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POV

TURNING
ANNOYANCE INTO
ADVANCEMENT

Frustration Innovation.

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& **Holly Mourgues**



At Ahzul, we've always believed that the most meaningful innovations stem from understanding life's everyday challenges.

Our late co-founder, Miguel Gomez Winebrenner, truly understood this and was passionate about it. He believed that frustration wasn't just a problem to solve but an opportunity to create something better—a concept he called "Frustration Innovation."

Before his passing earlier this year, Miguel partnered with our Strategy Lead, Holly Mourgues, to co-author this piece that brought this vision to life: ***Frustration Innovation: Turning Annoyance Into Advancement.***

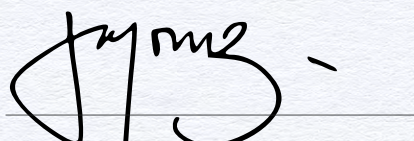
This article explores how consumer frustrations and pain points can be transformed into new opportunities for innovation—whether it's in the products we create, the services we offer, or the ways in which we deliver them.

Miguel's leadership and passion for reimagining consumer insights are embedded in every word. His belief in pushing the boundaries of what's possible is something we continue to carry forward in all our work at Ahzul.

We are honored to be able to share his legacy with you through this piece, which serves as a testament to the impact Miguel had not only within Ahzul but on the many brands and partners he worked with over the years.

We invite you to read the piece and reflect on the ways consumer challenges might inspire new ideas and solutions in your own work.

As always, thank you for being part of our extended Ahzul community. Miguel's vision, legacy and passion live on in the work we do every day, and we are grateful to have you with us as we continue to build on the foundation he set.



Johana M. Gomez
Ahzul Co-Founder & Principal

the **Grandmother**
OF **Innovation**

The idiom "necessity is the mother of invention" has been widely used in many cultures. It basically means that as we need something, **'we make it happen'** (Indians call this "jugaad"). And while this concept, first introduced by Plato in his book "The Republic" holds true,

AT AHZUL

★ **we believe that if
"necessity is the
mother of
invention" then
"frustration is
the grandmother
of innovation."**



HERE'S WHY

people 
often don't
know what
they need.

Steve Jobs himself said that the iPhone wasn't created from a need that people openly expressed (he didn't quite believe in market research for this reason). Rather, he tapped into a **wealth of articulated and unarticulated frustrations** - hard to read driving instructions on MapQuest that needed to be printed out for each drive and carried along, and costly text message prices, just to name a couple.



What Is

Frustration Innovation?

++ We have all, no doubt, experienced frustration, but what is it exactly? Frustration is a **complex emotional response** triggered by the

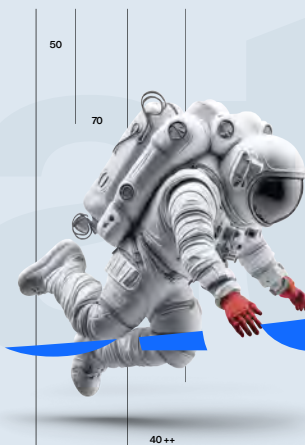
**perceived
discrepancy
between our
goals and
our ability to
achieve
them.**

It is what happens when our expectations crash into our reality, leaving us annoyed, disappointed, and maybe even a little angry.

And while no one would argue that **frustration is a positive emotion, it is most certainly a valuable one** – especially for marketers, researchers, product developers, and innovators.

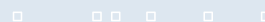
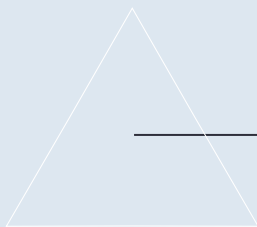
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We as humans only know what we have already experienced, so we are terrible at articulating solutions that don't yet exist. But we are **much better at understanding and expressing what frustrates us – and what we wish we could change.** So, while we can't predict the future, by tapping into what frustrates us, we can get a glimpse into what future innovations will come.



AND THAT'S
EXACTLY
WHAT
FRUSTRATION
INNOVATION IS:

a process through
which frustration
is used as a
catalyst for
improving and
innovating
products and
services.





FRUSTRATION
INNOVATION
IS:



NETFLIX

channeling user frustration with endless scrolling and decision paralysis about what to watch into innovation through algorithms that give personalized recommendations and curated "Top 10" lists for a more satisfying (and less frustrating) viewing experience.



recognizing the constant menace of tangled headphone cords and taking it on as a design challenge, from which the AirPods, cord-free earbuds that revolutionized the way we listen to music, emerged.



DELTA

and other airlines taking aim at the frustration of weary travelers waiting in long airport lines and developing a wave of innovation including self-service kiosks, bag drops and mobile apps that let you check in from the comfort of your home – ultimately redefining the airport experience and minimizing at least one of the many challenges of air travel.





NOW, TO BE CLEAR,



not all innovation is (or should be) driven by frustration.
Innovation is often driven by

technological advancements

like the rise of **artificial intelligence**,

competition and market forces,

where brands are constantly seeking to differentiate themselves to gain a competitive edge, and **changes in societal values**, like the growing awareness of sustainability.



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Frustration Innovation^{is}

A Critical Approach to Innovation

BECAUSE IT
speaks directly to **unmet consumer
needs and desires** – even those that
are unarticulated.

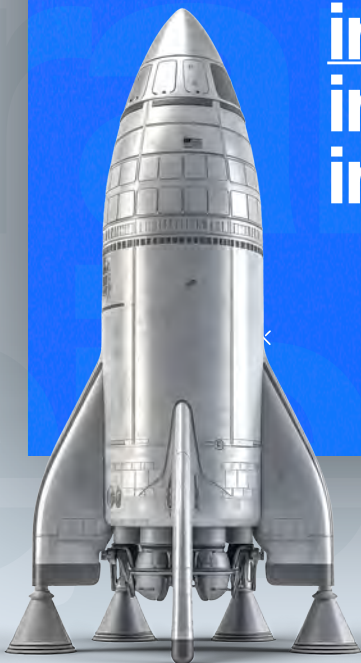
That said, it is an approach that is
often **underleveraged by companies.**



JUST LIKE PEOPLE,

companies are sensitive to negative information, where even constructive criticism can feel disproportionately harsh. It's why many companies, when conducting consumer research, screen out "brand rejectors." But brand rejectors **offer a unique perspective, often highlighting shortcomings that loyal customers might overlook**

— **providing a valuable source of insights for innovation and improvement.**



How Does

Frustration Innovation Work?

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First The Bad News

there is no single framework or approach for exposing frustrations. But in our experience, there are a set of tools and methodologies that can **help uncover and understand frustrations.**

Talk to Rejectors, Complainers, and Those Who Have Left the Brand

As mentioned above, brands often avoid hearing from people who don't like their products and services, but **understanding these perspectives is incredibly useful.** Seeking out people who have considered the brand but didn't choose it, people who outright reject it, and those who are former users who left are all audiences worth hearing from. **It's often uncomfortable to hear negative feedback about your brand, and even more uncomfortable to spend money to do so**

— **But it Can Yield Important Insights for Innovation.**

• • • • •

Along these same lines, social media listening can be a great tool for understanding customer frustrations as **social media often provides the platform** for expressing frustrations with brands.

The Other Source for Understanding Frustration Within a Company?

Customer Service Reps ▶

▼
MANY
COMPANIES
COMPLETELY
OVERLOOK
▲

customer service

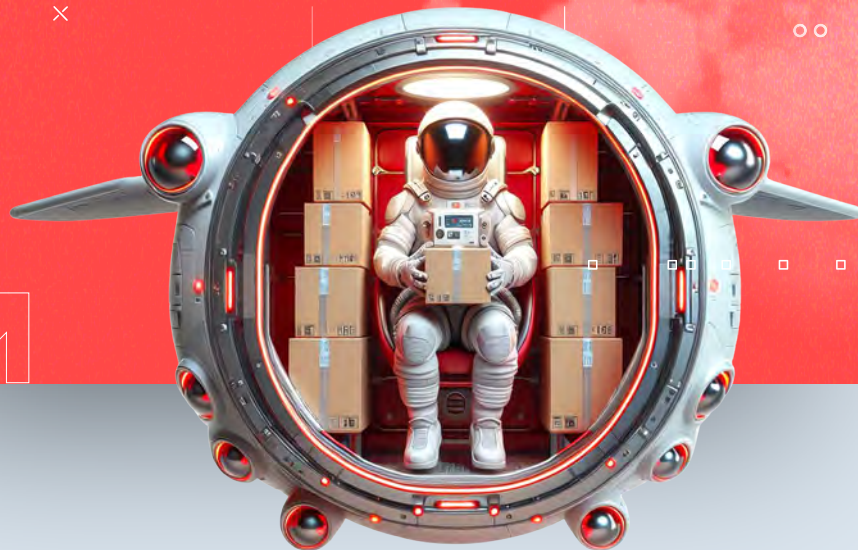


in their research plans, and yet these teams are on the front line of hearing and responding to customer frustrations on a daily basis.

Go Beyond the Rational
Mind to Understand

Deeper^x Frustrations

While people can, at least to an extent, **understand and express their frustrations**, we have found it particularly useful to **use tools and techniques** which allow us to dig deeper **to uncover frustrations and desires** which often lie under the surface.





The Use of Observational Research Tools Like



for example, can help researchers see frustrations that people might not even notice about themselves.

PROJECTIVE
TECHNIQUES
LIKE

**metaphors,
storytelling, and
collage making can
help participants
bypass verbal filters
to express emotional
motivations and
underlying feelings.**

: Non-traditional research tools like **role-playing or simulations** can also help put participants in situations where we can uncover hidden anxieties and preferences. ×

Co-Create

WITH YOUR AUDIENCES

- × As mentioned above, **people don't always know what they need** – so we'd like to caveat this section with a huge asterisk.



THAT SAID

co-creation sessions, where researchers, clients, and consumers work together to solve problems in a “research” setting, can be very useful tools for understanding frustrations through the lens of potential solutions.



Your audiences might not come up with a “good” solution – they certainly wouldn't have come up with the iPhone, but by **digging deeper** into their solutions, you can often **uncover new dimensions** to their expressed and unexpressed frustrations.

PUTTING

Frustration Innovation into Practice

Ultimately, companies that learn
**to approach
frustration⁺
with an[»]**



open
mind

**and a willingness
to listen can unlock
valuable insights
and opportunities
for growth.**

Addressing challenges raised
by your audiences can lead to
innovations that solve
previously unrecognized
problems and can help
products and services reach a
broader audience.

IF YOU'RE JUST GETTING STARTED,
HERE ARE A FEW THINGS TO CONSIDER:

1 Be open to hearing what's not working – and seek it out

Hearing negative feedback about your brand or product is never easy. Help your teams understand the importance of these insights and take the time to invest in understanding frustrations, whether through social media listening, regular conversations with customer service, or by inviting brand rejectors and those who have left the brand to research.

2 Know thy brand –

Not every frustration can be or should be solved by a brand. In fact, some frustrations are actually part of the allure of the brand (think waiting in line outside a store in the cold to get one of a few pairs of a new sneaker drop). Having a clear understanding of your brand's equity and position in the marketplace will help you understand where frustration innovation makes sense, and where it could actually backfire.



3 Go Deeper –

While brand equity surveys are important (we know, we conduct plenty of them!) and can reveal important brand shifts, they often lack the nuance needed to identify frustrations. Exploratory qualitative methodologies are most suited to this type of exploration and can allow for a deeper, more emotional understanding of articulated and unarticulated frustrations.

And if you'd like to talk more about

HOW

Frustration Innovation Could Work⁺ for your Brand

Give us a Shout –
We'd Love to Chat!

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