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Still Problematic? Generalizability, Validity, and Reliability of API-Based Research

Researchers continuously rely on digital trace data from APIs for social science research, often ignoring methodological limitations. In this talk, I first show that studies using Google Trends data frequently neglect the data's limited generalizability, fail to validate whether search queries measure their intended constructs, and overlook known reliability issues. Second, I introduce a new challenge: Downloading data from APIs such as YouTube, Google Trends, and the New York Times API for identical queries returns different results depending on the download country, further undermining reliability and reproducibility. Together, these findings add to the call for a post-API world in computational social science.