

HUL, RB, ITC up the ante in home hygiene

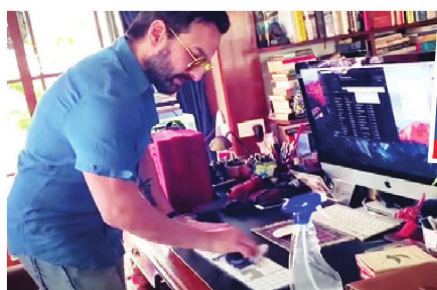
Brands look to leverage the sharply rising consumer interest in external cleanliness, launch new campaigns and products

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Among the lasting lifestyle changes that the pandemic is expected to bring about is the increased and frenzied focus on hygiene, reflected not just in the increased demand personal care products and safety gear (such as masks, gloves and protective clothing), but also for cleaning agents, such as floor and surface sanitizers and cleaners. And leading consumer goods companies such as Hindustan Unilever (HUL), ITC and RB (earlier Reckitt Benckiser) are responding to the shift in consumer behaviour with a sharp focus on their portfolio of cleaning brands, with new campaigns and also new products that promise to address the concerns raised by the pandemic.

As people work from home and increasingly come to terms with restricted living induced by the Covid-19 pandemic, the war on germ-kill, say experts, has taken new dimensions, with many now seeking products that can offer better anti-germ properties across platforms. HUL has been running a campaign for its cleaning brand Domex that claims to remove the Covid-19 virus from all surfaces if used for a minute. RB, maker of Dettol, Harpic, and Lizol, has been running a high decibel campaign on surface cleaning and ITC has been actively promoting its brand Savlon on multiple platforms.

A recent Nielsen India report says that segments such as floor and toilet cleaners have doubled their rate of growth (to 24 per cent) in March-April versus January-February. Another



(Clockwise from above) Lizol (RB) has roped in celebrity endorsers, Domex (HUL) claims it can kill all germs on any surface, and Nimyle (ITC) promises to keep the virus off all surfaces



study by ad agency Wunderman Thompson on consumer behaviour in India during the lockdown shows that 86 per cent people surveyed (in 32 cities across 15 states) said that if floor and kitchen cleaners came with better anti-germ benefits, they would purchase the product. The study also said that 85 per cent of the respondents were open to the idea of purchasing detergents that had anti-germ properties in them.

The Covid-19 pandemic, as KV Sridhar, global chief creative officer, Nihilent Hypercollective explains, has accelerated the shift from personal to home hygiene. "The war on germs has extended to everything involved in a consumer's life as people endeavour to keep safe in a health crisis," he says.

The pandemic has intensified interest in the category of cleaning products, which is likely to transform long term behaviour towards such products and brands. Ajeeta Bharadwaj, national planning director, Wunderman Thompson India, says that the Covid-19 pandemic has led to "structural changes" in mindsets and mar-

ketplaces alike. "It is forcing a rethink on the way things have been done so far at a scale that is hard to imagine," she adds.

Marketers are picking up the cues quickly. Hence the campaign for Domex highlights its disinfectant properties and the presence of sodium hypochlorite, a bleach recommended by the World Health Organization as an effective germ-killer. "There are a new set of consumers who've emerged as hygiene warriors due to the pandemic. They want complete disinfection of the spaces around them and are seeking products that help them in this regard. Domex has sodium hypochlorite that is effective when it comes to germ and virus kill. We've also tested the product at an ISO-certified laboratory in the US to establish that Domex kills germs in 60 seconds," says Prabha Narasimhan, executive director, homecare, HUL.

ITC, the makers of Savlon and Nimyle, both hygiene brands, has also amplified their germ-kill properties to suit the new consumer. In an interview to *Business Standard* this week, B Sumant, executive director,

ITC, said that the company had witnessed significant demand for surface cleaning products, prompting the company to launch Savlon disinfectant spray as well as Savlon germ protection wipes during the lockdown. RB has sought out celebrity power to turn the spotlight on its portfolio of brands (Dettol, Harpic, and Lizol). Saif Ali Khan and Kareena Kapoor as well as Genelia and Riteish Deshmukh are the faces for its #DisinfectToProtect campaign that urges consumers to disinfect surfaces frequently.

Sukhleen Aneja, chief marketing officer and marketing director, RB Hygiene South Asia, says that at this time both protection and precaution are key to fighting viruses. "It has become extremely critical to maintain good hygiene at home. With the campaign, we want to raise awareness about the need for disinfecting not just floors but multiple surfaces," she says. In the coming months, the focus on the category will stay sharp and also, experts point out, there are likely to be a flurry of brand extensions and innovations to widen the market further.