



Actors Nagarjuna (left) and Rana Daggubati (right) have been appointed ambassadors for the brand's new campaign that has been launched in the South

# HUL gives Brand Domex a lift

With celebrity ambassadors and a campaign around social taboos, the toilet-cleaner brand steps out of the closet

VIVEAT SUSAN PINTO  
Mumbai, 24 September

It is not often that brands align themselves around political movements, most usually preferring to keep their distance from even the hint of such associations. The past couple of years, however, have been an aberration of sorts as a number of brands have swiftly and smoothly lined up around the present government's Clean India Mission (*Swachh Bharat Abhiyaan*). The most recent one to do so is Domex, the toilet cleaner brand from Hindustan Unilever (HUL).

HUL runs the Domex Toilet Academy, an initiative that helps set up toilets in north India. And it sees an opportunity in the growing political and social backing for a nationwide cleanliness drive. Over 60 million toilets have been built so far, improving coverage from 38 per cent to nearly 70 per cent under the Clean India mission. By 2019, another 100 million toilets are expected to be added as part of the programme, pushing overall coverage even more.

The challenge now is increasingly about keeping the newly built spaces clean. And herein lies the potential that brands such as Domex, which competes with rivals such as Harpic from Reckitt Benckiser (RB), are hoping to leverage.

HUL has just launched a new campaign in the south, aimed at not only reinforcing

the habit of sanitation, but also breaking gender barriers in the process. "Cleaning toilets is like all other household chores and must not be relegated to the weakest or to those who are 'made for the job' or worse still someone who can't or won't say no, such as a worker, wife or mother," says Priya Nair, executive director, Homecare, HUL. "Domex has taken up the task to champion this cause," she says.

HUL has also appointed brand ambassadors as part of the initiative, including southern stars Nagarjuna, Venkatesh and Rana Daggubati, who will urge consumers to banish the shame around cleaning toilets. "When our heroes, whom we hold in such high regard, don't feel any shame in picking up the toilet brush, then why should we?" asks Nair.

While the campaign will be deployed only in the south for now, HUL is likely to take the concept of "drop the shame and pick up the brush" to other parts of the country. Experts point to deep-rooted prejudices attached to cleaning toilets, which makes the task of organised players quite challenging. "Traditionally, the task has been left to a certain section of society," says Harish Bijoor, chief executive officer, Harish Bijoor Consults. "Initiatives like these will help build greater awareness about hygiene at home and how it is the responsibility of all and not a few when it comes to keeping

toilets clean," he says.

## Price and awareness challenge

The threat for organised toilet cleaners, say experts, also comes from products such as bleaching powder and acids that have traditionally been used for sanitation purposes. "Breaking the habit of using such products will take time, which means brands in the space will have to work harder to present themselves as viable alternatives," says Bijoor.

In 2017, HUL launched a powder sachet of Domex priced at ₹10 in the South, aimed at improving penetration. RB, meanwhile, launched a single-use pack of Harpic at ₹5 to make it affordable for consumers. But more needs to be done to improve accessibility for consumers in the hinterland.

HUL's campaign also comes as rival Harpic raises the pitch around sanitation, appointing actor Akshay Kumar to drive home the message of '*Har Ghar Swachh*' (make every house clean). Sukleen Aneja, CMO, marketing director, South Asia, RB Hygiene Home, says, "Harpic aims to sensitise people about basic cleaning habits and ensure that every

Indian household has access to clean toilets."

Kumar is also the brand ambassador of *Swachh Bharat Abhiyaan* and was the star of the film '*Toilet: Ek Prem Katha*', released last year. RB has already kicked off a multimedia campaign featuring Kumar, pushing to the hilt his association with Harpic. "Professionally and personally, Akshay has been a key influencer to drive the sanitation mission and it is an honour to have him as Harpic's brand advocate," Aneja said.

## Organised around a cause

The effort by brands such as Domex and Harpic to shun prejudices and improve sanitation is expected to rub off positively on the domestic toilet-cleaning category, a market that is estimated to be ₹9-10 billion in size. Both Domex and Harpic have been growing in double-digits in terms of sales over the last few years, riding on programmes such as the *Swachh Bharat Abhiyaan*.

While the government is expected to continue pushing its flagship programme aggressively—this month the Prime Minister launched an offshoot called '*Swachhta Hi Seva*' (cleanliness is service)—toilet cleaner brands will have to find ways to improve their footprint.

Purposeful campaigns seem to be the way forward, as shown by recent initiatives by a number of brands. For instance, RB has been riding the cleanliness wave for brands Dettol and Harpic; HUL has done the same with Lifebuoy as have many others. Cleanliness does seem to point the way to the customer's heart, or at least her social media feed.

**"Cleaning toilets is like all other household chores and must not be relegated to the weakest, or to those who are 'made for the job' or worse still, someone who can't or won't say no"**

PRIYA NAIR  
Executive director,  
Homecare, HUL