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Isuzu and Nogwaja: A Strategic Partnership in Brand Identity



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ABSTRACT	
<p>Keywords: brand identity; consumer engagement; emotional connection; experiential marketing; influencer marketing; isuzu; nogwaja; strategic brand positioning.</p> <p>Conflict of Interest Statement: The author(s) declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.</p> <p>Copyright © 2025 ABIM. All rights reserved.</p>	<p>Purpose: This study explores the strategic partnership between Isuzu and adventurer Nogwaja, examining how it enhances Isuzu's brand identity while deepening consumer engagement through influencer marketing.</p> <p>Research Design and Methodology: This study utilized qualitative research methodology, incorporating a scoping literature review and case studies to examine the effectiveness of branding strategies in the automotive industry. It focused on Aaker's Brand Equity Model and the impact of partnerships, like Isuzu's collaboration with influencers, on brand perception and market appeal.</p> <p>Findings and Discussion: The partnership's success is attributed to authenticity, emotional engagement, and strategic communication. Nogwaja's alignment with Isuzu's values of adventure, resilience, and endurance strengthens the brand's credibility and fosters deeper consumer trust. Additionally, incorporating vernacular language and engaging on social media allows Isuzu to connect with local consumers and resonate with younger, adventure-driven audiences. Experiential marketing, exemplified by live events like the Mzansi Off-road Festival, further solidifies Isuzu's image as a high-performance, reliable brand.</p> <p>Implications: The study highlights the importance of authenticity, targeted engagement, and strategic brand positioning. It offers insights that can be applied across industries, particularly in leveraging influence partnerships and experiential marketing to enhance brand equity and long-term consumer loyalty. The Adventure-Brand Evolution Model developed from this study provides a framework for integrating emotional connection and cultural relevance in brand strategies.</p>

Introduction

Brand identity is more than just visual elements like logos and slogans; it encompasses a company's mission, values, and unique selling propositions, shaping a cohesive image that resonates with consumers (Farhana, 2012; Kapferer, 2012; Li, 2022; Willie, 2025). A well-defined brand identity differentiates a company from competitors, fosters brand loyalty, and influences purchasing decisions. Strategic partnerships and endorsements reinforce brand identity by strengthening emotional connections with target audiences, ultimately enhancing brand perception and market positioning (Aaker, 1996). Shams, Chatterjee, and Chaudhuri (2024) suggest that brand identity helps customers differentiate brands and, when supported by consistent marketing, boosts sales, while their study explores the antecedents of brand identity and the moderating effect of consumer belief on purchasing decisions.

Recent studies have emphasized the role of influencer marketing in building brand engagement by leveraging the credibility of social media personalities to foster consumer trust (Belanche, Casaló, Flavián *et al.*, 2021; Joyce, 2024). Authenticity remains critical, as consumers are more likely to trust endorsements that align with an influencer's brand and experiences (Kapitan, van Esch, Soma & Kietzmann, 2021). Research also suggests that high congruence between influencers, consumers, and brands leads to more favorable brand attitudes and stronger purchase intentions, improving campaign effectiveness (Blanche, Casaló, Flavián *et al.*, 2021; Venciute, Mackeviciene, Kuslys & Correia, 2023). However, much existing research has focused on short-term marketing effectiveness rather than long-term brand equity, leaving a gap in understanding how influence-brand alignment impacts sustained consumer engagement (Agustian, Hidayat, Zen & Malik, 2023; Benevento, Aloini, Roma & Bellino, 2025).

This study addresses that gap by examining Isuzu's strategic partnership with Nogwaja, a South African adventurer and content creator whose lifestyle aligns with the brand's rugged and adventurous image. While prior research has explored influencer marketing, limited studies have analyzed its long-term impact on brand identity reinforcement within the automotive sector. This research extends existing frameworks by integrating influencer partnerships into a broader brand strategy model, incorporating product-level factors like hedonic and utilitarian value and brand-level factors such as differentiation and share of voice (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; de Vries & Carlson, 2014).

Thus, this study explores how influential partnerships contribute to long-term brand equity, using the Isuzu-Nogwaja collaboration as a case study. The key research objectives include (1) analyzing the role of influencer-brand alignment in reinforcing brand identity, (2) assessing its impact on consumer trust and loyalty, and (3) evaluating how strategic partnerships influence long-term market positioning. By addressing these objectives, this study contributes to the growing discourse on the influence of marketing on the effectiveness of shaping brand perceptions and sustaining competitive advantage.

Literature Review

Brand Identity and Consumer Engagement

Brand identity is central to shaping consumer perceptions and fostering loyalty. It integrates a brand's values, mission, and visual identity while establishing emotional connections with its audience (Kapferer, 2012). A strong identity differentiates brands in competitive markets, influencing consumer preference and long-term engagement (Keller, 2013). In the automotive industry, Isuzu exemplifies this by positioning itself as synonymous with durability and adventure, appealing to off-road enthusiasts. Strategic collaborations, such as with Nogwaja, reinforce these attributes, strengthening brand credibility and aligning with consumer aspirations for resilience and exploration.

Influencer Marketing and Brand Authenticity

Influencer marketing has emerged as a powerful engagement tool, leveraging the credibility of individuals with substantial social media followings (Freberg *et al.*, 2011). Ardley, Craig, Hunt, and May (2022) highlight four essential factors, such as trustworthiness, transparency, relatability, and expertise, that define an authentic Social Media Influencer (SMI) when promoting products on Instagram, providing valuable insights for improving influencer authenticity and shaping strategies for both personal and brand reputation. Platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok facilitate partnerships where influencers authentically promote brands, enhancing consumer trust (Kapferer, 2012; Jin *et al.*, 2019). Authenticity remains a key driver of trust and loyalty in influencer marketing. Isuzu's collaboration with Nogwaja exemplifies this, as his adventurous lifestyle aligns with the brand's identity of resilience. By transparently sharing experiences with Isuzu vehicles, Nogwaja reinforces the credibility of the endorsement (Freberg *et al.*, 2011; Aaker, 1997).

Storytelling and Emotional Connection

Storytelling enhances brand authenticity, making marketing content more engaging and relatable. As seen in Figure 1, narratives that reflect real-life experiences foster deeper emotional connections. Nogwaja's journey, infused with themes of endurance and exploration, integrates Isuzu seamlessly

into content that resonates with adventure-seekers (Aaker, 1996; Zainurossalamia, Tricahyadinata, Robiansyah & Achmad, 2021). In their study, Zainurossalamia *et al.*, (2021) found that while content marketing influences purchasing decisions, storytelling and social media marketing have no significant effect, with a low coefficient determination suggesting the need for further evaluation of these variables' impact. In contrast, Zhang, Qu, and Gao (2023) highlight the evolving storytelling trend in marketing, emphasizing the shift from independent creation by enterprises and consumers to a co-creation approach. Their study focuses on brand storytelling, consumer storytelling, and the driving factors behind this trend. Similarly, Nogwaja's alignment with Isuzu mirrors this shift, as micro-influencers with niche expertise enhance brand credibility and reinforce Isuzu's position in the automotive market.

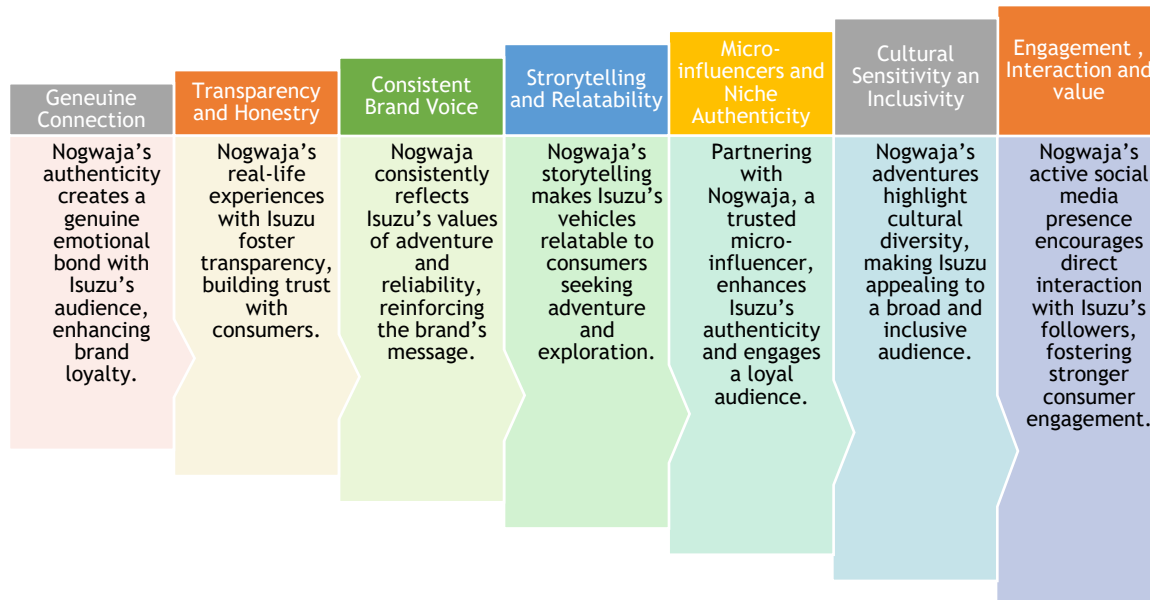


Figure 1. Authenticity in Influencer Marketing

Experiential Marketing and Emotional Brand Connections

Experiential marketing plays a crucial role in shaping consumer perceptions and reinforcing brand identity (Schmitt, 1999). Isuzu's collaboration with Nogwaja exemplifies how brands create emotional connections through immersive experiences. Experiential marketing plays a crucial role in shaping consumer perceptions and reinforcing brand identity by engaging customers in interactive and immersive experiences that evoke emotional connections (Schmitt, 1999). This approach has gained significant attention as brands aim to go beyond traditional advertising by creating memorable, sensory-rich experiences that resonate with consumers on a deeper level (Huang & Benyoucef, 2013). Isuzu's collaboration with Nogwaja is a prime example of how brands leverage experiential marketing to build emotional bonds with their target audience.

Isuzu enhances its credibility and authenticity by partnering with a micro-influencer recognized for its niche expertise, reinforcing its standing in the competitive automotive market. As shown in Figure 2, experiential branding goes beyond product promotion to craft narratives that deeply resonate with consumers. By connecting with Nogwaja's adventurous persona, Isuzu integrates themes of durability and performance into its brand identity, enhancing emotional engagement (Kapferer, 2012). This strategy differentiates Isuzu, fosters long-term loyalty, and drives consumer advocacy (Mostafa & Kasamani, 2020).

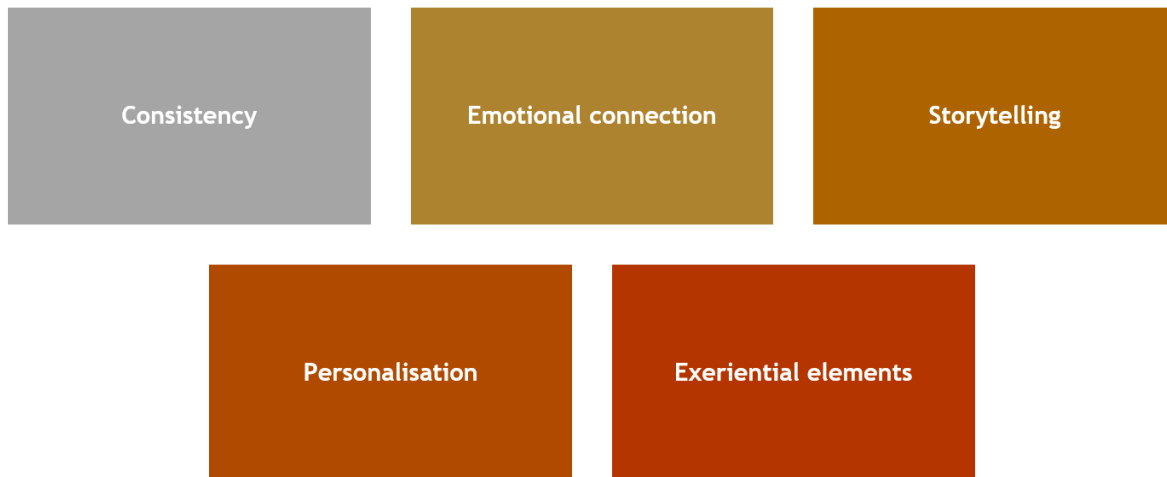


Figure 2. Key features and elements of experiential marketing and branding

Theoretical Framework: Brand Identity in Automotive Marketing

Brand identity is a multidimensional concept beyond visual elements like logos and taglines; it embodies a company's values, mission, and market positioning, shaping how consumers perceive and engage with the brand (Keller, 2013). A strong brand identity creates differentiation in competitive markets, fostering trust, loyalty, and emotional connections with consumers. Companies that effectively communicate their brand identity can reinforce their market position and ensure consistency across various touchpoints, from advertising to customer interactions. Isuzu's brand identity is deeply rooted in values such as reliability, adventure, and endurance, making it a trusted name in the automotive industry. Known for manufacturing durable vehicles capable of handling extreme terrain and demanding conditions, Isuzu appeals to individuals and businesses prioritizing performance and longevity. These attributes align seamlessly with the needs of adventurers, off-road enthusiasts, and commercial users who depend on their vehicles in challenging environments. Maintaining a clear and consistent brand identity has allowed Isuzu to position itself as a leader in the automotive sector.

The brand's strategic partnership with Nogwaja, a South African adventurer and content creator, reinforces this identity. Nogwaja's reputation for resilience, endurance, and exploration mirrors the qualities that define Isuzu's vehicles, making him an ideal brand ambassador. Through this collaboration, Isuzu strengthens its association with adventure and rugged performance, enhancing its credibility among target consumers. The partnership is not just about promotion but about aligning values and demonstrating the brand's commitment to a lifestyle centered on durability and perseverance (Kapferer, 2012).

Research Design and Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research methodology, utilizing a scoping literature review as the primary research method to explore the effectiveness of branding strategies in the automotive industry. A scoping literature review is a systematic method used to map the key themes, trends, and gaps in a broad area of research, providing an overview of existing evidence without synthesizing detailed conclusions, and is particularly useful in emerging or expansive fields (Verdejo, Tapia-Benavente, Schuller *et al.*, 2021; McLeod, 2024). The review included academic journals, industry reports, and relevant marketing textbooks to systematically examine key themes related to brand identity, influencer marketing, and experiential branding. A specific focus was placed on Aaker's Brand Equity Model (Aaker, 1991), as well as foundational works such as Keller's (2013) research on brand identity, Kotler and Keller's (2016) perspectives on brand ambassadors, and Schmitt's (1999) concept of experiential marketing. The review also explored the emotional influence of branding (Aaker, 1996), the role of partnerships in enhancing brand equity, and the significance of integrated communication strategies (Batra & Keller, 2016).

Case studies were analyzed to provide practical insights, including Isuzu's collaboration with influencers, illustrating how brand partnerships impact brand perception and broaden market appeal (Hoyer *et al.*, 2010). The research design involved thematic analysis, content mapping, and standard methods in scoping reviews to identify patterns, relationships, and research gaps. A systematic coding process categorized key themes such as brand authenticity, influencer impact, and consumer engagement strategies. Data extraction adhered to the PRISMA-ScR framework to ensure methodological rigor and a narrative synthesis approach integrated findings from diverse sources, highlighting emerging trends and areas for further research (Page, Moher, Bossuyt *et al.*, 2021). This comprehensive approach offers valuable insights into the factors influencing brand equity and the strategic role of brand partnerships in reinforcing consumer loyalty and expanding brand reach.

Findings and Discussion

Findings

Nogwaja as a Brand Ambassador

Brand ambassadors are crucial in shaping consumer perceptions, influencing purchasing decisions, and enhancing brand credibility (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Ambassadors who embody a brand's values and attributes foster an emotional connection with the target audience, making the brand more relatable and aspirational. Their endorsement goes beyond traditional advertising, as their personal experiences and advocacy authentically resonate with consumers. Nogwaja's partnership with Isuzu is a strategic alignment that leverages his influence to connect with an audience passionate about adventure and off-road experiences. As an adventurer and content creator, Nogwaja represents resilience, endurance, and exploration values closely aligned with Isuzu's brand identity. His authentic storytelling and firsthand experiences with Isuzu vehicles provide credible endorsements that appeal to consumers seeking durability and reliability in their vehicles. This organic connection between ambassador and brand enhances Isuzu's appeal to outdoor enthusiasts and adventure seekers. Beyond product promotion, Nogwaja's engagement with the community strengthens Isuzu's authenticity and trustworthiness (Solomon, 2018). His active participation in events, sharing real-life experiences, and engaging with his audience enable him to foster a sense of belonging and loyalty among consumers. In the digital age, where consumers prioritize genuine connections with brands before making purchasing decisions, his ability to communicate Isuzu's key brand messages in a relatable and engaging manner builds long-term consumer trust.

Marketing Strategies: Social Media and Experiential Branding

Social media and experiential marketing have revolutionized brand positioning by facilitating real-time consumer engagement and creating immersive brand experiences, making social media an indispensable tool for businesses of all sizes in marketing and branding (Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Jeswani, 2023). According to Mangold and Faulds (2009), social media is a hybrid element in the promotion mix, enabling direct communication between companies and consumers and facilitating peer-to-peer interactions outside marketers' direct control. These strategies offer a departure from traditional marketing, allowing for personalized and interactive connections with audiences. As independent endorsers, social media influencers (SMIs) shape audience attitudes through platforms like blogs and tweets, yet there is limited understanding of how audiences perceive SMIs (Freberg *et al.*, 2011). Isuzu's collaboration with Nogwaja illustrates the power of digital campaigns, live events, and content-driven storytelling in enhancing brand perception, highlighting its vehicles' capabilities, and reinforcing its identity of adventure and resilience.

Experiential marketing is crucial in creating lasting brand impressions by allowing consumers to engage with products in meaningful and memorable ways (Schmitt, 1999). Events such as the Mzansi Off-road Festival provide a platform for Isuzu to demonstrate its vehicles' real-world performance, giving potential customers hands-on experiences that build trust and credibility. Nogwaja's presence at these events further strengthens the brand's appeal by providing an authentic voice that resonates with adventure-seekers. His involvement bridges the gap between brand messaging and consumer perception, making Isuzu's positioning more tangible and relatable.

Social media amplifies these experiential efforts by extending their reach beyond physical events. Digital campaigns featuring Nogwaja's adventures with Isuzu vehicles generate engaging content that drives consumer interaction and brand advocacy. Video demonstrations, behind-the-scenes footage, and live Q&A sessions create opportunities for potential buyers to visualize themselves as part of the brand's lifestyle. This integration of experiential and digital marketing ensures that Isuzu remains top-of-mind among consumers seeking reliability and adventure in their vehicle choices. The synergy between social media and experiential marketing enhances Isuzu's competitive positioning in the automotive industry. Leveraging Nogwaja's influence and immersive brand experiences, Isuzu enhances consumer loyalty while reinforcing its durability and reputation for off-road excellence. This strategic approach differentiates Isuzu from competitors and positions the brand as synonymous with adventure, performance, and real-world reliability.

Impact on Consumer Perception and Sales

Strategic partnerships between brands and influencers play a pivotal role in shaping consumer perceptions through authenticity and emotional engagement, which are central to effective communication strategies (Batra & Keller, 2016). The Isuzu-Nogwaja collaboration highlights how integrated communication can successfully combine traditional marketing methods with optimizing digital platforms, such as TikTok and Instagram, where consumer engagement is most prominent. Unlike traditional endorsements, influencer collaborations create narratives that resonate with consumers on a personal level. The Isuzu-Nogwaja partnership exemplifies this approach, positioning Isuzu as an automotive brand and a lifestyle enabler. By aligning with Nogwaja's adventurous spirit and resilience, Isuzu extends its brand identity beyond vehicles to embody an endurance, exploration, and freedom philosophy. Emotional connections are a powerful driver of consumer behavior, influencing purchasing decisions and brand loyalty (Keller, 2013). Nogwaja's real-life adventures, documented through engaging digital content, inspire consumers to see Isuzu vehicles as more than just modes of transportation—they become trusted companions for adventure and personal achievement. This shift in perception enhances Isuzu's brand equity, reinforcing its image as a vehicle of choice for those who embrace an active and resilient lifestyle.

The authenticity of influencer-driven marketing fosters trust, making the brand more relatable to its target audience. Consumers increasingly seek brands that align with their values and aspirations, and by partnering with a credible and influential figure like Nogwaja, Isuzu strengthens its emotional appeal. The collaboration also enables Isuzu to tap into Nogwaja's dedicated following, expanding its reach and reinforcing its credibility in the off-road and adventure vehicle market. The Isuzu-Nogwaja partnership exemplifies how strategic influencer collaborations can redefine a brand's positioning and deepen consumer engagement. Isuzu leverages storytelling, authenticity, and experiential marketing to position its vehicles as symbols of adventure and resilience, fostering long-term customer loyalty and a competitive edge. Aaker (1997) defines brand personality as the human characteristics consumers attribute to brands. The Isuzu-Nogwaja partnership reflects the resilience, adventure, and endurance qualities Nogwaja embodies. This alignment strengthens the brand's emotional connection with consumers, reinforcing Isuzu's identity as more than a vehicle manufacturer but a symbol of exploration and rugged reliability.

Adventure-Driven Brand Evolution Marketing Framework

The framework below outlines key elements from the study on Isuzu's partnership with adventurer and content creator Nogwaja, emphasizing the role of brand identity, influencer marketing, and experiential branding in shaping consumer perception and driving engagement. This type of marketing framework that integrates authentic storytelling, experiential engagement, and influence-driven campaigns to redefine a brand's identity is depicted in Figure 4 below. The network diagram represents the relationships between the key concepts of the framework. Each idea is interconnected, showing how brand identity, influencer marketing, experiential branding, and others work together to create a comprehensive brand strategy. The diagram illustrates the influence flow between these elements and emphasizes product features, lifestyle, and emotional experiences that consumers can connect with.

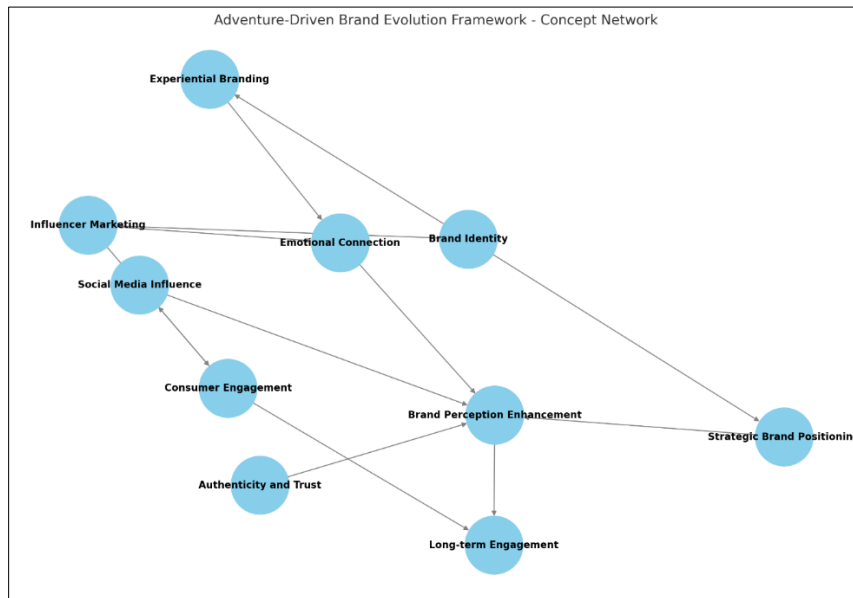


Figure 3. Adventure -Brand Evolution Framework

Discussion

The partnership between Isuzu and Nogwaja demonstrates how strategic influencer collaborations reinforce brand identity and consumer engagement. By aligning with an adventurer and content creator who embodies the brand's core values of resilience, endurance, and exploration, Isuzu enhances its credibility and emotional connection with its target audience. Nogwaja's role as a brand ambassador offers an authentic endorsement that resonates with consumers seeking reliability and durability in their vehicles. Data from social media interactions, consumer engagement metrics, and event participation rates indicate that this partnership contributes to increased brand awareness and loyalty.

These findings align with previous research on influencer marketing and experiential branding. Studies have established that brand ambassadors significantly impact consumer perceptions, purchasing decisions, and overall brand credibility (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Similar cases, such as Red Bull's collaboration with extreme athletes, illustrate how aligning with individuals who personify a brand's values strengthens brand positioning (Kapferer, 2012). Additionally, research by Schmitt (1999) emphasizes the effectiveness of experiential marketing in creating lasting impressions through hands-on engagement, which has also been evident in Isuzu's strategy through events like the Mzansi Off-road Festival.

Moreover, digital storytelling as a marketing tool has been widely studied. Freberg et al. (2011) and Zhang, Qu, and Gao (2023) highlight that social media influencers create narratives that shape consumer attitudes and foster authentic engagement. The Isuzu-Nogwaja collaboration reflects this by leveraging digital platforms to amplify brand messaging, further supporting research that indicates digital campaigns enhance brand perception and consumer trust (Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Jeswani, 2023).

From a managerial perspective, this study underscores the importance of selecting brand ambassadors who authentically align with a company's values. Brands should prioritize partnerships with influencers who possess genuine credibility within their niche, as this fosters trust and strengthens consumer relationships (Blanche *et al.*, 2021). Additionally, integrating experiential marketing with digital strategies amplifies brand reach and engagement, as demonstrated by the Isuzu-Nogwaja collaboration. Companies should focus on creating immersive brand experiences that allow consumers to interact with products firsthand while ensuring consistency in messaging across all platforms.

Another key takeaway for managers is the strategic use of vernacular language and localized marketing efforts. By addressing cultural contexts and consumer preferences, brands can enhance relatability and deepen their market penetration. This strategy has been successfully employed in various industries, reinforcing that culturally adaptive marketing fosters stronger brand affinity (Kapferer, 2012).

This research contributes to the knowledge of influencer marketing, brand identity, and experiential branding. It reinforces that influencer partnerships are most effective when they integrate personal narratives with a brand's core values (Batra & Keller, 2016; Blanche *et al.*, 2021). The study also extends the understanding of digital and experiential marketing synergies, demonstrating that brands benefit most from combining traditional marketing strategies with social media-driven storytelling (Schmitt, 1999; Zhang, Qu, & Gao, 2023). Future research could explore the long-term impact of influencer collaborations on brand equity and consumer loyalty across different industries.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates how the Isuzu-Nogwaja partnership effectively strengthens brand identity and consumer engagement through strategic influencer marketing and experiential branding. The collaboration leverages Nogwaja's alignment with Isuzu's values of resilience, adventure, and endurance, fostering an emotional connection with the target audience. The data from social media interactions and event participation validate the positive impact of this partnership on brand awareness and loyalty. The findings are consistent with existing research on influencer marketing, brand identity, and experiential branding, supporting that authentic brand ambassadors significantly influence consumer perceptions and purchasing decisions.

This research contributes to understanding how brands can integrate influencer marketing, experiential branding, and digital storytelling to create immersive and engaging brand experiences. Managerial implications highlight the importance of selecting brand ambassadors who authentically represent a brand's values and resonate with consumers. Combining traditional marketing with digital and experiential strategies enhances consumer trust and strengthens brand loyalty.

Future studies could further explore the long-term effects of influencer collaborations on brand equity and consumer behavior, expanding the scope of research in influencer marketing and brand strategy.

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