

Consumers' Perceptions Regarding Halal and Cosmetics: The Halal-Certified System in Morocco

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The purpose of this study is to contribute to the socio-cultural knowledge of cosmetology by exploring the *halal*-certified system and Muslim consumers' perceptions regarding notions of *halal* and beauty practices in Morocco. The term *halal* means "lawful" or "allowed" according to Islamic Law. The global *halal* market has gained a lot of attention because of the universal rise in the number of Muslims. If a product is marked "halal," this means that the materials, products, and process facilities of the products have been subjected to approved certification systems and that they provide consumers with a guarantee that no forbidden components are present. All Muslims and non-Muslims who value traceability and high-quality products are expected to be the new consumers of these products. The data for this study was derived mainly from ethnographic fieldwork research in 5 Moroccan cities in March 2014, including discussion with about 130 students, a preliminary questionnaire administered to 116 students, and face-to-face interviews with several persons involved in the certification system, as well as scholars.

The Moroccan government established a *halal*-certified system for foods in July of 2012. *Halal*-certified cosmetics and personal care products had no approval system in place at first, but three months after my fieldwork, it was instituted. Producers and makers who desire a *halal* logo have to contact IMANOR (Institut Marocain de Normalisation) for an inspection. It can help the procedures in Morocco if the cosmetics in question already have ISO 22716 (Cosmetics Good Manufacturing Practices) certification or have been approved by such certification institutions as JAKIM (Department of Islamic Development Malaysia). The government has approved the *halal* industry as being economically profitable, but most Moroccan consumers do not know that Morocco has entered this new industry. They believe that "every Moroccan product is *halal*," so they are not worried about *halal* as long as they are in Morocco. Besides, people care about whether or not food is *halal* rather than cosmetics and personal care products, so they use homemade, co-op, and big name brand cosmetics. There are also some people who consider cosmetics "*haram* (forbidden acts according to Islamic Law)".

Thus, the reaction toward *halal*-certified cosmetics is split. Some people regard selling them as an opportunity for economic growth or as a chance to start a business. Other people regard *halal*-certified cosmetics as excessive consumerism, believing them to be a capitalistic exploitation of religious norms. Companies that emphasize social responsibility can work on this point. An association of women in argan oil producing areas, for example, has attempted to raise awareness about sustainable development by promoting such concepts as environmental protection, literacy education, and so on. Now, more than 200 associations display an awareness of natural resources in their manufacturing processes. Likewise, promoting *halal*-certified cosmetics and personal care products can be promoted as a form of social responsibility as well.

Halal business can provide an opportunity to deepen mutual understanding between Muslims and non-Muslims, on one other hand, while running the risk of emphasizing the differences between the two, on the other. At the same time, the gap between the rich and poor is inherent in it. Nonetheless, *halal*-certified cosmetics and personal care products are in demand as a mechanism that ties religious ethics to business ethics even more strongly than organic products and *halal*-certified food.