

Startups explore beyond reality with AR and VR

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Chennai: Imagine wearing a lens in your eye that transports all phone capabilities onto a virtual screen. Add to that the interactive gaming experience of Counter Strike, traveling over the dunes of the Sahara or, what's more, even see a baby dragon tearing through the wall. That's augmented reality (AR) for you.

With the AR/Virtual Reality (VR) market pegged at \$56.8 billion by 2020 as per research firm MarketsandMarkets, the technology appears disruptive. A clutch of native startups, therefore, are dabbling with the concept, which some believe is ahead of its time in India.

During summer 2015, Shubham Mishra, Harikrishna Valiyath and Vrushali Prasad bid adieu to BITS Pilani halfway through to set out on a journey in AR. After spending a year in developing the prototype, Tesseract was born — a device that takes the user through a VR walk, giving a 720-degree view and an immersive



NOT SCI-FI ANYMORE

experience. "We chose to venture into AR despite being fully aware of its nascence," said Mishra.

Backed by a seed funding of Rs 1.2 crore from Astar Ventures, 50k Ventures and other individual angel investors, the trio have already bagged 500 pre-orders from gamers, developers and gaming cafés. "Our product is different from Facebook's Oculus as it is compatible with all existing PC games, movies and one can also live-stream from online gaming communities. It can also be used with mobile phones through devices like Chromecast," said Mishra.

AR and VR is drawing global attention — Google Glass came and went, Facebook acquired Oculus VR for \$2 bil-

lion, Microsoft has HoloLens and Google put \$542 million into Magic Leap. Back home, for Hemanth Satyanarayana, an IIT-Madras graduate who has been working with VR since 2004, AR and VR are old toys.

While the global scene is excited about AR and its applications, adoption in India is not up to the mark, says Satyanarayana. "The consumer is yet to comprehend the effort required behind an AR offering. Even businesses use AR/VR only as a marketing tool," he said.

Vijay Karunakaran quit Intel as director after a 14-year stint to set up Ingage — a mobile technology company that integrates traditional marketing channels with interactive digital platforms, social media and e-commerce. The company's early work includes development of the app that launched 4D images of Rajinikanth in his Kochadaiyaan attire. "We were way ahead of our time when we did work for Kochadaiyaan," said Karunakaran.