

A Two-Week Brand Incubation Model for Design Education: A Practice-Based Study

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRRISS.2025.91200229>

Received: 21 December 2025; Accepted: 27 December 2025; Published: 12 January 2026

ABSTRACT

In contemporary design education, short-term teaching formats often struggle to translate brand strategy and design management into coherent and tangible design outcomes. This study proposes a Two-Week Brand Incubation Model as a practice-based pedagogical framework for industrial design education, aiming to bridge strategic thinking and design execution within a compressed timeframe. The model structures an intensive learning process in which student teams simulate early-stage brand development through brand positioning, user research, design language systems, user experience mapping and product visualisation. A role-based team structure is introduced to reflect interdisciplinary professional practice. Using a practice-based research approach, the study analyses course implementation, design artefacts and reflective documentation. Findings indicate that the incubation model supports the development of systemic design thinking, strategic coherence and collaborative competence, demonstrating higher efficiency in aligning brand strategy with design outcomes compared with conventional studio projects. The study contributes a replicable and transferable pedagogical framework for integrating brand strategy into short-term design education.

Keywords: Design education, Brand incubation, Brand strategy, Industrial design, Practice-based learning

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary design practice increasingly requires designers to engage with brand strategy, user experience and cross-functional collaboration, rather than focusing solely on form-giving or aesthetics. However, within industrial design education, particularly in short-term and intensive courses, brand strategy is frequently treated as an abstract context rather than an operative driver of design decisions. As a result, students may produce visually competent artefacts without achieving strategic coherence across products, visual language and user experience.

This challenge is especially pronounced in compressed teaching formats, where educators must balance conceptual depth with tangible outputs. Brand strategy is often reduced to brief positioning statements, disconnected from subsequent design development. The absence of a time-efficient and integrated pedagogical structure limits students' ability to experience how strategic intent, design management and product development operate as a unified system.

In response, this study proposes a Two-Week Brand Incubation Model that positions brand strategy as a generative constraint throughout the design process. Rather than simulating full-scale brand development, the model foregrounds critical early-stage strategic decisions and their translation into design language and product systems within a manageable timeframe.

The study addresses the following research questions: (1) How can brand strategy be embedded as an operative design driver in short-term design education? (2) What pedagogical structures support the translation of strategic intent into coherent design outcomes within two weeks? (3) What learning outcomes emerge in terms of strategic reasoning, design coherence and collaboration?

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study is informed by two interrelated strands of literature: (1) strategic and practice-based approaches in design education, particularly within short-term and project-based formats; and (2) brand strategy, design management and design language systems as mechanisms for achieving design coherence. Rather than offering an exhaustive theoretical survey, the review focuses on concepts that directly support the rationale and structure of the proposed Two-Week Brand Incubation Model.

Strategic and Practice-Based Approaches in Design Education

Studio-based learning has long been regarded as the foundation of design education, supporting reflective practice through iterative cycles of making, critique and refinement (Schön, 2017). Building on this tradition, Project-Based Learning (PBL) situates learning within open-ended, practice-oriented projects that resemble professional contexts, and has been shown to enhance students' problem-framing abilities, collaboration skills and experiential understanding (Dym et al., 2005; Chen et al., 2021).

However, within short-term and intensive teaching formats, such as design sprints or compressed studios, PBL often prioritises rapid ideation and tangible output over deeper strategic integration. While these formats increase engagement and efficiency, they risk reducing complex considerations such as brand positioning and design management to background context rather than operative drivers of design decisions (Brown & Katz, 2011). As a result, students may demonstrate technical proficiency without developing a systemic understanding of how strategic intent shapes design outcomes over time.

Practice-based research (PBR) provides a complementary framework for addressing this limitation. By positioning creative practice as both a mode of inquiry and a site of knowledge generation, PBR foregrounds learning through action, reflection and iteration rather than through abstract instruction alone (Candy & Edmonds, 2018). Within design education, this approach enables the investigation of how strategic understanding emerges through situated design activity, making it particularly suitable for analysing experimental pedagogical models implemented in real teaching contexts. In short-term courses, where time constraints limit theoretical exposition, practice-based structures become essential for embedding strategic reasoning within the act of designing itself.

Brand Strategy, Design Management and Design Coherence

Brand strategy has traditionally been examined within marketing and management disciplines, with an emphasis on positioning, differentiation and consumer perception (Kapferer, 2012; Chernev, 2025). Design management research, however, reframes branding as a design-driven process in which products, visual systems and user experiences actively construct and communicate brand meaning (Borja de Mozota, 2006; Best, 2010). From this perspective, brand strategy is not merely a contextual narrative but a generative framework that guides design decisions across multiple artefacts and touchpoints.

A key mechanism through which such strategic alignment is achieved is the development of design language systems (DLS). Research on product semantics and design language demonstrates that meaning is embedded through consistent relationships between form, material, proportion and interaction logic (Krippendorff, 2005). When applied systematically, design language supports recognisability and coherence across product families, enabling brands to sustain identity beyond individual objects.

In educational contexts, however, students often engage with branding at a surface level, replicating stylistic features or visual motifs without understanding the strategic rationale underlying design coherence. Brand strategy is frequently introduced as theoretical knowledge, while design language emerges implicitly through critique rather than being constructed deliberately. This disconnect suggests the need for pedagogical models that require students to actively translate brand positioning into design language and product systems through practice, rather than treating strategy as a preliminary or descriptive exercise.

By integrating brand strategy, design management and design language construction within a short-term, practice-based framework, the Two-Week Brand Incubation Model directly addresses this gap. It positions

brand strategy as an operative constraint throughout the design process, enabling students to experience how strategic intent, design coherence and material outcomes are negotiated through making, iteration and collaborative decision-making.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a practice-based research (PBR) approach to investigate how a structured brand incubation model operates within industrial design education. Rather than isolating learning outcomes from the processes that produce them, the methodology positions design practice as the primary site through which strategic understanding is generated, enacted and interpreted. By situating the research within an authentic teaching context, the study examines how pedagogical structure, collaborative roles and design artefacts interact to support strategy-led design learning within a short-term educational framework.

Practice-Based Research Approach and Research Design

Practice-based research is particularly suited to design education studies, as it recognises creative practice not only as an outcome of learning but also as a mode of inquiry through which knowledge is produced and refined (Candy & Edmonds, 2018). In contrast to positivist or outcome-driven educational research, PBR foregrounds situated action, reflection and iteration, enabling the investigation of how understanding emerges through making rather than through abstract explanation alone.

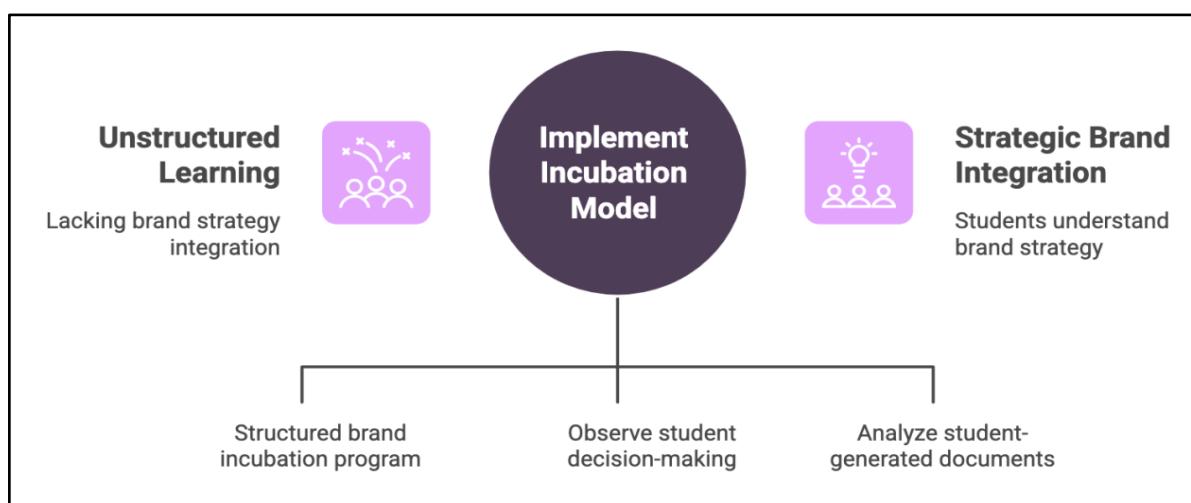


Fig. 1 The Brand Incubation Model.

In this study, the teaching intervention itself constitutes the core research design. The Brand Incubation Model was implemented as a structured pedagogical framework within an undergraduate industrial design programme (see Figure 1). The model was designed to function simultaneously as a teaching structure and a research instrument, allowing observation of how students negotiate brand strategy, design management and product development through practice. This dual role aligns with established perspectives on reflective practice in design, where reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action operate as key mechanisms of knowledge generation (Schön, 2017).

This study adopts a practice-based research (PBR) approach to investigate the effectiveness of a short-term brand incubation model in industrial design education. Practice-based research is particularly suitable for design education studies, as it recognises creative practice not only as an outcome of learning, but also as a primary mode of inquiry through which knowledge is generated, tested and refined. Rather than seeking universal generalisation, this approach focuses on contextual validity, depth of understanding and the articulation of transferable pedagogical principles.

In the context of this research, the teaching practice itself constitutes the core research site. The Brand Incubation Model was implemented as part of a design management and brand strategy course within an industrial design programme. The model was examined through its application in real teaching settings,

allowing the study to capture the dynamic interactions between pedagogical structure, student collaboration and design outcomes. This aligns with established perspectives on design research that emphasise reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action as central mechanisms of knowledge production.

Data Sources and Analytical Strategy

Consistent with a practice-based research orientation, the study draws on multiple forms of practice-generated evidence. These include student-produced design artefacts, such as brand positioning statements, user experience maps, design language system frameworks, sketches, digital models and final visualisations; teaching documentation, including course briefs, milestone guidelines and evaluation criteria; and reflective accounts derived from student presentations and post-project discussions. In addition, instructor reflection was used as a reflexive analytical layer to document observations of student engagement, workflow patterns and recurring challenges across teams.

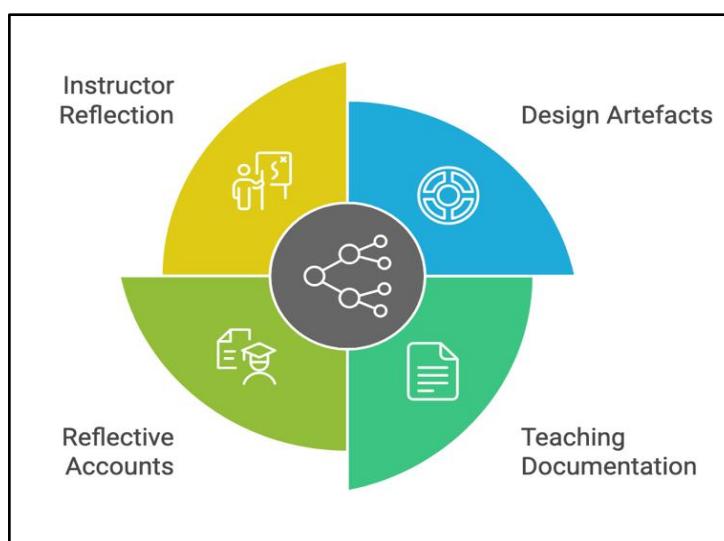


Fig. 2 The four interrelated sources.

Analysis focused on the progression of design practice over time rather than on quantitative assessment outcomes. Mid-term and final submissions were compared to identify shifts in strategic reasoning, design coherence and system-level thinking. Figure 2, presented in subsequent sections, functions as analytical evidence, illustrating how brand strategy was externalised and stabilised through design practice rather than serving as illustrative decoration.

Research Boundaries and Reflexivity

The study is situated within a specific institutional and disciplinary context, and its findings are bounded by the two-week incubation model's short-term nature. The research does not aim to evaluate long-term learning trajectories, commercial brand performance or market validation. Instead, it focuses on how strategic understanding emerges within a compressed educational intervention. Instructor positionality is explicitly acknowledged, as the researcher also served as the course instructor. This dual role was addressed through systematic documentation, triangulation of evidence sources and reflective analysis. Rather than constituting a limitation, this reflexive positioning aligns with practice-based research principles, in which the researcher's engagement with practice is recognised as integral to the production and interpretation of knowledge.

The Two-Week Brand Incubation Model and Implementation

Following the practice-based research approach outlined in Section 3, the Two-Week Brand Incubation Model (see Figure 3) is implemented as a time-structured, practice-centred pedagogical intervention that unfolds across four sequential yet interconnected phases. The model is designed to compress strategic exploration, design development and synthesis into a two-week period while maintaining coherence between brand strategy, design language and product outcomes. Each phase is associated with specific forms of design

practice and decision-making, enabling the observation and analysis of how strategic understanding emerges through situated action.

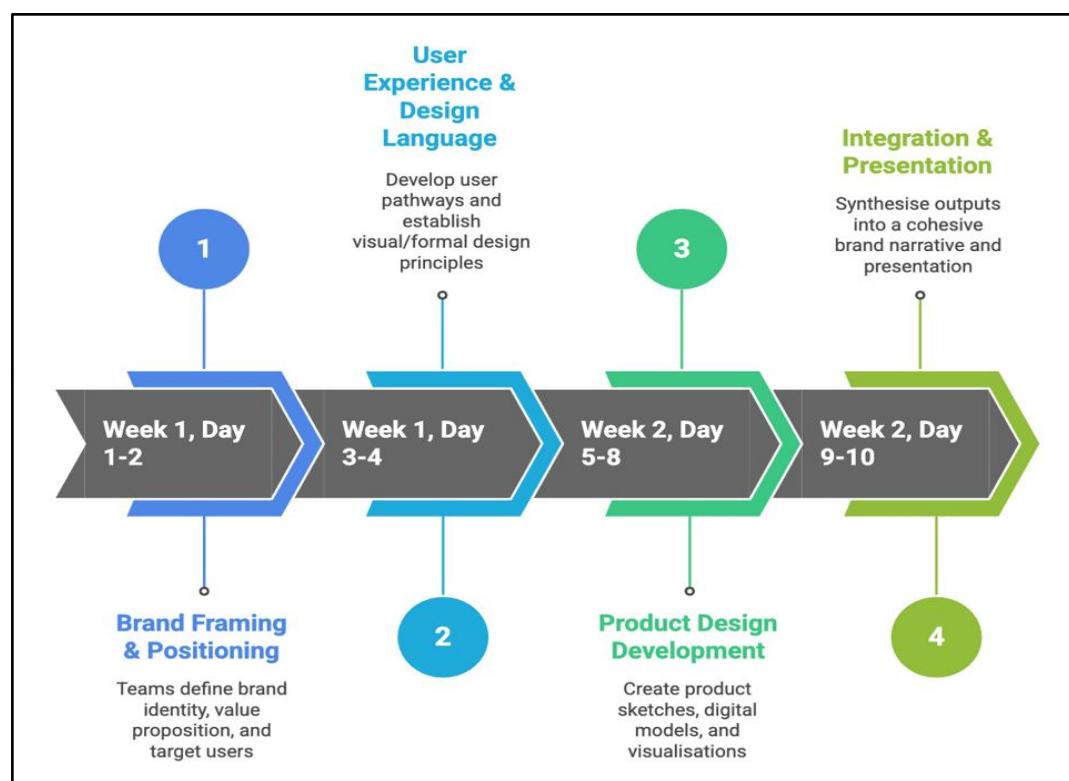


Fig. 3 The Two-Week Brand Incubation Model.

The first phase, Brand Framing and Positioning (Week 1, Days 1–2), focuses on establishing a strategic foundation for subsequent design activities. During this stage, student teams define brand identity, articulate value propositions and identify target users. Rather than treating branding as a descriptive exercise, this phase positions brand framing as an operative constraint that shapes all later decisions. The outcomes of this phase function as a shared strategic reference, delimiting the design space and guiding evaluative judgement throughout the incubation process.

The second phase, User Experience and Design Language (Week 1, Days 3–4), translates strategic intent into experiential and formal principles. Teams develop user pathways that articulate key interaction moments and usage scenarios, while simultaneously establishing visual and formal design principles that express the emerging brand identity. Design language is approached as a system of relations rather than a collection of stylistic elements, allowing strategic values to be embedded within form, proportion and interaction logic. This phase plays a critical mediating role between abstract brand positioning and material design practice.

The third phase, Product Design Development (Week 2, Days 5–8), centres on the materialisation of strategic and experiential frameworks through industrial design practice. Students generate product sketches, digital models and visualisations, applying the previously defined design language and user experience principles. Iteration during this stage enables the examination of how strategic constraints are negotiated through form-making and modelling decisions. From a practice-based research perspective, this phase provides rich opportunities to observe decision-making processes as they unfold in response to both strategic intent and technical considerations.

The final phase, Integration and Presentation (Week 2, Days 9–10), emphasises synthesis and communicative coherence. Outputs produced during earlier phases are consolidated into a cohesive brand narrative and presentation, integrating strategy, design language and product representation. Rather than serving solely as an assessment endpoint, this phase functions as a reflective moment in which the alignment between brand intent and design execution becomes explicit. The integration process enables both students and researchers to examine how strategic understanding is stabilised through representational practice and collective articulation.

Across the two-week period, the incubation model operates not only as a teaching structure but also as a research framework through which design practice can be systematically examined. By aligning temporal phases with distinct forms of practice and decision-making, the model supports a practice-based investigation into how brand strategy and design management are enacted, negotiated and materialised within a compressed educational context.

Findings and Analysis: Practice-Based Outcomes of the Two-Week Brand Incubation Model

The findings reported in this section are derived from a comparative analysis of practice-generated artefacts. The findings presented in this section are derived from three student team projects developed within the two-week brand incubation framework. Each team completed a mid-term submission followed by a final project, allowing for direct observation of design progression, shifts in decision-making, and methodological internalisation. Rather than evaluating outcomes through quantitative grading, this study examines student work as practice-based evidence, focusing on how brand strategy thinking was translated into structured design artefacts over time.

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Fig. 5 The nineteen projects

Across all nineteen projects (see Figure 5), the transition from mid-term to final submission revealed a clear shift from fragmented conceptual exploration towards more integrated brand–product systems. Early-stage outputs primarily emphasised isolated product ideas or visual impressions, while final outcomes demonstrated increased coherence between brand positioning, design language systems and product line articulation. These changes suggest that the incubation model helped students align creative decisions with strategic brand frameworks through iterative practice.

Practice-Based Learning Progression: From Mid-Term to Final Outcomes

Comparative analysis of mid-term and final submissions indicates that learning progression occurred primarily through making, revising and re-contextualising design artefacts rather than through abstract theoretical discussion. In the mid-term phase, students tended to approach branding as a surface-level narrative layer, often expressed through slogans, mood boards, or single-hero products. Design decisions at this stage were largely intuitive and locally optimised, with limited consideration of system consistency or user pathways.

Following structured incubation stages, final submissions showed notable shifts in design behaviour. Students increasingly employed brand positioning statements as decision anchors, using them to justify formal choices, material strategies and product differentiation. Visual systems evolved into more explicit design language frameworks, and individual products were repositioned as components within a broader brand ecosystem rather than standalone artefacts. These developments illustrate how the incubation model facilitated a transition from unstructured exploration to strategically informed design execution.

While all nineteen teams demonstrated measurable improvement, the degree of methodological internalisation varied. Two teams exhibited steady refinement in visual coherence and product detailing, successfully translating brand concepts into consistent artefacts. However, their final outcomes remained primarily product-centric, with brand strategy functioning as a supportive rather than generative framework.

In contrast, the project titled Simple Care demonstrated the most substantial transformation across both strategic and visual dimensions. This project is therefore discussed as a key case study, not as an exemplar of aesthetic superiority, but as evidence of deeper alignment between brand strategy and design practice enabled by the incubation model.

Key Case Study: "Simple Care"

Among the nineteen projects, Simple Care is discussed as a key case not for aesthetic superiority but for its high degree of strategic-formal alignment. The "Simple Care" project exhibited a pronounced shift from conceptual ambiguity in the mid-term stage to a highly structured brand-product system in the final submission. Initial materials focused on general wellness themes and individual product concepts without a clearly articulated brand logic. By the final stage, through the analysis of the user experience map (see Figure 6), the team had developed a comprehensive brand positioning centred on emotional care, simplicity, and everyday health rituals, which functioned as a guiding framework for subsequent design decisions.

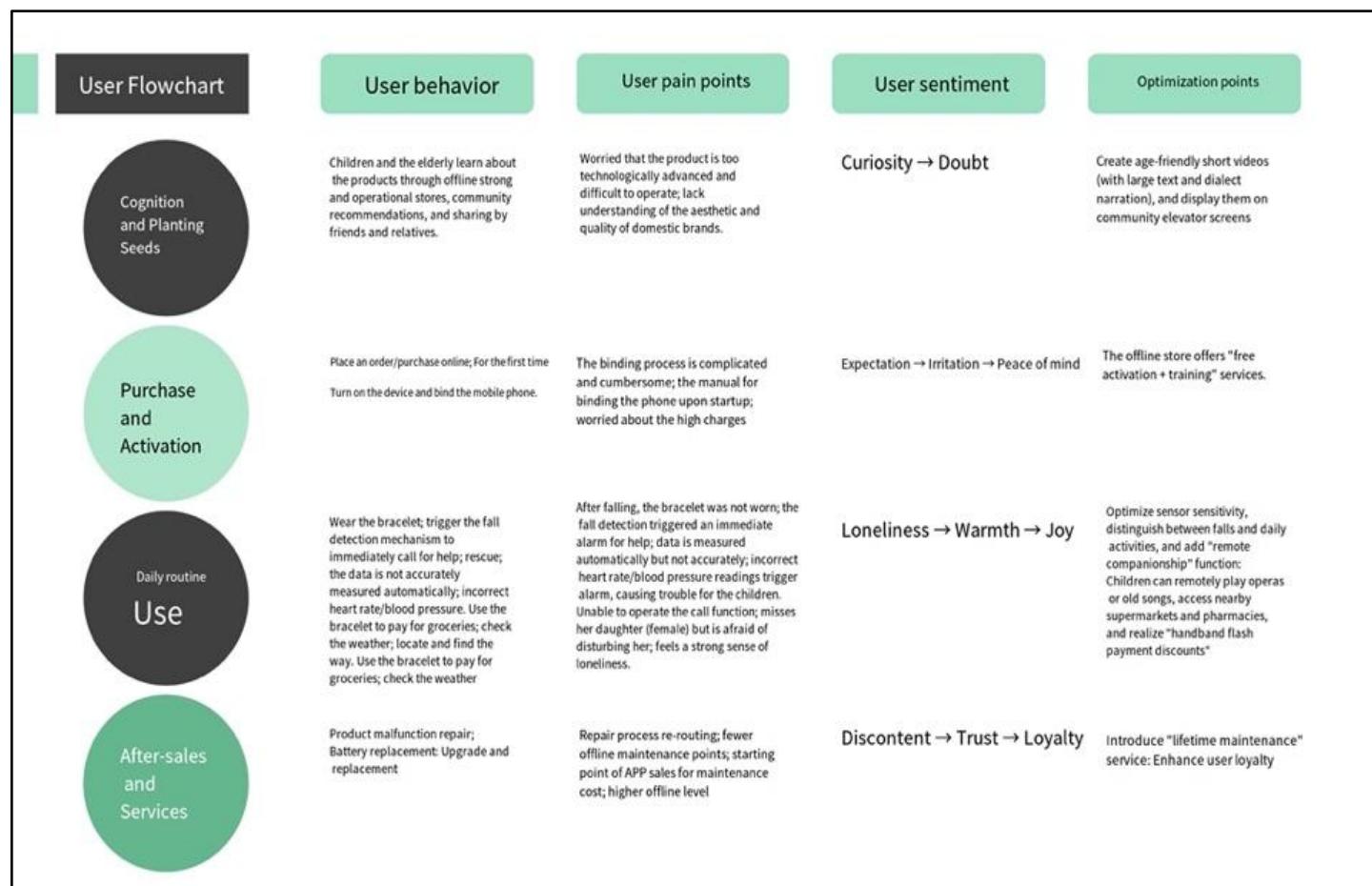


Fig. 6 The user experience map

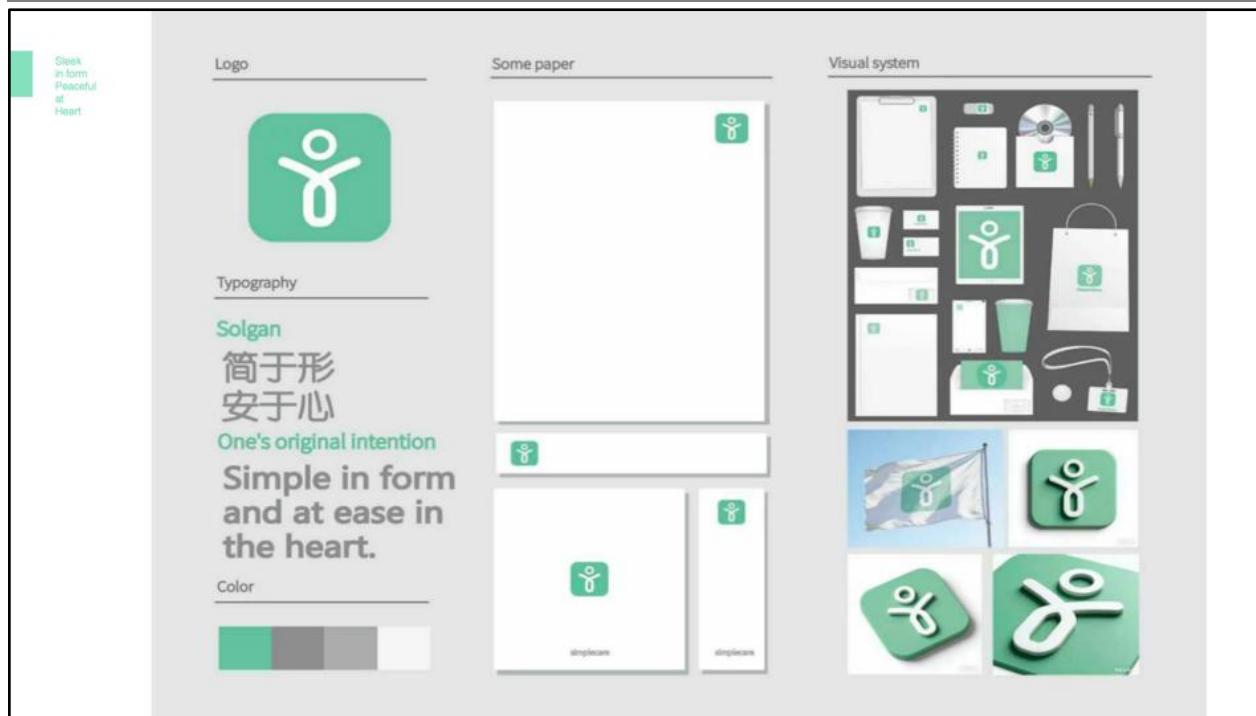


Fig. 7 The design language system

This strategic clarification was reflected in the development of a coherent design language system, encompassing form principles, colour strategies, and material choices consistently applied across multiple product lines (see Figure 7). The final submission presented a diversified yet unified product portfolio, demonstrating an understanding of brand scalability and internal consistency. Visualisations included systematic product renderings, usage scenarios and brand applications, indicating a shift from object-level design to brand-level thinking (see Figure 8).



Fig. 8 The brand visualisations

Notably, the Simple Care team employed visual artefacts as tools for reasoning rather than mere presentation. User experience pathways and product narratives were used to test and refine brand assumptions, suggesting an iterative feedback loop between strategy and form. This practice-based engagement illustrates how the

incubation model enabled students to internalise brand strategy as an operative design mechanism rather than an external constraint.

Taken together, the three projects provide evidence that the two-week brand incubation model effectively supported the integration of brand strategy into industrial design practice. Improvements were not limited to visual polish but were manifested in how students structured problems, justified decisions, and coordinated multiple design outputs into coherent systems. The emergence of system-level thinking, particularly evident in the Simple Care project, suggests that even within a short timeframe, practice-based incubation can foster strategic awareness when supported by clear stages and artefact-driven reflection. Rather than producing uniform results, the model allowed for differentiated outcomes aligned with each team's capacity to absorb and operationalise strategic concepts. This variability reinforces the value of the incubation framework as a pedagogical structure that prioritises learning through practice, enabling students to negotiate brand complexity through making, iteration and critical reflection.

DISCUSSION

This study examined how a short-term, practice-based brand incubation model can support the integration of brand strategy within industrial design education. The findings indicate that, even within a compressed two-week timeframe, a structured incubation framework can meaningfully shape how students frame design problems, justify decisions and construct coherent brand–product systems. Rather than operating as an abstract strategic overlay, brand strategy functioned as an operative component of design reasoning, becoming embedded in students' practices through iterative artefact production and reflective adjustment.

A key implication of these findings is that strategic understanding in design education is more effectively internalised through making than through explanation alone. Students demonstrated strategic learning not by reproducing theoretical terminology, but by progressively aligning form, function and narrative across multiple artefacts. This supports practice-based research perspectives that conceptualise knowledge as emerging through action and reflection, rather than as a transferable set of abstract principles. Within this process, the incubation model acted as a pedagogical scaffold that enabled students to externalise strategic reasoning through visual, formal and material decisions, thereby transforming brand strategy from a conceptual requirement into an operative design tool.

The variation observed across student projects further highlights the role of methodological internalisation rather than output standardisation. While all teams showed improved coherence and clarity between mid-term and final submissions, only one project achieved a fully systemic integration of brand positioning, design language and product line development. This outcome suggests that the incubation model is not intended to produce uniform results. Instead, it creates conditions under which students can engage with the relationship between brand strategy and design execution at different levels of depth, depending on their capacity for reflective engagement. Such variability should therefore be understood not as pedagogical inconsistency, but as evidence of differentiated learning trajectories within a shared methodological framework.

The Simple Care project illustrates how the incubation model can facilitate a shift from object-centred design thinking towards brand-level system design. The project's progression demonstrates that when brand positioning is treated as a generative constraint rather than a descriptive statement, it can actively guide decisions related to product hierarchy, visual coherence and user experience design. While this observation resonates with existing design management literature that emphasises the role of design language systems in maintaining brand coherence, this study extends those discussions by showing how such systems can be learned experientially within an educational setting, rather than adopted as fixed professional templates.

From a pedagogical perspective, the findings suggest that time-limited incubation does not necessarily constrain strategic depth, provided that the learning process is structured around clear stages and artefact-based reflection. The two-week model does not attempt to replicate the full complexity of real-world brand development. Instead, it foregrounds critical moments of strategic decision-making within a deliberately constrained scope, allowing students to experience how strategic intent is negotiated through design practice. This approach aligns with contemporary debates in design education that advocate for intensive, focused learning interventions capable of fostering integrative thinking without overextending curricular resources.

At the same time, the study acknowledges inherent limitations. The short duration of the incubation model restricts opportunities for longitudinal evaluation of brand evolution and market responsiveness, and the outcomes remain situated within an academic rather than a commercial context. These limitations are not framed as methodological shortcomings, but as defining conditions of exploratory practice-based pedagogical research. Within these boundaries, the incubation model demonstrates potential as a transferable framework that may be adapted, extended or integrated into longer-term or interdisciplinary design projects in future studies.

Overall, this discussion positions the two-week brand incubation model as a viable pedagogical strategy for bridging the gap between brand strategy and industrial design practice. By foregrounding practice-based learning, the model enables students to encounter brand strategy not as an external managerial concept, but as an integral component of design reasoning. This reframing contributes to ongoing conversations in design education concerning how strategic competencies can be cultivated through making, reflection and system-oriented thinking.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the pedagogical potential of a two-week brand incubation model within industrial design education, with particular emphasis on the integration of brand strategy into design practice through a practice-based approach. By analysing student projects developed through structured incubation stages, the research demonstrates that strategic brand thinking can be meaningfully internalised by design students when it is embedded within making, iteration and artefact-driven reflection rather than taught as an abstract theoretical framework.

The findings indicate that the incubation model supported a shift in student design behaviour from fragmented, intuition-led exploration towards more coherent, system-oriented outcomes. Students increasingly employed brand positioning as a generative framework for decision-making, enabling greater consistency across visual language, product development and user experience design. The emergence of differentiated learning trajectories across projects further suggests that the model functions as a flexible pedagogical scaffold, accommodating varied depths of strategic engagement without enforcing uniform outcomes.

Importantly, this research contributes to design education discourse by demonstrating that short-term, intensive interventions can foster strategic awareness when carefully structured. The two-week timeframe did not diminish learning effectiveness; instead, it foregrounded critical moments of design decision-making and encouraged students to externalise strategic reasoning through tangible artefacts. In doing so, the model bridges a common gap between design management theory and studio-based practice, repositioning brand strategy as an operative component of design thinking rather than a supplementary managerial layer.

While the study is situated within a specific educational context and does not address long-term brand development or market performance, its value lies in articulating a transferable methodological framework. The two-week brand incubation model offers a practical reference for educators seeking to integrate brand strategy into industrial design curricula through practice-led pedagogy. Future research may extend this framework into longer project cycles, cross-institutional contexts or interdisciplinary collaborations to further examine its adaptability and impact.

In conclusion, the study affirms the effectiveness of practice-based incubation as a means of cultivating strategic design competencies. By aligning brand strategy with iterative making and reflective learning, the proposed model contributes a viable pedagogical approach to contemporary industrial design education and opens avenues for further exploration of strategy-led design pedagogy.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors acknowledge the support of the Chengdu Academy of Fine Arts and its Department of Industrial Design. Appreciation is extended to the students who participated in the course, as well as to colleagues and industry practitioners for their valuable insights. The authors also thank their family for their continued support.

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