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# ACADEMIC WEEKLY DIGEST

School of Hospitality & Tourism Management

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## THE RICH KIDS OF INSTAGRAM

It comes as no surprise that The Rich Kids of Instagram (RKOI), a prominent collection of Instagram posts, portray glamorous lifestyles on social media. What has been less known is the role of transport modes and luxury travel within these images.

**Prof Scott Cohen, Dr Hongbo (Daisy) Liu** and colleagues analysed how travel and transport are depicted online by the RKOI.

# THE RICH KIDS OF INSTAGRAM: LUXURY TRAVEL, TRANSPORT MODES AND DESIRE

**PROF SCOTT COHEN & DR HONGBO (DAISY) LIU**

Travel features heavily in Instagram posts, and a holiday destination's 'Instagrammability' has become an important factor in millennials' decisions on where to visit. While it seems evident that travel must play a role in how the RKOI depict their lifestyles online, and that these portrayals are likely to contribute to social norms of what is desirable, there has been a lack of research on the interrelationships between luxury travel, transport modes and image construction on social media.

A research team led by SHTM's **Prof Cohen** and **Dr Liu** used co-occurrence analysis to reveal the ways in which transport modes and luxury travel are depicted on Instagram by the RKOI. Their findings show that the RKOI depict themselves with powerful cars, helicopters, luxury yachts, and private jets, where they for instance flaunt ample space, private crew, and luxury food and drink, often coupled with iconic destinations as the backdrop.



## FURTHER READING:

Cohen, S., Liu, H., Hanna, P. Hopkins, D., Higham, J. & Gössling, S. (2021). The Rich Kids of Instagram: Luxury travel, transport modes, and desire. *Journal of Travel Research*,  
Link: [bit.ly/3At5uIF](https://bit.ly/3At5uIF)

The authors argue that the lifestyles represented by the RKOI may contribute to the social normalisation of carbon-intensive tourism and transport choices. Their work exposes how the travel-related displays of affluence of the super-rich are an important yet largely neglected barrier to shifting social norms towards more sustainable consumption practices.