

Published Date:	16 Nov 2023	Publication:	Mint [Kolkata]
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HUL adds pizzazz so app can help outdoor e-comm platforms

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NEW DELHI

India's largest packaged consumer goods company Hindustan Unilever Ltd (HUL) is pushing personalized messages and promotions on its business-to-business app Shikhar to drive engagement for small store owners amid greater competition from online platforms.

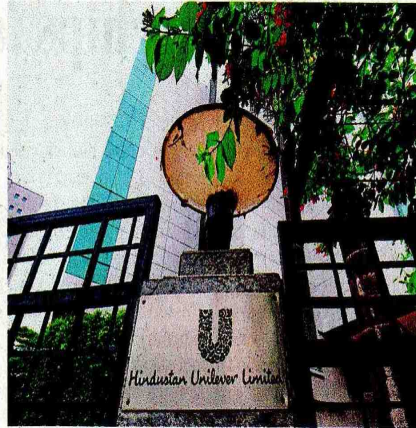
Shikhar is the company's business-to-business app that allows millions of shopkeepers to place orders directly with its distributors any time. In FY23—1.2 million retail outlets used the Shikhar app to place orders. Since HUL sells a wide variety of products spanning soaps, detergents, shampoos, washing bars, ketchups to soups and ice-creams, retailers find it useful to place orders

directly from the company's app.

However, over the past few years, the popularity of online platforms has changed the dynamics of how consumers and shopkeepers trade goods. These platforms include eB2B companies that supply goods directly to small shopkeepers and quick commerce companies that deliver goods to consumers from dark stores within minutes.

The onslaught of new distribution channels is prompting large companies, including HUL, to rethink how they distribute their wide assortment of goods. Nine out of ten households in India use one or more of its brands.

The company recently rolled out the 'Power to The Retailer' campaign that helps local retailers offer customized, celebrity-fronted adver-



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tisements—a strategy aimed at boosting their store footfall and customer engagement, the company said. The feature is available to over 1.3 million retailers on Shikhar. In the first two weeks of the campaign going live, the company

is generating one customised advertisement every 20 seconds.

Shopkeepers can use an in-built feature within the app—within minutes of submitting, a customised celebrity (Arshad Warsi) endorsed

video will be generated which the retailer can then share through WhatsApp and email. The advertisement can be generated in Hindi or English depending upon the retailer's location.

The key objective of this campaign is to empower retailers to advertise their offerings and enable personalized promotions at each store, Kedar Lele, executive director, Customer Develop-

ment at HUL, said. This, in turn, will push shoppers to buy more of the company's brands such as Vim, Dove, Pears, and Surf Excel, among others.

"As digital commerce platforms grow, shoppers are shifting to these platforms,

and neighbourhood *kiranas* are concerned about decreasing shopper footfall and consequent sales loss. While many have adapted by launching their own home delivery services, offering discounts or credit, they often lack the necessary expertise

Since HUL sells a wide variety of products, retailers find it useful to place orders directly from the app

to effectively promote these offerings. Additionally, the production of high-quality digital content often exceeds their resources. To address these

issues, we have designed this campaign to democratise advertising by empowering neighbourhood *kirana* stores," Lele said.

Formerly, such promotional tactics were the domain of large, resource-rich chains.