

Lifebuoy will be more than just a germ fighter soap: HUL

Soap to be positioned in the 'skin protection' category; new packaging, relaunch in works

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Lifebuoy, one of the top-selling soap brands in India that is worth more than ₹2,000 crore in sales, is getting a makeover. Citing declining sales in the 'hygiene soap' segment, a top executive at HUL said that Lifebuoy will now be positioned within the broader 'skin protection' category, moving beyond its traditional 'germ protection' focus.

"It is a big transformation that we are doing on the brand and that entails pivoting the brand from the world of germ protection to the world of skin protection along with a change in packaging and new communication," Vipul Mathur, executive director, personal care for Hindustan Unilever Ltd said in an interview last week.

Lifebuoy is shifting its proposition from "illness protection" to "skin protection", offering both existing and new benefits while contemporizing its image, the company said. The new Lifebuoy formulation will address concerns such as rashes, itches and skin acne.

"To communicate this change in proposition, we are also elevating the packaging design to make it more modern and premium," Mathur said.

The company will also expand the brand to categories such as body washes, where Lifebuoy has limited presence compared to other brands such as Lux and Dove.

Bollywood actor Shahrukh Khan has been roped in for the relaunch that will see the company roll out new communication to fire up sales of Lifebuoy. New packs have already been rolled out in select markets, and the company has unveiled a large on-ground campaign at the ongoing Mahakumbh religious festival. The brand last underwent a propo-



The move comes as demand for hygiene soaps is under pressure. @HUL_NEWS/X

sition and packaging change back in 2000.

The pandemic significantly boosted demand for germ-protection brands like Dettol, Savlon, and Lifebuoy—that demand has since plateaued. Consumers are now looking for products with advanced credentials and potent ingre-

in rural markets," Mathur said.

HUL also sells soaps and body wash under brands such as Lux, Dove and Pears. Last fiscal, the company's personal care segment—that includes soaps and toothpaste—reported revenues of ₹9,412 crore, which was 15.5% of its overall standalone revenues ₹60,469 crore.

STRATEGY SHIFT

HINDUSTAN

Unilever will expand Lifebuoy's presence in categories such as body washes

NEW packs of Lifebuoy have already been rolled out in select markets

THE company has unveiled a large on-ground campaign at the ongoing Mahakumbh festival

HUL'S personal care revenue fell 4% in Q3, mainly due to a drop in skin cleansing product sales

dients, Mathur said.

"The hygiene journey of any country, or community, follows closely with the education and income levels. As education and income levels rise, people move away from just understanding basic hygiene to understanding and requiring more advanced benefits; the same is true

The move comes as demand for hygiene soaps is under pressure. The category recorded 5.5% growth in moving annual turnover (MAT) as of December 2024 compared to 7.4% in December 2023, per data from NIQ. MAT refers to total sales over a 12-month period.

The Indian soap industry is currently valued at approximately ₹25,000 crore in revenue, per data from NielsenIQ. Several large companies such as Reckitt, ITC and Godrej Consumer Products sell soaps.

"The beauty segment continues to dominate, accounting for 75% of total sales," said Roosevelt Dsouza, head of customer success for FMCG at NielsenIQ India.

The soap category has also experienced sales pressure due to rising palm oil prices, a key soap ingredient. This has forced companies to increase prices across their soap portfolios, impacting sales volume.

HUL's personal care revenue, for example, declined 4% in the December quarter, primarily due to a drop in skin cleansing product sales within the hygiene segment.

India is among the major markets to kickstart changes to the brand sold in over 50 countries.

"Post-covid the entire segment of hygiene has seen a bit of a squeeze. A large part of our challenge on soaps was coming from the hygiene segment. In order to solve for this, we need to appeal to consumers. This transformation is a part of a multi-step journey to offset that squeeze that we are facing," he added. Changes will be rolled out starting with the brand's core red bar.

The move will also see the company expand offering such as body wash under the brand. "We're going to transform every part of the brand portfolio and take it towards the world of skin protection," he said.

Mathur did not confirm whether the new product will be rolled out with a new pricing. "We have said earlier that in context to inflation—there is consistent pricing we are taking. That's part of a journey to mitigate inflation and pass on calibrated price increases; we are continuing to do that," he said.