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Consumers use virtual and augmented reality to look and feel good

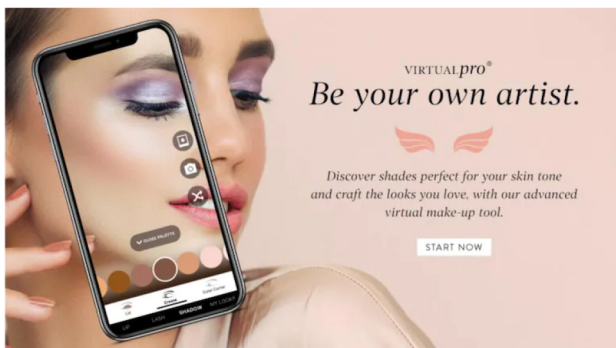
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Wellness company House of Beauty launched Boddess, a multi-brand online beauty platform, in March this year.



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Looking good just got easier. The beauty industry's courtship with artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) is ushering in a new era. You can now use your laptop or smartphone to test your skin, try out various shades of lipsticks and foundations and discover the perfect shampoo for your hair.

In March this year, wellness company House of Beauty launched Boddess, a multi-brand online beauty platform. To enhance the user experience, the portal offers what is called the Boddess Virtual Pro, which allows you to try on make-up and diagnose your skin condition virtually. "We use technology for trying, discovering and personalising products and routines, disrupting in-person beauty consultations and product testing for customers," says Ritika Sharma, founder and CEO. Boddess Virtual Pro allows customers to get recommendations on product solutions at the click of a button. Its skin diagnostic tool is able to assess wrinkles, fine lines, blemishes, inflammation, pigmentation, sensitivity/ redness, pores, dark spots and circles. "The Virtual Make-up Tool allows customers to choose across all colour cosmetic brands in real time. We are launching the Eyebrow Virtual Pro soon," reveals Sharma. If you download the Boddess Beauty mobile app, it uses augmented and virtual reality technologies for personalised product recommendations. "We get to know each user's skin [type] as they use the application," says Sharma.

SkinKraft is another an AI-driven brand that gets under your skin. "A Skin ID Quiz filled out by the user gives us all the relevant information--about their environment, lifestyle, geographic location and skin characteristics--which help us create an accurate picture of what their concerns are and the ingredients best suited for them," says Chaitanya Nallan, co-founder and CEO. The users are asked up to 30 questions pertaining to their skin type and lifestyle choices which might have a direct or indirect bearing on their skin health. Once the skin is assessed, a skin profile is created which details the skin type and concerns/ issues and lists the user's current skin requirements. Armed with this information (done through AI and ML algorithms and programmes), the user is classified into one of 72 broad profiles, "each of which breaks down into thousands of combinations", says Nallan. A similar assessment is done for the user's hair--the hair and scalp type are analysed, the texture and environmental factors assessed. "We are soon launching an advanced version of this virtual tool to help the end-user get a more accurate description of what their skin or hair needs," says Nallan.

Similarly, beauty start-up Bare Anatomy collects an individual's unique hair data through a small quiz to formulate a personalised hair product. Giving it company and challenging the beauty industry's one-size-fits-all standard is another tech-driven beauty firm, Freewill. Like Bare Anatomy, Freewill too focuses on a person's hair. The brand believes that a person's hair health goes beyond their hair type; it is influenced by factors such as "your local weather, treatments you have taken (straightening, colouring), hair thickness and more". Therefore, the brand uses over 122 data points about an individual's hair and then creates a product that meets their hair nourishment needs.

The virtual services apart, the in-store experience is also gearing for change. Leading this movement is the Korean cosmetics brand, Innisfree. "We have the Beauty Talk Mirror experience, which provides skin analysis, virtual make-up services as well as the recommendation of the perfect colour to match an individual skin tone utilising augmented reality (AR) in order to deliver customised beauty solutions," says Mini Sood Banerjee, assistant director and head of marketing for India. Currently, the service is available only in two stores overseas, but will soon make it to Indian shores. Beauty may or may not be skin-deep, but it has become attainable with virtual assistance.

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