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Digital ethnobiology: Exploring the digisphere in search of traditional and indigenous knowledge and practices

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Abstract

Over the past few decades, the scope of ethnobiological research has expanded due to the influence of globalisation and urbanisation. Advancements in technology, telecommunications, the internet, and social media have facilitated the development and maintenance of ties within and between communities through multifaceted forms of digital communication. As a result, digital or virtual communities have emerged, providing platforms for sharing knowledge, perspectives, and ideas. In many rural areas, digital networks are now widespread and robust, with farming cooperatives, smallholder farmer networks, and trader networks using networking platforms and forums for communication and knowledge exchange. Similarly, both local and transnational digital social networks have emerged within and between diverse communities in urban settings, including migrant communities. These digital networks serve as platforms for sharing ethnobiological data and catalyze its adaptation to new environments. We emphasise the significance of these virtual digital social ties and the associated exchange of ethnobiological knowledge among and between ethnic groups. The latter has led to an expansion of the ethnobiological field of study into a digital or virtual environment. We propose the term “digital ethnobiology” to refer to the scientific study of the dynamic relationships between peoples, biota, and environments in a virtual or digital environment. Addressing the significance of digital ethnobiological knowledge exchange offers numerous opportunities for among others, research, development, conservation, capacity building, and communication. However, it also has far-reaching implications for the theoretical approach to ethnobiological research. We address and discuss opportunities, concerns, challenges, future perspectives, and raise some relevant questions regarding good research practices.

Keywords: Digital ethnobiology, digital networks, knowledge systems, migrant groups, urban ethnobotany