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Digital Folklore and Digital Fieldwork: Researching Online Humour with Its Offline Context in Mind

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The digitalization of folklore has transformed the practices of folklorists' ethnographic fieldwork. Drawing on the experience of collecting digital family humour, the article discusses the peculiarities of digital folklore, its interconnections with oral folklore, and the ways to record and interpret it. As context is an important dimension for folklore interpretation, the analysis suggests ways to collect both the content of digital folklore and its offline contexts by combining various fieldwork methods.
▪ **Keywords**: digital folklore, fieldwork, family humour, context, Belarus

Digitalizacija folklore je preoblikovala etnografsko delo folkloristov na terenu. Članek na podlagi izkušenj zbiranja digitalnega družinskega humorja obravnava posebnosti digitalne folklore, njen preplet z ustno folkloro ter načine njenega beleženja in interpretacije. Kontekst je pomemben za interpretacijo folklore, zato prispevek predlaga združevanje različnih metod terenskega dela, ki omogočajo hkratno zbiranje digitalne folklorne vsebine in njenih zunajspletnih konteksov.
▪ **Ključne besede**: digitalna folklora, terensko delo, družinski humor, kontekst, Belorusija

Introduction

The ever-increasing popularity of digital folklore (also referred to as 'electronic folklore' and 'internet folklore', see Domokos, 2014) means that folklorists and other researchers of culture inevitably must follow suit and embrace the content, forms, and context of folklore in the digital realm (De Seta, 2024). The collection of digital folklore opens new horizons, but also inspires important methodological reflections (see e.g. Ilyefalvi, 2018). Apart from granting the access to novel topics, genres and practices of contemporary folklore, digital fieldwork also presupposes a new dynamic of interaction between a researcher and their research participants which has to be taken into consideration while interpreting the collected data (Bluteau, 2021). And while digital ethnographic fieldwork has made large quantities of folklore materials much more accessible, some aspects of vernacular culture remain elusive if we rely exclusively on it.

The paper thus advocates for an approach that combines elements of digital and conventional fieldwork (cf. De Seta, 2024) and discusses this approach in the context of internet humour research. While digital fieldwork seems an appropriate tool for such data collection, a number of technical, social, and cultural limitations make it difficult to rely on digital fieldwork alone if the research question implies looking for the meanings of such folklore for its sharers. As one of the crucial aspects of vernacular

culture research is a close reading not only of a text, but also of its context (Goldstein, 2015), a scholar has to adopt a multilevel approach to the data collection. Therefore, the paper illustrates several possible ways how digital and conventional fieldwork can supplement each other in order to provide a broader perspective on internet humour. Finally, the applications of such new research methodologies are considered within the framework of the transformation of folkloristics as a discipline.

Outlining the boundaries of digital folklore and digital fieldwork

As much of the contemporary folklore goes digital, so must the folklorists. Despite some initial scepticism (see the discussion in Blank, 2009), many folklorists have embraced the digital realm in the recent decades and made it a fruitful field of study (see e.g. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1996; Mason, 1996, 2007; Howard, 1998, 2005, 2008; Blank, 2009, 2012, 2013, 2014; Frank, 2011; Abello et al., 2012; Krawczyk-Wasilewska, 2016; Laineste, Voolaid 2016; Blank, McNeill, 2018; Peck, Blank, 2020; De Seta, 2020). Reflections and debates on digital forms of fieldwork are not specific to folklore studies alone, but have also been prominent in the neighbouring disciplines such as cultural studies and anthropology (see e.g. Kozinets, 2010; Horst, Miller, 2012; Markham, 2013; Bengtsson, 2014; Sanjek, Tratner, 2016; Airoldi, 2018), especially after the start of the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g. Góralska, 2020; Howlett, 2022).

Scholarly works have shown that digital and oral folklore have much in common. While a detailed analysis of shared features of digital and oral folklore lies outside the scope of this article, it is nonetheless important to outline several aspects that are instrumental to the understanding of the very concept of contemporary folklore and folklore fieldwork.

Firstly, both formats of folklore contain patterns (Blank, 2012: 6) which, on the one hand, allow for maintaining traditions, and, on the other, account for variability. Another shared feature of digital and oral folklore is intertextuality. This concept has long been used in folklore studies to define genres and investigate the connection between folklore texts and the discourse to which they belong (see Briggs, Bauman, 1992; Shuman, Hasan-Rokem, 2012: 69–70), and it has become particularly crucial for the study of digital folklore (Laineste, Voolaid, 2016). Moreover, both digital and oral folklore contribute to community building and identity formation (Amato et al., 2010). Finally, the very practices of creation and sharing of digital and oral folklore are also strikingly similar as they largely rely on non-institutional, informal mechanisms of knowledge production and distribution (Sims, Stephens, 2011: 3, Howard, 2008).

The shared features of oral and digital folklore partly stem from the fact that these two formats are intrinsically interwoven (this process was labelled hybridization, see Blank, 2012: 4). And while acknowledging these interrelations and common features

is essential, it is also necessary to point out that digital folklore has a lot of idiosyncratic features that set it apart from the material that used to be analysed by folklorists throughout the 19th and most of the 20th century. These features include the amount of data that is instantly available, the speed of information sharing, new forms and genres of folklore (such as memes and gif animations), the increasingly important role of visuality, topics that are specific to the digital space (such as screen time and cybersecurity), interaction between digital folklore and mainstream media, the role and stance of the audience (such as producers who both create and consume content) and so on. In short, digital folklore has opened up a whole new world for the researchers to explore.

One of the questions that inevitably arises when a new type of material becomes available is the appropriateness of the earlier methods of data collection and analysis. This is particularly relevant for folklorists, who have always relied almost exclusively on face-to-face methods of data collection, or at the very least on the personal correspondence with their research participants or archival accounts of earlier researchers' fieldwork. The personal interaction with the research participants not only provides scholars with folklore texts but also gives an opportunity to understand the context in which these texts are created and spread (cf. Gilman, Fenn, 2019).

However, while traditional ways of conducting fieldwork can provide us with abundant data, some new genres and forms of folklore remain in the "grey zone" if we try to research them using oral interviews or face-to-face participant observation. These are the genres and forms that are specific to the online reality and cannot be easily performed in offline communication, such as, for example, internet memes, videos, forum discussion boards, animations and many more. Not only the quality, but also the quantity of this data differs dramatically from what a researcher could possibly access through face-to-face interaction (Ilyefalvi, 2018: 219). Therefore, folklorists have to resort to new methods of data collection that take into consideration the specificity of the digital realm.

The dynamics of interactions between researchers and research participants is also different in the digital spaces; as Timothy Tangherlini put it, "fieldwork can now be carried out *on* [emphasis in the original] and *among* (as opposed to *with*) groups and individuals who are not necessarily aware that they are participating in an ethnographic project" (Tangherlini, 2016: 6). In a realm where a scholar can remain not just anonymous but also invisible, the ethics of data collection becomes a particularly important consideration, especially if the participants belong to vulnerable groups (Thompson et al., 2021). The boundary between the public and private sphere on the internet is vague and in constant flux; it leaves folklore researchers with multiple questions on how to approach the data, when and how to obtain the informed consent of their research participants, and whether some of the technically public data is suitable for the analysis at all (Miller, 2012). A crucial ethical and methodological consideration is establishing the identity of research participants online. The (quasi-)anonymity of many online spaces

and the limitless possibilities for creating a fake identity often mean that folklorists can no longer investigate the links between a text and its context, a ritual and a performer etc. "[R]e-imagined people living their virtual lives" (Krawczyk-Wasilewska, 2016: 53) may project their "offline" lives onto the digital space in different degrees of proximity: from a careful and faithful documentation of their real life in their internet blogs to creating an entirely different avatar for their online activities. An additional complication is the frequent use of bots[1] – their activities can account for a significant proportion of social media posts (Bessi, Ferrara, 2016; Marlow et al., 2021) and they can become very influential (Aiello et al., 2012). These and other complications stimulate the reflections on folklore fieldwork in the digital space and encourage looking for new ways and methods to approach the data (Peck, 2020: 6).

Not only the boundary between public and private spheres, but also the boundary between face-to-face and digital fieldwork is often vague. While juxtaposing these two types of fieldwork might be a useful tool for methodological reflection (akin to the one presented in this article), in fact the contemporary ethnographic data collection can be seen as a continuum between oral face-to-face fieldwork and digital data scraping. Many forms of fieldwork combine digital and face-to-face elements, for example interviews with the help of voice over internet protocol technologies, or participant observation in the events that happen both online and offline (see Snodgrass, 2014 for a detailed account). The defining feature of face-to-face fieldwork discussed in this article thus lies not in the physical co-presence of the researchers and research participants, but rather in the participatory nature of the interaction between them, since for the brief period of time the researcher becomes not only an observer but also a participant in family humorous interactions. Digital fieldwork does not allow such immediate interactions and is, thus, less personally engaging and more asynchronous.

Challenges and opportunities of fieldwork on contemporary internet humour

Fieldwork on contemporary humorous folklore can serve as a good case in point that illustrates the benefits and challenges of digital fieldwork. It also offers several possible solutions to overcome its drawbacks. While defining humour as a research object, Boxman-Shabtai and Shifman have outlined three clusters of humorous genres:

> (1) "old humour" – humorous genres that were widely transmitted in the pre-internet age, mainly via oral communication (e.g. jokes); (2) internet-mediated humour – humorous genres whose interpersonal

[1] A bot is "a computer program that works automatically, especially one that searches for and finds information on the internet" (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.).

> circulation is enabled by internet technology (e.g. funny advertisements); and (3) internet-generated humour – new humorous genres that dwell on the affordances of internet technology and participatory culture (e.g. digitally manipulated images). (Boxman-Shabtai, Shifman, 2015: 526)

The first cluster of humorous genres is relatively easy to collect with the methods of traditional fieldwork (such as, for example, participant observation or oral interviews); however, jokes and other humorous narratives that belong to this cluster are also available in large quantities online. The latter two clusters, on the other hand, are often very specific to digital realms and thus are less accessible during face-to-face fieldwork. In the context of family communication, internet-mediated humour such as funny advertisements is less notable, but the internet-generated humour is often shared between family members. Internet-generated humour in the form of memes, viral videos, gif-animations and similar genres of humour is becoming increasingly popular not only in family interactions but also on a more general scale, while the popularity of oral jokes is gradually declining (see e.g. Graham, 2009: 139; Laineste, 2016; Fiadotava, 2020; Olah, Hempelmann, 2021: 331), especially among younger generations. Given this tendency and taking into account the fact that "[i]nternet memes have become a universal form of spreading worldviews" (Babič, 2020: 134), developing the methods for its study becomes of utmost importance.

Internet-generated humour is readily available in large quantities and in open access online, on social media, imageboards, internet forums and other digital environments. In some cases it is also aggregated in large-scale databases (see, for example, Know Your Meme) which categorise the examples of humour according to their topic, form etc.

However, this instant and easy availability does not necessarily mean a researcher can always adopt a versatile approach to their research material. A number of technical, social and cultural considerations have an impact on the nature of the dataset that can be obtained by a researcher by simply browsing online.

Looking at the technical aspect, it is important to take into consideration the mechanisms of search engines. On the one hand, by using internet search engines, it is possible to filter hundreds and thousands of examples of humour belonging to a particular topic or genre. On the other, Google, Yahoo and other popular search engines do not always index the data that have been posted on social media platforms. Given the prominence of social media in the spreading of contemporary folklore (see e.g. Peck, 2020), a significant share of folklore material is underrepresented if a researcher uses only web search engines to compile their dataset.

Lurking through popular social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram etc. for data collection has its own complications. A researcher often has a personal account in the social media they use for their research, and thus they become a part of a certain community of users (friends, followers, members of thematic groups). Consequently,

a researcher's perspective and outreach are to a certain extant limited to this digital environment. In other words, social media contribute to the creation of echo chambers of like-minded individuals (Cinelli et al., 2021) which has an inevitable impact on the representativeness of a data sample that a researcher is able to collect on them. Social media algorithms that define the selection of content available to a user thus to a certain extent shape folk culture and promote both its continuity and its change (Flinterud, 2023). Moreover, many social media take a deliberate effort to censor and block certain content that could be potentially harmful for its users – not only serious, but also humorous one (Fiadotava et al., 2023). Some of this content may be of interest to folklorists: for example, conspiracy theories, rumours, fake news and so on. The absence or insignificant amount of this content on popular social media platforms might lead a researcher to biased conclusions about its general (un)popularity among internet folklore sharers.

Apart from web search engines and social media platforms, a researcher might also turn to the websites that aggregate folklore of a particular type. While some of them are indeed invaluable repositories of folklore material, these compilations might include examples from very heterogeneous sources, and often these sources remain hidden from a researcher. A good example is joke compilations that are published online "with no major discursive variations or demands for contextualisation" (Yus, 2021: 2). Without contextual clues, interpretation and analysis of the texts becomes problematic at best, as images, videos, or texts per se do not always reveal the ideas behind sharing them. Moreover, the data available in such compilations might be filtered to fit its creators and owners' tastes, technical characteristics of the websites where they are hosted, copyright restrictions and other factors. These circumstances do not mean that folklore compilations on the internet cannot provide any useful material for the analysis; but a folklorist has to be aware of these limitations and build their research strategy accordingly.

As the discussion above implies, many of the public and semi-public digital fieldwork sites share a common drawback: they provide access to texts, but not to their contexts. The context of a practice or performance is important for the understanding of any folklore text, but it becomes especially critical in the case of highly ambiguous and controversial material, such as, for example, humour revolving around pressing social issues (see e.g. Ödmark, 2021). If a person shares a joke or a funny meme ridiculing immigrants, vaccination, or climate change activism, there could be multiple possible explanations for it. A humorous item can be shared as an alternative way to demonstrate one's serious beliefs and ideas; in case of controversial issues, using the humorous rather than serious mode can be one of the ways to circumvent possible censorship and mitigate criticism (Lockyer, Pickering, 2008: 812). However, people can also share a joke or a meme even if they do not support the ideas it implies, but still find it amusing and entertaining.

Putting digital humour in context

The context surrounding digital folklore remains elusive unless we turn to the people who spread it. Researching the data in context thus requires a combination of conventional fieldwork approaches and digital ethnographic methods. It is essential to capture the personal background that resonates with specific humorous examples and understand the motivations behind sharing them with particular audiences.

These considerations informed and shaped my fieldwork on Belarusian family humour conducted during my doctoral studies between 2016 and 2019. My initial intention was to focus on humour in daily face-to-face interactions among family members. In order to investigate it, I did 60 oral semi-structured interviews with Belarusian couples aged 24 to 66. The interviews were conducted face-to-face, via VoIP-based applications (such as Skype or Viber) or via telephone. All the interviewees received the questionnaire and participant information statement at least several days before the interviews. Whenever possible, I preferred to interview both members of the couple together; in the cases when only one member of a couple was available to talk to me, I asked them to discuss the interview questions with their partner/spouse before the interview so that it would be easier for them to speak on behalf of both members of the family during the interview. I was asking my interviewees about their general attitude towards humour, the topics of their family jokes, the shared experiences that were transformed into humorous memories etc. (for a more detailed overview, see Fiadotava, 2021).

Although I initially did not focus specifically on internet humour and the digital ways of sharing it, it was mentioned rather frequently during the interviews, especially by the couples in their 20s and 30s, so I later included a question about the digital sharing of humour in my questionnaire. My interviewees described the practices of sharing humour digitally in the family communication, but the format of an oral interview made it difficult (if not impossible) for them to share with me the particular examples of the digital humour that circulates in their families. Even though many of internet-based humorous image macros (i.e. images with textual captions) structurally resemble verbal canned jokes (Dynel, 2016), there are many examples of digital humour that rely on the visual perception and cannot be efficiently retold during an oral conversation.

Therefore, I undertook the second round of fieldwork which consisted of an online survey dedicated almost exclusively to the digital sharing of humour. It included questions on the frequency of digital and oral sharing of humour, the ways of sharing humour digitally, the sources and formats of digital humour people preferred etc. The survey also invited the respondents to upload (the links to the) examples of humour that they have recently shared with their family members and add a comment of why they decided to share this particular example with them. 175 people replied to the survey and shared in total over 260 examples of humorous folklore circulating in their families

at that time (for the discussion of the results, see Fiadotava, 2020). The survey was anonymous, the only demographic data respondents were asked to indicate were their gender and age. The pool of the respondents overlapped only partly with the pool of my interviewees of the first round of fieldwork, but it was aggregated with the help of the same "snowball sampling" technique, which means that most of my interviewees and survey respondents were either my friends or the friends of my friends, and many of them had a similar socio-demographic background (middle class, urban dwellers, higher education etc.). While the difference between the pools of my interviewees and survey respondents does not allow for directly correlating the results of these two fieldwork rounds, it nonetheless inspired reflections on such a combination of face-to-face and digital fieldwork.

An important aspect of this combination is the possibility to analyse both the formal characteristics of the humorous examples and the layers of meanings that are embedded in them. The analysis revealed that while most of my respondents preferred sharing generic (i.e. not self-produced) internet humour (funny images, memes, viral videos etc.), they usually used private channels for sharing it and looked for personal connotations that would resonate with their idiosyncratic family experiences. The humorous genres with visual elements (especially images and image macros, often referred to as internet memes) tended to prevail in digital family communication. The prevalence of these genres in families' online communication points to the importance of context in the study of humorous folklore. The spread and visibility of these items online is largely governed by digital algorithms, and they are too numerous for any human to account for. As families share only a small fraction of the existing humorous images and memes, it becomes crucial for a researcher to understand why they select these particular humorous items, in what way they are relevant to their family, and how they assess their humorousness.

The respondents' comments to the items they shared showed that humorousness of some examples – which was clearly recognised and appreciated by my research participants – did not necessarily mean that these examples were shared "just for fun"; many of them were used to communicate serious ideas within a family. These ideas could have some didactic connotations (for example, sharing funny fake news to make family members aware of the potential harm of such information) or just aim at communicating love, care and tenderness in family interactions. Not surprisingly, a lot of digital humour in family communication revolved around children and pets. Some of it included the photos or videos of family's own children or pets, but many others were humorous memes and virals that showed relatable behaviour patterns and situations (see Figures 1 and 2).

Some of the humorous items that are shared between family members play with the incongruities and funny aspects of everyday life: such mundane activities as eating, watching TV, or driving tend to be suitable settings for digital humour (see Figure 3).

Figure 1: The caption reads: "That's my dog at every party". The image was shared with me via the online survey by a 21-year-old female who commented that she had a dog and such situations occurred frequently. Here and thereafter, the translations from Russian and Belarusian are made by the author.

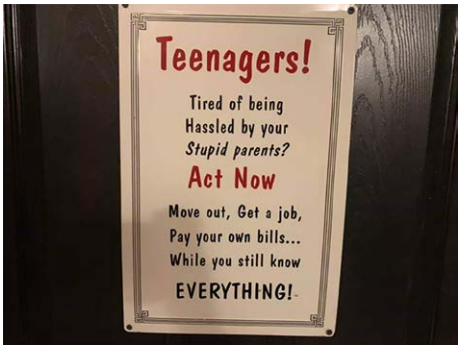

Figure 2: Unlike many other humorous items that featured young children, this image targeted teenagers. The image was shared with me via the online survey by a 38-year-old female respondent who commented that she found it funny because it refers to teenagers.

Figure 3: The image was shared via the online survey by a 26-year-old female. In the comment she mentioned that the image was sent to her by her sibling with the following caption: "When [the respondent's name] buys a car". At the time of receiving the image the respondent was attending driving lessons, and, according to her words, that was her family's way of ironically "supporting" her (quotation marks in the original). This example is an interesting combination of a generic image and an idiosyncratic caption that reflects one of the ways internet humour can be customized to family communication.

Humour revolving around pets, children and everyday activities can be easily represented in the visual form, contributing to these topics' popularity in families' digital sharing. However, more abstract topics were also sometimes evoked. For example, some of the humour targeted interpersonal relationships (Figure 4).

Less common topics of digital family humour that was shared with me via the online survey include sports, politics, professional aspects, popular culture (see Figure 5) and other spheres of life that have less immediate connections with family life.

Figure 4: Speech bubbles read: "Mom, a guy has asked me out". – "Don't go" – "Why?" – "Don't ruin the person's life". This example was shared by a 29-year-old female via the online survey.

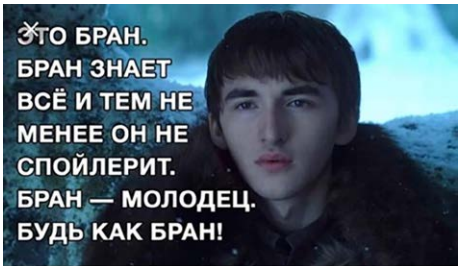

Figure 5: The caption reads: "That's Bran [Stark, a *Game of Thrones* character]. Bran knows everything but he doesn't tell spoilers. Bran is cool. Be like Bran!" This is a variation of a popular "Be like Bill" internet meme; it was shared by a 52-year-old male via the online survey. The respondent added a comment explaining that he and one of his daughters watch the *Game of Thrones* and they are tired of reading and hearing spoilers of the episodes they have not seen yet.

While the online survey participants mostly commented on the particular examples shared with me via the survey form, during the oral interviews my research participants also explained the general practices of sharing digital folklore in their families, focusing, among other, on the meanings of such sharing in their family communication. Many of them used digital sharing of humour to stay in touch while being physically away from each other. Several interviewees also mentioned that they send one another funny images, videos and jokes when they are together at home. Therefore, digital sharing of humour acquires the same meanings as oral face-to-face sharing; the format of sharing is just adapted to the formats of humour. If we look at these findings from the methodological perspective, it transpires that the multiple-choice questions of digital fieldwork became a useful tool to answer the questions of *what* and *how* is shared, while the traditional fieldwork helped to understand *why* it is shared.

On a technical level, combining oral interviews and online survey involved the adaptation of the questions to each form of fieldwork. During the interviews, I started by phrasing my questions in the broadest possible way to allow the interviewees to reflect on those features of their family humour that they themselves consider the most relevant, and then guiding them with follow-up questions if I wanted to clarify or elaborate on some aspects. Semi-structured interviews also created a suitable environment for better understanding the general family context and at least some of the nuances of family relations (for broader discussion of semi-structured interviews methodology in qualitative research see e.g. Adeoye-Olatunde, Olenik, 2021). While replying to the initial general questions such as "Do you often use humour in your family?" interviewees not only reflected on the frequency of their humorous utterances, but also made remarks on the role of humour in their family life (and life in general), pointed to some differences between themselves or between themselves and other families, and often tried to define the styles of their family humorous communication. The online survey, on the other hand, required very concise and unambiguous formulations of questions; in most cases the replies to the open-ended survey questions were also shorter and less detailed. Some survey respondents preferred not to elaborate on the meanings of the humorous items they shared, implying that any explanations of humour are redundant. The lack of broader contextual information about particular families also limited the possible directions of interpretation of the data collected via the online survey. This implies that digital fieldwork was instrumental to interpreting singular examples in particular settings, while oral fieldwork helped adopt a broader perspective on the data but often lacked finer details and specific examples.

Anonymity was also an important factor. Even though I assured my interviewees that their replies will be anonymised and their names will not be mentioned in any academic publications or presentations, the very setting of an oral interview with a researcher could and did prevent them from sharing some of the most intimate examples of their family humour. Some of the interviewees openly admitted that a number of humorous

stories and nicknames used in their family communication are too embarrassing or intimate to cite during an interview. The online survey, conversely, eliminates this restriction and provides the researcher with an opportunity to access a wider range of humorous expressions. For example, obscene and sexual references were more recurrent in the examples that were shared with me via survey than during the oral interviews; and even in the survey, some of the respondents apologized for sharing them. While comparing the data from oral interviews and online surveys (especially if interviewees and survey respondents are mostly the same people), it is important to take this factor into consideration to account for the discrepancy of the data.

Fieldwork transformations – a way to maintain the discipline of folkloristics?

The issue of combining the methods of face-to-face and digital folklore fieldwork is becoming more and more relevant for researchers as numerous new genres and topics of folklore emerge on the internet, and some of the folklore that used to be practiced orally is also gradually penetrating the digital realm. The latter process is prompted both by the ever-increasing role of modern technologies in our everyday life and particular events that make face-to-face folklore performances difficult or even impossible. The most recent and prominent example of such events was the COVID-19 pandemic, which boosted the online sharing of folklore in general, and humorous folklore in particular (see e.g. Sebba-Elran, 2021; Hiiemäe et al., 2021).

However, despite the abundance of different forms of (humorous) folklore on the internet and the ways of its sharing, the findings of this study clearly indicate that the context of humorous interactions considerably restricts their versatility. The responses of my interviewees and survey participants reveal the disproportionate popularity of one genre – internet memes created by third parties – among the genres of family humorous communication; likewise, private messaging was the most prominent mode of sharing humorous content. The fact that families often limit their humorous communication to certain genres and modes of sharing shows that humans still tend to scale the enormous variability of contemporary digital folklore down to the level at which they can grasp, understand and enjoy it.

The use of folklore in technologically-mediated communication not only affects its content and form, but also puts into focus the issues of performativity and the interrelations between the performers and their audiences. The concept of 'folk' which has been a topic for the discussion in folklore studies already since the 1970s when Alan Dundes published his thought-provoking essay 'Who are the folk?' (Dundes, 1978: 1–21), becomes even more ambiguous in the digital realm. The anonymity and impersonalization of many forms of vernacular expression online often leave open the questions of motives behind folklore sharing and the reaction of the (potential)

audience to it, even when sharing occurs in a relatively public digital environment. The ethics of researching these public environments adds an additional dimension to its complexity because a lot of contemporary folklore revolves around sensitive or taboo topics. Moreover, some folklore (such as rumours, conspiracy theories etc.) may be used to spread misinformation; thus its use even in scholarly context requires very careful handling and its publication should be accompanied by extensive academic commentary (see Fiadotava et al., 2025). The study of family digital humorous communication can shed light on these controversial issues on a relatively small scale. The contribution of this study to the digital folklore research therefore lies in pointing out the trends in digital communication that can be most fully revealed by combining digital and face-to-face fieldwork.

The large media datasets as well as the digital fieldwork methods have broadened the scope of folklore studies and allowed scholars to pose new research questions (Abello, et al., 2012). At the same time, these new research questions and the delicate balance between digital and conventional fieldwork call for new skills and approaches on behalf of researchers. The future implications of this call for new skills and approaches are possible changes in folklore studies curricula that might include more courses on digital fieldwork and the ways it could be combined with traditional fieldwork. Such courses might focus on technical and ethical challenges of digital folklore collection, as well as involve students and professors in the discussion on how traditional ethnographic approaches can be redefined to be better adapted to the study of contemporary folklore. The transformations this situation entails could become a challenge for folklore scholars, but they also imply that our discipline remains relevant in the contemporary world and can uncover some of its most interesting hidden layers.

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Research data statement

The author states that the article is based on research data that is stored by the author and is available upon reasonable request.

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Digitalna folklora in digitalno terensko delo: upoštevanje zunajspletnega konteksta pri raziskovanju spletnega humorja

Pojav novih folklornih žanrov, ki so značilni za digitalno okolje, in preoblikovanje zgodnejših folklornih žanrov, ki so vse bolj dostopni na spletu, sta spremenila prakse etnografskega terenskega dela folkloristov. Članek obravnava posebnosti digitalne folklore, njene medsebojne povezave z ustno folkloro ter načine zapisovanja in interpretacije digitalnih folklornih žanrov s pomočjo folkloristovega metodološkega orodja. Avtorica članka izhaja iz osebnih izkušenj zbiranja digitalnega družinskega humorja in na podlagi izbranih primerov humorja, ki so jih delili avtoričini intervjuvanci in anketiranci, razpravlja o priljubljenih temah družinskega humorja in razlogih za priljubljenost teh tem. Ker je kontekst

pomemben za interpretacijo folklore, so v članku s kombiniranjem različnih metod terenskega dela predlagani načini zbiranja vsebine digitalne folklore in njenih kontekstov. Takšna kombinacija metod omogoča odkrivanje različnih vidikov folklornih podatkov. Vprašanja digitalnih anket z več možnimi odgovori lahko denimo postanejo uporabno orodje za odgovore na vprašanja, *kaj* in *kako* se deli v spletnem okolju, medtem ko tradicionalno terensko delo pomaga razumeti, *zakaj* se takšna vsebina deli. Avtorica zaključuje članek z ugotovitvijo, da so obsežne zbirke podatkov o digitalni folklori in metode digitalnega terenskega dela razširili področje folkloristične raziskav in omogočili raziskovalcem postavljanje novih raziskovalnih vprašanj, vendar ta nova raziskovalna vprašanja in občutljivo ravnovesje med digitalnim in klasičnim terenskim delom od raziskovalca terjajo nove veščine in raziskovalne pristope.