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HUL scales the 'shikhar' of seamless user interface

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Hindustan Unilever's (HUL's) business-to-business application (app), Shikhar, responsible for nearly a third of the fast-moving consumer goods company major sales, now boasts a user interface as seamless as popular social media apps, ensuring a user-friendly experience for retailers.

Unlike conventional Stories, the app employs brands to incentivise shopkeepers to purchase high-demand items within their vicinity. HUL has also customised the top carousel to display the brands most frequently ordered by the retailer. Moreover, the app's offers are personalised for each retailer, aiding in product ordering and providing insights into profit margins based on number of orders placed.

"We received internal user feedback urging us to offer an experience similar to popular social media apps, and we complied. It involves dovetailing inputs and insights to be able to build it back into something like this," stated Meenakshi Burra, chief data officer at HUL and vice-president of technology, data, and analytics for Unilever South Asia.

HUL also leverages big-ticket events to maintain engagement among its kirana awals (small shopkeepers). For instance, during the Indian Premier League, HUL introduced offers, prizes, and discounts for retailers, effectively fostering app engagement.

"We've crafted best-in-class user experience for our Shikhar app based on deep understanding of retailer operations. Elements like gamification and

HIGH HOPES

■ The company sees almost a third of its revenue coming from *Shikhar*

■ *Samadhan* remains in its testing phase

■ Eyes potential to optimise deliveries by exploring diverse models

■ FMCG major analysing demand across India through 16 clusters



multi-language support enhance engagement, making it effortless for retailers to connect with HUL online," Burra emphasised.

Pursuing a highly digital and data-driven identity, the Unilever Operations (UniOps) team strives to bring digital experiences to consumers, clients, and internal processes through avenues like Shikhar, Samadhan, and the Agile Innovation Hub.

The manufacturer of Lux soaps looks to shrink the time between retailer orders and delivery to a mere day. The company has initiated a pilot programme named *Samadhan* in Chennai, aimed at reducing delivery timelines to one day.

While *Samadhan* remains in its testing phase, the

company eyes its potential to optimise deliveries by exploring diverse models.

"*Samadhan*, our extensively automated distribution centre, is a key enabler to increase last-mile delivery speed. We've refined the model and plan to extend this capability to other metros, prioritising swifter and superior retail experiences," Burra stated.

While currently focused on larger cities, the company continues to formulate its approach, emphasising the importance of next-day deliveries.

The company's 'Winning in Many Indias' (WiMI) strategy, inaugurated in 2015, assists in data collection at a granular level and facilitates product launches tailored to specific regions based on preferences and tastes.

HUL transitioned to analysing India through 16 clusters.

"The WiMI framework is central to HUL's business approach. Previously divided into four divisions, we deaveraged into 16 consumer clusters. Data plays a pivotal role in this transformation; our HUL Data Lake houses granular, up-to-date data across all aspects of our operations. Analytical tools such as Livewire and Jarvis leverage cutting-edge artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning to provide detailed, predictive insights driving actions and decisions at the WiMI cluster level," explained Burra.

"We possess the historical data at our disposal, empowering us to forecast and collaborate on assortment with our retailers," she added.