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FRAGRANCE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

As demand for fragrances in the Middle East continues to grow, **Roshini Raj** explores the fragrance industry's regulatory framework across the region

Fragrances and perfumes are essential oils (made using traditional processes) and alcohol-based synthetic solutions (obtained via modern industrial processes) applied to enhance body odour.

The regulatory bodies of various countries define them based on regional understanding and their intended use. For example, the US Food and Drug Administration (USFDA) perceives fragrances that are intended to be applied to a person's body as cosmetics. In the Middle East, they are termed as only 'perfumes'.

It is necessary for manufacturers to understand these regional differences before

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planning their market entry into a targeted region/country.

Today, people perceive perfumes and fragrances as less of a status mark and more of a necessity. Increased income and spending capabilities have supported this trend and are driving product usage fervently, creating an opportunity for many internationally recognised fashion brands to claim a market share, attracting both the uber-rich and commoners alike.

Destined to reach millions of lives, perfumes and fragrances are subject to stringent evaluation for safety and efficacy. Manufacturers are required to establish products' quality as per the standards laid out by domestic regulations in individual regions/countries and are responsible for carrying out post-market surveillance for any adverse reactions on the user end.

The Middle East, with its huge demand for fragrance, exhibits caution to ensure consumer safety. For a manufacturer wanting to gain a market stake in the region, the onus lies in their

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understanding the regulatory frameworks and procedural challenges, and practicing compliance throughout.

Across the globe, the Middle East region is among the largest consumers of fragrances and perfume products. Market growth in the region is second in the world, behind only Latin America. With a traditional inclination towards perfumes and a rapid income surge, the region offers immense potential for global manufacturers of fragrances and perfume products to tap into.

In the Middle East, the regulatory focus is on product safety and a recognised risk management system for the safe use of fragrance ingredients to ensure there is no risk for the consumer or the environment.

These parameters are regulated by various bodies including The Fragrance Foundation Arabia and the Emirates Authority for Standardization and Metrology (ESMA). All these regulations are in line with global

standards in the perfumery industry. All the fragrance products must therefore match with international standards before the product launch. Across the Middle East, different markets perceive fragrances and perfumes differently. Here we list a few:

KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA (KSA)

KSA is the biggest perfume and fragrance market in the Middle East. It does not provide separate regulations for fragrances and perfumes; instead it recognises them under cosmetics and personal care products. With no specific definition for perfumes and fragrances, suppliers and importers of fragrances and perfumes in the KSA should adhere to the usual regulation applicable to cosmetics as the final rule.

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES (UAE)

UAE declares fragrances and perfume products to be a sub-section of cosmetics and personal care products, defining them as “any perfume or perfumery product offered for sale, such as musk, dehn al oudh, incense and other perfume types, which emits a pleasant odour so that it can be used as a perfume”.

ESMA is the competent authority in the UAE for regulating such products, while the Emirates Conformity Assessment Scheme (ECAS) will assist in the testing and certification for registration of conformity to compliance requirements of products manufactured and imported into the country. According to ESMA, fragrances and perfume products are divided into five categories based on the percentage of perfume in the solution. The percentages and relevant names are:

- **Concentrated perfumes** are solutions with a minimum of 20% perfume and their product compound in it
- **Perfumes or extracts** are solutions with 15-20% perfume and their product compound in it
- **Eaux de parfum** are solutions with 8-15% perfume and their product compound in it
- **Eaux de toilette** are solutions with 4-8% perfume and their product compound in it
- **Eaux de cologne** are solutions with 1-4% perfume and their product compound in it.

The supplier (as manufacturers are referred to by the UAE authority) must ensure the following safety and quality requirements to conform to regulatory compliance:

- The supplier must refer to the terms laid down by the International Fragrance Association (IFRA) for the presence of any prohibited, restricted and specific ingredients in the manufacturing of fragrances and perfume products
- The supplier shall test the products for safety and quality using an accredited laboratory and must provide documentation of the results

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- In case the supplier observes the presence of any allergens beyond the threshold limit of 0.001%, they shall declare the same (in labelling and packaging).

Labelling and packaging requirements that are consistent with the regional law must be applied by the supplier. The common requirements are:

- The supplier shall comply with packaging and labeling requirements in the Gulf Standard (UAE.GSO ISO 22715:2008)
- All information shall be visible, legible and declared in clear Arabic and English languages
- Pictures and illustrations which are inconsistent with the prevailing social customs and values in the UAE shall not be used, nor any religious phrases
- The supplier shall not claim any medical benefits for their perfumes or products
- In compliance with quality and safety standards, the supplier shall declare the observed allergens on the label.

The supplier holds responsibility for providing any required additional documentation when and if required, and for maintaining all records for submission. The product supplier is granted the below depicted Emirates Quality Mark (EQM) once ESMA finds compliance with all regulations are in place. It grants conformity to products that are compliant with such standards, manufactured by organisations with an effective quality management system.

However, local municipalities such as Dubai have placed additional restraints to scrutinise companies. So, more filtering may be imminent for suppliers.

Usually, the KSA and UAE registration certificates for fragrances and perfumes are perceived as the gold standards by most of the other countries in the Middle East. Often, no additional requirements are called for other countries in the region. Even if required, the manufacturer must provide as per the regional health authority standards.

LANGUAGE FOR LABELLING OR ARTWORK

The labelling requirement should comply with the regulations of the Gulf Standard Organization. With regard to GSO 1943:2016, the name of the product, its trademark, the name and address of the manufacturer or distributor, the country of origin, the content of product and the date of manufacturing, both on primary and secondary packaging, are required in English and/or Arabic.

The name of the product, usage and warning/precautions instructions and storage instructions for safe use shall be presented in both Arabic and English language on the product label. These are some of the mandatory

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If compliant, the product supplier is granted the Emirates Quality Mark (EQM)

requirements in the Middle East before the registration of perfume products.

To conclude, the perfumes and fragrances industry in the Middle East is constantly evolving. Currently, the UAE and Saudi Arabia are leading the fragrance markets in the GCC. Because of the rise in people's economic status, increased beauty consciousness and a rise in spending on cosmetics, many of the large and medium-sized perfume and fragrance companies are eyeing Middle East market entry. From a regulatory perspective, it is predicted that in future there will be no trade secrecy for perfume formulas.

With great opportunities lying ahead, it would be safe to say that the perfumes and fragrances market is burgeoning and constantly growing in the region. But, before stepping into the region, manufacturers must clearly evaluate their regulatory priorities and ensure compliance is thoroughly met with authoritative market intelligence for a smooth market entry ●

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