



VANLIFE

Department:

Management Science
and Engineering

Program:

PhD

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Research project

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Project co-researchers:

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Core research themes within the field of human-computer interaction (HCI) are how lived experiences with technology intersect with home and work. Existing research has primarily focused on conventional life and work in Western countries. However, the unconventional is becoming conventional: several rising subcultures are coming into prominence due to socio-economic pressures, aided by social media. One example – #vanlife – is now practised by an estimated three million people in North America. #Vanlife, a modern nomadic movement, combines travel, home, and working remotely by their occupants (vanlifers) who live full-time in cargo vans, school buses, or campers converted into living spaces.

Rizvi investigated how the nomadic nature of #vanlife adapts and innovates technology meant for traditional homes and workspaces into these small living areas. Rizvi and Morayko travelled to Arizona to collect testimonies from vanlifers about how they use technology in their mobile homes, and what challenges they face. The team was able to identify eleven technological interventions to improve vanlifers quality of life. For example, technology can better support religious practices, sustainable work, and even recreational activities in small spaces.

With these findings, Rizvi hopes to advocate for designing technology and tools that address the challenges that people living outside typical home spaces with different socio-economic factors face. This includes Indigenous communities in northern Canada, individuals living in small apartments during the COVID-19 pandemic, and military bases. Next steps of the research are to further investigate unconventional, and non-Western communities.

Interesting fact: Researchers spent over 200 hours in Arizona collecting testimonies from vanlifers while living in a rented 2-bedroom van.



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