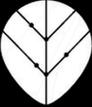


How culturally misaligned microcopy slowed user engagement

Japan market case study

Client:  THRIVE
GLOBAL 

TL; DR

No lift?

Cultural misalignment

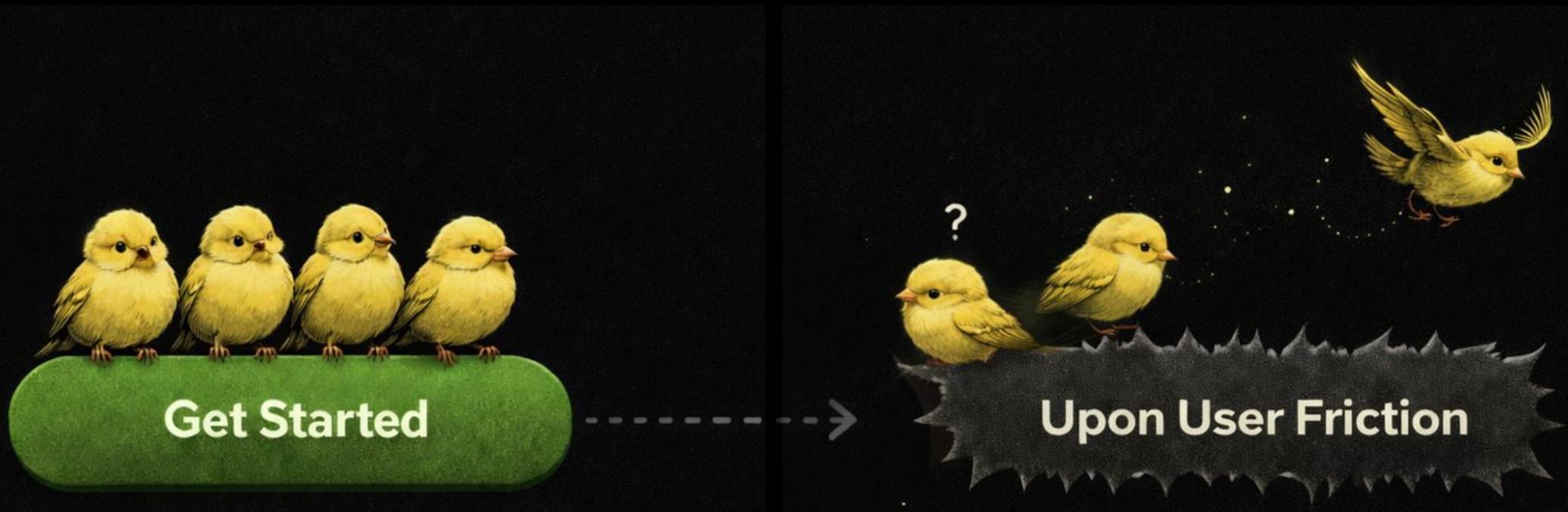
→ hesitation

Microcopy fix

→ traction started.

Where global growth hesitates

Global expansion rarely fails loudly.



It just slows quietly.

We tracked hesitation

- 45 users in Greater Tokyo Area, Japan
(5 new users /month)
- 9 months of testing (2024-2025)
- Task-based usability sessions

Output: **The culturally misaligned microcopy that slowed activation**



Results

79% ↓

reduction in **negative feedback** on the onboarding flow

33% negative ratings

APR – JUN · 5 of 15 users

7% negative ratings

JUL – SEP · 1 of 15 users

Hesitation, defined

A reread.

A hover.

A moment of doubt.

A break in momentum.

Hesitation is
the moment users

...pause to think

instead of acting.



Inspired by *Don't Make Me Think* (Steve Krug)

Where hesitation began

*“I saw some expressions that were too literal,
like it was using the AI translation*

e.g. 習慣を変えるのは困難です

(It is difficult to change habits).

—Target Japanese user in her late 20s from
Saitama, Japan, Apr. 2024



Judging vs. Encouraging

User hesitated at the culturally misaligned tone:

習慣を変えるのは困難です

(It is difficult to change habits)

→ Verdict → Judging → Withdrawal

Fixed as follows:

習慣を変えるのは簡単ではありません。

(It is not easy to change habits).

→ Process → Momentum → Habit.

Momentum erosion

When interface language ignores Japanese cultural code, **micro-hesitations** quietly chip away at momentum.



Stop guessing at global growth

Identify
target users'
friction points
first

Don't rush
to edit all.