AI, Data Tech Halved Operation Time: HUL

Sagar.Malviya
@timesgroup.com

Mumbai: Hindustan Unilever said it has slashed the time taken for sourcing material, product innovation, manufacturing and distribution by over half after it used artificial intelligence, new technology and data analytics after the start of the pandemic last year.

For the country's biggest consumer goods maker, this is part of an initiative — Reimagining HUL — where it wants technology to drive all aspects of operations and avoid future disruptions. The maker of the Rin detergent and Dove shampoo said it is taking steps across the digital ecosystem by focusing on consumer insights, always on-trend products, agile innovation and faster launch time.

"Internally, we were using tech, but the environment was far more conducive to accepting a lot of these technologies and hence saw a step shift in terms of how we adopted or how we deployed these initiatives," said Arun Neelakantan, vice-president, digital transformation and growth, for South Asia at parent Unilever." And that means digitising various ecosystems, plus using new-age technology to get better at what we do, not just the speed of innovation, but even the quality of innovations getting better with technolo-

gy," Neelakantan said during an interaction with **ET**.

And it has already started reflecting on sales — its internal ordering app, Shikhar, now has 600,000 retailers, accounting for 10% of total orders, compared with fewer than 100,000 kirana members prior to the pandemic. In addition, the online channel contributed nearly 6% to its overall sales, doubling over the past one year.

HUL said leveraging data and tech capabilities started a few years ago but the pandemic accelerated the shift in building capability in terms of handling big data, both in terms of trends as well as consumer insights and new innovations.

Co is taking steps across the digital ecosystem by focusing on consumer insights

"We have AI engines that sit on top of all of these different pieces of information that are coming in ... And this allows us to see and predict where actual trends are moving, what are the big areas, what are the most exciting areas to get into, and consumer insights. We are also using neuroscience at a cellular, cognitive and systems level to understand what consumers aren't able to verbalise, but what they really want," said Vibhav Sanzgiri ED R&D at HUL.