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Fashion | Design | Buying | Merchandising

PORTFOLIO



I blend creativity and commerce into fashion
that resonates

Nidhi Jhevar

ABOUT ME ✨ ✨

As a child, I discovered fashion through the simple joy of playing dress up, where clothes felt like a way to tell stories and reinvent myself. That spark grew into a love for design and eventually led me to work in a denim manufacturing unit for a startup, where I learned how ideas move from sketch to reality and how much determination it takes to build something tangible.

Beyond work, I love the small joys that keep me inspired, whether it is going for coffee, long walks in the park, discovering new music, or simply being around people and conversations that spark energy. I am outgoing and curious, and I carry that same spirit into my design process.

This portfolio reflects the next chapter of that journey. While my foundation lies in design, my master's in Fashion Design Management has taught me to look deeper, to research with intent, and to understand the immense work behind every strategic and creative decision. Together, they form a bridge between practice and insight, and this project brings both sides of my learning to life.



MASTER'S PROJECT

This project examines how emerging Indian designers and entrepreneurs are shaping homegrown fashion brands in a fast-growing yet highly competitive market. It focuses on the rise of direct-to-consumer models and the challenges of building global visibility.



Findings highlight the balance between creativity and commerce, where digital platforms and cultural identity open new opportunities but limited resources, market saturation and scalability issues create obstacles. The study captures both the promise and the fragility of transforming local labels into global fashion stories.

INTRODUCTION ✨



This study explores how emerging Indian designers/entrepreneurs are developing homegrown fashion brands (HFBs) in a rapidly expanding yet intensely competitive domestic market, focusing on the direct-to-consumer (D2C) model and the opportunities and constraints of internationalisation. Despite India's position as one of the world's leading apparel manufacturing hubs, its homegrown brands struggle to gain equivalent recognition abroad.

This paradox reflects a structural imbalance where India's production strength supports global fashion giants while locally founded labels face limited funding, weak international networks and intense domestic competition when seeking visibility beyond national borders. Using a constructivist, qualitative approach with semi-structured interviews of nine early-stage founders, the research examines how

entrepreneurial realities are shaped by creativity, resource limitations and the broader forces of India's fashion ecosystem. Effectuation theory highlights the improvisational, resource-driven strategies that support early survival in uncertain domestic markets, while the Uppsala model offers insight into the gradual, experience-based pathways to international expansion. Together, these perspectives reveal how designers/entrepreneurs balance emergent decision-making with the structured planning required for long-term growth.

The findings present a landscape of opportunity and fragility. India's rising middle class, cost-efficient production base and rapidly expanding digital platforms lower entry barriers and provide immediate consumer reach. Yet these same conditions create market saturation, high customer acquisition costs and vulnerability to imitation. Many founders rely on bootstrapping, family networks and small-batch production to preserve creative independence and brand identity, but these approaches often limit scalability and readiness for export.

The tension between creative autonomy and operational discipline emerges as a defining challenge, where short-term flexibility can delay the formalisation needed to scale sustainably.

The recommendations emerging from this research are intended for designers and fashion entrepreneurs planning to start a homegrown brand. They emphasise the need to strengthen domestic positioning through strategic brand building and operational consolidation while cautiously exploring international opportunities through selective markets and incremental capability development. By aligning creative differentiation with pragmatic planning, new founders can navigate an environment that is both enabling and restrictive, using India's manufacturing strength as a platform for lasting recognition at home and abroad.

RESEARCH QUESTION ?



How are emerging Indian fashion designers developing and scaling homegrown fashion brands through the direct-to-consumer model, and what are the critical success factors and barriers influencing their growth in the domestic market and pathways toward international markets?

PROBLEM STATEMENT

India is a global hub for apparel manufacturing, yet homegrown designer-led brands struggle to gain international visibility. Emerging designers face a saturated domestic market where the direct-to-consumer model creates opportunities but also exposes barriers to scalability and global growth.



AIM & OBJECTIVES ✨

This study aims to explore how emerging Indian fashion designers are developing homegrown fashion brands (HFBs) within a saturated domestic market, particularly through the direct-to-consumer model. It examines the entrepreneurial and strategic factors that influence brand growth, and also investigates the challenges and opportunities these brands face when considering expansion into international markets.

OBJ 1

Review literature on fashion entrepreneurship, homegrown brands, D2C models, and internationalisation in the Indian context.

OBJ 2

Analyse emerging Indian homegrown brands (2–5 years old) with a focus on positioning, business models, and D2C strategies.

OBJ 3

Explore the motivations and strategic challenges faced by early-stage fashion entrepreneurs in the domestic market.

OBJ 4

Examine opportunities and barriers to internationalisation, including internal and external influencing factors.

OBJ 5

Provide strategic recommendations to support domestic growth and enable global expansion.



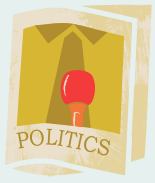





RATIONALE

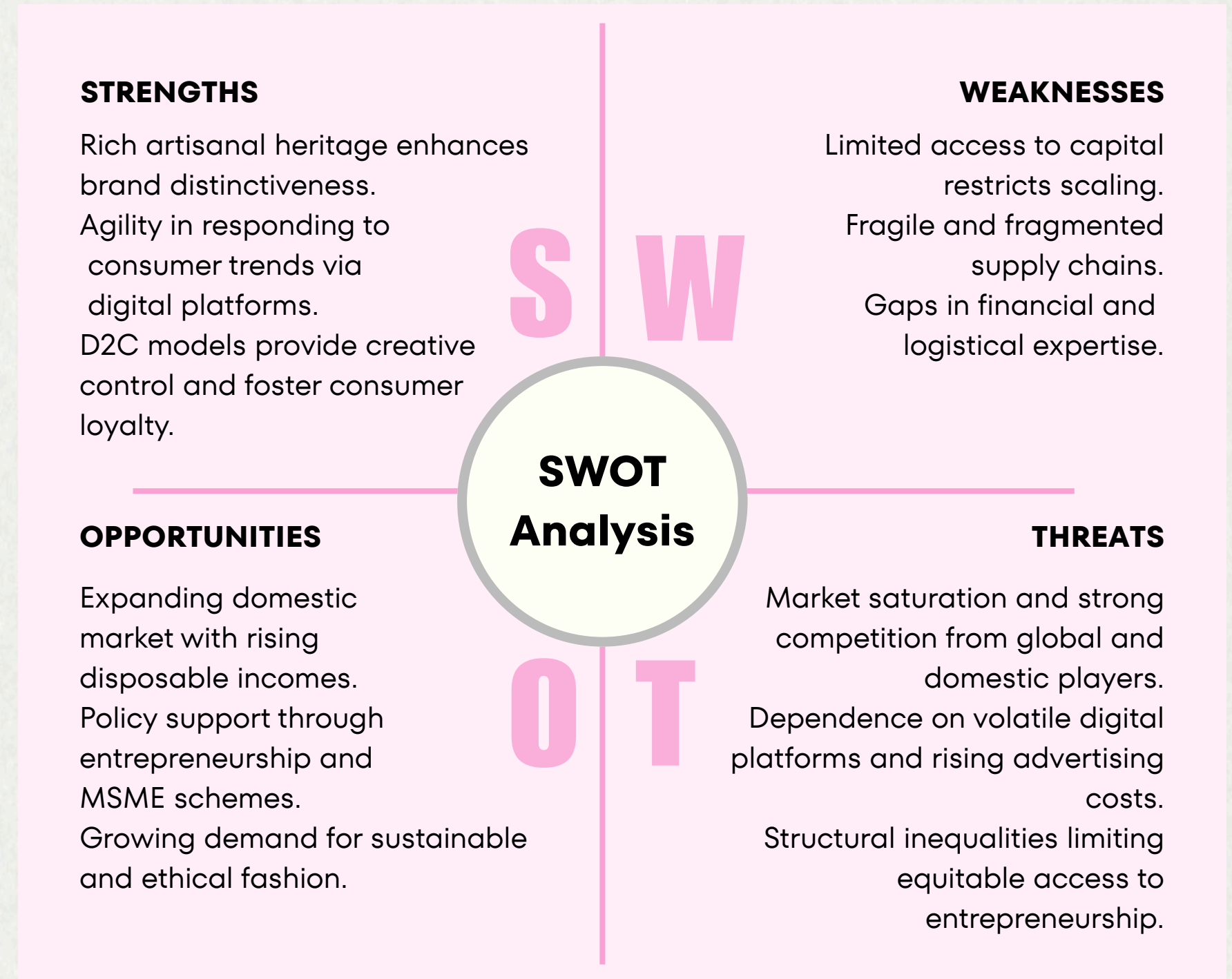
Despite India's status as a global apparel manufacturing hub, its homegrown designer brands struggle to achieve visibility on the international stage. Established players, both global and domestic, dominate the **mid-market**, while early-stage fashion entrepreneurs face **limited funding**, resource constraints, and fragile brand positioning. Understanding the **success factors** that help these brands survive and scale, alongside the barriers that restrict their internationalisation, is crucial. This research addresses that gap, offering insights that can guide the next generation of Indian fashion entrepreneurs in building brands with both local strength and global potential.



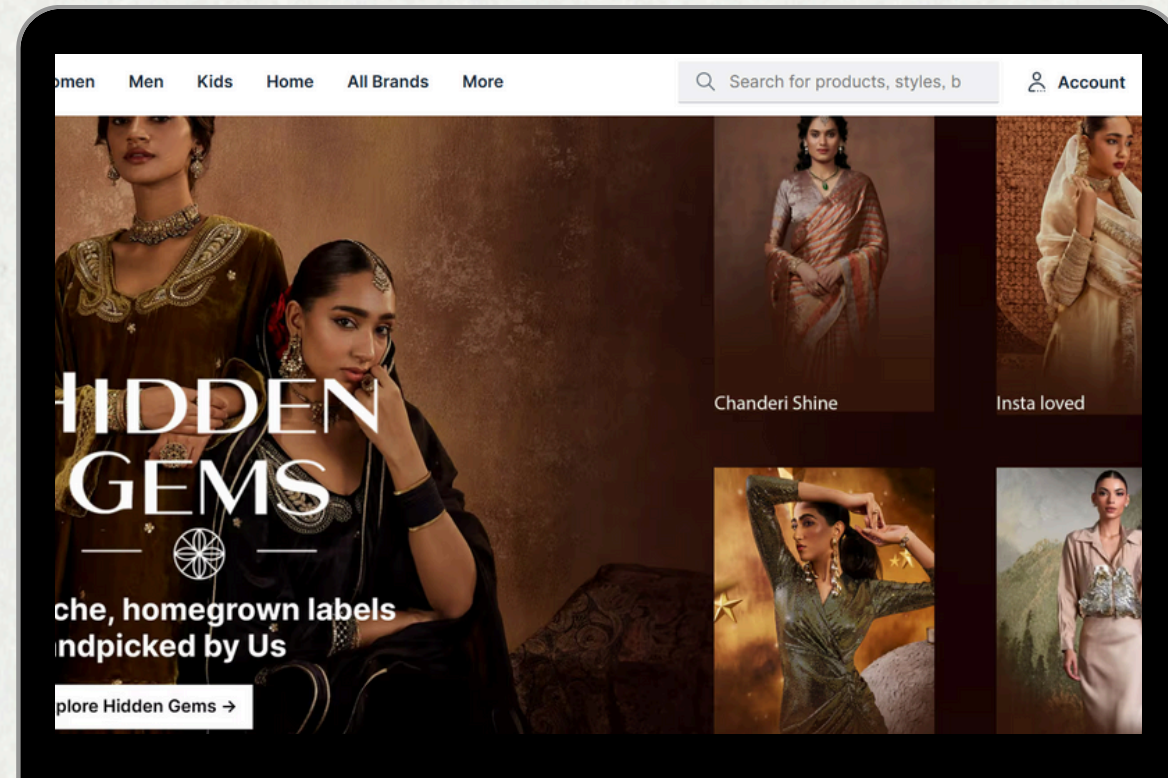


P E S T E L

 <p>Political</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government schemes encourage entrepreneurship but remain urban-centric. • Trade disputes, tariffs, and policy volatility create instability for small brands.
 <p>Economical</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large-scale manufacturers dominate exports, while HFBs face higher costs. • Market saturation and global fast fashion intensify competition. • Currency fluctuations impact margins.
 <p>Social</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rising youth demand and disposable incomes drive trend-led consumption. • Consumers balance interest in local crafts with global fashion aspirations. • Larger brands replicate HFB designs; fast fashion cycles clash with slow fashion.
 <p>Technological</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low digital literacy increases reliance on platforms and influencers. • Weak logistics and poor cybersecurity hinder D2C growth.
 <p>Environmental</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustainable production remains costly. • Climate change disrupts raw material supply. • Limited infrastructure for circularity and waste management.
 <p>Legal</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weak IP enforcement exposes HFBs to design theft. • Complex compliance and evolving e-commerce rules increase legal risks.



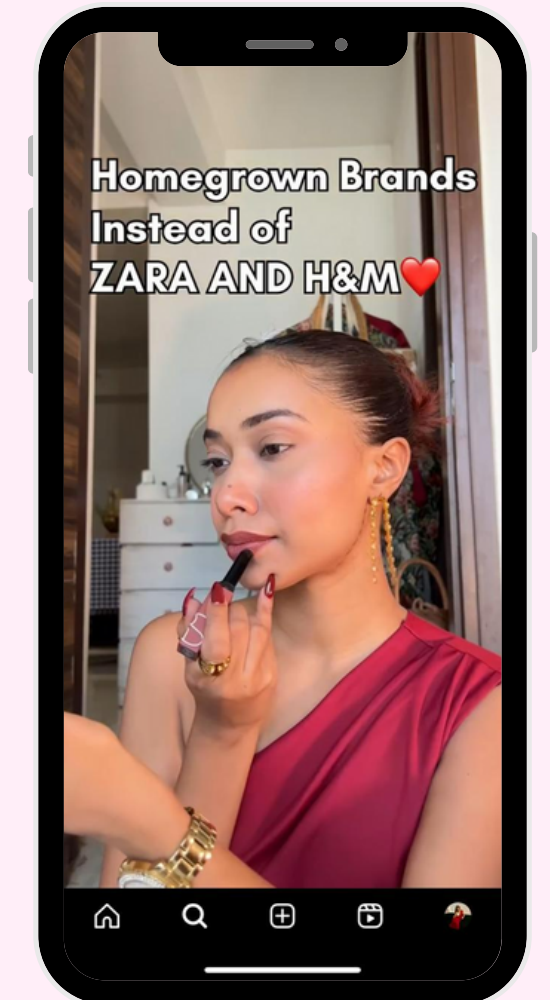
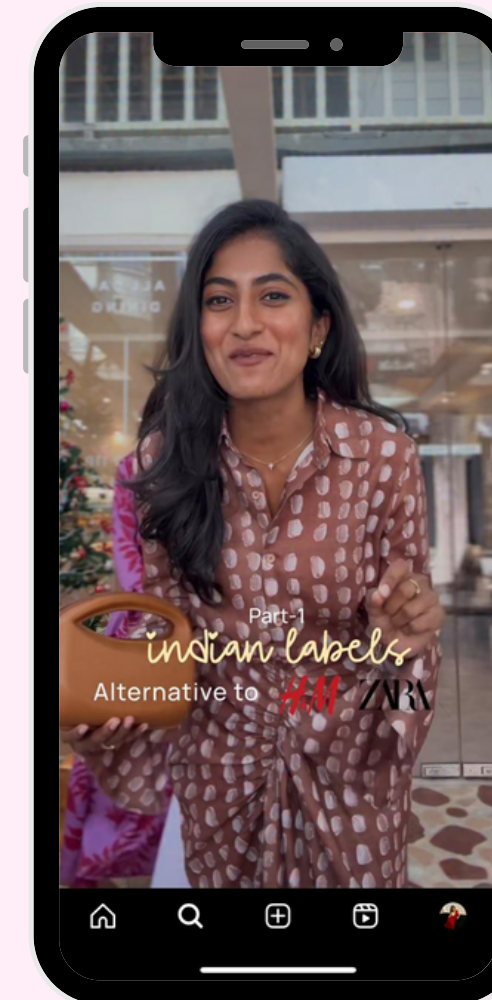
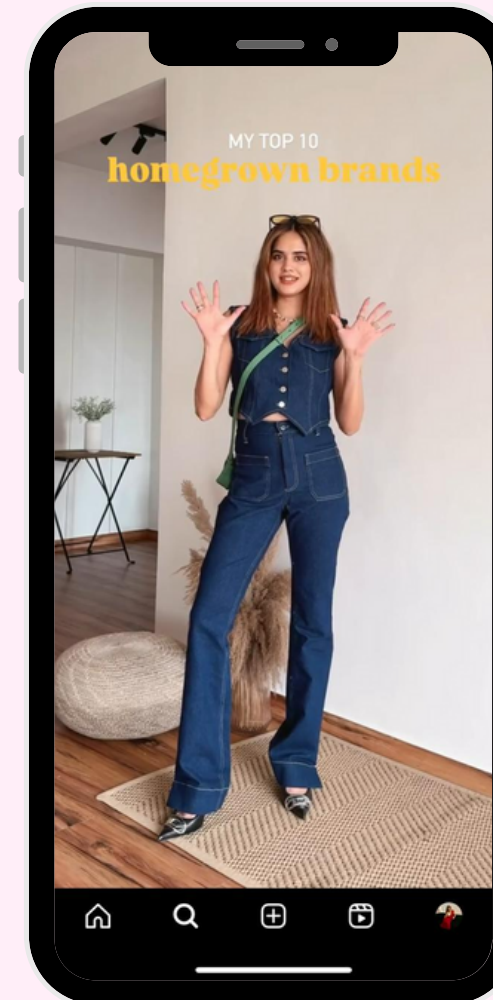
D2C & THE RISE OF INDIAN HOMEGROWN BRANDS

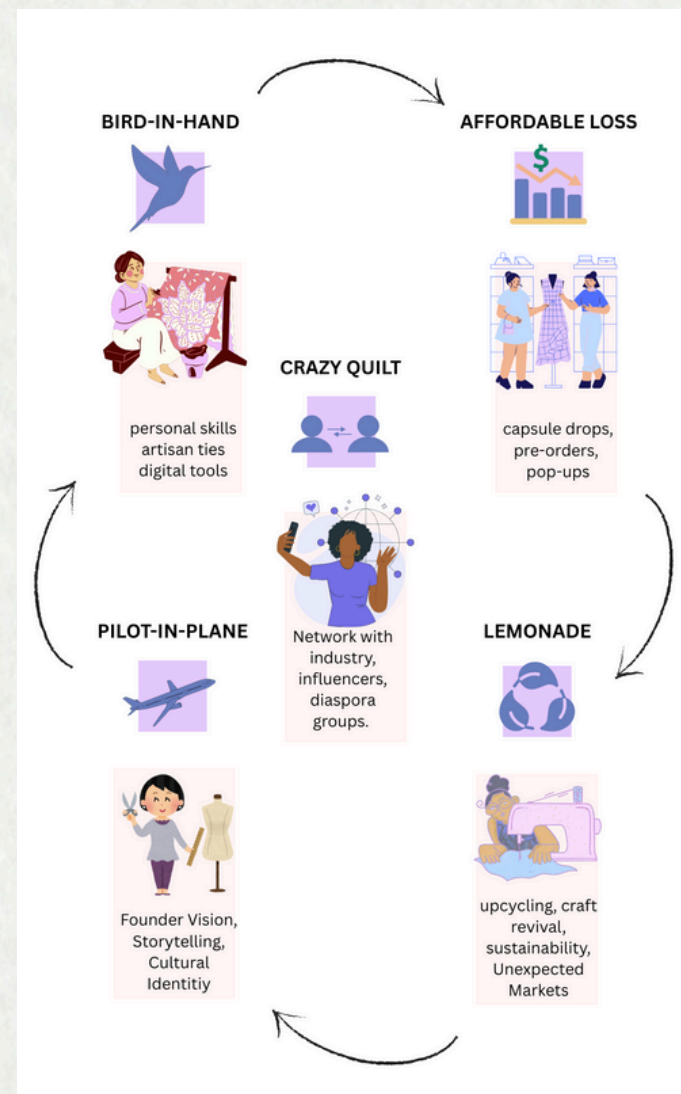
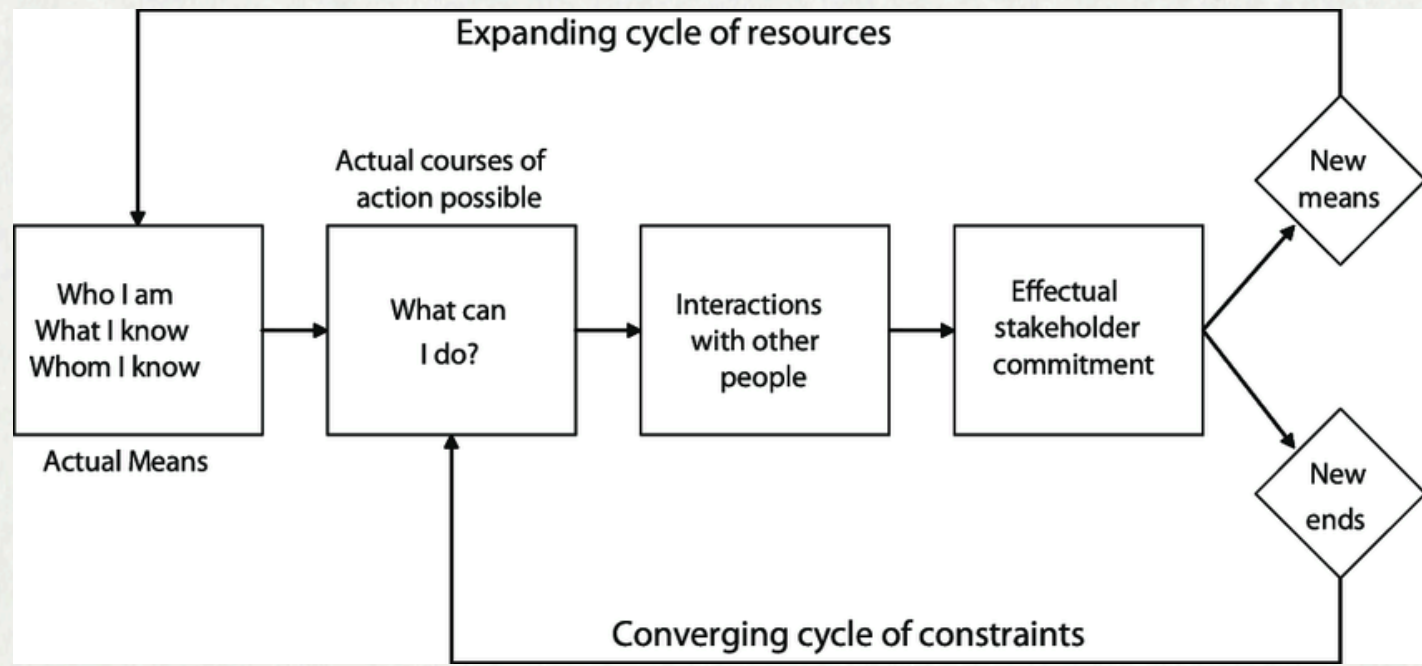


The Indian fashion landscape is being reshaped by the rise of direct-to-consumer models, giving emerging designers the freedom to bypass traditional retail and connect directly with their audiences. By selling through their own websites and social channels, brands gain creative independence and the ability to experiment with small-batch collections, limited drops and more personal storytelling.

At the same time, India's growing middle class is looking for fashion that feels both aspirational and authentic. Consumers are increasingly drawn to homegrown labels that reflect cultural identity, sustainability and individuality, positioning them as stylish alternatives to global fast-fashion giants. This shift is amplified by the influence of social media.

Popular creators highlight emerging Indian brands as homegrown alternatives to Zara or H&M, giving them visibility, validation and a sense of desirability. What was once a niche movement is now becoming mainstream, where homegrown fashion represents not just style but also creativity, pride and cultural relevance.



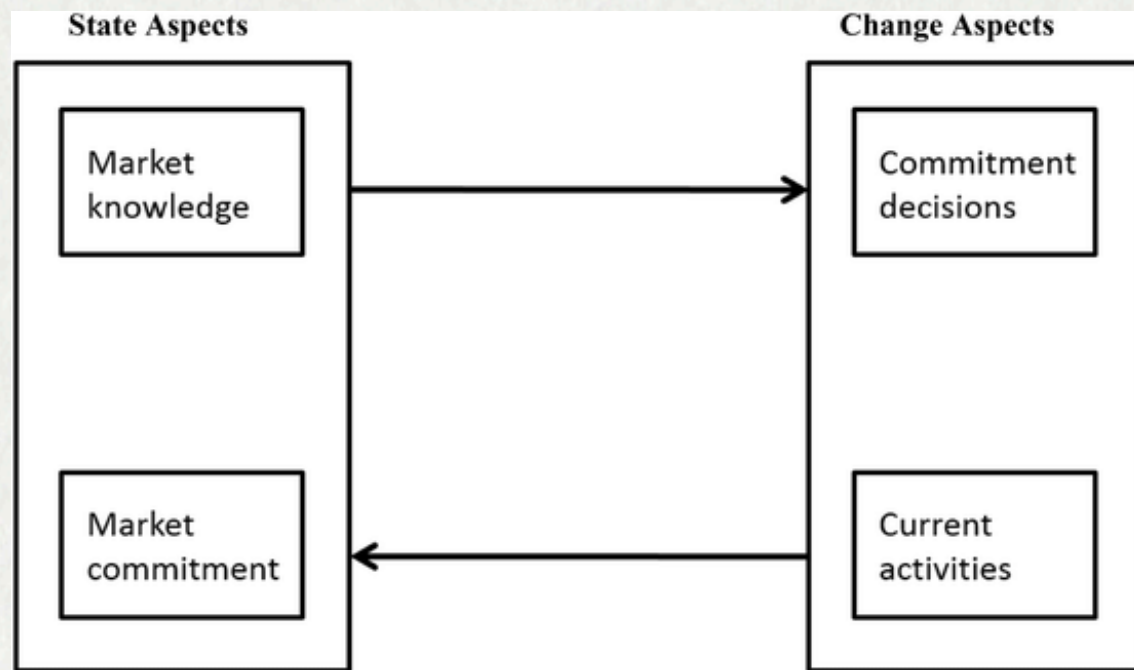
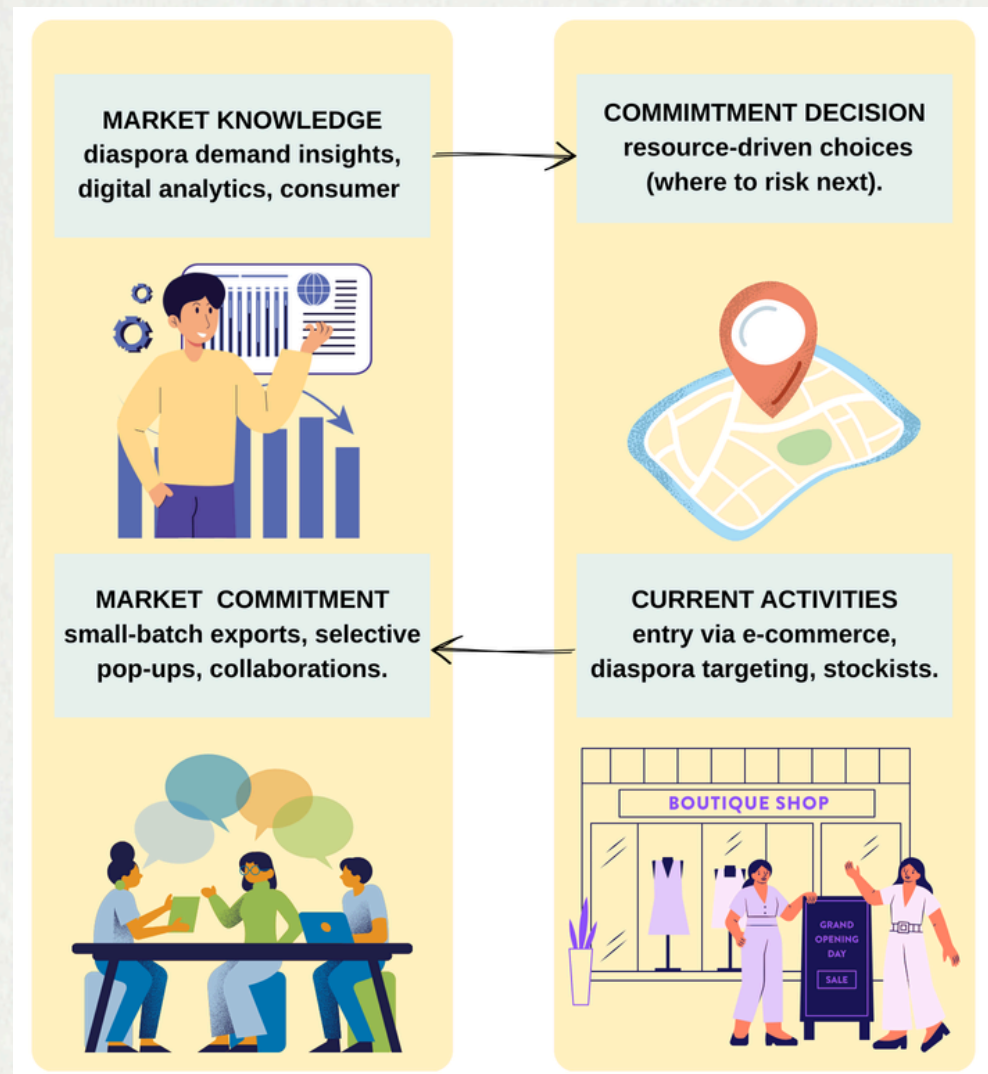


THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING

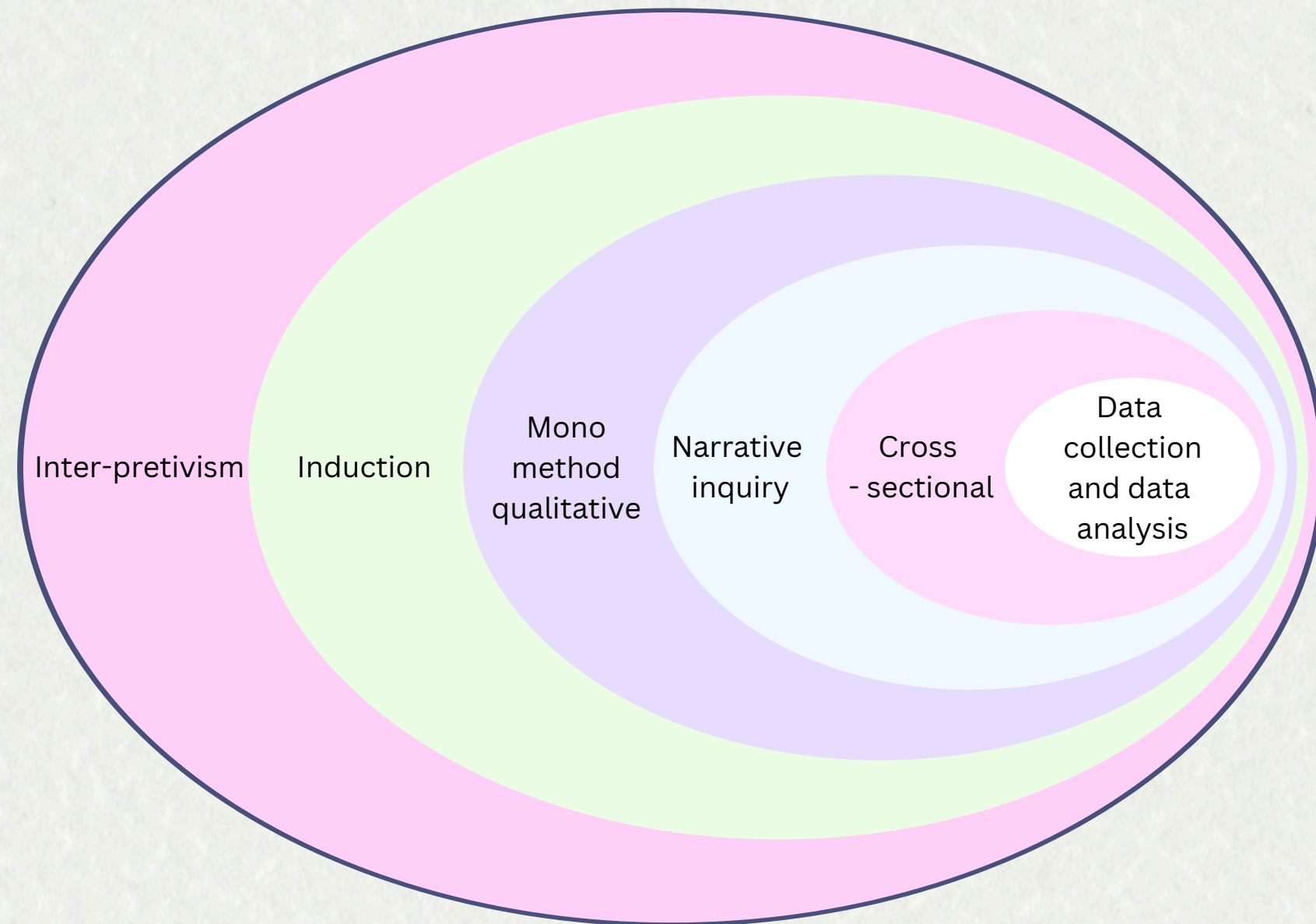
Effectuation Theory explains how entrepreneurs navigate uncertainty by leveraging creativity, networks, and available resources rather than fixed long-term plans. For emerging Indian designers, it highlights how resource constraints and improvisation drive the early survival of homegrown fashion brands.

The **Uppsala Model** focuses on how businesses expand internationally through gradual learning, building networks, and reducing risk. Applied here, it explains how Indian fashion brands approach global markets in incremental, adaptive ways.

Together, these models provide a balanced lens: effectuation captures the agility needed in early domestic growth, while Uppsala explains the pathways of scaling abroad. Their integration offers a fuller understanding of how Indian HFBs move from local beginnings toward international recognition.



RESEARCH DESIGN & METHODOLOGY



Philosophy

Constructivist–Interpretivist (focus on lived experiences & co-created meaning)

Methodology

Qualitative, inductive, exploratory
Narrative inquiry with cross-sectional design

Sampling

Homogeneous purposive (9 HFB founders, 2–5 yrs)
Recruited via Instagram outreach

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews (8 online, 1 in-person)
Open-ended, storytelling approach

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis
Manual coding: inductive + theory-informed

Validity & Ethics

Reflexivity & bracketing to minimize bias
Pilot-tested interview guide
Informed consent, anonymisation, UAL ethics compliance

PARTICIPANT OVERVIEW



P7



P5

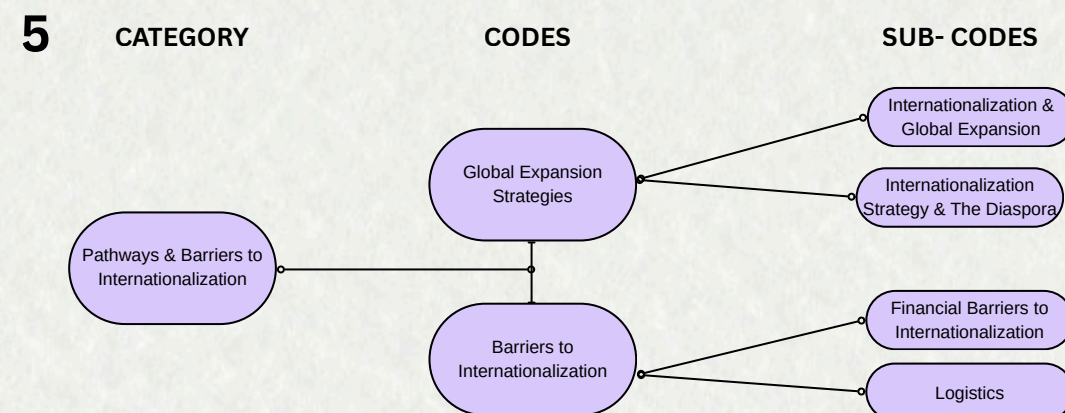
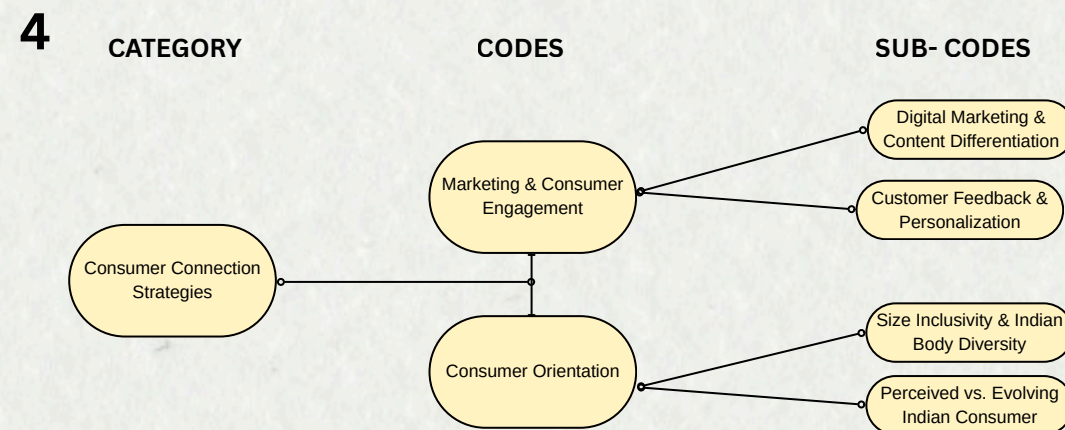
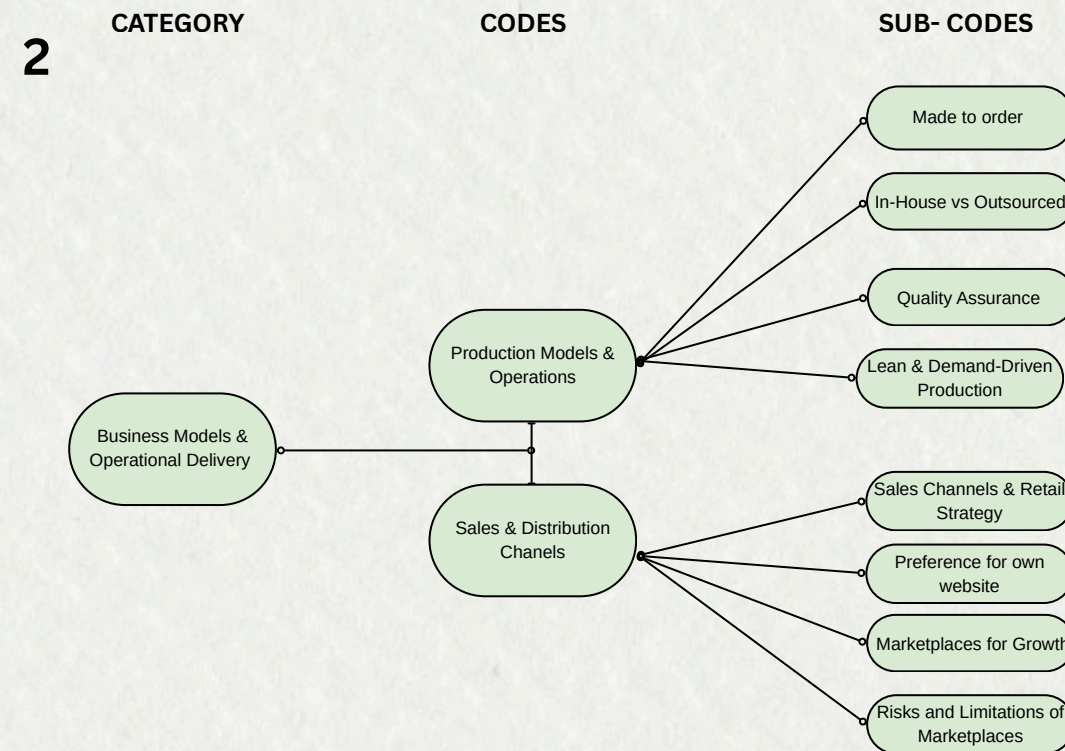
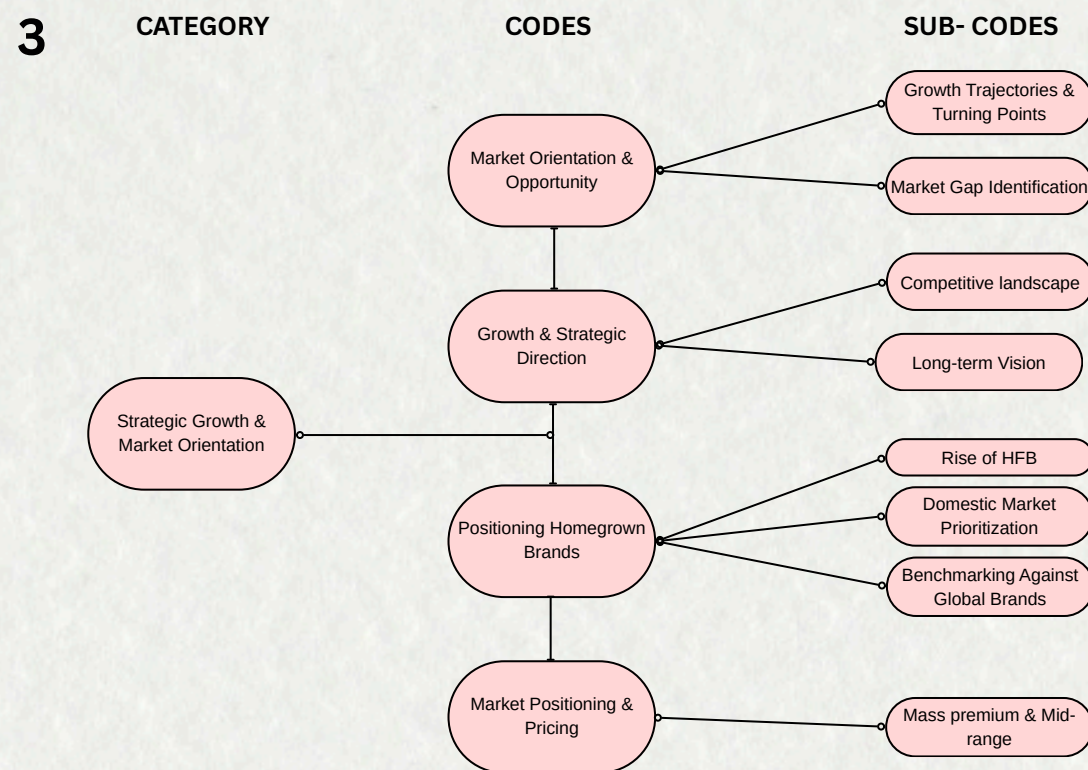
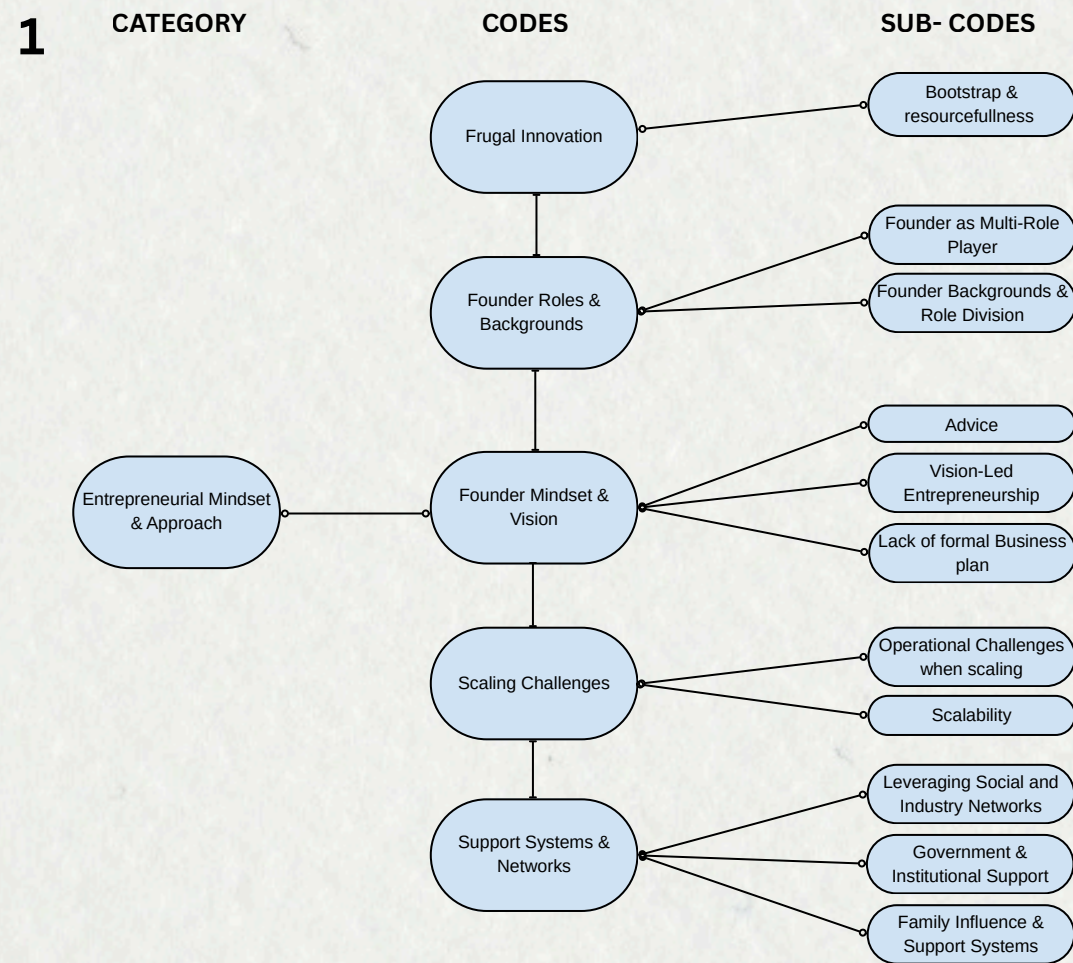
The table introduces the **nine founders** who participated in the study, each representing a homegrown fashion brand in its early growth stage.

While they shared many common challenges, their stories also reveal distinct milestones, including a brand that appeared on **Shark Tank** and now sells across major e-commerce platforms in India, another that has been featured in multiple **magazines**, and one that has hosted several **international pop-ups**.



P9

Participant ID	Interview Mode	Years in Operation	Number of employees	Brand category	Internationalisation Status
P1	Online	5 years	25	Western	Intending to pursue
P2	Online	2 Years	9	Western	Actively pursuing
P3	Online	4 years	6	Western	Exploring
P4	Online	4 years	3	Western	Exploring
P5	Online	1 ½ - 2 years	11	Western & Indo-Western	Not pursuing
P6	Online	4 years	19	Indo-Western	Indirect international presence
P7	Online	4 years	16	Western & Indo-Western	Actively pursuing
P8	In-person	2 Years (Rebranded) 4 years	21	Western	International to domestic
P9	Online	3 years	5	Western	Actively pursuing



FINDINGS & ANALYSIS ✨

The founders' journeys show that homegrown fashion brands in India often grow from passion and improvisation rather than formal plans. Many started small on Instagram, **bootstrapped with savings**, and relied on family or peer networks to bridge gaps. Trial and error, frugal innovation, and **taking on multiple roles** became both survival strategies and creative foundations.

As brands matured, choices around production, sales, and consumer engagement reflected the same balancing act.

Founders protected quality through **in-house production**, built visibility on Instagram, and adapted to **diverse consumer expectations** while eyeing international markets. Ambition to expand globally was strong, but **financial, logistical, and regulatory hurdles** meant growth was gradual, shaped more by adaptability and authenticity than rapid scale.

RECOMMENDATION

for emerging designers

Capital & Funding

Pursue MSME loans, incubators, and government schemes instead of relying only on family support.

Management & Operations

Pair creative founders with business minds and use rolling 12-month plans to stay agile.

Consumer Engagement

Host pop-ups, feedback sessions, and co-creation events to refine designs and build loyalty.

Production Strategy

Begin with made-to-order to reduce risk and gradually shift core pieces to in-house production.



Competition & Positioning

Differentiate through experience, customisation, and inclusivity that fast fashion cannot match.

Distribution

Prioritise your own website while using marketplaces like Myntra or Nykaa for visibility.

Target Market

Build for Indian body diversity, cultural preferences, and aspirational yet price-sensitive buyers.

Sales & Marketing

Balance performance ads with storytelling and educate consumers on craftsmanship and slow fashion.

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Thank you

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