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Pre-Halal Certification Barriers in Cosmetic Production: Insights from Brunei's Female-Dominated Muslim MSMEs

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the pre-certification barriers encountered by cosmetic Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in Brunei in preparing for halal certification, particularly those related to production readiness and regulatory preparation. While halal certification has become increasingly important within the expanding global halal cosmetics industry, existing studies have largely focused on certification processes rather than the earlier challenges faced by cosmetic producers. Adopting a qualitative approach, data were collected through one-on-one semi-structured interviews with eight local cosmetic producers operating primarily at the micro and small enterprise level (MSMEs). The findings reveal four major themes: limited access to raw materials, absence of manufacturing and laboratory testing facilities, import and export constraints and challenges in maintaining product quality control. The barriers in obtaining halal certification are deemed to interconnect broadly with structural and operational limitations within Brunei's cosmetic industry. The study further highlights how these challenges particularly affect female-led MSMEs, which dominate the local cosmetic sector. Overall, the study contributes to existing halal cosmetics literature by shifting attention towards the pre-certification stage and emphasizing the importance of reinforcing production infrastructure and regulatory coordination to improve MSME readiness for halal certification.

Keywords: Halal Certification; Barriers; Halal Cosmetics; Brunei Cosmetic MSMEs; Female

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INTRODUCTION

The halal industry has expanded beyond food to include sectors such as cosmetics, driven by increasing consumer demand for products that comply with religious and safety standards. In this context, halal certification plays a critical role for market enhancement among MSMEs, along with gaining consumer trust (Bahrudin, Moh., et al, 2025), especially in predominantly Muslim-populated market. However, the certification can be complex and costly, impacting MSMEs' ability to participate fully in the halal market. This is further compounded by inadequate awareness regarding the benefits of halal certification, contributing to relatively low rate of compliance (Azhari, F.F., et al, 2025), especially on non-food products like cosmetics where halal is perceived not as compulsory. Efforts to address this gap are evident in Brunei, where economic diversification being pushed through Brunei Vision 2035 which emphasizes the development of strategic sector including halal manufacturing (Ayman Falak Medina, 2025). Nevertheless, experiences from comparable contexts such as Indonesia suggest that MSME participation in halal sector remains limited despite favorable market conditions. Given the significant contribution of MSMEs to national output and employment rates, such inadequate engagement may hinder their potential role in advancing participation within the global halal economy (Azizah, S. et al, 2025). A similar trajectory could be observed in Brunei, where MSMEs are increasingly encouraged to grow and sustain as formal business entities, particularly to facilitate economic diversification and reduce reliance on the oil and gas sector.

In contextualizing the present study, existing literature on halal cosmetics industry development emphasizes the importance of establishing clear and comprehensive frameworks, standardization protocols and policies to govern the halal cosmetic industry (Nursyabani, C., Nurwahidin, 2025). Additionally, the same study has also highlighted the need to empower local manufacturers through initiatives such as mentoring and training programs, ease of licensing and halal certification, fund incentives, as well as the development of research and production facilities. These strategies reflect the broader recognition that industry growth is closely linked to the operational readiness and institutional support available for the local cosmetic MSMEs. However, existing discussions of Halal certification among MSMEs commonly center around certification awareness, perceived benefits, and difficulties associated with fulfilling certification requirement. These perspectives, however, do not fully capture the conditions within the enterprise that may prevent a cosmetic producer from reaching the certification stage. For cosmetic MSMEs, readiness for certification is closely connected to the production environment itself, including the availability and sourcing of raw materials, production facilities, quality control practices, and compliance with related regulatory requirements. These operational conditions are particularly relevant in emerging cosmetic industries where producers may still depend on external suppliers and operate with limited production infrastructure. Examining these conditions therefore provides a different perspective on Halal certification barriers by considering what occurs before an MSME can engage effectively with the certification process.

Against this background, this study examines the pre-certification barriers encountered by cosmetic MSMEs in Brunei in preparing for halal certification, particularly those related to production processes and readiness. Rather than treating Halal certification as a standalone administrative requirement, the study situates certification readiness within the broader realities of local cosmetic enterprises in Brunei. Thus provides an empirical

account of how production-related constraints can shape MSME's progression towards Halal certification in a small, predominantly Muslim market.

The findings could further provide practical considerations for Halal authorities, policymakers, and industry-support institutions in determining where support is required before certification can become a realistic pathway for local cosmetic producers. In this respect, the study connects the certification agenda with the underlying production capacity of MSMEs and offers a basis for addressing barriers at the stage where they arise.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Contextual Overview of Cosmetics, Halal Regulations and Woman Entrepreneurship in Brunei

Cosmetics are often associated with women, reflecting a broader tendency towards aesthetic appreciation and personal care. The product's ability to cleanse, beautify and promote attractiveness without affecting the body's functions has hold its value among women, which underpins their appeal in consumer markets (Bilal AI, 2017). Not only that, but cosmetics also has in fact are believed to influence self-identity, social interactions, health (Robertson, 2021) and self-perceptions among women (Anchieta, 2021). In the contemporary context, Halal has evolved beyond a mere conceptual or religious notion into an institutionalized system encompassing various aspects of the Muslim lifestyle. While traditionally associated with food consumptions, Halal principles have now expanded to include non-food sectors such as cosmetics, pharmaceuticals, as well as industries like finance and tourism. In Brunei, cosmetic products are governed by a dual framework involving product safety control and Halal certification. Product safety is overseen by the Ministry of Health through the Department of Pharmaceutical Services, which requires Cosmetic Product Notification (CPN) approval as a prerequisite for Halal certification. This requirement is mandated under the Medicines (Cosmetic products) Regulations, 2007. Halal certification, in turn, falls under the authority of the Halal Food Control Division (HFCD) of the Ministry Religious Affair. The regulatory framework is further supported by the Guidelines for the Manufacture and Handling of Halal Cosmetic Products (PBD26:2016) and the Guidelines for the Manufacture and Handling of Medicines, Traditional Medicines and Health Supplements (GD24:2010).

Within this regulatory context, existing observations suggest cosmetic industry in Brunei is predominantly composed of micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), many of which operate as micro or home-based businesses with limited formalization. This pattern reflects broader trends in women's entrepreneurship (Kumar, S., & Kumar, B. , 2025). These enterprises rely heavily on digital platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook for marketing and sales, enhancing brand visibility and customer engagement while reducing operational costs (Rashid, F. R., & Abdullah, A. D. A, 2025). Physical retail presence also remains limited, with many entrepreneurs opting for distribution through department stores or cube retail spaces due to accessibility and cost considerations.

However, the predominance of small-scale operations and limited production capacity presents challenges in meeting regulatory requirements. MSMEs often face structural constraints related to resource access, production capability, compliance processes and insufficient capital for expansion (Eshetu, 2024) (Ogunsola, M., et al, 2025), which may affect their readiness to engage in formal halal certification. Despite the increasing

relevance of halal cosmetics, limited attention has been given to the barriers encountered by cosmetic MSMEs in Brunei prior to entering the certification process, particularly at the pre-certification stage. This gap underscores the need to examine the operational and regulatory challenges that shape local cosmetic companies' readiness for halal certification in Brunei's cosmetic sector.

A Review of Pre-Notification Constraints in Cosmetic Regulatory Systems Across Countries

This study decided to delve into identifying the complexities in acquiring the pre-notification approval for cosmetic products encountered in other countries, as the comparative analysis is anticipated to shed light on the diversity regulatory frameworks and the difficulties that cosmetic manufacturers face globally.

Table 1

Comparative Overview of Regulatory Constraints in Cosmetic Production

Context	Regulatory focus	Key constraints reported	Implications for MSMEs
European Union	Product safety assessment and pre-market compliance	Variations in safety assessment practices due to differences in assessors' expertise; challenges associated with alternative safety-testing methods and emerging regulatory requirements (Ferreira, M., et al, 2022) (Regulation (EC) No 1223/2009 of the European Parliament and of the Council, 2009)	Requires access to appropriate technical expertise and capacity to fulfil complex safety requirements
Japan	Manufacturing and marketing licensing and product notification	Multiple licenses, separate regulatory requirements and engagement with different authorities increase administrative and procedural demands (Crevedo, 2022)	May increase compliance costs, administrative workload and time required before market entry
Brazil (São Paulo)	Regulatory procedures and internationalization	Bureaucratic procedures, logistical costs, limited access to capital and insufficient institutional support (Farina, M. C., et al, 2018)	Resource and institutional limitations may constrain the ability of smaller enterprises to expand and comply with formal requirements
European regulatory context	Ingredient classification, labelling and emerging technologies	Uncertainty surrounding ingredient classification, labelling requirements and nanomaterial regulation (Clara Shelley-Egan, 2015) (Akmen, V. et al, 2022)	Regulatory uncertainty may complicate product development, compliance and investment decisions
Brunei Darussalam	Cosmetic Product Notification and preparation for halal certification	Limited production facilities and materials, product quality control issues, regulatory requirements and other operational constraints	Production and regulatory readiness may constrain progression towards halal certification before the certification itself begins

Note: The table synthesizes regulatory and operational constraints reported in selected studies and situates the Brunei context within the broader cosmetic regulatory literature.

Regulatory Complexity and Standardization Issue

In the European Union (EU), manufacturers and importers, referred to as Responsible Person (RP) are required to ensure product safety prior to market release by conducting safety assessments and compiling Cosmetic Product Safety Report (CSPR) in accordance with Regulation (EC) No. 1223/2009 (Regulation (EC) No 1223/2009 of the European Parliament and of the Council, 2009). These assessments must be performed by qualified safety assessors/ However, variations in academic background, expertise and professional experience have led to inconsistencies in evaluation outcomes (Ferreira, M., et al, 2022) due to the absence of fully standardized criteria. Additionally, the regulation's prohibition of animal testing has introduced further challenges in assessing the safety of new ingredients, necessitating the development of alternative testing methods to meet pre-market approval requirements.

Procedural Burden and Multi-layered Requirements

In Japan, the process of registering cosmetic product involves obtaining both Cosmetic Manufacturing License and Cosmetic Marketing License, each with their own requirements. After obtaining the required licenses, the Cosmetic Manufacturing Notification shall be submitted and approval of the notification signifies that the cosmetic is now ready to be marketed (Crevedo, 2022). Although the acquisition of multiple licenses is intended to ensure that cosmetic products manufactured and sold in Japan adhere to quality and safety standards, it may have added complexities to the registration process such as lengthy and time-consuming application procedure as it requires completion on different sets of standards. Obtaining these licenses also requires navigating through multiple prefectures or authorities, which increases the administrative burden and may cause additional delays in the registration procedure.

A study conducted in São Paulo, Brazil, highlights challenge comparable to those faced by cosmetic MSMEs in Brunei, particularly in relation to bureaucratic export procedures, logistical costs, limited access to capital, and inadequate government support (Farina, M. C., et al, 2018). While the Brazilian study focuses on barriers to internationalization, similar constraints are evident in Brunei; however, these challenges are not confined to export activities but extend more broadly to the overall development of the local cosmetic industry.

Scientific and Technical Uncertainty

The slow development of regulatory frameworks in the cosmetic industry has created a gap between rising market demand and existing legal requirements, ultimately constraining industry growth (Akmen, V. et al, 2022). Challenges such as unclear ingredient classification, ambiguous labelling requirements, and limited clarity on legal liability continue to affect competitiveness and investment potential. In addition, firms must navigate differing regulatory standards across countries, which further complicates compliance. In the European context, uncertainties surrounding nanomaterial regulation particularly on the lack of clear thresholds for "nano" labelling has added to this complexity and further complicate the effective distinction between conventional and nanomaterial-based cosmetic products (Clara Shelley-Egan, 2015).

A comparison between global and local contexts suggests that regulatory challenges in more developed markets tend to center on advanced compliance issues revolving around standardization, scientific uncertainty, and cross-border regulatory alignment. In contrast,

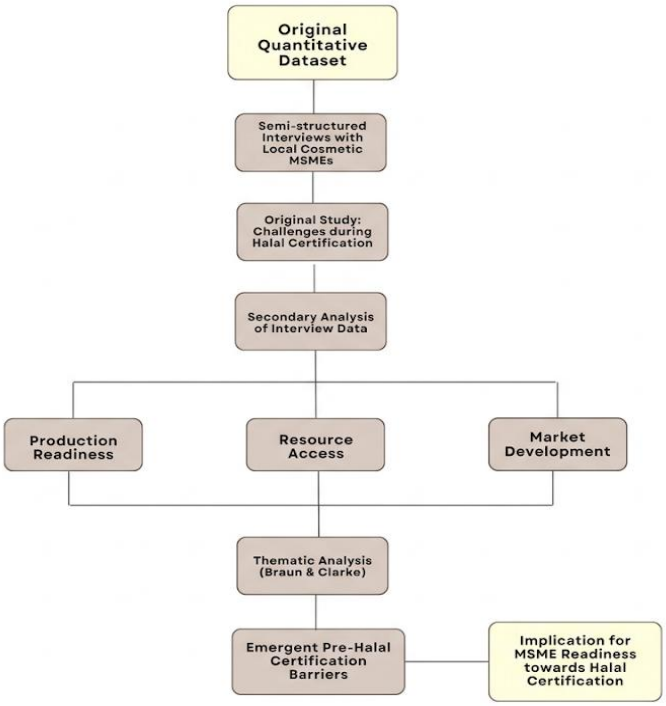
challenges faced by cosmetic MSMEs in Brunei+ are more fundamental, occurring at the early stages of development such as the limited production capacity, restricted access to materials, regulatory communication gaps, and difficulties in obtaining pre-certification approvals. This distinction highlights a critical gap in the literature, where existing studies focus predominantly on mature regulatory environments, with limited attention given to early-stage constraints affecting these emerging cosmetic industries.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative secondary analysis of interview data previously collected from local cosmetic producers in Brunei. The original interviews explored challenges encountered by the local cosmetic producers in relation to Halal certification. For the present study, the dataset was re-examined to identify experiences and constraints occurring before the Halal certification stage, with particular emphasis on product readiness, resource access and product preparation.

The use of secondary qualitative analysis is appropriate because the original interviews contained information extending beyond the immediate Halal certification process. Participants were anticipated in discussing aspects of their business operations, production arrangements, sourcing materials, product development and regulatory experiences that provide relevant evidence for examining pre-certification conditions. Accordingly, the present analysis does not treat the dataset as a new set of interviews but applies a distinct analytical focus to previously collected qualitative data to examine the barriers that may affect cosmetic MSMEs' readiness to pursue Halal certification, with the study sample representing a predominantly female-led segment of Brunei's cosmetic industry. Figure 1 presents the overall research framework of the study.

Figure 1
Overall Research Framework



Sampling Design and Data Collection

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with local cosmetic business owners. The study sample comprised eight respondents, all of whom are local cosmetic producers formally operating as Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in Brunei. The profile background of these eight local cosmetic producers can be found in table 2 below. As per the ASEAN main portal, Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) are organizations or companies with fewer than one hundred employees, annual revenues not exceeding B$5 million, and assets falling below B$3 million (refer table 1 below) (ASEAN Main Portal, 2024). Therefore, in accordance with the provided definition, the existing local cosmetic producers in Brunei are classified as MSMEs.

Table 2
Definition of MSME in Brunei as per ASEAN Main Portal

Country	Micro		Small		Medium	
	Number of Employees	Other Criteria	Number of Employees	Other Criteria	Number of Employees	Other Criteria
Brunei	1-9	Annual Revenue: Less than B$100,000 Assets: Less than B$60,000	10-29	Annual Revenue: Less than B$100,000 to less than B$1 million Assets: Less than B$60,000 to less than B$600,000	30-99	Annual Revenue: B$1 million to less than B$5 million Assets: B$60,000 to less than B$3 million

Source: ASEAN Main Portal

Most of the eight participants currently operate their cosmetic businesses primarily through social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram, while only a few maintain physical retail stores. In other words, these local cosmetic MSMEs are not distributors for external brands but rather independent entrepreneurs who own and manage their own cosmetic brands. Participants were initially contacted via telephone to request their participation. Upon obtaining informed consent, interviews were scheduled at mutually convenient times. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' permission and subsequently transcribed verbatim for analysis. The interviews were conducted in a one-to-one setting, as this approach was considered more practical and effective for the present study compared to focus group discussions. This decision was made to minimize the risk of biased responses that may arise from participant interaction, where individuals could be influenced by the opinions of others, thereby affecting the authenticity and independence of their responses and, consequently, the overall findings.

Data Analysis

The study has also employed thematic analysis based on six-phase framework outlined by (Braun, 2006) to systematically identify, analyze, and interpret patterns within the interview data. This approach facilitated the generation of in-depth insights into the barriers encountered by local cosmetic MSMEs during the cosmetic production process. This methodological approach ensured that the data collected were both relevant and robust, laying a strong foundation for the subsequent analysis of the challenges faced in obtaining Halal certification. Their profile background can be referred to in table 2 below:

Table 3
Profile Background of Local Cosmetic MSMEs

Profile Background of Local Cosmetic MSMEs				
Informants' Codes	Gender	Age	Duration Involved in Cosmetic Business	Main Products
D	One Female	25	5 years	Lip Products
G	One Female	36	5 years	Full range of Makeup and Personal Care Products
R	One Female	28	2 years	Perfume
M	One Female	45	3 years	Soaps
S	One Female	31	2 years	Eye Makeup Products
F	One Female	36	16 years	Traditional Herbs, Lotions, Feminine Spray
Y	One Female	37	20 years	Soaps and Beauty Creams
W	Two Males	25 & 27	3 years	Perfume

FINDINGS

Four primary themes have emerged from the dataset obtained during the interview. The findings reveal that pre-certification barriers faced by local cosmetic MSMEs in preparing Halal certification are largely associated with production processes and readiness which

consists of absence of production materials, limited access to testing and manufacturing facilities, import and export constraints, and challenges related to product quality control.

Theme One: Absence of Materials for Production

A considerable number of the informants has emphasized the challenges they experienced in sourcing raw materials and packaging resources for cosmetic production in Brunei. Informants M, Y and W stressed on the inconvenient access to raw materials in Brunei due to the dearth of availability. The materials, including raw materials and packaging used for their cosmetic production are mainly imported from the neighboring countries.

Informant M recounted her struggle to get her hands on some of the cosmetic ingredients such as the soap base for her soap product. She had to place her order online to bring in the raw materials she needed into Brunei:

> *"So, the essential ingredient for my soaps is the soap base itself. The soap base, I would order it online from our neighboring countries since it's quite difficult to find it in a big quantity here in the country, but with the expanded ingredients such as turmeric, I can get it here. So basically, I face the lack of available raw materials like the soap base ingredient."*

As per the account provided by informant Y, the scarcity of raw materials in Brunei would result in an undoubtedly increase in the cost of the current existing materials. She additionally observed that the materials that were readily accessible within Brunei were usually unsuitable for incorporation into their cosmetic products. The informant further asserted that the scarcity of raw materials has also seemed to pose threats to the sustainability and viability of her business, as it incurs substantial expenses for transportation, taxes, and permits. She formerly manufactured her cosmetic products by hand manually, particularly the soap, but the inaccessibility of the necessary raw materials compelled her to relocate production to an overseas facility. She disclosed:

> *"Lack of raw materials in Brunei and its costly even if we have it. For example, glycerin, there are various types of glycerin e.g., vegetable, fats. Sometimes what we have in Brunei is not suitable of use for our products."*
>
> She added: *"I used to create my own products from scratch, however due to the shortage of raw materials in Brunei, I find it hard to sustain as it costs me at shipping, taxes, and permit. Now, my products are manufactured by OEM factory abroad.*

For informants W, two male business partners who specialize in perfumes, apparently also struggle with similar issue in obtaining raw materials for their perfumes. Apart from not having the raw materials itself in the country, the challenge of procuring raw materials for perfume stems from Brunei's dearth of suppliers for the materials distillation process. This indicates a labor shortage in Brunei, more specifically a dearth of expertise in the perfume manufacturing sector. They elaborated:

> *"The difficulty in obtaining raw material for perfume in Brunei is because we do not own any local supplier to distil raw material. Some of the raw materials could not be planted and grown in Brunei e.g., flowers and plants that are unsuitable to be cultivated in Brunei due to our climate and weather. The only*

> *source of material for perfume that could be cultivated here for now is mainly agarwood and sandalwood to a certain extent."*

Another perfumery, informant R also provided a similar account, stating that most raw materials are unattainable in Brunei to the extent that many of the essential resources must be imported from abroad. This observation, however, is not limited to resources for perfume production. She further emphasized the concern regarding the labor shortage, which informant W had also encountered.

> Informant R: *"We also face labor in producing raw materials. We feel that everything is difficult to obtain in Brunei, even outside from the cosmetic context for example clothing. If we must make our own, the capital would be huge and to sell it retail, not much profit would be made. That is why we need to get help from outside."*

One of the major challenges that threatens the sustainability of their business is the struggle to obtain packaging resources for their cosmetic products. The F and W, frequently encounter difficulties in maintaining a steady supply of packaging materials, as most of these are primarily sourced from neighboring countries. Consequently, the likelihood of receiving an incorrect quantity of orders from suppliers is quite prevalent.

> Informant F: *"I also struggle with obtaining stocks for the packaging bottle. Sometimes I received the wrong bottles with wrong amount of quantity."*
> Informant W: "*We face the issue regarding the lack of packaging material. In other countries like Malaysia, they have manufacturers who provide production services right from formulation to the packaging process. In Brunei, we do not have that, everything we do, we need to do it by hand, no factories. We buy the bottles in bulk; we fill the liquid into the bottle ourselves"*

Taking together, the scarcity of materials required for the production of cosmetics, which has caused local cosmetic manufacturers' concern, appears to be centered on two aspects: a) raw materials and b) packaging materials. Because of this predicament, it has left the local cosmetic MSMEs with no choice but to import most of the materials imperative for the cosmetic manufacturing process.

Theme 2: Import-export Constraints

Despite strong interest among local cosmetic MSMEs in entering this lucrative market, significant challenges persist in the import and export of materials and products. These include bureaucratic procedures, inconsistent customs regulations, and logistical constraints, which delay the procurement of high-quality ingredients and increase production costs.

Shipment delays to Brunei further exacerbate these challenges. For instance, one informant reported routing deliveries through Limbang, Sarawak, a border region adjacent to Brunei, as a strategy to ease logistical constraints and reduce costs associated with direct importation.

> Informant D: *"Other issues are delaying of the process of the final products and shipment delay to Brunei also happens all the time. My products basically*

> *will be sent to Limbang, Sarawak and then I will hire people to fetch it for me along with all documentations provided for the use of the Royal Customs."*
> Informant S*: "Another one, shipping cost to Brunei is way more expensive so we use Limbang, Sarawak as a cheaper shipping option."*

When queried about the difficulty of importing and exporting materials and products, informant G also alluded to the recurring problem of customs clearance delays preceding the products' distribution to the applicants.

> Informant G: " *Maybe just minimal issue like delay in custom clearance but that is normal for us businesspeople, not specifically any exclusive issue with cosmetic products."*

Another challenge faced by the cosmetic manufacturers is the exorbitant tax burden associated with importing raw materials. However, informant R as a small-scale company is not yet prepared for exportation; hence, no exportation-related issues were identified.

> Informant R: "*We face import problems; raw materials are from abroad, so we must get the permit from custom. But we spent so much on taxes on the raw materials. For export no issues because we do not export yet as we are still a small-scale company."*

An additional concern which contributes to the increase in production cost is the occurrence of delivery errors from the supplier. The supplier's inattentiveness has consequently doubled the cost of shipping to transport the materials into Brunei. Informant R further explained that the inaccuracy of the delivered products would typically result in the nullification of that batch which ultimately resulted in an inflation of manufacturing cost for the final goods:

> *"Sometimes the raw material's supplier sent us the wrong products so if we sent it back to them, it doubled our costs. So usually, if there is an error in importing, we would not use that batch, we will just order another batch. So that batch will be considered void."*

When questioned to specify precisely on what she meant by the phrase 'wrong products,' informant R continued to give a case on bottle leakage from suppliers which may cause contamination and deterioration of quality to the imported essential oils. Therefore, they are obligated to reorder the material to uphold quality standards of their products.

> Informant R*: "For example, during the transportation, the oil's bottles leaked so there is a possibility for contamination to happen. Because sometimes the oil essence's quality could change, that is why we must reorder. That is also why our stocks are usually limited due to oil essence insufficiency.*

Additionally, informant W encountered difficulties pertaining to the entry of items into Brunei. Brunei has stringent limitations on the importation of liquid substances, necessitating applicants to complete and submit numerous paperwork. A significant quantity of perfume units necessitates the approval of numerous ministries, in addition to laboratory testing for specific ingredients to secure the import authorization.

> Informant W: *"Hard to import the materials in. Brunei has restriction on liquid, so many forms to fill. If we bring in big number of units, we need to go through multiple ministries. There are also certain materials that need to undergo lab test, again, if we import a lot of it."*

It is challenging for them, as a perfumery, to import alcohol directly into Brunei for use in their spray perfume due to Brunei's legal restriction. Hence, they employ the prevalent shipping alternative by transporting their materials to Miri, a coastal city located in Sarawak. The trend can be observed that local MSME proprietors in Brunei are seen to increasingly adopt the practice of utilizing the address of the border-sharing region of Sarawak as the delivery destination option.

> Informant W: "*Another issue, if we want to sell our perfume in spray form, we need alcohol. So, the importation of alcohol is quite difficult to be imported directly into Brunei due to our legal restrictions. So, what we do is, we got it posted to Miri."*

Additionally, informant W detected inconsistencies in the customs and excise duties associated with the importation of perfumes and essential oils. Essential oils require components in the mixture of their perfume as a natural oil-based perfumery. However, according to the interviewee, perfume is the only product subject to taxation; essential oils are exempted. The discrepancy occurred on the mixed up of term on perfume and essential oil. On occasion, the natural oil that the customs officer received was labelled as perfume, and on other occasions, it was classified as essential oil. This has resulted in informing W facing inconsistent tax-paying experiences, in which they are occasionally obligated to pay taxes and at other times not. The subject explained:

> *"The legal act on perfume seems discrepant because there are 2 categories; - a) perfume b) essential oil. Taxes will be imposed on perfume but not on essential oil. From our experience, sometimes the natural oil that we brought in was classified as perfume and some other times as essential oil. In another word, the tax paying experience was inconsistent. Because from what we understand as a perfumery, essential oil can also be used as perfume, so we are not sure by how they define perfume in accordance with Brunei's act. There was this one time when we brought in essential oil and they asked for tax payment, but of course we clarified to them that essential oils are not included for taxation.*

The customs officers expressed their concern regarding the clarification of whether the imported essential oils are intended for topical application or not. Based on that particular experience, informant W concluded that in the case where essential oils are to be applied topically to the skin, the officer is required to label the substance as perfume; which means tax will be imposed, however, if the oil is not intended for topical application, it does not qualify as perfume thus tax will be exempted.

> Informant W: *"The only concern inquired by the custom officer was if the essential oils we brought are meant to be used topically or not. That indicated that if it is used topically on skin then essential oils are considered perfume and if not, then it's not perfume. So, I told them the oils were intended to be used as mixture of liquids. Well, we basically had to improvise our situation back then.*

> *All in all, we discovered that there are discrepancies in our legal acts in perfume as up till now, we are not quite clear about this."*

In summary, import and export barriers stem primarily from shipment delays and high import costs. Many producers avoid direct shipping to Brunei, instead routing materials through border regions such as Limbang and Miri to reduce expenses. However, reliance on imported input remains necessary due to limited local availability, increasing financial strain. Additionally, inconsistencies in tax classification particularly between essential oils and perfumes have occasionally resulted in misapplied taxes, contributing to uncertainty and uneven cost burdens for producers.

Theme 3: Absence of Production and Testing Facilities

The presence of cosmetic manufacturing facilities plays a significant role in stimulating industry growth. This is evident in South Korea, where the strong contribution of Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEM) and Original Design Manufacturer (ODM) firms has positioned the country as one of the leading global exporters of cosmetics (Byeong Yeon Lim, 2020). Similarly, Indonesia's cosmetics industry has experienced rapid growth, supported by the expansion of local brands and the increasing availability of OEM services and manufacturing infrastructure (Kimiko Hikari Zuhria, 2023) (Surya Ardi, 2022). This has demonstrated that the presence of cosmetic manufacturing facilities in a particular country can positively prompt the development of the cosmetic industry in the region where the facility is constructed.

In the case of Brunei, manufacturing facilities for cosmetic products including OEM and ODM are regrettably absent in the country. Informant D emphasized the lack of an original equipment manufacturer (OEM) facility in Brunei, which compelled her to travel abroad in search of an OEM factory capable of producing her cosmetic products. On certain occasions, complications arise in the context of product formulation since she was primarily reliant on telephone communication, particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic. The indirect interaction with the supplier appeared to be not convenient for entrepreneurs. As she stated:

> *"Common local producer issues for me are the absence of OEM factory in Brunei, so we had to go abroad to produce the goods. So, it is quite hard for us to formulate our products as communication with the factory is mainly made by phone only, especially during the covid times. We made our selection of formula and ingredients through phone."*

Informant D also proposed that the establishment of original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) in Brunei would have a favorable influence on the development of the local cosmetic sector by mitigating the financial burden on entrepreneurs who would otherwise have to travel overseas. Cosmetics manufactured in foreign countries generally undergo a long-drawn-out restocking process, which causes a subsequent delay in the delivery of the products to customers.

> Informant D*: "I hope Brunei could have our own OEM factory or manufacturing company. This would be so helpful for us, so we do not have to go abroad to manufacture our cosmetic products. With the presence of OEM factory in Brunei, it will speed up our restocking process so local consumers*

> *would not have to wait for so long, compared to having to do all the manufacturing process outside the country."*

Aside from the lack of manufacturing facility, Brunei also fails to furnish laboratory test services for the commercial application of the local cosmetic enterprises. As a cosmetic entrepreneur whose primary products consisted of handmade traditional items, informant F expressed her frustration on the hurdles in obtaining notification approval for cosmetic products in Brunei, where laboratory testing services are not yet available.

> Informant F: *"it is quite difficult to obtain product notification for handmade & traditional products due to the absence of lab test in Brunei. Brunei needs to have its own lab and factory with its own scientific officers for the use of local cosmetic businesses instead of getting it checked abroad. This could boost the country's economic along with diversifying our local industries through the cosmetic sector."*

The predicament of not having our own cosmetic manufacturing facility is also experienced by informant S and informant Y. As a result of the geographical distance between the manufacturing facility overseas and informant Y, there were intermittent discrepancies regarding the transparency of the products' manufacturing processes. She learned that the original equipment manufacturer (OEM) with whom she completed cosmetic products would alter the ingredients without prior notification. This resulted in financial losses for them, as the products' quality occasionally declined.

> Informant Y: "*Transparency of product formulation from OEM would sometimes be an issue. Sometimes they change the ingredients a bit without informing them. So here is where it costs us loss as the product quality sometime will change too. To be in cosmetic industry, Cosmetic producers need cosmetic knowledge even if you do not have science background."*

Informant S also mentioned her struggle to obtain information on the laboratory test procedure.

> Informant S: "*There is also no lab test provided in Brunei. The information about this is not even easy to obtain."*

To acquire the CPN approval from the DPS, a specific measurement of the ingredients is occasionally required to be listed in the form. This procedure necessitates laboratory testing that is not accessible within the country according to the informants. As a result, these local cosmetic MSMEs were generally required to travel abroad to have their products evaluated by foreign laboratories. This has led to an increased outlay on travel and the expensive fee for the laboratory testing services. She is also aware of the existence of the government laboratory testing services, but she has appreciated that these services are not made accessible to entrepreneurs for private use.

> Informant Y: *No lab test in Brunei so difficult to obtain specific measurement of the ingredients asked by MOH. Lab test outside is very costly. It does not cost me hundreds but thousands. These measurements required by MOH can only be performed through a lab test. How can that be logic for them to require us to have a lab test when the country does not provide that service for us*

> *SMEs? Even if we have it, we SMEs could not utilize as it is only for something industrial. I do not know who, but not for us, the small companies.*

Despite of the challenges claimed by local cosmetic MSMEs in Brunei in regard to the absence of laboratory testing services for cosmetics in the country, it is noteworthy that the Department of Scientific Services (DSS), a division under MOH, Brunei does offer analytical services not only for cosmetics but also for pharmaceutical products, traditional medicines, and health supplements. However, the scope of analytical services offered for cosmetics are rather limited to Hydroquinone, Mercury, Lead, Methanol, Tretinoin, Prednisone, Betamethasone and Dexamethasone (refer figure below).

Figure 2
Brochure of Pharmacy Section Services, Department of Scientific Services.



Source: MOH Website (2023)

These findings provide some tentative initial evidence that the local cosmetic MSMEs are not adequately informed about the existence of laboratory testing services in Brunei. While some may have been aware of this information, they still held misconception that the services were not made available for commercial users, particularly for private companies. Moreover, upon examining the concern regarding financial strain raised by the sources in the first theme, it can be inferred that the applicants may also perceive the pricing structure of the analytical tests offered by DSS as prohibitively steep, which consequently impede the ability of local MSMEs to perform comprehensive quality control and compliance testing in Brunei. The fee to conduct laboratory tests on cosmetics is presented in the figure below:

Figure 3
Department of Scientific Services Scheme of Charges 2022.

PHARMACY SECTION **PCY**

TEST/ SERVICE CODE	SERVICES/ TEST DESCRIPTION	CHARGES
COSMETICS		
CPCY-C001	Screening and Confirmatory Testing for Steroids in Cosmetics by HPLC per sample	$700
CPCY-C002	Identification of Steroids in Cosmetics by HPLC (per sample per steroid)	$120
CPCY-C003	Identification of Hydroquinone in Cosmetics by HPLC	$120
CPCY-C004	Identification of Tretinoin in Cosmetics by HPLC	$120
CPCY-C005	Identification of Lead in Cosmetics by GFAAS	$150
CPCY-C006	Identification of Mercury in Cosmetics by CVAAS	$150
CPCY-C007	Methanol Content in Cosmetics by GCFID	$50

Source: MOH Website

In summary, the lack of production facilities and limited laboratory testing services in Brunei constrain the development of the local cosmetic industry. Entrepreneurs face financial barriers in accessing services abroad, resulting in inefficiencies in product development and restocking, and limiting product quality and innovation. The establishment of OEM and ODM facilities, alongside accessible testing services, could strengthen industry capacity, enhance standards, and support growth. Such developments may also improve Brunei's competitiveness in the halal cosmetics market, attract international manufacturing partnerships, and generate employment opportunities.

Theme 4: Product Quality Control

As noted in the previous theme, the absence of cosmetic manufacturing facilities locally somehow affects the entrepreneurs' abilities to maintain product quality particularly due to the heavy reliance on manufacturers abroad. One informant highlighted challenge in ensuring consistency, noting that her products were initially hand-produced but had a short shelf life due to the absence of preservatives. While transitioning to OEM manufacturing improved production, she expressed concern that industrial processes might compromise the traditional value of her products, which are based on herbal ingredients.

> *Informant F: "For my feminine wash, I used to make the product right from scratch however its life span does not last as no preservatives were added, thus in the end I still need to get it manufactured in factory. However, for me, if my products are manufactured in the factory, somehow, I feel like it will lose its traditional value. So, the main issue is quality control as some of my products are handmade"*

Informant R, as a perfume company that have been navigating through a multitude of procedures to import the integrated components of perfume e.g., alcohol, natural oils, and essential oils into Brunei, also faced challenges in maintaining quality control over their perfume batches. They value feedback from their customers, which is how they understood that their customers were experiencing bottle leakage issue.

> Informant R: *"Feedback are highly welcomed from the consumers. Minor complaints such as bottle leakage. So, another issue we face sometimes is the quality control of our perfume***."**

The theme of product quality highlights how the absence of local manufacturing facilities in Brunei constrains entrepreneurs' ability to maintain consistency and preserve traditional product values, with reliance on external production linked to concerns over formulation integrity and occasional quality control issues such as packaging defects.

DISCUSSION

The findings highlight that barriers to halal certification are not limited to the certification process itself, but emerge earlier at the stage of product notification, production readiness, and market development. These challenges are particularly evident among small-scale entrepreneurs and home-based enterprises, which dominate the local cosmetic sector. Given that most participants in this study are women, the sector may be characterized as largely female-led, making it relevant to consider how such structural barriers are experienced within a gendered entrepreneurial context. While the study does not undertake a comparative gender analysis, the findings suggest that these constraints may carry additional implications in relation to resource access, business scalability and complications in quality control. Although operating at a micro-scale, these women-led enterprises represent a growing segment of entrepreneurial activity within Brunei's cosmetic sector. Their participation reflects emerging economic engagement that, if adequately supported may contribute strongly to the economic diversification attempt in Brunei.

In this context, it is important to distinguish the experience of MSMEs from those encountered by large-scale international cosmetic firms. Halal certification among MSMEs represents the later stage of a broader compliance pathway where producers must first have the operational and regulatory capacity to prepare products that satisfy the requirements for market entry before they can progress towards Halal certification. This finding is consistent with the previous study conducted among the same group of Brunei cosmetic producers, which found that difficulties encountered during the Halal application were closely associated with the prerequisite Cosmetic Product Notification (CPN) process rather than the Halal requirements alone (Aiman Samhani Abdul Halim, Zeiad Amjad Aghwan, 2025).

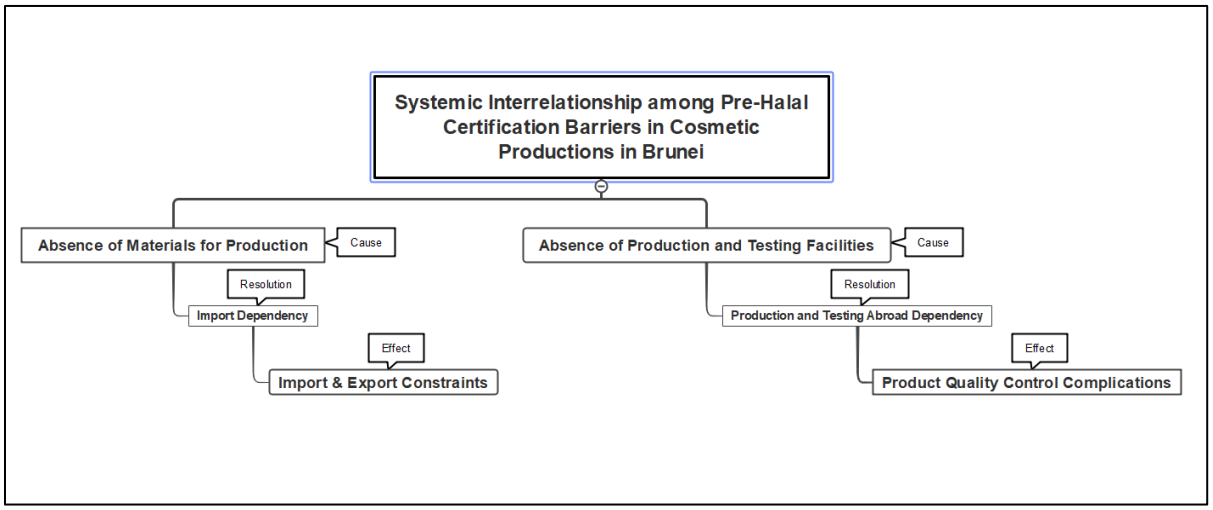
A key implication is that regulatory compliance for small cosmetic producers cannot be considered independently separated from their production capacity. The absence of locally available raw materials, packaging materials and manufacturing facilities increases their dependence on external suppliers and service providers. This dependence introduces more additional stages into the production process including sourcing, transportation, documentation, testing and quality verification. As a result, a requirement that may appear administrative at the regulatory level can become an operational challenge for micro-scale producers due to the lack of resources, infrastructure and technical support needed to fulfill it. This could explain why regulatory requirements can have a disproportionate effect on MSMEs compared with larger-scale manufacturers.

This interpretation is consistent with studies of Halal certification among MSMEs in other contexts which have identified complex hurdles across regulatory administrations, supply chain and financial costs as recurring barriers to certification. For example, comparable constraints can be identified among Malaysian and Indonesian cosmetic MSMEs where they also experience similar obstacles on resource access, fund constraints and limited awareness of certification procedures (Othman, Y., & Awang, M, 2023) (Utari, D., & Tsuroyyah, N. K., 2024) (Othman, Y., et al, 2025). The present findings add another dimension to this discussion by showing that resource constraints can become embedded within the production process itself. The issue is therefore not simply whether producers understand or are willing to comply with the requirements, but whether they possess the production infrastructure and efficient supply chain access necessary to demonstrate compliance.

The figure below shows the systemic interrelationship diagram depicting barriers encountered by local cosmetic MSMEs in Brunei's cosmetic industry:

Figure 4

Systemic Interrelationship Diagram among Pre-Halal Certification Barriers in Cosmetic Productions in Brunei (Source: Researcher's Compilation)



The interrelationship among these barriers is particularly important in understanding the situation of Brunei's cosmetic MSMEs. It illustrates that the barriers faced by these local cosmetic MSMEs are not isolated but are structurally interconnected. The absence of raw and packaging materials necessitates reliance on imports, which in turn contributes to import and export constraints. Similarly found, the lack of local manufacturing and testing facilities compels producers to engage external providers, which has led to additional

complexities in maintaining product quality and consistency. These conditions can make product formulation and quality control more difficult for small producers, particularly where production is carried out on small scale. This pattern reflects broader characteristics of MSME constraints, where resource limitations and institutional requirements interact in reinforcing ways.

These interdependencies suggest the existence of a systemic constraint structure, where limitations at the production level eventually expand into regulatory, operational and quality-related issues. Rather than functioning as discrete issues, these barriers reinforce one another, creating a cumulative effect that impedes the progression of MSMEs towards Halal certification. Therefore, integrated solutions and strategic approaches to problem-solving are required to be designated as addressing one issue may impact another. Piecemeal solutions may not be as effective as this type of solution would only provide temporary relief. A more holistic approach to policy design and industry development is therefore necessary.

Recent research on Indonesian cosmetic industry identifies traceability, packaging, warehousing, transportation, policy and technology as interconnected challenges in implementing Halal supply chain (Ardiantono, D. S., et al, 2022) (P., Sugihartanto, et al., 2026). Inadequate traceability of raw materials can create difficulties in maintaining Halal integrity across cosmetic supply chain. Although the regulatory setting differs from Brunei, the underlying issue is quite comparable where compliance depends partly on the producer's ability to obtain reliable information about the materials used and maintain their product quality control. In Brunei on the other hand, these challenges appear at a more basic production level, where limited access to materials, facilities and testing services can restrict the producer's ability to meet prerequisite regulatory requirement in the first place.

The findings further suggest that greater emphasis should be placed on the process of obtaining CPN approval, as it serves as a foundational requirement for subsequent certification processes for cosmetics including Halal certification. Strengthening support mechanism at this stage will facilitate smoother progression through the comprehensive regulatory framework. More broadly, the development of a halal cosmetic industry in Brunei is contingent upon the advancement of the local cosmetic sector itself, as compliance with halal certification inherently requires adherence to the existing product safety and regulatory standards governed by the Ministry of Health.

CONCLUSION

The findings highlight that barriers to halal certification among cosmetic MSMEs in Brunei begin at the pre-certification stage, particularly related to production readiness and operational capacity. These challenges were revealed to be interconnected barriers, including the absence of testing and manufacturing facilities for cosmetics, limited access to raw materials, import and export constraints and difficulties in maintaining product quality control. This study extends the existing halal cosmetics literature by shifting the attention beyond certification procedures to the structural condition that precede them particularly within a largely women-led MSME context. Addressing these structural barriers may therefore contribute to enhance MSME participation within halal cosmetic industry while supporting Brunei's effort in diversifying the economy, which will extensively promote the third goal of Brunei Vision 2035 in stimulating a dynamic and sustainable economy. The limitation of this study however lies on the relatively small

number of participants involved in this research, limited to cosmetic MSMEs in Brunei which constrains the generalizability of the findings. The method was also constrained to one-on-one interview. Focus group discussion may have the ability to elicit a wider range of perspectives and stimulate the emergence of diverse opinions due to interactive dialogue and peer exchange. In addition, the study concentrated primarily on operational inefficiencies throughout cosmetic production, rather than examining each identified theme in greater depth. Future research could therefore adopt a more focused approach by exploring specific areas in greater detail, such as the import and export of raw materials and other related regulatory and supply chain issues. Additionally, it is also recommended for future studies to conduct a comparative analysis on the bottlenecks of implementing Halal certification on cosmetics across different countries.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this study

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