

Digital Traces via Data Donations

Workshop DGPUK RezFo 2026

Session **2** : Data Donation Studies (Participant Perspective)

👉 Part of the SPP DFG Project [Integrating Data Donations in Survey Infrastructure](#)



Agenda

1. What are data donation studies?
2. Participant perspective, including

- ▶ **Task 1:** Inspect your DDPs
- ▶ **Task 2:** Try donating your data
- ▶ **Task 3:** Extract personality profiles from 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)

How is data from DDPs different?

Compared to APIs ([Haim & Hase, 2023](#); [Ohme et al., 2024](#))...

- Control & informed consent of users
- Longitudinal data without “rate limits”
- Partly more knowledge about missing data (e.g., unit drop-out)
- Partly additional measurements (e.g., exposure data; non-public data)

How is data from DDPs different?

Compared to **tracking** ([Haim & Hase, 2023](#); [Ohme et al., 2024](#))...

- Retrospective & often more longitudinal
- Partly additional measurements (e.g., algorithmic inferences)
- Anchored in current provisions in law (for issues with tracking, see [Edelson & McCoy, 2021](#))

👉 but similarly burdensome for participants!

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



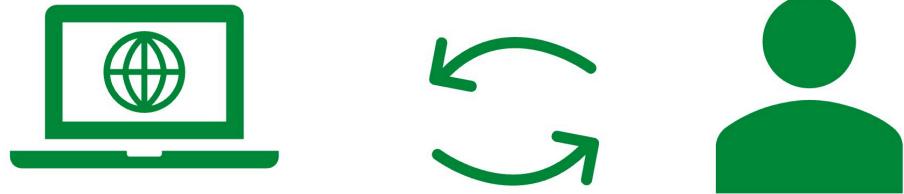
Source: Image by Markus Winkler via Unsplash

Data donation studies - participant perspective



Figure. Data donation study - participant perspective

Step I: Data request



1 Request

Users request their data from a platform

Figure. Data donation study - participant perspective

Step 1: Data request

CREATE A NEW EXPORT

1

Select data to include

1 of 1 selected

Products

Deselect all



YouTube and YouTube Music

Watch and search history, videos, comments and other content you've created
on YouTube and YouTube Music [More info](#)



Multiple formats

Show more products

Next step

Figure. Data donation study - participant perspective

Step 1: Data request

2 Choose file type, frequency & destination

Destination

Transfer to:

When your files are ready, you'll get an email with a download link. You'll have one week to download your files. [Learn more](#) about how to locate, access, and share your data.

Frequency

Export once
1 export

Export every 2 months for 1 year
6 exports

File type & size

File type:

Zip files can be opened on almost any computer.

File size:

Exports larger than this size will be split into multiple files.

Figure. Data donation study - participant perspective

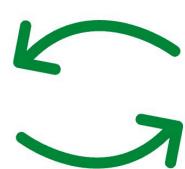
How easy (or hard) did you find it to request your data? Did you encounter any obstacles? 🤔

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



1 Request

Users request their data from a platform

2 Download

Users download their data once it becomes available

Figure. Data donation study - participant perspective

Step II: Download

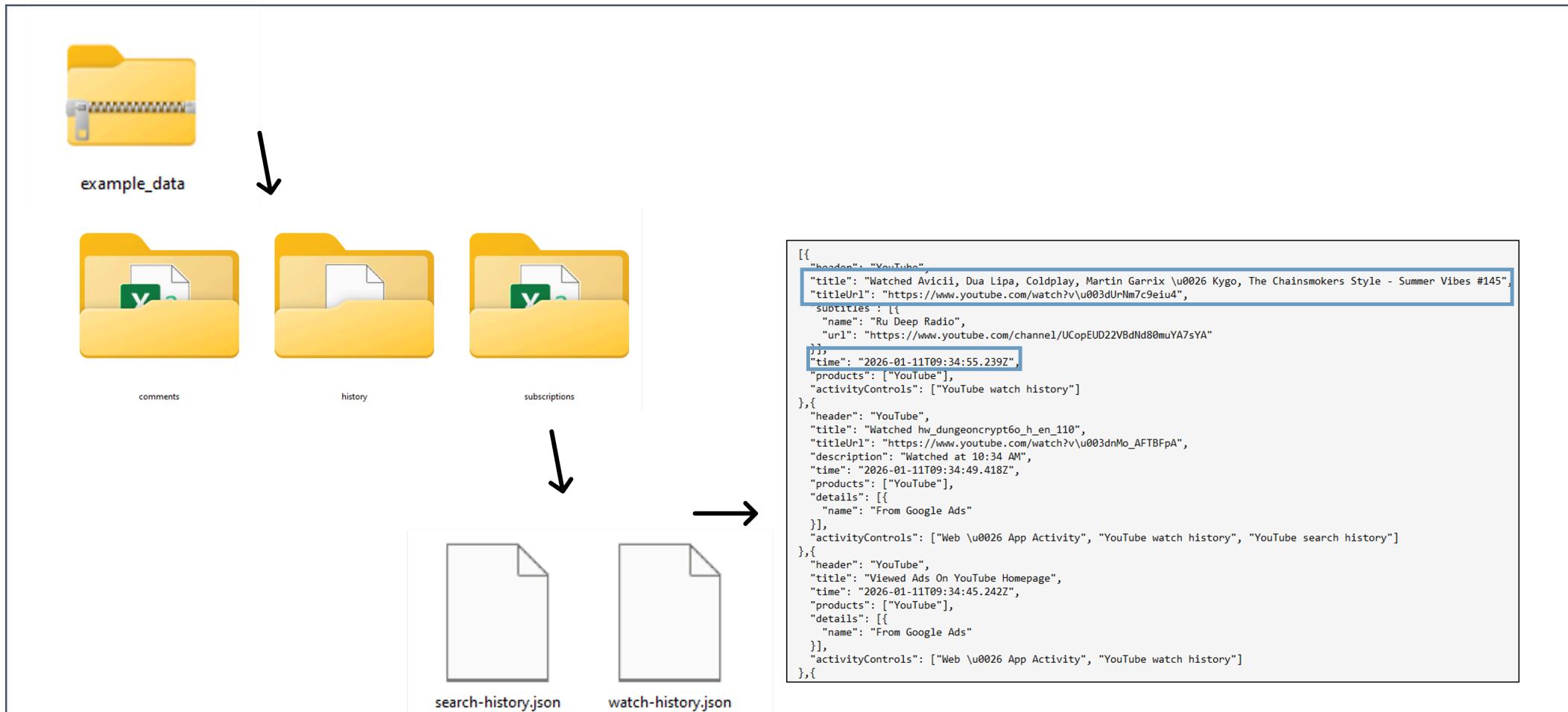


Figure. Data donation study - participant perspective

 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

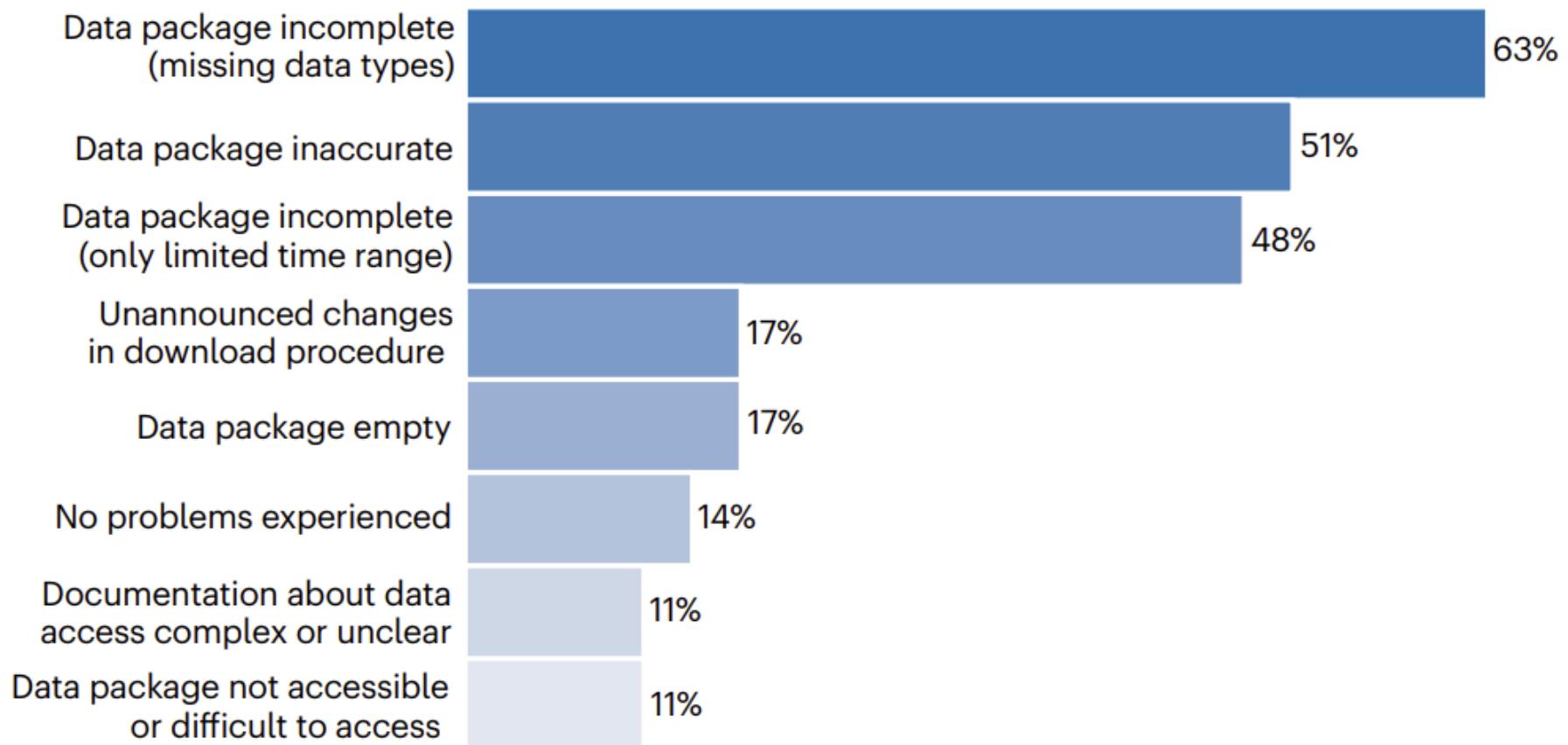


Fig. 1 | Common problems in platform data donations experienced by researchers. Data from a [June 2024 survey](#) among 51 data donation researchers.

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

Step III: Data donation



Figure. Data donation study - participant perspective

Step III: Data donation



Donate your data

You are about to go through a few steps to donate your data. Before donating, you can view your data and then give your consent to share it.

The page may take a moment to load – thank you for your patience.

Continue

Figure. Data donation study - participant perspective

Step III: Data donation

YouTube Data Donation

Please select your downloaded YouTube ZIP file.

 Choose file

Note: The process to extract the correct data from the file is done on your own device. No data is stored or sent yet.

Continue

Figure. Data donation study - participant perspective

Step III: Data donation

1 Watch History

The screenshot shows a participant's perspective on a data donation study. At the top, there are navigation buttons for 'Watch History' (back, forward, page 1-7). To the right, it says '19 pages' and has a 'Search' input field. The main area is a table with the following columns: Timestamp, Video Title, Video ID, Channel Name, Channel ID, and Activity Controls.

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	UrNm7c9ieu4	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	OugxD0argKI			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_oyl	Helios Deep	UCw527CsYYlcRVR3W2ywMVOA	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.



Task 3: Extract personality profiles from data.

Inspect the ZIP folder “example” data for this session (manually or upload it to the data donation study - data you see may then differ). Imagine you are a commercial company.

Based on the trace data, how would you profile this person in terms of....

1. sociodemographic characteristics
2. their interests
3. ads you may target them with

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):

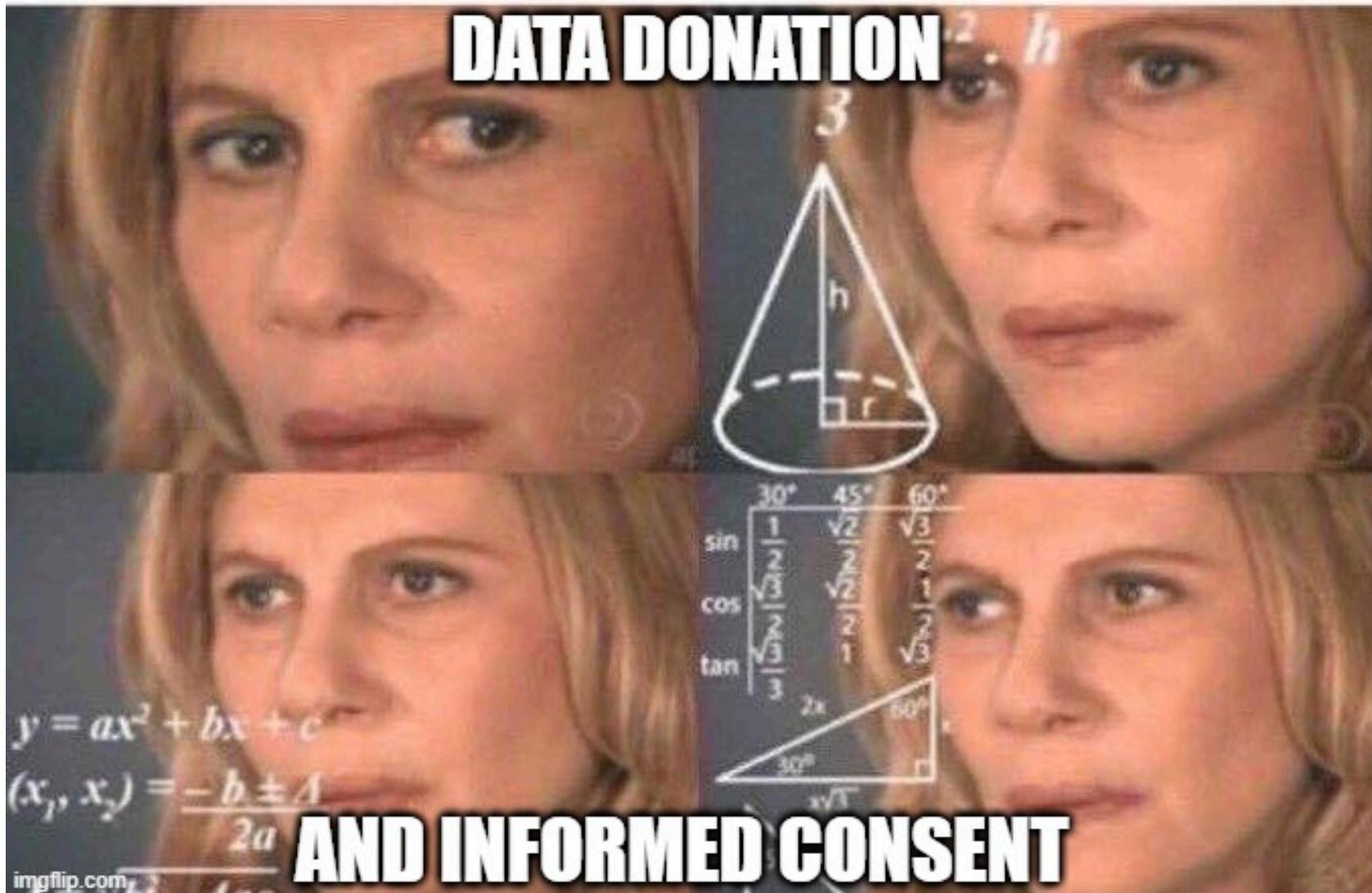
- Errors in representation (e.g., coverage error, non-response error)
- Measurement errors (e.g., missing data, specification error)

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

👉 We will talk about this in Session 4.

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?

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