FRAGRANCE AND PERSONAL CARE

Chanel becomes latest luxury player in beauty AI

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Lipscanner is a new in-house beauty app that allows Chanel customers to match and try on different lipstick shades. Image credit: Chanel

By NORA HOWE

High-end beauty brands and retailers have been exploring the possibilities of augmented reality technology in recent years, but the global pandemic has accelerated innovation and created new expectations for the shopping experience.

The latest beauty brand to join the AI voyage is French fashion house Chanel, which has introduced a new lipstick color-matching tool, Lipscanner. Using artificial intelligence and virtual try-on technology, the brand can now match any color to its nearest lipstick shade.

"We believe that AI and virtual technology will become an industry standard," said Sheri Koetting, founder and creative director of MSLK, New York. "Digital platforms provide ample and robust opportunities for brands to deliver rich and engaging experiences online.

"The amount of information that one can learn about a brand with the help of AI and virtual technology is now on par with the wealth of information one could previously only receive from an in-person consultation or conversation," she said.

Ms. Koetting is not affiliated with Chanel, but agreed to comment as an industry expert.

The future of beauty is here
Developed by Chanel's Makeup Creation Studio, in collaboration with CX Lab, Lipscanner allows users to upload or scan an image of any red, pink, plum or orange color from a street sign to the petal of a flower. In return, the app provides a range of Chanel lipsticks in the same shade.

"This app essentially offers a digitized personal stylist who goes beyond the role of a sales associate and takes on detailed tasks like matching your lipstick with your outfit," said Aleni Mackarey, chief operating officer at Base Beauty Creative Agency, New York. "The opportunity to normalize this process may introduce Chanel as a beauty brand to new consumers who will be intrigued and excited by this elevated shopping experience."
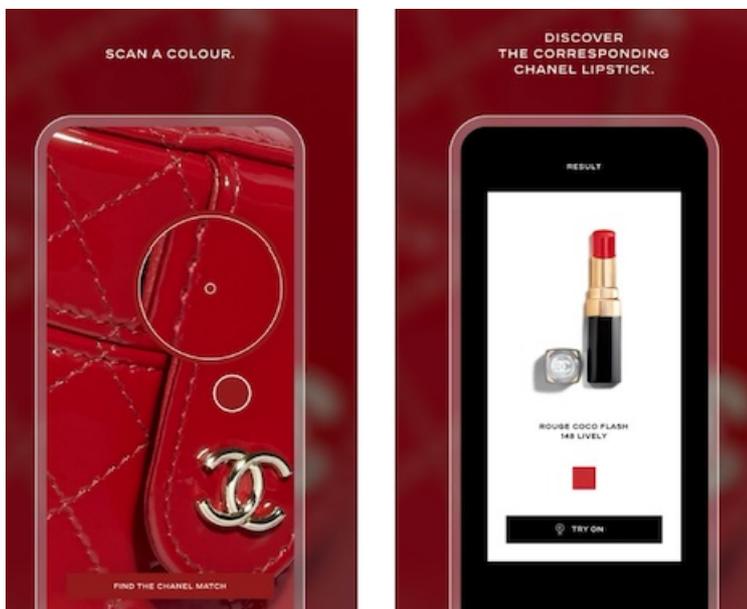
Using Lipscanner, customers may scan any color using their phone camera, and Chanel will match it and provide the nearest lipstick shade. Image credit: Chanel

With the uncertainty of in-store experiences due to continued COVID-19 restrictions, the app allows users to "try on" their selected lipsticks using virtual facial recognition technology.

Recent research has shown that brands can further encourage online beauty purchases by using AR or AI digital "try-ons" (see story).

With the algorithm trained to analyze hundreds of thousands of faces, the Chanel app is programmed to consider skin tones and lip shapes before suggesting an appropriate color and texture.

While the Lipscanner app is the first ever in-house virtual try-on service from the brand, Chanel began testing the waters of digitized service in 2019 with the launch of Atelier Beaut Chanel in New York.

The concept store was a noteworthy step in shifting the focus in retail from selling products to creating an immersive brand experience, blending in-person service with digital innovation (see story).

"Virtual technology is an exciting way for consumers to familiarize themselves with products without having to leave their homes," Ms. Mackarey said. "In a post-pandemic world, brands will still want to create convenient shopping experiences for consumers.

"While we are seeing progress, consumer safety and comfortability is still a top priority, and brands who keep this at the forefront of their initiatives will win," she said.
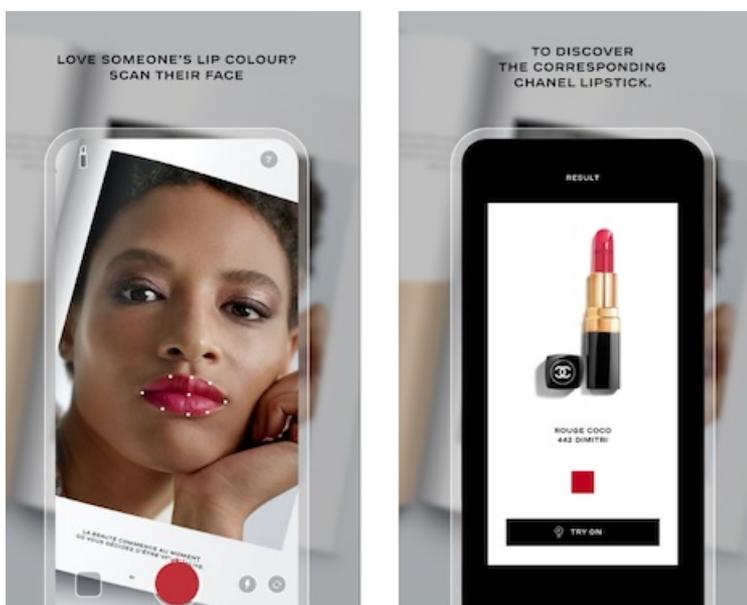
Once a shade is matched, customers can "try it on" and decide to make a purchase. Image credit: Chanel

The Lipscanner app is exclusively available on iOS devices, designed specifically for mobile. An Android version

of the app is expected to be released within the next few months.

"The long-term effect on consumer behavior post-pandemic is that a higher percentage of consumers are fully acclimated to online shopping," Ms. Koetting said. "Wunderman Thompson Commerce indicates that 40 percent of consumers are more comfortable with digital technology than before lockdown.

"A variety of factors come into play with this pattern notably safety and convenience, but also hygiene," she said. "It remains to be seen how many consumers will feel comfortable using in-store testers, especially for lip products, in the new normal."

Evolution of AI
Beauty brands and retailers have developed artificial intelligence and virtual reality from an exciting new idea to an effective marketing tool.

Over the last several years, LVMH-owned beauty retailer Sephora has made AI tech a large part of its brand and business strategies. In 2015, users of its app could hover over model images and instantly learn how to complete looks themselves and gain access to products and exclusive content (see story).

By the spring of 2017, Sephora launched a virtual try-on service, enabling customers to craft their own eyeshadow looks and try experts' curated stylings with purchasable products. Virtual Artist, Sephora's mobile and online augmented reality tool, was updated to include eyeshadow capabilities in which users could try their own blend of products, test expert looks and follow tutorials (see story).

In December 2020, tech giant Google rolled out a feature allowing consumers to digitally try on cosmetic products through the search function on mobile devices. By using the front-facing camera on their phones, users are able to visualize products on themselves as well as on models with similar skin tones (see story).

"We'll continue to see more brands using virtual technology, but it will be important for them to find a way to weave that into existing marketing initiatives in a way that answers their consumers' needs instead of adding to the noise consumers already hear in the marketplace," Ms. Mackarey said.

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