

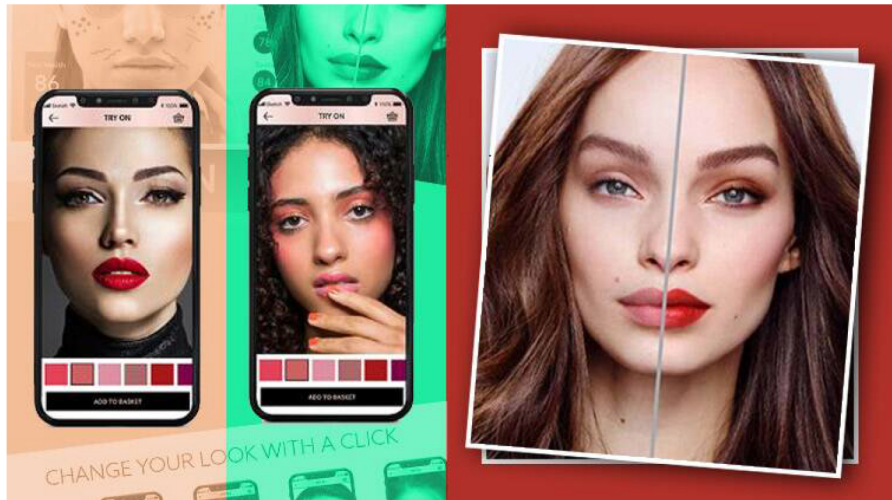
Will augmented reality spearhead the future of buying lipsticks?

In a world where touching or using something comes with an inherent fear, how do you plan on buying the perfect lipstick for yourself?

Written by **Shambhavi Dutta** | New Delhi |

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At least 51 per cent of the consumers will continue to spend online in the next six months out of which 43 per cent will account for cosmetics. (Photo: L'Oréal, Boddess/ Screengrab, designed by Gargi Singh)

You have had that brown lipstick with a hint of burgundy on your mind for the longest time. You are eager for the weekend to arrive so that you can finally head to the mall and sample the shade. For makeup-lovers like us, buying lipstick continues to be as important as ever because we not going to stop **applying makeup even under our face masks!**

But ever since the pandemic struck, it has eclipsed a multitude of experiences — one of them being testing makeup products on ourselves at an offline store. Even though we move toward the unlock phases, there is still an inherent fear of heading



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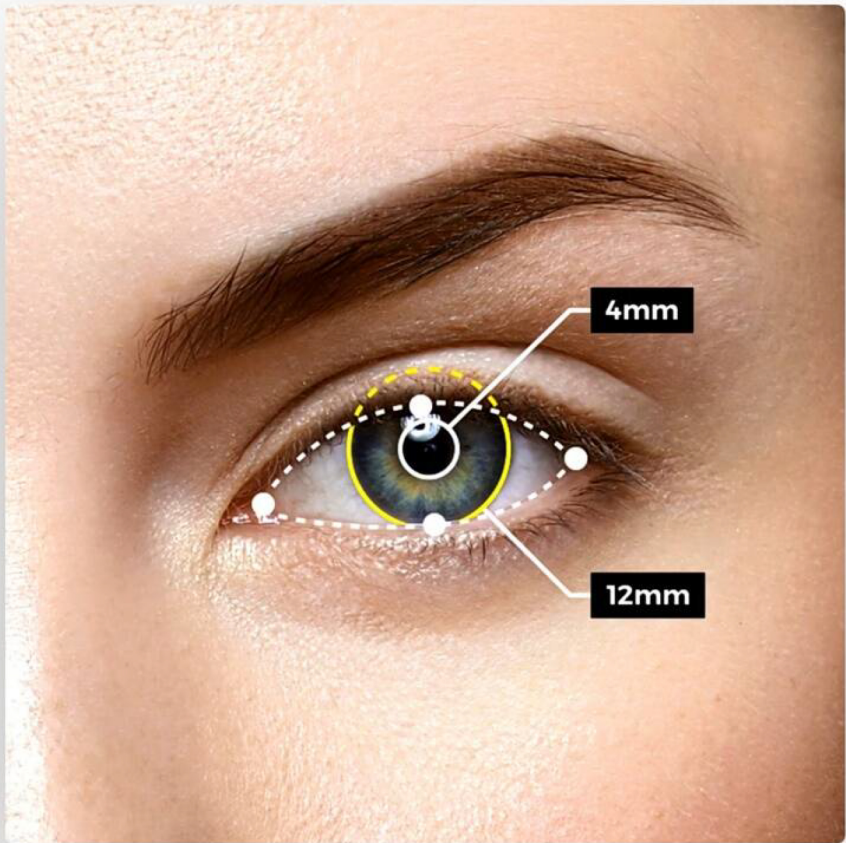
Anil Chilla, the chief digital officer for L'Oréal India, tells [indianexpress.com](https://www.indianexpress.com) that “in the current no-touch environment, consumers are rethinking their usual purchase behaviour. This is evident from the surge in online purchases, with 18 per cent people buying personal care or beauty products online for the first time ever during the pandemic.”

A report by [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com) India, in association with Boston Consulting Group which traced how the [pandemic](#) has impacted consume behaviour, explains how online buyers for beauty products have increased by 1.35 times. At least 51 per cent of the consumers will continue and increase online spending in the next six months out of which 43 per cent will account for cosmetics, the report says.

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AR allows the user to indulge in their purchase at their own pace and convenience in an unconscious way. (Photo: Modiface/ screengrab)

While sitting at home during the lockdown, you would have most likely checked out lipsticks on your phone . This is where Augmented Reality (AR) comes into play. With AR, you open your front camera, click a selfie or your face comes on the screen, you select a shade from the multiple options of lip shades on your screen, click on it, and see how it looks on you.

Arnab Samanta, head of marketing, Graphixstory, a tech-driven advertising studio providing AR services to various brands, tells indianexpress.com, “AR helps shoppers transform their homes into virtual landscapes so as to interact three-dimensionally on their mobile devices.”

“Finding the right shade for online customers has not just gotten easier, but also more fun. There’s also the added benefit of not having to remove a swatch before moving on to the next shade to see how it suits you.

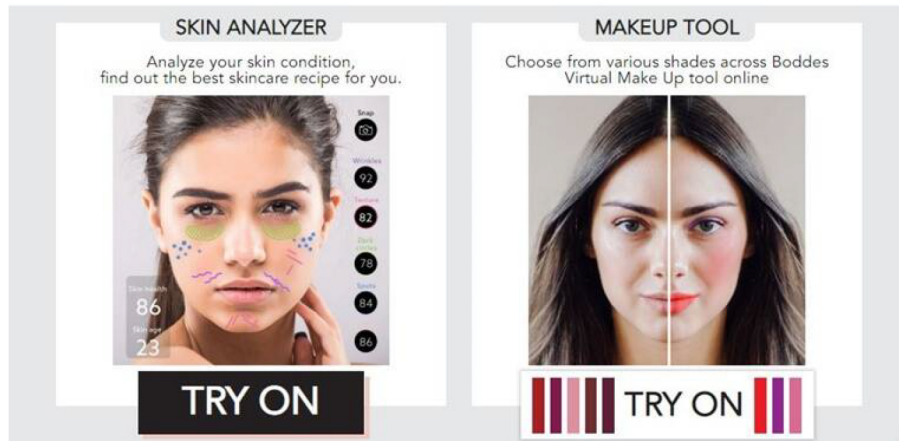
READ | [Look good for your video meetings sans makeup with these tips](#)

Concurs, Ritika Sharma, founder & CEO, House of Beauty. “We recognise that people’s relationship with physical retail may have fundamentally changed in COVID times. The beauty industry has been resilient over the past decades with generations of loyal customers and with high bounce-back rates. Amid the crisis, we’ve our finger on the pulse of the consumer and are trying to evolve with the current times and the needs of the consumer.”

Chilla shares that their brand acquired Modiface, an AR company, and used the technology to offer virtual try-on for make-up, hair colour and one-on-one beauty consultations via video chat back in 2018. “This has provided a compelling proposition, especially during the lockdown with stores closed as we have seen an increase of 2x in terms of engagement with AR tools online compared to pre-COVID time. Trying on the product virtually also removes the friction from the physical environment of access to multiple shades, removal after every trial, safety and cleanliness, which are important as we are amidst a pandemic.”

READ | [Will we finally make a place for clean beauty products in our makeup cabinet?](#)

Personalising beauty with a click



“We serve personalized product recommendations and learn each user’s skin as they use the technology,” says Ritika Sharma, Founder of House of Beauty. (Photo: Boddess/ screengrab)

While we have to let go of the conventional ways of buying makeup, for many consumers swatching and feeling the product have been an important aspect of the process. But with that option not available anymore, how has the meaning of personalisation altered? Brands like L’Oréal have already been making strides in transforming itself from just a beauty company to a beauty tech company. It has a ‘try & test’ feature which helps the user experience the product not only from the comfort of their homes but it allows a virtual try-on experience using an advanced face tracker algorithm that detects where one’s lips, eyes, cheek, hair are and applies virtual cosmetics on this zone, giving users a true-to-life view of the products.

texture and how it feels post-application. “Though AR tools still can’t bridge the gap to give the customers the feel of gliding the lipstick, the final look is definitely shown well that helps the customer select the lipstick of a particular texture.” In order to take care of this limitation, they have incorporated product videos and images of the specific lipstick range that show a close view of the lipstick texture.

READ | [Sustainable living: Simple ways to make your beauty regime more eco-friendly](#)

Boddes, too, has heavily invested in AR with the aim to solve the biggest pain points of e-commerce shopping — that of customers not being able to try the products. With an in-house AR/VR tool that allows the customer to diagnose their skin and try makeup, they help them find products that suit them while trying them on digitally.

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In 2018, L'Oréal acquired ModiFace – an augmented reality company and used that technology to offer virtual try-ons for make-up and hair colour. (Photo: Modiface/ Screengrab)

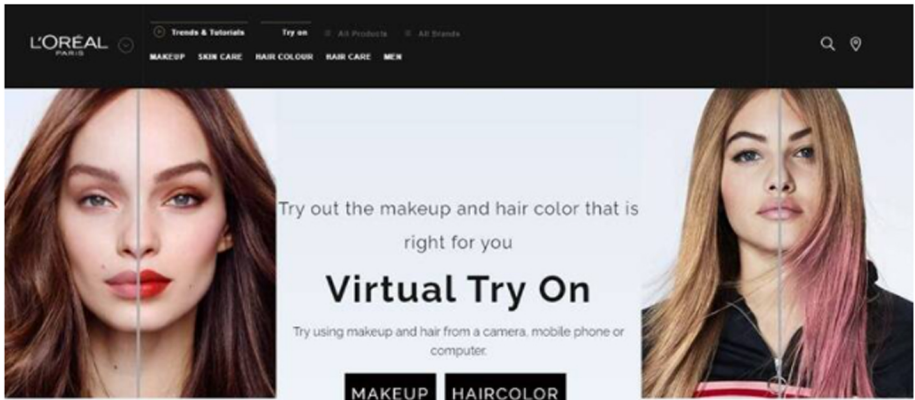
Sharma says, “Our team has spent the past few months building our machine learning database of skin types in partnership with leading dermatologists in India. We take thousands of high-resolution images of men and women and tag their skin condition with our proprietary collection of skin metrics which includes hydration, wrinkles, dark spots, skin age and other aspects into account.”

Explaining the process, she adds how they have also made sure to train their algorithms on a diverse array of skin colours, ages, and ethnicities. “We then train our algorithms on this data set and build supervised machine learning models to improve this algorithm every week. The more images we collect, the better it gets.”

measure the impact of what we are doing in a very detailed manner with the help of analytics,” says Chilla. Agrees Samanta as he adds, “It allows the brand to have a unique approach while enriching a consumer’s experience. It also virtually creates an opportunity for brands and consumers to connect more intimately leading to building a bigger community.”

READ | Celebrity makeup artist Namrata Soni: Beauty will certainly become more inclusive in the years to come

The road ahead



“Before every product and shade is launched, our teams spend a significant amount of time and effort in testing the AR experience” shares Chilla. (Photo: L’Oréal/ Screengrab)

Does this mean the end of physically going to store and trying a lipstick has come to an end? Yes and no. While Chilla says when it comes to AR, “consumers dictate what they want, and the brands follow and create experiences that are true to the desires of the consumer”

Singh mentions that despite this, it definitely does not rule out the traditional manner of shopping. “For many, shopping is a therapeutic experience. AR is a great add-on but won’t replace the traditional shopping experience once retail is back in full swing. Till such time, we will continue to leverage these tools along with different marketing collateral showcasing products and their textures on different skin tones,” she tells indianexpress.com.

Sharma, too, says, “AR is not meant to 100% replace the in-store experience which is important for aspects such as texture, staying power, etc. However, it aims to provide the customer with the next best alternative during times like COVID when going to the store is impractical.”

itself. For most brands, they still don't want to be limited to an online platform."We truly believe the physical retail experience is the heart of our business," says Sharma.

However, the opportunities in the future for technology in beauty are abundant. Features ranging from virtual try-on to 3D printed makeup tools and requests for customized cosmetic and skincare product are in the works for beauty brands across the channel.

As a part of our beauty series we also interviewed those in isolation to know how they take care of their skin. Check out the links below to know more

Part 1 [Beauty in lockdown: Three working moms on pampering their skin while multitasking](#)

Part 2 [Beauty in lockdown: Three women in their 20s share why skincare is important to them](#)

Part 3 [Beauty in lockdown: Three men in their early 20s share their skincare routine](#)