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Branding – is it for Love, or Monday?

THE PANEL

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Johnnie Moore is a UK-based facilitator and consultant with a strong background in advertising, marketing and business. In recent years he has written and spoken widely on "putting the humanity back into branding" and, with 14 others, he co-authored **Beyond Branding** (Kogan page 2004) which presents "ideas for how branding can move beyond its current limitations, so that it truly meets the needs of society". He lives in London. (www.johnniemoore.com)

Gail Anderson worked as a graphic designer/art director for over 20 years and is now the head of faculty of digital media studies at the Design and Arts College of New Zealand. She is also an artist/designer and earlier in 2004 she had an exhibition called **UN=BRAND YOURSELF** which explored anti-consumerism messages. She lives on the edge of a volcano in Banks Peninsula. (Gail.Anderson@dac.ac.nz).

PRODESIGN Is it right to link deep emotions such as love with brands of products? Shouldn't these emotions be reserved from relationships and fellow humans?

KR Love is the highest order emotion, with a myriad of nuances and interpretations. You can love your family. Your dog. Your cat. Your house. Your car. Your holiday. Your local pub. Your rugby team. Your mobile. Your morning espresso. Your evening shoes. And not always in that order. They all have meaning. They're all relationships. They can be deep, shallow or mellow. They can be organic, electric or plastic. And their owners don't suffer outsiders ranking them, prioritizing, excluding them. Love is a force without boundary or category. It transcends everything.

JM I think commercial efforts to invest products with human qualities are at best a form of poetic licence. At worst they trivialise the rich possibilities of human experience. I may talk of "loving" a product or service, but only in the sense of "liking a lot". If that sense of the word is confused with deep human love, we get into all sorts of trouble. Deep love is for living creatures not for objects and abstract ideas. In marketing-speak, I fear that the word love is getting confused with mere lust and addiction.

GA I liken the wanton exploitation of our emotions by the giants of global consumerism to the exploitation that these same power brokers extend to the work forces of the third world. These global business powerhouses see the planet's natural resources in pretty much the same way – use the people till they drop, use the resources till they dry up – so what? As long as we make plenty of money for the faceless wealthy who reside in the sacred land of shareholders-ville, where the living is easy, the gates are high, the money endless and where consideration for the rights of fellow human beings is represented by a small annoying voice whispering in the back of some distant Sunday school memory.

So if global business can reap havoc on human and natural resources what's the problem about it getting stuck into our most intimate emotions. And, I ask myself, why the hell not? It's open slather on everything, isn't it? With a divorce rate of 40 per cent clearly relationships with our fellow human beings aren't what they're cracked up to be.

In fact, relationships are pretty much like those new jeans you whacked on the credit card last month – remember the ones you just loved, made you look thinner, younger and hipper and just had to have. The first couple of times you wore them they lived up to the carefully crafted logo and flatteringly cool positioning statement but once they had been through the electronic mastery of your washing machine they kind of never felt as good again. They were then relegated to the 'just something to wear' end of the wardrobe until they limped towards the 'didn't remember I had them' dark recess of your mind. Not unlike many relationships – was that my partner, the person I vowed to love until the end of time, or the other person that helps pay the Visa bill and keeps me awake snoring like a band saw.

I ask myself endlessly, does the advertising industry own the problem or has our lust for self indulgence rendered precious emotions such as 'love' into a banal form of introspective obsession that is conveniently fed by the endless wash of media messaging? Is it a case of the chicken and the egg – do we consume to feed our egos or do our egos feed our consumption?

PD Isn't linking emotions with brands a cost-free way of adding non-existent value to products?

KR Try telling an iPod user they're buying a functional product not a life-enhancing experience. They wouldn't believe you. There are no brands without emotion. No emotion, no relationship. No relationship, no purchase. Offer a transaction? You're dead. We're in a commodity blizzard. Consumers have seen it all before. They don't care about transactions, commodities, information or rationality. We're 80 per cent emotional and 20 per cent