The collected data were composed of published works and historical accounts on audiovisual production in KSA, online articles on the socio-cultural developments in KSA and posted blogs, videos or posts on social media. Online resources were important as a result of the lack of sufficient published writings on the subject. Observation and sociological enquiry were the two main tools of collecting data.

Periodical and historical analysis

To facilitate the field analysis, three periods were identified, with each one drawing on relevant developments, primarily technological, eco-political, and socio-cultural. Each period examined the external (i.e., the socio-cultural and eco-political factors) and internal (i.e., the agents) dynamics of the field. The analysis follows a thematic and periodical structure, inspired by the theoretical framework and sociological studies. Finally, the whole dynamics of the field will be discussed, compared and analysed in Section Four.

III. RESULTS

The first period (1950s-1980s)

Since the unification of KSA in 1932, local cultural production experienced various turns and has been influenced by numerous factors. The production of AVT in KSA has always been interlinked with audiovisual production in other Arab countries such as Egypt and Lebanon (Gamal, 2007, 2013, 2020). However, AVT in KSA has been (re)shaped by different external factors which influenced its process and dynamics. The first of these factors was the country's economic progress, starting with the discovery of oil in the late 1930s. Becoming a global oil producer was undoubtedly a significant factor in fostering cultural production in KSA. The indirect outcomes of oil production on audiovisual production were important. First, the California Arabian Standard Oil Company (changed later to Saudi Aramco in the 1980s) was the company in charge of oil surveying and production, and became an integral part of Saudi society in the eastern region, where the company headquarters was based.

The second outcome of oil production was the socio-cultural change that Saudi Aramco inspired by being an effective member of Saudi society. In 1957, the first Arabic-language TV station was launched in KSA, Aramco TV. It was 'the second oldest Arabic-language television station in the Middle East' (Baghdad TV was the first Arabic-language TV in the Middle East, aired in 1956), which broadcasted daily educational and recreational programmes 'for its 100,000 viewers in Saudi Arabia' (Aramco World, 1963, p. 2). This station provided Arabic, English, and subtitled shows and was the main source of entertainment in the covered areas, given the restricted nature of terrestrial TV and broadcasting technologies at that time.

According to Al-Dawsary (2005), Aramco TV broadcasted English shows only in response to the launch of Saudi TV. It is unknown whether these English shows were subtitled, but the social role played by Aramco TV was prominent in introducing and promoting audiovisual production and AVT in KSA. By analysing some of the programmes made available by Aramco TV, there appear two important contributions of the station to audiovisual production in KSA, as shown in Table 1. First, Aramco TV promoted non-Arabic content, including American shows, films, and

Table 1: A summary of Aramco TV's programmes.

Programme Type/ Purpose	Examples
Culture-oriented programmes	• Quran recitations
	• Local news
	• Sport coverage (e.g., Telesport Digest)
Films & series (English language, mostly American)	• Checkmate (1935)
	• The Adventure of Ozzie and Harriet (1952)
	• I Search for Adventure (1954)
	• Perry Mason (1957)
	• Whirlybirds (1957)
	• Sea Hunt (1958)
	• Rawhide (1959)
Educational (tailored to Saudis and produced by Aramco)	• Channel 2 Bookshelf
	• Your Home
	• Auto School
	• Your Health
	• Agricultural Show
	• Science Classroom
	• Modern Biology (an American TV series)
Recreational (Arabic shows)	• Three District Quiz
	• A Cup of Coffee
Specials	• Arab World Men of the Letters
	• The Island of Arabia (historical documentary)

series. Even though it was an important tool for cultural exchange, the station was aware of KSA's religious and cultural norms (Aramco World, 1963). Second, Aramco TV encouraged, or rather pushed, the Saudi government to establish its own TV and invest in audiovisual production and broadcasting.

While these early positive developments were critical, it is important to clarify the relevance of religion and culture on audiovisual and cultural production in KSA. As observed by Nevo (1998), KSA has been one of the most conservative nations in the world, which upholds firm religious and cultural values, inspired by Islamic and social norms. Religious opinion is respected by most Saudis and supported by institutional orders and laws (Almaglooth, 2013). Therefore, when religious discourse was against the introduction of TV (or other forms of audiovisual production), the majority of Saudi society was expected to follow this stance. Thus, Saudi society has experienced a complex and 'fascinated process of negotiation related to technology' and audiovisual production (Campbell, 2007, p. 201). To clarify, the religious opinion was often based on the argument that tools of audiovisual production and dissemination (i.e., TV, cinema, video cassette, DVDs, etc) were 'western tools' (Alghannam, 2020, p. 122) for Americanisation and promotion of immorality (Al-Madani, 2022). Thus, Aramco TV was presumably

viewed as one such tool, leading to the necessary establishment of a local TV station according to the prevalent religious and socio-cultural norms in KSA.

Saudi TV was therefore launched in 1965, as a form of 'innocent entertainment', a platform for supervised and censored content that adhered to the local laws of audiovisual production and religious regulations (Alsobaihi, 2011, p. 103). Saudi TV has become an important source of entertainment and broadcasting of foreign content, particularly considering the closure of cinemas in 1979 following certain local incidents and strong religious and socio-cultural views (Alsayed, 2008; Alyosef, 2020). Cinema was opened during the 1960s-1970s. They were introduced by foreign embassies (Alastaa, 2013), but were primarily limited to elite, foreign companies, or home-based cinema. As part of the developmental plans of the Saudi Broadcasting Authority and the wider broadcasting sector in KSA, Saudi TV 2 (STV2) was launched in 1983, among other channels in different years, to communicate initially with the growing number of non-Arabic speakers residing and working in KSA (Al-Garni, 2000). It was an English-language channel that broadcasted various shows, films, and news until 2017. While there have been little data available on the history of STV2, it offered subtitled and dubbed programmes. As a state-governed TV station, it was strictly (re)shaped by

Table 2: A Simplified List of STV2 English Programmes

Genre	Number of Programme
Cartoons	140
Drama	50
Comedy	43
Children Shows	37
Game Shows	9
Documentary	6
Education	3
Sports	3
Reality Shows	2
Sci-fi	2
Anthologies	1
Cooking Shows	1
Crime/Horror	1
Magic	1
Soap Opera	1
Total	300 Programmes.

religious and political discourse in KSA, or the field of power. STV2 had to adhere to the regulations imposed on broadcasting and media. These regulations emphasised the importance of not broadcasting audiovisual content showing sexual scenes, violence, or immodest women. Al-Garni (2000) and Alsobaihi (2011) discuss these regulations which include upholding religious, cultural, and social norms, and censoring scenes that did not agree with these norms.

The era of terrestrial TV, such as Aramco TV and STV2, was important as these two agents paved the way for developing audiovisual broadcasting, promoting AVT, and importing more foreign content. Subtitling was present in the products of these two agents. However, these agents were still largely restricted by the governmental regulations and the spatiotemporal perspectives in that time. Given the arrival of new technologies, home video entertainment became an integral part of the subtitling field in KSA in the 1980s-1990s. The introduction of recording devices and video players such as VHS, videotapes, and later versions (e.g., VCR, CDs, DVDs) were vital for providing accessible, easy-to-use, less censored, and alternative means of entertainment. Saudis were able to enjoy and share copies of films or loan cassettes from rental stores, given the expensive price of VHS during that period (Al-Dhuwaihy, 2014).

According to Basfar (2007), people in KSA watched more recorded content (i.e., on VHS, DVD, etc.) than TV, due to the lack of diverse and abundant programmes to suit all tastes and ages. The relative success of home video entertainment in a conservative country such as KSA was potentially a result of what Hegghammer and Lacroix (2007, p. 103) called 'a limited liberalization' during the late 1990s. The proliferation of home video entertainment could be ascribed to the inclusion of subtitling at a later stage due to customers' demands (Al-Dhuwaihy, 2014). Although the subtitling process is undocumented in this period, American movies were among the most favourable genre featuring subtitling.

This first period represented the emergence and developments of the homologous and interlinked fields of both audiovisual production and subtitling in KSA. The dynamics of the subtitling field were (re)shaped and restructured according to several eco-political, socio-cultural, and religious factors. As a result, three agents (i.e., Aramco TV, STV2 and video rental agencies) were apparent and active during the 1950s-1980s. Aramco TV (1957-1989) was a product of the economic plan in KSA, but contributed to introducing TV and AVT to the country, leading to the later establishment of Saudi TV. Aramco TV was aware of the doxa of the audiovisual production and subtitling fields. Therefore, the station seemed to pursue social and symbolic capital, which was clear from their broadcasting of Quran recitations. Aramco World (1963, p. 5) states that Aramco TV attempted to 'avoid all program material that might offend custom or religious tradition'. Following a vast economic boom from 1974-1985, many development plans were introduced leading to the launch of STV2 (1983-2017). It is important to emphasise the impacts of globalisation, modernity, and global ideologies on cultural production in KSA. According to Alghathami (2005), conservatism and modernity were two competing ideologies, with the former strongly dominant. He contends that KSA experienced a 'heated' religious and socio-cultural ideological debate in the 1980s. All of these factors were critical in (re)shaping the progress and dynamics of subtitling in KSA. Censorship, (dis)allowing certain programmes to be shown, or opposing audiovisual and film production entirely were but examples of this prolonged debate.

However, subtitling was a powerful position-taking strategy for Aramco TV and STV2 to expand, maintain, or improve their positions and forms of capital in the subtitling field (as well as in other fields). Unlike Aramco TV and STV2, rental

agencies (for videotapes and DVDs) were primarily pursuing an economic capital. Their importance for the field of subtitling was their competition with these two agents who pursued social and symbolic capital. The internal structure of the subtitling field was influenced by the position-takings of these three agents during the first period. It was largely heteronomous, being dependant on the field of audiovisual production and the field of media, and widely impacted by the field of power (the external factors). Each agent dominated for specific periods, but STV2 and rental agencies continued to be present, although less significant, in the following period. The appearance of new technological advancements in the late 1990s and 2000s altered competition in the field and introduced new agents and dynamics.

The second period: 1990s-early 2010s

The late 1990s and the beginning of the 21st century introduced significant technological tools and (re)shaped the process of producing, consuming, and distributing audiovisual content. Regarding KSA, three important technological developments influenced the dynamics of the subtitling field and introduced new agents to it. The first development was access to the Internet. It was initially allowed for governmental purposes in 1993, then approved for public usage in 1998-1999 (Al-Tawil, 2001; Al-Hajery, 2004). According to Alshahrani (2016), the Saudi government was hesitant to allow public usage of the Internet, which caused this long delay in comparison to other countries. As illustrated in Figure 1, the number of Internet users increased significantly in the following eleven years, reaching approximately 11.4 million users in 2010 (CITC, 2010). One of the main reasons

for this vast growth was that the Internet became an essential source of entertainment and content consumption. Discussion forums were prominent during the 2000s where their users engaged with various topics, reaching around 2,500 forums in 2004 (Alzaid, 2020). Given the closure of cinemas and limited film production and consumption in KSA, film-based forums were created to discuss cinema and films. According to Almutairy (2016), this absence of active audiovisual production led to the emergence of a community of fans, and inspired many to be film directors, scenario writers, and similar.

With the development of Web 2.0, online users were able to upload videos. Among the many features presented by Web 2.0, it enables creating online communities (i.e., via blogs, forums, social media, etc), providing them with tools to create and share content. User-generated content (UGC), video hosting websites, wikis, web applications and improved user experience in sharing information and advertising products are all but a few examples of techniques presented by Web 2.0. Thus, fansubbing websites started to become an important resource for watching new films and series from different cultures and languages. UGC and user-generated translation (UGT) became achievable with Web 2.0 as movie fansubbers started to build their own dedicated websites for fans of films. While this area is still widely unstudied in the Arabic context, there are many Arabic-based fansubbing websites that became visible and available to most users. For example, EgyBest (إيجي بست) has been one of the most active websites- and has seen multiple versions and names to avoid censorship and blocking in KSA and elsewhere. In KSA, the Saudi Authority for Intellectual Property has started strongly tracing and blocking these websites (Alarab, 2021; SAIPspokesman, 2021). However, it is
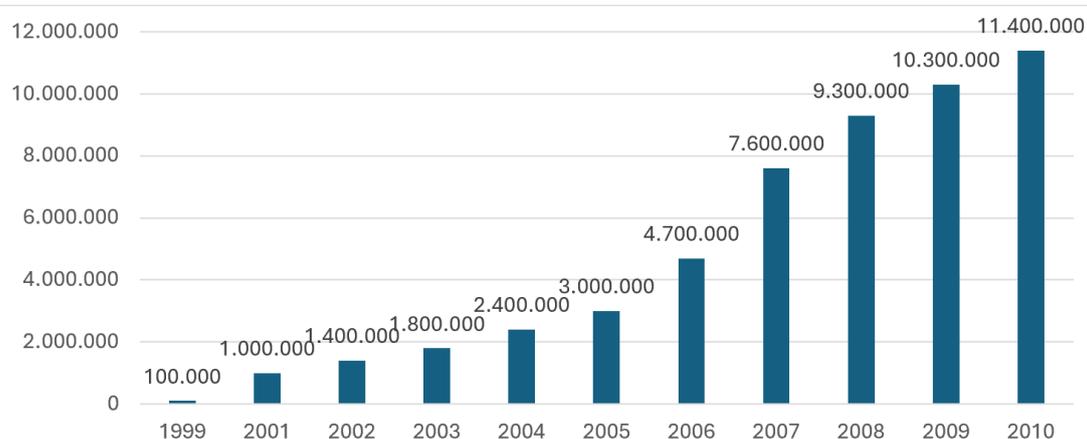
Figure 1: Internet users in KSA in the 2000s according to CITC.

argued that fansubbing websites have been an important source of subtitled content in KSA, and have competed with other media platforms to obtain a wider audience and more users. Movie fansubbing has promoted UGT in KSA and led to the emergence of other forms of fansubbing, such as social media fansubbing, which is discussed later.

While the Internet was inspiring UGC and shifting people's behaviours of production and consumption, the second development in the subtitling field emerged. The expansion and renovation of satellite TV in the Arab World during the 2000s encouraged private TV stations to expand and appeal to people's needs (see Al-Grani, 2000; ASBU, 2016; Gaboor, 2017 on satellite TV in KSA and the Arab World). Moreover, Al-Garni (2000) argues that Saudi TV (as a public state outlet), including STV2, was disinterested in changing its programmes and considering people's tastes, which may have allowed the proliferation of online content and private TV. By 2010, there were 37 private channels in comparison to five public channels. Among those private channels was MBC Group, the Middle East Broadcasting Company. It was launched in 1991 in London before moving to the United Arab Emirates in 2002 and opening its new headquarters in Saudi Arabia in 2022. It advertises its service as 'the largest and leading media company in the Middle East and North Africa' (as shown on its website). It has 13 free-to-air channels, and an Arabic streaming platform called Shahid. MBC Group dedicates four channels to subtitled content from English to Arabic, accessible to the Arabic audience. MBC2, MBC4, MBC Action, and MBC Max have been broadcasting subtitled shows since 2003. The prominence of MBC Group is multifaceted, but part of its visibility was the support, endorsement, and indirect funding that it has received from the Saudi royal family (Alterman, 1998; MBC Roots, 2017).

Another reason was the relatively unorthodox approach that the MBC Group has adopted, becoming an example of liberal values and frequently opposing the prevailing norms of the subtitling and audiovisual fields in KSA. The MBC Group has faced criticism from many educators and scholars in KSA, being accused of intentionally promoting moral degeneracy and corrupting the youth in Islamic-based countries, such as KSA (see Alredwani, 2003; Lafi, 2013; Zafran, 2015). However, MBC Group has become one of the leading platforms for subtitled content in KSA, since its launch as the 'first private non-encrypted Arabic satellite channel' (Media Ownership Monitor Egypt, 2019). To compete with other agents, MBC Group claims to be 'the best venue for Arab viewers' by providing the latest regional and international releases and exclusives, including a wide range of subtitled genres (MBC no date). In doing so, the MBC Group has been attempting to accumulate objectified cultural capital and symbolic capital by subtitling award-winning films, featuring Oscar-winning actors, and presenting itself as the home of exclusives, as frequently showcased on its websites and commercials.

Following the spread of satellite TV and private channels, another form of UGC proliferated, influencing the dynamics of audiovisual production and subtitling in KSA. Video-sharing platforms became a virtual cinema for Saudi content producers, fans, and consumers. YouTube, in particular, was a prominent example in the early 2010s, which Saudi users utilised to create short films, talk shows, or comic episodes, tackling various socio-cultural topics in KSA (Alastaa, 2013). YouTube gained wide usage in KSA, becoming the country's most visited platform in 2012 and providing
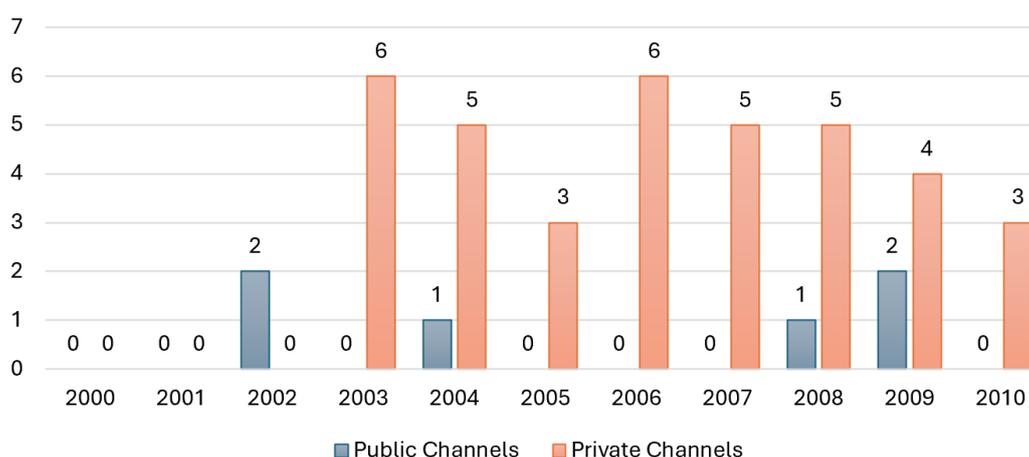

Figure 2: New public vs private satellite channels in KSA in the 2000s.

social and economic capital for Saudi YouTubers (Aleqtesadiah, 2012). While most Saudi shows made on YouTube were in Arabic, a few shows included subtitles. More importantly, YouTube enabled community members to add subtitles, resulting in a new wave of fansubbing by individuals and teams. For example, Altalidi (2017) analyses the subtitling activity of a Saudi voluntary team, called *Autrjim* (أترجم), which added subtitles to selected YouTube videos using the subtitling tools offered on the platform. Arguably, YouTube has been a starting point for social media fansubbing, which has since expanded to social media, promoting new dynamics and paratexts. Both private TV and UGC producers on YouTube have continued to be the primary agents of the subtitling field after the mid-2010s. However, several developments have (re)shaped the field's dynamics since 2015, leading to the appearance of new agents and diverse competition. The dynamics of the subtitling field were significantly restructured by the introduction of SV2030, along with its economic and socio-cultural initiatives and projects.

The third period: Post-2015 and Saudi Vision 2030

Aiming to transform the economy of KSA, SV2030 was announced in 2016, marking a crucial new era in the modern history of KSA on all levels. This vision aims to produce 'a vibrant society, thriving economy and ambitious nation' through the implementation of various projects and objectives (Vision 2030, no date). Geopolitically, SV2030 emphasises the importance of KSA's central position within the Islamic and Arab worlds, as well as its global role in facilitating trade between Asia, Africa, and Europe. The term 'Great KSA' was frequently used by Saudi journalists to promote and assert the assumed role of KSA regionally and globally. Socio-culturally, it could be said that KSA has started to embrace unexpressed liberal modernism while strictly monitoring conservative religious discourse. More importantly, one of the vital outcomes of the vision was the reopening of cinemas in 2018, as well as the funding and promotion of film production and distribution in KSA. Many socio-cultural events and initiatives were sponsored and organised by the Saudi General Entertainment Authority, despite being opposed and criticised socially (Deutsche Welle Arabic, 2017; BBC News Arabic, 2021). Social media have been the leading platform for discussing, debating, and expressing opinions for or against any topics or events related to KSA. In line with the changes promoted by SV2030, KSA has witnessed a significant increase in the use of social media, consumption of audiovisual content, and expenditure on entertainment and leisure (see, for example, Alarabiya, 2020; Alramani, 2016; Alkhalidi, 2020; CITC, 2020). The digital transformation promoted by SV2030 has led to the active adoption of digital means for using, consuming, and producing media content. According to Trend (2022), 59% of Saudis use the Internet for streaming and consuming audiovisual content online. (See Figure 3 for Saudi preference in watching movies in 2019)
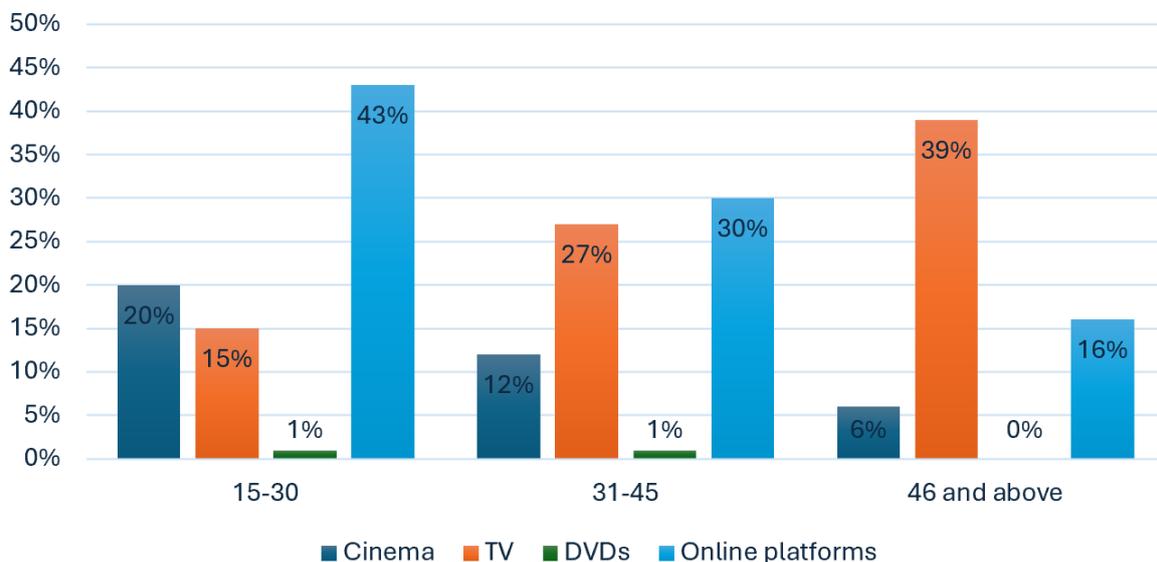
Figure 3: Platform-wise movie watching preferences in KSA in 2019.

Since 2016, the subtitling field has witnessed the participation or re-engagement of various subtitling providers. By 2023, six cinema providers had offered subtitling content across 20 cities through 63 cinema halls (Alghabri, 2023). The display of films in cinema has rarely been censored or withdrawn, illustrating the shift in religious discourse imposed by SV2030 and subsequently the change of the field of power and the field's doxa. On the other hand, streaming services began to grow and expand, benefiting from the large number of digital users in KSA. Netflix and Amazon Prime are two prominent agents of on-demand services available to Saudi audiences since 2016, competing to obtain a wider audience and offer affordable subscriptions and deals. While Netflix has notably dominated the subtitling market, according to Ovum Media Center (2018), other agents have had to react and deploy new strategies. For example, MBC Group rebranded its streaming service, Shahid, in 2020 to offer original Arabic shows, foreign films and series. MBC Group promoted Shahid as an alternative to Netflix, with slogans such as 'It's Our Time', aiming to reach five million subscribers by 2024 (Vivarelli, 2020). In terms of content, Netflix offers more than both Shahid and Amazon Prime, considering its diverse audiovisual library. Another factor was that Netflix's basic subscription (32 SAR) was cheaper than Shahid's (40.79 SAR). While cinema and streaming services competed for economic and social capital, movie fansubbers attempted to utilise similar position-takings to obtain economic capital. For instance, some fansubbing websites announced subscription rates, costing around 15 SAR per month, allowing users to stream, download, and enjoy films or series with no ads, and introduced dedicated mobile applications.

Therefore, the dynamics of the subtitling field were reshaped by the membership of those agents, internal competition and struggle among them over capital, and by the various positions they took to dominate and 'make a name for themselves' (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 58). As a result of this internal competition, STV2 stopped broadcasting in 2018. The industry of renting and selling video players, cassettes, and DVDs has nearly vanished in KSA, with the dominance of digital entertainment (see, for example, Ekhbariyatv, 2018). More importantly, the continuous influence of the field of power (politics and religion), critical technological and socio-cultural developments in KSA, and the incessant competition among various agents have all (re)shaped the dynamics of the country's subtitling field since the 1950s, as summarised in the following section.

IV. DISCUSSION

As an ever-expanding social field, the trajectory of the subtitling field has been (re) structured by various external and internal factors and different agents since its emergence in the 1950s, as shown in Figure 7 below. In the first period, the subtitling field was specifically circumscribed by the development of audiovisual broadcasting in KSA. The early developments in TV broadcasting were crucial factors in structuring the field, leading to its largely heteronomous nature. In other words, during the 1950s to 1980s, the subtitling field was heavily dependent on the development of various fields (see Figure 2). It was informed by the doxa and dynamics of intersecting fields, such as media and audiovisual production. Therefore, it displayed a homologous structure in this period, and an interrelationship with relevant and influential fields, as expressed by Bourdieu (1991). More importantly, the influence of the field of power was explicit. External religious and political factors, as well as changing doxa, significantly influenced the production of subtitled content on TV and other media, despite the spread of Arab nationalism and modernity during this initial period. Censorship and regulatory laws were imposed on the broadcasting and distribution of audiovisual content. Aside from these external factors, internal competition and struggle over dominance and capital were observable. Empowered by technological advances, Aramco TV and STV2 competed over social and symbolic capital until the arrival of video distribution agencies in the 1990s (in all formats: cassettes, VCRs, CDs, DVDs, etc.). The historical analysis of the first period complements Al-Dawasry's (2005), Alsobaihi's (2011), and Al-Dhuwaihy's (2014) accounts of Aramco TV and STV2. However, the sociological analysis adopted in this study provided an in-depth mapping and discussion of subtitling practice as a field, as well as the position-taking assumed by these two agents, which previous studies have overlooked. The adoption of Bourdieu's theory interprets the competition among agents over capital as a crucial aspect of the subtitling field.
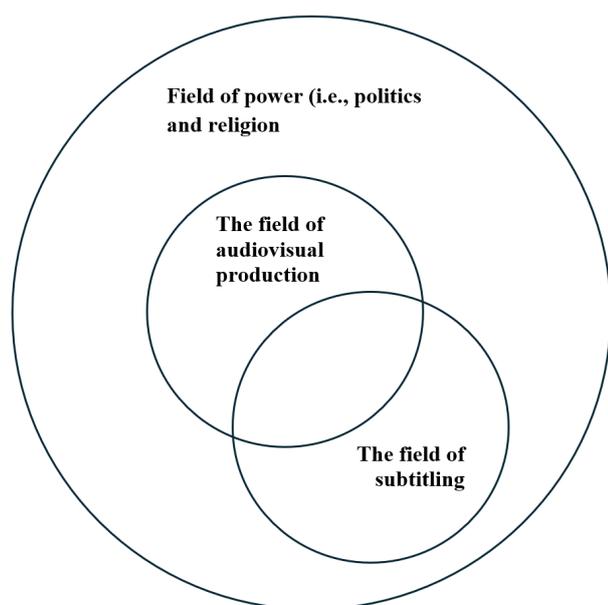
Figure 4: The heteronomy of the subtitling field during the 1950s-1980s.

In the second period (2000s-early 2010s), the advent of the Internet was a pivotal factor in audiovisual production, content creation, and entertainment in KSA. It promoted globalisation, modernity, and cross-cultural exchange, challenging the country's conservative values and norms. It also allowed more access to content, which has made it more challenging for regulatory organisations to censor or monitor the flow of information and content. Consequently, the subtitling field was (re)shaped and developed by the Internet, leading to the appearance of new agents who competed and challenged the existing doxa of the field. Driven by technical advances in the broadcasting industry, MBC Group entered the field seeking dominance and competition over vacant positions. Individual agents also attempted to compete and accumulate social capital, benefiting from the tools offered by the Internet to create, produce, and consume subtitled content. Movie fansubbers became essential agents of the field during this second period. The active usage of YouTube in KSA, as a virtual cinema, led to the expansion of competition and the provision of digital tools for users to subtitle and share self-created content. Digital and social capital were among the main motives for the field's agents. This internal competition between MBC Group, movie fansubbers, and YouTube users over social capital led to a change in the structure of the subtitling field. During this second period, the subtitling field became semi-autonomous, gaining relative independence but maintaining homology

with other neighbouring fields. Although there was an observable tendency towards liberal thinking during this period, religious discourse and socio-cultural norms continued to regulate, intervene, and monitor the audiovisual production of subtitling in KSA. Social media platforms were practical tools in the 2010s for expressing and sharing opinions towards audiovisual production in KSA, as were newspapers and social events. The outcome of this second period emphasises what Gamal (2019, 2020) highlighted in these publications, namely the lack of sufficient research in fansubbing in the Arabic context. In addition, the analysis of the Internet's development in KSA aligns with the findings reported by Almutairy (2016) and Alshahrani (2016). Nevertheless, this study furthered the discussion of digital developments and their influence on content creation, UGC and the competition between satellite TV and digital communities.
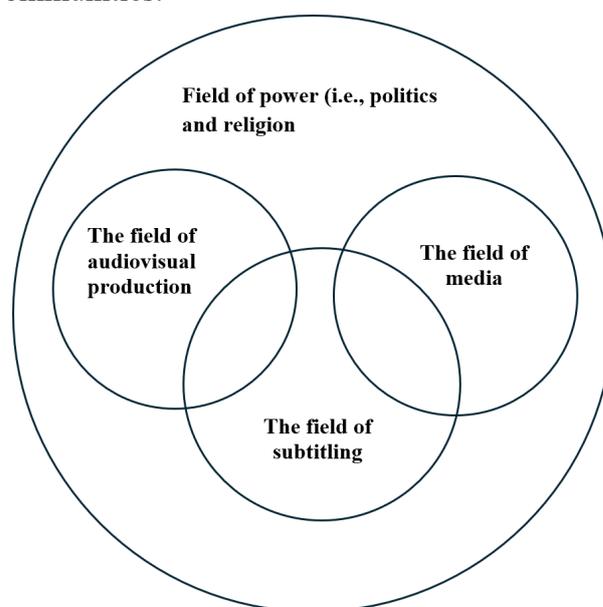
Figure 5: The heteronomy of the subtitling field during the 2000s-2010s.

Lastly, the third period marked the beginning of a significantly unorthodox approach to audiovisual production in KSA, promoted by the eco-political and socio-cultural objectives of SV2030. Aiming to transform the country culturally and digitally, numerous events have (re)shaped the subtitling field in KSA since the announcement of SV2030 in 2016. Many agents joined the field for various reasons, shaping its internal structure. After being permitted and reopened in 2018, cinema agencies became essential providers of subtitled content, deploying various position-takings, and seeking economic capital. Digitally speaking, streaming

services were introduced to KSA after 2016, allowing users to access a wide range of subtitled content. Netflix, Amazon Prime, and Shahid were three platforms that continued to compete with other agents in the field to accumulate economic and symbolic capital. They applied various position-takings to dominate and secure central positions in the field. In this third period, non-Saudi streaming services, such as Netflix, were the dominant agents, as noted by Ovum Media Center (2018). However, this study demonstrates how local Saudi agents, such as MBC and Saudi cinema, were competitive, frequently reshaping the field dynamics.

Additionally, driven by an increase in the number of users (as shown in Figure 6), social media platforms, particularly Twitter, have promoted a form of social media fansubbing, wherein short clips are produced and (re)circulated by Twitter users to discuss various socio-cultural and political topics. All of these new emerging agents competed with the existing ones, seeking to dominate, secure positions, and accumulate social, economic and symbolic capital. As a result, the subtitling field was driven by these interactions to be relatively autonomous and to intersect with other fields such as film production. While the outcomes of some developments are yet to affect its structure in the long term, the subtitling field is expected to secure relative autonomy and maintain strong homology with other social fields in KSA. Subfields may emerge given the digital ramifications on audiovisual production and consumption in KSA.
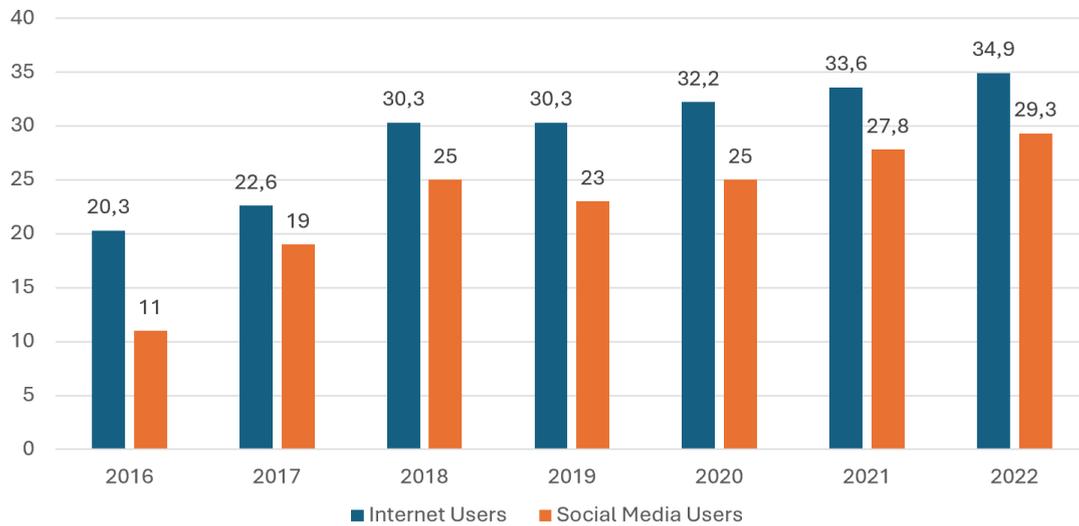

Figure 6: Year-wise Internet and social media users in KSA (in million).
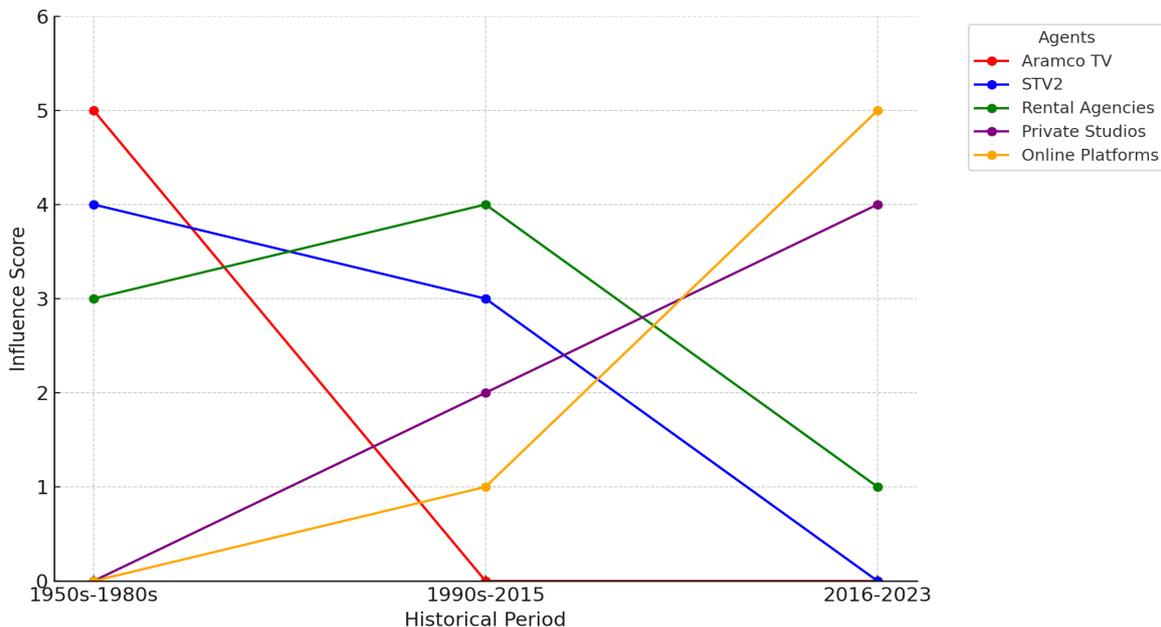

Figure 7: A Summary of Agents' Positions and Competition

Finally, the application of Bourdieu's theory to an Arabic and Islamic context, as demonstrated, for example, by Hanna (2005, 2006) and Khalifa (2017), among others, has proven relevant and valuable. However, the sociological study of the Saudi context has illustrated important socio-cultural and eco-political aspects, which differ from those in the mentioned studies. This resonates with the assertion by Gamal (2007) and Jacquemond and Selim (2015) that research on AVT tends to be 'west-centred' or 'Eurocentric', highlighting the lack of Arabic research. In addition, previous studies on the linguistic and cultural perspectives of Arabic subtitling were useful. Still, they cannot be fully understood without a detailed and inclusive sociological and historical analysis. Thus, this study explains the development of subtitling in KSA and presents critical interpretations that can be combined with the findings of Arabic researchers (e.g., Al-Adwan, 2015; Thawabteh, 2013, and others).

V. CONCLUSION

Notwithstanding the lack of socio-historical documentation and analysis of subtitling production in KSA, this study provides valuable and significant results. First, it draws the boundaries of the subtitling field in KSA, identifying its primary stages and linking these with early developments in the audiovisual and media sectors. It subsequently divides the trajectory of the field into three phases, tracing the emergence and evolution of social practices that reshaped the field's structure. Secondly, the study analyses the external factors that led to the evolution and progress of the subtitling field, focusing on the most relevant technological and socio-cultural factors. It showcases the influence of the field of power on the dynamics of the subtitling field, whereby religious and political discourse and practices have regulated and affected audiovisual production in KSA. Thirdly, the analysis of the subtitling field identifies the leading agents and the position-taking strategies that they applied to accumulate capital and secure dominance in the field.

As a result, this detailed examination of the internal dynamics of the field reveals the importance of internal struggle and competition for its development and continuity. The continual entry and ongoing membership of new agents to the field have contributed to the transformation of the field from relatively heteronomous in the 1950s-1980s to relatively autonomous by the beginning of the 2020s. Lastly, this historical study enables the close analysis of a significant event in KSA, SV2030, and determines its influence on the subtitling field since 2016. This paper aims to pave the way for further research in the subtitling field in KSA, considering anticipated changes and developments, as well as for a detailed investigation of the social practices of yet unstudied agents and institutions. This paper recommends a detailed and specific study of the emerging field of AVT and subtitling in the Arab World and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), as well as an in-depth analysis of subtitling producers and streaming services, including the MBC Group and Netflix. It also suggests continuing to examine the influence of SV2030 on the cultural production of AVT and subtitling in KSA, as well as analysing its changing dynamics. Finally, it recommends a linguistic analysis of subtitling in KSA, examining the relationships between the linguistic features of subtitles and their social and cultural implications for the subtitling field.

ETHICS STATEMENT

The authors have read and followed the ethical requirements for publication in **Jurnal Arbitrer.** The current work does not involve human subjects, animal experiments, or any data collected from social media platforms.

CREDIT AUTHOR STATEMENT

Bandar Altalidi conceptualised the study, conducted the research, and wrote the manuscript. *Abdullah Alqarni* and *Yousef Sahari* assisted with data verification and provided feedback on the final manuscript.

DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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