Dutch identity in fashion: Co-evolution between brands and consumers
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10.1 INTRODUCTION

Throughout this research I sought to explore the relationship between a number of Dutch fashion brands and their consumer groups. Studying the aspects that define each of these relationships, the goal was to present an idea of the value connections that govern purchase behaviour and consumer loyalty, and put forth an understanding of what a Dutch fashion identity—within the confines of my frame of research—might look like. This foray is in no way meant to be conclusive—nor could it ever be. It is a first attempt to define the field; a basis for future research, perhaps; a possibility to see what distinguishes the Dutch fashion landscape from other countries, in terms of buying patterns and product preferences. With a focus on consumer behaviour, my research tried to gain insight into the relays between supply and demand.

The goal of this chapter is to synthesise the findings of the study and respond to the main questions it was meant to explore. Studying the relationship between different kinds of Dutch fashion brands and their consumer groups, the three central questions guiding my research were:

1. What are the different value systems that govern the brand-consumer relationship and is there something typically Dutch about them?
2. What level holds strongest when it comes to the purchase behaviour of Dutch consumers: individual identities, group identities, national or international sites of identification?
3. How do different audiences relate to their preferred brands? Do those ties have an impact on the buying behaviour of Dutch consumers?

Structurally speaking, in this chapter I will move from concrete to more abstract results. I will first discuss the concept of consumer involvement introduced in CHAPTER 3. By facilitating an understanding of the different types of relationships between brands and consumers, the goal is to provide insight into the predominant value connections and to develop an understanding of the purchase behaviour of different Dutch consumer groups. After that, I will look into the notion of identity discussed in CHAPTER 2. Here, the focus is on individual and group identities with respect to the concept of style groups and national identity.

10.2 THE FOUR FACES OF DUTCH FASHION

The expert panel discussed in CHAPTER 5 produced four dimensions of Dutch fashion, each of which represented a combination of a certain style of fashion and a business approach. The panel was intended as an attempt to structure and define the local fashion landscape in its diversity and stimulate critical debate about the different factors that play a role across the spectrum. As a reminder, the four dimensions were:

1. Modernist Design with a Twist
2. Wild Design
3. Sophisticated Casual
4. Stylish Mid-Market

Modernist Design with a Twist covers the high or higher segment of the Dutch fashion industry, with a focus on brands like Orson+Bodil, Spijkers en Spijkers, Saskia van Drimmelen’s ‘Painted’ or the now-defunct Klavers van Engelen. The emphasis is on a conceptual and no-frills type of product that usually comes in limited editions and is retailed in select, exclusive boutiques. The Dutch top-end market is characterised by a high degree of creative freedom and experimentation, so the addition ‘with a twist’ refers to the fact that it is a type of product that usually incorporates unexpected, and sometimes contradictory, elements. Although Dutch high fashion does not have significant leverage in economic terms, it is an important part of the Dutch fashion industry. On the one hand, it spearheads a type of fashion that—in mitigated form, to be sure—percolates also into the Dutch high street. On the other hand, the labels in this category are largely responsible for putting the Netherlands on the international fashion map and garner interest from press and buyers abroad.

Wild Design refers to the more outgoing and rebellious strand of Dutch fashion. Taking its cues from a wide variety of sources, in this category brands like Bas Kosters, CoraKempersman, People of the Labyrinth or Ooh! look large. The result is a type of product that is colourful and slightly irreverent, sometimes even frivolous and daunting. The attribute ‘wild’ consequently refers to a casual mix and match of inspirations that range from pop culture to comics and from paisley prints to Indian folklore. While the Netherlands, until now, has been primarily associated with a more restrained and conceptual approach to fashion, it is a common goal of the research project ‘Dutch Fashion in a Globalised World’ to recognise this alternative tradition as well.

Sophisticated Casual targets street-style brands like G-Star or Gsus, which are characterised by the combination of commercial and cutting-edge fashion styles as well as a marketing-savvy business approach. The word ‘sophisticated’ relates to the way these brands are positioned in the market: although firmly established on the high street they offer that extra bit of fashion cachet that distinguishes them from many competitors in the segment. With their innovative marketing strategies and a well-defined trademark style, these firms usually have a reach beyond the national borders and target a rather diverse consumer base.

Stylish Mid-Market represents the large number of Dutch womenswear brands that operate in the crevices between inspired fashion design and more stately...
and business-oriented looks. Characterised by a rather broad range of clothing styles, brands like Just B., Vanilia, Claudia Sträter or Aiko are geared for a comparatively large target market and seek to satisfy a plurality of consumption interests. More generalists than specialists, companies in this group are defined by a high degree of business acumen, and they produce clothing styles that are right on message between casual and formal, stylish and sporty, outgoing and understated.

None of the categories exists in isolation. In fact, to a greater or lesser extent there are overlaps and junctions, clashes of different elements, and even collaborations between, for instance, more minimalist high-end designers and high-street firms (e.g. Spiket's en Spikkers for Claudia Sträter or Antoine Peters for Crazu). In their diversity, all brands have one element in common: the bicycle factor. By this I mean that clothing in the Netherlands needs to be practical, so it can be worn throughout the day and function effortlessly in different social or professional settings. Taking your child to school on a bike, doing groceries, going to work, and having dinner with friends at a restaurant – all that has to be manageable with just one set of clothes. As a result, Dutch fashion design is not only stylish, but it also understands the value constructs that define the relations in the fashion landscape in its diversity, and develop and understand these dimensions with respect to my own research and findings. As we can see in Fig. 10.1, the summarised results of item 1 (‘I like to buy clothes with an outspoken look’), which tested the level of clothing involvement in relation to a well-defined product style, a different picture emerges. In section 10.3 it was said that clothing involvement can either relate to purely functional qualities or to what Jacobs (2010: 587) calls ‘looking good’, i.e., a style of fashion that makes the wearer look good but that is not necessarily connected to fashion trends. As Fig. 10.4 demonstrates, a recognisable product style is a critical driver in the purchase decision-making process of each audience. In C-G’s audience, 59.15% agreed and only 14.94% disagreed, while 69.66% of Vanilia’s consumers agreed and 13.23% disagreed. In Corakemperman’s audience we find the most pronounced distribution, with 88.10% agreeing and less than 1% disagreeing.

In the following sections 1 will deal with each of the four dimensions in order to explore the Dutch fashion landscape in its diversity, and develop and understand the value constructs that define the relationship between supply and demand. In the following section I will look in detail into this relationship, based on a synthesis of the quantitative analysis of the three most empirical cases. For each dimension, my research sought to examine the determining factors affecting consumer involvement and, if possible, identify a connection with Dutch identity or a country-specific style of fashion.

10.3 CONSUMER INVOLVEMENT

In CHAPTER 3, the distinction between ‘looking good’ and ‘being fashionable’ was introduced. Each of them corresponds to a different motivational scheme and involves different factors that impact on the purchase decision-making process. As a reminder, Fig. 10.1 introduces the different dimensions with the three axes: ‘fashion’, ‘functionality’, and ‘brands’. In turn, these dimensions have an impact on the type of involvement that consumers develop towards a clothing brand.

As I explained in CHAPTER 3, we can distinguish between three different types of involvement: clothing involvement, fashion involvement, and brand involvement. Clothing involvement relates to the functionality of clothes or to a specific signature style that may or may not be fashionable. The more stylish a firm’s clothes are perceived, the closer it is to the centre line. The more functional the attitude towards firm and product, the further it will shift to the upper left in the figure. By contrast, fashion involvement corresponds to the degree to which trends and a firm’s fashion cachet have an influence on the purchase decision-making process. The more consumers wish to look fashionable, the less their purchase behaviour is motivated by functional or practical concerns. The axis of brands cuts right across these two dimensions. Brand involvement corresponds to the degree consumers make a company’s identity part of their considerations. But when purchases are purely driven by practical considerations (e.g. a private-label white T-shirt) or when a fashion aficionado buys products from an innovative brand, unknown designer then we look at identity may be of hardly any importance. While these extremes certainly exist, it is more common that either dimension is to a greater or lesser degree connected to a certain brand.

In the following sections I will deal with each of these dimensions with respect to my own research and look at points of connection and divergence between the individual cases.

10.3.1 FASHION INVOLVEMENT

When we look at the quantitative results of the research on G-Star, Vanilia, and Corakemperman it appears that the fashion value of clothes is not an overly strong driver in the purchase decision-making process. The results indicate that only for G-Star’s consumers the fashion cachet of their clothes has relevance, whereas

![Fig 10.1 Consumer Attitudes Towards Clothing (Jacobs 2010: 587)](image-url)

![Fig 10.2a I like to dress according to the latest fashion trends (summarised results of item 2) for Corakemperman, Vanilia, G-Star](image-url)

![Fig 10.3a I am among the first in my circle of friends to buy a new fashion item when it appears’ (summarised results of item 3) for Corakemperman, Vanilia, G-Star](image-url)

In the previous section, we learned that the fashion involvement in all three audiences is not overly pronounced. While G-Star’s consumers showed at least moderate levels of involvement, for Vanilia’s and Corakemperman’s consumers the fashion value of clothes does not appear to play a significant role. Interestingly, when we compare these findings with the results of item 7 (‘I like to buy clothes with an outspoken look’), which tested the level of clothing involvement in relation to a well-defined product style, a different picture emerges. In section 10.3 it was said that clothing involvement can either relate to purely functional qualities or to what Jacobs (2010: 587) calls ‘looking good’, i.e., a style of fashion that makes the wearer look good but that is not necessarily connected to fashion trends. As Fig. 10.4 demonstrates, a recognisable product style is a critical driver in the purchase decision-making process of each audience. In C-G’s audience, 59.15% agreed and only 14.94% disagreed, while 69.66% of Vanilia’s consumers agreed and 13.23% disagreed. In Corakemperman’s audience we find the most pronounced distribution, with 88.10% agreeing and less than 1% disagreeing. We can see in the results of item 14 (‘Please try to name three characteristics you associate with the clothing of G-Star/Vanilia/Corakemperman’), which sought to facilitate an understanding of the product-related mental concepts consumers develop towards a brand, this tendency is further corroborated. TABLE 10.1 shows the coding scheme including the product attributes for each firm. Rather than looking at the full set of responses, I tried to focus on attributes that are connected to the firms’ product proposition and distil elements that mark their distinctive style.

Fig. 10.5 shows the results, according to the product attributes indicated in TABLE 10.1. In the case of G-Star, 72.50% of the respondents indicated product style as a product characteristic, whereas Corakemperman’s audience this was 88.68%, and for Vanilia it was 64.96%. Following these results, consumers connect
with each of the firms, based on a well-defined and individual product proposition that is distinguished in terms of appearance and a recognisable product style.

**CORAKEMPERMAN** Unique; expressive; original; special; different; surprising; extravagant; distinct; recognisable • VANILLA Neat; classy; stylish; original; fashionable • G-STAR Tough; masculine; distinctive; recognisable; identity; innovative; own style; special; new; original

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<th>TABLE 10.1 CODING SCHEME FOR CONSUMER RESPONSES ITEM 14 BRAND FOLLOWED BY VALUES</th>
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Rather unsurprisingly, for each audience the style concept had a slightly different meaning, which is interesting with respect to the fact that each of the case studies was meant to explore a different dimension of the Dutch fashion landscape. When comparing the above observation with the results of item 15, which was formulated as a multiple-choice question with 15 pre-conceived respectively randomly assigned answers, and item 14, which relates to the variables tested through item 14 and a number of standardised brand values, this aspect becomes even more apparent. As Fig. 10.6 shows, each audience associated different values with their preferred firm, which facilitates an understanding of the relation between the respective brands and the predominant product preferences within each audience group.

For consumers of Cora Kemperman, an example of what I called ‘Wild Design’, product style manifests itself in terms of product uniqueness. As Fig. 10.6 shows, the primary value connection with the brand is an important driver of purchases. In Cora Kemperman’s case, the most common characteristics are ‘tough’ (38.97%), ‘special’ (30.50%), and ‘authentic’ (20.40%). Consumers aspire to a type of product with a distinct characteristic, the use of bright and vibrant colours, and the versatility of the garments (e.g. tops can be worn inside out; straps can be adjusted in multiple ways etc.).

Vanilla is a case of what I named ‘Stylish Mid-Market’. As Fig. 10.6 demonstrates, consumers see Vanilla as a brand that is stylish (81.43%) and fashionable (50.65%). Interestingly, the latter of these values clashes with the rather low level of fashion involvement discussed in section 10.3.1. One possible explanation for this discrepancy might be that the brand tries to assimilate global fashion trends and customise them for the Dutch market. To a certain extent, then, the clothes do probably impart fashion qualities. As explained in Chapter 7, however, these are not the main drivers for purchases. More important for the relationship are the company’s signature patterned fabrics and a versatile and feminine silhouette, which render the products all-rounders that work well for business and leisure occasions alike.

In the case of G-Star, an example of what was called ‘Sophisticated Casual’, consumers associate with this product proposition in the firm’s signature look with the brand. As Fig. 10.6 demonstrates, the values consumers connect with the brand are ‘reliable’ (30.83%), ‘stylish’ (33.33%), ‘fashionable’ (30.50%), cool/hip (31.66%), and ‘recognisable’ (37.50%). Consumers associate a type of clothing with the brand that is up-to-the-minute and identified by a combination of basic casual-wear items (frequently with big logo prints) and more cutting-edge denim pieces. When we look at the way consumers describe the firm’s products (Table 10.1) the most common characteristics are ‘tough’ (38.97%), ‘authentic’, ‘innovative’, and ‘demin’. Following those descriptions, style relates to the firm’s history in more or less innovative denim designs and it rather broad selection of street-wear products. We might also say that the word ‘tough’ is a rather peculiar choice to describe clothes. The attribute presupposes something

masculine and coarse, perhaps. Taking G-Star’s marketing strategy into account, which centres on its so-called ‘raw’ image (modelled on the firm’s signature use of untreated denim), we can assume that, to a certain extent, consumers have actually assimilated the firm’s marketing messages.

For the analysis of Spijkers en Spijkers, a case of what I described as ‘Modernist Design with a Twist’, I was not able to collect statistical data since the firm does not have any outlets of their own. Still, it is possible to offer a description of the company’s signature style and the way it is recognised in the Dutch fashion milieu.

The firm’s aesthetic is defined by a dialogue between playfulness and restraint, thereby presenting a fusion of different elements: on the one hand, we can identify the sober and pared-down style that Dutch fashion design is well known for, while, on the other hand, the designers integrate exotic prints and bold chrome-like hues in the collections, which to a certain extent makes them akin to ‘Wild Design’. With an emphasis on the cut and graphic composition of garments, and the use of fabrics like silk or lace, their designs combine edgy looks with contemporary elegance and cutting-edge fashion with nonchalant sophistication. According to incoming store manager, Chananja Baars, in her shop the main target group for Spijkers en Spijkers clothes are consumers who appreciate what she calls a ‘special type of fashion’. While she admits that for many Dutch consumers the clothes are too outspoken, they attract a following among women who enjoy the combination of playfulness and sharp cuts, and who can afford to buy fashion products that are out of the ordinary.

As these results make clear, the level of clothing involvement across the different consumer groups I studied is relatively high, while in the previous section we saw that the level of fashion involvement is moderate in the case of G-Star and low in the other two cases. We can conclude, therefore, that for each of these audiences a product proposition with a distinct visual identity is crucial, whereas the fashion qualities of the clothes are far less significant. What does this tell us when it comes to the difference between ‘looking good’ and ‘being fashionable’? Following the results, for the audiences I studied at least the former is far more significant than the latter. The consumers of G-Star, Vanilla, and Cora Kemperman have a far more pronounced interest to look good than to look fashionable. One weakness of my study is that I was not able to do research on the consumers of Spijkers en Spijkers or any other brand in this segment. A true fashion brand that is not present in the high street would have been a valuable addition to my study to examine this audience more in-depth as well.

**10.3.3 BRAND INVOLVEMENT**

The question remains to what extent brand identity plays a role in the relationship between the firms I studied and their audience groups. Item 8 (‘I like to purchase clothes from brands I can identify with’) sought to explore to what extent brand identity has an effect on the relation between supply and demand. Fig. 10.7 indicates a rather mixed distribution across the different case studies as only 21.65% disagreeing with the statement, we can conclude that for G-Star’s consumers the identity of the brand is an important driver of purchases. In Vanilla’s audience, 50.72% agreed and 33.70% disagreed, while in Cora Kemperman’s consumer group 46.58% agreed and 40.50% disagreed. Consumers who appreciate the firm’s aesthetic are more likely to identify with the brand.

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Vanilla’s audience, only 32.56% come to the shops on a monthly basis, compared to 61.35% who visit the outlets less often. If we now take into account the average purchase behaviour (item 13), FIG 10.9 demonstrates that on the whole Vanilla’s consumers buy about one item at a time (25.47%), while CoraKemperman’s consumers purchase between one (44.58%) and two items (45.75%). In FIG 10.10 we can see that 24.16% of G-Star’s consumers purchase between one and three items at a time compared to 24.16% who do not buy a single item per visit.

As the results clarify, the purchase behaviour in the case of CoraKemperman and G-Star is comparatively high, whereas in the case of Vanilla the general visiting frequency and consumption pattern are rather moderate. Notwithstanding the differences, the study demonstrates that the average number of visits is fairly regular and the number of purchases per visit respectable, so we can say that the consumers of each individual brand invest in their wardrobe on a regular basis and spend substantial amounts of money on clothing products. One of the interesting findings of my study is that, contrary to popular belief that likes to portray the product proposition and the in-store performance of staff to distinguish the firm in the market. When we look at Vanilla’s audience, the level of brand involvement is almost identical, yet the relationship is slightly different: the firm’s consumers aspire to a type of product that is fashionable but not actually brand-oriented. The discrepancy in purchase behaviour is explained by the fact that CoraKemperman’s audience is largely owned by the brand whereas Vanilla’s is not.

If we now place the different brands in the figure introduced in section 10.3, we can get an idea how the firm’s clothes are marked by a characteristic signature style. In other words, while the brand persona does not play a prominent role, there is an awareness that few other companies offer a comparable type of product. Also, the clothes allow women with a slightly bigger body size to ‘look good’ in a chic and special way. G-Star is positioned right on the centre line in the spectrum of ‘brands’. With a casual and fashion-oriented product style, and a distinct trademark style, the firm capitalises on its recognisable design identity, as well as on its ability to marry street style with up-to-the-minute fashion pieces. As we have seen, consumers relate to the product but also to the firm’s strong brand identity. Spijkers en Spijkers is clearly situated in the spectrum of ‘being fashionable’. Focusing on product development rather than on marketing and branding activities, innovative and cutting-edge fashion pieces are the company’s main selling point. Correspondingly, it can be assumed that people who purchase the products are more interested in the design value of the clothes than in the firm’s brand image.

For further reference see Jacobs (2012).
That demand for practicality is not exclusively con-
ected to product-inherent aspects, but has its roots in
the relatively poor alcoholism rates in the Dutch culture.
In the Netherlands it is possible to visit the opera in a
pair of jeans and a T-shirt, an act that would be consid-
ered inappropriate in many other countries. Although
rather obvious, the example demonstrates that local
fashion culture is rather tolerant compared to other
regional cultures. In the long run, the question is which
is more institutionalised and traditional, it is not uncom-
mon to change clothes several times a day according
to different occasions and activities. Dutch culture, by
contrast, is fairly liberal when it comes to corporate or
festival clothing, so garments are designed and used as
all-round performers, suited for work and leisure time,
grocery shopping or dinner at a restaurant.

In section 10.3.2 we saw that each of the brands I
studied has a different product style and their own well-
defined aesthetic register. G-Star’s clothes range from
basic to more cutting-edge designs, Vanilia’s clothing
is rather universal, while the clothing by CoraKemper-
man is fairly outspoken. What all the cases have in common
is that their products casually balance functionality with
aesthetics. In the introduction of this chapter I hinted
at the results of the expert panel in chapter 5 that
produced the ‘bicycle factor’ as one of the defining fea-
tures of Dutch fashion culture. Practically, we might
say, is a variation on that theme and confirms the as-
sumption that local fashion consumers put a premium
on a product proposition that is simultaneously stylish
and practical.

10.4 DRESS AND IDENTITY AT DIFFERENT LEVELS

In the previous sections I discussed different types of
involvement and analysed the question to what extent
these correspond to (or conflict with) the purchase be-
aviour and visiting frequency of consumers. We saw
that style proves a crucial connector in the relationship
between brand and consumers. Every staff member
had a specific role, and that the team and invest most of their
resources in the development of lifestyle concept, so it can firmly concentrate on
product development. Having said that, we learned in
chapter 9 that the firm engages in a wide variety of
activities that contradict the self-proclaimed prod-
cut-centric strategy (e.g. product placements, art and
lifestyle events), and by that G-Star maintains a fairly
active presence on the internet. Therefore in effect part
of the value proposition extends the focus from prod-
cut-specific aspects to external sites of identification.

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cut-specific aspects to external sites of identification.
In CHAPTER 3, style groups are formed by a segment of consumers and a number of clothing brands that show a certain level of stylistic congruence. The term defines mostly imagined communities that are not actually based on real-life encounters and interaction within a group of people. Just like Benedict Anderson's concept, which I introduced in CHAPTER 2, it is an approach that looks at social structures and their cohesiveness from an alternative point of view. The concept is a theoretical tool that allows studying consumer behaviour with the aim to find out if, and to what extent, we can identify collective patterns in a firm's audience group. Belonging to a style group, then, is not actually a conscious decision or process, but a method to find out which additional aspects play a role in the relation between certain consumer types and their preferred brands. The connection between the two positions is never static but continuously redefined by supply and demand. Brands try to get as close as possible to the needs of their audience group and consumers reward the manner in which a firm seeks to distinguish itself, by identification and loyalty. In that way, brands and audiences co-evolve: the higher the degree of identification with a brand and the stronger the congruence in the life-worlds of consumers, the more coherent and 'tight' the style group.

10.4.3 STYLE GROUPS

Corakemperman's consumer group is a relatively tight style group with a fairly consistent look. The group's visual coherence is owed to the firm's product portfolio that is not only highly recognisable, but also encourages a 'complete look'. With high degrees of product identification, many of the firm's committed consumers actually hardly source their wardrobe from any other brand. Following the interviews, consumers use and understand the clothes as an extension of their identity, so we can conclude that the specificity of the product coincides with the consumers' self-image. Apart from that, however, it would be more appropriate to speak of a collective agenda concerning a specific choice of product: consumers share a similar background and seek to express a certain attitude with their clothing. In other words, despite the audience's relative heterogeneity it is unified by a common mode of expression. Offering a versatile and adaptable identity, and product proposition and collective identity are connected to the extent that the appearance and composition of the clothing promote a certain lifestyle that is shared by members of the clientele.

As a jeans and casual-wear brand, with international aspirations and the concept of a 'total look', the target group consists of a large number of clothing lines, styles (from casual to fashion-forward), and sizes. Covering a spectrum, from sporty and casual to fashionable and trend-savvy, the firm caters to men's and women's markets across different segments. Due to the fact that the firm offers multiple points of connection and accommodates a rather large Dutch fashion lifestyle, it is hard to pinpoint whether specific consumer types are more strongly represented than others. By the same token, it is hardly possible to speak of a group identity or a shared set of features that connect the audience as a whole. For some, the brand name and recognizable appearance of the products are the driving factors in the purchase decision-making process, for others fashion-appeal and innovative details are the determining variables.

Judging by the plurality of consumer types attracted by the company, G-Star's audience is a light style group (see Fig. 10.2), which I introduced in a monthly or near-monthly visits, consumers tend to purchase one or more items at a time. At the same time, the study shows that the association between firm and audience is primarily product-specific and not so much based on high emotional commitment. One explanation for this asymmetry could be that the firm offers a product with a high recognition value, while the audience is divided between a number of firms that operate in the same segment and according to similar stylistic properties. Section 10.3.3 showed that consumers visit the firm's outlets less than once a month on average, and purchase about one item at a time. In contrast to Corakemperman's clientele, the purchase decision-making process is less driven by a desire to express a unique personality. Rather, identification and commitment with the brand is connected to an understated and versatile product proposition.

The typical Vanilia consumer can be characterised as modern and mainstream, established and interested in offerings suited to that lifestyle. When it comes to consumers' life-worlds, we can speak of awareness in terms of age or professional background. Apart from that, however, it would be more appropriate to speak of a collective agenda concerning a specific choice of product: consumers share a similar background and seek to express a certain attitude with their clothing. In other words, despite the audience's relative heterogeneity it is unified by a common mode of expression. Offering a versatile and adaptable identity, and product proposition and collective identity are connected to the extent that the appearance and composition of the clothing promote a certain lifestyle that is shared by members of the clientele.

10.4.4 DUTCH OR INTERNATIONAL?

From the level of group identification we are finally moving on to what G-Star's core target is. Internationally oriented international sites of identification are important in a clothing-consumption context, and to what extent the brands I studied reflect characteristics that are typically Dutch. Item 11a ('G-Star/Vanilia/Corakemperman is typically Dutch') intended to determine if consumers connected their preferred clothing firms to attributes that are related to the Dutch cultural landscape as well. As Fig. 10.12 demonstrates, no clear picture emerged in that regard. For the most global brand G-Star, 43.3% of its consumers agreed while 38.30% disagreed with the statement. In Vanilia's audience 22.08% of the respondents agreed while 28.75% disagreed. In Corakemperman's consumer group, 27.94% agreed and 36.26% disagreed with the statement.

According to this distribution, part of the sample connects the firms to country-specific aspects, while at least as many consumers contradict that idea. Item 1b ('Why is/isn't G-Star/Vanila/Corakemperman typically Dutch?') was constructed in an effort further explore the question of national identification and allow respondents to explain their view. Unfortunately, the vast majority left the question unanswered, which made it difficult to relate their opinions to an attitude or a certain degree of specificity. When questioned about their answers to the question, the respondents usually told me that they were unsure what aspects actually qualify as typical for local culture or how to define Dutch identity.

In some way, this result is not altogether surprising. Ever since we started the project 'Dutch Fashion Identity in a Globalised World', one of the central questions that kept coming back in the discussions within our course group was how we could identify what属于‘典型的Dutch', and how to extend characteristics that are pertinent to local culture in general to a fashion context. Is there anything like ‘Dutchness'? What distinguishes Dutch identity from other countries' identities and how to get a grip on that question? While my research did not find a definitive answer to any of these questions, I was able to identify a number of characteristics pertinent to local dress culture and the way that the local fashion landscape is defined. To start with, we can certainly speak of something like a Dutch national style of dress in the sense that the way the Dutch like to dress differs from the way people in other countries like to dress. An journalist Sanje Kramer (cited in De Vogelvrij Agenda 2012: 36, my translation) states, "We are women who brave the elements on our bicy-
that the beauty of Dutch women shows best on a bike. Still, light skirts you need to pull up across your derrière, woolen dresses irritate the skin on a woman’s saddle (…). And rain does not go well together with high heels or panties and skirts made from deli-
icate fabric.’

While Kramer’s description is pointed and oversimpli-
fied, the fact remains that the Dutch are not decla-
rative, woolen dresses irritate the skin on a woman’s saddle (…). And rain does not go well together with high heels or panties and skirts made from delic-
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the Netherlands is often considered a ‘jeans country’ (Feitsma 2012a) with a predilection for denim products and generally a more casual and informal style. Applied to the local fashion culture that means that clothes are usually a bit more sturdy and made from hardwearing fabrics: they need to be practical, comfortable, and preferably require little maintenance. As I pointed out earlier, that does not necessarily mean that the Dutch are unsty-
lish or staid when it comes to their clothing choices. Rather, the general template is more casual and less focused on details. A simple cotton dress is preferred to one made of silk, simply because the former can be worn effortlessly while the latter requires intensive care and does not present itself as the first choice for a variety of activities. For the same reason, in the men’s market a suit made from simple wool fares better than one made from Super 120s pure wool (i.e., the high-
grade wool used for men’s suits). The former is good value for money, low-maintenance, and crease-
resistant, whereas the latter is pricey, delicate, and re-
quires special care to keep in a good state. The Dutch like their fashion products to be simple but expressive, neither extravagant and overstated nor drab and mean-
ingless. Adaptable and stylish, they go for the middle ground, a compromise that marries style with practi-
cality.

10.5 CONCLUSION

We saw that across the different case studies a different picture emerged with respect to the question how the relationship between supply and demand is defined, and what aspects of the brand or product proposition drive purchase behaviour. My study is special in that respect, because it is not limited to a specific detail of the local fashion landscape, but focuses on the bigger picture instead, in order to stimulate critical debate and future research activities. The cases I studied are based on the ‘Four faces of Dutch fashion’ discussed in CHAPTER 5. Until now, the discussion was mainly concentrated on certain historic moments whereas no attempt has been made to define the field as a whole. I do not claim that in that regard my foray is final or exhaustive. Rather, it is a first attempt to develop an understanding for the field of Dutch fashion in its di-
versity, and provide a perspective on certain currents that are noteworthy in the discussion about the Dutch fashion identity. It is arguably possible that the catego-
ries produced by the expert panel do not exclusively ap-
ply to the Dutch context. Pundits might argue that the life-
cycles of fashion categories would be defined in many other fashion indus-
tries in the West. As this point has yet to be proven, my argument is that it is the combination of these ele-
ments – rather than its individual components – that makes it unique. In other words, it is the mix that is typically Dutch.

Synthesising the findings, we saw that many of the values consumers connect to their preferred fashion brands coincide with the four dimensions of Dutch fashion. G-Star’s consumers relate to the brand based on the firm’s ‘raw’ signature style and a prod-
uct proposition that is down to earth yet a smattering more innovative than the norm. In contrast, the latter is pricey, delicate, and resistant, whereas the former is affordable and practical, and easy to maintain. As such, the concept of style groups is a relevant and appropriate method to study the dynam-
ics between consumers and brands. I demonstrated that certain characteristics can be seen as extensions of product categories and clothing preferences as a theo-
retical tool to cluster audiences according to different consumption profiles. In turn, these make allowances for certain inferences about an audience in terms of consumer backgrounds and experience worlds.

As a last point, I tried to define a number of char-
acteristics that are typical for the Dutch fashion culture. As we have seen, the research did not actually produce a clear picture when it comes to the question what as-
pects are considered typically Dutch. In CHAPTER 2, four different levels of identification were discussed: cognitive, evaluative, affective, and conative. From the research it appears that neither consumers nor brands are even aware of a Dutch style of dress. Consumers do not consciously buy ‘Dutch clothes’ – in fact, more often than not they are unaware of the national ori-
gins of their purchases. Local fashion brands, for their part, do not devise a ‘Dutch product’, but they mostly respond to certain preferences (e.g. a more informal cultural climate, the ‘fashion-written’ clothes of slightly sturdier body type), and consumers are attract-
ed to these products because they reflect their needs or fit with a specific requirement profile and lifestyle. As such, the concept of a national fashion identity is anything but straightforward. It should be seen and treated as an implicit notion that neither brands nor consumers are particularly conscious of.

Some of the issues presented in this research might appear to be rather universal, while other points are more directly linked to the Dutch national culture. At the end of the day, all insights produced by this study should be seen as tendencies rather than hard facts that pertain to Dutch fashion culture exclusively. All the firms under scrutiny are relatively accessible and boast a product proposition that is slightly differ-
ent from what is generally offered on the high street. At the same time, none of them takes this ambition to an extreme. Nothing is overly fashionable or minimal, over the top or demure. In fact, all the brands in this study seek to achieve a balance between certain values: merging fashion cachet with comfort, colour and pat-
tern with basics and plains, elegant fabrics with easy-
maintenance materials. Typically Dutch is, perhaps, a compromise between seemingly opposite poles; a sense of individualism that surfaces in details; an innov-
ative and progressive spirit that is kept in balance with consumers and retain their loyalty. Each of these ap-
proaches is successful in its own right. More important than the question to what extent they are implicit or explicit, seems to be that the approaches are authentic and in-sync with the overall brand proposition. Contrib-
uting to an understanding of the life-cycles of fashion experi-
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