What do people do online? Using data donation to understand digital behavior.

a workshop at the SPP Junior Researcher Meeting

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October 22, 2025

NEW DATA SPACES

2️⃣ What is data donation?

The participant's perspective.

Changes in legal contexts ⚖️

- EU secures right to own data in Art. 15 of the General Data Protection Regulation
    - "The data subject shall have […] access to the personal data" (§ Art. 15, 1)
    - "The controller shall provide a copy of the personal data" (§ Art. 15, 3)
- According to § Art. 20, users must receive their data "in a structured, commonly used and machine-readable format" (§ Art. 20, 1)

👉 **Solution:** Platforms offer data download packages (DDPs), which users can request and download to inspect data.

👉 **Consequence**: Researchers uses DDPs as part of user-centric data donation studies.

🤔 Please raise your hand ✋

(Before a week ago...) Who has ever tried to request their data from an online platform?

What are data donation studies?

💡 **Definition:** Data donation studies are a user-centric method for collecting digital traces:

- Users have the right to request, access, and download data that platforms collect about them.

- They can make their *data download packages (DDPs)* available to science, often in the context of web surveys.

- Researchers use CSS methods to filter, anonymize, and aggregate this data locally on participants' devices.

- Participants can inspect/delete their data before any data is transferred.

Which types of data do DDPs contain?

For platforms like YouTube, Instagram, or LinkedIn, for example…

(Hase et al. 2024)

- User profiles (e.g., privacy settings)

- Activities (e.g., friends, likes, searches, exposure, analog movements)

- Content and context (e.g., ads watched, algorithmically inferred interests)

How is data from DDPs different?
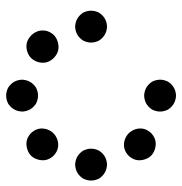
Compared to **APIs** (Ohme et al. 2024)...

- Control & informed consent of users

- Longitudinal data without "rate limits"

- Partly additional measurements (e.g., exposure data; non-public data)

👉 but can be burdensome for participants!

Survey

Request &
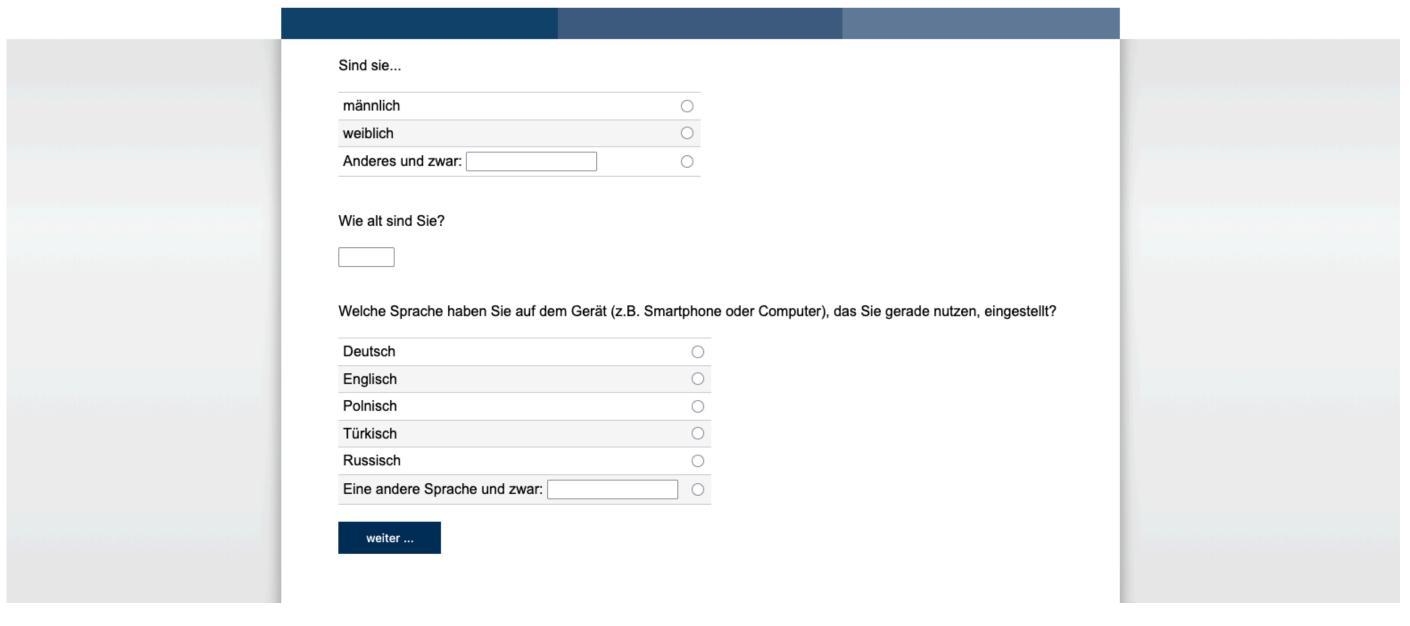Download Data

Extract
Data

Inspect
Data

Consent

🤔 How easy (or hard) did you find it to request your data? Did you encounter any obstacles?
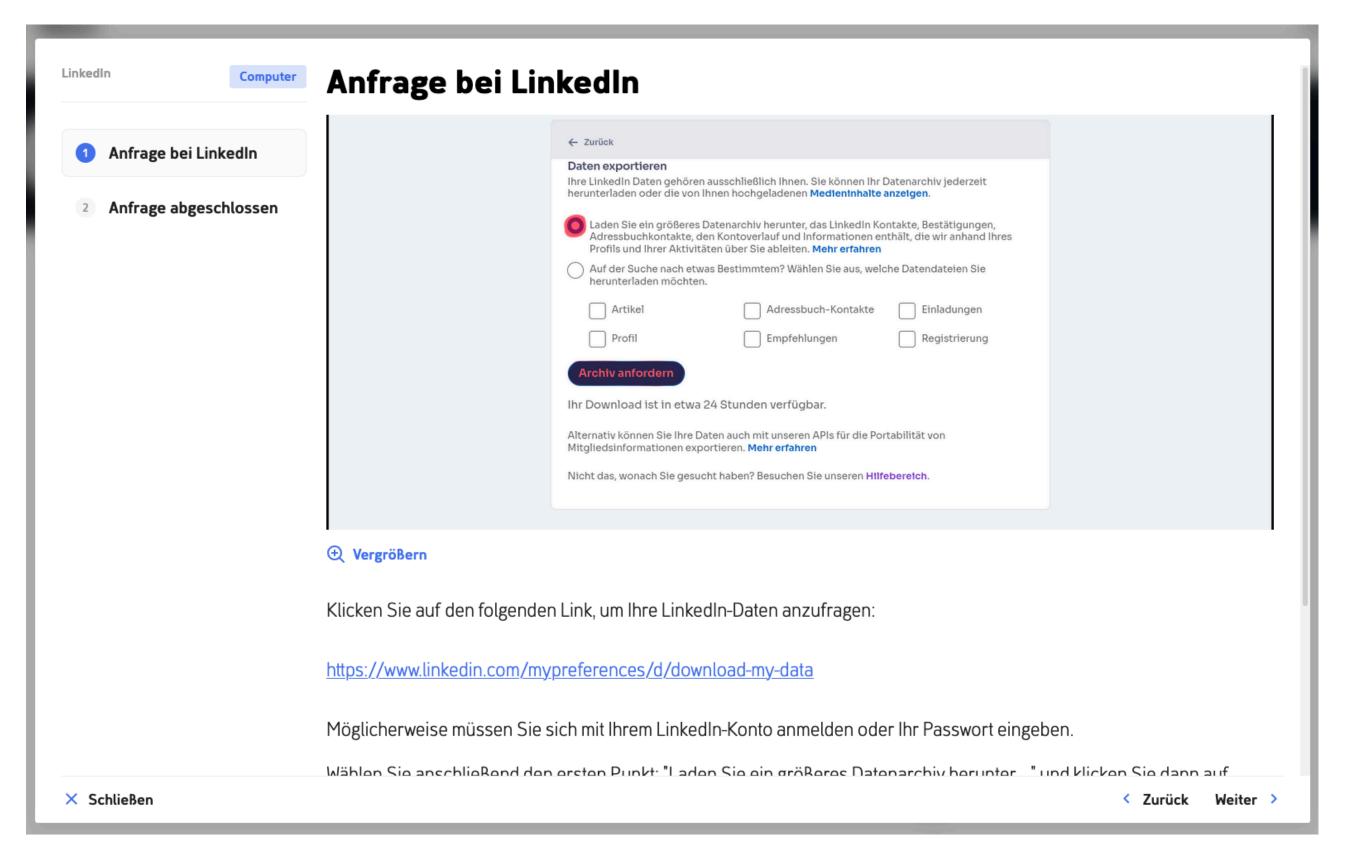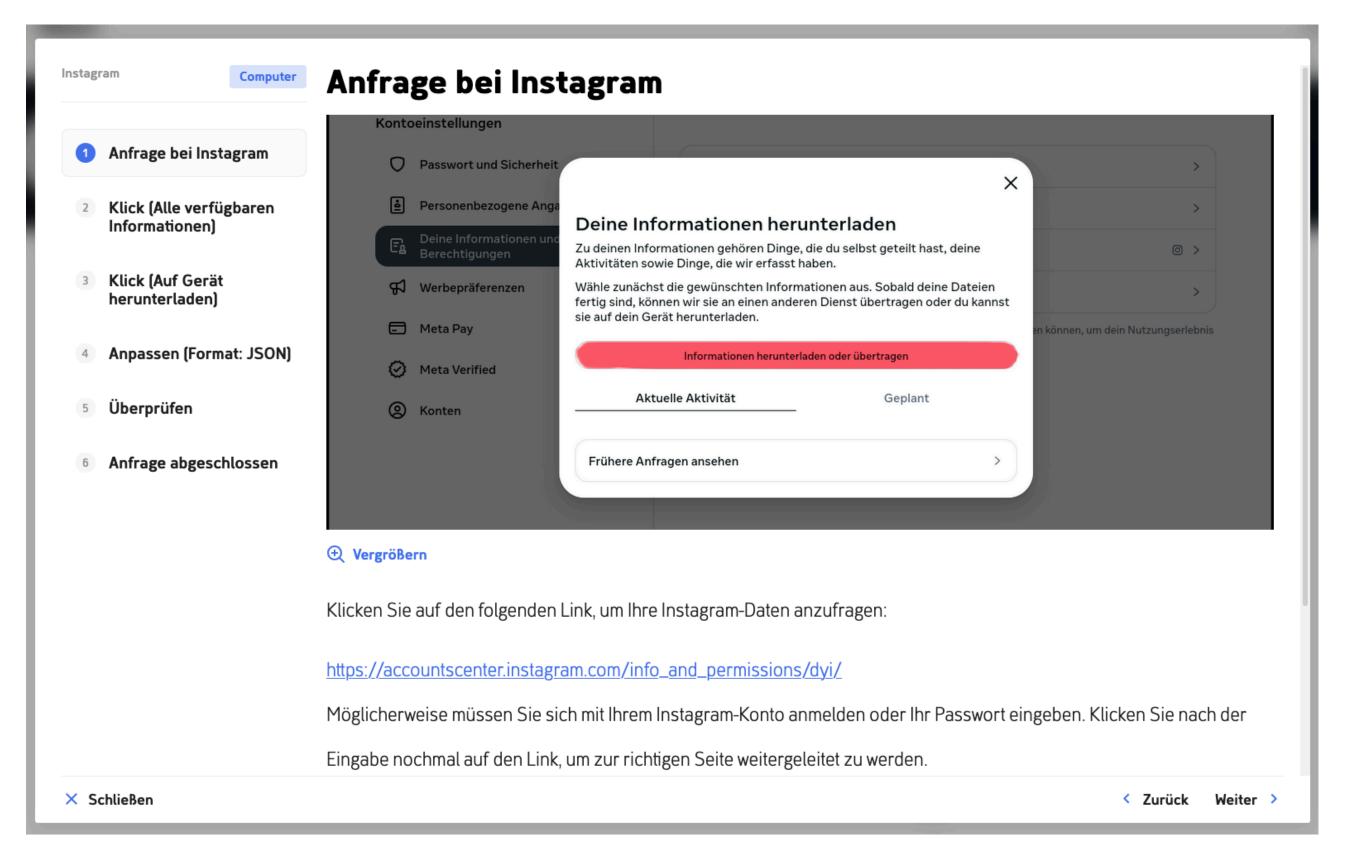
Survey

Survey start page

🗎 Request & Download Data

Different degrees in standardization for data requests (Hase et al. 2024)...

- Verification procedure

- Specification of data (metrics, observation period)

- Notification on provision of DDP
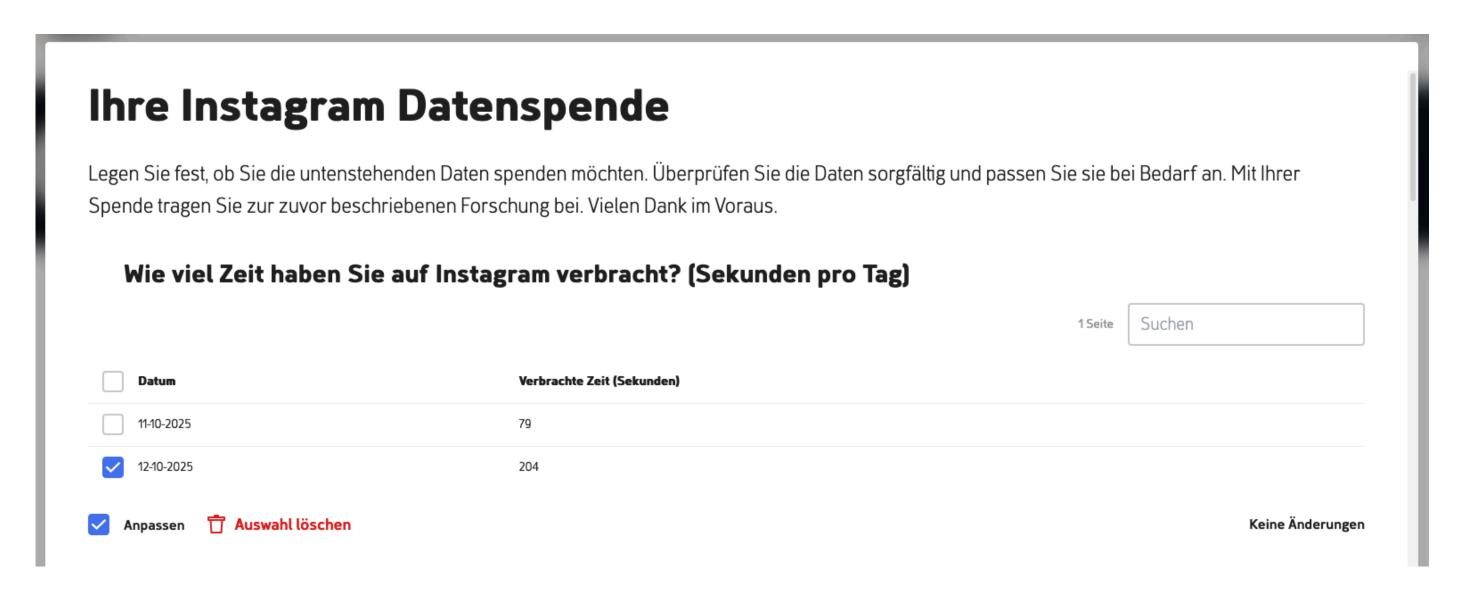
- Duration of DDP availability

Request manual for LinkedIn on computer

Request manual for Instagram on computer

Extract Data

🔍 Inspect Data

Data overview on data donation platform

☑ Data donation

📢 Task: Try it yourself.

You might have already requested and downloaded your data in preparation for today.

Did you encounter any difficulties in sharing your data?

🤔 **Questions?**

References

Hase, Valerie, Jef Ausloos, Laura Boeschoten, Nico Pfiffner, Heleen Janssen, Theo Araujo, Thijs Carrière, et al. 2024. "Fulfilling Data Access Obligations: How Could (and Should) Platforms Facilitate Data Donation Studies?" *Internet Policy Review* 13 (3). https://doi.org/10.14763/2024.3.1793.

Ohme, Jakob, Theo Araujo, Laura Boeschoten, Deen Freelon, Nilam Ram, Byron B. Reeves, and Thomas N. Robinson. 2024. "Digital Trace Data Collection for Social Media Effects Research: APIs, Data Donation, and (Screen) Tracking." *Communication Methods and Measures* 18 (2): 124–41. https://doi.org/10.1080/19312458.2023.2181319.