Introduction to Data Donation

Workshop TU Ilmenau 2026

Session 2️⃣ : Data Donation Studies (Participant Perspective)

👉 Part of the SPP DFG Project Integrating Data Donations in Survey Infrastructure

UNIVERSITÄT KLAGENFURT

Agenda

1. **What are data donation studies?**
2. **Participant perspective**, including
   - 📢 **Task 1**: Inspect your DDPs
   - 📢 **Task 2**: Try donating your data

Image by Hope House Press via Unsplash

1) What are data donation studies?

Source: Image by Markus Winkler via Unsplash

Changes in legal contexts

- EU secures right to own data in Art. 15 of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)
  - "*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)

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👉 **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 ✋ if you...

1) knew about this right?

2) ever tried to request your data?

In Switzerland, only 8% of members of an online access panel did (Pfiffner & Friemel, 2023, p. 17)

What are data donation studies?

Definition 💡 : Data donation studies are a **user-centric**, **privacy-by-design** 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 packages (DDPs)* available to science via *data donation tools (DDTs)*, often in the context of 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 Facebook, Instagram, or YouTube, 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)

Summary: What are data donation studies?

- **Summary**: User-centric method for collecting digital traces: Users download their data packages (DDPs) from platforms and make them available to science via data donation tools (DDTs).
- **Further literature**:
  - Boeschoten et al. (2022)
  - Carrière et al. (2024)

2) Participant perspective

Source: Image by Markus Winkler via Unsplash

Data donation studies - participant perspective

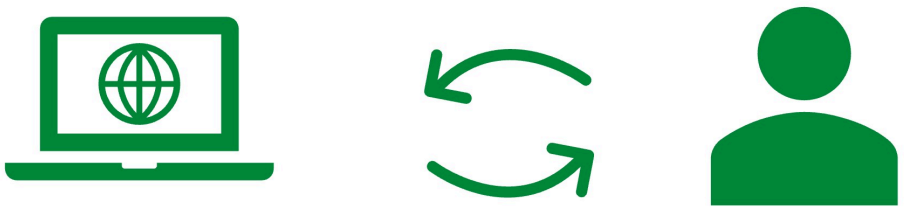
1 **Request**
Users request their data from a platform

2 **Download**
Users download their data once it becomes available

3 **Data donation**
Users donate their data to research via data donation tools

Figure. Data donation study - participant perspective

Step I: Data request



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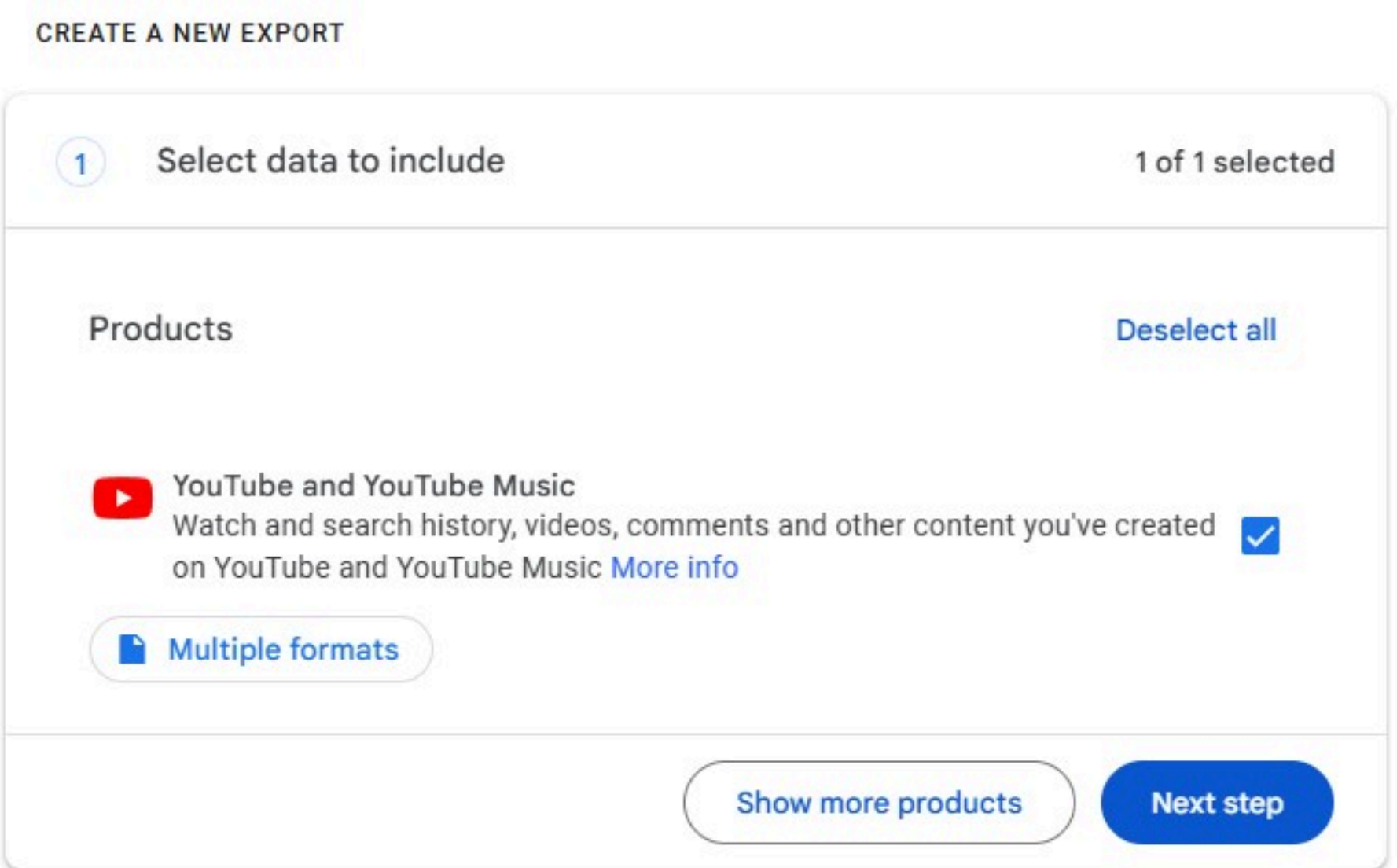

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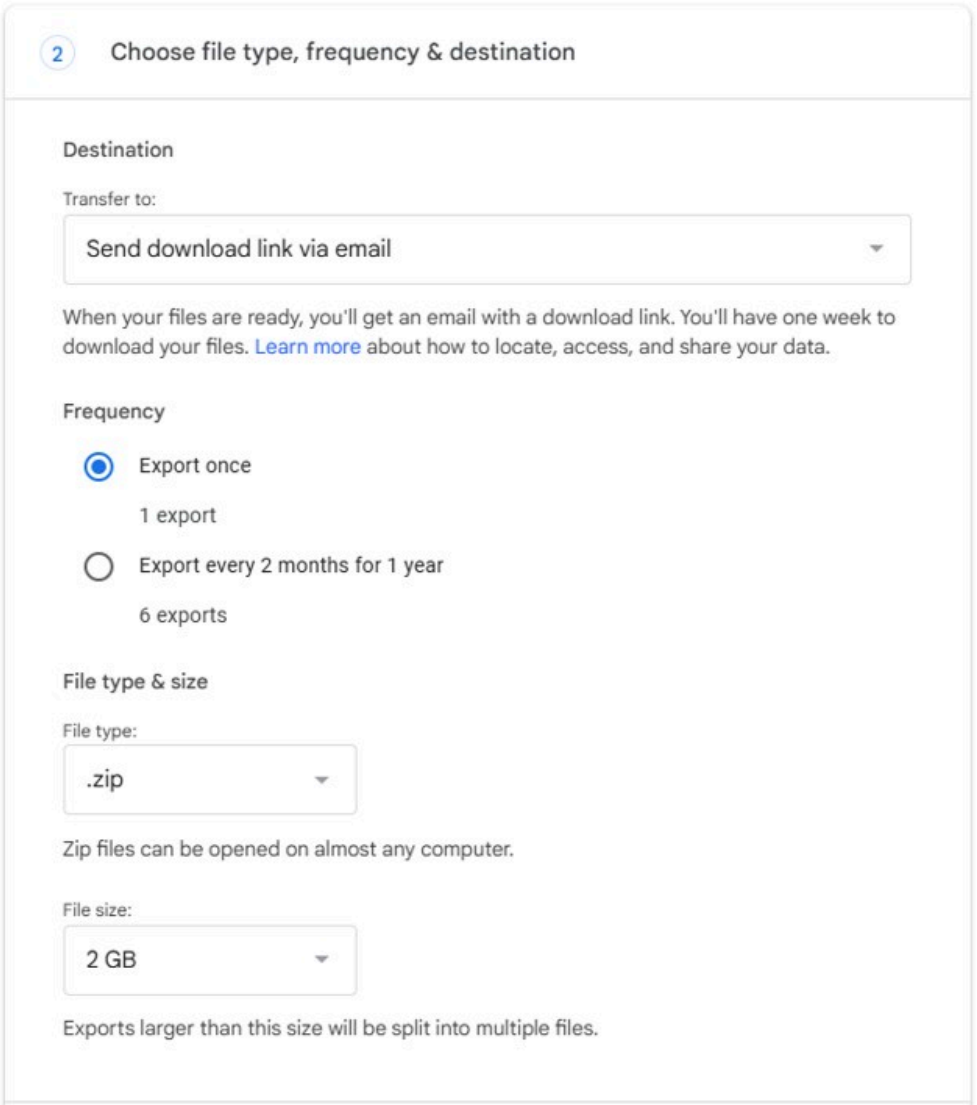


Figure. Data donation study - participant perspective

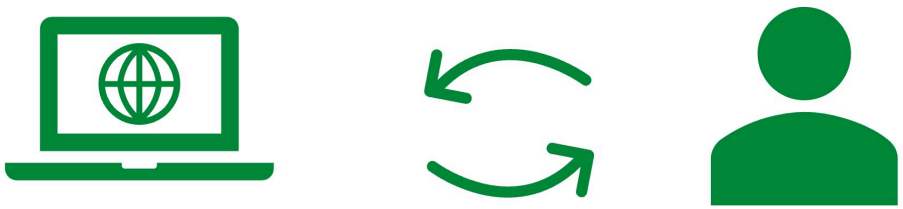
How easy (or hard) did you find it to request your data? Did you encounter any obstacles? 🤔

Step I: Data request

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

Step II: Download



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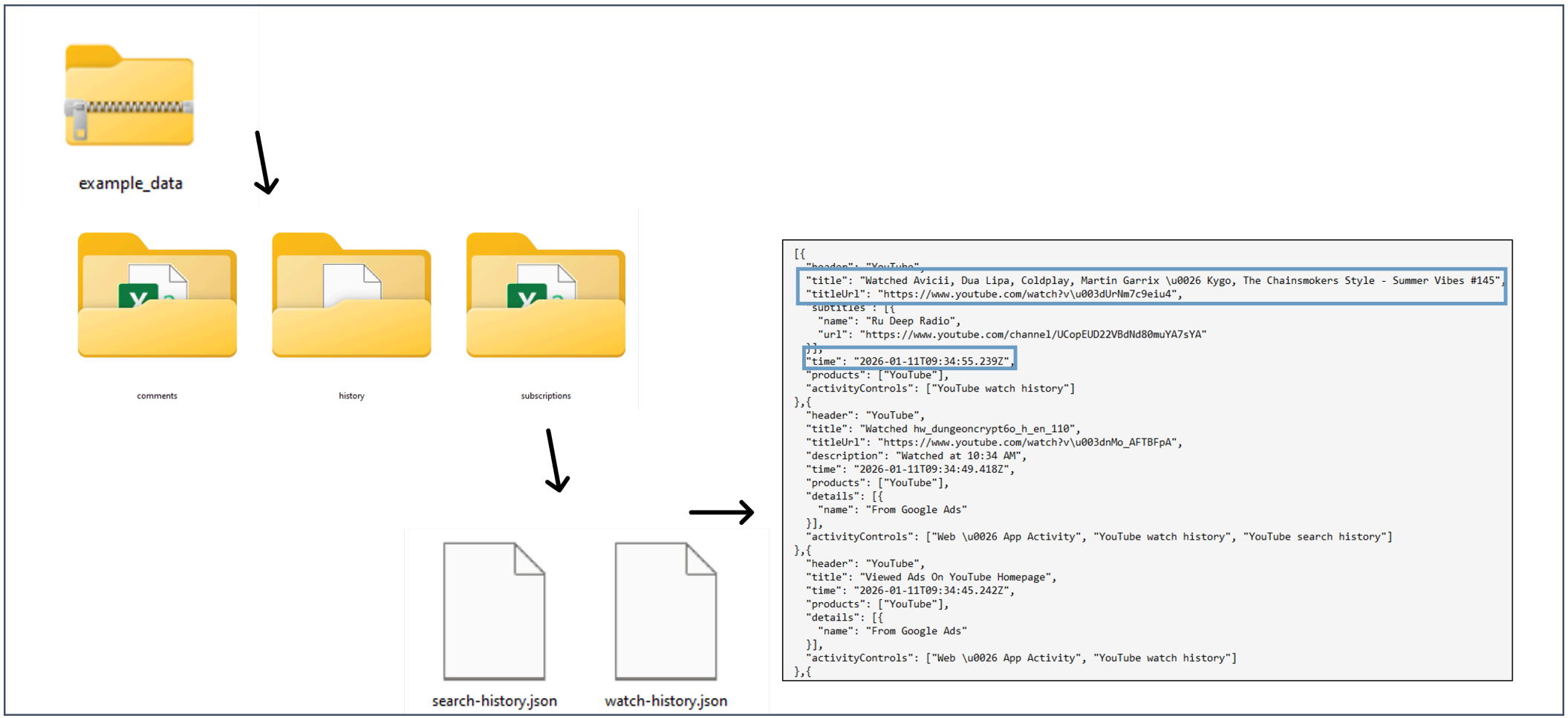

Figure. Data donation study - participant perspective

📢 Task 1: Inspect your DDPs.

1. *Which variables can you identify?*
2. *How could you use these for research in your field?*
3. *What are questions you may have about these measurements?*

Feel free to work in groups of 2-3 people (around 15 minutes)

Step II: Download

Different degrees in standardization for DDP content (Hase et al., 2024)...

Documentation & changes over time

- What does each file "mean"?
- How was this data measured?

Completeness & scope

- Is data missing and, if so, why?
- Why are some data points limited to specific time frames?
- How do we handle multi-lingual DDPs?

Step II: Download

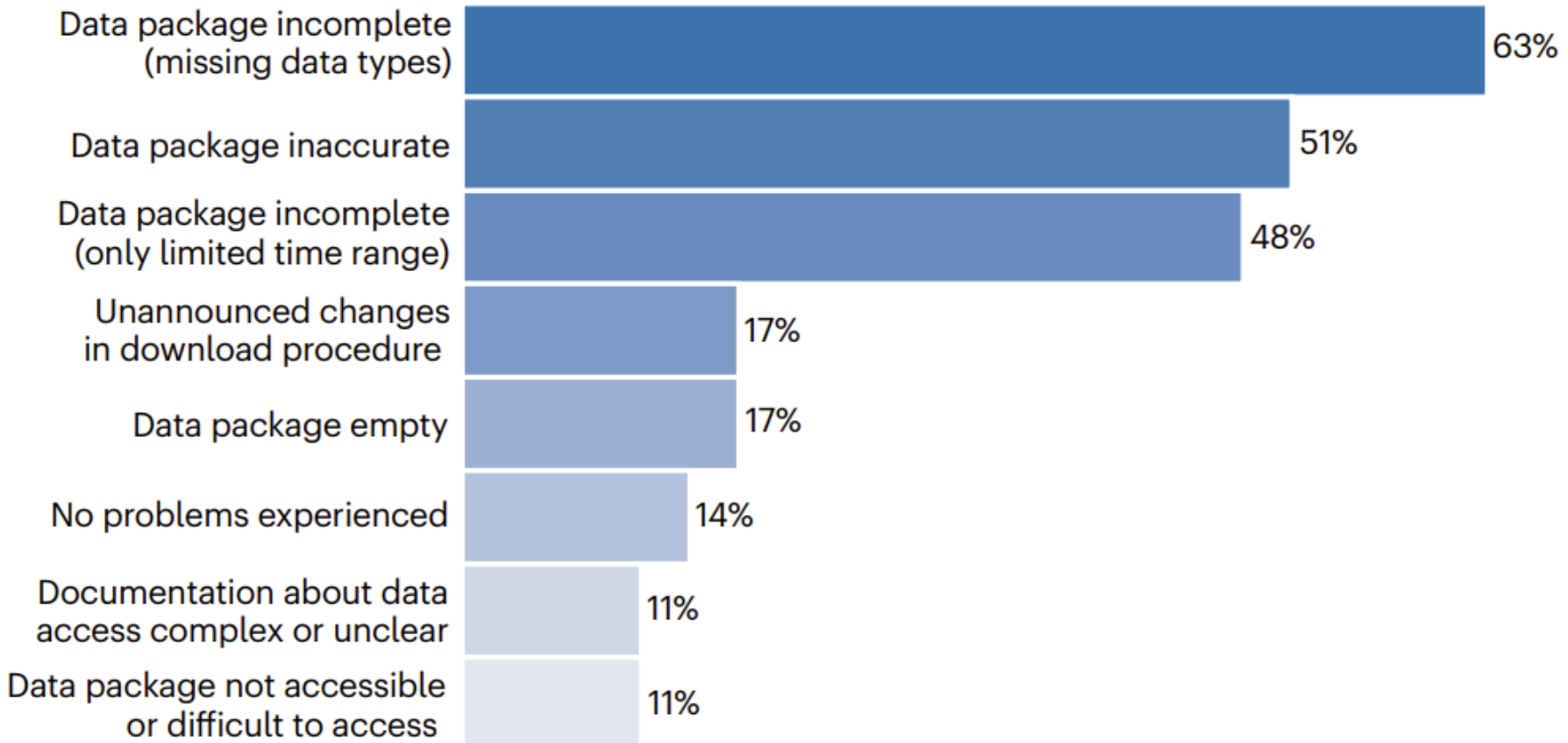

Fig. 1 | Common problems in platform data donations experienced by researchers. Data from a June 2024 survey among 51 data donation researchers.

Valkenburg et al. (2025). It is time to ensure research access to platform data

Step III: Data donation

1 **Request**
Users request their data from a platform

2 **Download**
Users download their data once it becomes available

3 **Data donation**
Users donate their data to research via data donation tools

Figure. Data donation study - participant perspective

Step III: Data donation

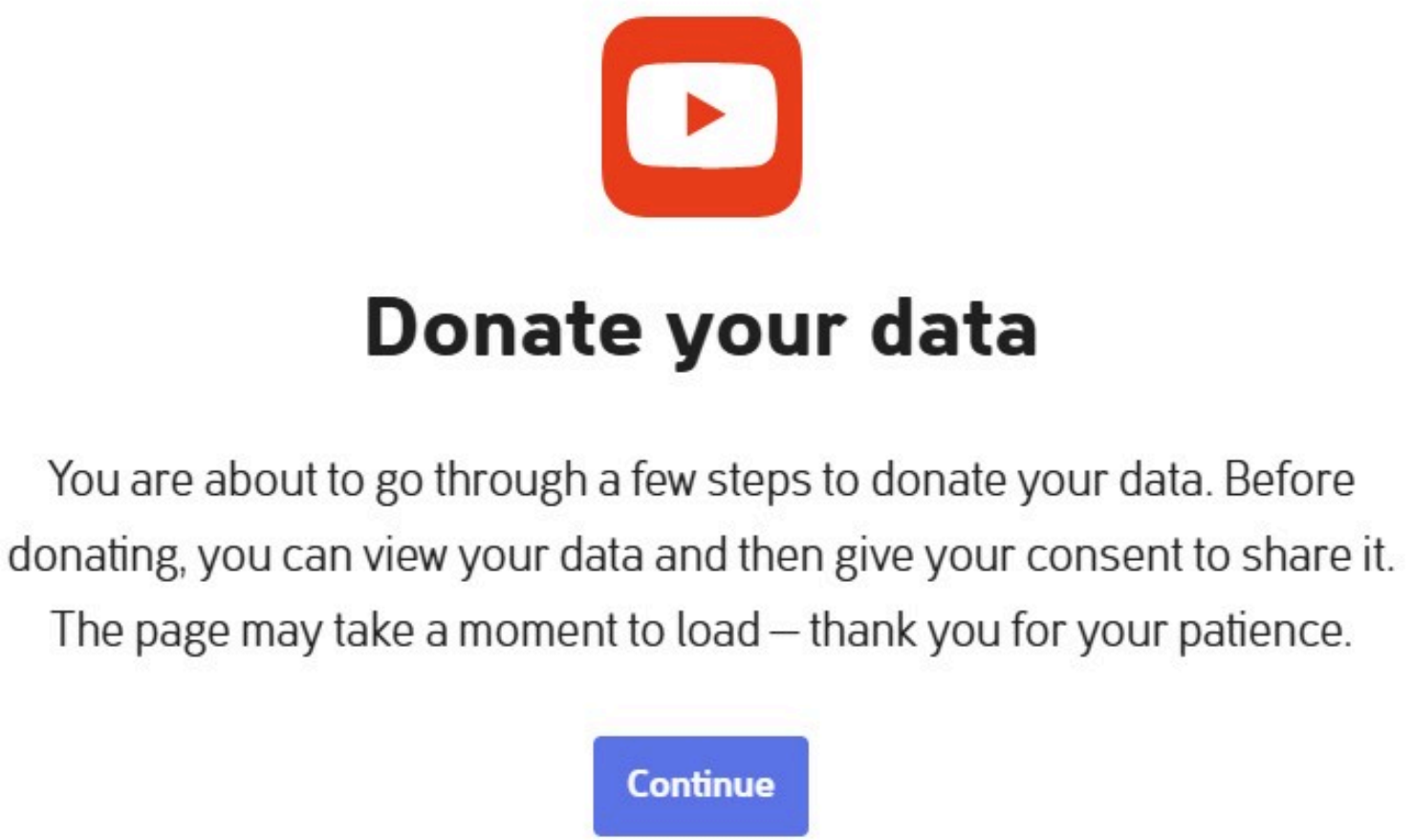

Figure. Data donation study - participant perspective

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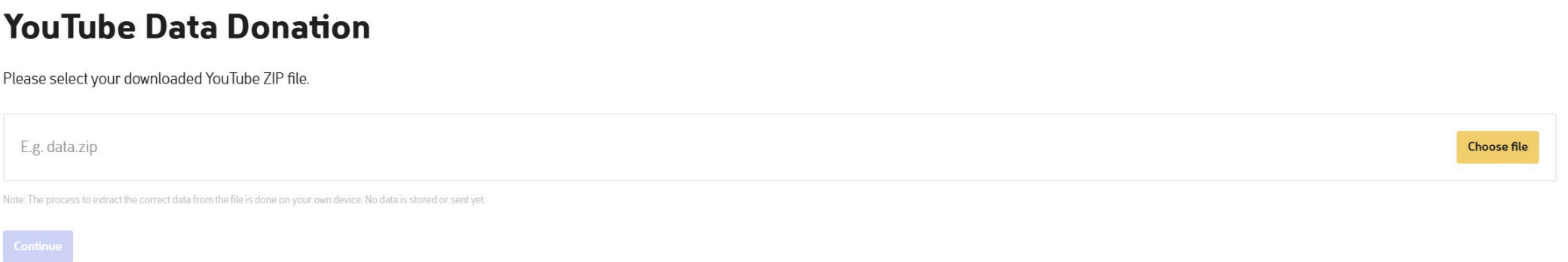


Figure. Data donation study - participant perspective

Step III: Data donation

1 Watch History

‹ 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 › 19 pages Search

Timestamp	Video Title	Video ID	Channel Name	Channel ID	Activity Controls
2026-01-11 09:34:55.239	Avicii, Dua Lipa, Coldplay, Martin Garrix & Kygo, The Chainsmokers Style - Summer Vibes #145	UrNm7c9eiu4	Ru Deep Radio	UCopEUD22VBdNd80muYA7sYA	YouTube watch history
2026-01-11 09:34:49.418	hw_dungeoncrypt6o_h_en_110	nMo_AFTBFpA			Web & App Activity, YouTube watch history, YouTube search history
2026-01-11 09:05:45.500	Tom Odell - Another Love (Lyrics)	Jkj36B1YuDU	7clouds	UCNqFDjYTexJDET3rPDrmJKg	YouTube watch history
2026-01-11 09:05:38.861	Bring your ideas to life with Base44	OugxDOargKI			Web & App Activity, YouTube watch history, YouTube search history
2026-01-11 09:05:32.534	Einmal satt auf die Hand: BIG Toppings. BIG Taste. BIG Sensation. Von Wagner.	Or47Afc4Xqs			Web & App Activity, YouTube watch history, YouTube search history
2026-01-11 09:05:10.530	Mega Hits 2025 🌳 The Best Of Vocal Deep House Music Mix 2025 🌱 Summer Music Mix 2025 #4	N6DW31S_oyI	Helios Deep	UCw527CsYYlcRVR3W2ywMV0A	YouTube watch history

Figure. Data donation study - participant perspective

📢 Task 2: Try donating your data.

Upload and inspect your data. If you could not download the data, use the ZIP folder "example data" (see landing page) for this session.

1. Are there any surprising/missing values?
2. Did you encounter any difficulties in deleting/sharing your data?

Use this link: https://next.eyra.co/a/nWPJC4?p=999 - replace number after *p=* with random number. Feel free to work in groups of 2-3 people.

Bias in Data Donation Studies

Similar to tracking studies, data donation characterized by (Hase et al., 2024; Hase & Haim, 2024; Keusch et al., 2024):

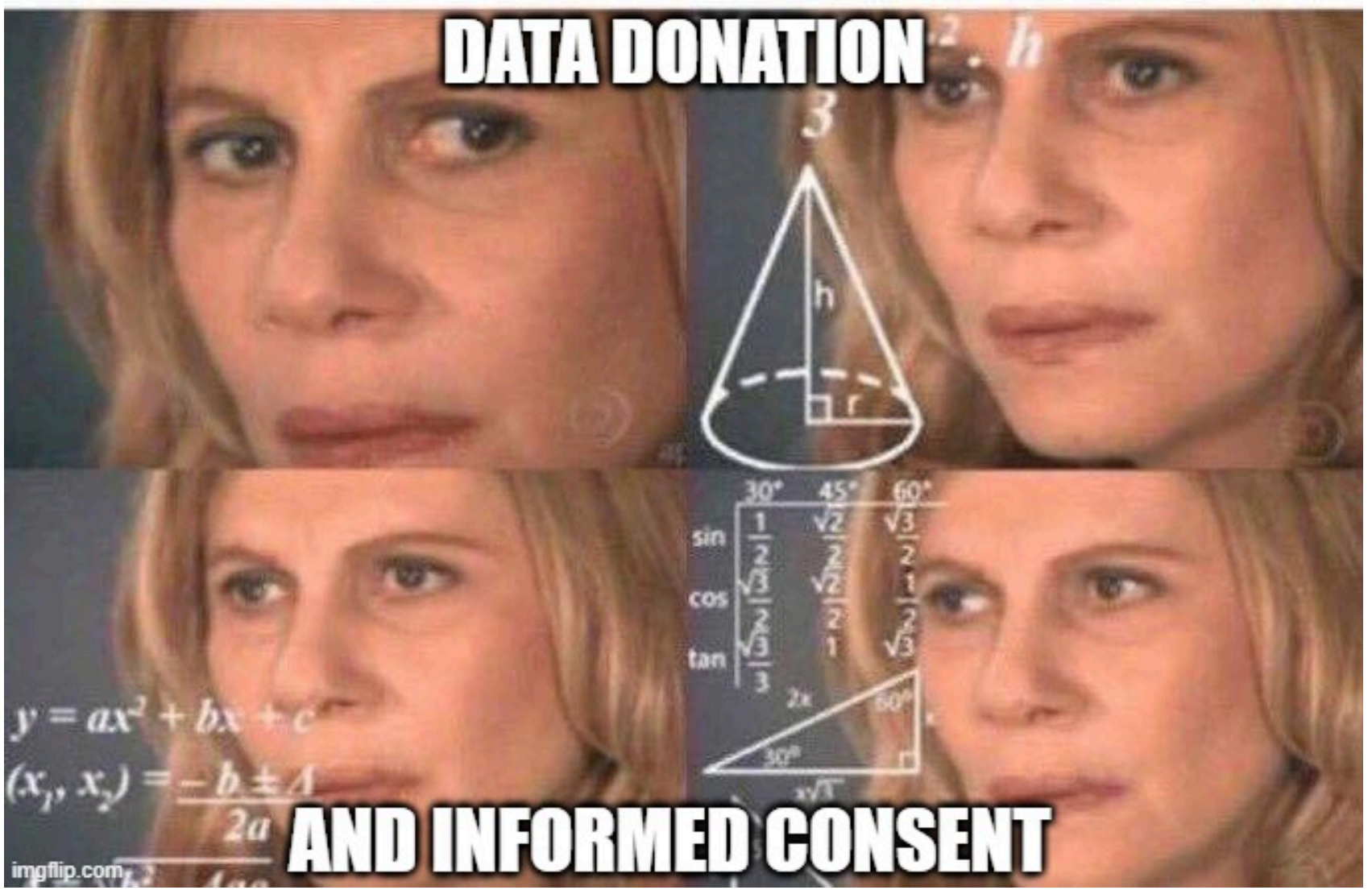
- Errors in representation (e.g., coverage error, non-response error)
- Measurement errors (e.g., missing data, specification error)

👉 Not necessarily less biased than survey data - but subject to different bias?

👉 We will talk about this in Session 4️⃣.

Informed Consent in Data Donation Studies

Similar to tracking (Kreuter et al., 2020): Is consent really "informed"? (Groot Kormelink et al., 2025; Hase & Haim, 2024)



Informed Consent in Data Donation Studies

Similar to tracking (Kreuter et al., 2020): Is consent really "informed"? (Groot Kormelink et al., 2025; Hase & Haim, 2024)

- in walk-through interviews, participants "*fundamentally misunderstood [this] key principle*" (p. 8)
- Anecdotal evidence: sending data via email, sending different data, sending someone else's data, etc.
- Almost no one deletes data (except for searches!)

Summary: Participant perspective 📚

- **Summary**: Key steps from the participant perspective ...
    1. Data request
    2. Data download
    3. Data donation
- **Further literature**:
    - Boeschoten et al. (2022)
    - Carrière et al. (2024)

Questions?

References

Boeschoten, L., Mendrik, A., Van Der Veen, E., Vloothuis, J., Hu, H., Voorvaart, R., & Oberski, D. L. (2022). Privacy-preserving local analysis of digital trace data: A proof-of-concept. *Patterns*, *3*(3), 100444. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.patter.2022.100444

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