

# Developing an integrated brand activation strategy framework for platform-dependent creative studios based on the kemsgraphics case



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## ABSTRACT

Digital creative enterprises face significant strategic risk from platform dependency, as reliance on a single marketplace can lead to unstable revenue when algorithmic changes reduce visibility. This research addresses that risk by designing and empirically testing a brand activation strategy to elevate brand awareness for Kemsgraphics, a virtual studio highly dependent on Fiverr. The strategy was developed using the Brand Activation Process (Discovery, Strategic Development, Creative Development, Delivery, and Evaluation) as the primary framework, enriched by the incorporation of the Steps of Effective Communication Development for strategic planning and Design Thinking principles for creative solution development. The impact of the strategy was tested using a quasi-experimental, time-series design with mixed-method analysis, collecting daily performance data and qualitative insights from five digital platforms. The intervention produced an 890% increase in TikTok follower growth and substantial improvements in reach, engagement, and profile visits across all platforms during a five-day period. This research demonstrates how an integrated, theory-based brand activation strategy can help remote creative businesses build brand resilience and reduce platform risk, providing a practical blueprint for managing digital brand presence in the creative sector.



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## 1. Introduction

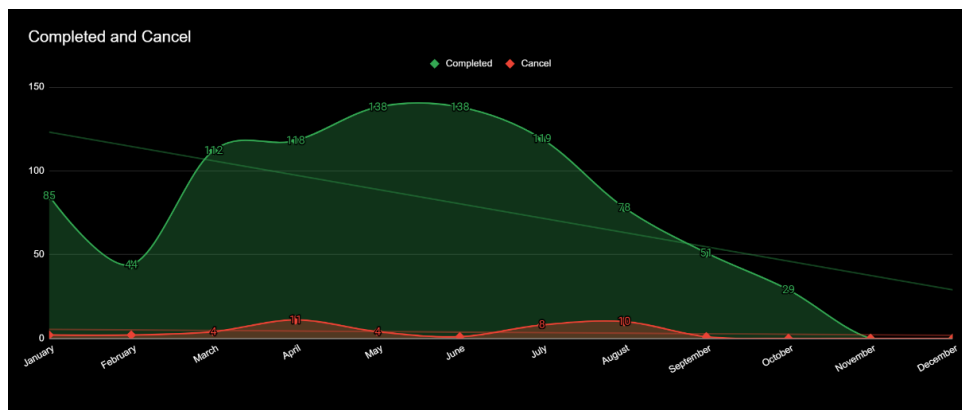
Kemsgraphics, a virtual design studio established in 2020, operates within the field of Visual Communication Design. The studio confronts a significant strategic challenge stemming from its high dependency on a single digital marketplace, Fiverr, which accounted for 99.44% of its projects in 2023. This situation exemplifies platform dependency, a critical risk that makes creative enterprises vulnerable to the platform's policy changes and strategic shifts [1]. This vulnerability materializes through mechanisms like the platform's algorithmic "rolling" system, which can arbitrarily reduce a service's visibility, directly impacting its revenue and market presence, as evidenced by the significant decline in both impressions and completed projects (Fig. 1 and Fig. 2). This practice highlights a fundamental issue for digital brands: the loss of brand control when operating on third-party platforms, a trade-off for market access [2]. The resulting instability necessitates a strategic intervention to mitigate these platform-induced risks. To overcome this challenge, the necessary strategic direction is to adopt a multi-channel approach by expanding to alternative platforms, a method proven to reduce dependency and enhance business resilience [1]. The primary step in this expansion is to increase brand awareness, for which brand activation is the chosen method. Unlike traditional marketing, which often relies on passive messaging, brand activation works by creating memorable and interactive experiences designed to influence how consumers think, feel, and behave positively toward a brand [3]. It focuses on "activating" the consumer by forging a direct, emotional connection at the

right time and place [4]. Through this process of direct engagement, a brand becomes a tangible part of the consumer's life, which is how it effectively increases brand awareness and recognition [5].



**Fig. 1.** Impressions graph of Kemsgraphics' gigs on Fiverr for the period July 12 – October 9, 2023.

Building this awareness is critical, as it significantly impacts brand equity—a key factor that enables a brand to compete effectively in a new environment [6]. As Kemsgraphics expands, it must establish its presence on platforms with different competitive landscapes. The strategy will therefore focus on two key categories of platforms: visual-centric social media (such as Instagram and TikTok) and professional portfolio platforms (like Behance), which are primary arenas for freelance designers to attract clients [7], [8]. This research aims to design and test a brand activation strategy to enhance Kemsgraphics' brand awareness as part of its market expansion efforts. The primary contribution of this study is the development of a novel, integrated methodological framework that combines the Brand Activation Process (DSCDE), enhanced by the Steps of Effective Communication Development (SECD) and Design Thinking (DT). This integrated model offers a structured yet adaptable process for creating brand activation strategies, providing a practical solution for creative industry practitioners facing similar platform-dependency challenges. The strategy is specifically tailored to Kemsgraphics' context as a fully remote studio with a limited budget, focusing on increasing brand recognition as a key level of brand awareness [9]. This study is conducted within the field of Visual Communication Design and is methodologically limited to the "Measure Result" stage of the SECD framework.



**Fig. 2.** Number of Kemsgraphics projects per month in 2023

### 1.1. Brand Activation Process

The concept of brand activation has evolved from a simple marketing tactic to a core strategic process. While traditionally defined as a marketing relationship that encourages customers to integrate a brand into their lives through experiences [3], its contemporary application is more nuanced and context-dependent. Modern scholarship often views brand activation as a central component of experiential marketing, where the primary goal is to create a platform for consumers to interact with the brand in a tangible, engaging manner [10]. This can manifest in various forms, from event sponsorships designed to build brand equity through association [11] to strategies focused on activation as a mediator that translates consumer affection into tangible brand awareness [12]. This approach moves beyond theory to practical application, with some scholars viewing it as a "natural step in the evolution of brands" [13], shifting the focus from activating the brand itself to activating the consumer [4]. However, despite its widespread use, its theoretical foundations are still developing,

with ongoing scholarly debate about how to best measure its direct impact beyond simple engagement metrics [4].

#### 1) *The Five-Stage Brand Activation Framework*

This study adopts the Brand Activation Process framework described by Saeed *et al.* [3], which provides a structured, five-stage approach abbreviated as DSCDE. The following sections analyze each stage, considering its role and challenges within the contemporary digital marketing environment.

- **Discovery:** This initial stage involves a comprehensive analysis of the brand, its goals, and its target market to inform the strategy [3]. In the digital context, this is not merely data collection but a significant strategic challenge. Marketers face the risk of data overload and must navigate consumer privacy concerns while trying to gain genuine insights. A key challenge is to move beyond surface-level analytics to understand the nuanced behaviors and motivations of online audiences. The solution, as demonstrated in case studies, involves targeted research methods like developing detailed customer personas and conducting thorough competitor analysis on the chosen digital platforms [5].
- **Strategic Development:** In this stage, the core strategy, communication mode, and activation approach are determined to make the brand resonate with consumers [3]. The primary challenge in today's market is channel fragmentation. A strategy must be cohesive yet adaptable across platforms with vastly different user behaviors and communication styles, such as the professional focus of LinkedIn versus the fast-paced, visual nature of TikTok. The key is to develop a central brand message that can be strategically tailored for each channel without losing its core identity, a central aim of this research.
- **Creative Development:** This stage focuses on the creative execution that brings the brand's essence to life in a unique and memorable way [3]. In an era dominated by user-generated content, the challenge for brands is to create content that is authentic and cuts through the noise. A purely corporate or overly polished message can be perceived as inauthentic and ignored. The solution lies in leveraging the brand's unique identity and value proposition to produce content that provides genuine value—be it educational, entertaining, or inspirational—fostering a more organic and credible connection with the audience.
- **Delivery:** The delivery stage is where the creatively developed strategy is implemented to connect with the audience [3]. Modern challenges in this stage include the high cost of digital advertising and the unpredictability of platform algorithms, which can limit organic reach. For businesses with limited budgets, like Kemsgraphics, relying on paid advertising is often not feasible. Therefore, the strategic solution is to focus on organic delivery, prioritizing high-value content and consistent engagement to build a community over time, rather than seeking short-term visibility through paid means [14].
- **Evaluation:** The final stage assesses the effectiveness of the activation to understand its impact and inform future efforts [3]. A significant challenge in modern brand activation is measurement. While metrics like likes, shares, and reach are easily accessible, they often fail to capture the true impact on brand perception, loyalty, or purchase intent [4]. This makes calculating a clear return on investment (ROI) difficult. A comprehensive evaluation must therefore use a mixed-method approach, combining quantitative data (like engagement rates and profile visits) with qualitative analysis (like sentiment analysis and direct feedback) to gain a holistic understanding of the strategy's effectiveness.

#### 2) *The Role of Identity and Communication in Brand Activation*

Among the different activation stimuli, research highlights that identity and communication are particularly impactful [15], [16]. A quantitative study by Aulia *et al.* on a coffee shop found that while identity had a significant effect, the 'communication' dimension received the highest assessment from customers and was the most significant factor in driving brand awareness. This finding, from the context of a small, community-focused business, is relevant as it underscores the importance of direct and effective communication for niche brands like Kemsgraphics. Similarly, a study by Fauziah *et al.* in the banking sector found that 'identity' and 'communication' were the only two variables to have a statistically significant positive effect on the brand activation construct, with communication again having a stronger influence due to its role in building interpersonal relationships. These findings collectively suggest that while a strong brand identity is fundamental, a proactive and engaging communication strategy is the primary driver of successful brand activation. Therefore, implementing

strategies that prioritize these elements, especially when supported by an Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) approach that ensures consistency, can significantly enhance brand awareness and consumer engagement [17]. This approach ensures that brand activation not only improves recognition but also strengthens consumer engagement, positioning the brand as a meaningful part of the consumer's life and ultimately driving sales.

### 1.2. Steps of Effective Communication Development in Integrated Marketing Communication

A structured promotional strategy in the form of integrated marketing communication is necessary [18]. Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) is a perfect framework to achieve this objective. Defined by the American Marketing Association, as cited in Kotler and Keller [19], IMC is a strategic planning process designed to ensure that all brand-related contact points received by consumers or prospective customers are relevant and consistent over time. While this definition is foundational, the concept has evolved in the digital age into a complex, interactive strategy essential for managing a cohesive brand identity across fragmented digital channels [20]. Modern IMC has moved beyond a one-way, mass-oriented approach to become a multifaceted process of two-way communication and co-creation with consumers [21]. For a digital creative business like Kemsgraphics, this is particularly relevant as IMC provides the framework to ensure every interaction, from a portfolio post to a direct message, reinforces the same core brand values and positioning. By coordinating all communication efforts, IMC enables businesses to deliver a unified message across multiple channels, ensuring their brand positioning is effectively communicated. It also helps organizations prioritize the importance of various media and guarantees that promotional activities are executed with precision and at the right time [19]. This structured approach fosters message consistency, which strengthens brand equity and maximizes its impact on sales. Through its emphasis on integration, relevance, and consistency, IMC demonstrates why it is the ideal solution for creating a structured promotional strategy. According to Kotler and Keller [19], the Steps of Effective Communication Development (SECD) in IMC consist of the following stages:

- **Identify Target Audience:** The process begins by clearly defining the target audience, which could be potential or existing consumers, decision-makers, influencers, or a broader public. Understanding the target audience is crucial for determining what message to convey, how to deliver it, and when and where it should be communicated. In the digital context, a key challenge is that a brand's audience may exist in distinct segments across different platforms (e.g., B2B clients on LinkedIn vs. art enthusiasts on Instagram), requiring tailored communication for each.
- **Determine Objectives:** Establishing communication objectives, which may include building brand awareness, shaping brand attitude, or influencing purchase intention. These objectives can be guided by models such as the Hierarchy-of-Effects Model. As noted by Rossiter and Percy and cited in, the objectives may also focus on specific outcomes like creating category need or increasing brand loyalty. For a new brand activation, the primary objective is often foundational, such as building brand awareness before focusing on purchase intent.
- **Design Communications:** This step involves formulating the message to achieve the desired response based on communication objectives. In today's digital market, the challenge is to maintain a consistent core message while adapting its creative execution to fit the unique format and culture of each platform. It includes: (1) **Message Strategy:** Developing the core message by identifying unique brand qualities, whether related to quality, price, or value, to position the brand effectively, (2) **Creative Strategy:** Determining how the message is presented, using informational appeals (highlighting product benefits) or transformational appeals (evoking emotional responses). Appeals may use positive (e.g., humor, happiness) or negative (e.g., fear, guilt) tones (3). **Message Source:** Selecting a credible source, often chosen based on expertise, trustworthiness, and likability. For digital brands, personification can enhance authenticity and trust.
- **Select Channels:** Choosing appropriate communication channels to deliver the message. The modern challenge is not a lack of channels but an overabundance, each with its own algorithm and user culture that affects communication effectiveness. Channels are typically categorized into (1) **Personal Communication Channels:** Interactive methods that facilitate two-way communication, such as phone calls or email, allowing for direct feedback, (2) **Non-personal or Mass Media Channels:** Broad-reaching channels, like advertising, events, or public relations,



are designed for larger audiences. Although less interactive, mass media can stimulate discussions that lead to personal interactions.

- **Establish Budget:** Determining the financial resources allocated to marketing communications. [19]. Identify methods for setting budgets, such as the Affordable method (based on available funds), the Percentage-of-sales method (based on projected revenue), the Competitive-parity method (based on competitor spending), and the Objective-and-task method (based on specific tasks and goals). The choice of method is critical as it directly constrains the strategic options; for instance, choosing the Affordable method often necessitates a focus on organic rather than paid strategies.
- **Decide on Media Mix:** Selecting a combination of media to optimize message reach and effectiveness, influenced by the strategy, creative approach, and budget [19], highlights eight modes of communication, including advertising, sales promotions, events, public relations, and digital channels like online and social media marketing. A key variable here is ensuring the chosen media are synergistic and that the content is adaptable across the mix to maintain consistency.
- **Measure Results:** After implementing the IMC strategy, evaluating its impact on brand awareness and other objectives is essential. Effective message delivery can lead to positive customer expectations and satisfaction, while poorly delivered messages may result in consumer dissatisfaction. A modern challenge is that surface-level digital metrics (like views or likes) often fail to capture the true impact on brand perception, requiring a more nuanced analysis of engagement and sentiment.
- **Manage IMC:** Managing IMC involves ensuring all communication efforts work together cohesively, providing clarity, consistency, and maximum impact. This requires overcoming organizational barriers, such as siloed departmental structures that can hinder collaboration and lead to disjointed messaging [22]. Coordinated IMC can enhance brand awareness by reinforcing the brand's presence across multiple touchpoints.

By ensuring a strategic and cohesive communication approach, IMC can help companies reach the right audience with relevant and timely messaging. This process is consistent with key principles of brand activation, such as establishing an emotional connection with consumers at the right time and place (McKay & Brown as cited in Gunawardane & DK [4]). Furthermore, the SECD framework in IMC is integral to strategic brand activation planning, particularly during the strategic development stage, as it enhances brand awareness and positions the brand effectively in the competitive landscape, especially in modern marketing [17], [23].

### 1.3. Design Thinking

Creative thinking is crucial during the creative development stage, where Design Thinking (DT) serves as a powerful process for addressing creative problem-solving needs. Design Thinking is highly suitable for brand activation and communication strategy processes because it provides a flexible, iterative approach to solving problems through creativity, as stated in [24]. Although DT models vary, they share a common foundation as a creative, solution-oriented methodology that effectively addresses complex problems. Design Thinking's versatility makes it an ideal choice for creative processes, with characteristics that include flexibility [25], a human- and environment-centered focus [26], multivalency—its ability to be approached as a mindset, process, tool, or philosophy [27], [28] and adaptability to diverse contexts and requirements [29]. These qualities not only make DT well-suited for creative development but also allow it to integrate seamlessly with other methodologies [27], [30], [31], [32], [33]. Therefore, DT should also be possible to be integrated with DSCDE and SECD of IMC. One of the most widely recognized models in DT is the Hasso-Plattner Institute (HPI) Design Thinking model, which has been used extensively and is adaptable to integration with other methods [32], [34]. The HPI model, selected for this study, comprises five stages that facilitate a structured yet flexible approach to creative problem-solving:

- **Empathize:** Designers start by gaining a deep understanding of the problem through research and analysis, observing users to identify their needs. Methods may include interviews, observations, or even direct engagement to understand client perspectives and experiences fully. This stage is directly applied in this research during the initial data collection phase to understand the needs and content preferences of Kemsgraphics' potential new audiences.
- **Define:** Using insights from the empathize stage, designers clarify the core problem or specific needs of users or clients to ensure the focus is well-defined and targeted. For this study, this

involves framing the core creative challenge that the brand activation must solve, which is detailed later in the discovery findings.

- **Ideate:** Designers brainstorm potential solutions based on the insights gathered, generating ideas or concepts that address the problem creatively and practically. This stage is used to generate the specific creative strategies and content pillars (e.g., Education, Portfolio) that form the basis of the brand activation media.
- **Prototype:** Designers create prototypes of the proposed solutions, bringing ideas to life in tangible forms that can be tested. This stage often requires multiple iterations to refine the prototype toward a viable solution. In this context, prototyping involves creating the initial visual mockups for social media content, as shown later in the results section.
- **Test:** The prototype undergoes testing to assess its effectiveness and gather feedback. Testing can lead back to previous stages (e.g., returning to ideate or empathize) if adjustments are needed, highlighting the iterative nature of DT. This is applied through the quasi-experimental testing of the implemented media to measure its impact on brand awareness metrics.

Although the stages are presented linearly, Design Thinking is inherently iterative and non-linear, allowing teams to revisit earlier stages as needed. For example, testing a prototype may reveal new insights that lead back to ideation or even empathy to refine understanding. This flexibility ensures that solutions evolve in response to user needs, creating room for innovation and adaptation in real-time [34]. Design Thinking's human-centric nature aligns well with the human-centered approach in brand activation, reinforcing its suitability for creative development stages in brand strategy and communication planning. The Empathize stage is crucial for identifying audience pain points, which allows for the design of more meaningful brand interactions. Furthermore, the Ideate and Prototype stages directly facilitate the creation of highly resonant content by allowing for rapid experimentation, the results of which are useful for content ideating for Kemsgraphics social media. Additionally, DT's adaptability allows it to be integrated with other methods in various conditions, ranging from different industries to project scopes and stages [24]. DT also supports simultaneous or sequential use with other methods, acting as a "plug-and-play" solution that enhances other processes by extracting its strengths, such as fostering creativity, adaptability, and user-centered focus [25], [31]. This unique blend of flexibility and adaptability makes DT an invaluable tool for driving creativity and innovation in brand activation and communication processes.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Design Method

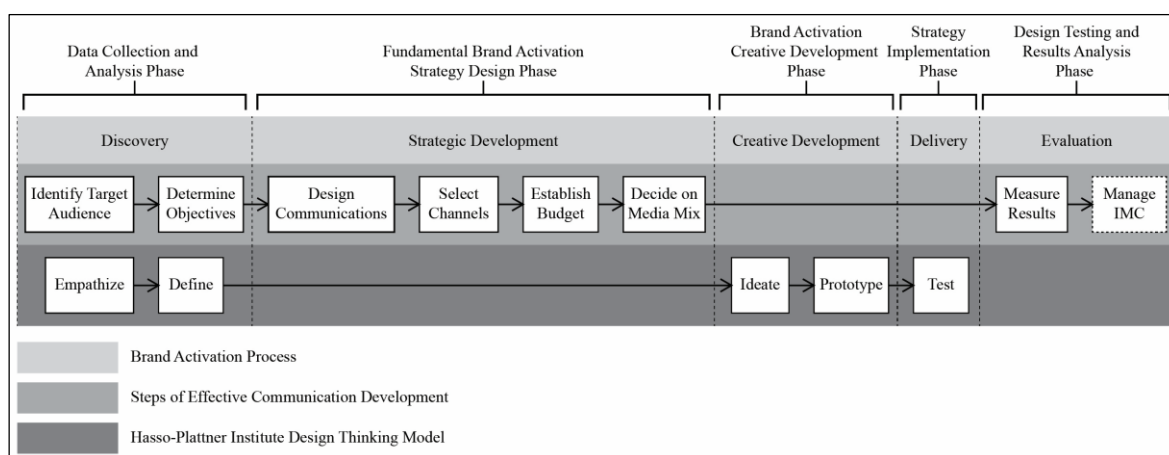
The design of the brand activation strategy in this study is conducted using a novel integrated framework that combines three established models: the Brand Activation Process (DSCDE), the Steps of Effective Communication Development (SECD) from IMC theory, and the Hasso-Plattner Institute's Design Thinking (DT) model. The DSCDE process provides the overarching five-stage structure for the project, while SECD and DT are integrated as specialized engines that drive specific stages, ensuring both strategic marketing rigor and creative, human-centered solutions. The interaction, boundaries, and responsibilities of each model at each stage are detailed below, and a visual representation of this process is shown in the flowchart (Fig. 3).

- **Discovery Phase:** This initial DSCDE phase is fundamentally driven by the first stages of both SECD and DT. The primary activities are identifying the Target Audience and Determining Objectives (from SECD), which are executed through the human-centered methods of Empathize and Define (from DT). Here, DT provides the process for understanding user needs, while SECD provides the strategic marketing lens to ensure the insights are framed in terms of communication goals.
- **Strategic Development Phase:** The second DSCDE phase is entirely powered by the core strategic planning stages of SECD. The insights gathered from the Discovery phase are used as inputs to Design Communications, Select Channels, Establish the Budget, and Decide on the Media Mix. In this stage, SECD's role is to translate the understanding of the audience and objectives into a concrete, actionable marketing and communication plan.
- **Creative Development Phase:** The third DSCDE phase is driven by the creative engine of the DT model. The strategic outputs from the previous phase (e.g., the message strategy and channel selection from SECD) serve as the brief for the Ideate and Prototype stages of DT. The

responsibility of DT here is to generate a wide array of creative concepts and produce tangible mockups that bring the strategy to life visually and experientially.

- **Delivery Phase:** The fourth DSCDE phase, Delivery, involves implementing the strategy by publishing the created media. This stage corresponds directly with the Test stage of the DT model, as this is where the prototypes are exposed to a live audience, and real-world performance data is generated.
- **Evaluation Phase:** The final DSCDE phase, Evaluation, aligns with the concluding steps of the SECD framework: Measure Results and Manage IMC. The performance data gathered during the Delivery phase is analyzed against the initial objectives. This allows for a comprehensive assessment of the strategy's effectiveness and informs the ongoing management and optimization of the integrated communication efforts.

This integrated approach ensures that the brand activation strategy is not only strategically sound and objective-driven (thanks to SECD) but also innovative, empathetic, and highly relevant to the target audience (thanks to DT), all within a structured and manageable project flow (thanks to DSCDE).



**Fig. 3.** Flowchart of the strategy design process.

## 2.2. Data Collection Method

Data collection, which is also part of the Discovery stage of DSCDE, will be conducted using the methods of document studies, observations, interviews, and literature reviews. Documents that will be the object of the document study in this research include the Brand Blueprint, Business Model Canvas, Graphic Standard Manual (GSM) of Kemsgraphics, communications between Kemsgraphics and clients, native analytics tools reports from the platforms used by Kemsgraphics, as well as sales reports from Kemsgraphics. Observations in this study are conducted using a semi-structured, passive-participation approach. The observation focuses on the digital platforms Kemsgraphics currently uses or plans to use, such as Instagram, TikTok, LinkedIn, and Behance. To ensure a comprehensive understanding, the specific aspects observed include: platform characteristics, such as trending content formats and audience interaction patterns; the communication strategies of key competitors, including the types of content they publish and their visual styles; and the platform-specific features that can be utilized for brand activation. Findings from these observations were systematically documented for subsequent analysis. Interviews will be conducted in an unstructured manner using a guideline that outlines the main topics to be discussed [35]. The interview will be conducted with Eka Putri Wulandari, a Social Media Specialist and Content Creator, with topics related to brand activation on social media. The literature review will cover relevant topics such as brand activation, brand awareness, IMC, DT, social media, and portfolio platforms.

## 2.3. Testing and Analysis Methods

The brand activation strategy will be tested using a Quasi-Experimental Design, specifically a Time Series Design, which involves collecting data before and after an intervention [35]. In this design, the performance metrics from the period before the intervention serve as a baseline control, against which the metrics from the period after the intervention are compared. This approach allows for the measurement of change attributable to the brand activation strategy while controlling for the

inherent characteristics of the brand's existing presence. The intervention refers to the implementation and distribution of the designed media across the selected platforms, corresponding to the Delivery stage of the DSCDE framework. The data collection will be divided into two five-day periods:

- Pre-Intervention (Control Period): May 25, 2024 – May 29, 2024
- Intervention (Test Period): May 30, 2024 – June 3, 2024

The data to be measured includes insight metrics obtained from the native analytics tools of each platform. The impact of the designed strategy will be determined by comparing the metric data from the control period to the test period. The metrics to be measured are generally used as Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) related to brand awareness. Based on interview results, these KPIs include metrics related to reach, engagement, page visits, and follower growth. The specific metrics from each platform are detailed in Table 1.

**Table 1.** List of metrics to be measured in the test.

Facebook (F)		Instagram (I)		TikTok (T)		LinkedIn (L)		Behance (B)	
$F_1$	Reach	$I_1$	Reach	$T_1$	Video Views	$L_1$	Impressions	$B_1$	Project Views
$F_2$	Content Interactions	$I_2$	Content Interactions	$T_2$	Likes	$L_2$	Reactions	$B_2$	Appreciations
$F_3$	Visits	$I_3$	Profile Visits	$T_3$	Comments	$L_3$	Comments		
				$T_4$	Shares	$L_4$	Reshares		
				$T_5$	Profile Views	$L_5$	Page Visits		

The metrics obtained directly from the native analytics tools of each platform will be processed to obtain KPIs related to brand awareness. These metrics, along with their processing, are as follows:

$$F_r = F_1 \quad (1) \quad L_e = L_2 + L_3 + L_4 \quad (9) \quad I_v = I_3 \quad (17)$$

$$I_r = I_1 \quad (2) \quad B_e = B_2 \quad (10) \quad T_v = T_5 \quad (18)$$

$$T_r = T_1 \quad (3) \quad F_{er} = \frac{F_e}{F_r} \times 100\% \quad (11) \quad L_v = L_5 \quad (19)$$

$$L_r = L_1 \quad (4) \quad I_{er} = \frac{I_e}{I_r} \times 100\% \quad (12) \quad X_{gr} = \frac{X_{ef} - X_{if}}{X_{if}} \times 100\% \quad (20)$$

$$B_r = B_1 \quad (5) \quad T_{er} = \frac{T_e}{T_r} \times 100\% \quad (13)$$

$$F_e = F_2 \quad (6) \quad L_{er} = \frac{L_e}{L_r} \times 100\% \quad (14)$$

$$I_e = I_2 \quad (7) \quad B_{er} = \frac{B_e}{B_r} \times 100\% \quad (15)$$

$$T_e = T_2 + T_3 + T_4 \quad (8) \quad F_v = F_3 \quad (16)$$

Several previous studies have used different methods and timeframes in their tests, including periodic measurements from 1 hour to 7 days [36], 2 to 3 days post-implementation [37], and measurements taken over the implementation period of 3 days [38]. For this research, the implementation period for brand activation strategy testing will be set to 5 days, as it falls within a similar range to previous studies, and the data can be recorded daily, resulting in five data points for both before and after implementation. The Evaluation stage of DSCDE, which aims to analyze the designed brand activation strategy as well as the implementation results, will be conducted using a mixed-method analysis due to the presence of both qualitative and quantitative data. Qualitative data will be analyzed using Miles and Huberman's Analysis Method, while quantitative data will be analyzed using Descriptive Statistical Analysis Methods. For quantitative data, the Descriptive Statistical Analysis Method will be used to describe the meaning of the collected data as is, without making generalized conclusions which is done through data presentation in the form of tables or diagrams, calculations of mode, median, mean, decile, percentile, data distribution via averages and standard deviations, and percentages [35].



### 3. Results and Discussion

#### 3.1. Discovery

In this step, the Empathize phase of DT was conducted to collect and analyze data before moving on to the Define phase, which includes identifying the target audience and determining objectives from the SECD. This data analysis aims to understand the problems faced by Kemsgraphics and develop a basic concept for the brand activation strategy design. After the analysis was conducted, more detailed problems emerged beyond those previously mentioned. In addition to the rolling issue, which reduced the visibility of services and directly impacted Kemsgraphics' revenue, the company also faced challenges related to Fiverr's strict rules, which prohibit users from communicating outside the platform. Violating these rules can result in permanent bans, meaning Kemsgraphics' Fiverr account would be permanently unusable if such violations occurred. Thus, Kemsgraphics must exercise caution when communicating with clients to avoid breaching these rules, further highlighting the urgency to expand its reach to other platforms. Increasing brand awareness on other platforms has become more critical to ensure Kemsgraphics' sustainability and growth outside of Fiverr. Additionally, Kemsgraphics has been active in the graphic design services industry for almost four years. Therefore, the goal of implementing brand activation to increase brand awareness is not only to enhance Kemsgraphics' existence but also to leverage its established track record and ensure that Kemsgraphics can compete with existing competitors on new platforms. Another challenge faced by Kemsgraphics is a limited budget. Financial reports indicate that 89.25% of Kemsgraphics' total expenditures are allocated to employee wages, while only 3.97% is allocated to promotional activities. This very small percentage of the budget dedicated to promotion highlights the fact that Kemsgraphics has limited funds for promotional activities, which must be taken into account when designing the brand activation strategy to ensure its implementation is still effective despite the budget constraints. Through analysis of other documents, the basic concept for the brand activation strategy can be determined, including several aspects such as: (1) The Target Audience includes geographic, demographic, psychographic, and behavioral aspects, (2) Brand Positioning of Kemsgraphics, (3) Value Propositions offered by Kemsgraphics, (4) Priority Services are provided by Kemsgraphics, (5) The type of Customer Relationships that Kemsgraphics aims to build, (6) The Platforms suitable for Kemsgraphics to use, (7) Visual Elements to be used based on Kemsgraphics' GSM.

#### 3.2. Strategic Development

##### *1) Design Communications*

The first element designed in the communication planning process is the Message Strategy. This strategy identifies the core message to be delivered during brand activation, focusing on Kemsgraphics' priority services. The core messages identified include: (1) Highlighting the streetwear design services offered by Kemsgraphics, (2) Discussing the service packages provided, especially the package specifications that benefit clients, (3) Showcasing Kemsgraphics' portfolio to demonstrate the company's capabilities, experience, and expertise, (4) Emphasizing the appeal of the modern brutalist design style, which is Kemsgraphics' signature style. Next, the Creative Strategy is designed to determine how the message will be delivered. In this case, Transformational Appeals techniques will be used, meaning that the core message is delivered indirectly [19]. The indirect delivery of the message makes it more general, thus suitable for Kemsgraphics' diverse audience, given the wide range of industries, niches, and sub-niches represented by Kemsgraphics' audience. The Message Source strategy is also designed, where Kemsgraphics, as the source of the message, is personified as an individual designer. This personification is done to build a more personal and closer connection with clients. This is also part of Kemsgraphics' organic customer relationship approach, which aims to foster closer relationships with clients.

##### *2) Select Channels*

In this strategy, selecting the right platforms as Channels was essential to fulfill both mass communication and personal communication needs, aligning with the SECD framework and IMC principles. Social media platforms emerged as the optimal choice due to their unique ability to function as mass communication channels, which stimulate broader awareness, and as personal communication tools that enable two-way interaction with consumers. This dual capacity is vital for leveraging mass communication to foster personal engagement, a core emphasis of IMC. Supporting this, their development revolves around user behaviors such as sharing personal information, identities, and influence, demonstrating their role as both a social and strategic tool [39]. Additionally, Alfatah [40] describes social media as a digital technology that facilitates connection, interaction, content creation,

and message sharing, making it an effective communication platform. Its ability to enable direct communication, as highlighted by Laksamana [41], creates sustained interactions that positively influence brand perception. Furthermore, Chandra [42] emphasizes that social media promotions and engagement significantly enhance brand awareness, underscoring its importance in strategic marketing. Social media marketing is further validated by Putri [43], who identifies it as the second most effective channel for building brand awareness, following mobile marketing. For Kemsgraphics, a fully remote business heavily reliant on online platforms, social media provides an indispensable space for reaching and engaging clients. Its versatility and effectiveness make it a cornerstone of this strategy, bridging the gap between broad visibility and meaningful consumer interaction. Each selected platform was chosen for its unique advantages, aligning with Kemsgraphics' objectives and audience characteristics:

- Instagram and TikTok: These platforms were selected due to their vast user base and popularity among visually driven content consumers. Both platforms offer high engagement potential through interactive features such as reels, stories, and live content, making them ideal for showcasing Kemsgraphics' design work in an eye-catching way. Their broad reach and ability to create viral content allow Kemsgraphics to attract a diverse audience and generate significant visibility for its portfolio.
- Facebook: Despite being less popular than Instagram and TikTok among younger audiences, Facebook remains an effective platform for engaging a broader demographic. With the Meta Business Suite integration, Kemsgraphics can manage posts on both Instagram and Facebook simultaneously, maximizing reach without additional effort. This cross-platform capability enhances efficiency while ensuring consistent messaging.
- LinkedIn: LinkedIn was selected with a focus on business-to-business (B2B) engagement, as many of Kemsgraphics' clients are business entities. This platform allows Kemsgraphics to establish a professional presence, connect with other companies, and share industry-relevant updates. LinkedIn's professional environment facilitates networking with decision-makers, which is critical for securing partnerships and business-focused projects.
- Behance: As a specialized portfolio platform, Behance is essential for showcasing Kemsgraphics' work comprehensively. Unlike platforms like Pinterest, which mixes diverse user-generated content, Behance is tailored for professional creatives, supporting detailed portfolio publications and attracting clients specifically looking for design expertise. Its structure allows Kemsgraphics to display cohesive collections, which helps establish credibility and professionalism in front of a design-oriented audience.

The selection of these platforms is also based on their individual strengths in either mass or personal communication. For instance, while Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook provide a mass communication approach to reach a broad audience, LinkedIn and Behance focus more on targeted, professional connections. This mix of platforms allows Kemsgraphics to communicate consistently with both casual and professional audiences, maximizing engagement opportunities across varied consumer segments. These chosen channels offer Kemsgraphics a balanced approach, ensuring impactful brand activation and client engagement by leveraging the strengths of each platform to reach both broad and specialized audiences effectively.

### *3) Establish Budget*

Based on the analysis showing that Kemsgraphics has a limited budget, the Affordable Method will be used in Kemsgraphics' brand activation strategy. This means that the strategy will focus on organic activation without using paid services such as ads or endorsements. Additionally, the interviewee stated that the use of ads, especially on social media platforms, is less suitable when the goal of the activation is to increase brand awareness. This is because, aside from the fact that audiences are more likely to interact with organic content, they tend to skip over the content if they are not interested in the advertised product or service from the outset. Therefore, using paid ads would reduce the likelihood of increasing brand awareness. Paid ads are more suitable when coupled with a significant budget to extend reach over a long period.

### *4) Decide on Media Mix*

Among the eight marketing communication modes widely used, as mentioned by [19], Online and Social Media Marketing were chosen, given that four of the five selected platforms fall into the category of social media platforms. The main media form in this activation will be image-based media, particularly carousel content. This is because image-based media can be shared on Facebook,

Instagram, TikTok, and LinkedIn simultaneously with only minor adjustments, supporting one of the principles of consistency in IMC theory. Limited resources also contributed to the decision to use images as the primary media rather than videos.

### 3.3. Creative Development

#### 1) Ideate

In this stage, the foundational strategy created during the Strategic Development phase is expanded creatively, combining the core message from the message strategy with additional elements such as value propositions, client segmentation, positioning, and other contextual data. This creative development process is initiated through brainstorming, which not only facilitates the generation of new ideas but also deepens understanding by exploring various approaches [44]. Brainstorming is further enhanced using mind mapping to visually organize and connect ideas, allowing for the elimination of irrelevant information and highlighting valuable insights [45]. This approach helps identify creative aspects that can be developed and links these aspects to form cohesive ideas for the creative development phase. Fig. 4 shows the process of brainstorming as part of the ideate step:

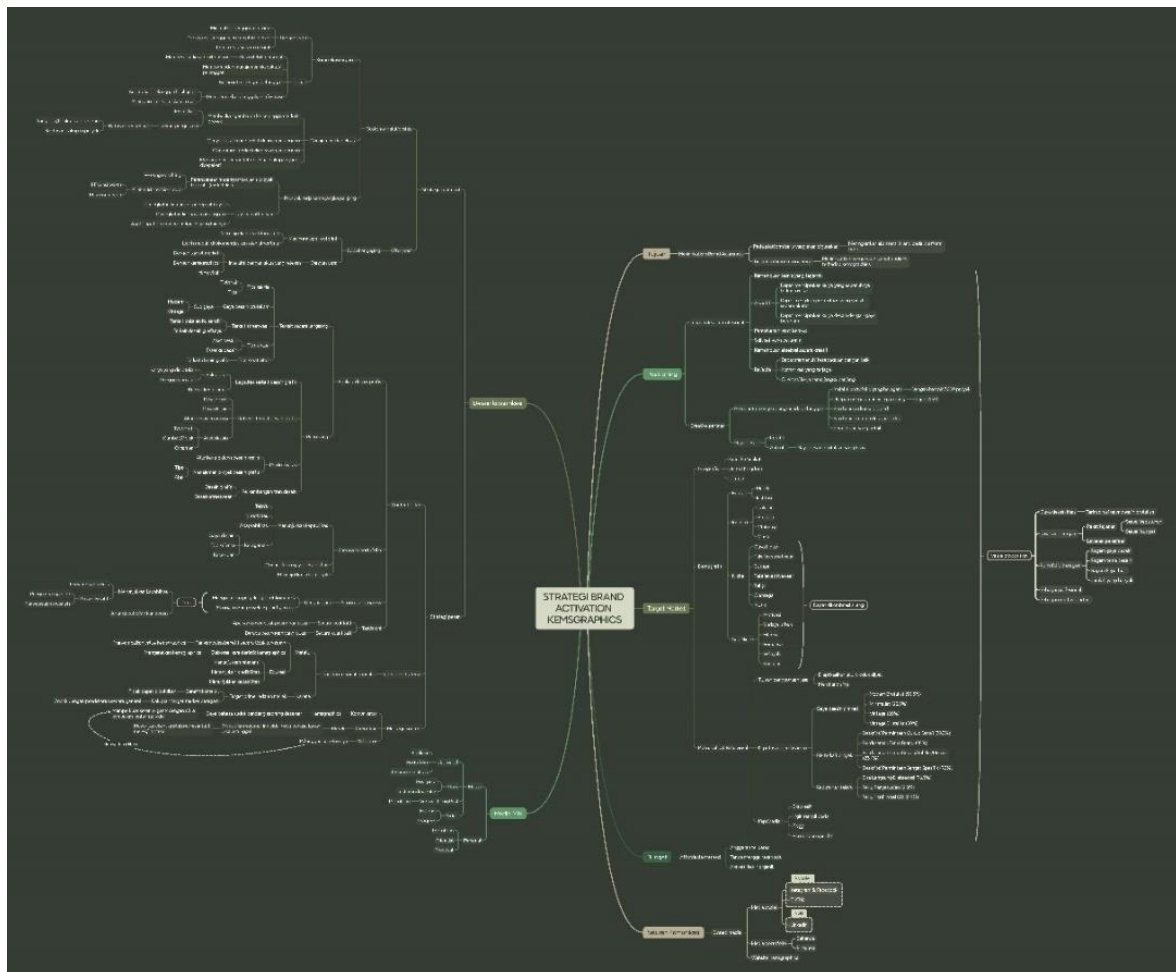


Fig. 4. Mind mapping process showing the result of brainstorming as part of the ideate step.

The brainstorming process led to several key creative developments for Kemsgraphics:

#### a) Development of Kemsgraphics' Identity

The identity development defines Kemsgraphics' foundational characteristics, captured through the following elements:

#### Core Values:

Creativity and Innovation

Quality and Excellence

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Client-Centric Approach  
Integrity and Professionalism  
Flexibility and Adaptability  
Collaboration and Partnership  
Passion for Design

**Brand Positioning:** Kemsgraphics positions itself as a professional creative partner, capable of transforming client ideas from concept to execution, whether for individual designs, collections, or entire brands.

*b) Creative Development of Brand Activation Strategy*

Creative brand activation development further refines the brand's communication, focusing on message clarity and engagement through the following strategies:

**Message Strategy:**

**Objectives:** Communicate Kemsgraphics' unique and creative design style, flexibility in meeting client needs remotely, and reinforce core values.

**Core Messages:** Adaptability in design creation, expertise in diverse styles, creative execution, reliable communication and collaboration, extensive experience, and alignment with clients' brand concepts.

**Keywords:** Virtual Studio, Brutalism Design, Streetwear, Branding, Promotional Media, Remote Collaboration, Creative Solutions, Innovation, Client-centric, Quality, Integrity, Adaptability, Professional Partnership, Expressive Designs.

**Creative Strategy:**

**Content Strategy:** Structured around Content Pillars—Education, Portfolio, Progress, and Testimonials—for daily content. Interaction-focused content fosters audience engagement, while promotional content raises awareness of Kemsgraphics' services.

**Tone of Voice:**

**Personal Use:** Casual language is adapted based on the audience's language, with Indonesian used for local audiences and English for international clients.

**Mass Communication:** English is used predominantly, reflecting Kemsgraphics' global client base.

Establishing a designer persona with single pronoun usage to give an individualistic and approachable feel, maintaining professionalism yet avoiding a rigid tone.

**Creative Networking Strategy:**

**Social Footprint:** Establishing an active presence on social media by interacting with relevant accounts, including target audiences, similar businesses, and trending content through comments, shares, and reactions.

**Customer Relationship Management:**

**Organic Communication:** Building natural, personalized connections, minimizing forms and automated messages.

**Expectations Management:** Clear project timelines and expected outcomes are established to align Kemsgraphics' perspective with client expectations.

**Long-Term Collaboration Focus:** Offering ongoing support and suggestions for clients planning multiple projects or collections, along with after-sales services to strengthen client relationships.

*c) Creative Media Strategy*

The creative media strategy involves selecting appropriate media channels and content frequency to maximize brand activation:

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**Media Types and Uses:**

Carousel Posts: For daily content, portfolios, and qualitative testimonials.

Vertical Long Posts: Used on Behance, ideal for publishing portfolios by project type or client theme.

Stories: For sharing primary content, trending “add yours” prompts, quantitative testimonials, and activity documentation.

Video: Supports daily content, progress updates, and portfolios, with plans to expand usage in the future.

**Minimum Publication Frequency:**

Instagram and Facebook: 4 times per week

LinkedIn: 3 times per week

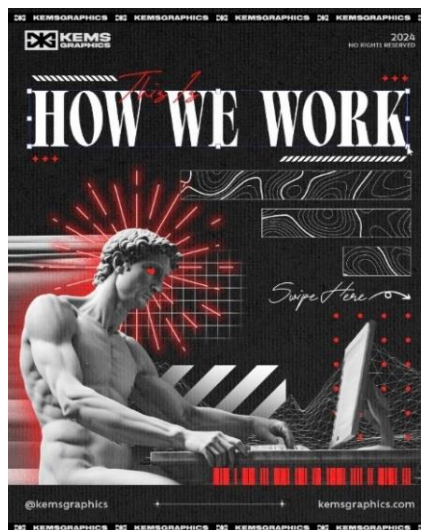
TikTok: 5 times per week

Behance: 1 time per month

TikTok and Instagram are prioritized due to their suitability for viral and versatile content, respectively. Facebook aligns with Instagram’s frequency due to Meta Business Suite’s cross-posting capability. LinkedIn’s focus is on educational content, while Behance emphasizes portfolio collections, posted less frequently but with substantial content per post.

**2) Prototype**

Prototypes were created to serve as examples of the use of visual elements that comply with Kemsgraphics’ GSM in designing Kemsgraphics’ brand activation media. The prototypes generated are as [Fig. 5](#).



**Fig. 5.** Prototype of daily content cover.

All the strategies that were developed creatively, along with the implementation examples that were created, as well as the procedures for brand activation implementation and performance measurement procedures, were all compiled into a document called the Brand Activation Blueprint (BAB). This BAB serves as a guide for Kemsgraphics team members in executing daily brand activation tasks, from content creation to the execution of media. [Fig.6](#) is a Prototype of portfolio content for social media platforms.





**Fig. 6.** Prototype of portfolio content for social media platforms.

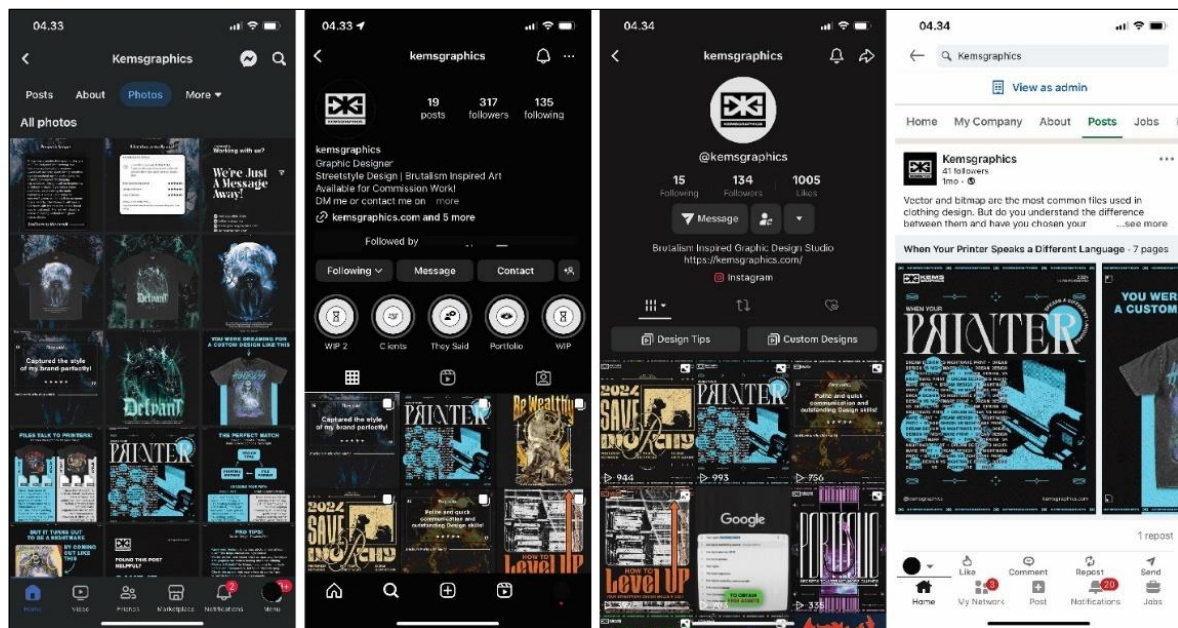
### 3.4. Delivery

The strategy was then implemented directly by publishing media designed based on the BAB as part of the testing. [Table 2](#) is the list of media produced by following the guidelines in the BAB.

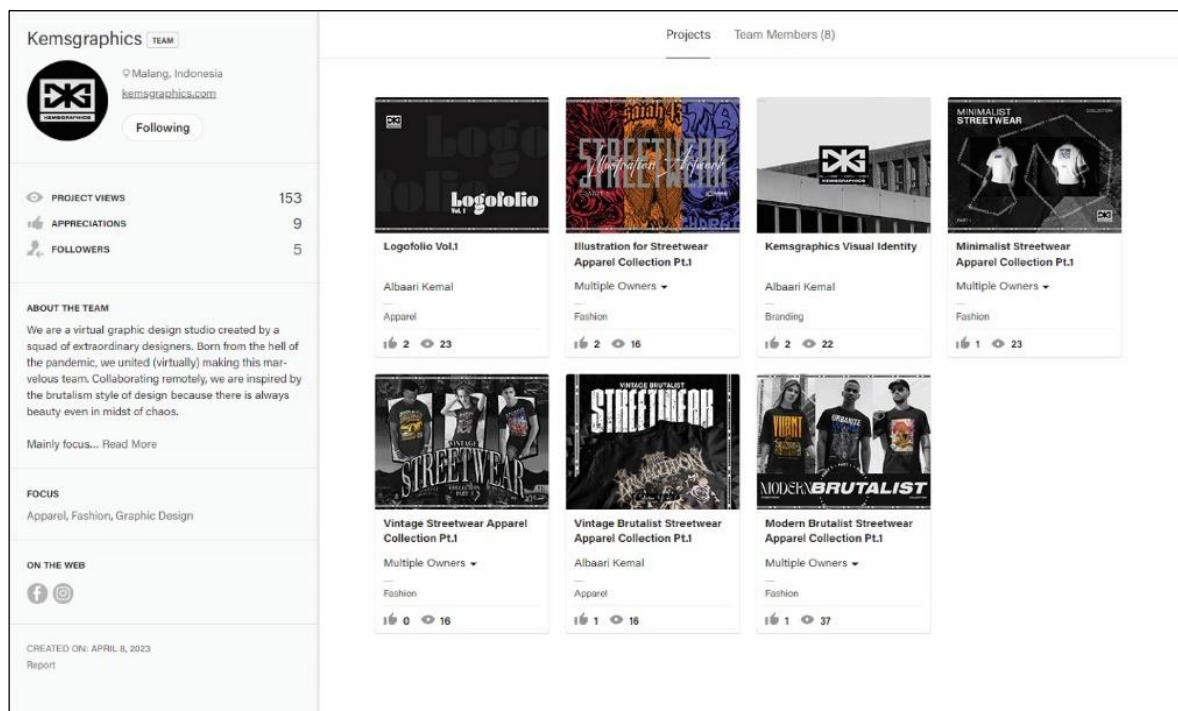
**Table 2.** List of media generated based on the BAB.

Media Type	Number of Media	Media Units
Brand Activation Blueprint (BAB)	1	E-book
Educational Carousel	8	Carousel(s)
Portfolio Carousel	4	Carousel(s)
Qualitative Testimonial Carousel	4	Carousel(s)
Quantitative Testimonial Story	8	Story(s)
Behance Vertical Long Post	6	Collection(s)
Video	2	Video(s)
Fiverr Gig Portfolio	6	Collection(s)
Fiverr Profile Portfolio	10	Collection(s)
Story Template	3	Design(s)
Story Highlight Cover	5	Design(s)
Story Overlay	3	Design(s)
Studio Profile	1	E-book
Price List	1	E-book
Total	62	Media Units

[Fig 7](#) and [Fig. 8](#) are the results of media publication based on the BAB on social media and selected portfolio platforms.



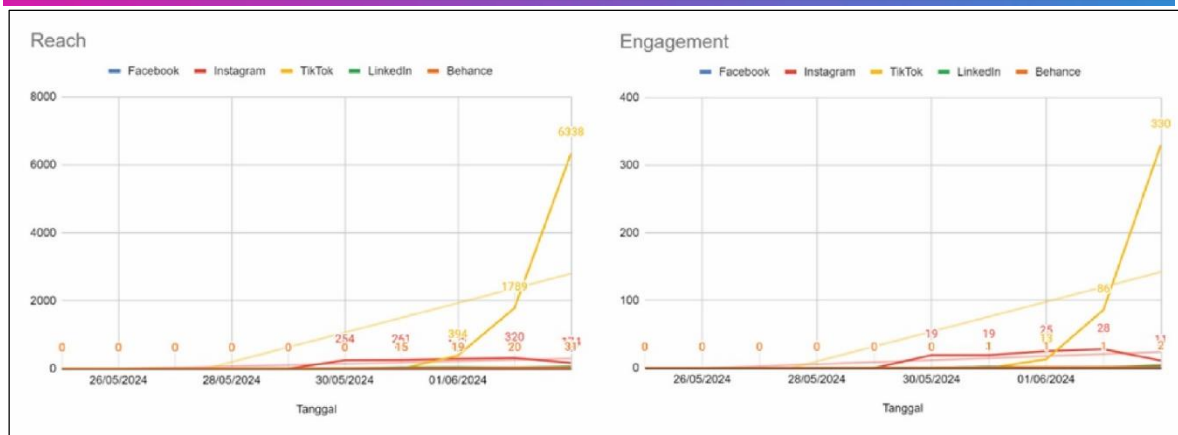
**Fig. 7.** BAB implementation on social media platforms (From left to right: Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and LinkedIn)



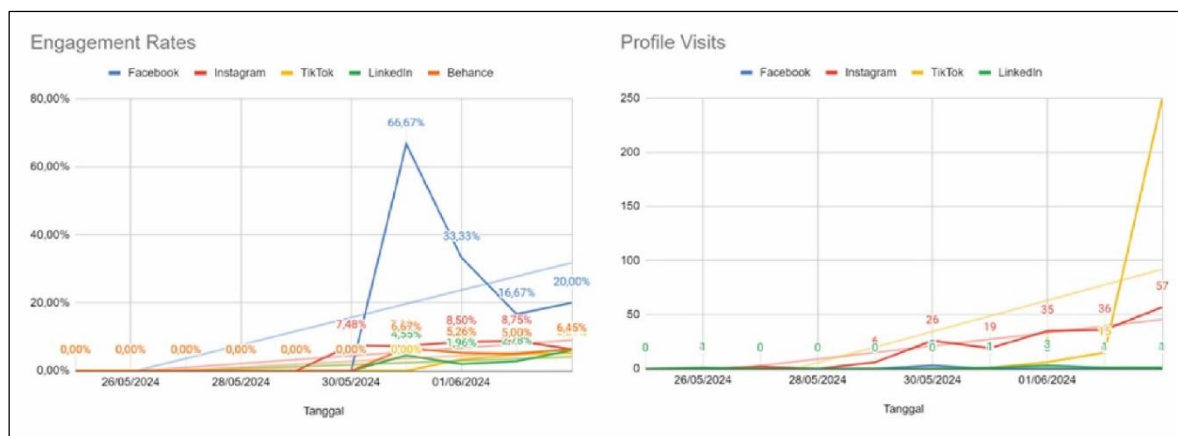
**Fig. 8.** BAB implementation on the Behance portfolio platform.

### 3.5. Evaluation

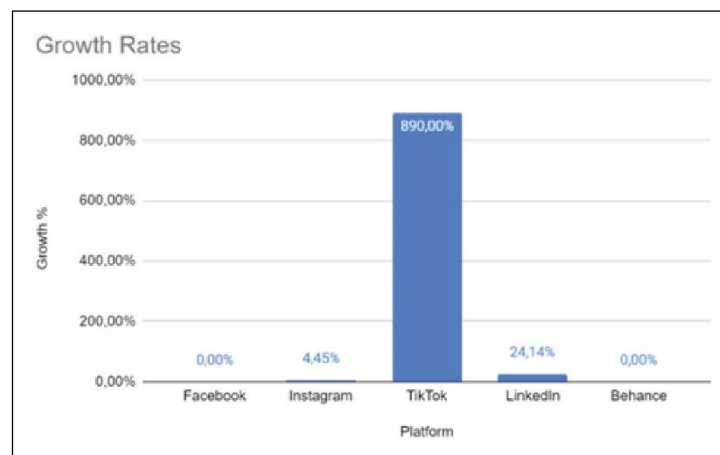
The results are presented in the form of graphs showing data obtained from each platform before implementation (May 25, 2024 – May 29, 2024) and after implementation (May 30, 2024 – June 3, 2024). These results have been processed based on the KPIs related to brand awareness (see Fig. 9, Fig. 10, and Fig. 11).



**Fig. 9.** Graph of reach (left) and engagement (right) before and after strategy implementation on each platform.



**Fig. 10.** Graph of engagement rates (left) and profile visits (right) before and after strategy implementation on each platform.



**Fig. 11.** Graph of follower growth after strategy implementation on each platform.

Based on the reach and engagement graphs in Fig. 8, as well as the engagement rates and profile visits in Fig. 9, an increase in each of these metrics can be observed beginning from the time the implementation was carried out. This increase generally continued until the end of the testing period, indicating that, overall, the designed strategy was appropriate, as it increased several metrics related to brand awareness. On the other hand, the increase was not very significant for follower growth, as shown in Fig. 10. This indicates that while the strategy was generally appropriate, adjustments are needed to ensure that Kemsgraphics' audience not only views its content but also follows its accounts. Follower growth was most significant on TikTok, with an increase of up to 8.9 times. Additionally,

TikTok showed a significantly higher increase in other metrics compared to the other platforms. This suggests that, in addition to the strategy being the most appropriate for TikTok, TikTok is also the platform with the highest potential for increasing Kemsgraphics' brand awareness. To understand the test results more deeply, further analysis was conducted on the data obtained after implementation, resulting in the following findings (Table 3, Table 4, Table 5, Table 6).

**Table 3.** Descriptive statistical analysis findings for the reach metric.

Reach					
	<i>FB</i>	<i>IG</i>	<i>TT</i>	<i>LI</i>	<i>Be</i>
count	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00
mean	4.20	260.60	1704.20	39.40	17.00
std	1.30	55.20	2692.79	24.63	11.20
min	3.00	174.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
25%	3.00	254.00	0.00	36.00	15.00
50%	4.00	261.00	394.00	44.00	19.00
75%	5.00	294.00	1789.00	51.00	20.00
max	6.00	320.00	6338.00	66.00	31.00

**Table 4.** Descriptive statistical analysis findings for the engagement metric.

Engagement					
	<i>FB</i>	<i>IG</i>	<i>TT</i>	<i>LI</i>	<i>Be</i>
count	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00
mean	1.00	20.40	85.80	1.60	1.00
std	0.71	6.54	141.12	1.52	0.71
min	0.00	11.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
25%	1.00	19.00	0.00	1.00	1.00
50%	1.00	19.00	13.00	1.00	1.00
75%	1.00	25.00	86.00	2.00	1.00
max	2.00	28.00	330.00	4.00	2.00

**Table 5.** Descriptive statistical analysis findings for the engagement rates metric.

Engagement Rates (%)					
	<i>FB</i>	<i>IG</i>	<i>TT</i>	<i>LI</i>	<i>Be</i>
count	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00
mean	0.27	0.08	0.03	0.03	0.05
std	0.25	0.01	0.03	0.02	0.03
min	0.00	0.06	0.00	0.00	0.00
25%	0.17	0.07	0.00	0.02	0.05
50%	0.20	0.07	0.03	0.03	0.05
75%	0.33	0.09	0.05	0.05	0.06
max	0.67	0.09	0.05	0.06	0.07

In Table 3, Table 4, Table 5, and Table 6, we see relatively high standard deviations (*std*) across various metrics for each platform, particularly on TikTok, which recorded a standard deviation of 2692.79 for reach, 141.12 for engagement, 0.03 for engagement rates, and 109.06 for profile visits. This indicates that although the designed strategy is generally appropriate, adjustments are still needed for the content being shared to reduce the standard deviations, leading to more consistent performance improvements. On the other hand, platforms like Facebook and Behance displayed smaller standard deviations, but the mean values for each metric on these platforms were relatively low. This suggests that these platforms are less supportive of Kemsgraphics' brand activation efforts, particularly in increasing brand awareness.

**Table 6.** Descriptive statistical analysis findings for the profile visits metric.

Profile Visits				
	<i>FB</i>	<i>IG</i>	<i>TT</i>	<i>LI</i>
count	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00
mean	0.60	34.60	54.20	1.20
std	1.34	14.33	109.06	1.10
min	0.00	19.00	0.00	0.00
25%	0.00	26.00	1.00	1.00
50%	0.00	35.00	6.00	1.00
75%	0.00	36.00	15.00	1.00
max	3.00	57.00	249.00	3.00

#### 4. Conclusion

The brand activation strategy designed using the novel integrated framework of the Brand Activation Process enhanced by SECD and Design Thinking proved effective in increasing Kemsgraphics' brand awareness, yielding concrete results, including an 890% follower growth on TikTok. The primary contribution of this work is the framework itself: a validated, replicable process for designing brand activation strategies. However, these positive results should be considered in light of the study's limitations, namely the short test period and the single case study context, which affect the generalizability of the specific outcomes. Theoretically, this research offers a new integrated model for brand activation that connects strategic communication with human-centered creative processes. For practitioners, the study's key takeaway is the importance of using real-time KPI monitoring to enable agile adjustments to creative content, thereby optimizing performance across different digital platforms. Building on this foundation, future research could provide further depth by exploring two key avenues: first, a longitudinal study to assess the long-term impact on brand equity, and second, focused research into how specific principles of visual communication design influence audience engagement within digital brand activations.

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