

Lipstick in the Time of Corona: Psychosocial Musings

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Abstract

This article is a psycho-social musing regarding the importance of lipstick as an item of makeup at a time when its primary area of usage, the face, has been covered due to demands of health and safety as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. Being a musing, the article does not follow any strict methodology and has been written based on certain day-to-day observations. By looking at the continued sale of lipsticks on online platforms and the ideas regarding its importance and usage as explicated by online beauty personalities, this paper tries to understand the importance of lipstick as a tool of women's self-esteem, body image, self-confidence, emancipation, beautification as well as a symbol of consumerism in the current times when it cannot be flaunted due to the mandatory requirement of face masks. Using theories of feminism, especially post-structural feminism, consumerism and psychological theories such as those related to self-esteem and defence mechanism, the article has tried to put forward a psychosocial explanation of the use of lipsticks during pandemic times

Keywords: self-confidence, lipstick feminism, lipstick effect, self-esteem, body image, COVID-19

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1. Introduction

A lipstick has been a major beauty arsenal for women and even men since times immemorial. Right from ancient Egyptian civilisations to modern day, beautifully stained puckers have been an aspect of womanly grace for centuries. The lipstick has not only been a tool of beautification but also of empowerment as many feminist authors have analysed over the years. The use of lipstick in modern times especially has been about a deliberate attempt by women and sometimes even men to express themselves freely and be who they truly are. The lipstick is a tool not only of psychological upliftment but it also is a tool of social acceptance or defiance based on how it is used. For example, gothic makeup was originally a rebellious form of makeup against the stereotypical white society in which women were supposed to wear only subdued makeup. As such, makeup in general and lipstick in particular has been a very important tool that has said a lot about gender roles and rules and has also affected the psychological makeup of the wearers.

By acknowledging the importance of lipstick in creating beauty and also in creating impressions about oneself, this paper deals with the issue of the use and importance of lipsticks in the time of the coronavirus pandemic that hit the world in early 2020 that suddenly required us to mask up to protect ourselves, thereby covering up the portion of the face where the lipstick would go. The paper has been written based on observations made as viewers and consumers in the beauty world regarding the importance of lipstick in the context of the coronavirus pandemic and what they potentially say about the psychosocial aspects of human society.

2. The Evolution of Lipstick Use

Lisa Eldridge, a famous Hollywood makeup artist, recently made a three-episode documentary series on BBC Network titled "Make-up: A Glamorous History" that delved into British makeup trends and what they said about British society spanning from the Georgian era to the 1920s. In this documentary she has shown in great detail exactly how women made themselves up in accordance with their social positions. As written in the description of an

episode, 'Wealthy Georgians used their looks to show off just how rich they were – it took time, skill and money. The sheer glamour of the high Georgians was no accident: it is a style that owes its origins to the turbulent history of the age. The 18th century was a period of massive ostentation, matched by staggering inequality – ending in parts of Europe with bloodshed and revolution ... in this period of extreme wealth in Britain, the rich entered an arms race of beauty – competing to go more and more extreme to show that they belonged' (BBC 2021). Faces painted completely white with toxic paint that was potentially and at times actually fatal, elaborate hairdos and definitely discernible makeup including specifically coloured lips were important aspects of the look. However, with the revolution raging on in Europe, such displays of wealth began to be looked down upon and even became dangerous as the guillotine of Marie Antoinette indicated. Yet, while it was popular, it said much about society and about the need for women to look a certain way in order to be good representatives of the community and their social status. With the Victorian era, the approved look changed completely and became extremely subtle, something akin to the currently common "no-makeup makeup look". The idea was to look as though one is effortlessly beautiful but there definitely was some use of makeup to attain porcelain-plain faces and slightly reddened lips. This gave way to the 1920s where women's beauty and fashion took a serious turn towards self-expression and numerous brands emerged that are still common and prestigious names in the world of cosmetics such as Max Factor, Estee Lauder, Elizabeth Arden, etc. A significant development that took place during this time that changed the meaning of makeup for women greatly was the creation of small and compact makeup items that the post-World War II working women could fit in their handbags. It is during this era of earning women with greater say and choice regarding their looks, that the stark red lipstick became the mark of a strong and glamorous woman, especially since it began to be as depicted such in Hollywood. As the documentary shows, makeup by this time became a necessity to be presentable in society and the lipstick became a very important part of producing that presentable look.

The importance of lipstick is, however, not just a Western phenomenon. In India, for example, before the arrival of colour

cosmetics, women enhanced their lips using different methods and implements such as chewing on the betel leaf, something that older Indian women still do to get stained lips, which is a happy side-effect of the joy that chewing on betel leaves give. Even in old Hindi cinema, the lips were enhanced with the use of dark colours so that it would be visible enough through the black and white camera. In modern day Indian television, actresses of soaps and serials are decked up in various kinds of lipstick styles and shades as per the characters they are playing. For example, if the character is negative, then her makeup is exaggerated with dark 'vampy' lips and if the character is positive then she is made to look as serene as possible with makeup including light coloured lipsticks. The emancipatory role of lipsticks has also been reflected sometimes in the Indian film industry. Movies have also depicted the emancipatory role of lipstick in modern times such as the movie *Lipstick Under My Burkha*. Although the movie does not have anything to do with lipsticks directly, the lipstick is used as a metaphor for emancipation, self-confidence, self-expression, and self-exploration.

Lipstick is more than just a cosmetic item for women. Women start experimenting with lipsticks in early adolescence. There are looks for daytime, evening time, special occasions as well as basic. The importance of these different looks is that it has a positive effect on physical attractiveness and holds the possibility for a woman to personally transform herself. Therefore, as a tool it helps in building self-confidence, self-esteem, self-image and self-presentation especially on days that the individual feels depressed or even slightly low. Women, upon painting their lips, tend to look brighter which may help them alleviate their feelings of depression. Lipstick also helps in presenting the self as less tired in the midst of great physical or psychological labour. Women are perceived to have it all and have a higher need to showcase themselves as superwomen or supermoms. Thus, lipstick helps in creating a façade for women to be attractive even in the middle of the struggle to maintain a work-life balance. As such, there are both social and psychological implications of lipstick in our everyday lives.

The lipstick's journey has been a long one, from using insect juices and leaf juices to get the red tainted lips to the modern lipstick

created in high-tech laboratories with various colours and finishes. However, what has remained a constant in this long journey of the lipstick is its importance and perhaps the most convincing proof of this is the continued sale of lipsticks even in the time of the coronavirus pandemic which demanded face coverings for protection.

3. A “Non”-Methodology

This paper does not have a strict methodology since, as the title says, it is primarily based on musings of a sociologist and a psychologist who have observed certain phenomena keenly to try and understand what lipsticks say about our society and the human psyche. By way of data collection, the study has only resorted to observing content on social media platforms, especially YouTube and Instagram and also the items being sold on beauty apps, which have then been analysed using certain theoretical positions. The musings are possibly quite generalisable since the lipstick’s fate in times of COVID-19 seems to be quite similar in different societies and parts of the world if we go by the content that global beauty influencers are putting up on YouTube, Instagram or TikTok. It must, however, be made clear that this study is by no means universal, historical and thorough. This work is an example of using the sociological eye (Collins 1998) and sociological imagination (Mills 1959) to notice certain behaviours that a section of the population is engaging in the particular context of the pandemic to understand what it might say about the current society and about the psychological aspects of human behaviour.

4. Observations as Viewers of Online Beauty Content during COVID-19

The authors are avid consumers of beauty content on online platforms giving them fair knowledge of the latest trends in the beauty community that emerge in the West and transport the world over, including to our own nation, India. The transportation of beauty ideals and trends from the West to the East is a good example of how the West has been hegemonizing the Non-Western world through not only materialistic products but even cultural

and social ideals. The influence of Western products and trends is obvious when we watch makeup tutorials on YouTube or Instagram or when we browse through the categories of products on beauty apps. In fact, wearing makeup on a daily basis to work or to college has recently become a common phenomenon among Indian women as a result of watching Western beauty influencers or beauty gurus on YouTube or other such platforms. These beauty gurus teach women and gradually many men that “imperfections” like acne or dark circles need to be hidden using makeup while other parts of the face need to be enhanced such as the eyes and the lips, perhaps because they are the most expressive parts of the face, used the most in daily communication and therefore must be presentable. Context-specific lipstick looks are recommended to viewers by such beauty gurus such as wearing my-lips-but-better (MLBB) lipstick shades in formal occasions and trying out darker or “funky” colours for festive makeup looks. Lipstick shades and formulas are recommended based on the season as well – lighter shades of lipsticks and lip glosses are recommended for spring and summer months while darker lipsticks, especially the matte finish ones are ideal for the colder months of the year. Therefore, lipsticks of different colours and finishes have to be kept in a woman’s arsenal of beauty so that she is always prepared for the perfect look, no matter what the occasion or season. This meant that beauty gurus also encouraged continuous buying among their viewers by showcasing the latest launches and trends and creating “FOMO” (fear of missing out). The story is the same in the West, in India and elsewhere in the world. As such, it is not surprising that lipstick constituted a billion-dollar industry.

5. The Beginning of the Pandemic

When the corona virus pandemic hit in early 2020, the human world literally stopped for a period of time while the animal world got a chance to flourish, or just breathe, for the first time in decades. While the animals breathed and the air cleared, all the makeup remained as useless entities inside vanity drawers. However, clever as we human beings are, we quickly developed online platforms through which work could continue via video-conferencing. Thus, all of a sudden, looking presentable even inside the home became

necessary. As a result, the lipsticks that were left untouched in vanities again began to be drawn out and worn. Along with this, beauty content began to be geared towards makeup suitable for online occasions and beauty gurus began to churn out new video ideas of creating makeup looks using existing makeup, a novel idea since the trend before this was to use the latest launches, reflecting the excessive consumerism that the beauty industry has been supporting.

When lockdowns finally began to be lifted and people began going outside wearing masks, one would think that the lipstick would be forgotten since the lips would be covered and lipstick would get smudged under the masks. These were two convincing issues that beauty gurus quickly realised and began to focus their content on teaching how to make the eyes the centre of attention and creativity. This did not last though. Makeup brands began to start competing with each other to make the perfect “mask-proof” lipstick that would be long lasting and smudge-proof. It did not take long for such lipsticks to be formulated since many brands were already carrying lipsticks of similar description even before the pandemic hit when the only requirement from a lipstick was to remain on the lips after a heavy and oily meal. Now, with the added need of having to remain intact under a sweaty mask, lipstick formulations have been perfected in that direction and are marketed as “mask-proof” lipsticks, advertised, reviewed and raved about by beauty gurus online as usual. This is probably the reason that despite the pandemic and the covered lips, the sale of lipsticks bounced back very quickly after the initial lull due to the lockdown.

While capitalism has a big role to play in increasing consumerism in the makeup industry by advertising and marketing mask-proof lipsticks to ensure sales are maintained, the social conditioning of females has been such that lipsticks have been an integral part of the way a woman presents herself to the world, mask or no mask. In more traditional times, women were taught that lipstick is a marker of social status and gradually it has been used as a tool in developing self-esteem and self-confidence. This social conditioning is justified by the feelings of glamour and empowerment that lipstick wearers tend to feel. Beauty gurus

encourage wearing a bold coloured lipstick to “feel good” on days that women feel low or to “feel powerful” when going out in the world of social stigmas and rules. The red lipstick, once associated with prostitution, is today seen as especially important in transferring to its wearer a special sense of power. Women speak casually about wearing a red lipstick at home just to feel good on a bad day. This is one of the main incentives behind the continued and unabated production of red lipsticks in different tones and formulations in spite of the pandemic. The bold lipstick that women have been taught to associate with feelings of strength, power and confidence, is therefore still going strong in idea and usage under the masks. The authors themselves, admittedly, are victims of the idea of wearing a lipstick under the mask to “feel good”, an idea that has been planted in the minds of consumers by cosmetic companies and beauty influencers who are of the opinion that wearing lipsticks is not about showcasing one’s beauty to the external world but to feel internally confident and good about oneself. Therefore, although the social conditioning of women around the wearing of lipsticks has changed over the ages, the importance of wearing lipstick has remained the same even at a time when the lips are invisible to the outer world.

6. Observations as Consumers of Beauty Products during COVID-19

Consumption habits are very closely related to viewing choices, especially in the age of social media in which pleasures of consumption often override actual needs or become disguised as needs. The need we often feel to buy an expensive lipstick if it goes on sale even though we know we cannot showcase it to the world due to masks is an example of pleasures disguised as needs. To understand consumption patterns of lipstick, some useful tools are simple interactions with fellow lipstick enthusiasts, following the purchases of different consumers on beauty apps and monitoring one’s own consumption patterns. One of the authors has accumulated more than ten lipsticks in a year and a half since the pandemic hit in spite of knowing very well that there are hardly any chances of flaunting the lipsticks outside in the real world, let alone using up one. This is not only in the case of the author but it

is a general market trend. The author's explanation, as well the explanations of many other women in the author's known circle, is that the lipstick is not worn to show anyone else but for one's own desire to feel good and confident. In other words, lipstick helps women to have a better self-image. Thus, the lipstick is used as an accessory of self enhancement not just in terms of physical appearance but also psychological build and therefore is used in spite of the mask thereby justifying the buying of lipsticks during the pandemic. Moreover, with the fast-paced vaccinations and gradual opening up of public places along with more frequent gatherings of friends and families, opportunities to go mask free are increasing and therefore opportunities to flaunt lipstick are also on the rise. In fact, as the media and marketing director of a makeup brand pointed out in an interview to Times of India, the lowered sales during the initial phase of the pandemic had more to do with supply issues than with demand issues. In the first phase of the coronavirus induced worldwide lockdown in 2020, only essential items were sold in the market – online and offline – and the lipstick, being non-essential, was not getting a chance to be sold. Lipstick sales dipped and some estimates say that it went down by 25% to 30% (Bousquel, 2021). However, as soon as the restrictions were lifted around the middle of the year, numerous people once again began to buy lipsticks in spite of not needing them for any practical purposes. A cursory glance through the beauty apps tells the tale of the lipstick's popularity in the times of coronavirus, possibly over and above any other form of makeup. In fact, lipstick manufacturers have once again begun producing creamy, easily smudgeable lipsticks showing that the lipstick's form is also not affected significantly by the pandemic. In fact, beauty gurus come to the rescue here as well by showing techniques to mattify the transferable lipsticks thereby mask-proofing them. Therefore, the importance of lipstick has not faded even in times of corona. This may be explained using the "lipstick effect".

7. The Lipstick Effect

The "lipstick effect" was proposed by Leonard Lauder of the famous Estee Lauder cosmetics company in 2001 after the 9/11

attacks. According to him, this effect is seen as the tendency to buy small luxuries and indulgences like lipsticks at a time of economic crisis and chaos in order to feel good by splurging at a time when economic resources are otherwise strained. Going by the lipstick effect, buying a lipstick at the time of the pandemic indicates that people are looking for comfort by buying something that they are fond of which is also something they use to improve body confidence and portray a specific kind of body image. As consumers in the beauty industry, the authors can vouch for both effects when buying a lipstick knowing well that no one can see it under the mask. Consumer behaviour thus, remained largely unchanged despite the circumstances. Sublimation as a defence mechanism took place as women channelised the energy from the sorrow of the pandemic into painting their lips with beautiful colours and feeling good about themselves. The lipstick which has always been used as a “pick me up” became even more so in the pandemic times.

In the Indian scenario, what has probably added more strongly to the unabated lipstick sales in spite of the pandemic, apart from frequent discounts that beauty apps and websites keep promoting, is the launch of various international brands in the Indian market. With the proliferation of international beauty content through YouTube in India, knowledge about international makeup brands has increased tremendously. Therefore, when these brands started launching their products in the Indian beauty market, it has made the hearts of many a beauty lover flutter and has made them open up their wallets whole heartedly to buy these products, including lipsticks in spite of the need to wear masks over the painted lips. The lipstick effect, the linkage of wearing a lipstick to feeling good and confident about oneself combined with the desire to have more and more international items which are markers of status more than anything else, even when prices are marked up to a good measure due to taxes and import duties, has meant that the sale of lipsticks has remained important after a brief lull in the beginning of the pandemic possibly primarily due to supply issues. Therefore, the wearing and buying of lipsticks even at a time when it is of no significance to enhance one’s facial features in the eyes of others proves that it means much more than a makeup item to its wearers. Based on these observations, the authors will now put forward a

psycho-social explanation of the importance of lipstick in pandemic times.

8. Attempting a Psycho-Social Explanation

Firstly, the lipstick has an inherent power that is transferred to its wearer. Secondly, lipstick aids capitalism for the beauty brands, especially well-known international brands, which can immediately grasp women's attention and grab a major proportion of the market even during times of economic strains and turmoil. Thirdly, lipsticks enhance feminine beauty standards by increasing self-image of women. Fourthly, lipsticks boost self-confidence along with making the individual look presentable even on low days. Lastly, applying cosmetics has a positive impact on the self-esteem of the woman.

9. Power & Lipstick

Femininity has been typically associated with a lack of power. The "ideal" woman is supposed to be adequately meek and subservient to the men in the family, look after every need of the family and do all this while looking pleasant. Not just women's behaviour but their looks have also been very important in determining whether or not they represent their families properly in the outside world, especially when it is a wealthy family, as Lisa Eldridge's documentary has depicted. Since looking the desirable way needed external help, therefore makeup played a very important role in creating different forms of "ideal" feminine looks at different points of time and in this endeavour the lipstick always played a very important role. Being an aid to looking the desirable way as stipulated by society, the lipstick becomes 'a polarising marketplace icon that is simultaneously associated with both women's autonomy and oppression' (Gurrieri & Drenten, 2021, 225). In feminist scholarship, the lipstick has been variously analysed, sometimes being seen as an expression of power while at other times being explained as manifestations of patriarchal ideals of feminine beauty. Third wave feminism and "lipstick feminism" particularly promoted "girlie culture" by encouraging the use of the lipstick and other feminine symbols even though it was aware

of the patriarchal roots of the ideal feminine look, 'emphasising that femininity is a positive trait that can be celebrated, such as through one's self-expression with makeup and fashion (Schuster 2017)' (ibid.: 225-226). Thus, by expressing oneself through makeup, women portray themselves as agential subjects of this patriarchal society in which they are *choosing* how they want to look and be perceived by others in society instead of being told by society how they should be looking.

There is, however, ample scholarship that has perceived wearing lipstick as a 'patriarchal bargain (Kandiyoti, 1988) whereby a woman conforms to gender-based rules in order to gain benefit or power from the system. Such a perspective acknowledges that beauty occupies a central space in women's lives (Bartky, 1990) due to the importance placed on women's physical appearance and the impetus to conform to unattainable and forever shifting ideals. In turn, this means that beauty work for women is never complete and thus functions as a political weapon against women's advancement (Wolf, 1990)' (ibid.: 226). As such, the lipstick is seen as a tool that is used by patriarchal society to continue to produce and maintain unequal relations between men and women by ensuring women keep on subscribing to models of "ideal" beauty, even though women themselves may feel that they are truly expressing their agency and choice by wearing lipstick. As such, it is questionable whether or not the lipstick really is a symbol of power for women. Yet, the sisterhood, if we can call it that, of the online beauty community does help in granting women a sense of power by attaching feelings of confidence and strength to wearing lipstick unlike the patriarchal project of making women subservient to men's standards of ideal beauty. Seen in this light, the lipstick symbolises the feminine sisterhood which is bound by feelings of pleasure, empowerment and emancipation from patriarchal standards of beauty. In fact, Lazar's (2011) idea of power femininity suggests that the female identity can also be powerful just like male identity and in trying to portray power femininity, the lipstick can be seen as an important tool due to its association with the sense of empowerment and confidence. The lipstick wearing woman is an agential subject of society who is willing to express her choices and desires fearlessly as well as being in charge of her body and sexuality, of which the red lipstick has been an important symbol

(Wolf, 1990; Gurrieri & Drenten, 2021). Therefore, the lipstick began to be marketed as 'something that a woman wore for her own pleasure and satisfaction' (Gurrieri & Drenten, 2021, 228). These aspects of lipstick wearing can be explained using a psychological perspective by bringing in the ideas of self-esteem and self-image.

10. Self-Image, Self-Confidence, Self-Esteem and the Lipstick

Self-image is how one sees oneself as well as how one looks and behaves. Lipsticks play a major role in how a woman views herself when she looks at herself in the mirror. The perception of self-image starts from the way she admires herself when she gets ready in front of the mirror in the morning before starting her work as a homemaker or as a working professional. This is also because she as an individual from her perception of herself starts to evaluate how she is being measured by others. This self-image seeps into self-esteem, that is, how she values herself and reflects upon the person that she thinks she is. Self-esteem leads a woman to follow a make-up trend and also transform one's feelings of inferiority and depression into positive emotions. Here, we must say that self-image along with self-esteem is developed through the perception that lipstick has created for itself in the market. The confidence that cosmetics gives a woman when she conceals facial blemishes or highlights her features plays a part in making her more self-assured. Moreover, the fact that nude lipstick shades exist portray the importance of how women perceive themselves upon the use of lipsticks for women. It is not just about boosting self-esteem through the perception of others but also about a woman's self-perception. The no makeup make-up look is to feel pretty inside-out. Self-image (Morgan, C.T. et.al, 2019) of a woman and her confidence on the way she looks and believes others perceive her are interlinked. Self-image is the way an individual perceives oneself and views how others perceive him/her. Thus, lipstick creates an impression about the woman wearing lipstick as having high self-esteem, confidence and self-image. This image is not just for others viewing the woman but for the woman herself when she sees her reflection in the mirror she feels confident and good about herself. Self-image proves to be essential in determining a sense of

well-being in an individual. It is not surprising, therefore, that women are still wearing lipsticks to feel pleasure, satisfaction, empowerment and freedom even though they are unable to display their lipsticks to the rest of the world due to the masks (Morgan et. al. 2019).

11. Capitalism & Lipstick Consumption

While it is debatable whether the lipstick is a true tool of women's empowerment or if women are continuing to unknowingly further patriarchal ideals of beauty, one thing is certain - the lipstick is a perfect example of consumerism. The lipstick has always been an important item sold to women, discretely in the past and gradually more openly. Ideas of pleasure, empowerment and emancipation have aided the sales of lipsticks since women feel that if they wear lipsticks they will truly achieve these feelings. Therefore, one may argue that feminist ideals of empowerment and emancipation are actually instrumental in aiding the entry of capitalism into more and more avenues of women's lives. Brands have been minting money by manufacturing lipsticks even during the pandemic due to these feelings that women want to feel and are willing to put in a considerable amount of money in order to help them feel empowered and emancipated - something akin to the lipstick effect - thereby helping the capitalist brands. Thus, the lipstick is not just a makeup product but is something with which the wearers' emotions are attached and it is this attachment that brands have been able to successfully exploit (Truong et. al 2009). While the lipstick was initially a thing of conspicuous consumption (Veblen, 1899), designed to express the status and wealth of the wearer and her distance from the rest of the population, today it is no longer so. In fact, there are dedicated makeup brands today that are making inexpensive duplicates (dupes) of lipsticks and other makeup products that are made by expensive brands so that the less wealthy sections of the population can have access to something similar. As a result, lipstick, while being an important tool in looking good, is no longer a marker of social status. One may say that a democratisation of beauty has taken place due to the effects of consumerism that has aided and has also been aided by

the entry of capitalism in women's lives who are the typical consumers of beauty.

However, this does not mean that the aura of expensive, exclusive luxury brands has reduced in the minds of the consumers. This is evidenced by the fact that even during the pandemic and its resultant economic turmoil, lipstick wearers in India have been buying expensive lipsticks from international brands that are launching in India which have been hyped up for many years by international beauty gurus. The unabated sale of expensive lipsticks during the economic turmoil due to COVID-19 can be explained with the concept of lipstick effect. Lipsticks are considered as 'the emblem of those "little luxuries", that consumers do not want to give up, even in harsh economic times' (Mason et al. 2017, 8). As the authors describe, the lipstick effect 'makes apparent consumers' need for compensation (Schaefer 2008) especially in hard economic times. However, it is also a visible manifestation of the changing meaning of luxury in the 21st century' (ibid.: 9). Therefore, even during the pandemic period with strained economic conditions and the impracticality of putting on makeup since it would be hidden by the mask, lipsticks are still being bought simply for their hedonistic pleasure, thereby aiding the incomes of makeup brands. This has meant that capitalism is making easier inroads into women's lives by being able to exploit the emotional attachment that women have developed with makeup and especially lipsticks due, once again, to the feelings of empowerment and confidence that media and the recently formed sisterhood of beauty gurus have taught women to associate with lipstick.

The lipstick, therefore, has retained its importance in spite of the need of mask wearing and the economic turmoil of the pandemic as evidenced by the continuous sale of lipsticks as well as online content regarding it.

12. Conclusion

Just as love survived in the time of cholera, as Gabriel Garcia Marquez famously wrote in his book *Love in the Time of Cholera*, so did lipstick survive in the time of corona. It says a lot about

human behaviour and the social conditioning of human minds, especially female minds, with respect to body image, body positivity and society's ideas of appropriate behaviour when it comes to both love and lipstick. It also reveals how consumption is now intricately related to ideas of agency, choice and also identity. While the consumerist nature of modern women, especially earning middle and upper-middle class women, has definitely aided the unabated sale of lipsticks in the pandemic times, the sale has been strongly supplemented by the feelings of confidence and empowerment that women have been socialised to associate with the lipstick. This is very much the reason why lipstick has survived and is still thriving as an important part of a woman's (and nowadays many men's) attire in spite of the inability to show the outside world those perfectly painted pouts due to the requirement of mask wearing. The lipstick is a tool not just of beautification but also, very importantly, of unification of all women into a tribe, a brethren, of like-minded people gaining feelings of empowerment and emancipation from the simple act of colouring their lips, even if no one can see the range of colours under the masks.

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