

DETERMINING HALAL FOOD PREFERENCES AMONG MUSLIMS LIVING IN OSAKA, JAPAN

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ABSTRACT

Many Muslims residing in Japan encounter numerous challenges in accessing assured halal food and beverages. The availability of Halal-certified food remains a persistent issue for Muslims in Japan, as they continually struggle to find suitable food options. This paper aims to identify the specific challenges faced by Muslim consumers in Japan, evaluate their coping strategies, and explore the factors influencing their purchasing decisions. Qualitative data, obtained through shadowing and interviews, were collected from two participants aged 23 and 26, both long-term residents of Osaka, Japan. The study revealed several findings, notably that both participants frequented stores offering imported goods. They assessed food products based on past experiences and selected grocery stores primarily based on pricing. Checking manufacturing batch numbers to determine the product's origin was considered important, and both participants placed trust in established international brands. Analysis of the research data indicated that both participants employed conservative and exploratory coping mechanisms to navigate the challenges of finding Muslim-friendly food in Japan. Further research in this domain should encompass a larger sample of Muslims and delve deeper into the awareness of syubhah products, customers' understanding of cross-contamination concerning halal, and the logistics surrounding halal products.

Keywords: *Challenges, Coping Strategies, Purchasing decision, Muslim-friendly food, Osaka*

1. Introduction

Globally, the Muslim population is forecasted to grow at about twice the rate of the non-Muslim population over the next two decades (Srifauzi & Surwandono, 2023). If present trends persist, Muslims worldwide will account for 26.4% of the 8.3 billion people expected to inhabit the planet by 2030, up from 23.4% of the 6.9 billion people estimated to have inhabited the planet in 2010 (Lugo *et al.*, 2011). According to data presented at the Halal World Food Exhibition (Gulfood), the worldwide halal industry is expected to be valued at USD 10 trillion by 2030, indicating a surge in demand for halal food and beverages.

Thus, it is important to understand Muslims' consumption behaviour in various cultural and social settings, including in Muslim minorities and developed countries. In Japan, the number of Muslim residents is still small but growing. The Muslim population in Japan has more than doubled in the past decade, increasing from 110,000 in 2010 to 230,000 at the end of 2019 (Hajis, 2021). Supported by the government's policy to expand the 'inbound' tourism industry, the number of Muslim travellers is also expected to grow (Yulita & Ong, 2019). Consequently, the demand for halal food and beverages is rising as the majority of the Muslim population and tourists seek halal options (Yusof & Shutto, 2014; Raffi & Hasan, 2019).

As a result, while living in Japan, many Muslims experience difficulties obtaining guaranteed halal food and beverages (Johari *et al.*, 2022; Samori *et al.*, 2016; Iklima *et al.*, 2021). The availability of Halal-certified food remains an unmet need for Muslims living in Japan. Implementing halal in Japan is challenging for companies due to two primary reasons:

first, the Muslim population in Japan is still low, though growing (estimated to be around 230,000 people of the total population); second, there are differences in halal certification requirements from Muslim-majority countries (Srifauzi & Surwandono, 2023). Furthermore, the high cost of obtaining the halal certificate discourages many companies from adopting the halal concept into their businesses (Salleh *et al.*, 2019). Consequently, Muslims living in Japan are constantly struggling to find the food they want to consume (Samori *et al.*, 2016; Iklima *et al.*, 2021).

It is a matter of concern how Muslims in Japan cope with the challenges of procuring halal food and beverages in their everyday lives. Based on the field research conducted on grocery shopping activity in Osaka, this paper seeks to identify the specific challenges Muslim consumers face, their coping strategies, and the factors influencing their decision-making in grocery shopping. By gaining an in-depth understanding of Muslim consumers' grocery shopping practices, the researchers hope to contribute to developing the halal market and industry, making Japan a more Muslim-friendly society.

2. Material and methods

The research on which this paper is based employed two methods of qualitative data gathering: shadowing and interviews. Shadowing is a research method that requires a researcher to carefully monitor a participant for a prolonged time while taking notes on the actions made by the participants (McDonald, 2005).

Regarding the writing style of this paper, ethnographic writing is employed to provide rich descriptions and interpretations of the results. Ethnographic writing was implemented because it presents detailed, descriptive accounts of people, culture and social phenomena based on the direct observation of the researchers (Wolf, 2012).

To gain first-hand experience, the researchers conducted shadowing to gather data on the participants' grocery shopping practices at supermarkets in Japan. During shadowing, the researchers engaged in conversations and asked the participants questions, and the participants responded to those questions. Additionally, the researchers conducted follow-up interviews to gain an in-depth understanding of the participants' perspectives. During these interview sessions, the researchers aimed to identify the challenges faced by the participants and their coping strategies and to clarify the observations made during the shadowing sessions. In addition to shadowing and interviews, researchers from Brunei Darussalam visited several Japanese supermarkets and conducted grocery shopping on their own.

Snowball sampling was used to recruit participants for the shadowing and interview sessions conducted between the 10th and 14th of March, 2023. The researchers recruited four participants and selected two who fulfilled the research scope requirement, which is to have lived in Japan for at least one year and regularly shopped in supermarkets. The shadowing research occurred in two different supermarkets in Osaka Prefecture, Japan.

Before conducting the research, participants were contacted to brief them on the research purposes and set an appointment for the shadowing session. During the shadowing session, the researchers followed the participants, observed how they chose products and asked them a few questions. At the end of the session, the researchers scheduled another appointment for the follow-up interview session with the participants. The interview session was conducted through an online platform.

Referring to Table 1, the participants in this research consist of two female Muslim residents in Japan: Diana, a twenty-three-year-old Bruneian, and Sarah, a twenty-six-year-old Malaysian student (pseudonyms are used for this paper). Both participants are studying at Osaka University as postgraduate students, with monthly incomes of around 150,000 yen (approximately valued at 1,040 USD). Diana does grocery shopping several times per week, while Sarah does grocery shopping once weekly. In terms of their Japanese language and writing skills, both participants have the same intermediate level in these skills. Meanwhile, Sarah has intermediate-level Japanese language listening skills, and Diana is a beginner.

Table 1: Background of the Participants

	Diana	Sarah
Age	23	26
Gender	Female	Female
Nationality	Bruneian	Malaysian
Highest Education Level	Bachelor's Degree	Master's Degree
Status of Employment	Student	Student
Monthly Income	¥147,000	¥148,000
Duration of Stay in Japan	1 year 3 months	2 years 6 months
House Location (Area)	Mino-shi, Osaka	Ibaraki, Osaka
Level of Japanese Language Writing Skill	2 (Intermediate)	2 (Intermediate)
Level of Japanese Language Reading Skill	2 (Intermediate)	2 (Intermediate)
Level of Japanese Language Listening Skill	1 (Beginner)	2 (Intermediate)
Number of Members Living in a Household	1	1
Frequency of purchasing groceries	Several times per week	Once per week

3. Results

The information acquired during the shadowing and interview sessions has been extensively extracted in this part of the paper. Here, readers may comprehend the research participants' purchasing decisions for the food they believe is the best choice in the context of Japan, where halal food is not commonly available. Because there are only two participants, this section will be separated into two sub-sections to account for them.

3.1 Case One: Diana

3.1.1 Shopping at Izumiya (a supermarket chain store)

Diana, a twenty-three-year-old Bruneian female residing in Minoh City (a suburban area in the northern part of Osaka), was pursuing her master's degree at Osaka University. Despite living in Japan for one year and three months at the time of this research, she fluently spoke the Japanese language, a skill she acquired through attending kanji classes during her early days in Japan.

Diana usually purchased her groceries at Kansai Super, which is located in the vicinity of her residence. Additionally, she frequented Izumiya, a grocery store in LaLaport Expocity, one of the largest shopping malls in northern Osaka with around three hundred shops inside. Although Izumiya was not near her house (requiring a bus ride followed by two train journeys), she dropped by whenever she visited the shopping mall or nearby places. This is because "[Izumiya] has more options than other stores like Kansai Super." Izumiya was chosen for the shadowing session venue because, when the researchers contacted her to schedule an appointment, she was planning to spend her weekend at the shopping mall.

LaLaport Expocity, located near the monorail station, had ample parking space for cars and bicycles. When the researchers visited the mall, it was filled with people of various ages, most of whom came with their families. There were few vacancies in the car park. The researchers met Diana at the entrance of Izumiya. She wore modest apparel: a grey-coloured hijab, a green long-sleeve shirt, and blue long pants. She carried a medium-sized tote bag with her. Izumiya, situated on the ground floor of the shopping mall, had a large sales area, and rows of shelves were spaciouly arranged compared to typical mid-sized Japanese supermarkets located in residential areas. The shelves were neatly organised according to their designated food sections.

Based on Figure 1, Diana began walking around without a shopping list after entering the store. She seemed to have no predetermined shopping plan; if she had one, she was not following it. She did not take a straight route to a particular section but moved freely between sections, occasionally retracing her steps when recalling items to buy.

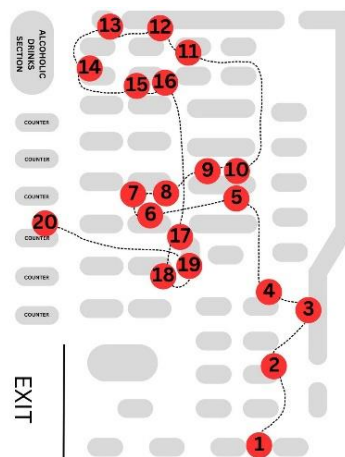


Figure 1: Diana's Route during Shadowing Session

She first stopped at the vegetable section, where she contemplated spinach, onions, and tomatoes before ultimately deciding against purchasing any of them. She explained to us, "I usually buy the vegetables here. Usually, the vegetables here are fresher than at Kansai Super. However, now, it's more expensive than usual." The researchers asked if her purchase decision primarily depended on the price. She replied, "Yeah, I look at the prices and the quality. If the prices are pretty much the same, I would choose more for the quality."

Afterwards, she ventured to the cereal section with a specific product in mind: Granola Chocolate and Nuts (Nissin Foods Holding Co., Ltd., Japan). She said she usually bought it for her *suhoor*, the pre-fast morning meal during *Ramadan*. "Usually, when I shop with my friends, I would ask them which product is good, if she has tasted the product, or if she has anything to recommend." The Granola Chocolate and Nuts (Nissin Foods Holding Co., Ltd., Japan) was recommended by her friend for *suhoor*, and she has often bought it. This product provided her with energy and sustenance throughout her fasting day.

From there, she proceeded to the tea section. She intended to buy Lipton Black Tea Bags. However, she hesitated, stating that the product's taste differed from what she was accustomed to in Brunei. She then contemplated purchasing matcha powder to try baking matcha cookies. She had never done it before, but her friends had tried it with great success. Unfortunately, she did not know which brand of matcha to purchase and sought her friend's advice on which matcha powder to choose. The researcher asked whether she would consider

alternatives if her usual preferences were unavailable. She stated, “If I could not find it, then I would find an alternative, but then I also have to check and skim through the ingredients for the alternative”. This precaution helped her avoid products containing alcohol or pig derivatives, aligning with halal dietary restrictions.

While perusing the same aisle, she pointed out a rice cracker brand she often bought, i.e., rice crackers (Sanko-Seika Co., Ltd., Japan), as she was confident in the product’s Muslim-friendly ingredients. She said it resembled the rice cracker (Namchow Thailand Ltd.) found in Brunei, a snack she craved.

Diana discovered several Muslim-friendly products in the cold storage section, including yoghurt and ice cream (Meiji Co., Ltd., Japan), soybean milk and mochi ice cream. For ice cream choices like Haagen Dazs, she explained, “Haagen Dazs is an international brand [and also found in Brunei]. It would be okay to consume except [when] the flavour is rum raisins or [it contains] other non-halal ingredients. Since I like Krispy Kreme or Baskin Robbin, I would buy it. I believe the manufacturer would be the same since it is an international brand.” Knowing that international brands like Meiji are readily available in Brunei influenced her to purchase those brands.

Among the products she found in Izumiya was soymilk (Kikkoman Corporation, Tokyo, Japan), which she enjoyed drinking due to its diverse flavours: the plain, strawberry, banana, matcha, and coffee. However, this product was not found in Kansai Super in the vicinity of her residence. When asked about the factors that influenced her purchasing decision about dairy products, she expressed an awareness of the importance of checking the manufacturing batch numbers for those products. This practice was prompted by a friend’s advice about potential cross-contamination in manufacturing facilities.

“Last time, I thought it was okay to buy any dairy product, but now I think it depends on the batches. My friend told me that sometimes you must check for the product’s batch number because cross-contamination may occur in the manufacturing facility. So, I was really surprised when I heard that”.

Although Diana was concerned about the production batch number because she believed that some manufacturers sometimes utilise the same facility to produce halal and non-halal products, this statement is not based on the hard evidence found by the researchers. Nevertheless, Diana was still concerned about the production batch number. In addition, Diana relied on her kanji knowledge to identify prohibited ingredients in food products, memorising the relevant characters to make informed choices.

“Sometimes, I know which kanji to look for when determining whether an animal extract is present in food. I try to memorise the kanji words because you should avoid these two characters (indicating an animal extract) if you see them. If the Kanji words look familiar to me, I would avoid them, especially in sauces. I took a kanji class before, so it is easier for me to memorise.”

In the dry section, she also found Muslim-friendly items like plain noodles (Ottogi Corporation, Anyang, South Korea), traditional Korean seaweed, and noodles (Samyang Foods Co., Ltd, South Korea) with the Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI) halal logo. Imported from South Korea, these products are free from animal-derived emulsifiers and pork, making them safe choices for her dietary preferences.

Concluding her shopping, she proceeded to the cashier, where she only purchased one packet of Granola Chocolate and Nuts (Nissin Foods Holding Co., Ltd., Japan) and one

packet of plain noodles (Ottogi Corporation, Anyang, South Korea). She completed her transaction using cash and placed her grocery items inside her tote bag. The shadowing session lasted for approximately forty minutes in total.

3.1.2 Follow-up Interview

The researchers conducted a follow-up interview with Diana, addressing questions that arose during the shadowing session. The interview covered various topics, including her dietary challenges when she first moved to Japan, her technique for creating a grocery checklist, her perspective on product substitutions and Muslim-friendly products, her preference for halal meat, and the mobile application she used for grocery shopping.

During the interview session, Diana shared that she initially believed there was no access to halal food at all in Japan. She explained, “I had to substitute my protein intake with tofu, vegetables, and fish”. She began following a vegan diet as she lacked information about halal or Muslim-friendly food at that time. Additionally, she did not have access to an internet connection, making it challenging to use Google Translate to inspect product ingredients.

This situation continued for about a month until her friends informed her that there were halal or Muslim-friendly food options available in the area where she lived. Consequently, she believes that her purchasing decisions are mainly shaped by her experiences, involving a process of trial and error. Initially, she was not afraid to pick out food products, but over time, she “felt like it was not the proper way because I was picking out products without questioning”. This realisation made her understand the need to change her mindset to become more autonomous in dealing with the challenges of obtaining Muslim-friendly food in Japan.

Diana said she would set aside 3000 yen (approximately 22 USD) per week for her groceries. For this reason, she would check the product's price before purchasing it. Another way she budgeted for her grocery shopping was by listing the ingredients needed for her upcoming weekly meal plan.

In the Kansai region, several Japanese shops sell imported products from other countries, where more Muslim-friendly products are available. For this reason, Diana usually goes to these stores when she needs to look for ingredient substitutions.

“Apparently, the soy sauces here sometimes have alcohol in them, so I have to buy them from an online halal market or the store in Kobe, where they import most of their products. In Kobe, they import many ingredients that are not usually sold in normal supermarkets. This is where I would recommend buying certain stuff.”

Baticrom is one of the online platforms where you can purchase fresh halal meat. According to her, she found that it was inconvenient to buy halal meat from physical grocery stores such as Gyomu Super, which imports halal meat, as “it is difficult to carry it home because it is frozen” and “it is cheaper to buy in bulk with my friends.” She also mentioned that there is “this taste of freezer to the halal meat sold in Gyomu Super,” which is why she preferred to purchase her halal meat from Baticrom. Diana believes that the halal meat sold at Baticrom is slaughtered in Japan, making it “fresher” since they distribute it right after slaughtering.

With her preference for “not having the same flavour all the time,” she thinks that she is exploratory when it comes to the food she consumes, especially when discovering new Muslim-friendly products. From her experience, the Halal Japan application (a mobile application that identifies halal or Muslim-friendly food) can only be used to scan well-known products since it is database-driven. Therefore, she only uses it to get information on well-known products. However, for the products she is interested in trying, she heavily relies on Google Translate to inspect the ingredients before purchasing them.

With the statements above, it can be concluded that Diana possesses the characteristics of an exploratory person when it comes to searching for Muslim-friendly products in Japan. This is because she would try other product brands if the ones she usually purchases are unavailable, first looking into the ingredients.

3.2 Case Two: Sarah

3.2.1 Shopping at Kansai Super (a supermarket chain store)

The second participant in this research was Sarah, a twenty-six-year-old Malaysian female residing in Ibaraki by herself. She was a doctoral student at Osaka University. Despite being in Japan for two years and six months at the time of this research, she was not fluent in Japanese.

Our meeting occurred at Kansai Super, although Sarah often purchased groceries from Gyomu Super. Considering Kansai Super’s proximity to Osaka University, the researchers chose to conduct her shadowing session there. Unlike Izumiya, situated inside a shopping mall, Kansai Super Onohara Store is an independent building at a residential crossing right before the bus stop station. The store had two separate parking lots. Besides buses and cars, many customers came to the store using bicycles; parking was located next in front of the store’s entrance and was full of *mamachari* (mom’s bike) - a popular type of bicycle characterised by a low-positioned frame, a shopping basket on the front, and sometimes with child seats.

Kansai Super is a typical middle-sized supermarket commonly found in urban residential areas. The supermarket provides various facilities such as a bicycle air pump, a vending machine offering a range of drinks, an ATM, an ID photo machine, AES Installation, as well as recycle bins. Based on observations during the shadowing session, most customers at that time appeared to be senior citizens, possibly because it was a weekday.

Sarah arrived at the store by riding her *mamachari*, just like the majority of the customers. She wore modest apparel, including a pink-coloured hijab, a purple long-sleeved shirt, and long blue pants, and she used a pink backpack to carry her stuff. The shadowing session was conducted after the researchers introduced themselves.

Much like Diana’s shopping experience at Izumiya, Sarah’s shopping at Kansai Super was impromptu grocery shopping. As shown in Figure 2, Sarah moved along different aisles and occasionally went back and forth. When questioned about this, Sarah mentioned that she was unfamiliar with Kansai Super. It should be noted that although Kansai Super was smaller than Izumiya and had approximately six shelf rows featuring sections for frozen and fresh meat, vegetables, dry storage, and cold storage, the spaces between the rows were narrower compared to Izumiya.

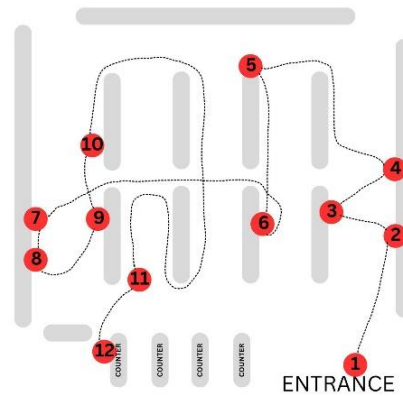


Figure 2: Sarah's Route during Shadowing Session

Upon entering the shop, Sarah took a shopping cart and went straight to the vegetable section located next to the entrance. There, she compared vegetable prices between Kansai Super and Gyomu Super. While the cucumber's price was the same in both places, she noticed that Gyomu Super offered a more generous quantity. She stated, "Gyomu has a lot of imported stuff. Some of the imported stuff is halal. I usually buy vegetables there." She added a cabbage to her shopping cart before leaving the vegetable section.

Moving on, she proceeded to the tofu section, placing fried tofu into her shopping cart. She was confident and did not feel the need to look at the ingredients of the tofu. She mentioned that having stayed in Japan for over two years, she had become familiar with products categorised as Muslim-friendly, making ingredient checks unnecessary for her frequent purchases.

Sarah was particularly concerned about the emulsifiers, leading her to rely on the Halal Japan application for inspection when in doubt. However, according to Sarah, some products mention the emulsifier's origin in the product's ingredients section. When asked about her preferred snack products, she mentioned that "so long as it contains plant-based emulsifiers, the majority of brands are safe to consume", such as Meiji products, which are famous for their plant-based emulsifiers.

Sarah then continued walking through different aisles and stopped at the egg section, where she took a tray of eggs. Afterwards, she moved to the dairy product section and used the Google Translate application on her mobile phone. She inspected the ingredients of some products, particularly the fresh cream, cream cheese, and mozzarella cheese. She compared the price of each mozzarella cheese and purchased the ones she usually buys, even if they were more expensive. She got the cream cheese and fresh cream and placed them into her cart.

She then searched for spring roll skin through different aisles but did not find any. When asked if she would buy an alternate brand for her spring roll, she replied that she would get it another time at Gyomu Supers since they sell the spring roll skin she usually purchases.

Finally, she proceeded to the cashier to pay for her groceries using her card. Her items included cabbage, cream cheese, mozzarella mixed cheese, fresh cream, fried tofu, and a tray of brown-shelled eggs. Once she finished checking out, she arranged her grocery items into two plastic bags she had purchased at the counter. These plastic bags were placed in the front compartment of her bicycle, and her backpack was placed in the back compartment. The shadowing session lasted approximately fifteen minutes as she seemed to be in a rush.

3.2.2 Follow-up interview

Judging from her statements, her eating pattern seems to have changed recently. She mentioned that when she started living in Japan, she always bought Onigiri from the *Konbini* (convenience store). She recalled, “When I started my PhD, I did not have the time to cook that much because I came home late at night. So sometimes I just bought stuff that I could eat from seven-eleven. However, since I am worried about my health now, I have started to buy more vegetables and put more effort into cooking at home.” She also avoids unhealthy foods such as snacks, “carbohydrate food” and “sugary food.” During this time, she began to purchase specific Muslim-friendly products in Japan. “It was easy for me because I had seniors telling me in the beginning which one I could eat and which I could not eat.”

In comparison to Diana, Sarah was less fluent in Japanese. This partly explains why she usually purchases food products recommended by her seniors. During the shadowing, the researchers observed that she would not look for alternative products if a particular product she was looking for was out of stock or could not be found in the store. This is also related to her style of grocery shopping. She usually does grocery shopping by herself and spends less than an hour. She plans menus for the upcoming days and buys ingredients to cook at home. During the interview, she stated, “I already have a set of lists that I want to buy. That is why my grocery time is usually less than an hour. I usually buy the stuff I wanted to purchase and go back home.” Even when she shops with her friends, her friends do not influence her purchasing decisions because of limited choices. Sarah explained, “Compared to our non-Muslim friends, our choices are limited. So, I kept eating the same thing (pre-made meals/food). That is another reason I started putting more effort into cooking at home: I got bored of the same food.”

Just like Diana, online grocery shopping complements shopping at supermarkets. Sarah also purchases meat through a website called Baticrom. The halal meat offered on the site is “cheaper” and “fresher”; online shopping is more “convenient” because they offer home delivery services. Like Diana, Sarah stated that she could taste the difference between the frozen meat sold in supermarkets and those sold online. She explained, “Baticrom has meat slaughtered in Japan. I prefer it over the imported one because I can taste the difference.”

Additionally, even though she is confident in products produced in Malaysia since they have a halal logo, she rarely purchases these products because they are usually processed foods. She also believes that Haagen Dazs is safe to consume because it is one of the goods identified as halal or Muslim-friendly by the Halal Japan application, but she hardly ever buys it because it is “too expensive.”

Sarah further explained that she would only purchase bread, which she was confident about by checking the manufacturing batch number. This is because some manufacturers produce other products containing alcohol or pig derivatives at the same facility. She knew this information from the Halal Japan application, and checking for the manufacturing batch number was easy. For this statement the researchers tried to confirm this statement by checking the Halal Japan mobile application, but it could not be verified.

“There is a type of bread that is only Muslim-friendly in certain regions because some manufacturing facilities produce products containing pig derivatives or alcohol. That is why we need to check the batch number of the bread. It is usually easy to check because you can find it in the Halal Japan application. For example,

if it is Muslim-friendly in Osaka, it does not mean that it will also be Muslim-friendly if it is manufactured in Kyoto.”

Analysing Sarah’s lifestyle in purchasing Muslim-friendly food in Japan, she relies heavily on her friends. She is hesitant to try or purchase brands she has not bought before, indicating that Sarah has a conservative consumer approach when it comes to finding Muslim-friendly food in Japan.

4. Discussion

The study yielded several findings, with the most notable contribution being as follows: both participants preferred shopping at stores offering imported goods; Diana relied on past experiences to inspect food products; their choice of grocery store was primarily influenced by price; they considered it crucial to check the manufacturing batch number to determine the product's origin; and, lastly, they expressed trust in established and international brands.

The data presented in this paper indicates the achievement of its objectives, which can be categorised into three themes: the participants’ early challenges, their coping strategies, and the factors influencing their purchasing decisions.

4.1 Early Challenges

Table 2: List of Participants’ Early Challenges

	Diana	Sarah
Difficulty in obtaining fresh halal meat	✓	✓
Limited food choices	✗	✓
No access to an internet connection and available information about halal food (at early period)	✓	✗

Given the limited availability of items bearing certified halal logos in Japan, the search for halal or Muslim-friendly products posed a challenge for both participants (Johari *et al.*, 2022). This underscores the pressing need to advance the halal industry in Japan. Moreover, the absence of an internet connection during the early period after arriving in Japan made it more challenging to translate (from Japanese) the product ingredients (Kurniawan & Jatmika, 2021). This language barrier, caused by product information written in Japanese, is a significant hurdle for newcomers in Japan (Handani, 2021; Said *et al.*, 2022). It highlights the importance of overcoming language barriers to improve accessibility for those with specific dietary needs or preferences.

To thrive in this environment and find compromises, Muslims residing in Japan must seek out products deemed Muslim-friendly. While these products are free from non-halal or doubtful ingredients, they cannot be guaranteed 100% halal due to potential contamination during the manufacturing process or in another stage of the supply chain (Iklima *et al.*, 2021). Therefore, the relevance of this finding emphasises the crucial role of knowledge of halal food, particularly on matters of syubhah food (doubtful or questionable food), in assisting Muslims in making informed decisions when purchasing these Muslim-friendly products. Thus navigating the challenges of adhering to halal dietary practices in Japan.

4.2 Coping Strategies

Table 3: List of Participants' Coping Strategies

	Diana	Sarah
Cook their meal	✓	✓
Shops at imported products shop	✓	✓
Purchase halal food by default.	✓	✓
Purchase products recommended by friends	✓	✓
Purchase fresh halal meat online.	✓	✓
Memorizes Kanji words for prohibited ingredients	✓	×
Experience	✓	×

As both participants faced similar challenges, it was found that Diana and Sarah developed coping strategies to ensure their daily halal food consumption. Among these strategies are cooking their meals, shopping at imported product shops, looking for halal products by default, purchasing food products recommended by friends, and buying fresh halal meat online.

Both participants adopted a conservative strategy by cooking their meals to have greater control over their food preparation, ensuring that their meals adhere to halal standards (Janti, 2020; Handani, 2021; Maknu *et al.*, 2021; Iklima *et al.*, 2021; Raffi *et al.*, 2022). Additionally, by shopping at imported shops, both participants took an exploratory approach to finding a more comprehensive range of halal-certified products, demonstrating their willingness to explore different options to meet their dietary needs. Moreover, both Diana and Sarah exhibited conservative choices in purchasing halal food by default, such as vegetables, fruits, and seafood, showcasing their commitment to adhering to halal practices and prioritising their dietary requirements (Yusof & Shutto, 2014; Said *et al.*, 2022; Johari *et al.*, 2022).

They also displayed a conservative purchasing strategy by relying on recommendations from friends for their halal or Muslim-friendly food purchases, mostly trying new products based on positive feedback (Destiana & Tairas, 2021). This aligns with the study of Said *et al.* (2022), where tourists found it initially difficult to find halal or Muslim-friendly food in Japan. However, after their Muslim friends suggested places to eat, they found it relatively easy.

Both participants purchased it online, overcoming the difficulty of obtaining fresh halal meat, reflecting their exploratory strategy in exploring alternative sources to meet their dietary preferences (Yusof & Shutto, 2014; Iklima *et al.*, 2021). This practice, mentioned by other researchers, highlights the convenience of home delivery services, fresher meat quality, and lower prices (Yusof & Shutto, 2014; Iklima *et al.*, 2021).

In addition to the coping strategies mentioned above, Diana employed other methods to deal with the challenges of obtaining halal or Muslim-friendly food. She demonstrated an exploratory strategy by actively memorising Kanji words for prohibited ingredients and through her trial and error experience. Attending Kanji classes equipped her with the ability to memorise Kanji words for prohibited ingredients. This finding aligned with Iklima *et al.* (2021), where participants memorised characters like 豚 and ポークエキス, representing

products containing pork materials. Similarly, Said *et al.* (2022) found that the participants kept useful Japanese (and Korean) terms in their notebooks to overcome language barriers.

Through her exploratory spirit, Diana learned to inspect food products based on her experiences, becoming adept at selecting Muslim-friendly items by accumulating various tips and techniques. This experiential learning enabled her to confidently identify potential non-halal ingredients, expanding her repertoire of food consumption. She also mentioned attempting to recreate dishes from her home country, demonstrating inventiveness when familiar ingredients were not readily available.

The significance of the findings on their coping strategies lies in their adaptive approaches, particularly their conservative and exploratory approaches to food choices in Japan. These findings are crucial for understanding how individuals navigate the challenges of maintaining halal practices in a different cultural context. The participants' cautious decisions underscore their commitment to halal requirements, emphasising the importance of dietary considerations in their daily lives and the measures they take to ensure halal food compliance.

4.3 Factors Influencing Purchasing Decision

Table 4: List of Factors Influencing the Participants' Purchasing Decision

	Diana	Sarah
Price	✓	✓
Quality	✓	✓
Utilises mobile application to inspect product ingredients	✓	✓
Inspecting the product's manufacturing batch number	✓	✓
Trusted brand	✓	✓
International brand	✓	✓
Purchase products according to their meal plan	✓	✓
Goes for an alternative brand	✓	✗

Five common characteristics in their purchasing behaviour were identified when the participants went grocery shopping. They carefully assessed the price and quality of products, utilised mobile applications to inspect product ingredients, examined the manufacturing batch number, purchased products according to their meal plan, and preferred products from trusted and international brands.

As students, both participants were initially influenced by product prices, with quality becoming a determining factor when prices were similar (Harahap & Amanah, 2020; Iklima *et al.*, 2021). This emphasises the importance of understanding the complex decision-making process for Muslim students in Japan.

Seeking Muslim-friendly products was a priority, but the limited availability of information in English posed a challenge (Maknu *et al.*, 2021; Kurniawan & Jatmika, 2021). Both participants adopted an exploratory strategy, using mobile applications like Halal Japan and Google Translate to gather information about product ingredients, ensuring compliance with halal standards (Said *et al.*, 2022). This aligned with the recommendation made by Hasanah and Harun (2018) to create a user-friendly mobile application with legitimate

information on Muslim-friendly destinations, addressing the challenges faced by Muslim tourists.

Inspecting manufacturing batch numbers emerged as another meticulous strategy employed by both participants. They think this practice allowed them to trace the product's origin and ensure the facility's adherence to halal standards. Additionally, they adopted a conservative approach by placing trust in established and international brands like Meiji, known for using plant-based emulsifiers. This preference likely stems from the belief that well-known brands adhere to higher quality and safety standards. Another factor may be the consumers' familiarity with the products' brand (Raju, 1977; Raffi *et al.*, 2022).

Both participants cooked their meals at home due to limited food choices in Japan, planning their grocery shopping based on upcoming meals (Cox, 2022). Diana demonstrated an exploratory strategy when faced with unavailable products by inspecting alternative brands' ingredients. At the same time, Sarah opted for a conservative approach, postponing the purchase until later shopping trips to avoid unfamiliar alternatives.

These findings contribute valuable insights into the diverse strategies employed by Muslim students in navigating their dietary challenges in Japan, emphasising the importance of considering both conservative and exploratory approaches in understanding their purchasing behaviours.

5. Conclusion

The research successfully achieved its objectives by identifying challenges faced by non-native Muslims in Japan, exploring coping strategies, and understanding factors influencing their purchasing decisions.

The participants, Diana and Sarah, exhibited a combination of exploratory and conservative strategies. Diana's proactive memorisation of Kanji words and experience-based food inspection represented an exploratory approach. Both participants shared exploratory traits by considering factors such as inspecting manufacturing batch numbers, shopping at imported shops, and using mobile applications for ingredient inspection.

On the conservative side, participants adopted strategies such as cooking meals, purchasing halal food by default, relying on recommendations, and trusting established international brands.

These findings provide valuable insights into the nuanced approaches of Muslim consumers in Japan, emphasising the need to cater to their diverse needs and preferences in the market.

While the research successfully addressed its objectives, there are opportunities for improvement. A more extensive study involving a larger and more diverse sample of Muslims, considering factors like gender, age, occupation, country of origin, and state, could enhance understanding. Additionally, exploring online purchasing behaviour, halal knowledge of cross-contamination, and halal logistics would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of Muslim consumers in Japan.

The awareness of syubhah products and knowledge about cross-contamination and halal logistics should be subjects of further research. Understanding these aspects would provide a more holistic view of how Muslims make purchasing decisions in Japan and contribute to enhancing their overall consumer experience.

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