Dutch identity in fashion: Co-evolution between brands and consumers
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CHAPTER 9

G-STAR: A GLOBAL PLAYER FROM HOLLAND
9.1 INTRODUCTION

Started under the name Gapstar in 1989, G-Star is recognised as one of the most successful Dutch fashion enterprises worldwide nowadays. Boasting steady double-digit growth over the past twenty years and annual turnovers of over a billion dollars (since 2006), the brand works with an intriguing mix of brand savviness and clever marketing tactics, product innovation and commerce (TextilWirtschaft 2010: 16). Worthy of attention is the company’s strategic positioning. First, since the mid-1990s G-Star has become known for a product mix of innovative denim pieces at one end, and fairly commercial, casual designs at the other. Second, the company boasts an interesting marketing mix, composed of traditional billboard advertising, product placement, and more advanced branding strategies. Third, the firm embraces a consistently commercial market approach stretching to all areas of the business model. The sum of these thoughts produces an interesting (and occasionally contradictory) brand identity with global appeal.

Within this chapter the brand’s Dutch clientele will be examined, based on a one-month period of research at different outlets across the country. As the results suggest, G-Star attracts a wide range of consumer types. Some are fashion-conscious and searching for fashion-forward denim products; some look for casual understated everyday pieces; others are attracted to the brand for functional or quality reasons; and yet others are drawn to the products for their status-differentiating value or as markers of group identity. In order to make sense of the firm’s relevance within these diverse consumption contexts, the following paragraphs are devoted to the brand’s structural set-up which is built around three key sites: product development, retail strategy, and branding.

9.2 (JUST) THE PRODUCT: BETWEEN HIGH STREET AND HIGH LINE

Since the mid-1990s G-Star has become known for its varied use of denim cloth. Credited with the first ever trousers created as a 3D design, head designer Pierre Morisset introduced the now classic ‘Elwood’ in 1996 as a wearable experiment in form and function, at once comfortable and fashionable, accessible and forward-thinking. Sold over 10 million times worldwide, the design was inspired by a water-soaked biker pant. With a shape based on a three-dimensional fit following the proportions of the human body instead of a pair of symmetrical trouser legs, the design meant a radical break with the traditional 5-pocket jeans (TextilWirtschaft 2007b: 96). To this day the model remains one of the brand’s top-selling items, warranting steady sales rates and a counter assurance for more experimental designs (Querfurth 2006: 14; TextilWirtschaft 2005: 48).

Under the motto ‘Just the Product’ the firm started to pioneer the use of raw and dark denim in the mid-1990s, and during the following years extended its scope of products towards a variety of styles. The product slate is composed of nine individual clothing lines nowadays. Seasonal is a regularly changing collection, composed of basics and cutting-edge pieces, an integrated approach navigating between leisure wear and fashion-forward looks. Coming in limited quantities with the goal to assert the firm’s position in the upscale denim segment, RAW Essentials is entirely made from Japanese and Italian selvedge denim, rich with innovative cuts, authentic details, and functional attributes. On a similar level, the Correct Line and New York RAW are programmes designed by Michel Keuper (formerly of high-end fashion duo Keupr/Van Bertm). RAW Sustainable seeks to tap into the current desire for sustainability while Laundry Army is a collection inspired by military apparel, featuring not denim but techno fabrics and utility-focused detailing. G-Star RAW by Marc Newson is an ongoing collaboration with Australian product designer Marc Newson. The collection is something of an outlier: featuring bright colours and an alternative take on the product philosophy, the collection is congruent with the house-style in terms of industrial clean aesthetics while the choice of colours and patterns or prints is distinguished from the company’s other products (Elle 2006: 122; Van Den Storm 2006). Added to that, the brand devotes individual collections to knitwear, jackets, and shoes (in collaboration with Stephen Palmer of Overland Shoes).

In all their diversity the interesting part is the product mix as a whole rather than the individual components. Coordinating a variety of styles, G-Star keeps a tight reign on its company and design philosophy, which binds together all the different threads. Product development in this context is turned into a collective play of creative design, marketing, promotion, and a smoothly running sales apparatus. According to CEO and stakeholder Jos van Tilburg, G-Star primarily acts as a supplier of what he calls ‘jeans casual’, seeking to tap into mid-range and upmarket customer bases alike (TextilWirtschaft 2007: 48). Geared towards a variety of consumption interests, brand identity and products are at once fashion-oriented and accessible, commercial and exclusive, innovative and traditional.

9.3 RETAIL CONCEPT: MONOLITHIC HOUSE-STYLE

Anno 2012 G-Star is established in Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Hong Kong, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, UK, USA. Maintaining 300 monobrand stores across the globe, all of which are run by franchisees, and over 3500 points of sale in 65 countries (multi-brand jeans stores, individual retailers) G-Star keeps expanding globally, with
Ensuring a consistent brand image, G-Star has its own in-house design team, comprising more than 40 people who are responsible for outfitting the stores and creating the ‘riff’ trademark look and atmosphere. Casual and stylish, functional and pure, the look and feel of the stores is supposed to capture the driving design ideals of the brand. In all its creative output, G-Star looks for coherence across the different facets of the brand proposition, with the same values (sober, neutral, rough, functional, no-frills, casual) resurfacing in a number of variations.

### 9.4 MARKETING/BRANDING: ALTERNATIVE STRATEGIES

With a distinct brand proposition across segments and lifestyle groups, G-Star’s market orientation and scope are largely mid-range, consistently international, and geared towards different target audiences. Working according to a thoroughly designed marketing strategy, the branding formula is a mix of signature style, interdisciplinary projects, and media savviness. Retail environments, advertising campaigns, and products all follow the same look in grey scales and muted colours with a seamless transition from one to the next. Until a few years ago the campaigns were all conceived in black-and-white, the campaigns feature rather obvious choices like Hollywood actresses Liv Tyler or model Elettra Wiedemann, as well as more unexpected ones like independent-cinema icon Vincent Gallo, chess grandmaster Magnus Carlsen or actress Clémence Poésy.

Next to PR activities directly linked to commercial interests, the company has a history in alternative branding concepts. Every new shop opening is accompanied by so-called ‘guerilla promotions’, resulting in women flaunting baroque-inspired denim dresses on the streets of Milan for instance, or models lounging by a pool in Dubai dressed in swimsuits made of untreated denim (Hintz 2006: 29). Similarly, the RAW Chess Challenge was organised in 2010 as an event following the unprecedented hype around the campaign ‘g-star is a machine’. The concept behind the campaign was to create a global, multi-channel experience with virtually every area of operation – from advertising to logistics, from shop design to online retail – is dealt with in-house, attests to the fact that the company wants to retain complete control over the value-creation chain. By all accounts, G-Star comes across as an almost hermetic structure: whatever information is available seems carefully edited, while any more detailed requests are fended off by a well-trained communications department.

While G-Star undoubtedly works according to a set of innovative ideas, this position is clearly not warranted by creative chaos, informality, or a spontaneous and playful attitude around which part of G-Star’s image is orchestrated, with the company’s image being sophisticated and nuanced. Instead they claim that the main activities are rather obvious choices like Hollywood actresses Liv Tyler or model Elettra Wiedemann, as well as more unexpected ones like independent-cinema icon Vincent Gallo, chess grandmaster Magnus Carlsen or actress Clémence Poésy.

### 9.5 ‘G-STAR IS A MACHINE’

What is the importance of all this? Why is it crucial to go to greater lengths to explain G-Star’s product philosophy, retail concept, and branding strategy? If we want to understand how the company manages the exten
d from mass-market to more sophisticated styles, from New York Fashion Week to run-of-the-mill jeans outlets, it is critical to take the interlocking of all three dimensions into account. For one thing, the brand proposition is driven and defined by a strong sense of coherence. More importantly, though, the system behind these different dimensions is organised in a rigorous and professional manner with little left to chance. Indeed, the fact that virtually every area of operation – from advertising to logistics, from shop design to online retail – is dealt with in-house, attests to the fact that the company wants to retain complete control over the value-creation chain. By all accounts, G-Star comes across as an almost hermetic structure: whatever information is available seems carefully edited, while any more detailed requests are fended off by a well-trained communications department.

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### 9.6 G-STAR’S CONSUMERS?

Following the predominant brand narrative, the goods are not geared to one or more specific target audiences. Instead they claim that the main activities are focused on product development and accessibility. If we ignore the marketing puffery behind these allega
tions for a moment, the underlying idea helps us to understand how the company negotiates a set of di
erse consumption interests. To an extent, the stretch

Over a period of about 6 months supervisors and researchers of the project ‘Dutch Fashion Identity in a Globalised World’ tried to stimulate research activities and encourage G-Star to collaborate in the project. To our dismay, each of these at
ttempts was turned down on the grounds that the company, as a policy, does not allow external research in any kind of way.

A case in point, I just had a talk with someone who recently started working for G-Star. During the conversation the work

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1 Jos van Tilburg, cited in TextilWirtschaft 2007a: 31
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3 A case in point, I just had a talk with someone who recently started working for G-Star. During the conversation the working environment was described as a 'bubble' with little, if any, information going in and out. Furthermore, the talk revealed that G-Star’s corporate culture was streamlined and highly uniform.
Co-evolution between brands and consumers is explained by the fact that attention is divided between product-related, highly commercial in scope and style and others that are directed at a comparatively small target market.

In the best possible sense there is an air of ambivalence to G-Star’s brand identity. The somewhat concealed reputation of a supplier of cutting-edge denim wear helps justify a philosophy that first and foremost targets a fairly average clientele. One glance at the product policy makes clear that the main collections are mid-range, both in terms of pricing and of market approach. The bigger share of revenues rolls in by a product slate that is innocuous and rather conventional in style, i.e., slightly more adventurous than your everyday denim but still mostly commercial in style and message. Global presence and diversification across different retail concepts (franchising, multi-brand jeans stores, haberdasheries) help reinforce this position. At the other end, the firm’s upscale collections (New York Raw, Correct Line, Raw Essentials), presences at New York Fashion Week, and the forays into art and design help pitch to the profile to more distinguished and demanding types of consumers as well.

G-Star consistently builds its brand identity on a set of distinct yet unequal pillars. Some might be higher or lower, but all are defined by a set of core characteristics. Head designer Pierre Morisset calls this approach ‘democratisation of luxury’ (Textil/Wirtschaft 2006: 96). As a good Frenchman, he might have picked up that idea from Gilles Lipovetsky’s books that describe the increasing democratisation of the fashion and luxury-goods market. The bottom line, however, is that the brand successfully supplies a mass-market clientele with interesting and edgy products at affordable prices. According to Joos van Tilburg, much of the firm’s branding strategy is about promoting a certain mentality (Textil/Wirtschaft 2009: 33). As he claims, ‘It’s about a specific attitude. Dividing the market into clusters is an outdated model. There is neither a young consumer group nor a sporty one. The idea has run into clusters is an outdated model. There is neither a young consumer group nor a sporty one. The idea has run into clusters is an outdated model. There is neither a young consumer group nor a sporty one. The idea has run into clusters is an outdated model. There is neither a young consumer group nor a sporty one. The idea has run into clusters is an outdated model. There is neither a young consumer group nor a sporty one. The idea has run into clusters is an outdated model. There is neither a young consumer group nor a sporty one. The idea has run into clusters is an outdated model. There is neither a young consumer group nor a sporty one. The idea has run into clusters is an outdated model. There is neither a young consumer group nor a sporty one. The idea has run into clusters is an outdated model. There is neither a young consumer group nor a sporty one. The idea has run into clusters is an outdated model. There is neither a young consumer group nor a sporty one. The idea has run into clusters is an outdated model. There is neither a young consumer group nor a sporty one. The idea has run into clusters is an outdated model. There is neither a young consumer group nor a sporty one. The idea has run into clusters is an outdated model. There is neither a young consumer group nor a sporty one. The idea has run into clusters is an outdated model. There is neither a young consumer group nor a sporty one. The idea has run into clusters is an outdated model. There is neither a young

9.7.1 Methodology

Forced to adjust the research settings in a number of respects (as compared to the case studies on the market, the only way to collect data was from the outside. Ideally, the research would have been conducted inside the shops, complete with participant observation and a research protocol. Because this option was not possible, I spent several weeks in front of a brand’s boutiques, taking note of what was happening. The Hague, and ‘s-Hertogenbosch, completing questionnaires with consumers who had purchased one or more items. The method of data acquisition was chosen in an attempt to gain insight into consumer perceptions and the way specific attributes are connected to the brand. The questionnaires were composed of 12 Likert-scale items (4.3.2.Denim(-related) (iii)), with closed response options, one freely-associative item with 3 response options, and one open-choice item (3 out of 5 possible options).

The period of research produced a total of 120 questionnaires from various types of consumers. The comparatively small number had to do with a variety of factors. First, despite the fact that the research was scheduled during the summer months the weather conditions proved anything but conducive. (The simple truth being that no one is prepared to fill in a questionnaire in the driving rain.). Second, many consumers were reluctant to collaborate, which might have had to do with the fact that I was not able to function in an officially appointed position inside the shops. Third, for me as a researcher the new setting took time to get used to as well. Irritated by the fact that the results did not come as swiftly as desired, I was hard-pressed to think of better ways to approach consumers and convince them to participate in the project. In short, the research was not without its difficulties. In the end, however, it delivered a representative sample and pertinent results.

In an attempt to substantiate the results during the following months, I spent time inside the shops on the days I was observing being a consumer. The effort was guided first and foremost by the thought to get a better image of the consumers G-Star generally attracts and whether they were similar to those contained in my sample. As the visits made clear, the questionnaires were completed by largely the same types I would spot during my visits. These estimations did not by any means contend to be exhaustive or complete. Rather, the goals were to get a first-hand impression of the whereabouts and goings-on inside the shops, to be able to observe the behaviour of different consumers, and to put the findings into perspective as well as sharpen my own point of view.

9.7.2 One Consumer Group or More?

In the previous sections we have seen that G-Star presents a complex and intriguing case based on the fact that product profile and brand DNA are at once flexible and rather straightforward. It is sometimes said that the G-Star brand has made a rather effortless stretch possible between different consumer groups and their consumption preferences. While this might be true to some extent, such statements are never fully unbiased and contain a certain level of marketing lore and puffery. In the context of my own research I was therefore rather curious to find out to what extent the assumption of a homogeneous clientele would hold true, and based on what factors consumers actually connect with the brand.

Table 9.1 Coding Scheme for Consumer Responses - Value Connection Followed by Attributes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribute</th>
<th>Group 1</th>
<th>Group 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Touch</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
<td>46.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cool</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>46.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innovative</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>46.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the period of observation and the results from the questionnaires, the age variable appears an interesting one to look into. The findings do support the claim that G-Star attracts a wide variety of consumers from all kinds of social, professional, and cultural backgrounds. For the most part they were male, which is congruent with the brand’s general customer profile (Textil/Wirtschaft 2005: 47, Textil/Wirtschaft 2007a: 32). Some were teenagers, others students, others professionals, and very few even retired. That variety notwithstanding, across all four locations a relatively uniform pattern has emerged when it comes to the brand’s main audience position. in short, they aspire to a clothing style that is effortless stretch possible between different consumer groups and their consumption preferences. While this might be true to some extent, such statements are never fully unbiased and contain a certain level of marketing lore and puffery. In the context of my own research I was therefore rather curious to find out to what extent the assumption of a homogeneous clientele would hold true, and based on what factors consumers actually connect with the brand.
shows, in both groups we can identify a—presumably share a direct link to, the value on the one hand.

eral expectations. on the other hand, reliability might relates to the company’s clear-cut and distinguished brand identity, indicating a relation to consumers’ gen.

9.7.3 PURCHASE BEHAVIOUR AND BRAND INVOLVEMENT

In the previous section we have seen that by consumers across the two different age groups G-Star is perceived in slightly different ways. Further it has been said that different characteristics were assigned to the range of products in both groups, thus indicating different drivers in the purchase decision-making process. With these insights in mind, this section broadens the scope of analysis towards the purchase behaviour of G-Star’s consumers and their involvement with the brand.

The study’s most remarkable finding is the average buying behaviour of G-Star’s consumers. Item 9 (“On average, how many items do you purchase per visit?”) sought to determine the average number of purchases made per visit. Fig. 9.2 shows that the respondents in both groups tend to buy between 1 and 3 pieces per visit (Group 1: 72.09% / Group 2: 79.41%), while some indicated not to buy even one item per visit (Group 1: 7.20% / Group 2: 7.41%), while some indicated to visit an outlet about once a month. These findings concur with a number of aspects that have been discussed above: just like the consumption behaviour is moderate but steady, the visiting frequency is not exceptionally high but permanent. Furthermore, the results reflect a more general tendency in clothing retail, i.e., younger consumers will buy a larger number of basic pieces whereas the older ones might purchase on a less frequent basis but spend more money on the individual items.4

4 There is an interesting dimension to this aspect in the context of interactive online technology. Counting almost 46,000 members, G-Star’s Dutch News account, on the one hand, is proof of the brand’s popularity, but, more importantly, on the other allows insight into the fashion preferences of many young consumers. What we find there is that a) most of them own quite a substantial number of items, and b) that most of them opt for basics like T-shirts, jeans, jackets, or sweaters.
These findings are relevant in the context of brand identification and the degree to which name and image of the company have an impact on the purchase decision-making process. Item 6 (‘I like to purchase clothes from brands I can identify with’) meant to look into this dimension with respect to the question to what extent the purchase behaviour of G-Star’s consumers was influenced, not only by product-intrinsic properties (e.g., colour, style, cut, fit), but also by brand-specific attributes (e.g., brand identity, brand name, iconography). As Fig. 9.4 makes clear, in Group 2 we find a split distribution between 35.29% indicating they do not make their clothing purchases dependent on brand-specific attributes and 47.05% who confirmed the statement. In Group 1, by contrast, there is a positive relationship between purchase behaviour and brand involvement. 61.62% agreed with the statement whereas only 16.27% objected to it.

### 9.4 CLOTHING AND FASHION INVOLVEMENT

Looking at the results from item 2 (‘I am among the first in my circle of friends to buy a new fashion item when it appears’), which sought to relate the level of brand involvement to the purchase behaviour of consumers, we find an almost equal distribution in both age groups. As Fig. 9.5 shows, the results suggest a slightly negative tendency. In Group 1, 31.38% disagreed with the statement, while 24.41% agreed. The level of brand involvement is consequently not connected to their clothing purchases dependent on brand-specific attributes (e.g., brand identity, brand name, iconography). In Group 2, 44.11% disagreed, while 29.40% agreed. The level of brand involvement is consequently not connected to trend-driven buying behaviour. In other words, while G-Star’s consumers demonstrate high levels of brand awareness and a vested interest in clothing products, they do not qualify as early adopters in their peer groups (and otherwise).

These results are strongly supported by the findings from item 3 (‘I regularly buy fashion-related magazines’), which sought to test the level of media involvement. In literature a close connection is suggested between early adopters in fashion and the study of fashion magazines and related media (Phau and Lo 2004). Above we have seen that G-Star’s consumers qualify as followers rather than fashion innovators. Congruent with this assumption, the level of media involvement, as we assume the basis of fashion magazine readership, is considerably low. As Fig. 9.6 makes clear, the results indicate that journalistic writings and/or coverage of fashion-related topics constitute an insignificant referential framework for G-Star’s consumers.

Surprisingly, however, part of the brand’s audience uses websites and other Internet media to stay abreast of developments in fashion. As Fig. 9.7 demonstrates, in both groups we find a split distribution between one segment of the sample that appears largely uninvolved with web-related activities (Group 1: 47.67% / Group 2: 58.22%) and, at the other end of the spectrum, a large number of consumers (Group 1: 38.22% / Group 2: 44.11%) who use the Internet as a means to stay up to date with recent developments in the clothing sector.

In an effort to measure the level of fashion involvement as a potential connector in the consumer-brand relationship, the young generation that most recently gave rise to the latest fashion trends’) sought to explore the dimension of trend-motivated purchase behaviour. While part of the sample took a rather non-articulate stance, Fig. 9.8 shows that the majority of respondents synchronise their wardrobe with current trends in fashion. By and large, then, G-Star’s Dutch clientele has a vested interest in conforming to the latest developments in fashion. Rather than adopting a trend-averse attitude the respondents showed eagerness to keep in step with the times and compose their wardrobe in an adequate way.

There is an interesting dimension to these results when we consider the way G-Star seeks to distinguish itself as a producer of clothes that are timeless and individual—and thus largely independent from global fashion trends. Rather than looking at general developments in the market the company claims to focus on producing ‘classics’ (Querfurth 2006: 15). Marketing lore aside, this ambition is questionable, to some extent. By developing a clear-cut and recognisable signature the firm has arguably carved out a market position in its own right. In a similar vein, it is not too far-fetched to call an item like their ‘Elwood’ design a contemporary classic, seen that it still proves to be one of the brand’s most successful (and much-copied) products. The question is how many other products of similar quality the firm has been able to design and/or produce ever since.

Considering the brand’s sheer size and/or global expansion and product diversification, it seems rather unlikely that G-Star feeds the market with designs that are not in some way coordinated with current consumer demands and the firm’s global market orientation. We might therefore speak of timeliness in the sense that the majority of items suit the tastes of a global customer base, irrespective of national styles or a strong embrace of temporary fads. That, however, does not take away the fact that the firm in one way or another does assimilate global trends along general lines by translating them in the firm’s corporate style.5

Interesting in this context is the fact that, among the younger consumers, we find a similar distribution across the dimensions of fashion involvement and

5 A potent example of this is the now-defunct ‘Elwood 10’, thus adapting the design to ruling taste.
brand involvement. As Fig. 9.9 makes clear, fashion involvement (Item 1) and brand involvement (Item 6) are distributed in an almost identical manner. In view of the fact that we can identify almost equally high levels for both variables, we can conclude that G-Star is understood by its younger consumers as a fashionable and up-to-the-minute clothing brand.

Item 3 (‘I like to buy clothes with an outspoken look’) was constructed in an attempt to measure the level of clothing involvement that is distinguished from fashion involvement in the sense that it incorporates all kinds of clothing-related properties rather than exclusively fashion-specific ones. As we can see in Fig. 9.10, G-Star’s consumers showed considerably high levels of clothing involvement. 13.95% in group 1 and 17.64% in group 2 disagreed with the statement, 27.90% (group 1) and 23.52% (group 2) were neutral. with scores of 44.11% who strongly agree, 35.29% who agree, 17.64% who strongly disagree, and 13.95% who disagree. Item 7a (‘G-Star is typically Dutch’) addressed this question from a consumer perspective in order to test to what extent the findings were congruent with the ideas discussed above. As Fig. 9.11 shows, we are confronted with a split distribution. In Group 1, 43.02% of the respondents agreed with the statement, while 38.37% disagreed and 17.64% were neutral. In Group 2 we find a similar set with 44.11% who agreed, 35.29% who objected to the statement, and 17.64% who adopted a neutral stand. From a consumer point of view, then, it appears that there is no clear-cut answer to the question. To some extent this result might be owed to the fact that Dutchness in itself is a rather abstract and ambiguous concept, leading to confusion how to properly make sense of the question. Still, it is interesting to note that almost half of the sample in each group considers G-Star a typically Dutch brand.

9.8 TYPICALLY DUTCH?

In the context of Dutch fashion and its pertinent features G-Star is a somewhat peculiar case. On the one hand, the brand does not at first sight distinguish itself as a Dutch company. In fact, the primary association with the firm is that of internationality, if not neutrality. On the other hand, we saw in Chapter 5 that, from an expert point of view, hardly any fashion brand is considered more Dutch than G-Star – arguably, not so much in terms of style or brand image, but with respect to the company’s business approach. One of the main points in this regard was that G-Star offers innovative and distinct products that are international and mass-market in scope and style, brought to the market with a strong commercial drive. Marrying smart design and fresh ideas with business acumen, the combination results in a recognisable image, locally as well as internationally. Unfortunately, the vast majority regard the style of the products in their consumption profile. with modest fashion involvement, the company is more fashionable than many of its competitors in the same segment (e.g., Lee, Wrangler). At the same time, G-Star strikes a good balance between casual fashion and more understated styles: supplying the market with tasteful and interesting products at affordable prices, G-Star is attractive for people who wish to look up to date without making a committed and strong fashion statement, who trust to find products they like and that suit them. Nothing too fancy. But nothing drab or uninspired either. In other words: typically Dutch.

9.9 CONCLUSION

At the beginning of this chapter we have seen that G-Star is built around a detailed, well-edited, and heavily controlled company model. Branding and product philosophy are remarkable in the sense that they display a clean-cut and recognisable image, locally as well as globally. At the same time, it was shown that the firm’s image is by far not as innovative and experimental as is often claimed. In fact, we can assume that the majority of G-Star’s consumers are unaware of the firm’s more leftfield marketing strategies such as the Raw Chess Challenge or the Crosstour project discussed in section 9.4. Instead, its recognition value mainly depends on traditional approaches like large-scale billboard marketing and a well-defined visual identity.

In the ensuing analysis we have seen that both these aspects have critical relevance when it comes to the value connections of consumers and their identification with firm and product. G-Star’s Dutch consumers can be divided into two different groups. On the one hand we find a clientele younger than 30 years, on the other consumers between 30 and 50 years old. Although subject to variation, respondents from both groups make regular purchases from the brand. The younger consumers tend to choose the firm’s ‘innovative basics’, i.e., casual items with an interesting and somewhat edgy look. The older consumers demonstrate similar consumption preferences, but tend to include some of the more outspoken and fashion-oriented products in their consumption profile. With modest but steady purchasing rates, we can hardly speak of brand fans in the sense of strong emotional involvement. At the same time, G-Star’s logo prints and high profile are crucial components in the consumer-brand relation, so we can conclude that there is at least a passive sense of identification with the firm.

When we look at typically Dutch values, G-Star is a case in point as it supplies a mass-market consumer base with a product that is at once mid-range and fashionable, stylish but not extravagant. On average, the company is more fashionable than many consumers, irrespective of age, regarded the style as typically Dutch. This result is not altogether surprising considering that the firm’s principal aesthetics is based on characteristics like sobriety, matter-of-fact looks, and graphic elements. Those who disagreed with the statement indicated that the clothes were retailing all over the world and might just as well come from another country. Ironically, the way most respondents understood the firm’s international market orientation and product proposition contradicts the view of the experts. Whereas the latter deemed this aspect a determining feature of Dutch fashion, the former argued the opposite. The asymmetry might be explained by the fact that the experts looked at this dimension primarily from a business point of view, whereas consumers probably based their opinion on product-related features.