

Cultural Representation in Food Consumption: A Study on Bangladeshi Students Living in Munich, Germany

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to explore the food consumption behaviour of Bangladeshi students living in Munich, Germany in the context of the reflection of the Bangladeshi culture. The qualitative research methodology was followed to do this research and in-depth interview was conducted to collect primary data from Bangladeshi students living in Munich, Germany. The collected data was further analysed with thematic analysis methods to derive the codes and themes. The codes from the data are categorized into five different categories under the theme called “food consumption behaviour”. The five categorizations of the codes are “food consumption habit”, “style of cooking and preparing foods”, “foods available at home”, “representation of culture in food consumption” and, budget constraint”. The results indicate that the Bangladeshi students living in Munich, Germany, follow their cultures. However, because of the limited income and time they can’t taste all types of Bangladeshi foods as they want. The outcome of this research will help to the local businessperson and community businessperson to understand the food consumption choices of international students.

Keywords: Food, culture, consumption, shopping, consumer behaviour

1. Introduction

Culture is one of the most fundamentals decisive factors of an individual want, and behaviour and culture is defined as the combination of beliefs and values which is shared by a group of people. Also, culture influences significantly the consumption and decision-making patterns. The choice of foods and individual diet charts are strongly linked to culture. For example, Bangladeshi peoples have weakness on eating fish. Fish is seen as a common dish in Bangladeshi culture (Ramya, 2016, P. 79).

Cultural beliefs influence the food consumptions and processing of foods. Religion, traditions, and customs in different cultures lead to accept some foods in diet plan and restricts of some foods from diet plan. A study examined the impact of culture, traditional knowledge and religion on food choices and food consumption patterns. Researchers conducted this research in Turkey, where majority peoples are Muslims, and their food consumption were hugely influenced by cultures which are observable in a large scale on the two big religious festivals special days. The aim of their research is to investigate the role of cultures and religious beliefs in moderating consumption of foods during these special days. Their empirical research indicates that specific type of foods is consumed on special days. And all these foods are consumed in these special days have reasons both from religion and culture (Shipman, 2016, p. 92-93).

From the tourist perspectives, cultural background slightly dominates to buy home country flavoured foods in tourist places. However, research shows that tourists are likely show positive attitude due to taste, quality, and emotional value to purchase local foods also known as ethnic foods, which reflexes the tourist destinations local cultures (Choe, 2018, p. 1). Ethnic foods are widely liked and eaten by visitors to admiring and memorizing of the local cultures. A study is conducted to find out the tourist intention to Dayak food consumption, in Sarawak, Borneo regions in Malaysia, where the fourth largest indigenous group of Malaysia, the Dayak peoples are living. Tourists from four different areas, Indonesia, Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah, and Singapore were selected to conduct the research. Interestingly, tourists from three areas other than Singapore shown their positive attitude on buying local Dayak foods. Tourists from these three areas shared similar culture while Singaporean tourists are not. Singaporean tourists are very likely to the Chinese, Indian or Malay foods (Ting, 2019, p. 518-519).

The shopping behaviour of immigrants from different cultural orientation is a complex inquiry. Grocery shopping is a most common activity, is practiced with sociocultural values by immigrants. The ethnic shopping choices indicate that migrant peoples are not only the regular customer of ethnic shopping stores but also, they triggering to create a unique ethnical retail environment. A study about the grocery shopping behaviour of middle-class Chinese immigrants living in Toronto, Canada, examined the food shopping preferences of Chinese migrant peoples between mainstream supermarket chains and Chinese supermarkets. Their study found a strong fondness of immigrants on ethnic foods (Wang, 2007, p. 684).

The research question of this study is whether Bangladeshi students in Munich, Germany reflexes their culture in food consumption or not? My research aim is to investigate the shopping behaviour of Bangladeshi students living in Munich. My research objectives are to conduct interview with six selected individuals and then to execute a thematic analysis of the interview outcome.

2. Literature review

The diet choice decisions are complex and having enormous social and environmental impact. People's food habit is generally characterized by different factors such as culture, family habits, health, supply. Extensive research has been conducted to investigate the role food shopping in the culture of different ethnic groups and find out the specific cultural factors which effects on eating habits. Researchers selected participants for interviewing from 22 different nationalities and all are students in Hungary. Their studied found that cultural influence has strong impact on consumer shopping behaviour. The studied also found that the international students follow their consumption habits while stay abroad and they have a noticeable influence on shaping the dynamics of the food shopping habits at their temporary home abroad. Consumers habit on locally produced foods are very complex; the foreign consumers seek varieties of content based on their culture, they are looking for food items in restaurants which are like their home country and resemble home flavours. Their cultural diet systems have very deepened effect on the local food supply chain. Many of the interview participants of their study commented that they prefer to follow their national traditions during their stay abroad (Nemeth, 2019, p. 1, 6, 9).

Another empirical study find that culture, traditions, and beliefs are the most basic criteria in food consumption. Researchers interviewed 1286 participants (10 unanswered) from the different regions in Turkey to investigate how culture, subculture and social classes influence consumption behavior. Their research finds that the 569 participants (44.6%) out of 1276 total participants responded that the faith, tradition, and culture are “certainly the most important criteria” in food consumption. The 539 participants (42.2%) out of total responded that the faith, tradition, and culture are “the most important criteria” in food consumption. The 7.9% participants responded “not”, and the 3.2% participants responded, “certainly not”. According to their results it can be said that for most participants (86%), mentioned faith, tradition and culture are the most important criteria in buying foods and services. Another important finding is that 34.5% interview participants mentioned that environment or friends are not an important thing for them to buy goods and services (Yakup, 2011, p. 111-113).

Another study about the eating habits of university undergraduate students who living at home and who living away from home was conducted by the researchers of the University of Glasgow, United Kingdom and the Athens Agricultural University, Greece. The number of 84 Athens Agriculture University undergraduate students aged between 20 and 24 were interviewed in this study. The aim of this study was to find out the effect of living at home and living away from home on the dietary habits. The interview participants were asked questionnaire about their food practices before starting university and their present food practices. Researchers found that students living at home didn't show significant changes in their food consumption but students living away from home had experienced some positive changes in their eating habits. The students living away from home decreased their weekly fresh fruits, raw and cooked vegetables, seafoods, pulses, olive oil, oily fish consumption and increased alcohol, sugar, wine, and fast-food consumption. Whereas students who are living with their families didn't alter their diet plan in a major way (Papadaki, 2007, p. 169, 171-172).

3. Methodology

My study area of this research is Munich, Germany and the aim of this research is to find out whether Bangladeshi students living in Munich, Germany follow their own culture in food consumption or not. The qualitative research methods were used in this study. The sample size of this study is six. The semi-structured in-depth interview was conducted to

collect the data. As an interviewer, I am Bangladeshi and Muslim. So, I selected six Bangladeshi Muslim male graduate students for the interview based on the convenient sampling method. Convenient sampling means to use respondents or interview participants who are convenient to the research group or researcher (Galloway, 2005, p. 860). My selected interviewees were studied in different universities in Munich. A form with few demographic questions was provided to the interviewees to fill in. Another separate privacy policy form with interview guidelines which following an agreement between interviewer and interviewees that the audio of the conversation will be recorded, also provided to the interviewees to give consent and to put signature. My study aim is to examine the shopping behaviour of Bangladeshi students living in Munich. So, I developed an open-ended questionnaire to obtain food consumption data. The interview was held in the interviewee's kitchen of their home. Each interview was followed around 50 minutes.

The collected audio data were later transcribed with licensed f4 transcription software and store separately in six Microsoft word document files. For analysing the transcribed data, the thematic analysis is applied in this study. Thematic analysis is a widely used qualitative analytic method within psychology. It offers an accessible and theoretically flexible approach to analysing qualitative data. One of the benefits of thematic analysis is its flexibility. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organizes and describes your data set in detail (Braun, 2006, p. 6). I used the ATLAS.ti 9.1.3 version, qualitative data analysis software for performing the thematic analysis of my study. After having the data collection, the initial codes were generated from the texts. The selected texts were coded by using "code in vivo" system of the ATLAS.ti software. Finally, 186 initial codes were generated from six documents. Then, I sorted out the relevant codes under potential themes. Finally, the potential themes were reviewed and given a final name. The different themes generated from the codes were later compiled under the central theme of this study, called "food consumption behaviour".

4. Results and discussion

The table 1, below shows the descriptive statistics of interview participants. The all of six interviewees of this study are male and Muslim. Their aged between 26 and 31. All interviewees are studying in master's degree except one. The oldest interview participants in terms of the year moved to Germany came in 2014 and the newest came in 2019.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of interviewees

Interviewee Serial nr.	Age	Gender	Religion	Year moved to Germany	Ongoing degree of study
Interviewee 1	28	Male	Islam	2017	Master's
Interviewee 2	27	Male	Islam	2014	Bachelor's
Interviewee 3	29	Male	Islam	2017	Master's
Interviewee 4	30	Male	Islam	2014	Master's
Interviewee 5	31	Male	Islam	2017	Master's
Interviewee 6	26	Male	Islam	2019	Master's

After having done the analysis with the generated codes from the transcribed interview texts, I came into the decision to develop seven themes. Then, I separate all codes under these seven themes. In the figure one, I put all the themes under the central theme of this study called, food consumption behaviour. Our interview participants were talking about the food consumption habit, style of cooking and food preparation, foods available at their home, representation of culture in their food consumption and budgetary constraint. In the following, each theme is discussed separately and in details.

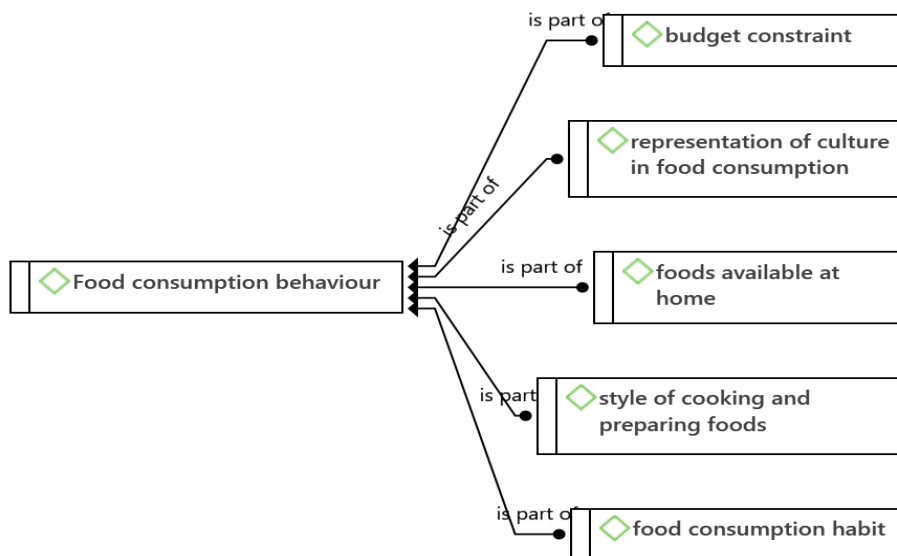


Figure 1: Development of themes from the generated codes

In the figure two, I am talking about the theme called, food consumption habit. Our participants interpreted their daily food consumption habit with two heavy meals menu called lunch and dinner and one light meal menu called breakfast. In the figure below, The mealtime and the customs and traditions regarding food consumption habit are considered as the property of food consumption habit. The meal menu and other food items are considered as the part of mealtime. Some food items are associated with the frequency of cooking some food items and some specialized food items. Their food consumption habit is mostly reflecting their cultures, traditions, and beliefs. All of participants responded that they take their two heavy meals, lunch and dinner with Bangladeshi cuisines such as different curries, soups, smashed vegetables. They used to buy Bangladeshi fishes from community super shops. They used to eat rice two times in a day. They take breakfast with Bangladeshi type bread, locally they called “ruti” and drink their traditional milk tea in the morning and in the evening.

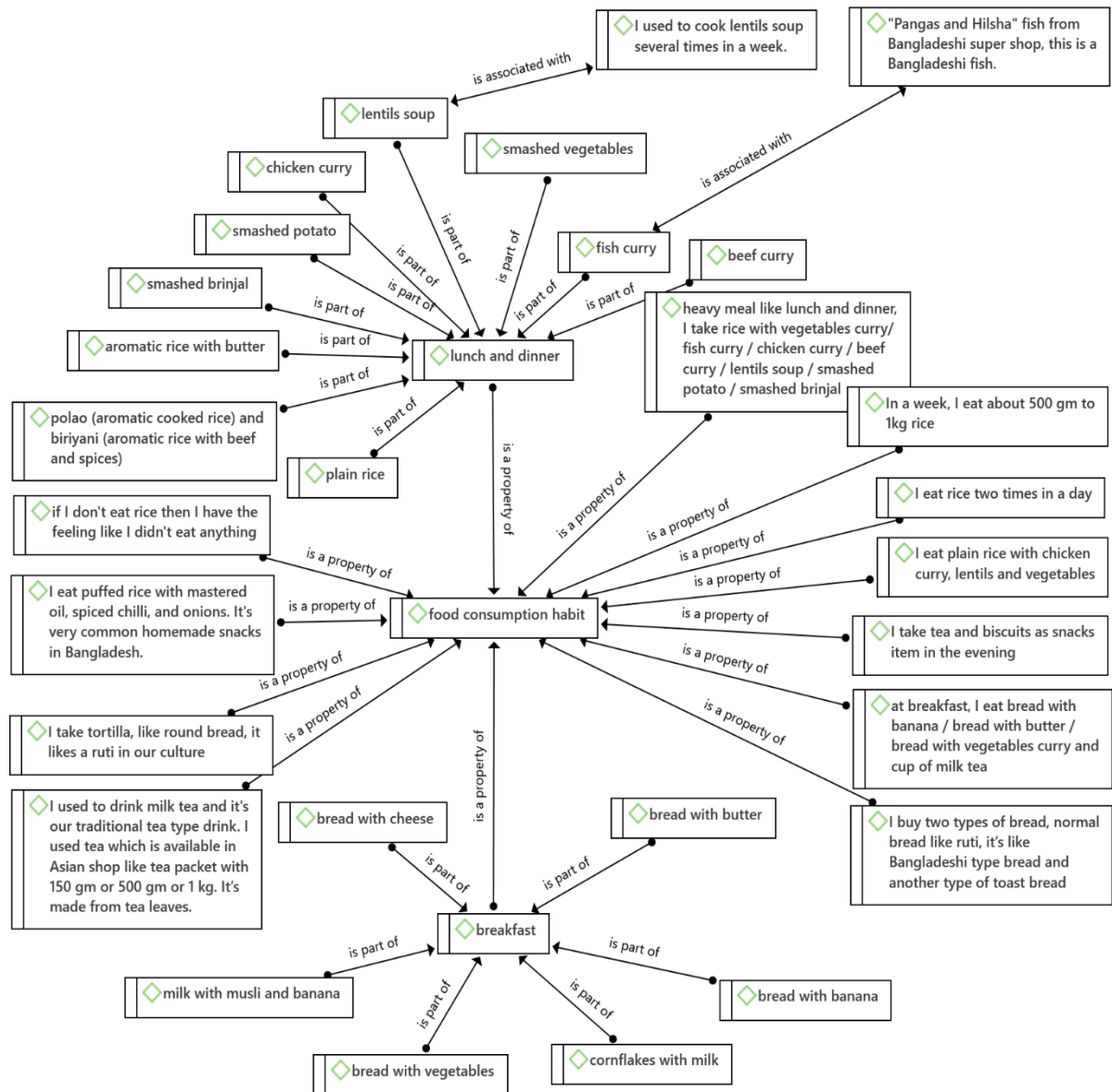


Figure 2: First theme, food consumption habit

In the figure three, all of selected codes regarding property food preparation are associated with the theme called “style of cooking and preparing foods”. Interviewees are talked about how they cook and prepare foods, how many times in a day or in a week cook foods. It is very clear that they follow their traditional cooking patterns to make foods spicy like their mom-made foods. They prepare and eat different curries with rice and cook at least once in a day and sometimes more. One participant said, “to prepare food, I follow our traditional cooking style, like slicing the fish, beef or chicken and then add spices like onion, garlic, ginger, cumin seeds, cardamom, cinnamon, red chilli powder, turmeric powder, coriander powder, coriander green leaves, green chilli and then cook it until it boils and soften properly”.

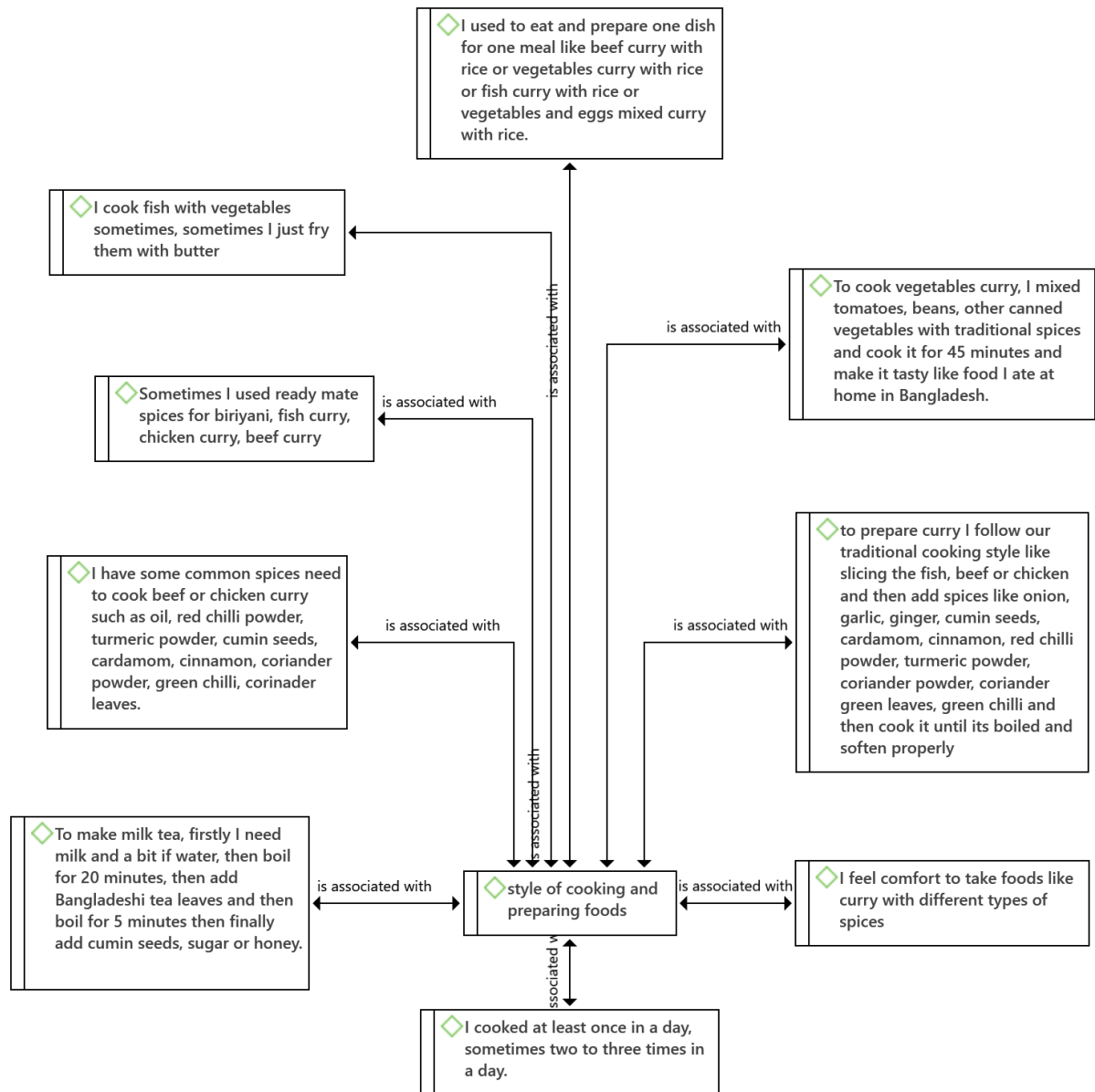


Figure 3: Second theme, style of cooking and preparing foods

In the figure four, the name of all foods is the part of the theme called, “foods available at home”. These foods are found at their home during the time of interview. Here, you can see the name of different types of foods including different types of Asian rice like Basmati, vegetables like ladies’ finger, homemade spices, puffed rice etc. Rice, which is very common in the Asian kitchen, one of the interview participants commented on that,

“I am used to eat rice from childhood. Even I can't think a day without rice” (Interviewee 1, 12:25-12:40). This comment describes the essentiality of rice in the daily food consumption of Bangladeshi peoples.

The most important items to prepare Bangladeshi cuisine are spices. All participants are using different types of spices including homemade spices to prepare foods like different curries. Another of my interview participants said that,

“I need chilli powder, coriander powder, turmeric powder, some other spices like cumin, cardamom, cinnamon. I prefer homemade spices. So, my mother prepares for it. And I bring the spices from Bangladesh to here in Munich when I visited my home country, and it will last through the years. Sometimes, I bought spices from Asian shop in Munich if I haven’t enough at home” (Interviewee 4, 22:52-23:25).

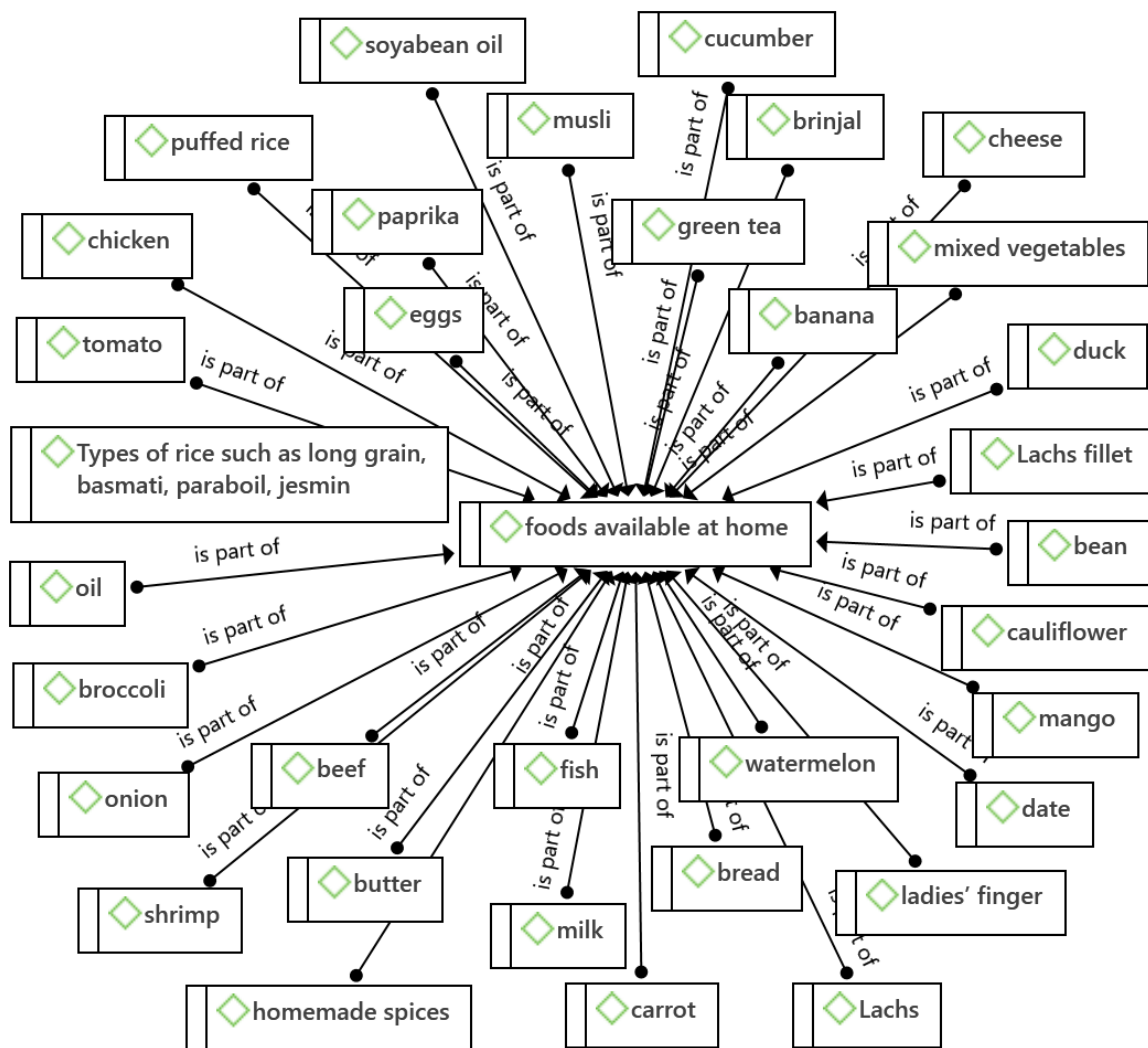


Figure 4: Third theme, foods available at home

In the figure five, I combined all the codes relevant with the culture under the theme named “representation of culture in food consumption”. So, all of codes here including home country foods, community shops and restaurants is a representation of culture in their food consumption. They refer different Asian super shops including Bangladeshi super shops and restaurants located in Munich from where they buy foods and groceries. They also mentioned “halal meat”, which supports their religious bindings in terms of meat consumption. To buy meat they visit Arab and Turkey super shops. So, it is significant that they also follow Muslim cultures in terms of buying meat as I conducted interview with six Muslim Bangladeshi International students living in Munich.

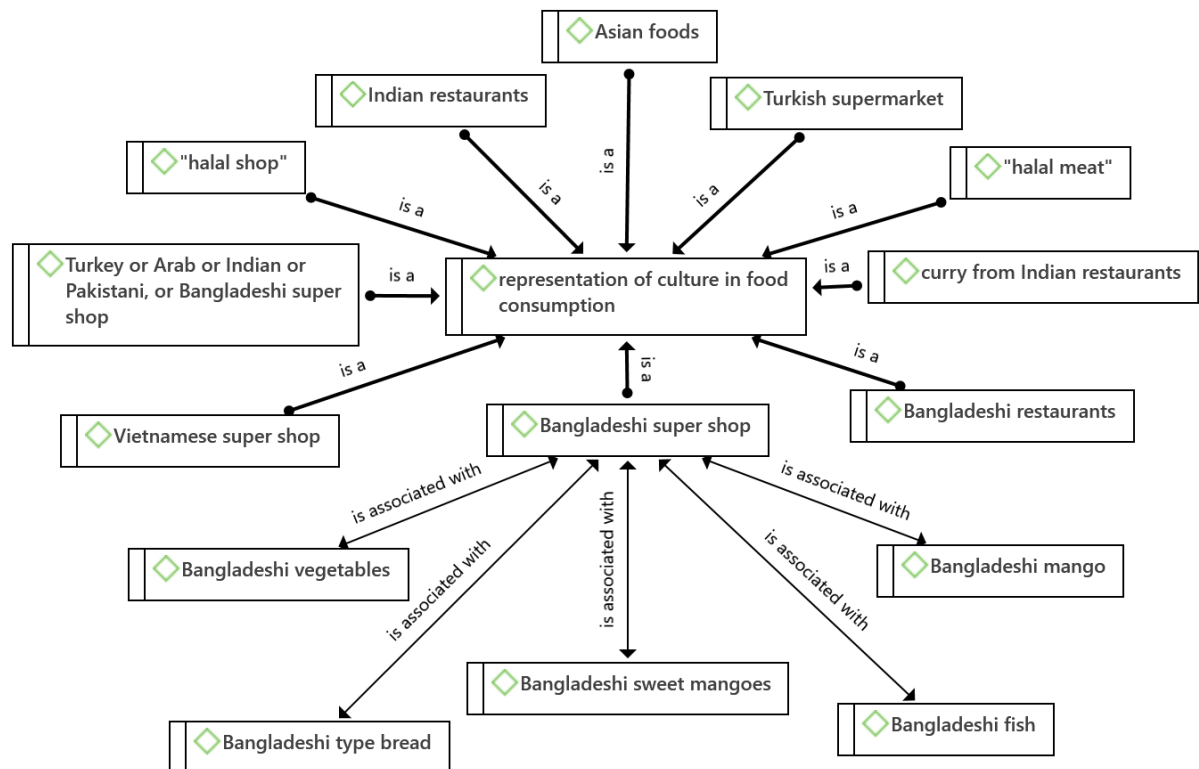


Figure 5, Fourth theme, representation of culture in food consumption

Another important finding is shown in the figure six is about the theme named “budget constraint”. So, all of the codes here about financial structures and obstacles is cause of budget constraint. All interview participants of this study were students, and they have limited income. And it is significant because of their limited budget they can’t afford their home country foods as they want due to higher costs involved. Which means that the cultural foods are expensive in comparison with the general foods available at the local supermarkets. They

have intention to purchase less expensive foods. They purchase home country foods and prepare home country dishes occasionally. From this figure, it is also understandable that they can't buy domestic aesthetic foods always due to their limited financial ability.

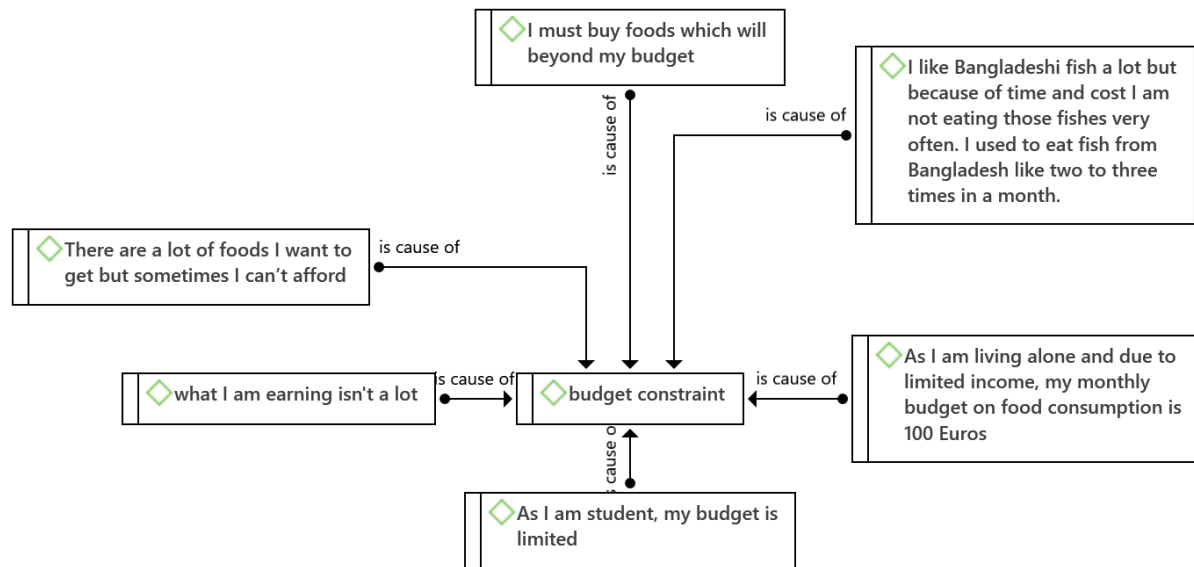


Figure 6: Fifth theme, budget constraint

My research results are indicated that the food consumption behaviour of Bangladeshi international students living in Munich reflexes their own cultures. The findings of this study are match with the findings of recent research of *Mrs. Nikolett Nemeth* and her colleagues about the role of culture in sustainable food consumption of international students in Hungary that International students trying to follow their food consumption habits during their stay abroad even during their more extended stays abroad.

5. Conclusion

The study explored the food consumption behaviour of Bangladeshi International students living in Munich. The study found that Bangladeshi students living in Munich follow their own cultures in food consumption. Which means that they buy groceries which they are familiar with, cook and prepare foods with following their traditional cooking and food preparation style, mostly their daily dishes are including with different curries and rice. The results also indicated that they prefer to consume their home country foods, however due to limited budget they can't afford their home country foods as much as they want. This study further concluded the results that the food habit of Bangladeshi International students in

Munich doesn't change a lot. This research has several limitations, such as potential regional differences of interviewees, small sample size, no religious diversities among interviewees and no gender diversities among interviewees. This study recommends doing further large-scale research to find out more about whether Bangladeshi senior immigrants living in Munich at least since last 10 years reflexes their own cultures in food consumption or not.

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