

Brand Resurrection and the Acceptance of Radical Innovation: An Archetypal Reading of the Renault 5 Electric

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Abstract

This study examines how the resurrection of iconic brands can foster the acceptance of radical innovations, using the case of the Renault 5 Electric. Drawing on Jungian archetypes, we conduct a netnography of 1,422 online comments coded with MaxQDA. The results show that the resurrected R5 activates positive archetypes (Hero, Mother, Trickster, Sage, Self), generating nostalgia, reassurance, and cultural continuity, thereby reducing symbolic resistance. By contrast, the generic electric car primarily mobilizes the Anima/Animus and the Shadow, reflecting ambivalent projections oscillating between idealization and rejection. Brand resurrection thus operates as a symbolic mediator, stabilizing collective imaginaries and facilitating the appropriation of ecological innovations.

Keywords: Brand resurrection, Radical innovation, Jungian archetypes, resistance, Ecological innovations

Résumé

Cet article analyse la manière dont la résurrection de marques iconiques peut favoriser l'acceptation d'innovations radicales, à partir du cas de la Renault 5 Électrique. En mobilisant le cadre des archétypes jungiens, nous menons une netnographie de 1 422 commentaires en ligne, codés à l'aide du logiciel MaxQDA. Les résultats montrent que la R5 ressuscitée active principalement des archétypes positifs (Héros, Mère, Farceur/Trickster, Sage, Soi), générant nostalgie, réassurance et continuité culturelle, ce qui réduit la résistance symbolique. À l'inverse, la voiture électrique générique mobilise surtout l'Anima/Animus et l'Ombre, révélant des projections ambivalentes, oscillant entre idéalisation et rejet. La résurrection de marque apparaît ainsi comme un médiateur symbolique qui stabilise les imaginaires collectifs et facilite l'appropriation des innovations écologiques.

Mots-clés : résurrection de marque, innovation radicale, archétypes jungiens, résistance, innovations écologiques.

Introduction

The fight against climate change and the urgency of the energy transition demand a profound transformation of consumption practices and industries. In this context, the automotive sector, historically dependent on fossil fuels, is undergoing a radical shift with the massive electrification of its product lines (European Commission, 2020). The adoption of electric vehicles therefore represents a strategic challenge, not only for manufacturers' competitiveness but also for the success of public policies on ecological transition.

However, this radical innovation faces persistent resistance. Such resistance may be functional (cost, autonomy, infrastructure), psychological (habits, identity tied to combustion engines), or social (peer perception) (Ram & Sheth, 1989; Talke & Heidenreich, 2014). In the case of electric vehicles, resistance is further reinforced by a lack of familiarity (Rogers, 2003; Jansson et al., 2017), intensifying cognitive dissonance: although consumers acknowledge climate issues, they struggle to align their practices accordingly (Festinger, 1957; Giner-Sorolla, 2012). These barriers, sometimes latent (Claudy et al., 2015), fuel the perception of electric mobility as a contested innovation (Heidenreich & Spieth, 2013), slowing down its diffusion and weakening its social acceptance.

In this context, some automakers are turning to a distinctive strategy: the resurrection of iconic brands. The relaunch of the Renault 5 in its electric version illustrates this approach, alongside the announced return of the Renault 4L, Fiat Panda, Fiat 600, Volkswagen Combi (ID.Buzz), as well as the revival of DS and Alpine. Such revivals rekindle an affective and symbolic relationship with consumers, leveraging familiar, nostalgia-laden cultural references.

The originality of this research lies in analyzing brand resurrection as a symbolic lever for the acceptance of innovation. More specifically, it explores how the mobilization of collective archetypes, as defined by Jung (1954), reshapes the perception of ecological innovation by reducing psychological and identity-related resistance.

Thus, the guiding research question of this paper is: **How does brand resurrection act upon the collective unconscious in a context of resistance to radical innovation?**

Theoretical Framework: Brand Resurrection and the Collective Imaginary

Resistance to innovation is defined as a negative attitude toward a novelty perceived as threatening to established habits or beliefs (Ram & Sheth, 1989). It can be functional (price, autonomy), psychological (values, identity), or social (peer perception) (Talke & Heidenreich, 2014). In the case of electric vehicles, these barriers are reflected in high costs, technical uncertainties, and a lack of familiarity, sometimes generating cognitive dissonance: despite ecological awareness, many consumers continue to prefer combustion engines (Festinger, 1957; Claudy et al., 2015).

Electric mobility exemplifies what the literature terms a radical innovation, an innovation that profoundly transforms an industry by disrupting technologies, practices, and cultural reference points (Garcia & Calantone, 2002; Chandy & Tellis, 2000). Unlike incremental innovations that build upon existing logics, radical innovations overturn them, which explains the strong resistance they provoke.

Brand resurrection refers to the return of a discontinued brand to the market in order to reactivate its symbolic and emotional capital (Lehu, 2004). Also described as retrobranding or brand revival, it may take the form of an identical relaunch, a modernization, or a reinterpretation around the brand name (Handique & Sarkar, 2020). Nostalgia plays a central role in this process, reconnecting consumers with personal and collective memories (Ferrandi, 2012; Brown, Kozinets & Sherry, 2003). Yet, success also depends on perceived credibility and the balance between past and present (Volpert & Michel, 2022). Some brands even achieve the status of cultural icons (Holt, 2004), becoming symbolic risk reducers that reassure consumers in the face of innovation (Kessous & Roux, 2006; Beverland & Farrelly, 2010).

To analyze this process, we draw on Jung's theory of archetypes (1954). Archetypes are universal figures of the collective unconscious, such as the Hero, the Mother, the Trickster, or the Sage, which structure human representations and manifest themselves in myths, narratives, and social behaviors (Jung, 1964). In marketing, they provide a powerful analytical framework for understanding the symbolic and emotional investments consumers make in brands (Mark & Pearson, 2001).

Our research thus focuses on eight key archetypes particularly relevant to the automotive sector: Hero/Child, Mother/Protector, Trickster, Shadow, Anima/Animus, Self, Kore, and Sage/Spirit.

Methodology: A Netnographic and Archetypal Approach

This research adopts a netnographic design, a qualitative approach suited to the study of online communities and digital discourse (Kozinets, 2002, 2015; Bernard, 2004). Netnography provides access to spontaneous exchanges rich in symbolic and identity-related content, making it particularly appropriate for analyzing consumers' reception of innovation.

The corpus comprises 1,422 comments collected between March 2025 and June 2025 from two public Facebook groups: "Renault 5 Électrique", focused on the return of an iconic model, and "Voiture électrique", dedicated to electric mobility without reference to a specific brand or model. Only French-language, on-topic comments with minimal argumentative content were retained; off-topic posts, advertisements and duplicates were excluded. All data were anonymized and collected from public spaces, in line with ethical guidelines for online research.

The analysis was conducted using MaxQDA (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2019). An iterative coding process, consistent with established qualitative coding protocols (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014; Saldaña, 2016), combined inductive theme identification with a theoretically informed coding dictionary based on Jungian archetypes (Jung, 1954; Mark & Pearson, 2001), including Hero/Child, Mother/Protector, Trickster, Shadow, Anima/Animus, Self/Mandala, Kore and Sage/Spirit. Discussion between researchers was used to refine the coding scheme and ensure consistency. Comparing the two corpora makes it possible to identify which archetypes dominate in each context (resurrected brand vs. radical innovation) and to show how brand resurrection may symbolically reduce resistance to innovation, echoing work on symbolic and narrative frameworks in consumer culture and innovation marketing (Thompson, Rindfleisch & Arsel, 2006; Cova & Cova, 2012).

Results: Archetypes and Symbolic Dynamics

Resurrected brand: between nostalgia, security, and cultural appropriation

The comments on the resurrected Renault 5 reveal a diverse mobilization of archetypes, dominated by the Hero/Child, the Mother/Protector, and the Trickster, complemented by the Sage and the Self.

The Hero/Child emerges through nostalgia and collective pride: *“Already adorable, it makes her even cuter!!!”, “I love it, I’m a fan of this version!”*, *“My entire adolescence in one car.”* The Mother/Protector appears in references to reliability and safety: *“Beautiful, simple, reliable... that’s all you need from it,” “An absolutely extraordinary car, 100% reliable!”*, *“Same reaction from my family, but doubled, since we bought two R5s.”* The Trickster, though less frequent, surfaces in affectionate mockery (*“A real toy,” “a fun gadget”*), signaling cultural appropriation rather than rejection. Finally, the Sage and the Self highlight heritage and balance between past and present: *“Is this the history of the update Renault rolled out?”*, *“I’d never sell it for anything in the world,” “We charge it quietly at home, no problem.”*

Overall, the R5 activates positive and familiar archetypes that facilitate acceptance while reducing the Shadow (fears and resistances).

Non-resurrected brand: between ambivalent projections and persistent resistances

By contrast, the generic electric car mainly mobilizes the Anima/Animus, accompanied by the Shadow. Online users oscillate between fascination and disappointment: *“Can’t wait until we can charge a car in five minutes,” “The whole ambiguity of Tesla: making a lot of noise while relying on an aging technical architecture,” “Honestly, a Dodge Charger should remain a big V8 supercharged, this is sad, I like EVs, but this is sad.”* This ambivalence appears in contradictory terms such as *“beautiful,” “magnificent”* versus *“expensive,” “heavy,” “weak.”*

The Shadow surfaces in criticisms about cost and maintenance: *“If you’re looking for something cheap but functional, why not, it does the job,” “How much did the Peugeot 3008 plug-in hybrid*

cost?”, “*One day you’ll have to get your hands dirty... or replace a battery module.*” These verbatims reflect a fragile mix of enthusiasm and persistent doubt.

Without symbolic mediation, radical innovation concentrates intense but unstable affects, making acceptance precarious.

The R5 mobilizes several positive archetypes (Hero, Mother, Trickster, Sage, Self), generating nostalgia, security, humor, and cultural continuity, which reduces symbolic resistance. In contrast, the generic EV, centered on Anima/Animus and the Shadow, fosters a polarized relationship between idealization and rejection.

Thus, brand resurrection acts as a symbolic mediator, stabilizing the collective imaginary, whereas radical innovation remains vulnerable to ambivalent projections and resistance.

Conclusion

This research set out to examine the extent to which brand resurrection can act as a symbolic mediator in reducing resistance to radical innovation. Through a netnographic analysis of online comments on the Renault 5 Electric and on electric vehicles more generally, we applied Jung’s archetypal framework to explore the collective imaginaries activated in consumer discourse.

The results show that in the case of a resurrected brand, several positive collective archetypes (Hero, Mother, Trickster, Sage, Self) are mobilized, generating nostalgia, security, and humor that foster cultural appropriation and reduce perceptions of risk (Shadow). In contrast, the generic electric car primarily activates the Anima/Animus, an archetype marked by unstable affective projections oscillating between idealization and rejection, often accompanied by economic and ecological fears.

These findings suggest that brand resurrection stabilizes the collective imaginary by reactivating shared symbolic figures, thereby serving as a powerful lever to facilitate the acceptance of innovation. From a managerial perspective, this strategy enables automakers to anchor their innovations within a cultural and identity-based continuity, moving beyond purely technical or economic arguments.

Looking forward, it would be valuable to test the relevance of this approach in other sectors where radical innovations face resistance, such as household appliances, sustainable fashion, or digital technologies. Comparative cross-sectoral studies could deepen our understanding of the role of archetypes and assess their effectiveness as universal symbolic mediators in the acceptance of innovation.

Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations. First, the analysis is based on a netnographic corpus drawn from public Facebook groups, which may introduce bias related to the profile of active users (e.g., an overrepresentation of enthusiasts or highly engaged consumers). Second, while the archetypal coding grid is grounded in robust theoretical work (Jung, 1954; Mark & Pearson, 2001), the coding process inevitably involves a degree of subjective interpretation, despite the support of MaxQDA software. Finally, the study focuses on a single case of brand resurrection (Renault 5) and one generic category (electric vehicles), which limits the generalizability of the findings to other contexts.

These limitations nonetheless open up fertile avenues for future research. It would be worthwhile to extend the analysis to other sectors facing radical innovations (e.g., sustainable household appliances, circular fashion, digital technologies) in order to test the cross-sectoral relevance of archetypes. Future studies could also combine netnography with quantitative methods (experiments, surveys) to measure the precise impact of archetypal activation on attitudes, purchase intentions, and consumer trust toward innovation. Finally, a longitudinal approach could assess whether the stabilizing effect of resurrected brands persists over time or erodes as societal expectations evolve.

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Annex 1 : Table – Archetypal Coding Grid (brief definition and coded verbatim examples)

Archetype	Brief Definition	Examples of Coded Verbatims
Hero/Child	Nostalgia, renewal, collective pride	“All my teenage years in one car”; “I love it, I’m a fan of this version!”
Mother/Protector	Safety, comfort, reliability	“Beautiful, simple, reliable... that’s all we ask of it”; “An absolutely extraordinary car, 100% reliable!”
Trickster	Humor, irony, transgression	“A real toy”; “Cool gadget”
Shadow	Fears, distrust, resistance	“How much did the 3008 plug-in hybrid cost?”; “Until the day you’ll have to get your hands dirty... or change a battery module”
Anima/Animus	Ambivalent affective and identity projections	“Can’t wait until we can recharge a car in five minutes”; “I like EVs but this is sad”
Self/Mandala	Union of past and future, quest for harmony	“I wouldn’t sell it for anything in the world”; “We recharge quietly at home, no problem”
Kore	Innocence, youth, transition	“A little car that marked my youth”
Sage/Spirit	Tradition, guidance, transmission	“This is the update Renault had rolled out?”; “A true automotive history lesson”

Annex 2 : Comparative Evolution of Archetypes in Discussions on the Renault 5 Electric and Generic Electric Cars

Rechercher un code ...

- Ombre
- Kore
- Mère
- Trickster
- Anima/Animus
- Le soi
- Sage
- Héros

