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

a workshop at the SPP Junior Researcher Meeting

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What is data donation?

The participant's perspective.

Changes in legal contexts 4

- 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)...

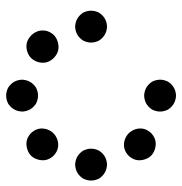
- Control & informed consent of users
- Longitudinal data without "rate limits"
- Partly additional measurements (e.g., exposure data; nonpublic data)
- but can be burdensome for participants!



Survey



Request & Download Data



Extract Data



Inspect Data

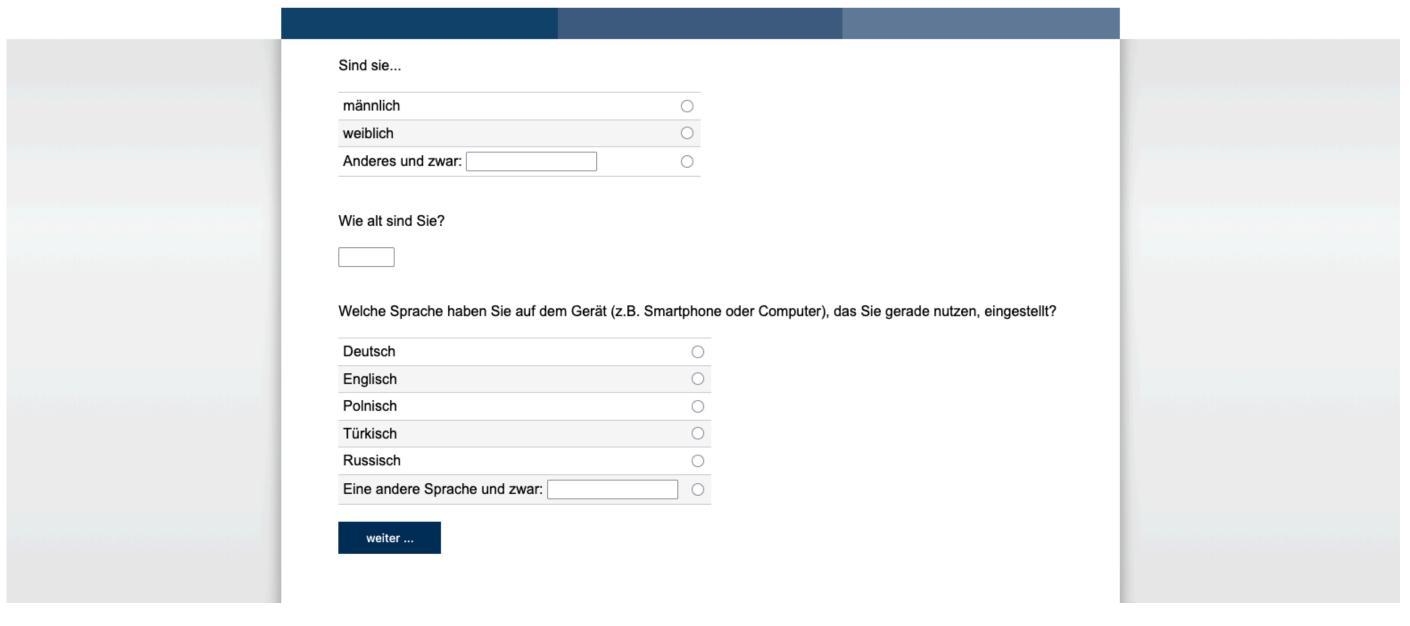


Consent

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

Survey



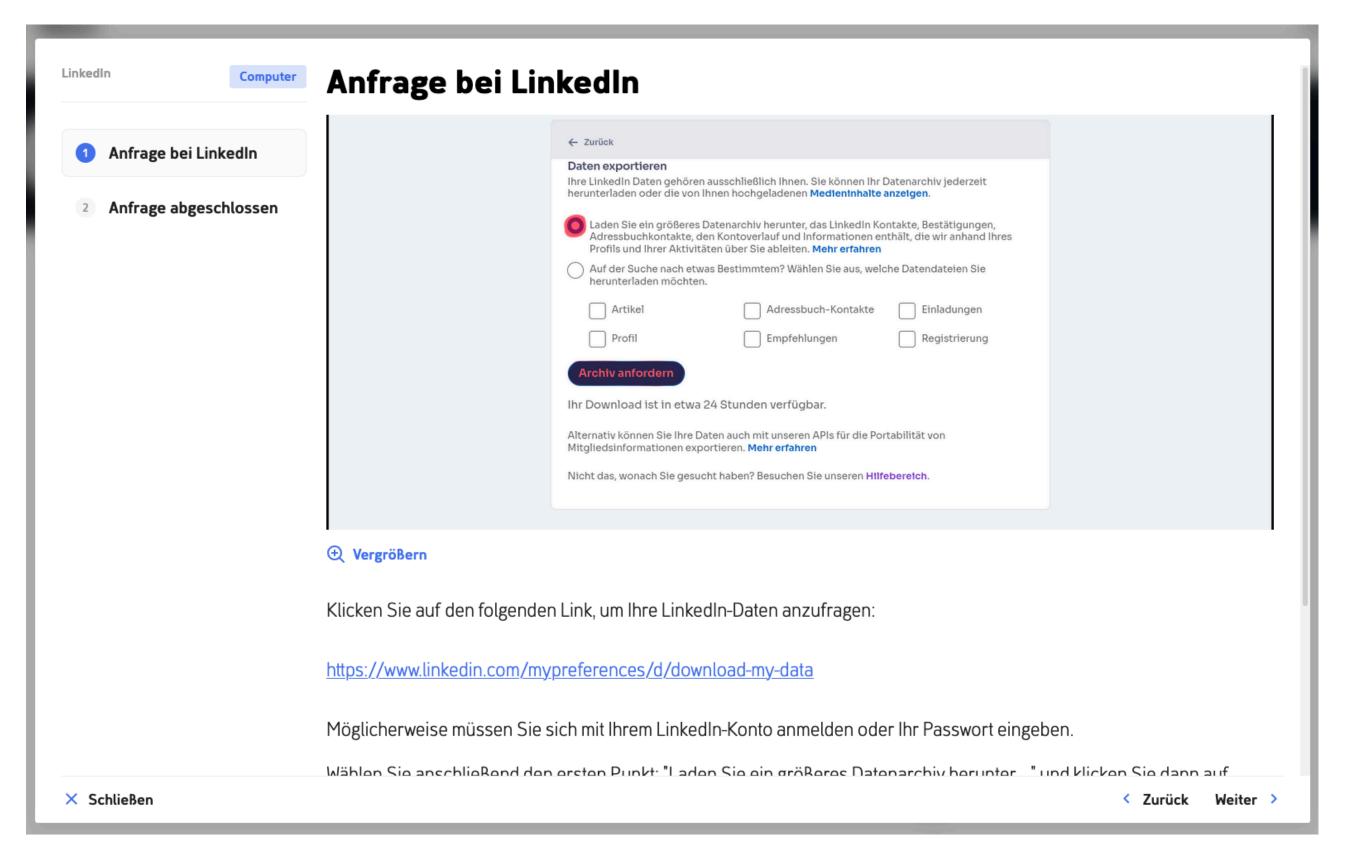


Survey start page

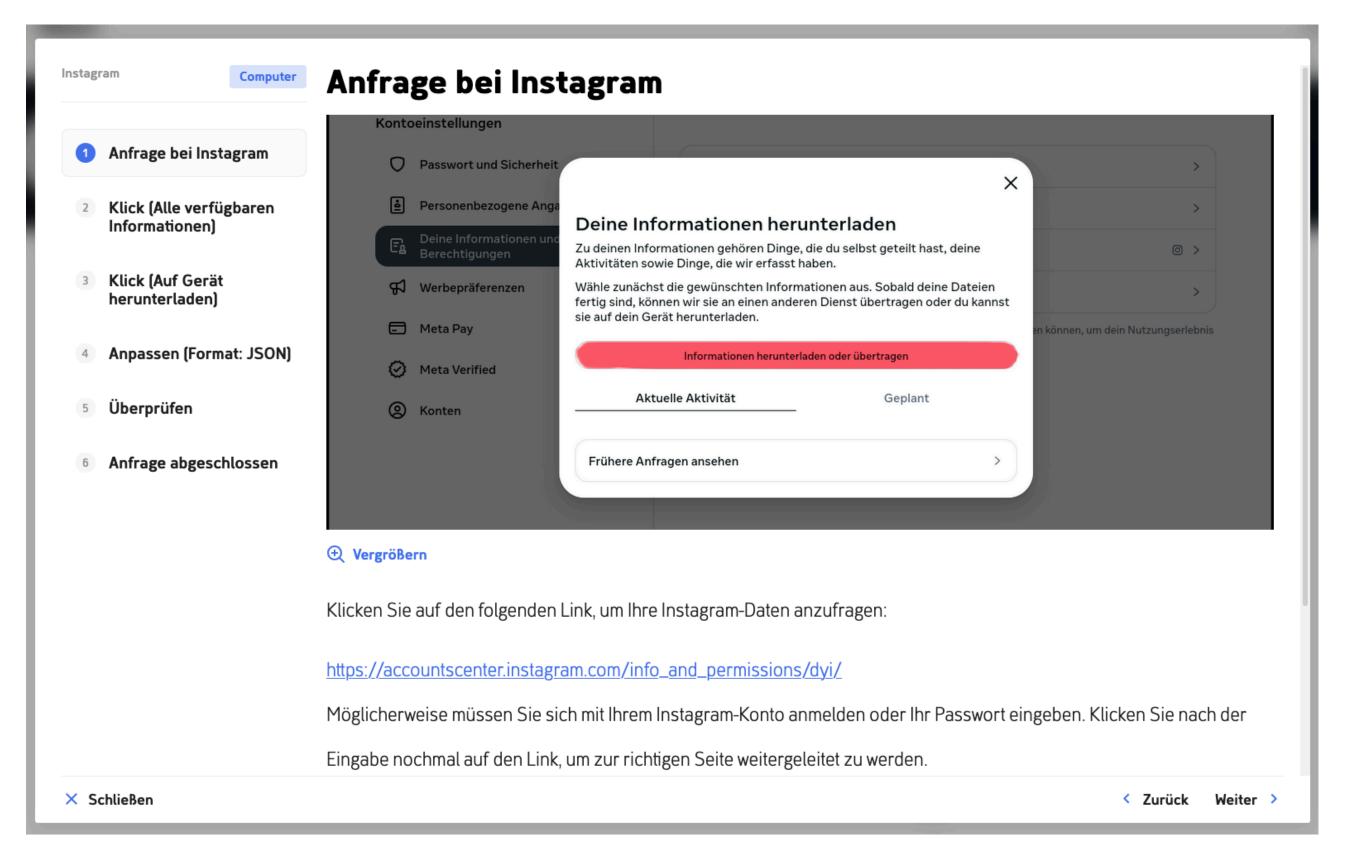
Request & Download Data

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

- Verification procedure (password requirements)
- Specification of data (metrics, observation period)
- Notification on provision of DDP
- Duration of DDP availability



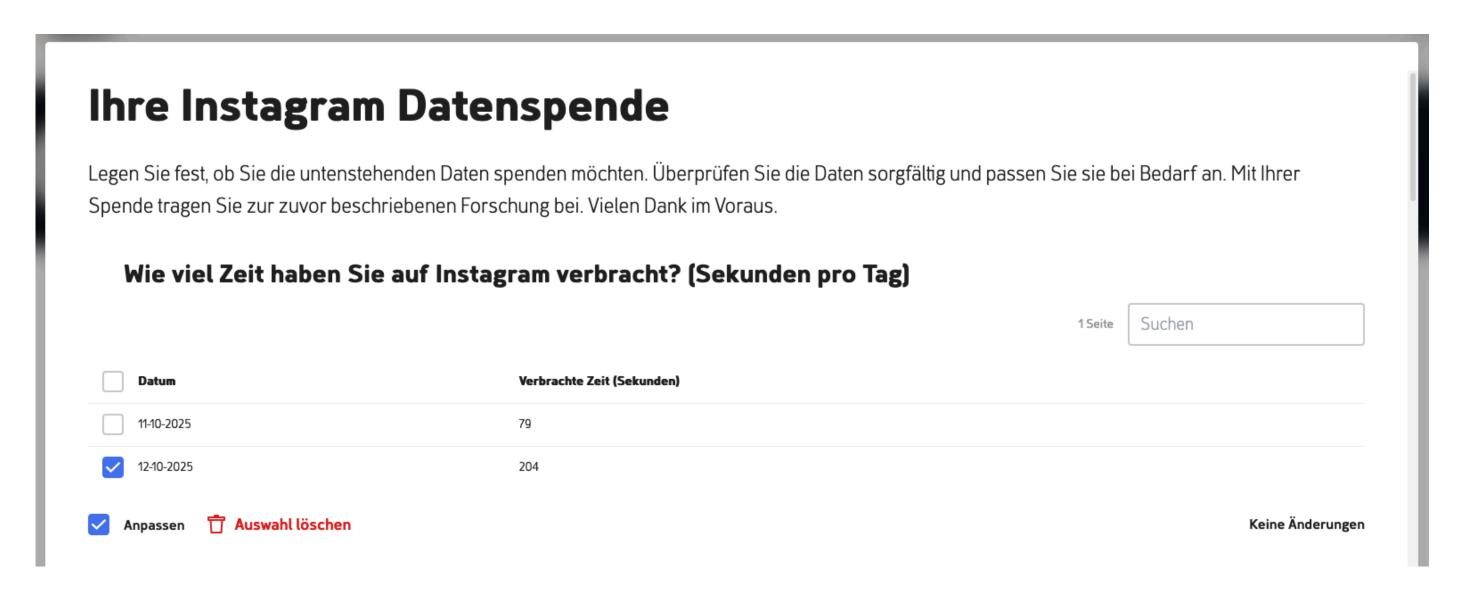
Request manual for LinkedIn on computer



Request manual for Instagram on computer

:: Extract Data

Q 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.