Proposal to use Twitter to report problems with both live and pre recorded subtitles

Overview

Viewing live broadcasts with subtitles can be a frustrating experience not only for the viewer but also the provider. At a round table held by OFCOM, as part of its current review of the quality of subtitles, broadcasters said that they would welcome timely reports of where subtitles were disappointing so that they could fix the problem as soon as possible.

The current means of reporting via telephone or email are too slow and many deaf people do not like to complain nor have the time to write an email or resources to make a phone call which can often take longer than the program they wish to complain about. To many it would be preferable to simply report a problem with the subtitles during a broadcast so that these can be investigated and fixed, so the deaf person can continue to enjoy the television program.

With the growth of social media and in particular its effectiveness at getting messages across quickly and timely DAC is proposing to trial a process of reporting issues with subtitles using Twitter which if successful could then be made permanent and expanded to Facebook and other social media. It is not intended to replace the current forms of reporting issues with subtitles offered but to complement them.

Format

The convention needs to be agreed with the broadcasters and subtitle providers but the initial suggestion is to use the following format for tweets

#{channel}subtitles followed by the time and a short description of problem.

Where available there should also be a direct reference to the TV channels Twitter name along with that of the subtitle provider. We are currently working with the broadcasters to agree the Twitter name to use.

It has also been suggested that the first part of the individuals postcode are included to help identify if the fault lies with a particular transmitter.

For example

#BBC1subtitles 10.20pm BBCnews #subtitles have stopped @redbee @bbconenews NW3

The # convention in Twitter allows one to group comments using the title immediately following the #. The @ preceding a name links the message directly to a recipient and will appear in their Twitter feed. Twitter only allows 140 characters per message which ensures the message is short and quick.

A list of potential issues will be compiled on the DAC website along with Twitter accounts for broadcasters once these have been agree with broadcasters.

By using Twitter in this way individuals will be able to see if other people have the same issue as them or if it is their own equipment and so will be able to address the issue

accordingly. The activity will also provide a natural and public audit. However it is not intended to replace the monitoring of live subtitles currently conducted by OFCOM.

We do not intend for this process to report minor errors such as grammatical errors or misspelling. However it could potentially be used to question factual inaccuracies e.g. £15m or £50m subject to further discussion as to how this would be managed.

Volunteers needed

We are looking for individuals to help trial this process using the agreed convention once this is agreed with broadcasters and their providers of subtitles. We are also looking for people to moderate the Twitter feed to ensure it remains productive for all parties.

If you are willing to trial please favourite the Tweet asking for volunteers. If you are willing to moderate then please DM DAC.

Progress to date

DAC has the support of UKCoD Trustees for a trial of this proposal.

Many of the deaf organisations are also supportive including Action for Hearing Loss, Sense, NDCS, NADP and Hearing Link.

We are currently in discussion with the main four broadcasters in the UK and their providers regarding the convention and how they intend to support it, one of which has already confirmed its commitment. The main concerns are mitigation of defamation risk and resources for monitoring. We hope to agree processes to be put in place to manage these but also ask for users to be follow the convention suggested and refrain from negativity in their messages irrespective of how frustrated they may be.

Next steps

Identify potential trialists by their favouriting the Tweet asking for volunteers.
Identify potential moderators who DM DAC.
Continue to discuss convention with broadcasters and providers.
Agree start date of trial and trial period along with success measures.

Please do not use this convention until we launch the trial.

DAC
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