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To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v8-i5/4489>

DOI:10.6007/IJARBSS/v8-i5/4489

Received: 06 April 2018, Revised: 30 April 2018, Accepted: 11 May 2018

Published Online: 23 May 2018

In-Text Citation: (Aziz & Ahmad, 2018)

To Cite this Article: Aziz, N. I. A., & Ahmad, F. A. (2018). The Halal Lifestyle of Muslim Working Women. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 8(5), 1121–1129.

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Vol. 8, No. 5, May 2018, Pg. 1121 - 1129

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The Halal Lifestyle of Muslim Working Women

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Abstract

The role of women has changed and has even reached critical heights today, especially as far as the working world is concerned. The kind of job they embark upon also influences their way of life. The question is whether the lifestyle that is supposed to be practised by Muslim working women today complies with the Shari'ah requirements stipulated for Muslim women. At the same time, the halal lifestyle concept has been increasingly accepted universally. The halal lifestyle concept focuses more on a way of life that prioritises and practises all that is commanded in Islam. A halal lifestyle is one of the elements in the halal concept and currently, it focuses more on the food, medical, self-treatment and hotel sectors. The aim of this paper was to examine the lifestyle of Muslim working women in the halal context. How can the halal concept be assimilated into women's career-lifestyle? Hence, this paper hoped to highlight the halal lifestyle concept of Muslim working women based on two objectives. The first objective was to identify the halal lifestyle concept among Muslim working women through published academic materials and the second objective was to come up with a halal lifestyle framework for Muslim working women. This working paper adopted the interpretive qualitative analysis using past literature and analysed from an Islamic perspective.

Keywords: Halal Lifestyle, Working Women, Muslim Women, Halal Concept.

Introduction

The role of women in development has become increasingly critical. Women today are indirectly regarded as an important entity that contributes to development, especially in the economic sector. Thus, it is evident that there is an increase in women's participation in the labour force from 45.7 percent in 2008 to 55 percent in 2016. According to Bakar (2014), women nowadays are actively involved in the working sector, especially in the education, medical and clerical fields. There are also a number of women who are involved in fields, which in general, are dominated by men such as security and engineering sectors. In a similar vein, it influences the lifestyle of Muslim women who are working in the field. Several demands by Islamic teachings are deemed appropriate in the current era, such as dressing, working hours, relationship with colleagues and logistical requirements, which also contributes to the issue of

halal in the career lifestyle of Muslim women. Moreover, it cannot be denied that there are also issues like excessive workload and sexual harassment that influences one's lifestyle. Whether people realise it or not, this finally leads to work pressure. Finally, the institution has to bear the consequences. To find the solution to this problem, this study needed to revisit the most fundamental aspect. Do women's involvement in their career today fulfil the basic requirements stipulated in Islam? What does the 'halal lifestyle incorporated into the career' mean for a woman in this technological era? To address these issues, this working paper had set forth two objectives. The first objective was to identify the halal lifestyle concept among career women following extant literature materials and the second objective was to design a framework to apply the halal lifestyle for working women.

Halal Lifestyle

The word 'halal' originates from the Arab word meaning, 'lawful', 'permitted', or 'legal according to syariah law' (al-Qardhawi, 1995). Al-Qardhawi (1995) explained further that halal is something that is permitted, which is cut off from ties and allowed by Shari'a. It is opposed to haram, which is something forbidden by Shari'a and one will face the wrath of Allah SWT if one commits an act that is haram. Halal and haram are part of the life system in Islam, called Shari'a. Something that falls in-between halal and haram is *makruh*, a phase that is lower than haram and with a punishment that is not as bad as haram. Halal and haram are two aspects mentioned in al-Qur'an by Allah SWT and this was explained by Rasulullah SAW through the latter's sunnah. There are verses of al-Qur'an that directly explain the meaning of halal and haram. Among them are 2:168, 3:93, 5:5, 5:88, 8:69, 16:114, 4:160 and 22:30. All these verses narrate about halal and haram issues, with particular attention to food.

The basic concept about halal is contained in surah al-Maidah verse 88, which means:

'Eat of that Allah hath bestowed on you as food, lawful and good, and keep your duty to Allah in Whom ye are believers.' (5:88)

According to Ibn Kathir, the verse above shows that humans need to eat good, halal food. It is also interpreted that human beings must obey and seek the mercy of Allah SWT in all worldly affairs and always abide by the commands of Allah SWT. This also prove that Islam stressed that halal does not only refer to food, but also refers to all matters related to humans.

Generally, the halal principle today is often linked to the aspect of food from an Islamic perspective. The discussion on Halal frequently focuses on the issue of whether a particular food is haram and halal. Nonetheless, this halal concept is actually more holistic than that. In reference to food intake alone, there are several aspects of halal-haram that are widely covered, including how to select food as well as the quality, hygiene and safety aspects of the food consumed (Jaafar, Endut, Faisol & Omar, 2012). Besides these, other aspects are very much considered in life too. Therefore, the term 'halal lifestyle' was introduced. It included wearing clothes or dressing appropriately, halal socialising, halal occupation, halal *muamalah* and halal lifestyle, all according to Shari'a.

Application of the Halal Lifestyle

Fundamentally, the halal lifestyle is a shari'a-compliant way of life determined by Allah SWT and concerns all aspects of life. The increasing global Muslim population has left an impact on halal needs and demands. In 2017, the Muslim global population rose by 1.84 percent compared to 2016 (Muslim population worldwide data, 2017). The number is expected to increase to 35 percent in 20 years' time (Desilver & Masci, 2017). With this increasing number, the demand for halal products by Muslim communities all over the world would have a significant impact on the halal industry (Nghah, Zainuddin, & Thursamy R, 2014). Jaafar, Endut, Faisol and Omar (2012) explained that customers are willing to pay more to obtain halal products because they are confident with the Islamic principles that promote clean, safe and quality products. Besides that, striving for halal will also indirectly safeguarding the six basic values in Islam that is life, honour and dignity, intellect, lineage and property. This was among others mentioned by the Prophet SAW during his farewell pilgrimage in a sermon which denotes a blueprint for every Muslim including Muslim working women: "*Verily, your blood, property and honor are sacred to one another (i.e., Muslims) like the sanctity of this day of yours (i.e., the day of Nahr or slaughtering of the animals of sacrifice), in this month of yours (the holy month of Dhul-Hijjah) and in this city of yours (the holy city of Makkah).*" (Sahih al-Bukhari)

Thus, the high demand for halal products is inclined not only the food industry, but also the hotel, tourism, fashion, cosmetics and pharmaceutical industries as well as the banking sector and everything that involves the Muslim lifestyle.

Although it has the potential to be applied in so many aspects of life and fields, the halal concept currently is often discussed when applied to food. This is undeniably important because halal food consumers, especially Muslims, tend to be more cautious when selecting food resources in order to show their obedience to Allah SWT. In addition, people's knowledge about food and nutrition has expanded, so hygiene, safety and nutrition aspects are considered to be part of the halal food industry. The society is not only concerned with halal resources, but it also emphasises on food handling activities (Zulfakar, Jie, & Chan, 2012). This involves food resources, food processing, food handling and clean food storage that in no way involves non-halal elements. Past studies have shown that the food handling process called logistics and the supply chain are also highly in demand. Both these industries must be free from violations of Islamic Shari'a, right from the start to the finish phase of the handling process (Zulfakar, Jie, & Chan, 2012).

The Shari'a-based tourism and hotel industry has also received encouraging responses recently from Middle East and other Islamic countries. Halal tourism is defined as a tourism industry that is free from using or preparing non-halal products, and the services in this industry must comply with Islamic Shari'a. Therefore, the development and implementation of the halal concept in the tourism and hotel industry must follow the guidelines determined by Shari'a (Boediman, 2017). According to Henderson (2010), halal tourism and hotel businesses must fulfil several criteria. First, refrain from preparing and serving alcoholic beverages; second, prepare only halal food; third, majority of workers must be Muslims; fourth, polite entertainment services; fifth, disallow men and women with no marital relations to be together in a room; sixth,

provide separate swimming pools for men and women; seventh, compulsory for women to be dressed according to Islamic teachings; eight, have the *qiblah* signage in every room; tenth, provide a *musolla* and eleventh, financial matters, especially those concerning guests, must follow the Islamic financial system.

The fashion industry also plays a significant role as the Malaysian fashion industry contributes approximately RM4 billion to the national income. The basic halal concept in the fashion industry involves the sensitivity of Muslim users, the risk of pollution and the involvement of haram resources in the materials used. In general, there is a guideline for Muslim women regarding fashion. First, the fabric should not be animal-based and made of non-halal materials; second, the clothes must cover the woman's whole body; third, the clothes must be thick, not too thin yet comfortable to wear; fourth, it must be loose and not too tight so that the skin does not show; fifth, the clothes should not resemble men's or the kafir's clothes or clothes worn just for showing off (al-Qardhawi, 1995; Othman, Muhamad, Yusof, & Harun, 2016). According to the guideline explained above, Muslimah fashion designers must fulfil the clothing criteria, such as the guideline in the application of the halal lifestyle in the fashion industry.

In addition, the cosmetics and pharmaceutical halal industry also plays a big role in the halal industry all around the world. The ingredients of the cosmetics and pharmaceutical products must be free from non-permitted materials, such as animal parts and alcohol. It is not only how the products are made, but the manufacturing, processing and marketing aspects are also emphasised from the halal perspective (Hashim & Hashim, 2013). The Malaysian Standard MS2200: 1 provides the guideline for halal cosmetics and pharmaceutical products in the preparation, manufacturing and handling aspects of halal cosmetics. The products must be free from human parts (skin, hair and nails). It is dictated by Islamic law that any product containing animal (such as a dog or pig) or human parts are forbidden. Moreover, halal cosmetics must be clean, safe and of very good quality (Yusof, Muhamad, Azmi, & Hanip, 2016).

From the above discussion it could be understood that halal encompasses every spectrum of Muslim's life as shown in Figure 1.

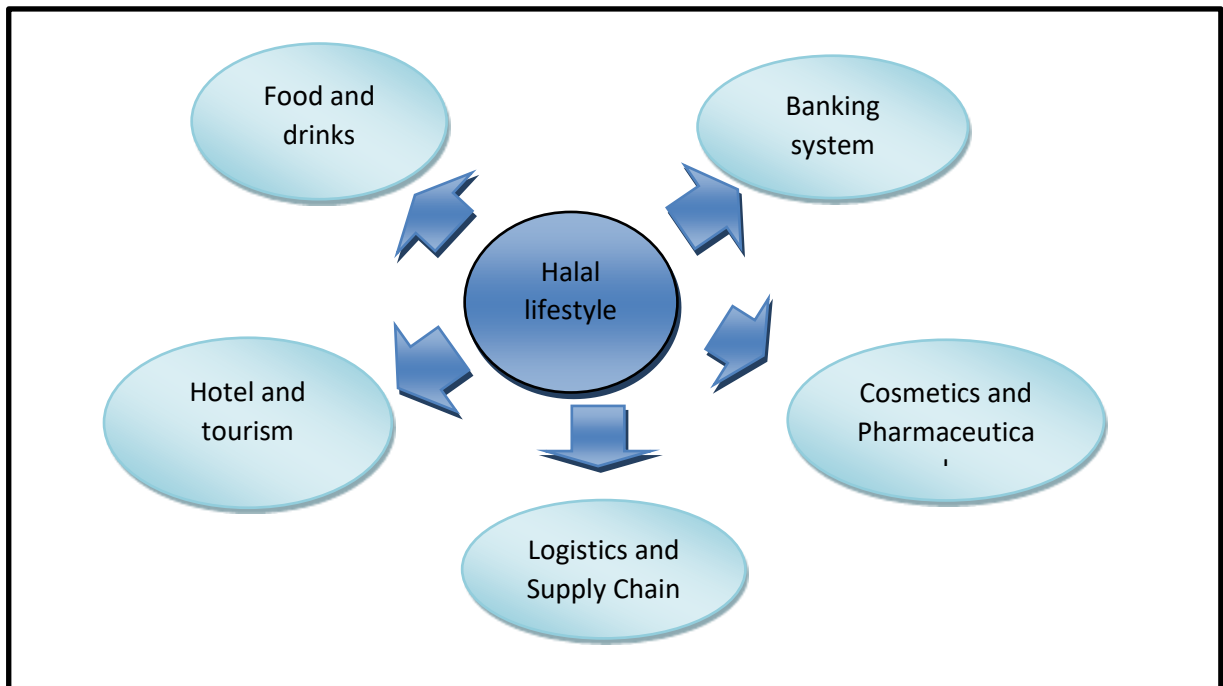


Figure 1: The summary of the halal lifestyle application

Women's Issues at the Workplace Concerning the Halal Lifestyle

Women's involvement and contribution at work has an undeniable positive impact on development, especially on the national economy. It also raises the status of women all over the world. However, it is also worthy of mention that there are various challenges that women face as they become part of the nation's labour force and these challenges influence the halal lifestyle that they adopt. This can be assessed through the six basic values that every Muslim including Muslim working women should safeguard in realising the halal lifestyle that is life, honour and dignity, intellect, lineage and property.

One of the aspects in safeguarding the dignity is making sure that the dress code or cloths worn to work is consistent with shari'a requirements. This could be of great challenge because aurah for Muslim women is not just making sure the aurah is fully covered, it is still deemed inappropriate if the clothings could show the woman's curvatures. The dress code, which is a portrayal of professional ethics during work, should be harmonious with the Islamic-compliant dress code. However the dress code should not interfere with the work routine and should be comfortable as well as cover the aurah according to Islam. As it is, there are occupations that do not make it compulsory to wear the hijab at work, and some employers even prohibit their employees from wearing hijab (Bakar, 2014, Rohaniza Idris, Nov 2017). Inadvertently, this has become a form of discrimination against women in the context of halal lifestyle as the honour and dignity of the Muslim working women could no longer be safeguarded.

Moreover, there is also the aspect of relationship with colleagues. The relationship and interactions at work often involve men and women who are working together, such as between

workmates or colleagues, or employers and employee of various ages. The physical contact when shaking hands together with the level of friendliness is the main issue in socialisation according to the Islamic perspective. According to al-Qardawi (1995) and Bakar (2014), women and men must play a role in adhering to the boundaries of socialisation at the workplace. If not given enough attention, it could lead to various issues, especially sexual harassment among women (Bakar, 2014 & Aziz, 2005).

Sexual harassment is an important issue in the workplace. It is a form of discrimination that involves the sexually-oriented or connotated humiliation and abuse towards women. According to Yusoff (2007), sexual harassment comes in multiple forms, such as physical harassment, verbal harassment, speech, body language, body parts like the finger and actions. This does not only have a negative impact on the job, but it also has an impact on individuals, who eventually suffer from psychological and mental issues. Among the main factors that can cause sexual harassment are the intimate socialisation between men and women without marital relations, lack of boundaries between men and women, dress code that does not cover the Aurah as well as self-appearance and the power of employers who have the tendency to manipulate women employees at work (Bakar, 2014).

This leads to work pressure. According to Azlina Abu Bakar (2014), work pressure could be the product of interaction between workers and the work environment, be it negative or positive pressure. In the context of the issue discussed previously, the pressure is called *distress*, which is negative pressure. The pressure can affect work and work productivity.

Halal Framework for Working Women

Based on the previous discussion, it was noted that some of the important aspects that ensure women at the workplace fulfil the halal lifestyle concept in the context of safeguarding the honour and dignity of Muslim working women are dressing, relationship and discrimination (including sexual harassment).

Women's dressing should follow the Islamic Shari'a in all circumstances and authorities should give serious attention to this. The consequences of dressing without covering the Aurah for Muslim women is very serious according to Islam and the society. Besides receiving the wrath of Allah SWT, it can also invite numerous other issues such as sexual harassment and moral decline (Bakar, 2014).

Sexual harassment and un-Islamic socialisation can be overcome by various parties by creating an environment according to Islam. The main interested party must be the employers themselves. Prevention is the most effective tool adopted by employers to overcome issues mentioned earlier. This can be done by applying the halal concept at the workplace. The dress code that complies with Islamic Shari'a and the socialisation aspect that forbids the intimate socialization of men and women without marital relations can be integrated in the work environment. Programs, promotions and education would be able to prevent incidents of sexual harassment. The elaboration about a halal lifestyle in the context of safeguarding the honour and dignity of Muslim working women is shown in figure 2 below.

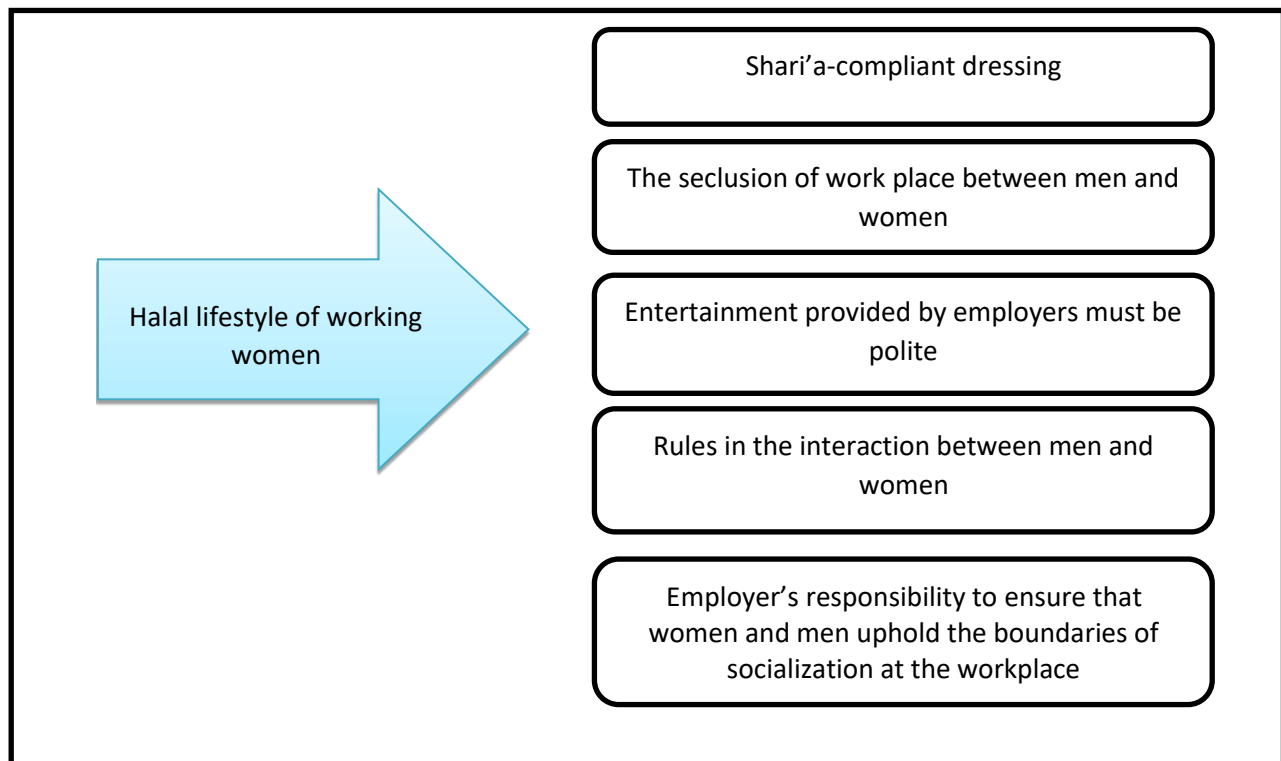


Figure 2: A summary of the halal lifestyle for women at the workplace

' O ye wives of the Prophet! Ye are not like any other women. If ye keep your duty (to Allah), then be not soft of speech, lest he in whose heart is a disease aspire (to you), but utter customary speech.' (33:32)

According to Tafsir Ibu Kathir, the statement above suggests the ethics dictated by Allah to the Apostles' wives were that women should emulate the good moral and noble values held by

these great women.

The verse above suggests that women should have Islamic-based ethical values and etiquette when socialising with men. It should be guarded with good boundaries and women should not invite any potential disobedient acts, such as 'dirty talk' or language that has slurs of obscenity (Azlina Abu Bakar, 2014). In addition, women should also conceal her aurah and not expose their bodies (except physical body parts) to males who are not their muhrim.

Conclusion

The concept of a halal lifestyle in the industry can be applied in the working world. Other than complying with the Islamic shari'a, it can also save and prevent any mishap or unfortunate incidents from occurring among working women. This must be accounted for especially when the policy that we have today tries to open the windows of opportunity for women to be involved in their respective career.

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