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Brand Identity and Founder Dependence in Indian Designer Labels: A Multiple-Case Study

Dr. Sanjay Kumar,
Assistant Professor, Fashion Management Studies, National Institute of Fashion Technology
Email id: sanjay.kumar@nift.ac.in

Dr. Rajeev Malik,
Professor, Fashion Management Studies, National Institute of Fashion Technology
Email id: Rajeev.malik@nift.ac.in

Abstract

Purpose. Indian designer labels draw much of their meaning from the person who founded them. This paper asks what actually carries a designer brand's identity, and how that carrier shapes positioning, differentiation and extension.

Design/methodology/approach. A qualitative multiple-case study of three contrasting Indian designer brands: Rohit Bal (heritage couture, founder deceased in 2024), House of Masaba (contemporary prêt and lifestyle, founder-led with corporate backing) and Sunita Shekhawat (Jaipur craft-led luxury jewellery, family house). Each case was analysed with Aaker's Brand Identity System and Kapferer's Brand Identity Prism, supplemented by points-of-parity/points-of-difference analysis, extension-fit assessment and an applied mock campaign. Cases were then compared through cross-case pattern matching. Evidence is secondary: brand-owned channels, press, retailer listings and industry reports.

Findings. In all three cases the externalised facets of identity (physique, culture) are strong and codifiable, while the internalised facets (personality, relationship) are carried largely by the founder. The brands differ in where they are moving that weight: Rohit Bal from the founder to named artisans, House of Masaba from the founder to proprietary print codes, and Sunita Shekhawat from the founder to an institution (a craft museum). Generic claims of craft, heritage and celebrity work only as points of parity; points of difference come from a narrowly owned code tied to place or authorship. Extensions fit best when they carry that code.

Originality/value. The paper proposes a four-carrier model of designer-brand identity (person, code, craft, institution) and four propositions linking the dominant carrier to succession risk, scalability and extension fit. It offers practical guidance for founder-led fashion and jewellery houses in India.

Keywords: brand identity; designer brands; founder-led brands; Kapferer prism; Aaker brand identity; luxury; brand extension; Indian fashion; heritage craft

1. Introduction

Indian designer fashion and jewellery are rarely bought for function alone. A couture sherwani, a printed sari or a meenakari necklace is bought for a wedding, a milestone or a statement of taste, and what the buyer pays for is a set of meanings: heritage, craft, family standing and self-expression. Designer labels in this market therefore behave as cultural signifiers, and managing them is mainly a task of managing meaning over time (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009; Fionda & Moore, 2009).

In most Indian designer labels that meaning originates in one person. The designer's name is the brand name, the designer's biography is the brand story and the designer's taste is the brand's quality control. This concentration is an asset while the founder is present, visible and active. It becomes a liability when the founder dies, steps back, sells a stake to a corporate group or simply cannot be present at every touchpoint of a growing business. Thomson (2006) shows that attachment to a "human brand" is intense but contingent on the person, and Kapferer and Bastien (2009) note that luxury is vision-driven, with the vision usually owned by a creator.

Three recent events in the Indian market make the question practical rather than theoretical. Rohit Bal, one of India's best-known couturiers, presented his final collection, *Kaaynaat*, at Lakmé Fashion Week in October 2024 and died on 1 November 2024 (The Tribune, 2024); the house has since continued without him. House of Masaba sold a 51% stake to Aditya Birla Fashion and Retail Ltd. (ABFRL) in January 2022 for about ₹90 crore (Outlook, 2022), moving from an independent label to a scaled lifestyle brand while remaining strongly identified with its founder. Sunita Shekhawat, a first-generation Jaipur jeweller, opened a Museum of Meenakari Heritage in Jaipur in 2024, turning a founder's craft practice into an institution (The Week, 2024).

This paper uses these three brands as contrasting cases. It draws on three detailed brand-management studies of the labels (Tiwari et al., 2026; Pradhan et al., 2026; Mandal et al., 2026) and synthesises them through a common analytical frame. The central question is simple: **when a designer brand's meaning starts in one person, what carries it forward, and what does that choice mean for positioning, differentiation and extension?**

The paper is organised as follows. Section 2 reviews the literature on designer and luxury brand identity, positioning and extension. Sections 3 and 4 state the research gap and objectives. Section 5 describes the method. Section 6 reports the three case analyses, and Section 7 compares them and develops a four-carrier model with research propositions. Sections 8 and 9 set out implications, limitations and conclusions.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Designer and luxury brand identity

Brand identity is the set of meanings a firm seeks to create and maintain, while brand image is what consumers actually hold in memory (Aaker, 1996; Keller, 1993). In designer fashion the two are joined by the designer's signature. Bourdieu and Delsaut (1975) describe the couturier's *griffe* as a form of symbolic capital that transfers from the creator to the object. Kawamura (2005) adds that the status of "designer" is socially constructed through fashion weeks, media and institutions. Fionda and Moore (2009) identify designer signature, heritage, product integrity and consistent

communication as core components of luxury fashion brands, and Kapferer and Bastien (2009) argue that luxury brands are driven by a creator's vision rather than by customer research.

2.2 Aaker's Brand Identity System

Aaker (1996) separates a **core identity**, the few enduring associations that survive extension into new categories, from an **extended identity** that adds texture. The system reads identity through four perspectives: brand as product, organisation, person and symbol. Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000) link identity to a value proposition with functional, emotional and self-expressive benefits, and to the brand–customer relationship. The model is strategic and owner-oriented: it asks what the manager wants the brand to stand for.

2.3 Kapferer's Brand Identity Prism

Kapferer (2012) models identity through six facets: physique, personality, culture, relationship, reflection and self-image. Physique, relationship and reflection are **externalised** (socially visible); personality, culture and self-image are **internalised** (felt). The prism is chiefly diagnostic because it exposes imbalance between facets. It has been applied to fashion and craft brands to compare intended identity with perceived image (Ross & Harradine, 2011).

2.4 Positioning, distinctiveness and differentiation

Positioning requires a frame of reference, points of parity (POPs) that make the brand a credible member of its category, and points of difference (PODs) that are relevant, deliverable and distinctive (Keller, 1993; Keller, Sternthal & Tybout, 2002). Romaniuk (2018) separates differentiation (being different) from distinctiveness (being quickly recognised through owned assets such as colours, motifs and names). Holt (2004) argues that iconic brands carry a cultural myth rooted in a place or a social tension.

2.5 Heritage, authenticity and human brands

Heritage is a managed asset built from track record, longevity, core values and symbols (Urde, Greyser & Balmer, 2007), and it supports loyalty and premium pricing (Wiedmann et al., 2011). Authenticity in luxury is constructed through commitment to craft, ties to place and the downplaying of commercial motive (Beverland, 2005), and is perceived through continuity, credibility, integrity and symbolism (Morhart et al., 2015). Thomson (2006) shows that consumers form strong attachments to human brands, but that these depend on the person's availability. Dion and Arnould (2011) show how luxury retailers build charisma through art and museum-like settings, which offers one route to institutionalising a creator's aura.

2.6 Brand extension

Extensions are evaluated through perceived fit with the parent brand and parent-brand quality (Aaker & Keller, 1990). Völckner and Sattler (2006) add marketing support and retailer acceptance, and Sattler et al. (2010) link these drivers to extension price premiums. In luxury, fit and hedonic value are especially important (Albrecht et al., 2013), and Keller (2009) warns that luxury growth trades accessibility against exclusivity.

3. Research Gap

The literature above leaves four gaps that this paper addresses.

1. **Single-brand application.** Aaker's and Kapferer's models are usually applied to one brand at a time and used descriptively. They are rarely used comparatively to diagnose *which* facets of identity depend on a founder and which are already codified.
2. **Western luxury bias.** Most work on designer and luxury identity draws on European houses (Fionda & Moore, 2009; Kapferer & Bastien, 2009). Indian designer labels, where craft clusters, regional heritage and wedding consumption dominate, are under-studied.
3. **Succession treated as a CEO problem.** Human-brand research (Thomson, 2006) explains attachment to a person but does not say what should replace the person in a brand's identity system. The options (codified design language, artisans, institutions) have not been compared.
4. **Extension separated from identity.** Extension-fit studies (Aaker & Keller, 1990; Albrecht et al., 2013) measure fit between categories, but seldom ask how the *carrier* of a brand's identity determines which extensions will fit.

No study we are aware of compares a heritage couture house, a contemporary prêt-to-lifestyle brand and a craft-led jewellery house in India on these questions using a common framework.

4. Research Objectives

The study pursues five objectives:

1. To decode the brand identity of three Indian designer labels (Rohit Bal, House of Masaba, Sunita Shekhawat) using Aaker's Brand Identity System and Kapferer's Brand Identity Prism.
2. To evaluate each brand's positioning and competitive differentiation through frame of reference, points of parity and points of difference.
3. To assess each brand's extensions for fit with its core identity.
4. To compare the three cases and identify what carries brand identity in each, and how dependent that identity is on the founder.
5. To derive a conceptual model and testable propositions, and to illustrate them through the applied campaigns developed for each brand.

These objectives translate into following two research questions.

- **RQ1:** Which facets of designer-brand identity are founder-dependent, and which are codified?
- **RQ2:** How does the dominant identity carrier shape differentiation and extension fit?

5. Methodology

5.1 Research design

The study uses a qualitative, exploratory **multiple-case design** (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2018). Case research suits "how" and "why" questions about contemporary phenomena where the boundary between the brand and its context is not clear. A multiple-case design allows replication logic: patterns that recur across contrasting cases are more credible than those found in one.

5.2 Case selection

Cases were selected purposively for **theoretical contrast** rather than representativeness. All three are eponymous, founder-originated Indian designer brands with strong craft or design signatures, but they differ on category, founder status and ownership (Table 1).

Table 1. Profile of the three cases

Dimension	Rohit Bal	House of Masaba	Sunita Shekhawat
Category	Heritage couture, bridal and menswear	Contemporary prêt, bridal, beauty and lifestyle	Luxury fine jewellery (meenakari, polki, enamel)
Founded	1990 (label)	2009	1996, Jaipur
Founder status	Died 1 Nov 2024; house continues	Active; public persona (Netflix series *Masaba Masaba*, 2020)	Active; next generation involved
Ownership	Founder-family house	51% held by ABFRL since 2022	Family-run house
Signature code	Kashmiri floral and Mughal motifs, ivory–black–wine palette, theatrical runway	Proprietary graphic prints (cow, camera, palm), saturated colour, wit	Modern meenakari, unconventional enamel palettes, French enamelling
Competitive set analysed	Manish Malhotra, Tarun Tahiliani, Anamika Khanna, Rahul Mishra	LABEL Ritu Kumar, Papa Don't Preach	Sabyasachi Jewellery, Viren Bhagat, Hanut Singh, Zoya
Applied campaign	*TAALEEM* (with Jaipur Rugs)	*Stick With Her* (women's hockey)	*Song of the River* (Ganga collection)

5.3 Data sources

Evidence is entirely **secondary** and was compiled in three underlying studies prepared in 2026 (Tiwari et al., 2026; Pradhan et al., 2026; Mandal et al., 2026). Sources include brand-owned websites and social media, designer interviews, fashion and business press (for example Vogue India, Business Today, The Tribune, FashionNetwork, ETBrandEquity), multi-brand retailer listings, company announcements (for example ABFRL's 2022 stake acquisition, reported in Outlook, 2022) and industry reports (for example IMARC Group, 2025). Each brand claim was tied to a documented source; analyst inference was labelled as such.

5.4 Analytical procedure

Analysis proceeded in four stages:

1. **Within-case identity analysis.** Each brand was coded against Aaker's four perspectives (product, organisation, person, symbol), its core and extended identity, and Kapferer's six facets.
2. **Positioning and differentiation.** For each brand, a frame of reference was defined and associations were classified as category POPs, competitive POPs or PODs, tested against relevance, deliverability and distinctiveness.

3. **Extension fit.** Existing and proposed extensions were rated qualitatively (high / moderate / low) on image, product and target-market fit with the core identity.
4. **Cross-case synthesis.** Facet-level findings were placed side by side and compared through pattern matching (Yin, 2018) to identify the dominant identity carrier in each case and to derive propositions.

Figure 1 summarises the framework. Ratings are qualitative analyst judgements; no primary consumer data were collected.

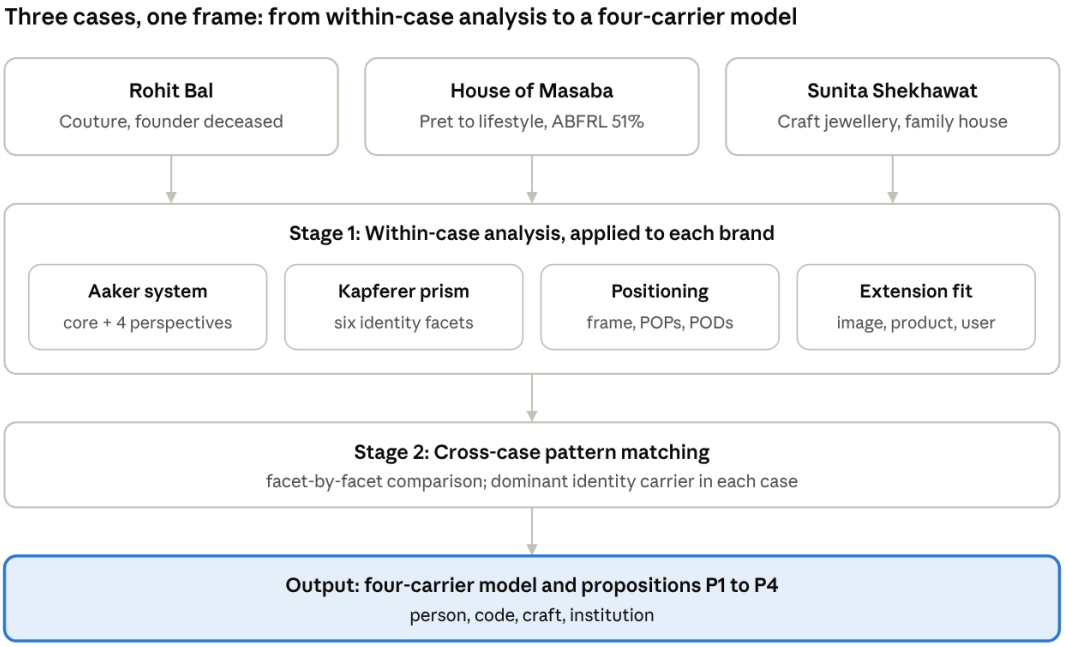


Figure 1. Research framework of the study

Figure 1. Research framework. Each brand passes through the same four lenses before the cases are compared.

6. Work Done: Case Analyses

6.1 Case A: Rohit Bal — a founder-brand facing succession

Identity. Rohit Bal (1961–2024), a Kashmiri Pandit from Srinagar trained at NIFT, built an eponymous label from 1990 on Kashmiri floral and Mughal-court codes. The core identity reconstructed by Tiwari et al. (2026) has four elements: **Kashmir** (origin and myth: "Whatever I am today, it's all Kashmir"), the **lotus** (the most ownable motif), **velvet** (tactile heritage luxury) and **poetry** (the verbal and theatrical register). The proposed brand essence is "Kashmir's floral poetry, staged as theatre." Recurring codes include the lotus, peacock and chinar leaf, an ivory–black–wine palette, and zardozi, kasab and aari embroidery. Runways such as *Gulbagh* (2014, about 100 models at the Qutub Minar) acted simultaneously as product launch, advertisement and cultural event.

Prism diagnosis. The externalised facets are strong and codifiable: physique is highly recognisable and reflection (the culturally confident connoisseur) is aspirational. Culture (Kashmir, craft revival) is the stable anchor. The internalised facets were fragile: personality

("Gudda," the warm, theatrical host) and relationship (host and patron) were embodied by Bal himself. No public identity guideline existed, so identity was held tacitly in the founder's judgement.

Positioning and differentiation. Within a competitive set of Manish Malhotra (cinema glamour), Tarun Tahiliani (drape and construction), Anamika Khanna (contemporary layering) and Rahul Mishra (art-led craft with global legitimacy), Rohit Bal occupies the heritage-opulent position almost alone. Hand embroidery is a point of parity; the point of difference is the specific Kashmir–nature–poetry narrative and strong menswear. Its weakest dimensions relative to Mishra are purpose visibility and global legitimacy, and the founder as "face" can no longer serve as a point of difference.

Extensions. Culture-carrying extensions fit best: the Good Earth home line and artisan programmes with Usha Silai rate *strong*; Balance (prêt) and jewellery capsules rate *moderate to strong*; denim and a short-lived children's line rate *weak.*

Applied campaign. *TAALEEM* is built on the Kashmiri *taalim*, a coded script that lets weavers reproduce a master's design knot by knot when the designer is absent. The campaign proposes a Rohit Bal × Jaipur Rugs collection of 75 numbered rugs, woven only in Kashmir under the GI label (QR-coded since 2022), with weavers named on every rug and paid a royalty. Its logic: **move the personality facet from the founder to named artisans.**

6.2 Case B: House of Masaba — a founder-brand scaled through codes

Identity. Masaba Gupta founded her label in 2009 at 19 after studying at SNDT Women's University and debuting through Lakmé Fashion Week's Gen Next platform (Pradhan et al., 2026). The core identity is the "Queen of Prints," fuss-free luxury and artful cultural fusion, with the essence "Irreverent Indian Pride." Proprietary graphic motifs (cow, camera, palm), saturated colour and witty naming work as distinctive assets in Romaniuk's (2018) sense: recognisable without a logo.

Prism diagnosis. Physique, personality, culture and self-image are closely aligned: the prints express the same irreverence as the founder's public persona. The relationship facet is described as "a friend you follow, not a house you revere." The founder's visibility is amplified by the Netflix series *Masaba Masaba* (2020), which blurred founder, character and brand. The tension is in reflection: as the brand moves into bridal couture (*Chardi Kala*, 2026) and 18-carat fine jewellery with Amrapali (2025), it must address an older, higher-spending buyer without losing its wit.

Positioning and differentiation. In the ₹5,000–₹45,000 designer prêt category, House of Masaba is rated the most differentiated label against LABEL Ritu Kumar and Papa Don't Preach. Its PODs are proprietary print IP, auteur founder equity and high category scalability through digital printing. LABEL Ritu Kumar is rated least differentiated, because generic paisley and block prints place it within reach of high-street imitation (the "diffusion-line trap").

Extensions. Extensions rate strong because the code travels: LoveChild beauty (*very strong* on image and target fit, low category overlap), The Masaba Bride (*strong*), fine jewellery with Amrapali (*strong*) and Masaba Man (*moderate to strong*). ABFRL's 51% stake (2022) supplies the scale.

Applied campaign. *Stick With Her* responds to India's women's hockey gold at the 2026 Asian Games (Business Today, 2026). Its creative leap is that a hockey stick in profile resembles a paisley. It combines an eight-look prêt capsule (₹16,000–₹32,000), a ₹499 LoveChild lip shade as an entry point and a pledge of 2,028 hockey kits to girls in Jharkhand before the 2028 Olympics. Its logic: **let the print code carry the brand into a new cultural territory.**

6.3 Case C: Sunita Shekhawat — a founder-brand institutionalised through craft

Identity. Sunita Shekhawat, a first-generation jeweller, began in Jaipur in 1996 and is presented by the house as "the Modern Meenakar" (Mandal et al., 2026). The core identity is Jaipur meenakari reimagined for modern luxury: enamel on gold with uncut polki and coloured gemstones, unconventional enamel palettes (pastel pink, navy, white, black) and French techniques such as plique-à-jour, champlevé and basse-taille. Pieces can take six to ten months, and reversible designs are finished on both sides.

Prism diagnosis. Physique (enamel, colour, reversible pieces) and culture (Jaipur, revival of meenakari) are the strongest facets. The relationship is personalised and appointment-led, framed around heirlooms; reflection is the culturally aware connoisseur. Unlike Case A, the founder's personality has already been partly converted into an institution: the **Museum of Meenakari Heritage** at Shekhawat Haveli, curated by jewellery historian Dr Usha R. Balakrishnan and opened in 2024, presents archival reproductions alongside the brand's own work. The next generation (Niharika and Digvijay Shekhawat) is involved in the business.

Positioning and differentiation. Against Sabyasachi Jewellery, Viren Bhagat and Hanut Singh, the analysis classifies luxury quality, craftsmanship, founder authorship, exclusivity and "Indian heritage" as category or competitive POPs. The only defensible POD is the combination of **modern mastery of Jaipur meenakari, a distinctive enamel colour language, and a museum–atelier experience** that turns craft knowledge into contemporary heirlooms.

Extensions. Existing extensions are mostly line extensions (Contemporary, Heritage, French Enamel, High Jewellery, Men's Jewellery under the *Mhaaro* campaign) plus an adjacent category (Objets d'Art) and an experiential extension (the museum). The proposed **Ganga Collection** is a line extension with high identity, product and craft fit: it adds a new narrative, not a new category.

Applied campaign. *Song of the River* interprets the Ganga's journey (Origin, Flow, Confluence, Expansion, Continuity, Delta, Biodiversity) through meenakari and enamel. It proposes a six-month launch budget of ₹10.76 crore before GST, with a launch at Namo Ghat, experiences at Neemrana Fort and Taj Falaknuma Palace, a Vogue India feature and airport out-of-home. About ₹7.05 crore of this is tied to celebrity talent, which the source study itself flags as the main financial constraint. Its logic: **extend the narrative while the craft code and the institution carry the brand.**

7. Cross-Case Findings and Discussion

7.1 Facet-level comparison

Table 2 places the three prism diagnoses side by side. Ratings summarise the source studies and are qualitative.

Table 2. Cross-case comparison of identity, positioning and extension

Dimension	Rohit Bal	House of Masaba	Sunita Shekhawat
Physique	Very strong: lotus, chinar, velvet, ivory–black–wine	Very strong: proprietary prints, saturated colour	Very strong: enamel colour, polki, reversible pieces
Personality	Strong, but embodied in the founder ("Gudda")	Strong, mirrors the founder (bold, witty, candid)	Refined, artistic; founder plus Creator/Sage archetype
Culture	Very strong: Kashmir, Mughal court, craft revival	Strong: contemporary, irreverent Indianness	Very strong: Jaipur meenakari tradition
Relationship	Moderate: host and patron, carried by the founder	Strong: "a friend you follow"	Strong: appointment-led, heirloom-oriented
Reflection	Culturally confident connoisseur	Modern, expressive Indian woman (now widening)	Discerning luxury connoisseur
Self-image	"I wear living art rooted in my culture"	"Modern, Indian, unafraid to stand out"	"I recognise craft and express individuality"
Most defensible POD	Kashmir–nature–poetry narrative staged as theatre	Proprietary print IP plus auteur founder voice	Modern meenakari mastery plus museum–atelier experience
Parity, not difference	Hand embroidery, celebrity wearers	Price band, omnichannel retail	Craftsmanship, exclusivity, "Indian heritage"
Best-fit extensions	Home (Good Earth), artisan programmes	Beauty (LoveChild), bridal, fine jewellery	Line extensions, collectibles, museum programming
Main identity risk	Founder loss; tacit, uncodified identity	Key-person risk; prestige stretch dulls wit	Generic "heritage craft" language; over-extension

7.2 Key findings

F1. Externalised facets are codifiable; internalised facets depend on the founder. In all three brands physique and culture are the strongest facets, and they can be written down, archived and reproduced. Personality and relationship, by contrast, were produced largely by the founder. This answers RQ1 and is consistent with human-brand theory (Thomson, 2006): what consumers attach to most intensely is also what is least transferable.

F2. Generic heritage claims are parity, not difference. Craft, heritage, exclusivity and celebrity appear in every brand's competitive set. Each brand's defensible POD is narrower: a place-bound narrative (Kashmir), an owned visual grammar (Masaba's prints) or a specific technique made visible through an institution (meenakari and the museum). This supports Keller et al. (2002) and Romaniuk (2018): distinctiveness comes from owned assets, not from category virtues.

F3. The brands move identity weight to different carriers. Each case responds to founder dependence by shifting weight to a different carrier (Figure 2). Rohit Bal moves personality to **craft**, by naming and paying artisans. House of Masaba moves it to **code**, letting proprietary prints carry recognition across categories while ABFRL supplies scale. Sunita Shekhawat moves it to an **institution**, a museum that gives the craft authority independent of any single person, much as Dion and Arnould (2011) describe luxury charisma assembled through art and museum settings.

F4. The carrier predicts which extensions fit. Extensions succeed when they carry the brand's dominant carrier. Code-carried Masaba extends widely, even into beauty, because the print transfers to almost any surface. Craft-carried Rohit Bal fits best in culture-carrying categories such as home textiles and rugs, and poorly in denim. Institution- and craft-carried Sunita Shekhawat fits best in line extensions and experiential programming, and the Ganga Collection adds narrative rather than category. This extends Aaker and Keller's (1990) notion of fit from category similarity to **carrier transferability**, answering RQ2.

7.3 The four-carrier model and propositions

The findings suggest that designer-brand identity is carried by four vehicles: the **person** (founder), the **code** (an owned design language), the **craft** (artisans and technique) and the **institution** (archive, museum or corporate structure). Founder-originated brands begin with the person and, as they mature, must shift weight to one or more of the other three.

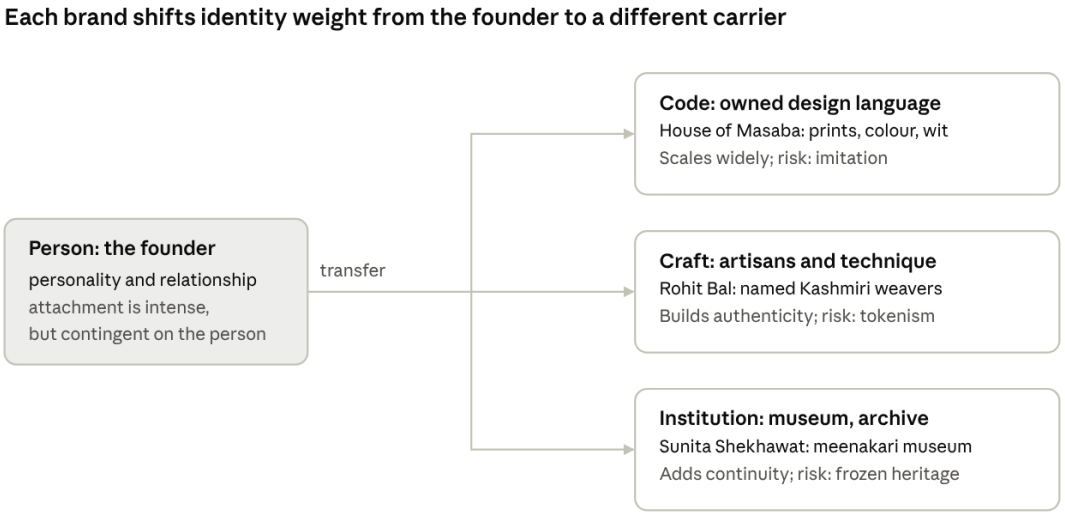


Figure 2. The four-carrier model of designer-brand identity

Figure 2. The four-carrier model. Each case moves weight from the founder to the carrier it relies on most; each carrier brings a different strength and risk.

Four propositions follow for future testing:

- **P1.** The greater the share of a designer brand's personality and relationship facets carried by the founder alone, the greater the loss of perceived authenticity when the founder exits.
- **P2.** Brands whose dominant carrier is a codified design language (code) achieve higher category scalability than brands whose dominant carrier is craft or institution.
- **P3.** Brands whose dominant carrier is craft or institution achieve stronger perceived authenticity and price premium, but narrower extension fit.
- **P4.** An extension is evaluated more favourably when it carries the parent brand's dominant identity carrier, independent of category similarity.

8. Implications, Limitations and Future Research

8.1 Theoretical implications

The study makes three contributions. First, it shows that Aaker's and Kapferer's models are more useful **comparatively** than descriptively: placed side by side, they reveal which facets are codified and which are held by one person. Second, it extends human-brand theory (Thomson, 2006) from attachment to **succession**, naming three non-human carriers that can take over from the founder. Third, it reframes extension fit as **carrier transferability** (P4), linking identity theory to extension research (Aaker & Keller, 1990; Völckner & Sattler, 2006).

8.2 Managerial implications

1. **Codify before you need to.** Founder-led houses should write down their identity system (motif library, palette, fabric or material rules, tone of voice) while the founder is present. Rohit Bal shows the cost of tacit identity.
2. **Choose a carrier deliberately.** Code scales but invites imitation, so it needs design registration and frequent motif renewal. Craft builds authenticity but must be tied to real credit and money to avoid tokenism. Institutions add continuity but must stay alive through new work, not only archives.
3. **Claim narrow differences.** Craft, heritage and celebrity are entry tickets in Indian designer fashion and jewellery. Positioning should name the specific place, technique or visual grammar the brand owns.
4. **Extend along the carrier.** Before extending, ask whether the new category can carry the brand's dominant carrier (the print, the artisan's hand, the institution's authority).
5. **Make provenance verifiable.** Tools such as GI labels with QR codes, named artisans and museum documentation turn authenticity claims into evidence, which matters to younger, more conscious luxury buyers.

8.3 Limitations

- Evidence is secondary. No interviews or consumer surveys were conducted, and consumer personas in the source studies are analyst constructs.
- Facet ratings, positioning judgements and extension-fit scores are qualitative and were made by the source-study authors.
- Three cases support analytical, not statistical, generalisation (Yin, 2018).
- Revenue data for Rohit Bal and Sunita Shekhawat are not publicly disclosed, so commercial performance could not be compared.

- The three campaigns are academic proposals; their budgets, prices and targets are illustrative, not brand commitments.

8.4 Future research

P1–P4 can be tested through consumer surveys measuring attachment to founder versus house, perceived authenticity (Morhart et al., 2015) and extension evaluation. Longitudinal tracking of Rohit Bal's post-founder collections (*Kash-Gul*, 2025; *Dastkar*, 2026) would show whether craft can carry personality over time. Comparative work with other Indian houses (for example Ritu Kumar, Sabyasachi, Tarun Tahiliani) and with international post-founder houses would test the model's boundaries.

9. Conclusion

This paper compared three Indian designer brands that began with one person: a couture house that has lost its founder, a prêt-to-lifestyle brand scaled with corporate capital, and a craft-led jewellery house that has built a museum. Applying Aaker's Brand Identity System and Kapferer's Brand Identity Prism to all three showed a common pattern. The visible facets of identity (physique and culture) are strong and can be codified, while personality and relationship depend on the founder.

The brands differ in what they ask to carry the brand next. Rohit Bal turns to craft and named artisans, House of Masaba to an owned design code, and Sunita Shekhawat to an institution. Each choice brings its own strength (authenticity, scalability, continuity) and its own risk (tokenism, imitation, frozen heritage). It also shapes which extensions will fit. The four-carrier model and propositions P1–P4 offer a framework for testing these relationships with primary data. For managers of founder-led labels, the practical lesson is to decide early, and deliberately, who or what will carry the brand when the founder no longer can.

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