

# “I even saw four deer grazing”: online-offline entanglements in the psilocybin pluriverse

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – This paper aims to examine evolving practices and discourses surrounding psilocybin mushrooms on an online drug forum. Situating use within hybrid digital and ecological contexts, it traces shifts in user engagement before and after the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic to contextualize localized realities of the contemporary psychedelic renaissance.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Using an agential cut framework, the authors conducted a thematic analysis of approximately 3,000 qualitative posts from the largest Polish forum (mid-2000s–2023). The study tracks how forum users integrate digital tools (mapping, smartphone verification) with environmental field observations, mapping the online-offline entanglements and more-than-human relations of foraging.

**Findings** – Analysis reveals a post-2020 shift from immersive, metaphysical narratives toward predictive, scientifically informed and risk-managed practices. Building directly on critical drug scholarship regarding assemblage thinking and ontological multiplicity, the authors conceptualize the forum as an apparatus within a psychedelic pluriverse, where radically different versions of psilocybin simultaneously coexist, negotiate legitimacy and sustain themselves.

**Originality/value** – By integrating longitudinal forum analysis with a multispecies and pluriverse perspective, the study shows how digital platforms and embodied ecological practices jointly shape contemporary psychedelic practices, highlighting their relational, contingent and ethically informed character and demonstrating how shifts in discursive framings coincide with changing modes of ecological attention and risk reflexivity.

**Keywords** Poland, Online forum, Alternative drug markets, More than human relations, Pluriverse

**Paper type** Research paper

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## Introduction: the psychedelic renaissance in an online drug forum?

Psychedelic substances, including *psilocybe* mushrooms, have been gaining increased visibility in scientific, cultural and policy circles. Clinical research has explored their potential to treat severe and chronic depression, anxiety and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), positioning them as alternatives to traditional psychiatric treatments (Payer *et al.*, 2024). Meanwhile, psychedelic use extends far beyond clinical settings. People describe using these substances to seek meaning, spiritual insight, emotional healing, enhanced creativity and deeper connections with others (Holm *et al.*, 2023). This situates psychedelics within broader projects of self-exploration and existential inquiry (Danias and Appel, 2023).

This paper examines how psilocybin forum users discuss, frame and report practicing psychedelic use, tracing shifts in discursive, ecological and embodied practices before and after 2020. We use the term “more-than-human encounters” (Tsing, 2015) to describe the entangled relationships between forum users, the fungal agency of psilocybin mushrooms and the technological apparatuses that facilitate their discovery. Drawing on longitudinal forum discussions in Poland, we explore how these users integrate field-based encounters and ecological knowledge, embodied experience and digital tools to understand psilocybin use, as narrated and interpreted within an online forum and how

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these practices reflect broader cultural, scientific and social transformations associated with the psychedelic renaissance. Growing interest in indigenous and ceremonial practices highlights long-standing human-fungi relationships (Sanabria, 2021), challenging narratives that view psychedelics solely as novel therapeutic agents or recreational substances. In this paper, we refer to psilocybin as the psychoactive compound and to *psilocybe* as the biological genus of mushrooms, reflecting their respective roles as chemical agents and ecological actants in the pluriverse.

Understanding these broader trends helps contextualize how users engage with psilocybin in online forums, where patterns of use, knowledge exchange and cultural framing intersect. Despite this growing interest, population-level data on psychedelic use in Europe remain limited and suggest relatively low overall prevalence compared with other substances. Among young adults (aged 15–34), estimates of past-year use of classical psychedelics such as LSD and hallucinogenic mushrooms generally remain at around 1% in many European countries, although subgroups and settings may show variation (European Union Drugs Agency, 2025a). In Poland specifically, survey evidence indicates that around 6% of adults have experimented with classical psychedelics, particularly LSD and psilocybin mushrooms, at least once in their lives, with use more common among younger men living in urban areas (Holas and Kamińska, 2025). ESPAD data show that, among broader adolescent populations in the EU, the use of other psychoactive or novel substances varies, and Poland is among the countries that report a higher prevalence of psychedelic use compared to its peers (European Union Drugs Agency, 2025b).

### *Psychedelic renaissance and an agential cut in the forum continuity*

Recent scholarship frames the resurgence of psychedelic research and use as part of a broader “psychedelic renaissance” spanning scientific, therapeutic and cultural domains (Payer *et al.*, 2024; Noorani, 2019; Schwarz-Plaschg, 2022). In Poland, attention to psilocybin mushrooms intensified again around 2020, coinciding with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, which reshaped patterns of substance use, peer-to-peer knowledge exchange and engagement with online forums (Malczewski *et al.*, 2022; Wanke *et al.*, 2024; see also: Danias and Appel, 2023). Thus, the cutoff point used in this study is an agential cut intervention (Bozalek and Fullagar, 2021; Barad, 2007) and serves as a provisional suspension of the otherwise entangled continuity of discursive framing of psilocybin use in the forum discussions.

This study examines how these converging dynamics are enacted in forum discussions through changing framings, hybrid online-offline practices and heightened attention to ecological and embodied dimensions of psilocybin use.

Concurrently, the psychedelic renaissance has sparked renewed interest in the traditional, ceremonial and Indigenous uses of psilocybin mushrooms. This has prompted a broader consideration of the ecological, ethical and cultural dimensions of psilocybin use, moving beyond strictly clinical or recreational contexts (Sanabria, 2021; Spiers *et al.*, 2024). However, this revival is not without controversy. Critiques highlight tensions between medicalization and commercialization and the appropriation or erasure of Indigenous and countercultural knowledge (Falcon, 2025; Noorani, 2019; Devenot *et al.*, 2022; Spiers *et al.*, 2024). These debates underscore the importance of situating contemporary use within historical practices and emerging sociocultural imaginaries. More broadly, they acknowledge that substances, humans and online spaces co-constitute evolving understandings of psychedelic engagement.

### *Co-creating hybridity in an online drug forum*

Online drug forums offer a unique entry point for exploring substance-related dynamics. Unlike controlled trials or surveys, forums provide access to vernacular knowledge, experiential accounts and peer-to-peer exchanges reflecting how users make sense of

psychedelic substances in real-world settings. These discussions unfold across therapeutic, spiritual, recreational and enhancement-oriented framings, often blending these categories in ways that challenge rigid definitions. Examining discussions on a Polish online drug forum, this paper traces the evolution of the meaning of psilocybin mushrooms, particularly before and after 2020, accounting for the COVID-19 pandemic. It illuminates how users articulate their changing understanding of psychedelic experiences, ecological engagement and embodied practices.

Just as more-than-human actors co-produce the material and symbolic realities of drug practices, online and offline spaces also shape users' experiences in hybrid ways producing entanglements (Tsing, 2015). Mushrooms, microclimates, vegetation and local fauna are not merely passive backdrops, but rather integral to the knowledge production that occurs online. Forum discussions often encode, reconfigure and produce interpretations of these ecological cues, highlighting the interconnection of more-than-human actors in the development of psychedelic practices (Simpson *et al.*, 2023; Huff *et al.*, 2021). From a multispecies perspective, substances, bodies and landscapes as well as technologies interact to produce knowledge, risks and benefits (Seear, 2026; Irvine, 2025; Carrington *et al.*, 2019). This perspective allows us to conceptualize digital and offline practices as another layer of hybridity in which the material constraints and affordances of ecological and technological environments are intertwined. In this sense, the forum operates as a more-than-human agent within these relations providing a constitutive apparatus to the psilocybin experience. Its architecture, shared photos and reported use of the mapping tools participate in interactions with mushrooms and landscapes. These tools co-create what users notice in the field and how they live their experiences.

This study examines how psilocybin forum users integrate digital tools, field observation and more-than-human encounters to navigate psychedelic foraging and consumption. It highlights the interplay of online and offline practices, embodied presence and the agency of more-than-human actants. In the following sections, we first conceptualize the psychedelic pluriverse of the forum, and then examine how the users' framings of psilocybin shift from mystical and recreational to more informed, ecological and therapeutic approaches. We then explore how online platforms co-construct these transformations, highlighting more-than-human encounters that include the digital.

### Psychedelic pluriverse: entanglements between forum and forest

Boundaries between online and offline worlds are often treated as self-evident, yet research increasingly shows that these distinctions are socially and culturally constructed (Maddox, 2016). In the context of drug use, practices categorized as digital or physical are shaped by local cultural and legal norms, social relationships and also by the technologies that facilitate them (Korshøj and Søgaard, 2024; Demant and Moretti, 2024). Studies of digital drug markets demonstrate that users routinely move between social media, messaging apps and face-to-face interactions, highlighting the interdependence of these spheres (Bakken *et al.*, 2023). Within psychedelic use, online forums provide spaces where users collectively interpret substances, ecological conditions and embodied experiences, creating narratives that integrate both digital and field-based practices. Previous research on psychedelic forums has shown that online discussions organize psychedelic use through recurring discursive framings, such as spiritual, therapeutic, scientific, recreational and enhancement-oriented narratives – rather than through a single dominant logic (Holm *et al.*, 2023). More broadly, these justifications offer different moral hierarchizations enacted through discursive valuations of psychedelic use across different orders of worth (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006), ranging from the inspired – unique for passion or emotions to industrial – solving practical problems. Building on this insight, this study treats forum discussions as sites where meanings are articulated and negotiated, while extending

analysis to how these discursive framings intersect with narrated more-than-human encounters and embodied practices.

From a multispecies perspective, psychedelic use involves an array of actors. Bodies, psychoactive substances, fungi, animals and landscapes are relational actants that shape practices, knowledge and risk (Simpson *et al.*, 2023; Seear, 2026; Irvine, 2025; Arslan *et al.*, 2026; Bozçali, 2024). Psychoactive substances, such as psilocybin mushrooms, do not exist as fixed entities but emerge through situated assemblages of ecological, embodied and discursive engagement (Sadowska, 2022). Forum users narrate these entanglements in ways that make sense of the mushroom's materiality, seasonal cycles and surrounding microclimates, co-creating human–fungi–landscape relations. In this sense, forums function as both repositories and sites of negotiation, where relationships between humans, substances, and other more-than-human actants are articulated, debated and shaped. In empirical terms, this means attending to how forum users describe encounters with mushrooms, landscapes and bodily effects, and how these descriptions cluster into distinct but overlapping ways of knowing and valuing psilocybin over time.

The concept of a pluriverse – defined as a “world where many worlds fit” (de la Cadena and Blaser, 2018) – offers an analytical lens for examining how multiple, coexisting ways of relating to psilocybin are articulated within the forum. Rather than assuming a single, coherent logic of use, a pluriverse perspective foregrounds how different ontologies of psilocybin – therapeutic, spiritual, ecological and experiential – are produced and sustained through specific narrative practices, ecological references and embodied accounts. This ultimately allows us to see the forum not just as a site of debate, but as a space where different orders of worth (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006) collide and negotiate their legitimacy.

Digital platforms themselves are apparatuses (Barad, 2007) of this pluriverse. Features of forums, shared photos and mapping tools co-constitute how users notice, interpret and respond to ecological and embodied cues. Rather than merely filtering information, these digital affordances actively generate new forms of knowledge, embodied experiences and psychedelic effects. In combination with narratives of field encounters, they create hybrid spaces where online and offline, human and more-than-human, interact to materialize the psilocybin experience itself. Hybridity here is a way of describing the interdependent relationships that constitute drug related practices (Stevens, 2020; Wanke *et al.*, 2022).

By focusing on narrated practices rather than direct observation, this study operationalizes the pluriverse as an analytical tool: it allows us to make the agential cut and trace how users relate to substances, other actants and ecological contexts, how these relations evolve over time and how digital and material practices mutually inform one another. In doing so, the paper highlights the relational and entangled nature of psychedelic use, offering insight into both the experiential and cultural dimensions of the psychedelic entanglements. While existing research has examined digital drug markets (Childs and Bernot, 2024; Moyle *et al.*, 2019), online drug cultures (Wanke *et al.*, 2024; Bakken *et al.*, 2023) or discourses (Holm *et al.*, 2023; Ladegaard, 2024), and started accounting for multispecies dimensions of drug practices (Seear, 2026), these strands are rarely brought together in longitudinal analyses of narrated psychedelic use. By focusing on how forum users articulate more-than-human encounters, embodied experiences and shifting framings of psilocybin over time, this study extends research on digital-material hybridity by showing how changes in more-than-human relations coincide with broader cultural transformations.

### Present study: the polish drug forum

The present study draws on data from the largest Polish-language drug discussion forum on the surface web. Active for over 18 years, the forum serves as a central site for peer-to-peer exchange about psychoactive substances. Topics include experiential accounts,

harm reduction practices, legal considerations and practical guidance. Due to its extended temporal span, the forum is particularly suitable for examining longitudinal changes in the meanings, practices and framings of drug use (Wanke *et al.*, 2024).

A two-stage purposive-random sampling strategy was used. In the first stage, relevant psilocybin forum threads were identified using keywords related to psychedelic mushrooms, such as: *Psilocybe*, mushroom picking, cultivation, microdosing and therapeutic or spiritual use. This filtering process yielded a corpus of discussions ranging from the mid-2000s to 2023.

In the second stage, a random subset of approximately 3,000 posts was selected for in-depth qualitative analysis. Importantly, once a post was selected, the entire discussion thread in which it appeared was retrieved and analyzed to preserve conversational, temporal and contextual coherence. Randomization was used at this stage to reduce selection bias, maintain the exploratory nature of the study and ensure coverage across different time periods.

The data were analyzed using thematic content analysis. During the initial exploratory phase, semi-structured coding was used to identify recurring themes. Following another psychedelic forum study (Holm *et al.*, 2023), predominantly five discursive framings were isolated: spiritual, therapeutic, scientific, recreational and enhancement-oriented. For this analysis, attention was paid to offline and material references, including mushroom picking, home cultivation and acquiring mushrooms from online vendors. In line with the study's focus on digital-physical hybridity, these references were analyzed as sites where online discussion intersects with embodied, ecological and material practices. The analysis also examined discussions of legal frameworks and power relations shaping psilocybin use, including references to prohibition, criminalization and legitimacy. Codes were iteratively refined to capture shifts in dominant framings over time, particularly before and after 2020.

To guide our qualitative, inductive analysis, we formulated the following research questions along the interpretative work:

- RQ1. How do forum users combine digital and field-based practices when foraging for psilocybin mushrooms?
- RQ2. How are mushrooms and psilocybin framed as therapeutic, spiritual or experiential substances in online discussions?
- RQ3. How do forum users' conceptualizations shift over time from metaphysical to psychological and neurological framings?

These questions guided our analysis of the evolving hybridity of online and offline practices, the material and social dynamics of mushrooms, and the reflexivity of forum members.

The study was conducted in accordance with established ethical guidelines for online qualitative research. Ethical clearance was obtained from the internal review boards of the <anonymized> and the <anonymized>. The analysis draws exclusively on publicly accessible forum content, and all usernames were pseudonymised and the quotations translated into English, making their discoverability unlikely. In line with a situated and structured approach to netnographic ethics, the forum was treated as a contextually sensitive space rather than a fully public domain, with care taken to minimize intrusiveness and avoid harm to participants (Demant and Moretti, 2024). Non-interventional presence assured the milieu remained undisturbed. Furthermore, the aforementioned pseudonymization and effective paraphrasing that limit the reverse-search were supplemented by the secondary identifiers scrubbed from the content.

We devoted considerable time to netnography and related analyses across multiple studies. We carried out coding and interpretation collaboratively as a team, translating the Polish original forum posts only for publication purposes. As academics, we acknowledge

our positionality as situated actants rather than detached observers. Our interpretations are shaped by our disciplinary training and epistemic goals. We do not claim a neutral stance. Instead, we practiced reflexive engagement with the data as described in the latest postqualitative literature (Murriss, 2021). Our interpretations act as part of the apparatus that brings these psilocybin discourses into focus (Barad, 2007). We recognize our status as academic outsiders to the forum social circles. Rather than seeking a neutral distance, we aimed for an engagement that acknowledges how our theoretical lenses of the pluriverse coproduce the meanings identified in the data. This team-based approach allowed us to check our interpretations against the vernacular realities of the forum, ensuring our analysis remained as grounded in the material and discursive practices of the users as possible.

## Results

To explore how these broader cultural and ecological dynamics manifest in practice, we now turn to an analysis of forum discussions from before and after 2020, accounting for the renewed interest in psychedelics in Poland and major societal disruptions, emblematic of the COVID-19 pandemic era. The cutoff point is an analytical constructivist move to delineate the periods to spotlight the reconfiguration of interpretative frameworks available to the forum user rather than a single milestone in a forum history. Following the framework proposed by Holm *et al.* (2023), we categorized forum discussions about psilocybin into five frames: spiritual, therapeutic, scientific, recreational and enhancement-oriented. Our analysis shows that the relative prominence of these categories has shifted over time, altering general justifications of engaging psilocybin (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006).

Prior to 2020, spiritual and recreational narratives dominated discussions, with users emphasizing personal transformation, communal experiences or purely experiential use. These attitudes were reflected not only in brief comments but also in longer narrative posts that depict psilocybin use as an immersive, multisensory experience unfolding over time. Focusing on outdoor experiences, we can, for example, consider a post from 2006 that illustrates the depth and intensity of early psychedelic engagement:

I think I made a breakthrough discovery. Yesterday I went looking for liberty caps [Psilocybe semilanceata] but only found three. Instead, I found maybe a few dozen *Panaeolus sphinctrinus* [...]. My friend and I decided to eat them: I had about 250, he had 200. About an hour later, our mood noticeably improved [...] lamps glowed intensely, surrounded by colorful halos and shimmering rays. Walking along the road, we saw a big naked woman, which turned out to be a willow [...] trees in fog looked like they were wrapped in scarves, almost melting into lakes. The fog itself felt alive, magical. In short, it was the best trip of my life - magical, beautiful, fairy-tale-like. [JayAdm, 2006]

Similarly, communal and first-time experiences emphasized joy, wonder and mystical insight, often intertwined with nature:

On Wednesday, I ate mushrooms for the first time in my life with two friends [...] It was simply wonderful, the forest was incredibly colorful, we laughed until we cried [...] These little inconspicuous mushrooms have a mystical potential, very constructive experience. [BeskNotDead, 2007]

Other accounts highlight individual sensory immersion and reflection, with users attuning closely to landscapes and internal experiences:

I knew what mushrooms looked like, but initially searched where they usually aren't [...] At home, nothing yet. Checked the mirror, big pupils, and it started: tiles and carpet began to ripple [...] Music on, incredible euphoria, laughing, reflecting, the landscape had wonderful contrast, trees rippled as if in 3D. First mushroom trip, priceless. [hryzntem, 2016]

These typical excerpts for the period illustrate the emphasis on transformative, mystical and aesthetic experiences that characterized pre-2020 discourse. Interactions with

more-than-human elements – forests, meadows, fog and animals – were primarily experiential and atmospheric, rather than instrumental or predictive. Overall, pre-2020 posts focused on mystical, communal and aesthetic experiences, whereas post-2020 posts emphasize methodical, informed and self-reflective practice.

After 2020, posts increasingly emphasized scientific, therapeutic and enhancement-oriented framings, reflecting both the psychedelic renaissance and shifts in substance use behaviors during and after the COVID-19 pandemic (Bălăeț *et al.*, 2025; Payer *et al.*, 2024). Users often discussed microdosing, structured use and ecological observation, moving beyond purely recreational narratives. A 2022 post exemplifies the methodical, knowledge-driven approach to foraging and preparation:

Liberty caps for sure! I've been foraging regularly in a few places in Poland for several seasons [...] I choose spots by reviewing areas on DuckDuckGo Maps. Then I visit several, and those that meet the conditions go on a shortlist [a curated list of prospective sites based on environmental data]. Question: what should I look for when picking meadows? I feel many spots, despite being near farms and manure, have been overharvested [...] PS. Good luck with your harvests-hope the weather helps! [rysiak\_\_\_, 2022]

Here, digital affordances like DuckDuckGo Maps do not merely represent the terrain but actively co-constitute the foraging space. The shortlist acts as a digital filter that pre-configures the physical body's movement through the landscape. The forum interface thus becomes an extension of the field, where spatial scouting and material encounter are inextricably entangled. Posts also reflect observation of environmental conditions and risk awareness:

Far south, high up, freezing like November[...] On a standard spot that usually gives 120–150 per hour, two hours of walking only gave me 40 or so cold, sad ones. Straight into the guts. Maybe October will be better, if it warms up. [Mejdej0ne, 2022]

Therapeutic and precautionary discussions became more common, with users planning microdosing sessions, reflecting on set and setting and asking for guidance:

Hi all, planning to eat magic mushrooms soon [...] I have no major concerns, read a lot online - so I roughly know what to expect. I want to share with my friend, who has more experience and is like a guide [...] First trip: home vs forest [...] I want the first experience to unblock my brain, not just for fun. [Zwierzak, 2021]

Even extreme caution and risk awareness were also evident. An experienced user shared a detailed report to warn others about potency:

We decided to eat mushrooms at night. At 22:30, 2.4g Mazatapec. Everything fine at first. Made lemon tek [a method of soaking mushrooms in citric acid to expedite digestion] - second time for me. Trip started classically. Visuals darkened as we entered forest. Once at the spot and smoking a joint, full turbo peak: felt like hell, no visuals, only demonic hallucinations, suicidal thoughts to prevent hurting others, surrounding world a psychodelic swamp, trees danced deathly dances. Difficult to move, fell into a trance. After long struggle, left forest at midnight, exhausted. Even 2.4g was extremely strong, like an atomic bomb - bad trip could be tragic. Only experience and preparation saved us. [entombod, 2022]

These examples illustrate a shift from immersive, communal and mystical experiences to goal-oriented, evidence-based and self-reflective practices. Users now integrate environmental tracking, ecological observation and community-generated knowledge into their experiences, highlighting a broader cultural transition toward intentional, informed and knowledge-driven substance use (Manthey *et al.*, 2021; Malczewski *et al.*, 2022; Wanke *et al.*, 2024).

### *Mushroom picking and engagement with the more-than-human*

In the early period (pre-2020), mushroom picking was largely framed as an exploratory, emotional and quasi-spiritual activity. Users often described wandering through forests and

meadows guided by intuition, atmosphere and a sense of adventure rather than codified knowledge. Encounters with landscapes, weather and animals were noted primarily for their experiential, aesthetic or mystical qualities, rather than as predictive or actionable information. For example, as the first-time forager cited above recounted in 2007:

It was simply wonderful, the forest was incredibly colorful, we laughed until we cried, my visuals were mild, friends seemed stronger. These little inconspicuous mushrooms have a mystical potential, very constructive experience [...] another bus passed with "MUSHROOM ESTATE" written on it – perfect! [BeskNotDead, 2007]

Other accounts emphasize synesthetic, fairy-tale-like perceptions of the forest. Another such typical example comes from an exchange in 2009:

Quote from Jesus: "[...] we could sit silently for minutes, admiring the scenery. It felt like every leaf, branch, tree was in harmony and happy where it was [...]" Forests are amazing; a single pine can transform a jungle into taiga. Mushrooms add even more joy. [OPR, 2009]

Descriptions of "forest psychedelia" highlight a deep sensory attunement to more-than-human elements, framed almost as a mystical dialogue:

When I enter a certain state [...] I call it "forest psychedelia." I don't care about the rest; if I get lost, the forest guides me. A touch of red, perception shifts, senses sharpen, I brush aside branches and move to the spot. There it is, exactly as it should be. How do I know? I just feel it. [PicekStrzala, 2007]

During this period, knowledge exchange on the forum was primarily trial-and-error or anecdotal, with basic questions about timing, legality or general location: "Are there already any mushrooms now??? Or only in September???" [Urabn00, 2009]. Interactions with more-than-human elements were primarily sensory and aesthetic. Animals, microclimates and landscapes were experienced as part of a poetic, immersive setting, rather than as systematic indicators of mushroom productivity.

After 2020, mushroom picking discussions shifted toward methodical, evidence-driven and ecologically informed practices. Users increasingly evaluated environmental conditions – soil moisture, vegetation, topography and the presence of animals – not only as background but as predictive indicators of abundance. A post from 2022 exemplifies this systematic, knowledge-driven approach:

So far I've had two successful trips, yielding 1,094 mushrooms (and it's just the beginning of the season) – first outing yesterday: 240, today with a friend: 854. We left many pins [immature mushroom primordia] and smaller mushrooms; I also found some sterile albinos. From my experience, the most important factor is regular humidity; the rest is up to the mycelium. Nearby there should be some dung (deer, sheep, etc.). I'm not a shroom eater really – I forage purely for the joy of mushrooms. [wiadorama, 2022]

Users also observed more-than-human actors, even when results were negative, reflecting careful ecological attunement: "Inspired by the recent rainy, cool days, I went to local meadows I'd never tried before. Large, lush grass, near forests [...] I even saw four grazing deer. Unfortunately, I didn't find a single cap" [tatpoten, 2022].

Quantitative observations further illustrate the shift toward data-driven, methodical reconnaissance: "Far south, high up, freezing like November [...] a spot that usually gives 120–150 per hour yielded only 40. Maybe October will be better if it warms up" [MejdejOne, 2022].

Ethical foraging is explicitly discussed, reflecting a community norm toward sustainability: "I also left a few sterile albinos and a lot of pins, so as not to wipe out the spot" [rysiiek\_\_\_\_, 2022].

This systematic engagement is further sustained through collaborative verification. In post-2020 threads, the physical act of picking is often paused for digital photo requests. Users

upload specific angles of a mushroom's stem or gills to seek communal validation. In these moments, the expert eye of the forum is extended directly into the forest via the smartphone screen, blurring the boundary between the solitary forager and the digital collective.

Together, these posts demonstrate a move from exploratory, mystical immersion toward predictive, evidence-based engagement with more-than-human actors. Users routinely combine field observation with digital mapping, community knowledge and ecological reasoning, highlighting a hybrid practice that integrates online and offline expertise. This reflects broader cultural trends in contemporary psychedelic use, where methodical, intentional and environmentally attuned approaches increasingly coexist with recreational and aesthetic motivations.

### *From metaphysical to psychological and neurological framings*

In earlier discussions, psychedelic substances were framed through a strongly moralized distinction between what is “natural” and what is “human-made.” Plant-based psychedelics were given inherent authority that transcended human intention or technical intervention, while synthetic substances and pharmaceuticals were considered inferior or even hubristic substitutes: “I know that there is greater power in this than in what humans themselves have created. In general, when it comes to things like drugs or antidepressants, for now God/nature always wins, and humans lose” [Johan Szpiller, 2010].

Psychedelic experiences were described as encounters with realities that preexist the individual and exceed ordinary perception. Difficult or destabilizing experiences were interpreted within a framework that gave them meaning rather than treating them as outcomes to be avoided: “I turned the saddest bad trip of my life into something beautiful [...] it's worth fighting with yourself [...] That's what you eat mushrooms for” [doktorzwypsy, 2009].

Religious and mystical language was common: “I experienced a powerful religious experience of a mystical nature” [Urbix, 2007].

After 2020, users increasingly described substances and experiences through the language of mental processes, self-observation, and practical effects. Metaphysical hierarchies gave way to accounts centered on the mind and risk management: “XTC also added its few cents to better contact with other people and showed me how certain things in my own mind work” [mertse\_merts, 2023].

Risk is now framed in terms of conditions, moderation, and contraindications: “They can even help with psychological difficulties, under favorable conditions. Obviously, if you have schizophrenia, you probably shouldn't take them” [DeenelSajko, 2020]. Interpretive frameworks shifted from metaphysical authority to psychological, neurological and risk-aware reasoning, while the intensity of experiences remained comparable.

Across these discussions, the shift is not from depth to superficiality, nor from belief to disbelief, but from one dominant mode of articulation to another. Earlier accounts situate psychedelics within a world understood as inhabited by forces exceeding the human, while later accounts increasingly translate similar experiences into the languages of psychology, neurology and risk management. What changes most visibly is not the intensity of experience, but the interpretive framework through which it is made publicly intelligible.

## **Discussion**

This study examined the evolving practices and discourses around psilocybin mushrooms on a Polish-language drug forum, highlighting the hybrid nature of psychedelic use in both digital and ecological spaces. Our analysis demonstrates that while the “magic mushroom” remains metaphysically and materially connected to meadows, animals, climate and the fungi themselves, user engagement has become increasingly informed, ethically aware and

attentive to mental health. Spiritual and metaphysical framings persist, yet they coexist with scientifically informed discussions, harm reduction strategies and reflective self-monitoring.

### *Hybrid online-offline practices*

Our findings echo previous research on hybrid drug markets, demonstrating that digital and offline practices are deeply intertwined rather than distinct domains (Korshøj and Søgaaard, 2024; Bakken *et al.*, 2023; Siuda *et al.*, 2025; van der Sanden *et al.*, 2023). Polish forum users rely on the online space to exchange ecological observations, field techniques and experiential knowledge. This shapes their embodied practices, such as mushroom foraging. This dynamic resembles patterns identified in other online psychedelic communities where digital spaces facilitate collective knowledge-building, peer guidance and the negotiation of risk and responsibility (Pestana *et al.*, 2021; Bancroft, 2017; Ladegaard, 2024; Sawicka *et al.*, 2022; Hupli *et al.*, 2019).

The digital apparatus does more than just store information. It actively transforms the way users engage with ecological and social environments. Forum participants integrate empirical observations with collaborative experimentation, combining embodied field experience with digitally co-produced knowledge. Online discussions extend across time and space, connecting local foragers with distant peers and facilitating the development of methodical practices. Importantly, the choice of digital infrastructure also appears to matter. References to privacy-oriented mapping and search tools, such as DuckDuckGo Maps, suggest an awareness of digital traceability in the context of legally sensitive activities. While these choices are not always explicitly framed in terms of privacy, they align with research indicating that individuals engaged in drug-related activities frequently develop practical strategies for managing digital risks that extend beyond market activities to encompass everyday information-seeking and navigation (Bancroft, 2017; Bakken *et al.*, 2023; Van der Sanden *et al.*, 2023). Similar patterns of digitally entangled, collaborative and evidence-based practice have been observed in online cannabis communities, where material constraints, peer guidance and legal awareness shape responsible use (Wanke *et al.*, 2024, 2025). This suggests that hybrid digital-offline practices may be a general feature of contemporary substance communities.

These digitally enabled practices also improve community-level monitoring of human and more-than-human actors. Through ongoing discussion, ecological cues, bodily responses, legal considerations and technological affordances are collectively evaluated and recalibrated. This aligns with the work of Holm *et al.* (2023), who emphasize that online forums are key sites where experiential knowledge, collective reasoning and discursive framing converge to produce nuanced and reflexive understandings of psychedelic substances.

Our findings reinforce the significance of materiality in shaping user practices. Like other psychoactive substances, mushrooms are not passive objects, but rather actants whose properties (seasonality, potency, sensitivity to handling) influence how users plan collection and engage in discussion (Simpson *et al.*, 2023; Huff *et al.*, 2021; Søgaaard and Lerkkanen, 2021). Digital tools extend these engagements by enabling collaborative verification, photo requests and mapping of foraging sites. This integration of material constraints with community knowledge is crucial.

In addition, forum users demonstrate heightened reflexivity regarding substances and practices, critically assessing sourcing, potency and preparation. This mirrors patterns observed in cannabis forums, where users increasingly monitor, evaluate and normalize responsible consumption (Wanke *et al.*, 2024, 2025). Together, these insights underscore the inseparability of digital/physical hybridity from material, ecological and social dimensions in shaping contemporary psilocybin practices.

### *More-than-human interactions*

Beyond online-offline hybridity, our findings underscore the significance of multispecies and ecological engagement. Mushroom picking is a relational practice that attends to more-than-human actants, including fungi, microclimates and grazing animals, rather than merely a human-centered activity. Consistent with the work of [Seear \(2026\)](#), [Arslan et al. \(2026\)](#) and [Simpson et al. \(2023\)](#), our data show that more-than-human entities influence practices, knowledge, and outcomes. Forum users monitor environmental indicators, such as moisture, soil quality, vegetation and animal activity. They integrate these observations with ethical and sustainable harvesting practices.

This attentiveness exemplifies the relationality central to multispecies perspectives. Mushrooms are co-actors whose properties, distribution and potency are actively interpreted and negotiated. The “natural” origin of psilocybin is not just a symbolic marker of authenticity; it is also a material factor intertwined with bodily effects, ecological awareness and community-mediated guidance. Users develop hybrid epistemologies combining empirical observation, embodied experience and digital knowledge to manage uncertainty and reduce harm.

### *Constellations and the psychedelic pluriverse*

Our analysis demonstrates that psilocybin use is not solely a human-centered practice, but emerges through entanglements between humans, mushrooms, landscapes and digital infrastructures. Forum discussions reveal how users negotiate knowledge about seasonality, potency, ecological conditions and embodied effects, integrating these insights into reflective and ethically aware practices. These findings resonate with [Hupli et al. \(2019\)](#) and [Holm et al. \(2023\)](#), who show that online forums are sites where discursive framings, collective reasoning and embodied experiences converge to produce nuanced understandings of psychedelic substances.

This pluriverse approach builds on the established tradition of assemblage thinking in critical drug studies, which views substance use as a contingent effect of heterogeneous relations (Duff, 2016; [Falcon, 2025](#)). Drug scholarship has long used the assemblage framework to show how bodies, substances, and spaces, ranging from harm reduction sites in Poland, co-produce drug effects and subjectivities ([Struzik, 2021](#)) to digital psychonaut networks ([Hupli et al., 2019](#)). While an assemblage analysis often traces how a specific network or event emerges ([Järvelin, 2026](#)), the critical drug studies tradition has long argued for the ontologically multiple realities of substances ([Gomart, 2002](#); [Fraser and Seear, 2011](#)). The pluriverse lens builds directly on this theorizing and emphasizes the coexistence of multiple, divergent ontologies within the same space. In our analysis, the pluriverse highlights that the forum is not just a single network, but a site where entirely different versions of psilocybin, ranging from the mystical and aesthetic to the neurological and risk-managed, are simultaneously enacted and sustained.

Viewed through [Stevens' \(2020, 2024\)](#) framework of drug policy constellations, these entanglements illustrate that substance use is shaped by networks of interdependent actants, rather than by isolated individuals. From a multispecies perspective, our “forest encounters” are not anecdotal curiosities; they exemplify the relational dynamics central to psychedelic practices, in line with [Tsing's \(2015\)](#) concept of co-constituted worlds, where human and more-than-human actors mutually influence knowledge and meaning.

This approach has broader implications. By explicitly attending to more-than-human and digital actants, analyses of drug use can move beyond individual-centered or purely discursive interpretations, capturing the ecological, social and technological dimensions that shape substance practices. In doing so, the study demonstrates that even seemingly mundane or playful engagements with the environment – for example, observing forest cues or seasonal cycles – are analytically consequential. More broadly, it underscores the

value of a pluriverse perspective for substance research, where realities of use are constituted across human and more-than-human, online and offline, ecological and social dimensions.

### *Shifts in discursive framings*

Over time, Polish forum users have shifted from metaphysical and recreational narratives to more scientifically informed, therapeutic and enhancement-oriented framings. Early discussions emphasized mystical encounters, moralized distinctions between natural and synthetic substances, and the romanticized idea that “nature is a cure.” Since 2020, discussions have increasingly emphasized bodily awareness, cognitive effects, self-monitoring and risk management (Bălăeț *et al.*, 2025; Payer *et al.*, 2024). Spiritual and metaphysical interpretations remain present but are increasingly integrated with evidence-based or goal-oriented approaches.

This evolution mirrors broader trends in online psychedelic and drug communities, where responsible engagement, differentiated normalization and reflective experimentation coexist with recreational and spiritual practices (Hupli *et al.*, 2019; Wanke *et al.*, 2024; Pestana *et al.*, 2021). These findings suggest that pluralistic, hybrid and ethically attuned approaches to substance use are not unique to Poland but resonate across digital psychonaut networks. The pluralistic frameworks observed align with evidence that psychedelic use can foster connectedness, ethical engagement and sustainability when incorporated into intentional and reflective practices (Anderson *et al.*, 2024). Online and offline interactions facilitate ethical awareness, sustainability norms and risk consciousness, constituting a new layer of collective responsibility in contemporary psychedelic pluriverses.

### *Limitations*

This study is based on posts from a single Polish-language forum on the surface web, which may not accurately reflect the diversity of psilocybin users in Poland or elsewhere. Forum participants self-select, so their experiences, knowledge and discourse may differ from those of offline-only users or users of other digital spaces, including encrypted platforms and international communities. In addition, we focused on discussions related to mushroom picking and field practices. Thus, other aspects of psilocybin use, such as procurement through social networks or market transactions, were not examined. Finally, although thematic content analysis provides rich qualitative insights, it cannot quantify prevalence or establish causal relationships between discourse and behavior. Future research could corroborate these findings through ethnographic fieldwork, surveys, or cross-platform analyses to capture a broader spectrum of experiences and practices.

### *Conclusion*

The analysis of Polish forum discussions suggests that contemporary psilocybin practices are shaped by a dynamic interplay of human, more-than-human and digital actors. Over time, user engagement has shifted from immersive, mystical experiences in forests to methodical, ecologically attuned and ethically reflective practices, blending embodied observation with digitally mediated knowledge. Psychedelic experiences themselves are increasingly interpreted through psychological, neurological, and risk-aware frameworks, yet spiritual and metaphysical sensibilities continue to coexist with evidence-driven approaches. These shifts highlight how hybrid online-offline practices, multispecies awareness and collective knowledge-building co-construct both the experience and understanding of psilocybin use, revealing a pluriverse where substance, ecology and community interweave rather than existing as isolated domains.

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