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'Taken for ride': an analysis of instagram, lifestyle branding and identity performance within Johannesburg-based urban cycling

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Abstract:

Instagram is a social media platform that enables its users to take photos and videos, filter and edit them, and then shares them instantly with fellow users. Because Instagram is free-to-use, it has become a platform for self-expression as well as a commercial space. Accordingly, several users have become increasingly aware of the nature of Instagram and have taken to putting on selected versions on themselves as means of making themselves commercially viable. Using the Maboneng City Riders (a social and urban cycling group that is based in the Maboneng Precinct) as a case study, this study looks into the group's use of Instagram as a means of lifestyle branding via the 'performance of self'. This is done by looking into the MCR's identity in online and offline spaces as well as looking into the economies that are generated and sustained by this lifestyle branding. This study therefore reveals that the MCR are branding their lifestyle through the performance of self. At the centre of this performance is Instagram as both a staging space to show the MCR's creativity and self-expression but more importantly, it is a platform being used to brand the MCR as lifestyle which is proving to be a profitable space. Whilst this branding is only benefitting a few people, it has also proven to be a highly effective and profitable system. It can be established that the findings of this study shows how the nature of Instagram enables lifestyle and branding to connect on social media as a form of performing self – a performance that is essentially feeding profits back in to very specific brands and commercial entities.