

# Web application for automated collection, analysis, and visualization of YouTube data

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October 27, 2025

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## 0.1 Abstract

## 0.2 Problem statement

According to Statista Dixon, 2025, YouTube is the second most used social network globally, only behind Facebook, with 2,530 million active monthly users. Notably, 35% of U.S. adults regularly get news from this video-focused platform St. Aubin and Liedke, 2025. These facts highlight how important it is to do any kind of analysis.

Although enterprise social-listening (like Talkwalker<sup>1</sup> and Meltwater<sup>2</sup>) and social science research tool (like Communalytic<sup>3</sup>) suites monitor YouTube, their pipelines and models are proprietary, limiting methodological transparency, reproducibility, and academic scrutiny for topic-level studies. This proprietary approach is fundamentally at odds with the principles of **transparent and reproducible science**.

**Academic researchers** often lack a verifiable system that automates collection, cleaning, descriptive analytics, and insight generation while exposing code and schemas for independent replication.

Currently, researchers face a significant technical barrier: they must either rely on these proprietary "black-box" tools or invest considerable time building complex data collection systems from scratch. There is a gap for an application that provides a transparent, documented, and reproducible foundation for YouTube data collection, specifically for users who do not want to deal with the complexities of the API directly.

### 0.2.1 Problem formulation

How to develop a web application to process, analyze, and visualize YouTube data?

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.talkwalker.com>

<sup>2</sup><https://www.meltwater.com>

<sup>3</sup><https://communalytic.org>

## 0.3 Problem justification

The use of social media has resulted in profound changes in the pattern of human interaction in today's contemporary society. The presence of social media has emerged as a phenomenon that places itself as a crucial element in the drastic changes in the way people interact in an era where information technology has undeniable dominance in almost every field of life (Azzaakiyyah, 2023). As these platform become central to public discourse and information dissemination, the methods used to analyze them face increasing scrutiny. However, much of the existing analysis is conducted using proprietary, "black-box" tools that limit transparency and prevent academic certification. This creates a critical need for **an application built on a reproducible, auditable, and documented methodology** for a major platform like YouTube, thereby empowering researches and the public with verifiable insights.

### 0.3.1 Academic

This project directly addresses a critical methodological gap in academic research: the lack of a unified, verifiable system for YouTube data analysis. Its core academic contribution is the promotion of **reproducibility** and **methodological transparency**. By providing a **fully documented methodology within this thesis**, the application's architecture and data pipeline allow for the independent verification of research findings. This application provides a **foundational tool**, enabling researchers to conduct reproducible analyses and serving as a **validated base for future work** in more advanced data analysis. This creates a valuable and reusable asset for the academic community, ensuring that future topic-level studies of YouTube can be conducted with higher methodological rigor and transparency.

### 0.3.2 Economic

The primary economic benefit is providing a **no-cost, high-value alternative** to expensive social listening tools. Commercial tools like Talkwalker or Meltwater represent a significant



financial barrier for academic institutions, non-profits and independent researchers, limiting their ability to conduct large-scale analysis. By developing a **free tool**, this project **democratizes access** to these analytical capabilities, providing functionality that is otherwise locked behind costly subscriptions. Furthermore, the application **automates the entire data pipeline**, from collection and cleaning to analysis and visualization. This automation creates significant efficiency gains, saving countless hours of manual labor that researchers would otherwise spend on data preparation.

### 0.3.3 Social

Given that a substantial portion of the population now uses YouTube as a primary source for news and information, understanding the discourse on this platform is a matter of public interest. This project contributes to social good offering a **transparent** tool for analyzing public opinion, which can be used by academic researchers. Unlike proprietary "black box" systems, this tool's **publicly documented methodology** ensures that its processes are completely **transparent** and **auditable**. This fosters greater trust and empowers organizations to monitor topics like misinformation, public health discussions or political sentiment with a **verifiable** and **accessible** tool.

## 0.4 Objectives

### 0.4.1 General objective

**To develop** a web application that automates the collection, processing, analysis and visualization of data from YouTube videos.

### 0.4.2 Specific objectives

1. **To design** a web application architecture comprising four integrated components:
  - (a) A configurable data collection module for querying the YouTube Data API with customizable filters.
  - (b) A natural language processing interface leveraging existing LLM models to translate informal user requests into valid API query parameters.
  - (c) A data processing pipeline for cleaning, normalizing, and structuring raw API responses into a standardized schema linking videos, comments, and replies.
  - (d) An presentation layer with dashboards and charts.
2. **To implement** the designed architecture using modern web development technologies and following the best software engineering practices.
3. **To test** the implemented system through:
  - (a) Functional testing of each module (data collection, LLM integration, processing pipeline, visualization).
  - (b) Integration testing of the complete workflow from user query to visual output.

## 0.5 Project Scope

### 0.5.1 Inclusions

This section details the specific features, deliverables, and technologies that are part of the project.

#### Functionality

The project will deliver a fully functional web application that automates the collection, processing, analysis, and visualization of data from YouTube. The core functionalities include:

- **Data collection module:** a configurable module will be implemented to collect video and associated comment data directly from the YouTube Data API using specified query filters.
- **AI query module:** a natural language interface that integrates with a pre-trained AI model to translate informal user requests into valid YouTube Data API queries.
- **Data processing pipeline:** the application will feature a processing pipeline designed to clean, normalize, validate, and structure the raw data retrieved from the API.
- **Presentation layer:** a user-facing presentation layer will be built, featuring interactive dashboards and charts to visualize the analyzed data.

#### Technology

**The specific technology stack for the application will be selected and justified as part of the implementation phase.** However, the architecture will adhere to the following principles:

- **Backend service:** the core application logic and API will be developed using a modern web framework, with a relational database for data storage.

- **Frontend service:** a lightweight web server (e.g., Nginx) will be used to serve the static frontend assets (HTML, CSS, and JavaScript) built from a modern JavaScript framework (e.g., React, Vue).
- **Containerization:** all services (web server, backend application, database) will be containerized using Docker to ensure a consistent and reproducible deployment environment.

### 0.5.2 Exclusions

To maintain a clear focus and ensure the project is achievable within the defined timeframe, the following features and functionalities are explicitly out of scope:

- **Support for other platforms:** data collection and analysis will be limited exclusively to YouTube. The application will not support any other social media or video platforms (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, TikTok).
- **Training of NLP models:** the project will **integrate** existing, pre-trained models (for sentiment analysis and query translation). The scope does not include the **training or fine-tuning** of new or custom natural language processing or machine learning models from scratch.
- **Real-time data streaming:** the data collection process is designed to be on-demand based on user queries. The project will not implement real-time or live-streaming data analysis.
- **Native mobile application:** the final deliverable is a web application accessible through standard desktop browsers. The development of native mobile applications for iOS or Android is not included.

## 0.6 Reference framework

### 0.6.1 Glossary

- **Methodological transparency (new term):** a practice in research where the methods, procedures, and analysis techniques are documented and shared in sufficient detail to allow other researchers to understand exactly how the study was conducted.
- **API (Application Programming Interface):** “a set of functions and procedures that allow the creation of applications which access the features or data of an operating system, application, or other service, enabling third parties to use the functionality of that software application”. (“Application Programming Interface”, [n.d.](#))
- **LLM (Large Language Model):** “a narrow artificial intelligence (AI) system that has been trained on a massive amount of text data to interpret natural language and generate human-like responses to text-based prompts or questions”. (Almarie et al., [2023](#))
- **Computational reproducibility:** “obtaining consistent results using the same input data, computational methods, and conditions of analysis”. (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, [2019](#))
- **Replicability:** “an attempt by a second researcher to replicate a previous study is an effort to determine whether applying the same methods to the same scientific question produces similar results”. (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, [2019](#))
- **Social network site:** “a networked communication platform in which participants (a) have uniquely identifiable profiles that consist of user-supplied content, content provided by other users, and/or system-level data; (b) can publicly articulate connections that can be viewed and traversed by others; and (c) can consume, produce, and/or interact

with streams of user-generated content provided by their connections on the site”. (Aichner et al., 2021)

- **Social listening:** “monitoring and analyzing conversations that take place on social and digital channels to gain insights into customer opinions, preferences, and trends. It involves tracking mentions of a brand, product, or relevant keywords, and analyzing the sentiment and context of these conversations”. (Emplifi, n.d.)
- **Sentiment analysis:** “can be stated as the procedure to identify, recognize, and/or categorize the users’ emotions or opinions for any service like movies, product issues, events, or any attribute as positive, negative, or neutral”. (Bordoloi & Biswas, 2023)

### Commercial social listening tools

Commercial social listening tools represent the closest existing solutions to the proposed system in terms of core functionality, offering capabilities such as multi-platform monitoring, sentiment analysis, and trend detection. Prominent platforms like Hootsuite (with Talkwalker) and Meltwater are optimized for business intelligence, brand monitoring, marketing analytics, and customer experience management across multiple social media platforms simultaneously, including Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, TikTok, LinkedIn, YouTube, and Reddit, processing millions to hundreds of millions of data sources daily.

However, despite functional similarities, these commercial solutions operate under a fundamentally different scope and design philosophy. These tools prioritize real-time monitoring, competitive intelligence, and actionable business insights over methodological transparency and scientific reproducibility. Their proprietary algorithms, closed-source architectures, and lack of access to raw data or processing methods make it impossible for researchers to verify results, replicate analyses, or understand the underlying computational processes, requirements that are essential for rigorous academic research.

Furthermore, enterprise pricing models (often ranging from thousands to tens of thousands

of dollars annually) create significant accessibility barriers for individual researchers, small research teams, and academic institutions with limited budgets. While these platforms offer sophisticated AI-powered analytics and visualization capabilities suitable for corporate decision-making, they are inherently unsuitable for transparent, reproducible scientific research where methodological clarity, open access to data processing methods, and cost-effective accessibility are fundamental requirements. This gap between commercial enterprise tools and academic research needs establishes the motivation for developing an open-source, research-focused social listening platform that maintains methodological transparency while providing the analytical capabilities required for scientific inquiry.

## Existing open-source and academic tools

The landscape of open-source YouTube analysis tools presents a fundamentally fragmented ecosystem where individual components exist in isolation, but no comprehensive, integrated solution addresses the complete workflow required for reproducible academic research focused on YouTube data analysis. This fragmentation represents a critical gap in the available infrastructure for transparent YouTube-based social media research.

While numerous open-source tools provide specific functionalities for YouTube data analysis—such as comment extraction libraries (e.g., YouTube Data API wrappers in Python like `youtube-search-python`<sup>4</sup>), sentiment analysis packages (e.g., VADER with 4.5K GitHub stars, TextBlob with 9K stars, spaCy with 30K stars), and data visualization frameworks (e.g., Matplotlib, Plotly, D3.js), none combine data collection, processing, analysis, and visualization into a unified, documented, and methodologically transparent platform designed specifically for academic research purposes. Examples of fragmented tools include standalone projects like `youtube-comments-sentiment-analyzer`<sup>5</sup> and YouTube Data Tools<sup>6</sup>, each addressing isolated components but requiring manual integration, custom scripting, and

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<sup>4</sup><https://github.com/alexmercerind/youtube-search-python>

<sup>5</sup><https://github.com/coskundeniz/youtube-comments-sentiment-analyzer>

<sup>6</sup><https://ytdt.digitalmethods.net/index.php>

technical expertise to create a complete research pipeline.

This modular approach requires researchers to manually integrate disparate tools, each with different installation requirements, documentation standards, data formats, and API authentication methods, creating substantial technical barriers and introducing potential points of failure in reproducibility. Furthermore, existing tools typically lack the methodological documentation frameworks essential for academic research: documented workflows and processing pipelines that enable independent verification of research findings.

The value proposition of an integrated YouTube social listening tool for academic research thus extends beyond merely providing free alternatives to commercial tools. It centers on establishing documented, validated, and reproducible methodologies within a unified platform that:

1. Abstracts API complexity and quota management, including the translation of informal, natural language requests into valid API queries.
2. Provides standardized data collection and processing workflows.
3. Offers built-in sentiment analysis and visualization capabilities.

Most importantly, such a tool must explicitly acknowledge and document its dependency on the YouTube API as a fundamental limitation and design consideration, implementing strategies to mitigate API variability through consistent query parameters, timestamp documentation, and transparent reporting of data collection conditions.

This gap between fragmented, component-level tools and comprehensive, methodologically transparent research platforms, combined with the inherent fragility of API-dependent data collection, establishes the primary motivation for developing an integrated free

YouTube social listening system designed specifically to meet academic research standards for transparency, reproducibility, and methodological rigor, while explicitly addressing the constraints and limitations imposed by platform API dependencies.



## Key academic studies

The academic community has increasingly utilized YouTube as a significant data source for social science research. This research is diverse: some studies focus on video content (such as education, health information, or politics); others investigate the recommendation algorithm (examining its relation to news, misinformation, or radicalization); and a significant portion specifically analyzes user comments to understand topics like hate speech, political ideology, gender differences, or sentiment (Deubel et al., 2024).

### 0.6.2 Theoretical framework

#### Interactions in the YouTube social network

Understanding the structure of interactions within YouTube as a social network is fundamental to designing a social listening tool that captures meaningful data for research purposes.

**Roles within the YouTube ecosystem** Sui et al. (2022) identify three primary roles that individuals occupy within the YouTube social network, each representing progressively higher levels of platform engagement.

- **Viewer:** represents represents the most basic level of engagement, consisting of individuals who interact with YouTube solely through passive video consumption. This role requires no account and represents the broadest, least specific form of platform engagement.
- **User:** extends beyond passive viewing to include active engagement mechanisms available through a Google account, such as leaving likes or dislikes on

videos, posting comments, replying to existing comments, liking or disliking comments, and subscribing to channels.

- **Creator(or YouTuber)** : occupies the highest degree of platform engagement, actively producing content by posting videos, writing descriptions, curating channels, and building subscriber communities that can elevate them to micro-celebrity status.

These roles are not mutually exclusive (creators are simultaneously users and viewers) but they represent distinct analytical categories for understanding platform interactions.

**Interaction mechanisms** Building upon the framework proposed by Giglietto et al. (2012), Sui et al. (2022) categorize YouTube interactions into distinct types based on the nature of engagement.

- **Audience interactions:** the views.
- **Social interactions:** the likes, dislikes and comments.
- **Platform interactions:** the metadata like title, date, ID, etc.

### **Extended data categories**

- **Engagement metrics:** quantifiable representations of viewer and user interactions with creators and the platform, including views, likes/dislikes, comments, comment replies, comment likes/dislikes, and subscriber counts. These metrics provide measurable indicators of content popularity, audience sentiment, and community activity.
- **Video/channel characteristics:** structural data independent of user interactions, including total video uploads, video duration, channel start date,

video posting frequency, and upload schedules. These characteristics enable analysis of creator behavior patterns and content production strategies.

- **Textual data:** language and discourse elements available for qualitative and quantitative analysis, including video transcripts (extractable through YouTube’s built-in transcript function), video titles, video descriptions, channel "About" pages, video tags, comments, and comment replies. This textual data provides rich material for content analysis, discourse analysis, sentiment analysis, and thematic exploration of community perspectives.
- **Visual data:** image and video content elements including the videos themselves (analyzable as complete recordings or extracted screenshots), video thumbnails, visual banners and annotations, environmental settings, camera angles, and visual representations of creators themselves (enabling analysis of demographic characteristics such as ethnicity, age, and gender presentation). Visual data facilitates ethnographic research, visual rhetoric analysis, and examination of multimodal communication strategies.

### **YouTube Data API limitations and computational reproducibility challenges**

Beyond the diversity of methodological approaches employed by researchers, the YouTube Data API itself presents inherent technical limitations that must be carefully considered to ensure research reproducibility. Crucially, all YouTube data collection tools—whether open-source or commercial—depend entirely on the YouTube Data API v3, which is controlled by Google and subject to unilateral modifications without academic input. The discontinuation of the `relatedToVideoId` parameter in August 2023, which was previously essential for expanding datasets through recommendation networks, exemplifies how platform decisions can retroactively invalidate established research methodologies and prevent replication of

earlier studies.

Recent empirical investigations reveal that the API’s Search endpoint exhibits significant temporal variability in returned results. Efstratiou (2025) conducted a systematic audit by running identical queries at 5-day intervals over 12 weeks across six diverse topics, finding that Jaccard similarity (measure of the similarity of two datasets) between video sets declined substantially over time—demonstrating that datasets collected using the exact same historical query may differ vastly based solely on when queries are executed.

These limitations underscore the critical importance of rigorous methodological practices in YouTube-based research. While the API’s temporal inconsistency and platform dependency cannot be fully eliminated, researchers can mitigate its impact through transparent documentation of collection timestamps and API parameters and explicit acknowledgment of these platform-imposed constraints in their methodology sections. Tools and frameworks that systematically document API dependencies, timestamp data collection, and maintain transparent records of all methodological decisions are essential for conducting replicable YouTube research within these known limitations.

## **Scrum**

Scrum is an agile project management framework that facilitates team collaboration through iterative and incremental development (Schwaber & Sutherland, 2020). The framework prescribes for teams to break work into goals completed within time-boxed iterations called sprints, typically lasting two to four weeks (Schwaber & Sutherland, 2020). Scrum is based on three pillars (transparency, inspection, and adaptation) and emphasizes self-organization, continuous feedback, and flexibility in response to changing requirements (Schwaber & Sutherland,

2020). Originally developed for software development, Scrum has since been successfully applied to various complex projects requiring iterative progress and stakeholder collaboration (Schwaber & Sutherland, 2020).

## 0.7 Methodology

This project adopts an adapted Scrum framework to guide the software development process. While Scrum is traditionally designed for team-based development, this thesis leverages specific Scrum artifacts and events that provide particular value for individual academic software projects, especially in maintaining transparency and systematic progress tracking.

The choice of Scrum is motivated by two primary factors: its **flexibility** through iterative development and its emphasis on **structured documentation** through artifacts. This aligns well with the exploratory nature of thesis development, where requirements may evolve as the research progresses.

### 0.7.1 Scrum artifacts adapted for this project

#### Product backlog

The product backlog serves as an emergent, ordered list of what is needed to improve the product and functions as the single source of work for the project (Schwaber & Sutherland, 2020). For this thesis, the **product backlog** will document all planned features, technical requirements, and improvements for the web application. Each **product backlog** item will be explicitly linked to the specific thesis objectives it addresses (as defined in section 0.4), ensuring clear traceability between development activities and research goals. This artifact provides transparency in planning and allows for systematic prioritization of development tasks based on their contribution to thesis objectives.

## Sprint backlog

Composed of the **sprint goal**, selected **product backlog** items, and an actionable plan for delivering an increment (Schwaber & Sutherland, 2020), the **sprint backlog** will serve as the operational plan for each development iteration. For this individual project, sprints will be two weeks periods during which specific functionality will be developed and integrated into the application.

### 0.7.2 Scrum events adapted for this project

While Scrum events are designed for team collaboration, certain events will be adapted to provide structure and facilitate self-reflection.

#### Sprint planning

At the beginning of each sprint, sprint planning will determine what can be delivered in the upcoming sprint and how that work will be achieved (Schwaber & Sutherland, 2020). This will involve selecting **product backlog** items and defining a clear **sprint goal**.

#### Sprint retrospective

The sprint Retrospective provides an opportunity to plan ways to increase quality and effectiveness (Schwaber & Sutherland, 2020). For this individual project, retrospectives will be conducted at the end of each sprint to reflect on what went well, what challenges were encountered, and what adjustments should be made for subsequent sprints. This practice supports continuous improvement and systematic documentation of the development process.

Although Scrum is traditionally conceived as a framework for teams, with defined roles including **Scrum master**, **product owner**, and **developers** (Schwaber & Sutherland, 2020), this project adapts its core principles to the context of individual thesis development. The emphasis remains on the empirical pillars of **transparency**, **inspection**, and **adaptation** (Schwaber & Sutherland, 2020), which are particularly valuable for maintaining rigor and documentation in academic software development projects.

### 0.7.3 Activities to be carried out

Table 1: Activities to be carried out

Specific objective	Expected result	Activity
Objective 1: Design a modular web application architecture.	Complete technical design documentation including system architecture diagrams, component specifications and data models.	Row 1 Col 3
Objective 2: Implement the designed architecture.	Delivery of the complete web application source code implementing all four components with documentation.	Row 2 Col 3
Objective 3: Test the implemented system.	Test reports documenting functional and integration testing results for the complete system.	Row 3 Col 3

### 0.7.4 Schedule of activities



## 0.8 Budget

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