

Beauty for Muslim women and their consumption: Halal Cosmetics in the Middle East

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This study explores the women's attitude and consciousness towards beauty and health through the acceptance of halal cosmetics in the Middle East, particularly, in the Gulf States (Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain and Oman) which have the strongest purchasing power in 1.6 billion Muslim residence. "Halal" means "permitted" or "lawful" in Islam. Halal cosmetics are the products made of ingredients that are permissible to use according to Islamic law. Islam also does not recommend Muslim women to beautify themselves for somebody other than their husband.

Halal products have long got much attention in both business scene and Islamic area studies, and its interest has been heavily on only halal food. Halal cosmetics, on the other hand, are new business but expected to grow by 13.4% annually from 2013 to 2018. Halal cosmetics are already popular in Malaysia but they are almost unknown in the Middle East.

I conducted fieldwork for 6 weeks from 2014 to 2016 for market survey and interviews in Oman, one of the oil rich Gulf states. However, I could not find any halal cosmetics on sale in any shops in Muscat, the capital of Oman. My interview result reveals that while Omani women are interested in and can afford to buy western natural and organic cosmetics, they do not recognize halal cosmetics. Many Omani women do not care of the ingredients of cosmetics whether they contain alcohol or not, and they interpret Islam to their advantage when it comes to beauty care. I expect that they will accept halal cosmetics in the near future because halal cosmetics have a certain similarity to natural, organic and even ethical cosmetics and that halal cosmetics have already gained attention in their wealthier neighbor, UAE.