

THE FRINGE EFFECT:

Why Tomorrow's Growth Opportunities Often Begin at the Edges

A **Client Impact Story**, featuring front end innovation work done by Ipsos India teams for Havells India Ltd.

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The future rarely arrives through the mainstream. It first shows up in the behaviours, workarounds and rituals that most people dismiss as unusual."

"This work helped us move beyond incremental innovation, identify emerging spaces that could shape the future of our category and prepare a long term NPD (new product development plan) for the brand to strengthen it's position in the category."

Bhuwan Chand,

Joint Vice President – Insights
(Marketing, Havells India Ltd,)

The Innovation Challenge: Looking Beyond Today's Consumer

For a leading household and kitchen appliance manufacturer in India, innovation has never been more challenging. The category is being reshaped by rapid technological advancement, changing lifestyles, rising expectations around convenience and efficiency, and growing demand for smarter, more personalised experiences.

Consumers are evolving faster than ever, and competitive advantage increasingly depends on identifying emerging needs before they become obvious. Yet this creates a fundamental challenge for innovation teams.

Traditional consumer research is highly effective at helping brands understand current needs, optimise products, and validate concepts. However, by the time a behaviour becomes visible among mainstream consumers, it is often already on its way to becoming an industry norm. The opportunity for true differentiation may already be shrinking. The question facing the client was therefore not simply what consumers want today, but something far more strategic: **How can organisations identify the earliest signals of future demand before those signals become mainstream?**



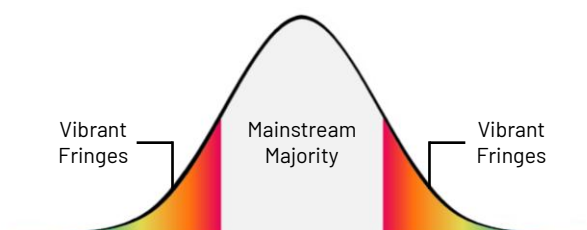
Why the Most Valuable Signals Often Hide in Plain Sight

Across industries, many breakthrough innovations began as behaviours practised by only a few people.

These individuals, often called lead users, adopters, or category pioneers, tend to experiment with products in unconventional ways. They create workarounds, develop new routines, modify existing solutions, and often encounter future needs before the broader market does.

In a world shaped by social platforms, online communities and creator ecosystems, these fringe behaviours no longer remain isolated

for long. What starts as a niche habit can quickly spread, influence expectations, and redefine entire categories. The challenge is that organisations often struggle to separate genuinely meaningful signals from the overwhelming volume of trends, conversations and noise surrounding them. The real opportunity lies not in collecting more data, but in finding the few behaviours that reveal where consumer expectations are headed next.

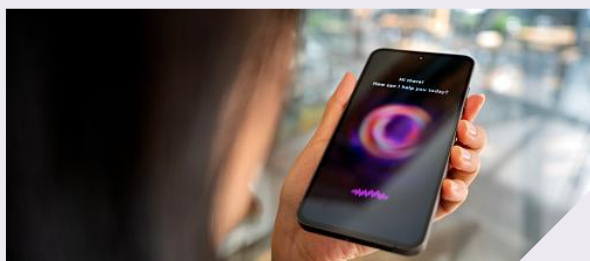


From Signals to Foresight

To tackle this challenge, Ipsos partnered with the client to build a fundamentally different innovation discovery programme. Instead of beginning with the average consumer, the work started at the edges.

The first step involved analysing large volumes of digital conversations, creator content, emerging communities and adjacent-category discussions to uncover behavioural signals developing across the home and kitchen ecosystem.

Advanced AI-enabled analysis was combined with researcher expertise to identify patterns that might otherwise remain hidden. Rather than producing a long list of disconnected trends, signals were evaluated



through a structured lens that assessed both their maturity and growth trajectory. This helped distinguish fleeting fads from behaviours with genuine future potential. Most importantly, the exercise identified the people behind these behaviours.

The goal was not simply to understand what they were doing. It was to understand why.

Understanding the Human Story Behind Emerging Behaviours

One of the most common limitations of trend spotting is that it often stops at observation.

*People are doing something new.
A behaviour is growing.
A conversation is gaining traction.*

But none of those observations explains the deeper motivations driving change.

To move beyond surface-level insights, Ipsos immersed itself in consumers' daily lives through a combination of in-depth conversations and real-world behavioural observation.



Researchers spent time with both lead users and mainstream consumers, exploring routines, frustrations, trade-offs, aspirations and emotional drivers.

Advanced immersive techniques enabled researchers to observe consumers interacting naturally with appliances and household environments, revealing the often unspoken workarounds and adaptations that traditional interviews can miss.

What emerged was a richer understanding of how households are evolving and how consumers are increasingly seeking solutions that help them save time, reduce complexity, increase control, and create a greater sense of ease in everyday living.

The most valuable learning was that many seemingly niche behaviours were not actually about products at all. They were expressions of deeper human needs.

A workaround used in the kitchen might reflect a desire for efficiency.

A new household routine might stem from a need for control. An unconventional product modification might reveal frustration with existing solutions.

The behaviour itself was merely the signal. The underlying human motivation was the opportunity.



Turning Insight Into Innovation

Discovering emerging behaviours is only valuable if organisations can act on them.

This is often where innovation programmes falter. Insights remain trapped in presentations rather than becoming tangible business action.

To bridge this gap, Ipsos facilitated an intensive cross-functional process that brought together stakeholders across marketing, R&D, strategy, sales and innovation functions.

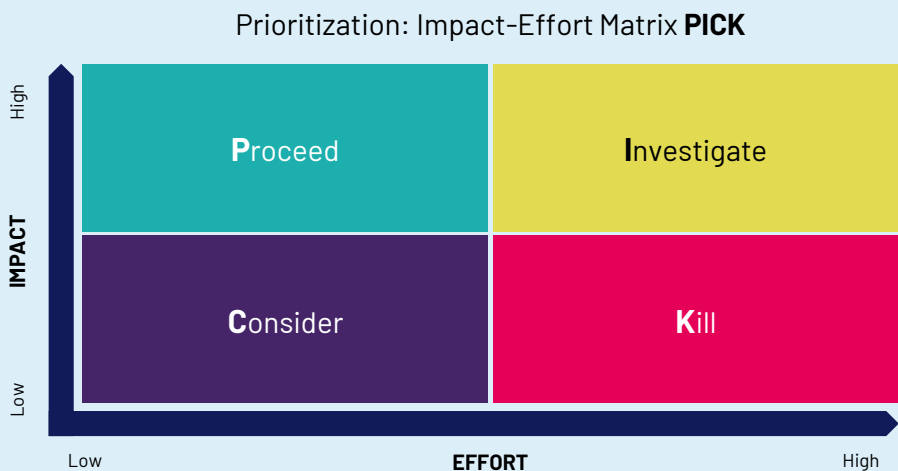
More than 50 stakeholders participated in collaborative workshops designed to translate emerging behavioural insights into commercially viable innovation opportunities.

Rather than evaluating ideas through the lens of existing product categories, teams were encouraged to focus on broader consumer tensions, opportunity spaces and future demand scenarios.

This shifted discussions away from incremental product improvements and towards identifying the next generation of growth opportunities.

Through a structured prioritisation framework, ideas were assessed based on consumer relevance, scalability, strategic fit and investment potential.

The result was a clear path from behavioural observation to action.



Creating Measurable Business Impact

The programme delivered far more than a catalogue of trends.

It helped create a future-focused innovation roadmap grounded in real consumer behaviour and validated through deep human understanding.

*The engagement generated approximately **150 innovation opportunities** spanning the client's key business domains, including kitchen appliances, air solutions and fabric care. These opportunities were subsequently prioritised and refined into a set of high-potential innovation platforms.*

Equally important was the organisational impact.

Identified 300 trends and pain points/need gaps

Shortlisted 150 ideas

10 taken forward by R&D for innovation

The work created a shared evidence base across functions, helping stakeholders align around future growth priorities rather than competing interpretations of market trends.

It strengthened confidence in innovation decision-making and provided a more systematic approach to identifying emerging demand spaces.



What This Means for Innovation Leaders

The most important lesson from this work extends far beyond one category.

In an increasingly fragmented world, organisations cannot rely solely on understanding the average consumer.

The future is often visible first among people who appear unusual, unconventional, or ahead of their time.

*Some of these behaviours will disappear.
Many will remain niche.
But a select few will become tomorrow's expectations.*

The organisations that learn how to identify those signals early, understand the human needs behind them, and translate them into action will be better positioned to shape the future rather than react to it.

For innovation leaders, the challenge is no longer access to information.

It is knowing where to look.

And increasingly, the answer lies at the fringes.

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Further Reading:

[The Vibrant Fringes](#)

[Ethnography, Immersions and Empathy](#)

[Signals GenAI, Instant Consumer Insights](#)

A quick WHAT, WHY, HOW video on Signal Gen.AI:

[Signals GenAI 🌟 by Ipsos Synthesio](#)