

# Back to the future

## Nostalgia as a driver of brand resurrection

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Based on the exemplary case study of the resurrection of the chocolate brand Merveilles du Monde, our article highlights the emotions, expectations, and fears generated by the announcement of the return of a “nostalgic brand”. The aim is to answer the following questions: How can the announcement of a brand’s return create the “Proust’s madeleine” effect? What are consumers’ expectations regarding the resurrection of a “nostalgic” brand? What are the fears and potential obstacles related to the purchase of this type of brand?

“She sent for one of those short, plump cakes called *Petites Madeleines* [...]. But at the very moment the mouthful, mixed with the crumbs of the cake, touched my palate, I shuddered, attentive to the extraordinary thing that was happening inside me. A delicious pleasure had invaded me, isolated, without any notion of its cause”, Marcel Proust, *Swann’s Way*, 1913.

In his novel *In Search of Lost Time*, Marcel Proust shows how the taste of a madeleine dipped in tea can trigger an intense and unexpected wave of childhood memories. It is a bygone time, buried deep in memory, that emerges through a sensory stimulus. From “the coincidence between a present sensation and the memory of that same sensation” emerges “a whole forgotten world, faces, objects, feelings contained in a small piece of cake dipped in tea” (Brunel *et al.*, 1986, p. 601). Through this taste experience, Marcel Proust illustrates how memories can be triggered by sensory sensations and experiences. The “Proust madeleine” has become famous for its ability to illustrate how memories are stored and recalled through unexpected experiences or events. The madeleine scene illustrates how a simple object triggers a cascade of memories and a feeling of nostalgia in the narrator. A bittersweet feeling (Divard &

Robert-Demontrond, 1997), nostalgia is associated with the reminiscence of experiences most often perceived as positive (Davis, 1979; Stern, 1992). Belonging to a bygone past, these experiences can simultaneously or consecutively evoke a range of emotions including joy, sadness, regret or even melancholy.

With reference to Hirsch (1992), the more dissatisfied we are with the present, the more we idealize the past, thereby increasing nostalgic desire. In times of gloom, it would then be easier to “sell” nostalgia. In the field of marketing, many researchers have thus examined this fascinating emotion of nostalgia through studies on brand attachment (Kessous & Roux, 2006), brand equity (Bartier & Schuiling, 2010) or even retrobranding (Vignolles, 2015). While the stakes for brands of a nostalgic imprint seem salient, our research aims to identify how they can capitalize on this emotion with a view to resurrection. Indeed, certain brands are engraved in the collective memory, and thus constitute powerful drivers of nostalgia. When they disappear, they leave indelible traces several years after their disappearance.

Our research focuses on the exemplary case study of the resurrection of the chocolate brand Merveilles du Monde. Through this case, we aim to understand the emotions, expectations, and fears generated by the announcement of the resurrection of a brand whose evocation arouses a feeling of nostalgia. We therefore seek to answer the following questions: How can the announcement of a brand’s return generate the “Proust madeleine” effect? What are consumers’ expectations regarding the resurrection of a “nostalgic” brand? What are the potential fears and obstacles inherent in purchasing this type of brand? In order to answer these questions, our article is structured around three parts. The first part naturally focuses on the literature relating to nostalgia

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and the resurrection of brands. The second part presents the research methodology as well as the Merveilles du Monde case. Finally, the final section presents the research results. The aim is to put into perspective the evocative power of the announcement of the brand's return via the so-called "Proust's madeleine" effect. The expectations raised by the announcement of the brand's return are also examined, as are the factors likely to thwart consumer enthusiasm. Finally, these initial results are compared with consumers' reactions following the actual tasting of the product.

Nostalgia and brand resurrection:  
A theoretical exploration

"Technology is always attractive, of course...  
But on rare occasions, you can touch people  
on another, deeper level. When they have  
a sentimental connection to your product. [...]  
Nostalgia. It's subtle, but very powerful"<sup>2</sup>.

Nostalgia: From illness to driving force  
of consumption

The term nostalgia<sup>3</sup> originated in the work of Johannes Hoferus, presented in 1688 at the University of Basel. Marking the beginning of the young doctor's career, the essay entitled *Dissertatio Medica de Nostalgia, Oder Heimwehe* (Medical Dissertation on Nostalgia or Homesickness) was the result of his compassion for the pain felt by those who found themselves far from their homeland for reasons of study or employment (Bolzinger, 1989). As Dodman (2022, p. 9) points out, "one did not 'feel' nostalgic, one 'had' nostalgia in the same way as one might have tuberculosis, cholera, or a simple cold". This disease could not only be caught but also succumbed to (Dodman, 2022). Debated within medical faculties, Hofer's work was enriched by Theodore Zwinger, who notably put into perspective the pathogenic role of certain musical melodies in the manifestation of nostalgia

(Bolzinger, 1989). By acting on memory, music constitutes an emotional marker of certain moments in our lives.

According to Dodman (2022, p. 12), it was at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that the way of understanding nostalgia evolved. It was no longer a pathological form of homesickness, but rather a "fairly harmless, even comforting regret for the past – a benign emotion [...] linked to time and memory". A powerful emotion connecting us to a past, whether lived or not, nostalgia is now understood as an ambivalent feeling, between joy and sadness, generated by a variety of sensory factors: a melody, a smell, a landscape... Nostalgia could find its origin in a disenchantment with a present perceived in a negative way and/or uncertainty about the future (Lowenthal, 1975; Taylor and Konrad, 1980). According to Hirsch (1992), nostalgia thus constitutes a driving force for real behavior: by trying to recreate an idealized past, one discharges psychic energies to satisfy nostalgic desires. For this author, this is particularly observable in the production of film and television series sequels, or in the practice of naming first-born children after their fathers. Table 1 highlights several definitions that may shed light on the understanding of this complex feeling of nostalgia.

Ultimately, nostalgia is a complex emotion expressed as a form of melancholy linked to the awareness of the difference between a past, sometimes idealized, and the present. It manifests itself through objects, places, or experiences, generally associated with periods when the subject was young.

An ambivalent feeling between sweetness and bitterness, nostalgia is a driving force behind consumer behavior (Havlena & Holak, 1991). Faced with the irreversibility of time, so-called "nostalgic" consumption allows, on the one hand, to recreate an idealized version of the past in the present (Hirsch, 1992; Stern, 1992), and, on the other hand, to connect with important figures from the past with whom individuals "shared important and/or intense experiences" (Maaninou, 2016, p. 123). Many brands are thus seeking to exploit nostalgia to establish an emotional connection with consumers.

<sup>2</sup> Replica of the character Donald (Don) Draper in the series *Mad Men*, season 1, episode 13. For an exciting reading of the series through the prism of marketing, we invite the reader to refer to Martin & Tellier (2022).

<sup>3</sup> From the ancient Greek νόστος (return) and άλγος (pain), the term nostalgia refers to "homesickness".

Author	Definition
Jankélévitch (1974, p. 346)	"A human melancholy made possible by consciousness, which is consciousness of something else, consciousness of an elsewhere, consciousness of a contrast between past and present, between present and future."
Davis (1979, p. 18)	"A positive evocation of the lived past."
Belk (1990, p. 670)	"A nostalgic mood that may be triggered by an object, scene, smell, or piece of music."
Holbrook & Schindler (1991, p. 330)	"A preference (general liking, positive attitude, or favorable affect) toward objects (people, places, or things) that were more familiar (popular, fashionable, or widely available) when one was younger (early adulthood, adolescence, childhood, or even before birth)."
Stern (1992, p. 11)	"An emotional state in which an individual yearns for an idealized or sanitized version of a previous period."
Baker & Kennedy (1994, p. 169)	"Sentimental or bittersweet nostalgia for an experience, product or service from the past."
Divard & Robert-Demontrond (1997, p. 48)	"Nostalgia is a bittersweet emotional reaction, possibly associated with cognitive activity, which is experienced by an individual when an external or internal stimulus has the effect of transposing them into a period or event from an idealized past, whether or not it fits into their own experience."
Holak & Havlena (1998, p. 218)	"A complex feeling, emotion, or mood, positive in nature, produced by thoughts about things (objects, people, experiences, and ideas) associated with the past."

Table 1: Definitions of nostalgia.

Consumers are likely to be attracted to products or experiences that evoke pleasant memories or allow them to relive moments from a lived or imagined past. According to Kessous & Roux (2006, p. 10), “nostalgic connections reflect the unique and irreplaceable character of the brand. The brand serves as a reference point and maintains memories relating to certain important places, individuals or events.” In doing so, the use of nostalgia in a marketing approach provokes positive emotions, generates a feeling of familiarity and promotes brand engagement. In the following section, we explore how the five senses intervene in the nostalgic experience.

### Reviving the past: The power of the five senses in the nostalgic experience

“[...] always came back with an unconfessed desire to get bogged down in the average, sticky, insipid, indigestible, and fruity smell of the flowered bedspread”, Marcel Proust, *Swann's Way*, 1913.

The types of products that generate the most nostalgia may vary depending on the generation and the personal experience of each individual. However, certain products seem more predisposed to arousing feelings of nostalgia; this is the case for cars (Schindler & Holbrook, 2003), toys (Baxter, 2016), clothing (Zaman *et al.*, 2019) or even agri-food products, on which we focus below. While nostalgic consumption can concern any type of “brand-product” pair, it is naturally more specifically in the field of food that the so-called “Proust madeleine” effect is highlighted. Due to their organoleptic characteristics, food products affect all five senses, and in doing so generate effects on the recollection of more or less buried memories. The research of Kessous & Roux (2006) also highlights that brands generating a feeling of nostalgia mainly refer to food products consumed in childhood, such as Kinder, Haribo or Nutella. Regarding Nutella spread, Cova & Pace (2005, p. 12) perceive in the relationship that consumers have with the brand “a nostalgic and regressive tendency”. In connection with the “Proust madeleine” effect, the authors highlight that consumers remember “their youth and return to the golden age of innocence” (Cova & Pace, 2005, p. 12). Zeytinkaya (2021) also considers that Proust






Sense	Nostalgic echo
 Smell	Smells are particularly powerful in evoking nostalgia. The smell of a dish, a flower, or even a perfume can evoke memories and emotions from the past. According to Hirsch (1992), smell is the sense with the most powerful impact on emotions: using nostalgia through the activation of the limbic system through smell produces the strongest emotional appeal as a means of marketing a product.
 Taste	Flavors and tastes are closely linked to nostalgia. Tasting a food or drink can trigger nostalgic memories. Research by Vignolles & Pichon (2014) highlights the nostalgia caused in particular by flavors of yesteryear. The authors point out that food consumption appeals to our five senses, particularly smell and taste, which leave strong memories in the minds of consumers.
 Sight	A simple image, a photograph, or a familiar place can revive memories of the past, evoking nostalgic emotions. Grainge's (1999) research highlights how the use of a monochrome aesthetic for certain photographs generates a form of nostalgia, including for the present. According to the author, commercial photography and certain forms of advertising have thus found a new niche in black and white or sepia.
 Hearing	Sounds, such as songs, melodies, or specific noises, have the ability to instantly transport a person to a specific moment in their past, triggering nostalgic feelings. In its advertising communication, the Mousline brand revives this feeling by using the iconic 1970s melody: « <i>Quand je fais de la purée Mousline</i> », in English “When I make Mousline mashed potato”. Beyond this textbook case, research by Chou and Lien (2010) shows that when integrated into advertisements, popular songs can arouse a feeling of nostalgia.
 Touch	Physical contact, such as the touch of a loved one's hand or the feel of a precious object, can revive nostalgic memories linked to past experiences. From this perspective, matter affects sensory experience. Ayouch Boda (1999, p. 271) gives the example of one of her patients who experienced exile, a factor likely to “rekindle and fuel” nostalgia. However, this woman's nostalgic emotion is particularly inherent in the memory of her grandmother, about whom she evokes a multitude of details relating to her scarf, including its tactile qualities when she touched it or pulled it.

Table 2: The five senses of nostalgia.

preceded the work of neuroscientists in his approach. The author then refers to the work of Lehrer (2008), according to which taste and smell are the only senses with a direct connection to the hippocampus. However, the hippocampus constitutes the center of the brain's long-term memory. As for the other senses (sight, touch and hearing), they pass mainly through the thalamus, considered to be the source of language and the gateway to consciousness. These senses would therefore be much less effective in approaching our past (Lehrer, 2008). The fact remains that each of the five senses constitutes a gateway to our memories. Each has the capacity to bring back nostalgic emotions by awakening past experiences. Nostalgia is thus most often the result of this sensory awakening, which connects us to the past in a deep and emotional way (see Table 2).

According to Hirsch (1992), individuals can partially satisfy their nostalgic impulses through their daily behavior. According to the author, food choices are an emblematic example of this. He illustrates his point by passing on family recipes from generation to generation. While nostalgia is originally presented as a painful feeling, marketers seem naturally keen to arouse its evocative power of pleasant memories. Nevertheless, Vignolles & Pichon (2007) propose a typology of food nostalgia based on the positive or negative nature of the latent association (see Table 3).

Type of food nostalgia	Characterization
Positive or soft	"A food product is associated with positive memories and emotional reactions such as joy, happiness, comfort or calm."
Ambivalent or bittersweet	"A food product is associated with both positive and negative memories, so affective reactions are ambivalent, involving conflicting emotions such as joy and sadness."
Negative or bitter	"A food product is associated with negative memories and emotional reactions such as regret, sadness and even anger."
Source: From Vignolles & Pichon, 2007, p. 18.	

Table 3: Categorizing food nostalgia.

At the heart of our argument, nostalgia for brands that have disappeared from the market seems to constitute a powerful argument for their resurrection. The following section puts into perspective how the literature understands the link between nostalgia and resurrection.

Brand resurrection: A matter of nostalgia

From the classical Latin *resurgere*, "to rise again", resurrection, according to the Larousse dictionary, refers to the return from death to life - it is also a question of "resurrection of the dead". Considering the resurrection of a brand implies lending it fictional or real characteristics specific to the understanding of the human species. This is anthropomorphism, which according to Epley *et al.* (2007) constitutes a phenomenon by which non-human entities are attributed characteristics, properties, behaviors and mental states similar to those of humans. In this movement, Puzakova *et al.* (2009, p. 413) define brand anthropomorphism as the perception that consumers have of brands as "real human beings with various emotional states, a mind, a soul and conscious behaviors that can act as prominent members of social ties".

According to Jankélévitch (1974, p. 89), "going from one extreme to the other, from omega to alpha, from the ultimate end to the first beginning, from the grave to the cradle", the leap "over death deserves to be called resurrection". So what about the resurrection of a brand? Echoing that of the dead, Volpert (2019) notes that it is a question of the resurrection of a brand as soon as we identify a breaking point (death) between the previous life and the new one. Regarding resurrection, Jankélévitch (1974, p. 94) explains that "the second life is, if not psychologically and physically, at least metaphysically burdened by the preexistence of the first." In terms of brands, is the second life also imbued with the first? Echoing the work of Brown *et al.* (2003), this appears to be the case for brands with iconic status. These are brands that are likely to generate vivid and powerful associations for consumers. According to the authors, this type of brand is particularly suited to resurrection. As Brown *et al.* (2003) point out, iconic brands that evoke personal or shared memories can exploit consumers' nostalgic tendencies. Dion & Mazzalovo (2016) point out that these brands, which they describe as "sleeping beauties", allow consumers to reconnect with their past and the communities with which they shared them. Thanks to the resurrection of these brands, consumers "can thus live or relive an idealized, but updated, past" (Dion and Mazzalovo, 2016, p. 5895). According to the authors, a so-called retrobranding approach can then be based "on personal nostalgia linked to the individual's memories and/or on common nostalgia linked to history and/or a shared nostalgia concerning historical events or a specific period of history" (Dion & Mazzalovo, 2016, p. 5895).

It is particularly in the automobile industry that rebranding initiatives aimed at arousing a form of nostalgia have been observed. Schindler & Holbrook (2003) give the example of Volkswagen, which was able to revive the Beetle, a car beloved when members of the baby boom generation were teenagers or early adults. The authors also highlight the popularity of sports utility vehicles with built-in spare tires, which are reminiscent of the high-end car models of the 1950s from the Ford and Lincoln brands. Alongside these cult brands, there are also forgotten brands, which prove to be unremembered on both an individual and collective level. Nevertheless, according to Dion & Mazzalovo (2016), these brands have a heritage, and can also be resurrected. The aim is to generate a form of resonance with historical events or specific periods in shared memory. Moreover, being a forgotten brand could, a priori counterintuitively, be an asset. Indeed, this position gives brand managers more latitude in defining the revival strategy. As Dion & Mazzalovo (2016, p. 5889) indicate: "There is nothing to erase and managers can select the most relevant characteristics of the brand's heritage". This allows them to escape criticism from historical consumers who are prey to a form of resistance to change. Typically, echoing the research of Brown *et al.* (2003), Cervellon & Brown (2014) point out that the new Beetle was rejected by fans of the old model. In this vein and in a completely different register, "the revival of the *Star Wars* franchise was castigated by film buffs who had difficulty seeing beyond the glory days of Carrie Fisher, Mark Hamill, and Harrison Ford" (Cervellon & Brown, 2014, p. 274).

According to Bartier & Schuiling (2010), the possible existence of a strong feeling of nostalgia for old or disappeared brands should be taken into account more in the discussions surrounding their revitalization, reinforcement or reintroduction. Indeed, these three options would be “less costly and less risky than the introduction of a new brand on the market” (Bartier & Schuiling, 2010, p. 15). Research by Volpert (2019) supports this perspective. According to the author, two main arguments explain why companies favor the resurrection rather than the creation of a new brand. The first argument is financial, insofar as it is less expensive to resurrect a brand than to create a new one. The second argument is emotional, in the sense that consumers show, in line with the work of Cattaneo & Guerini (2012), a preference for old brands over new ones.

Volpert (2019) highlights the challenges that resurrected brands face. According to her, it is a matter of convincing both insiders – who have known the brand in the past – and novices whose expectations may be discordant. The author then puts into perspective three key factors for the success of a brand's resurrection. Specific to the brand's heritage, the first two factors revolve around its updating and respect for its identity. This leads to a third factor: the ability to create personal stories with the consumer (Volpert, 2019). It is through the study of the resurrection of the chocolate brand Merveilles du Monde that we wish to explore the driving forces behind the resurrection of a so-called “nostalgic” brand.

## Case study: The comeback of an iconic chocolate

“For nostalgics, behind the desire to return to the past in space may lie a desire for temporal regression, toward a primordial time that they no longer know how to name otherwise, that is unnameable”,  
Ayouch Boda, 1999.

### Research methodology

Our research is based on a qualitative methodology with an interpretive focus. It is based on the case study of the resurrection of the Merveilles du Monde chocolate brand in 2023. To gain a comprehensive view of the sentiments expressed by the brand community, we conducted a broad data collection period from November 14, 2022 (the date the brand's return was announced on dedicated social media) to September 30, 2023.

We initially adopted a netnographic approach (Kozinets, 2012). The aim was to infiltrate the brand community and collect its communication activities. Netnography refers to the study of a community's interactions via electronic media. With this in mind, we collected posts made by the brand on the social networks Instagram and Facebook, as well as the associated comments. On the social network Instagram, a total of 61 posts and 11,128 reactions were collected, compared to 54 posts and 6,993 reactions on the social network Facebook. As a member of the Merveilles du Monde community, we also collected newsletters sent by the brand. There were 13 of them over the period mentioned.

Our attention was also drawn to the crowdfunding campaign presented on the Ulule platform, which ran from January 8 to February 14, 2023. Through this campaign, the aim was to reactivate the brand community. Indeed, with the product arriving in large and medium-sized stores (GMS) in March 2023, the brand's owners wanted to gradually speak out and consolidate the link with the communities of “historical consumers”. The crowdfunding campaign thus constituted a powerful driver of brand community activation, which was particularly interesting to decipher. Echoing Renault (2018), the communication actions relating to a crowdfunding campaign constitute material that lends itself perfectly to netnographic analysis. With 49,902 tablet pre-sales out of a target of 200, the campaign was a real success. This is indeed the most successful campaign on the Ulule platform in the food category. All of the brand's communication elements (campaign page and news) were collected, along with 3,039 comments from contributors.



Figure 1: Crowdfunding campaign on Ulule  
(Source: Screenshot <https://fr.ulule.com/merveilles-du-monde-chocolat/>), “Merveilles du Monde, your favorite chocolate is back!”, “Financed successfully!”

While these initial elements were analyzed on an ongoing basis, we felt it was important to also gather ad hoc information. We therefore distributed a consumer survey via Google Form in January 2023. 62 people responded. Consisting mainly of open-ended questions, our survey was structured around three main themes: consumers' relationship with the Merveilles du Monde brand; the effects of nostalgia and the brand's association with places, people, moments, and rituals; and reactions to the announcement of the brand's return and the expectations it raised.

Our corpus is finally enriched by two interviews granted by Amélie Coulombe, at the origin of the resurrection of Merveilles du Monde chocolate. The guide of the first interview, conducted before the actual launch of the brand, was structured around six key themes: presentation of our interlocutor; birth and realization of the Merveilles du Monde project; role of communities; challenges associated with the crowdfunding campaign; launch calendar and marketing mix; nostalgia and value creation. As for the guide of the second interview, conducted after the launch of the brand, it was structured around the following three themes: reactions of the brand community after the launch; possible difficulties encountered and adaptation strategies; analysis of the success achieved and keys to its sustainability.

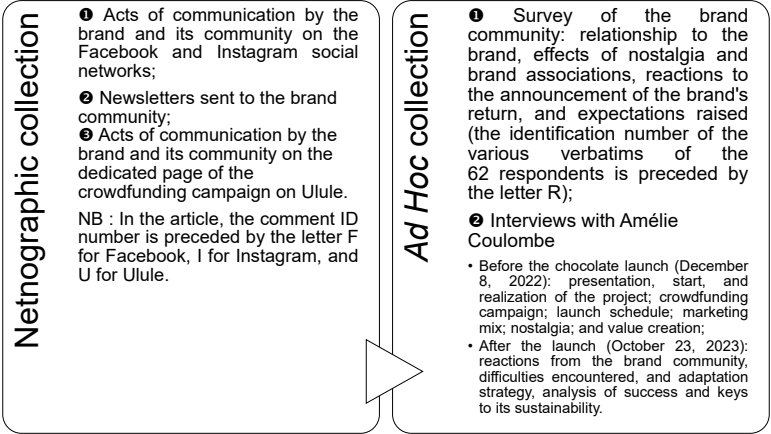


Figure 2: Summary of information collection.

All collected data (see Figure 2) were analyzed using Nvivo software. As Edlund & McDougall (2018) indicate, Nvivo allows for the organization and analysis of a wide variety of data, including documents, images, audio and video files, web content, and social media.

**Birth of the Merveilles du Monde brand**

The Merveilles du Monde chocolate bar was launched in 1978 by Nestlé, following in the footsteps of the eponymous albums. Published starting in 1929 at the initiative of Nestlé's chocolate department, Peter Cailer Kohler, the Merveilles du Monde albums were a form of illustrated encyclopedia. It was possible to paste vignettes collected from several Nestlé products into them. Each image sheet was accompanied by a text written by a specialist on the subject. In France, the first volume was published in 1931, the second in 1932, and the third in 1933-1934. After a long hiatus, a new series of Merveilles du Monde albums was released starting in 1953-1954 (see Figure 3). Six albums followed, the last being published in 1960-1961.



Figure 3: Les Merveilles du Monde  
(Source: Photographs from volume I of the album Les Merveilles du Monde 1953-1954 – series 1 “A bouquet of Alpine flowers” – personal collection of the author).

It was in 1978 that, under the impetus of Nestlé, Merveilles du Monde became a milk chocolate, hazelnuts and crushed almonds whose packaging contained a large cardboard image. On the front, an animal, and on the back, its educational presentation.

Among the salient features of the bar are its six large squares representing a different animal. Transcribed in Box 1, Nestlé bulletin number 189 relates the genesis of the brand as well as the salient features of the product.

**Box 1: Merveilles du Monde, a story of nostalgia**

“For years, before and after the last war, the prestigious title [Les Merveilles du Monde] was associated with the sale and success of our chocolates: millions of young collectors sought out, collected, and exchanged the famous images to paste them into albums that were as informative as they were attractive. Even today, we still receive letters from nostalgic parents, asking for a collection for their children, alas! long since sold out. It is in a new form, but in the same spirit, that the Chocolate Department has just revived this delightful tradition. These are no longer the reduced-size ‘vignettes’ as in the past, but large, 90 mm x 190 mm, color photos printed on cardboard that served as a support for the tablets. The chosen theme: animals. An initial series of 36 photos taken on the spur of the moment, in nature, is accompanied by an educational text. Another original feature: The bar itself becomes an image, or rather a bas-relief... it is in fact divided into six rectangles, each representing a different subject; one can thus bite into a giraffe’s haunch or a parrot’s wing without remorse, while enjoying fine chocolate... By the way, what kind of chocolate is it? A new specialty, whose name alone, ‘milk chocolate with crushed hazelnuts and almonds’, is both a definition and a temptation. The name ‘Merveilles du Monde’ [Wonders of the World in English] therefore encompasses a double launch: that of a new product and that of an exciting collection – a happy combination of two pleasures.”

Source: Nestlé Bulletin n°189 from 1978 - documentation provided by Amélie Coulombe to the author.

After several makeovers, production of Merveilles du Monde chocolate gradually slowed down, before stopping in 2007, leaving many fans – members of Generation X and Y – alone. A typical petition on the Change.org website titled “For the return of Merveilles du Monde chocolate” has gathered nearly 2,700 signatories. It is also on social networks, including Facebook, that those nostalgic for the brand in particular or for iconic products from the 1980s and 1990s in general have called for its return.

### The brand's resurrection

At the end of 2022, an entrepreneurial duo consisting of Amélie Coulombe and Alexandre Kanar announced the return of the Merveilles du Monde brand. Amélie Coulombe has marketing experience within major groups related to children's products: Mattel, on the one hand, and Haribo, on the other. Within the latter organization, she served as brand manager. She managed major product launches, including Haribo Pik and Chamallow Choco. Amélie Coulombe explains that she left her position at Haribo to embark on an entrepreneurial adventure, with the desire to create a responsible chocolate brand. After obtaining a professional chocolate maker certificate, she created the Krokola brand in 2021. Through the deployment of this brand, her goal is to find a healthier and more responsible alternative to chocolates sold in mass retailers. Her ambition is also to reconcile parents' beliefs about healthy eating with children's quest for pleasure and fun. Having met her at Haribo, her partner, Alexandre Kanar, joined her in the adventure.

Amélie Coulombe explains that Merveilles du Monde is a brand that Alexandre Kanar and she "grew up" with. For the entrepreneurial duo, this brand is evocative of certain values and missions that they are committed to. As Amélie Coulombe tells us, Merveilles du Monde echoed values that are close to her heart, including the protection of nature and biodiversity. They thus seized the opportunity to buy the brand from Alsacienne, a company specializing in the purchase/resale of historic brands. After recovering the rights to the brand, the entrepreneurs had "to rebuild everything". They called on a historian to better understand the brand's trajectory and carried out business studies aimed at identifying its fundamentals.

Three key elements of consumer attachment to the brand were then put into perspective:

- The original recipe: according to Amélie Coulombe, historical consumers have "a specific taste and recipe in their memory".
- The iconic shape: the bar consists of six large tiles featuring embossed animals. Amélie Coulombe explains that "the hems on the edges of the tiles are truly associated with a whole consumption ritual".
- The collection: collectible cards featuring the animal world are immediately available within the packaging. To revive the brand, the partners relied on fans belonging to active communities on social media such as Facebook. These are communities dedicated to the Merveilles du Monde brand alone or, more broadly, to iconic products from the 1980s and 1990s. According to Amélie Coulombe, the goal was to integrate these communities and involve them in the brand's revival. Discussions were initiated with small groups:

"We were able to create a truly daily dialogue with them to keep them informed of the brand's progress and ask for their opinions."

To ensure the product met their expectations as closely as possible, fans expressed their opinions on various topics, from the development of the packaging, the collection, and even the recipe. Fans of the brand supported its renewal. As Amélie Coulombe points out:

"The market has evolved over fifteen years, and there are issues that exist today that didn't exist back then."

With a brand name as evocative as Merveilles du Monde, social and environmental issues could no longer be ignored. Shaking things up without upsetting

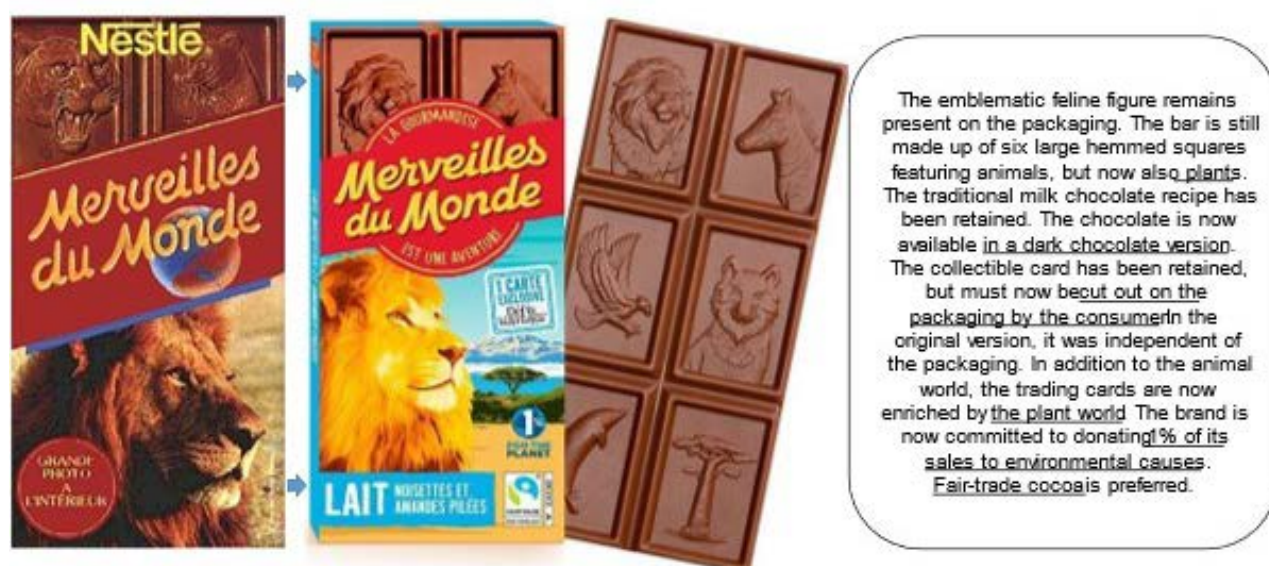


Figure 4: The main developments of Merveilles du Monde from yesterday to today.

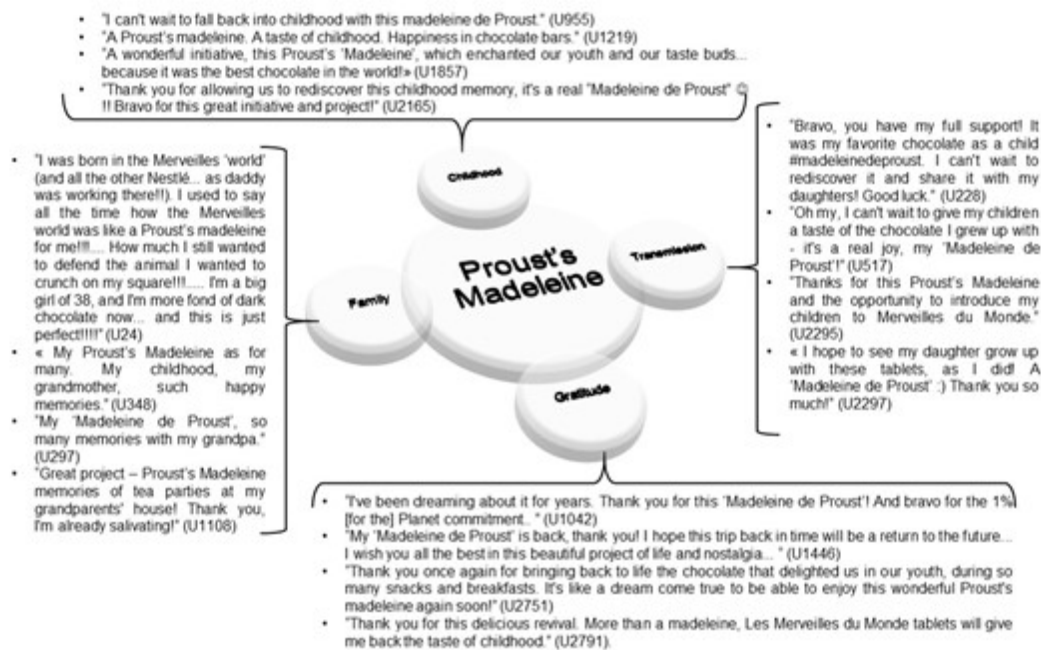


Figure 5: Perceptual map of the "Proust madeleine" effect  
(Source: Perceptual map produced from our Nvivo analysis – here only extracts from the Ulule campaign corpus were selected).

the nostalgic community was the challenge the entrepreneurs faced. Typically, in the two entrepreneurs' desire to be innovative, they considered a collection in a digital format. However, this idea came up against what Amélie Coulombe describes as "fundamental points of attachment". Regarding the collection, it ultimately came down to adopting the principle of a card immediately available on the packaging. The collection no longer only covers the animal world but also the plant world. In an eco-responsible approach, each card can now be cut out from the tablet's cardboard packaging. Regarding the recipe, Amélie Coulombe explains that even if the brand community was attached to the historical taste, it was also open to novelty. In particular, some consumers had seen their tastes evolve since childhood, which is why it was decided that the tablet would now also be available in dark chocolate. We summarize the main evolutions of the product in Figure 4.

## In search of lost time: The nostalgic virtues of the brand's resurrection

"Return is the medicine for nostalgia, like aspirin for migraines", Jankélévitch, 1974, p. 340.

### Sensory anticipation: When the announcement of resurrection provokes the "Proust's madeleine" effect

The announcement of the return of Merveilles du Monde chocolate was very well received by the historical community. So much so that consumers were sometimes prey to a certain perplexity: could it be too good to be true? Our corpus allows us to observe a form of curiosity

generated by the announcement of the brand's return. The community wonders what the return hides: Who is behind it? Will there be innovation? Will the chocolate have the same taste? Will it still be as good? Will new trading cards be included?... The announcement of the brand's return simultaneously gives way to a nostalgic surge on the part of the historical community. If the implicit prevails, there are many references to the terminology of "Proust's madeleine" when referring to Merveilles du Monde chocolate. Produced from our Nvivo analysis, the perceptual map presented in Figure 5 puts into perspective the relationships spontaneously established between the explicit reference to the "Proust madeleine" and the associated themes. It highlights an evocative force of childhood, family, transmission as well as the gratitude inherent in the emergence of a palette of emotions.

Regarding Merveilles du Monde chocolate, R41 indicates that he "missed it a lot" and adds: "It's a 'Madeleine de Proust', it evokes a lot of nostalgia, memories". These memories include periods of life, particularly childhood. Typically, R61 refers to the brand as "a Madeleine de Proust", echoing the "taste of childhood." In the same vein, R36 cites the "madeleine de Proust" with "a taste of childhood and the 1980s". Our research thus perfectly echoes the work on nostalgia conducted by Holbrook & Schindler (1991), in that it is mainly a period of life when they were young (childhood or adolescence) that resurfaces in the respondents' discourse. We also find in the verbatim comments explicitly referring to the "Madeleine de Proust" the bittersweet feeling linked to a bygone past. While echoing the research of Davis (1979) or Holak & Havlena (1998), it is mainly pleasant memories that we observe in our corpus, their possibly bitter character is inherent to the awareness of

what will no longer be (Jankélévitch, 1974). Typically, R08 evokes the “sorrow” relating to what “will not be re-experienced”. As for R21, she evokes a feeling of sadness linked to the comfort associated with the brand and latent memories. She evokes “moments shared in the carefreeness of childhood with friends, a carefreeness that inevitably disappears in adulthood”. R21 adds that “the images highlighted the beauty of the animal world, the distant lands that we dreamed of exploring”. According to her, “today, we cannot think of the animal world without evoking biodiversity in peril, the disappearance of species, zoonoses, etc.”. With reference to the work of Lowenthal (1975) or Taylor & Konrad (1980), a form of disenchantment with the present can be perceived in this testimony, which could be the origin of the feeling of nostalgia.

Our analysis also highlights the latent associations of the Merveilles du Monde experience with family members: grandparents, parents, siblings, and cousins. R25, for example, associates Merveilles du Monde chocolate with her paternal grandmother, with whom she spent the holidays with her sister. In her memory, she only ate this chocolate at her grandmother’s house. However, since some of the people with whom chocolate is associated are no longer with us, a feeling of sadness is latent. While the evocations are mostly positive, the respondents’ food nostalgia, echoing the research of Vignolles & Pichon (2007), lies on a continuum ranging from bitter to sweet.

While awaiting the brand’s return, the discourse of community members is not solely rooted in the past. Indeed, it is often through a dynamic of transmission that consumers are eager to rediscover the product. Many people want to introduce their children to the chocolate of their childhood:

“I’m delighted with this return. I can’t wait to introduce it to my children, and share my childhood memories with them” (R23). “It’s a huge pleasure. I wrote to Nestlé to see if they were going to remake this chocolate, I really wanted to introduce it to my daughters” (R30).

Our analysis also allows us to put into perspective the evocative capacity of the announcement of the brand’s return (see Table 4). These are places, moments of life, sensations that resurface. In reference to Brunel *et al.* (1986), the “Madeleine” effect allows us to awaken deeply buried memories. It is important to note that our discussion here focuses on the evocative power of the sole announcement of the product’s return. This evocative force therefore operates independently of the tasting of the product. In reference to Brown *et al.* (2003), Merveilles du Monde therefore constitutes an iconic chocolate brand. The resurrection of this “sleeping beauty” allows, as the work of Dion & Mazzalovo (2016) suggests, to reconnect consumers with their past.

ID	Selection of verbatims
R13	“Between the ages of 6 to 10, in the family kitchen with my dad, we would choose which animal would be eaten! And we loved the picture in the packet; it looked like the pictures we received at school when we had earned enough good points!”
R41	“I must have been 7 or 8 years old with my big brother. We would wait for Mom to open the tablet to find out which animal would be on the big cardboard picture. My brother and I would collect these pictures; then we would look at the animals in relief on the squares of the tablet, before tasting... It was a sweet moment lulled by carelessness, greed, a happy moment.”
R51	“On vacation, in the countryside, and I ate Merveilles du Monde chocolate with good country bread with lots of crumb.”
R60	“Coming home from school with my grandmother and sisters, I must have been 6 years old. Our little piece of baguette with chocolate. We fought over the picture as a gift.”
R61	“I remember my grandmother buying them, and I would eat them in the green-painted kitchen for snacks. Sometimes I was allowed butter and bread with them. It was a good time. And there was the pleasure of finding a card I didn’t have.”

Table 4: A journey through time.

Table 4 highlights that memories are associated with a period of life, with a specific physical and social environment. Through the return of the brand, bygone periods resurface. In a marginal position, some express their wish that the brand remains attached to the sole period of childhood. Typically, R46 expresses the wish that the resurrection be ephemeral: “This brand must remain associated with our childhood”. Notwithstanding, many people want to relive the wonder; the following section highlights their expectations.

## Consumer expectations 2.0: Reliving wonder

The analysis of the verbatim comments collected from members of the brand community demonstrates the community’s central points of attachment. The brand community’s desires are structured around three fundamental characteristics: recipe, tablet design, and collection. This single verbatim comment is emblematic from this perspective:

“My taste buds still remember that delicious taste that I loved to let melt piece by piece, starting with the outlines of the animals, and my eyes remember the pleasure I felt when I discovered the card that I would store in the precious metal box!!! 😊😊😊” (I715).

Referring to Table 2 (p.31), multiple senses are “nostalgically awakened” here. Our analysis thus perfectly echoes what Amélie Coulombe describes as the backbone of the brand (see Table 5 on p.38), and suggests, in line with the research of Brown *et al.* (2003) or Cervellon & Brown (2014), a form of resistance to change from several members of the historical community.

Selection of verbatims	
Recipe	"Great. Do you have the same recipe?" (I-316).  "What great news!!!!!! 🍬 I can't wait!!!!!! It's my childhood, I hope you'll keep the recipe, it was particularly good :) 🍬 🍬 🍬" (I-1771).  "RHOOO yes!!!! 🍬 Is it the same recipe? Does it taste the same?" (I-1621).  "So excited 🍬. I hope I'll get the taste of my childhood back 🍬 I hope they haven't changed the recipe" (I-2856).
Chocolate bar design	"And will the chocolate have the same animals as in our time?" (I-1951).  "You're just BRILLIANT 🍬 My brother and I used to fight over the cutest animals, like the giraffe. Then a second battle over the card" (I-2773).  "This week, my 5-year-old son told me he'd like chocolates with animals drawn on them. I told him that when I was little, I used to eat them for snacks 🍬 🍬. I can't wait to introduce them to him!" (I-1929).  "A childhood memory, a very good chocolate with large squares, and I remember the beautiful animal pictures in each pack 🍬" (I-1001).
Cards	"This chocolate has been my whole childhood; I own all the cards and even the storage box" (I-794).  "This project is huge! 🍬 I was talking to my 6-year-old son not long ago about this chocolate and its animal cards! He told me he wanted them all! (But I'll be the one eating the chocolate 🍬 🍬, it's for his own good, right!)" (I-1762).  "Thank you!!!! My whole childhood!!!! I'll be able to continue my card collection!!!! I have over 1,200 with the duplicates!!!! 🍬" (I-2224).  "That's good news 🍬. I hope there will still be trading cards? Okay, it's more for the chocolate 🍬, but the cards are to give me a clear conscience 🍬. In any case, a HUGE THANK YOU for this feedback" (I-2076).
Source: Extract from our verbatim tables – Instagram corpus.	

Table 5: The backbone of the brand.

Many respondents to our survey thus expressed a desire for the new product to be similar to the one they had as a child:

"Keep the same recipe and cards" (R01); Stay loyal» (R02); Don't change anything" (R03); Let it be the same product" (R04); Definitely don't change the recipe" (R30); etc.

Echoing the notion of a backbone, long-standing consumers are advocating for the rediscovery of the recipe and the connection with animals. The brand community thus wants to rediscover the animal world on packaging, on tiles, in advertising communications, and on trading cards. Referring to Jankélévitch (1974), the "resurrected" product must, in the minds of long-time fans, be physically imprinted with its original form. According to Amélie Coulombe, when relaunching a historic brand, it's crucial not to get lost:

"You really have to capitalize on the brand's fundamentals because there's a very strong attachment".

She adds:

"You can't just do anything. [...] We're not creating a new brand; it's a brand that truly has existing capital that we must build on to modernize it and give it a new dimension, but we have to start from the existing foundations".

This is why working "hand in hand" with fans was essential. Echoing Volpert (2019), we can see here the challenges inherent in relaunching a nostalgic brand. The challenge is significant: updating the product while respecting its DNA, and developing a connection with consumers.

While many are seeking similarities, many respondents say they are open to new things – sometimes even going so far as to advocate for them. Changes are particularly required from a "responsible" perspective. R22 emphasizes the importance of favoring fair trade

chocolate. In this context, R44 mentions organic chocolate, which means "reclaiming the codes of the time" while defending "a healthy origin for the cocoa and milk used". R55 also wants "healthy ingredients and an ecological and fair approach". It is also suggested that the range be extended to include dark, white, or praline chocolate. Several respondents' views are also based on a perspective of attracting new generations. Typically, R21 considers that "children today are more jaded, and sources of information are much broader today than in the 1980s". According to her, this implies greater care for images and the renewal of attractive themes. Echoing Volpert's research (2019), we perceive the tension between the desire to capture insiders attached to the backbone of the brand, more or less prey to a form of resistance to change, and novices who are more open *a priori* to novelty. These novices could, however, from a perspective of "intergenerational transmission", be influenced by the historical community directing them towards the product. It is also from this perspective of transmission that the recruitment of new consumers is envisaged by Amélie Coulombe.

While the announcement of the brand's return is generating enthusiasm and anticipation, certain obstacles could hamper the success of the brand's resurrection. Price is one of the main potential barriers to purchasing it. Indeed, this aspect is cited by nearly half of the respondents to our survey. Some respondents then compare this price to the chocolates they usually buy:

"The price, if it is prohibitive compared to similar brands distributed in supermarkets (Lindt, Côte d'Or)" (R21);  
"The price, if it were higher than what I usually buy (Côte d'Or hazelnut chocolate)" (R12).

The characteristics of the chocolate, including the type (dark, milk, etc.), taste, composition, sugar content, or the presence of additives, are also among the associated obstacles. Respondents are particularly interested in rediscovering the taste of chocolate from their childhood:

"I'm wary, because I've already been disappointed by the return of legendary products. For example, Copaya white chocolate doesn't taste at all the same today as it did twenty years ago!" (R61).

From this perspective, since the original chocolate is milk, some respondents say they fear finding it only in dark chocolate. Finally, to a lesser extent, the potential difficulties in finding it in supermarkets are among the natural barriers to purchasing. According to Amélie Coulombe, while nostalgics express their eagerness to find chocolate again, the real challenge lies in terms of visibility: learning that the product is coming back and actually finding it in supermarkets. As our interviewee points out, the important thing is "to be accessible at the time of the launch" and to be present in everyday life, in regularly frequented shopping locations. The issue of distribution is sensitive. As we demonstrate in the following section, given the product's significant success, some consumers have indeed encountered difficulties in obtaining it.

### Between delicious enchantment and slight disillusionment: The contrasting effects of actual consumption

Following the huge success of the crowdfunding campaign, Merveilles du Monde chocolate gradually arrived in supermarkets throughout France in March 2023, in stores such as Super U, Monoprix, Intermarché, and Auchan. A victim of its own success, the brand experienced its first stock shortage barely a month after its launch. As Amélie Coulombe explains:

"There was a somewhat abnormal stockpiling effect; people were buying the bars in batches of 10 or 15."

This rather atypical behavior for the purchase of chocolate bars can be explained by the enthusiasm of consumers who gave the product to their loved ones or who feared, after such a long wait, that it would disappear from the market again. The level of restocking was so significant that the product was out of stock for a month. This situation penalized the brand in terms of increasing distribution. In May 2023, an Instagram post from the brand then stated: "Back in the shelves! Wonders of the World is back!! 2 months after the arrival of our first bars on the market, we are back in force, with enough ammunition to delight all the gourmets! [...] We are still a small team, and we are working very hard for this launch. Every day, we give our all to delight you and take you back to your childhood memories".

Despite expanded distribution, the brand community's frustration at not finding the long-awaited product was evident in the analysis of their communication actions over the seven months following the actual launch. In September 2023, the brand announced that it was working on opening an e-commerce site – which will actually be launched in October 2023. Despite supply difficulties, many were nevertheless able to experience a reunion with the brand. In line with the strong expectations highlighted by our research, two elements seem particularly noticeable in the discourse of consumers who have actually rediscovered the product of their childhood: the organoleptic characteristics, on the one hand, and the card collection, on the other.

Regarding the bar's organoleptic qualities, contrasting opinions emerge. Some consumers say they rediscover the taste of their childhood and are grateful to the brand. They fully and intensely experience the "Proust's madeleine" effect. Other doubtful consumers question their organoleptic experience: what about the recipe, the product's melting nature, or even its thickness? While the recipe is identical with a similar proportion of almonds and hazelnuts, adjustments have been made since the product's launch to move towards even greater fidelity to the original product. Amélie Coulombe explains that she conducted focus groups with fans of the historic brand who weren't entirely convinced by the new recipe. Our interviewee tells us that she worked with them "hand in hand" to identify points for "recipe optimization". As she explains, even though the historic recipe has been retained, the ingredients being different from those of twenty years ago, it was necessary to make certain adjustments. In particular, this involved obtaining a more milky and melt-in-the-mouth result, with a slightly more

pronounced hazelnut flavor. The continuous improvement process involving consumers since the beginning of the adventure is perceptible in the entrepreneurial trajectory. On the brand's website, we can read: "We worked with fans of the brand to test and validate the recipe at each stage of its development, and we continue to adjust the result to be as close as possible to your expectations". Regarding the thickness, the historic bar weighed 125g versus 100g for the new version. The previous bar being slightly wider, the thickness would in fact be very close. It is ultimately the evolution of their own taste that some consumers question and / or their ability to remember the precise taste of the chocolate of their childhood. They thus approach the contours of their memories with caution and skepticism. As Amélie Coulombe explains, the taste of childhood is often highly idealized. She also considers that taste memories are influenced by everyday eating habits: the fact of consuming more or less sugar, the type of chocolate purchased, etc. According to our interviewee, memories are somehow biased, most often leading consumers to consider that "it was better before". These comments perfectly echo the research of Stern (1992) or Divard and Robert-Demontrond (1997), showing the idealization of the past to which nostalgics are prey. While the Merveilles du Monde chocolate is neither quite the same nor quite another, Table 6 (see next page) puts into perspective this duality between those, on the one hand, who feel the "Proust's madeleine" effect<sup>4</sup>, and those, on the other hand, who show perplexity.

Regarding the trading card, some regret not finding a format similar to the one that marked their childhood:

"It's a shame the animal card isn't an extra, but printed on the pack as is currently the case, but the taste is fantastic, four packs in one week, hmm..." (F2192).

To which the brand emphasizes the ecological reasons for its choice. On the one hand, it's a matter of avoiding over-packaging, and on the other, of addressing a technical issue inherent in the complex nature of adding a separate element (the card) during packaging<sup>5</sup>. Ultimately, the brand explains that it chose the best compromise in terms of the project's viability. It's worth noting that many consumers also express their satisfaction with the brand's eco-responsible choice. Similarly, the analysis of post-consumer feedback perfectly echoes the concerns expressed prior to marketing. In line with the research of Vignolles & Pichon (2007), a whole range of emotions emerges from the nostalgic consumption of Merveilles du Monde chocolate. In a gloomy and anxious climate, and in reference to Hirsch (1992), the resurrection of the Merveilles du Monde brand has aroused strong anticipation, and brought a touch of beneficial nostalgia to many consumers.

<sup>4</sup> The "Proust's madeleine" effect is characterized here by the fact that tasting chocolate plunges the subject back into that distant land of his childhood, his youth or, more broadly, into a bygone era.

<sup>5</sup> This technical aspect would also be one of the reasons why Nestlé stopped producing the product.

Madeleine effect: when the perception of similarity is present
"Wonders of the World, when I close my eyes while eating it, I feel like it's Wednesday afternoon in front of the Club Doa and I hear the jingle. Thank you for Proust's madeleine" (F223).
"What a return to childhood!!!! I remember coming home from school in a hurry to eat you without even a piece of bread... I close my eyes and feel the hazelnuts crunching under my teeth!!! Wonders of the World rocked our generation... Our famous 1980s... We had to have this moment of chocolaty happiness to be able to bear the mullet haircuts or other fancies of our parents... Love u 😊 and THANK YOU for having resurrected to fill our childhood palates..." (F230).
"Hello! A little feedback, because I was finally able to taste this wonderful chocolate and I rediscovered the taste of the chocolate of my childhood! Thank you very much for this great initiative. I also gave it to my eldest son to taste (milk and dark), there isn't much left... 😊 Have a nice day!" (F2185).
In search of lost taste: when organoleptic divergences appear
"Very happy to have found it again today, but a little disappointed; as we get older, tastes must change; too much hazelnut for my taste" (F230).
"I was finally able to taste the chocolate of my childhood and it is very good! The thing that I did not find, however, [...] is its natural 'melt' or maybe it is that I only ate it on hot days" (F560).
"Great! Finally found it in my store, it tastes good but as far as I can remember, the taste is different from my childhood, and the animals are not raised enough on the chocolate for me to be able to eat the outline without it breaking 😊 (little childhood habit of eating chocolate). Thanks anyway for bringing it out again, it's a great idea!" (F1928).
Source: extracts from our verbatim tables – Facebook corpus
<sup>a</sup> Referring to the show "Club Dorothée", a French television show that aired from 1987 to 1997 on the TF1 television channel. It was hosted by Dorothée, whose real name was Frédérique Hoschedé, a very popular French television personality. Offering a mix of Japanese cartoons, French teen series, sitcoms, games, and music sections, the show was very popular with children and teenagers of the time.
<sup>b</sup> The mullet refers to a hairstyle popular in the 1980s that involved wearing hair long at the nape of the neck and short on top of the head or temples.

Table 6: "Proust's madeleine" effect versus "search for lost taste".

Regarding the trading card, some regret not finding a format similar to the one that marked their childhood:

Conclusion

"I take a second sip, in which I find nothing more than in the first; a third, which brings me a little less than the second. It is time for me to stop, the virtue of the beverage seems to be diminishing", Marcel Proust, *Swann's Way*, 1913.

What if Merveilles du Monde wasn't actually chocolate after all? At the end of our analysis, it turns out to be a time machine, opening the doors to a lost era we long to rediscover<sup>6</sup> : our childhood.

Several key success factors of their approach can be highlighted. This involved meeting the challenge of respecting the brand's DNA while anchoring it in the contemporary era. A skillfully orchestrated communication approach prior to the relaunch enabled the commitment of the historical community, which continues to be solicited in the deployment of the brand. Finally, it is a question of going beyond the nostalgia effect and appealing to new generations with a brand that aims to be an ambassador for biodiversity. Figure 6 summarizes these aspects.

In terms of temporality, our analysis focused on the reactions of historical consumers before their reunion with the brand, and then in the seven months following its actual return. The longitudinal follow-up of the case reveals a range of emotions felt by the community, from the announcement of the return of Merveilles du Monde chocolate to its actual consumption. This research naturally calls for several extensions. We would be particularly keen to understand the mechanisms of resistance to change underlying the evocation of disappointment of certain members of the historical community. Furthermore, we find it interesting to probe the question of transmission. From a managerial perspective, this would involve understanding how brand managers can capitalize on the so-called "Proust's madeleine" effect of the historical community to attract their loved ones, first and foremost their children.

<sup>6</sup> Analogy to Donald (Don) Draper's remarks about the Kodak projector in the series *Mad Men*, season 1, episode 13.

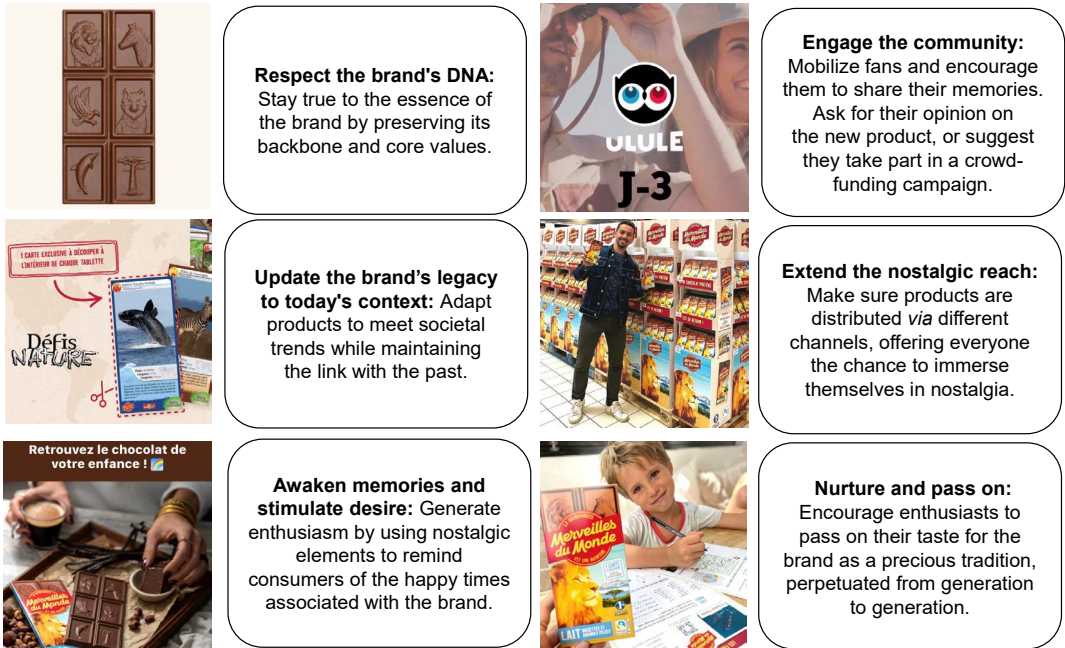


Figure 6: Keys to the resurrection of a nostalgic brand.

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