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HUL plans capex boost; eyes entry into new areas

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Mumbai: After two years of sluggish growth, Hindustan Unilever (HUL) is stepping up investments to defend market share amid stiff competition from a clutch of new-age brands and changing shopping patterns. On Friday, the consumer goods giant said that it will boost capex to 3% of turnover from 2% in the last five years and “decisively” enter select high growth spaces.

In its presentation to investors on Capital Markets Day, the company said that it will bet on the emerging pockets of consumption to drive expansion—a strategy the firm has dubbed internally as ‘winning in new India.’ “Structural shifts in new India present an attractive FMCG growth opportunity,” HUL said.

Last year, HUL replaced former CEO Rohit Jawa, passing on the baton to another company insider Priya Nair. Under Nair, the firm has been sharpening focus on consumer approach, crafting different strategies for different consumer classes. In a category like hair care for instance, growth in rural areas will come from increased consumption and premiumisation while in big urban cities, addition of new products to haircare routine and increased penetration will boost demand, the company said.

“HUL will leverage its iconic portfolio to unlock competitive volume-led growth through consumption, premiumisation, market making and entering new spaces,” the maker of Knorr soups and Dove shampoos said.

HUL has spent on new-age brand acquisitions bringing D2C startups such as Minimalist to its fold and is stepping up focus on distribution

HUL has posted an underlying sales growth of 10%, delivering its highest growth in 13 quarters. HUL's share price ended at Rs 1,974 apiece on the BSE on Friday, up 0.9%.