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When is technology worth the trouble?

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Abstract

Human beings are unique in the degree to which they rely on technology to interface with their environment. Applications of biologically derived foraging models have typically taken this technology as a given when analyzing ethnographic and prehistoric subsistence practices. This paper departs from the standard approach by treating investment in technology as a decision variable and looking at how investment decisions might be expected to vary with changes in both the time available to forage and the nature of the local resource base. The study draws attention to the importance of understanding both the costs and the benefits of technological investment and how they relate to one another. We use ethnographic and hypothetical data to demonstrate how one might represent these relationships mathematically, discuss the importance for understanding investment decisions, and explore their implications in circumstances where resources are randomly and non-randomly encountered.



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Keywords

technology; technological investment; time; subsistence; optimal foraging theory; prey choice

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