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Manual for media diary software:
MeTag Analyze & MeTag App

Manual for MeTag Version 1.0.10
and MeTag Analyze Version 1.2
(21.02.2022)



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Manual MeTag Analyze and MeTag app

Introduction

Media diaries are an established method in media and communication research and as a methodical approach can be applied to a wide variety of different research purposes. They can be used to research time budgets allocated to particular media, patterns of interpersonal media communication and many other purposes (see Gershuny & Sullivan 1998, Jäckel & Wollscheid 2006, Linke 2010 or Berg & Düvel 2012). Media diaries can also be a pedagogical tool in media education (Berg 2019; Hyers 2018), e.g. to make someone aware of their media use.

They are furthermore an appropriate tool for reconstructing the use of media from a procedural perspective, i.e., to show how media practices occur and develop over time, be it over a day, over a week or over a month, etc. Due to this orientation towards capturing passages of time, media diaries are also an established method to research media repertoires from a processual perspective (Hepp et al. 2016).

However, there are practical limits to this potential in principle: While diaries can be, and traditionally are, done via pen and paper, they pose certain challenges for data collection: they demand a high level of engagement from participants, creating entries can be time consuming. Less literate participants (e.g. children) are hesitant to fill them out sufficiently or at all. The response rate is typically rather low and the collected data can be unstructured which complicates comparable analysis.

One way to remedy the mentioned shortcomings is the use of digital diaries. While some studies rely on the use of programs like WhatsApp to collect diary-like data (Kaufmann & Peil 2020), there is also research software dedicated to digital media diaries. One such example is the program MeTag (Hohmann 2021), whose functionalities are being described in detail in this manual. In addition to simplifying data collection by a smartphone app, it also offers a backend for process-oriented data analysis that can help to recognize process patterns of media use through visualisation. And with the different purposes outlined above in mind, MeTag is built to support various kinds of research, ranging from standardized to non-standardized data collection.

The purpose of *MeTag Analyze* and the accompanying *MeTag app* (which can be found in the app stores of Apple¹ for iOS and Google² for Android) is to provide researchers with a tool to collect and analyse media diaries. The data collection takes place via the above mentioned MeTag app on the participants' smartphones.

¹ <https://apps.apple.com/de/app/metag/id1478391926>

² <https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=de.unibremen.metag&hl=de>

The data analysis is done via a web-based back-end app called MeTag Analyze which at the same time functions to start and end data collection projects.

Please be aware that MeTag is continuously developed as part of the DFG (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft) funded project “The sustainable provision of software for cross-media practices and digital traces research. A ‘co-creation approach’ for developing an infrastructure model for the digital diary and sorting apps MeTag and MeSort“ (HE 3025/13-1).



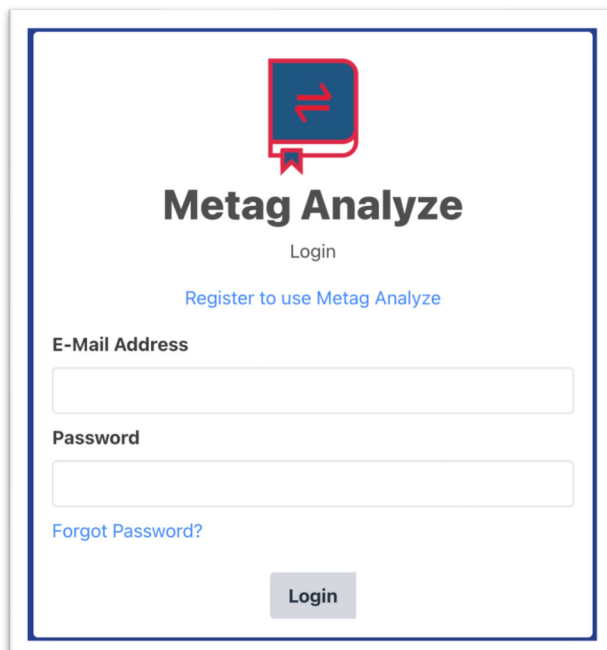
This manual refers to version 1.0.10 of the MeTag app and version 1.2 of MeTag Analyze and is a work in progress, which means that it will be continuously updated as MeTag is developed. Please consult the web page <http://mesoftware.org/index.php/metag/> or our Twitter account https://twitter.com/mesoftware_org for updates. For any comments on this manual or on MeTag Analyze itself, please contact us via e-mail at metag@uni-bremen.de.

Working with MeTag Analyze and the MeTag app

MeTag Analyze was tested using the web browsers Chrome, Firefox and Safari. The MeTag app is available for iOS and Android. When using the MeTag software we propose the following workflow, that will also be represented by the structure of this manual:

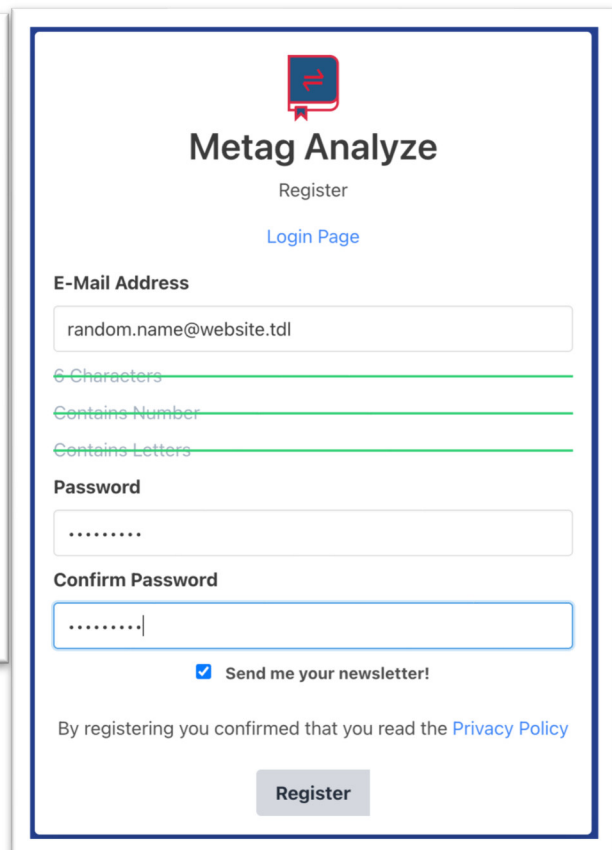
1. Creating a new project in MeTag Analyze
2. Creating cases for the study and inviting them
3. Collecting data via Metag app
4. Handling data provided by cases

When first visiting our website at <https://www.mesoftware.org/metag/login> you will find the login screen (see image 1), where you just enter your login credentials, consisting of an e-mail address and a password. If you are not a registered user yet, you can click on the “Register to use MeTag Analyze” link. Upon doing so, you can set an e-mail address and a password to use as your future login credentials (see image 2). Once successfully registered, you can go back to the login page and use your newly acquired credentials to log into MeTag Analyze.



The image shows the blank login screen of MeTag Analyze. At the top center is the MeTag Analyze logo, which consists of a red square with a white double-headed arrow and a red bookmark icon. Below the logo, the text "Metag Analyze" is displayed in a bold, black font, followed by "Login" in a smaller font. A blue link "Register to use Metag Analyze" is positioned below the "Login" text. The form contains two input fields: "E-Mail Address" and "Password". A blue link "Forgot Password?" is located below the "Password" field. A grey "Login" button is at the bottom center.

Image 1: Blank login screen of MeTag Analyze



The image shows the filled-out registration form for MeTag Analyze. At the top center is the MeTag Analyze logo. Below the logo, the text "Metag Analyze" is displayed in a bold, black font, followed by "Register" in a smaller font. A blue link "Login Page" is positioned below the "Register" text. The form contains several input fields: "E-Mail Address" (filled with "random.name@website.tdl"), "Password" (filled with "....."), and "Confirm Password" (filled with "....."). Three green progress bars are shown below the "E-Mail Address" field, labeled "6 Characters", "Contains Number", and "Contains Letters". A checkbox "Send me your newsletter!" is checked. A blue link "Privacy Policy" is located below the "Confirm Password" field. A grey "Register" button is at the bottom center.

Image 2: Filled out registration for MeTag Analyze

1 Creating a new project

Once you successfully logged in, you will see the home screen of MeTag Analyze (see image 3), where you can either left-click on the blue “+ New Project” button in the upper right corner or the blue “+ New Project” button in the now still empty section of your created projects.

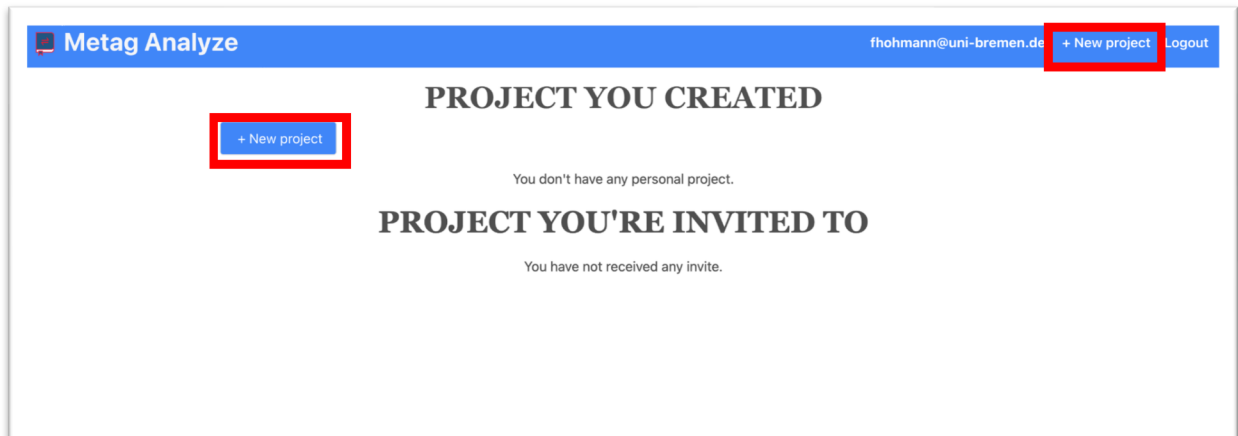


Image 3: Home screen of MeTag Analyze with no created projects. Red rectangles highlight buttons to create a new project

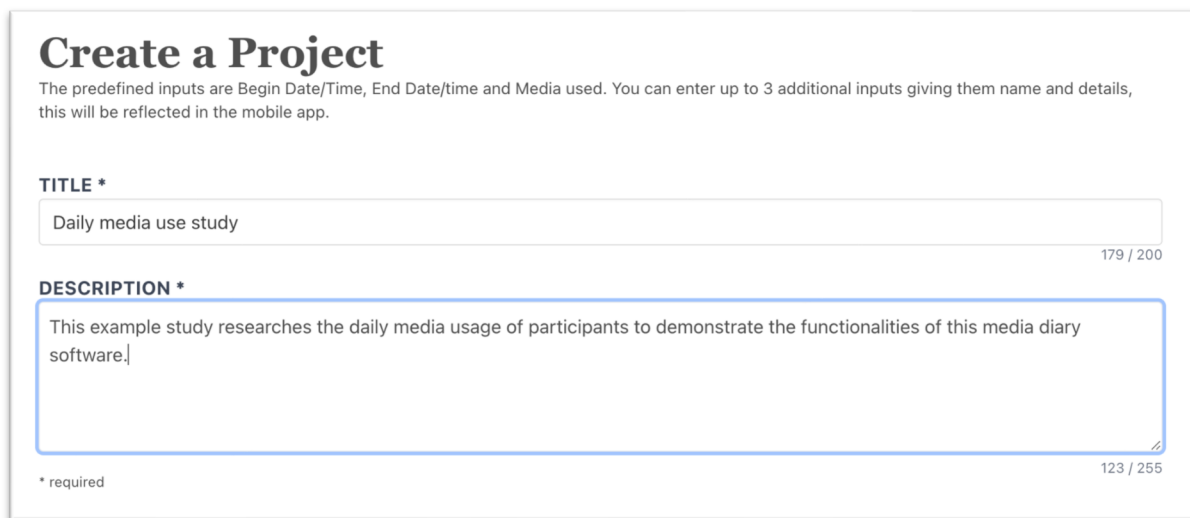
1.1 Adding a description to your project

The image shows the 'Create a Project' form. At the top, there is a title 'Create a Project' and a note: 'The predefined inputs are Begin Date/Time, End Date/time and Media used. You can enter up to 3 additional inputs giving them name and details, this will be reflected in the mobile app.' Below this, there are two main input fields. The first is labeled 'TITLE *' and has a text input field with a character count of '200 / 200'. The second is labeled 'DESCRIPTION *' and has a larger text area with a character count of '255 / 255'. At the bottom left, there is a '* required' label. The form is enclosed in a light gray border.

Image 4: Empty form when creating a new project

When you press the “+ New Project” button, your screen will change and you will be prompted with an empty form to fill out (see image 4). The field “Title” can contain the name of your project as it will later appear on your home screen, it is limited to 200 characters. In the field “Description” you can write a short summary of your project (max. 255 characters). For an example, see image 5.

1.2 Adding inputs to your media diary



Create a Project

The predefined inputs are Begin Date/Time, End Date/time and Media used. You can enter up to 3 additional inputs giving them name and details, this will be reflected in the mobile app.

TITLE *

Daily media use study 179 / 200

DESCRIPTION *

This example study researches the daily media usage of participants to demonstrate the functionalities of this media diary software. 123 / 255

* required

Image 5: Filled out form

Besides providing this more general information, you can also edit the data your media diary project is asking from the participants. Every media diary project you create in MeTag Analyze will *always* contain at least two inputs which every participant of a study has to provide:

- 1) The starting time and ending time of media usage and
- 2) the medium that has been used.

In case of the medium, you can provide your participants with a list of predefined inputs (see green rectangle in image 6). Since the question for the used medium always has an open text field for the participants to enter their answer into, this list will not be displayed to the participants to choose from. However, your list of media will be used for suggestions to the participants to quicker enter their data. For example, in image 6 there is added a “Smartphone” as a possible medium. If your participants now start typing the word “Smartphone” into the text field and enter the letter S, the word “Smartphone” will appear as a suggestion.

If you need more data from your participants, you can add up to three additional inputs by clicking the “+”-sign below “Number of additional inputs” and then set a name or question for each input of up to 255 characters. Furthermore, you can check a box to make this entry mandatory for your participants and also choose what type of format this input should have (see red rectangles in image 6). You can choose from:

- text: a free text field in which participants can openly answer,
- one choice: from a set of given answers participants can choose exactly one,
- multiple choice: from a set of given answers participants can choose several,
- scale: a scale from 1 to 5 stars participants can choose one value of, or

- audio recording: an input option that lets participants record an audio message of up to 30 minutes of length



A word on audio recordings: There can only be one audio recording option per entry, and you will receive an error message if you try to save a project that contains more than one. As stated above, the recordings can be up to 1800 seconds long (30 mins).

Image 6: Adding inputs to your media diary project



As an example project for this manual, we created a fictional project titled “Daily media use study” and entered the following description: “This example study researches the daily media usage of participants to demonstrate the functionalities of the media diary software” (see image 5).

We entered some very basic types of media we assumed, maybe based on previous research, participants might use daily - TV, radio, laptop, smartphone and book (see image 6) - and added overall three additional inputs. The first of which we named “Specific media content?”. It is a mandatory input of the type “text”, so that participants can freely enter what exactly their media consumption was comprised of. They could for

example specify what book they read or what they watched on TV (the exact handling of this input would then have to be part of our briefing for our participants on how to use the media diary prior to data collection). The second additional input is supposed to give some insight into the context of media usage and asks for possible companionship. To keep it simple, we selected the type “one choice” so that the participant only has to state whether he or she was with company or not, i.e. he/she watched TV alone or together with others. As the final input we selected the type “scale” to ask for the perceived enjoyment of the media use (see also image 6).

Once you have made all the required settings, you can save the finished project by clicking the “Create Project” button at the bottom of the screen (see blue rectangle in image 6). You will then be redirected to the home screen.

2 Creating cases for the study and inviting them

Once you created your project, it will appear in the “Projects you created” section of your home screen. It will show the title of your project, the e-mail login of the person who created it, how many cases are assigned to it and the short description you provided when creating the project (see image 7). It will also give you the option to actually add cases to it, i.e. participants who keep that media diary for a certain amount of time.

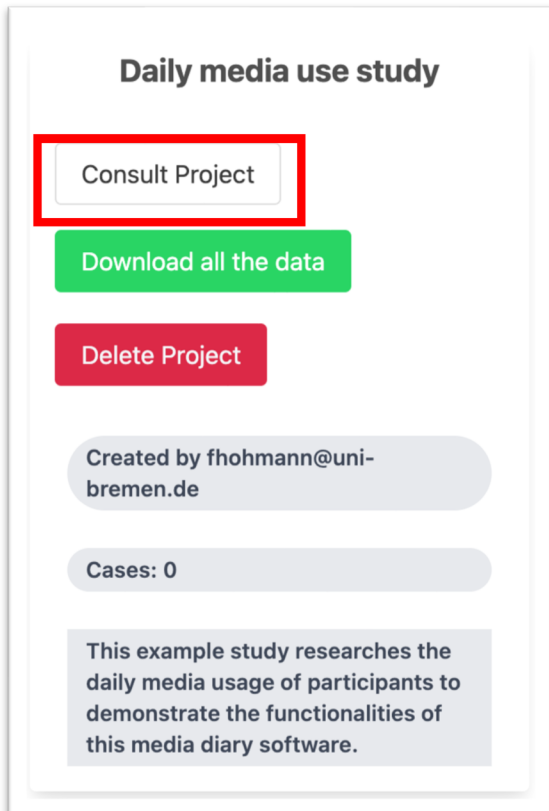


Image 7: Project overview

To do so, first click the “Consult Project” button on your project (see image 7, marked by the red rectangle). Upon doing so, you can view your project in more detail. Once you have cases, you will find an overview of them at the tab “Cases List”, you can invite other researchers to your project under the “Invites” tab and you can edit your inputs (as long as you have not added any cases yet!) at the “Inputs” tab. That means that on the one hand you can add completely new inputs you may have forgotten at the initial creation of the project or on the other hand you can delete inputs that turned out to be unnecessary. You can of course also just alter existing entries. The fourth tab “Users” gives a more detailed overview of the participants of your media diary project, once you have any (see image 8).

To now add one or more cases, i.e. participants who keep a media diary for a certain amount of time, just click on the green “Create Case” button at the top of the page (see red rectangle in image 8).

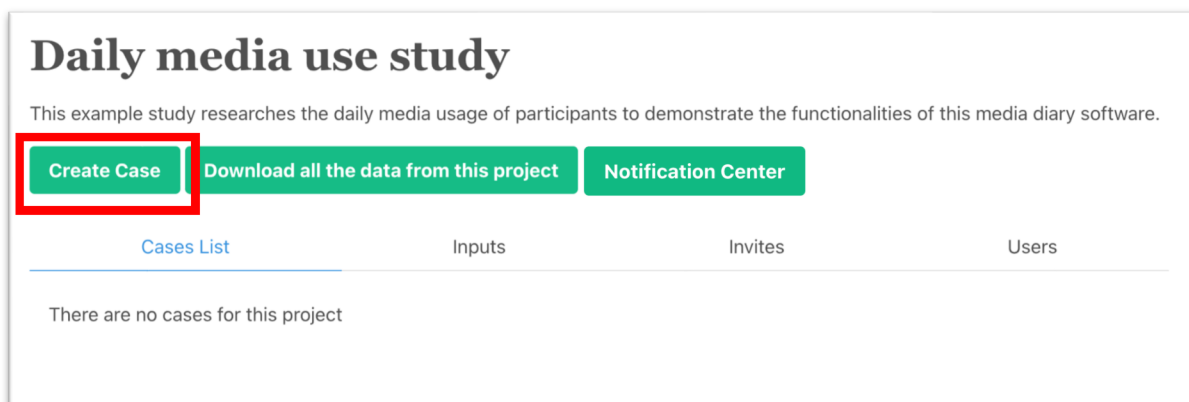


Image 8: A detailed view of your project

Upon doing so, the “Create a case” page will open and you can provide certain data for the case that should be created.

The first entry there is the case name. Although this data can only be accessed by you (or researchers you invited to the project), we would recommend not using the

actual name of the participant, but rather some other kind of identifier like a pseudonym or a case number to assure the anonymity of the participants.

In a second step you can set the duration for the data collection, i.e. how many days or weeks your participant should keep his or her media diary. Furthermore, you have the option to set the starting time of data collection to the time when the participant first logs into the mobile MeTag app or, by unchecking this option, set a certain date for the start of your collection period, independent of logins from your participants.

Create a Case

CASE NAME *
Case01

DURATION * 7 **UNIT** day(s) **ESTIMATED END:** 2.3.2021 194 / 200

THE DURATION START WHEN THE USER LOG IN

USER *
jane.doe@website.tld

THIS IS A BACKEND CASE

**If the user is not registered, he/she will receive an email to set a password.
If the user was already registered, he/she will just need to log-in to see the new case.
Please check beforehand if the user was already assigned to a case with the same email.
Data for backend cases can only be entered via MeTag Analyze, they are not accessible from the MeTag mobile app. They don't have a duration setting because they can be created, filled out and consulted at any time in the backend.**

* required

Create Case

Image 9: Adding a case to a study

The time is measured by the following method: if you set a specific starting day and a duration, the system starts counting from midnight of the set starting day until midnight of the last day. This is the period your participants can enter and edit data. Similar to that, if the duration is set to start when the participant first logs in, it counts from this moment on until midnight of the last day of the set duration.

The third and last step consists of entering a valid e-mail address of the participant. He or she will then receive an automatically generated e-mail asking him or her to set a password for login into the MeTag app on his or her smartphone. If the participant is already in the system, e.g. by having participated in an earlier media diary project, no e-mail will be sent and he or she can just log into the app using the already existing login data.



So, for our exemplary “Daily media use study” we created earlier, we still need participants. More specifically, we need their e-mail addresses. Once we recruited willing participants, we create a case in the project for each of these persons by clicking the “Create Case” button in the detailed view (see image 8 and image 9 above). After that we can enter a case name, which in the example in image 9 ist just “Case01”, as this is our first case and we want to keep it as impersonal as possible.

Then we set the duration of data collection: We can choose between a measurement in days or weeks. Since we want to collect data over one whole week, we set the duration to seven days. Furthermore, we have the option to set a starting time. By checking the box below the duration (and it is already checked per default), the seven days of data collection begin to count the moment participant “Case01” logs into the MeTag app for the first time. We could also set a specific starting date for data collection. To do that, we would simply uncheck the box and set a date.

At last, we enter the participants’ e-mail address into the “User” textbox and click the “Create Case” button to finish.



Caution! Each participant can only be assigned to one project at a time. This means, any participant can not use the same login data for two different projects at the same time. We advise to brief your participants accordingly, should they be taking part in more than one media diary project simultaneously.

There is also the option to add any case as a “backend case”. To do so, simply check the little box next to “This is a backend case” at the case creation screen. That means that this case will not be collecting data for your project through the MeTag app. Instead, the data can be directly entered into the backend by you (or anyone working with you on the project). This can be useful for digitalizing existing pen-and-paper diaries using MeTag Analyze or to ‘import’ data collected with another software. In this case, you only need to set a case name. You do not need (or will be able) to set a duration or an e-mail address. For example, “Blorian” in image 12 (see below) is a backend case.

2.1 Adding team members to your project

Once you created a project (see chapter 1) and added cases to that project to provide you with data (see chapter 2), you are good to go. But you might be working in a team and want your team members to also be able to work on your project. In that case, you can invite them. To do so, go to the detailed view of your project my clicking the “Consult project” button as described above (see also image 7).

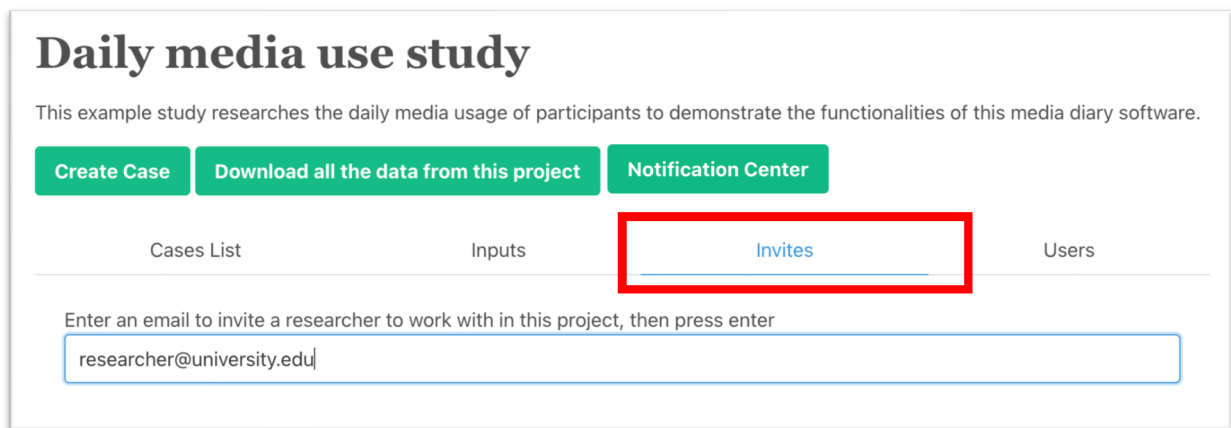


Image 10: Add another researcher to your project

Then switch to the “Invites” tab mentioned above (see red rectangle in image 10) and just enter the e-mail address of the person you wish to work with you on the project. As before, an e-mail will be sent to that address to set a password and so create a MeTag Analyze login should that be necessary.

The person you created can view (and also delete!) cases and their data. However, he or she can not delete the project or invite other people to join it.

Some closing remarks on MeTag Analyze: To help you navigate between and inside your projects, there will always be a so-called breadcrumb trail at the top of the website (see image 11). That way you can always see where you are and find your way back to previous pages.

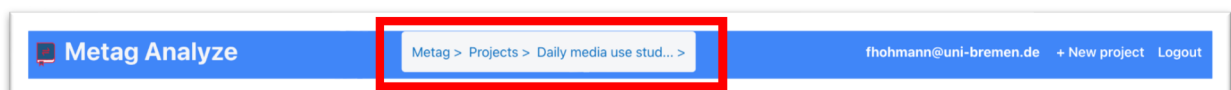


Image 11: Breadcrumb trail



And more importantly, you should be aware that you will not be able to view the data collected by the participants until the period of data collection has ended. This is to ensure the biggest possible control of the participants over their data, as they are able to edit and delete any entry until the end of the duration of data collection you have specified when you created the case. However, in the detailed view of your project you can see whether participants are collecting data, i.e. entering entries into their diary, or not.

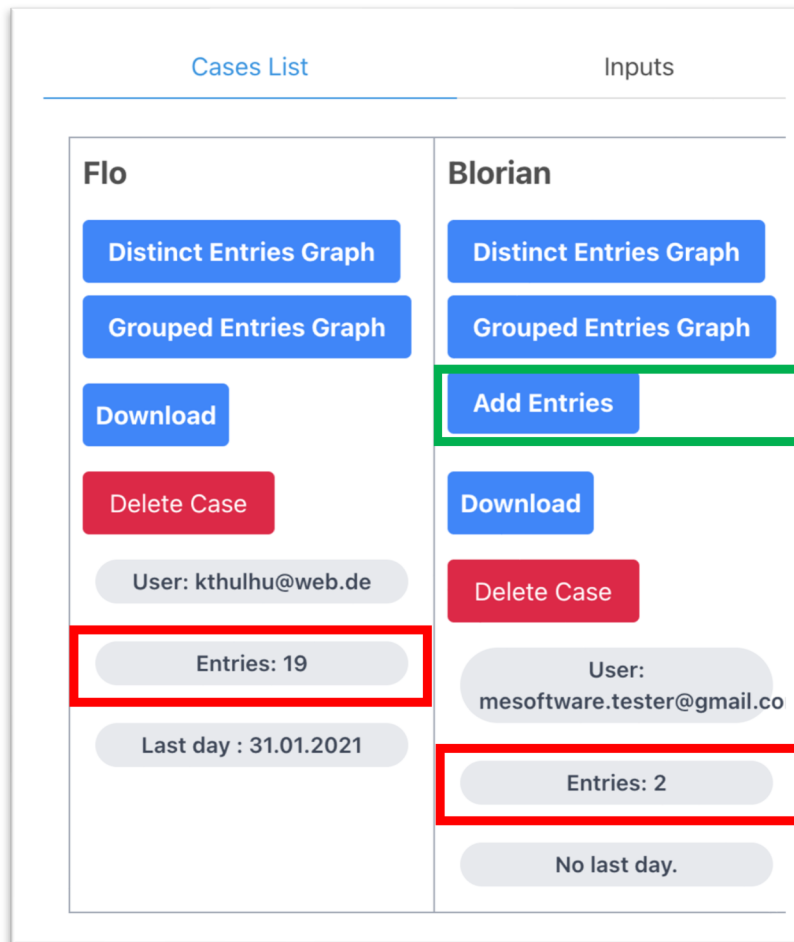


Image 12: Two cases assigned to a project



The example in image 12 shows two cases added to a diary project. They are called “Flo” and “Blorian”, and you can see that “Flo” already added 19 entries to their diary, whereas Blorian only has two entries (inside the red rectangles). But Blorian is in fact a backend case, as mentioned above. To enter more data, you can simply click the “Add Entries” button (green rectangle in image 12) on his case and enter more data.

2.2 Sending notifications to participants

Should you notice that one or more participants do not collect data appropriate to the amount that you would expect, MeTag does provide the option to send push notifications to participants to remind them of their media diary. These notifications work like all the notifications people get on their smartphones, so usually they can decide to allow an app, like MeTag, to display push notifications or not.



We would suggest you advise participants of a diary study to allow the MeTag app to send push notifications when recruiting them.

To send or set up automatic notifications, first navigate to the “Notification center” you can find at the detailed view of your project (see image 13).

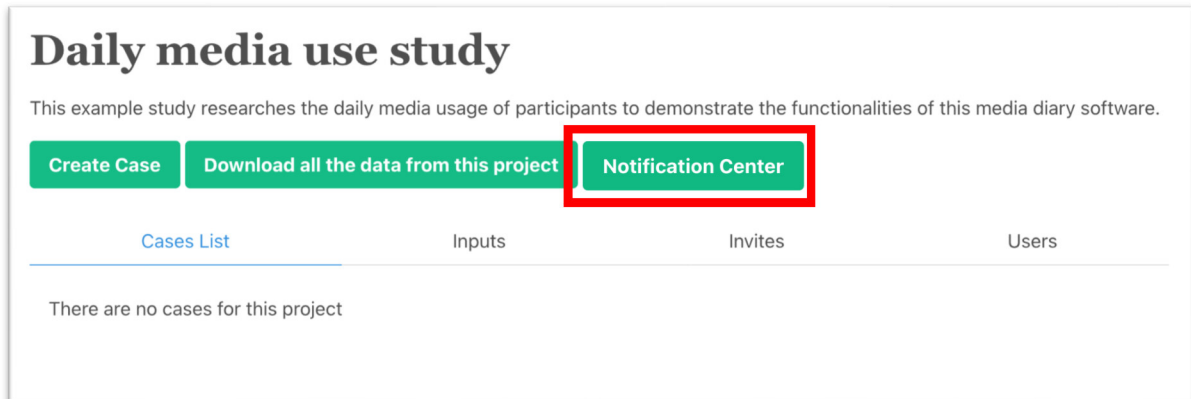


Image 13: Open notification center from project details

You will then see the notification center, where you can set the title and the text of the notification(s) you want to send, can choose the cases you want to send it to and also plan notifications to be sent automatically in the future.

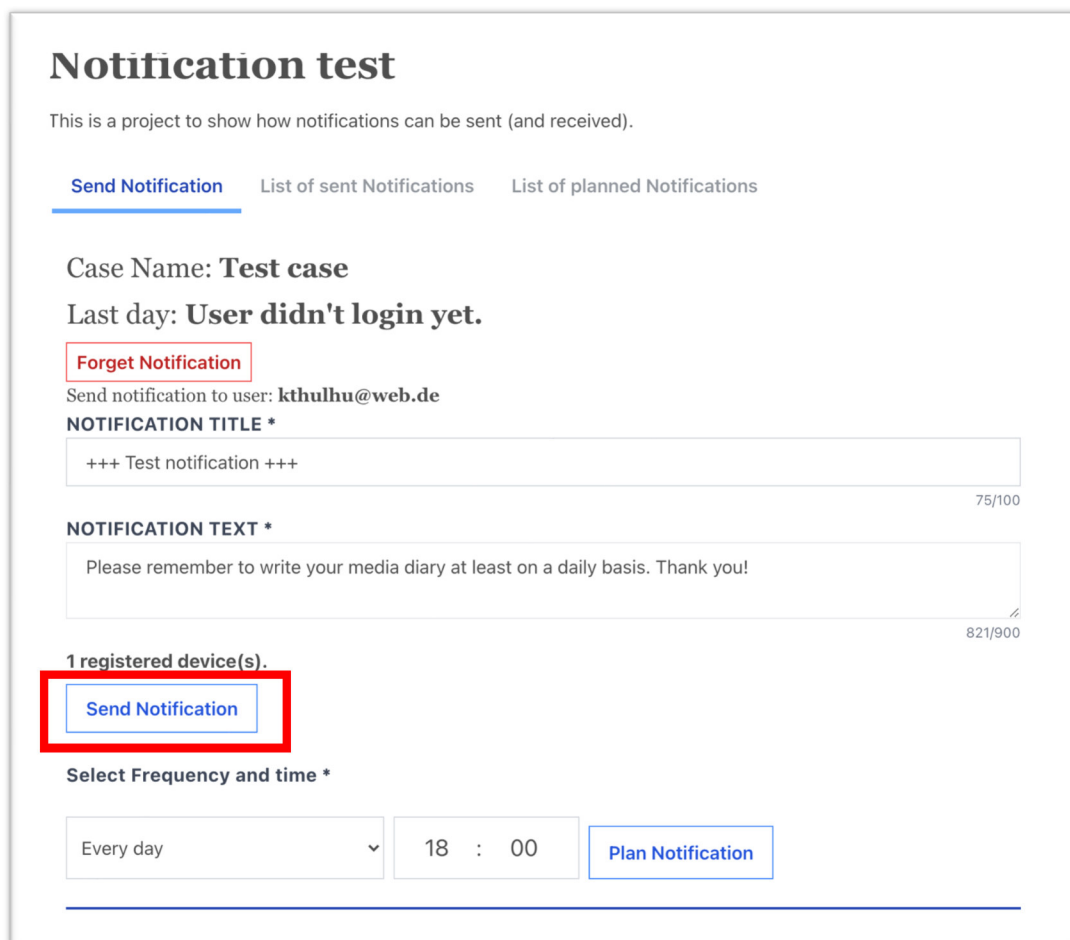


Image 14: The notification center

To send a notification, first choose the case name you want to send it to. Then, enter a notification title of up to 100 characters and below that a notification text of up to 900 characters. In image 14 for example, we wrote “+++Test notification+++” in the title and chose as a text for the notification “Please remember to write your media diary at least on a daily basis. Thank you!”

By then clicking the “Send notification” button, this notification instantly gets sent to the smartphone of the participant you chose prior (if he or she allowed the app to receive push notifications). You can also decide to have this reminder sent out automatically in a frequency of your choice. You can do so by setting a time and selecting from the drop-down menu if you want it sent daily, every other day or every three days and so on.

On the top of the notification center page, there are two other tabs called “List of sent notifications” and “List of planned notifications”, which in case of the first tab document what notifications you already sent to whom and when you sent them. And in case of the second tab display what notifications are currently set up to be sent automatically. There you can also cancel them by clicking the “Delete planned notification” button.

So to sum up, you now can create projects, add cases to these projects and invite other researchers to work on these projects and consult the data and also how to send notifications to your participants reminding them of their diary - but keep in mind: the data is only available once the period of data collection has ended.

3 Collecting data via the MeTag app

The MeTag app can be downloaded for Apple’s iOS devices and all smartphones that run on Android via the respective app stores. Before data collection, all participants should install the latest version of the app on their smartphones.

For iOS it can be found here:

<https://apps.apple.com/de/app/metag/id1478391926>

For Android it can be found here:

<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=de.unibremen.metag&hl=de>

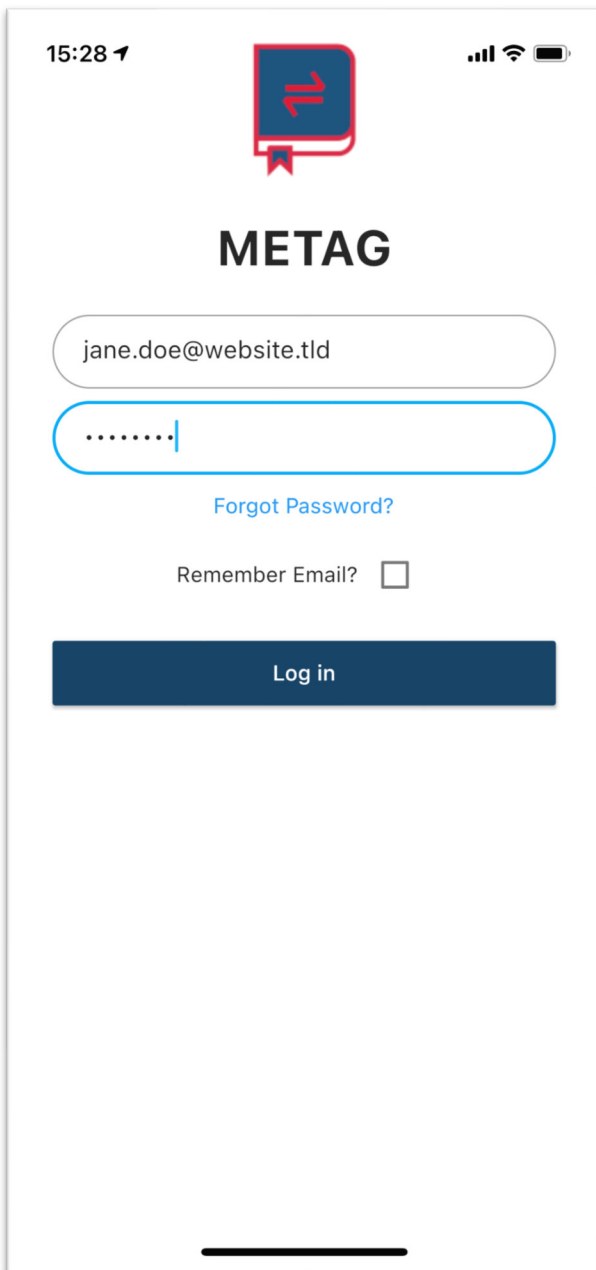


Image 15: Login screen of MeTag app

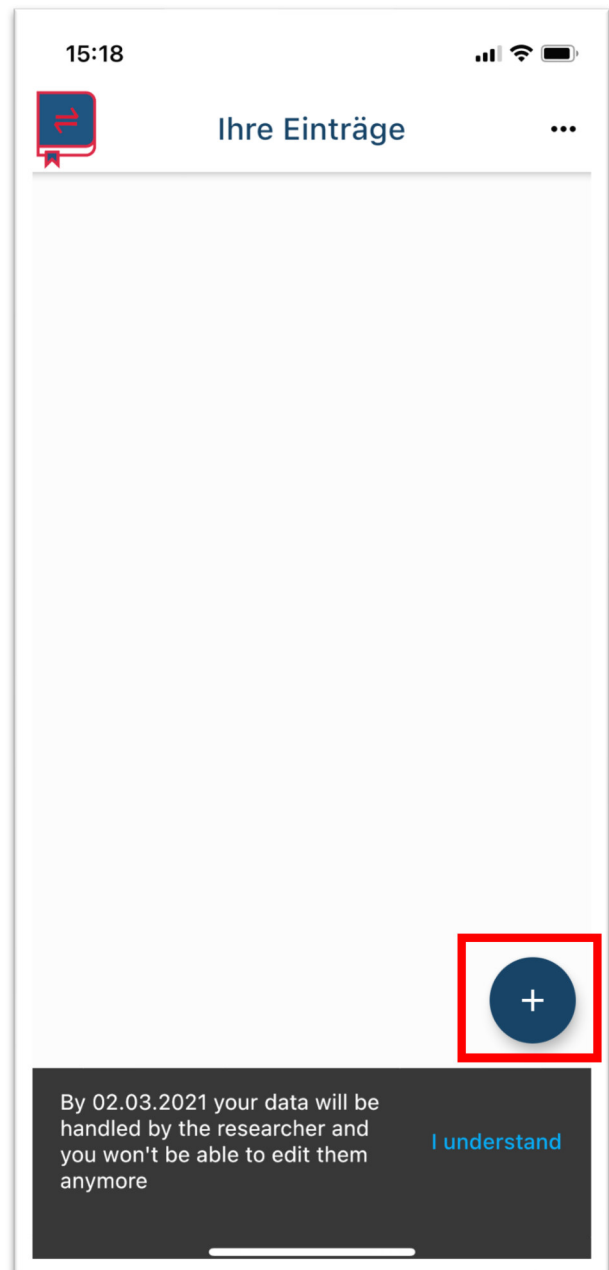


Image 16: Screen after first login

Upon starting the MeTag app, each participant gets greeted by the login screen (image 15), where he or she enters the e-mail address used to create him or her as a case for the project (see chapter 2, image 9) and his or her corresponding password. They can also choose to check the „Remember Email?“ box so that it is no longer necessary to enter the e-mail address every time the app is started. For security reasons the password will still be required though.

The first time the login was successful, there will be a message at the bottom of the screen reminding the participants of the duration of data collection and that they can not add or edit entries after that (image 15). This message will only appear once.

To create a new entry, participants simply tap the blue, circled „+“ at the bottom right of the screen. Then they can enter the data according to the inputs that were specified when creating the project. That means one input will always be the time of media usage, consisting of a starting time and an ending time. And another one will, since this is a media diary, always be the medium being used. This is a free text field, so participants can write there whatever they want. However, if at project creation certain media were specified, they will be suggested by the app in a scroll down menu and appear automatically when participants start writing.

All other possible inputs - three at the maximum - are dependent on the setup of the project and therefore flexible. To save an entry, simply tap the „Add new entry“ button at the bottom (see image 17). The following example illustrates that:



Coming back to our example project we called “Daily media use study”, the participants we added as cases to keep a media diary would all download the MeTag app for their respective smartphones. After that, they would login the way described above. To create an entry, they just tap the “+” in the lower right corner (see image 16) and can begin to provide the data specified during project creation. As mentioned earlier, this data will always consist of a) the time of media use and b) the medium being used. To set the time, participants simply provide a point in time the media usage started and one where it ended. Image 16 shows a participant having set the starting time to 15:45 on February 23rd 2021 and the ending time to 15:50 on the same day, i.e. roughly five minutes of media usage. The medium being used was a smartphone - one of the presets set during project creation (see image 6 in chapter 1.1). But since it is a free text field, the participant could have entered anything else, e.g. a medium not covered by the presets, like a magazine or a tablet computer. The remaining three inputs for this example were all set to ‘mandatory’, so the participant has to enter something in order to save the diary entry. In the free text field of the input “Specific media content?”, he or she

typed “Looking at Twitter” - illustrating the need for good, clear instructions and briefings for the participants on how detailed you want their answers to be. The input “Companionship?” only allows to choose one answer out of, in this case, two given ones. The participant chooses “I was alone during media use”. And lastly, we included an input of a scale format to rate the enjoyment of the media use, which in this case gets rated with five out of five stars. To save the data, they would then tap the “Add new entry” button (see image 17).

← Enter data

Begin date and time
23.2.2021 15:45

End date and time
23.2.2021 15:50

Media
Smartphone

Specific media content?
Looking at Twitter.

Companionship? ↓

I was alone during media usage.

Enjoyment?
★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Add new entry

Image 17: Creating an entry

← Enter data

Begin date and time
23.2.2021 15:45

End date and time
23.2.2021 15:50

Media
Smartphone

Specific media content?
Looking at Twitter.

Companionship? ↓

I was with company during media ...

Enjoyment?
★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Update Entry

Image 18: Updating an entry

Participants can also edit or delete entries they already created, as long as the period of data collection has not ended yet. To do so, they can just tap on an already existing

entry, make the changes they wish to make and finish by tapping the „Update entry“ button. In our example, the participant remembered that they were not actually alone when looking at Twitter, so they changed their answer accordingly and can now update the entry (see image 18).

To delete existing entries altogether, just right-swipe over them to make the „Delete“ button appear and then delete the entry by tapping it (see image 19). To log out of the app after having finished, tap the three dots in the upper right corner to open the menu and tap the „Logout“ option. Here you can also check our privacy policy, that can also be found on our website and when downloading the app from the app store (see image 20).

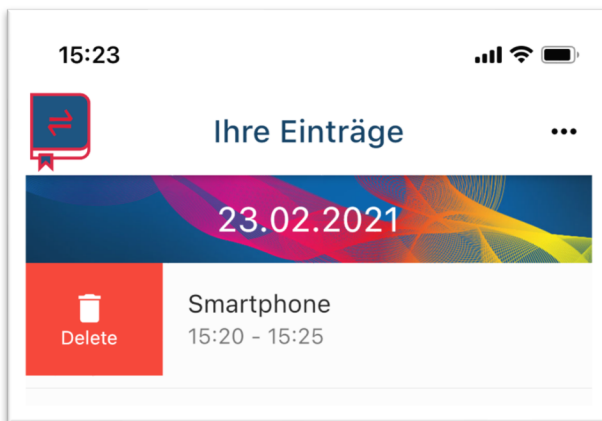


Image 19: Deleting an existing entry

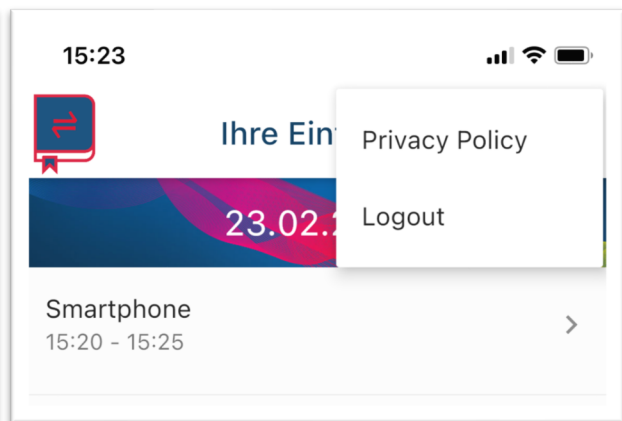


Image 20: Logging out of MeTag app

When data collection ends, participants can no longer add new entries, edit existing ones or delete them. Upon trying to do so, a corresponding info message will appear. At that time, the collected data will become accessible in MeTag Analyze.

4 Handling Data in MeTag Analyze

Once data collection period has ended, you can view the data via the „Consult Project“ option in MeTag Analyze, where you will now have more options than before (see image 21).

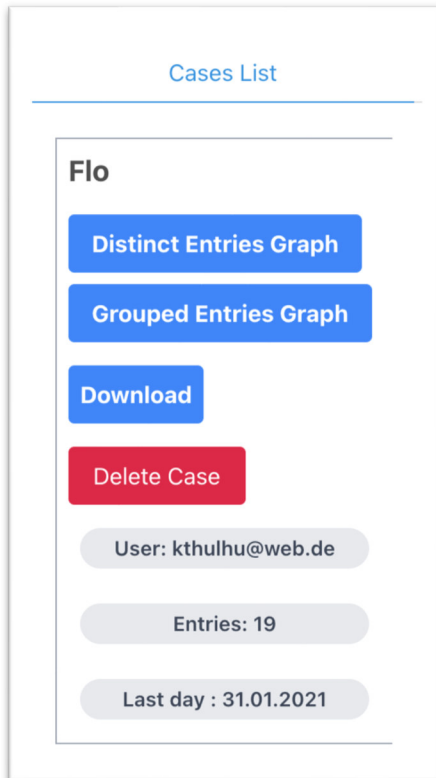


Image 21: Project with one case that finished data collection

MeTag offers three options to handle the collected data: you can 1) view two different visualizations of the entries participants have provided, 2) download them to further analyze them externally and/or 3) delete the case and all accompanying data.

To view a timeline visualization of each of the created inputs, simply click the „Distinct Entries Graph“ button available for every case. The diagram will - in this version of MeTag - show the characteristics of an input in relation to the time, e.g. at what time what medium was used (see image 22).

You can adjust the shown section of the timeline to „zoom“ on or out by shifting starting point and endpoint at the bottom of the diagram (see red rectangles in image 22).

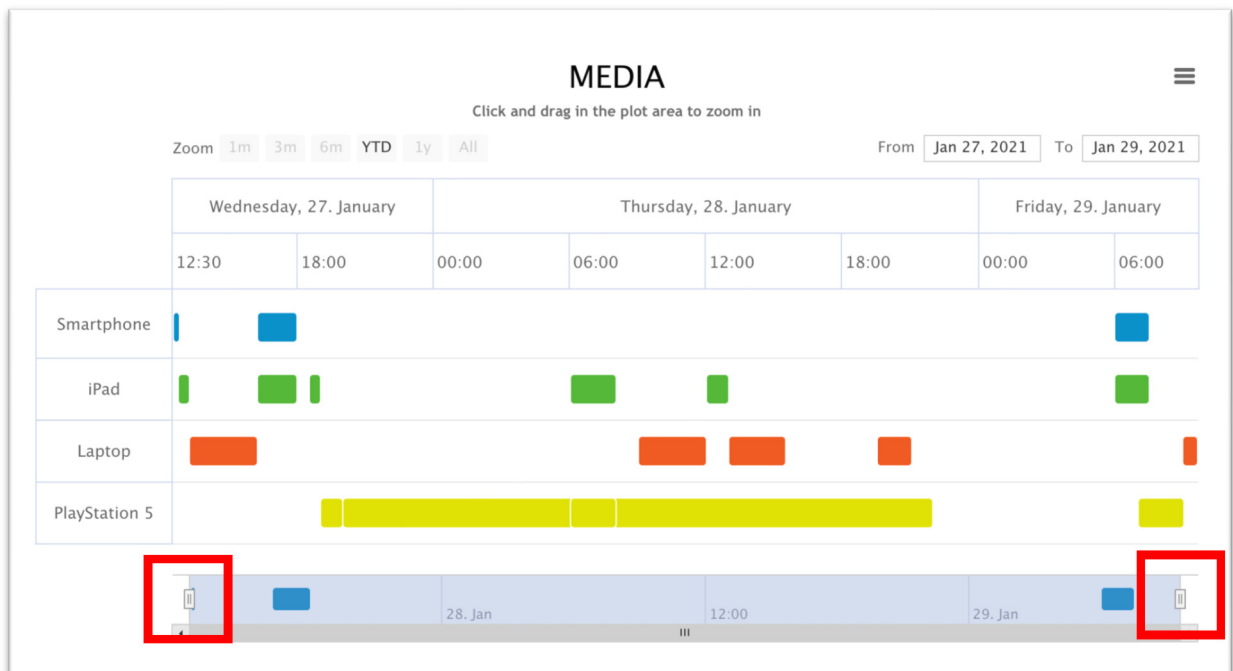


Image 22: Visualization of entries for input "Media"

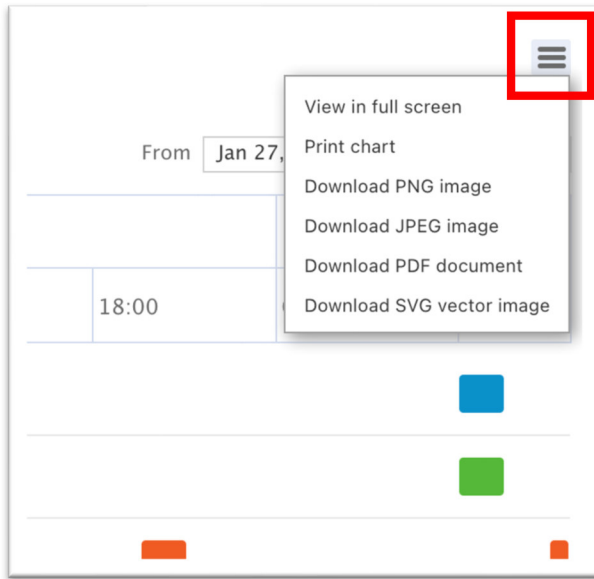


Image 23: Export options for diagrams

You can also download the diagram in different file formats. To do so, simply click the menu symbol at the top right of the visualization and choose one of the options (see image 23). You can view it in full screen or print it. And you can also export it as a PNG, JPEG or SVG image or in form of a PDF document.

A second option for visualization is the “Grouped Entries Graph” you can generate by clicking the corresponding button. This graph can be useful to visualize more complex data but is also based on a timeline. As before, you can download the graph in different formats (PDF, PNG and SVG) by choosing the format from the drop-down menu and clicking the “Download” button (see image 24).

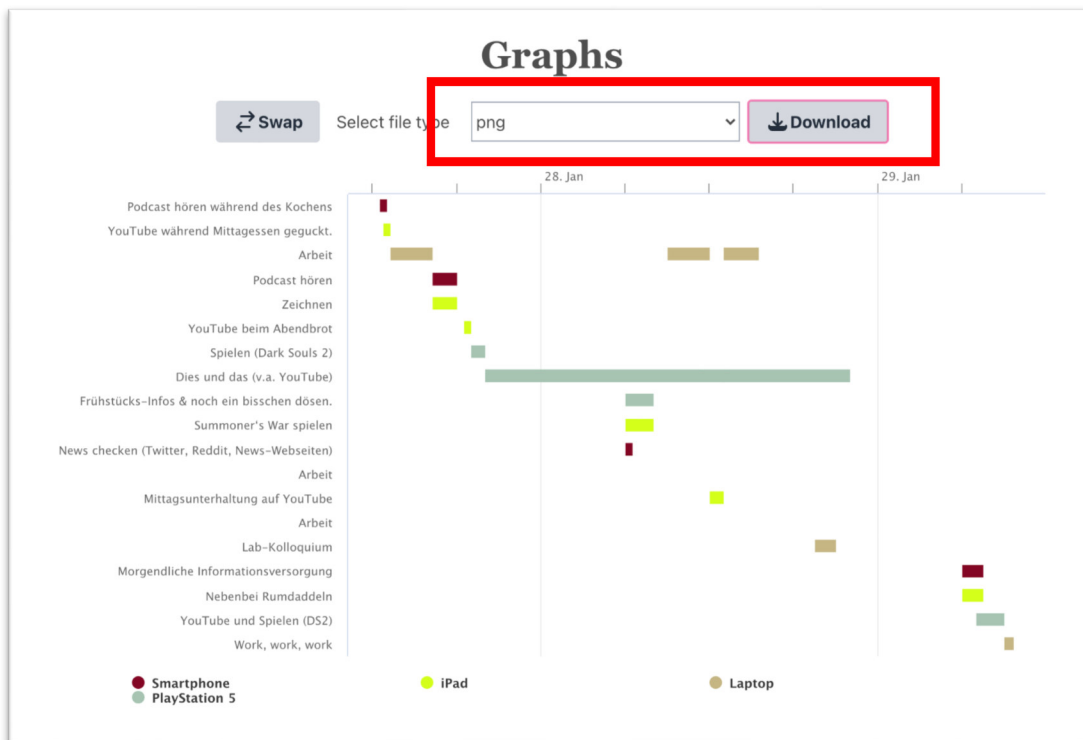


Image 24: Visualization of data in the grouped entries graph

Furthermore, you also have the option to directly download the collected data of each participant in form of a Microsoft Excel table. To do so, click the „Download“ button shown for each case once data collection has ended.



And lastly, you can delete the case and all corresponding data by clicking the red „Delete Case“ button. There will be a warning message and you will need to confirm the deletion. After doing so, the case and data will be deleted and can not be recovered, so consider carefully before choosing this option.

To sum up, you should now be able to create a project in MeTag Analyze (chapter 1), create cases or invite fellow researchers to this project (chapter 2) and train your participants in using the MeTag app for smartphones (chapter 3). Finally, you can view the collected data and export it for further use (chapter 4).

Should you encounter any bugs or problems when using MeTag Analyze or the MeTag app, feel free to contact us via e-mail at metag@uni-bremen.de. Further information about upcoming versions of this software or our other Software MeSort and, in the future, more tutorial material can be found on our website at <http://mesoftware.org/>.

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