



Junior Scientists Tandems

Final Report

Name of student: Yasmin Norazharuddin

German Research Institution (GRI): University of Applied Sciences Fulda

Supervisor at German Research Institution (IARC): Professor Joachim Allgaier

National University (Country)

Supervisor at National University:

International Agricultural Research Center (Country): WorldVeg Centre

Supervisor at IARC: Dr. Ee Von Goh

Start and end date of stay at IARC/ GRI: 14 April 2025 – 14 October 2025

Title: A Comparative Study of Digital Food Environments: Exploring Consumer Behavior and Systemic Influences in Germany and Malaysia

Funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)



Overview:

From 19 April to October 2025, I had the privilege of participating in a six-month research exchange program at the University of Applied Sciences Fulda, Germany. This experience was generously supported by the Council for Tropical and Subtropical Agricultural Research (ATSAF Academy) and GIZ through the Junior Scientists Tandems (JST) fellowship. I am deeply grateful to these organizations for funding my travel, and to the University of Applied Sciences Fulda—especially Prof. Joachim Allgaier—for warmly welcoming me and providing invaluable guidance throughout my stay.

I would also like to express my heartfelt appreciation to my supervisor, Dr. Ee Von Goh from the WorldVeg Centre, for her continuous support and encouragement in helping me pursue this opportunity to enhance my research knowledge, capacity, and international experience.

The main objective of my fellowship was to explore potential pathways to continue my studies as a PhD candidate, through regular consultations with Prof. Allgaier on my proposed research titled “*A Comparative Study of Digital Food Environments: Exploring Consumer Behavior and Systemic Influences in Germany and Malaysia.*” This research compares the digital food environments of a high-income country (Germany) and a middle-income country (Malaysia) to examine how digitalization shapes food systems and dietary behaviours.

This fellowship has been an invaluable experience—not only contributing significantly to the development of my PhD research but also expanding my professional network and exposing me to diverse international research methodologies and perspectives in food systems research.

Arriving in Germany:



I arrived in Spring which was a beautiful weather to experience. Prof. Allgaier and the international officer of the university, Karolina Pander, were very helpful and accommodating, which made my early days in Germany easier especially with the *anmeldung*.

One thing that I was not fully prepared of is the language barrier. Being in Fulda, it made it slightly more difficult as it is not a big city like Frankfurt where English is more commonly spoken at the shops. But, I took the initiative to learn some basic words to help me get by and picking more words up along the way was really important as well.

It was interesting to learn the basic daily routine that is not common in Malaysia like recycling bins that extends to different colour of glasses, the *pfand* model to recycle bottles and the accessibility of walking everywhere with busses and trains being available. I transitioned quite seamlessly with little to no major concerns.

University involvement:

Student tutor



Professor Joachim kindly gave me the opportunity to tutor his Master students enrolled in the Consumer and Food Business course. The course is a joint master's degree between University of Applied Sciences Fulda and University of Kassel.

From 12 April until 24 July 2025, I assisted Professor Allgaier in:

1. Guiding the students in theory of food and consumer science through the lens of food environment.
2. Guiding the students in articles review and mapping different theories and frameworks.
3. Guiding the students in developing their semester project.
4. Reviewing students' reports.

It was a fruitful experience as I get to learn through the students' findings which helped me with my own project too.

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Seminars



I attended 2 seminars by guest lecturers on campus throughout my stay. One seminar was particularly within my interest, Food Democracy, by Professor Francesca Forno from Italy. It provided me with a new look at how food is also an evolution of political turmoil. It's a growing into an important part within the food environment as it involves power to influence and communicate about food within a community. As much as there are advantages to food democracy, but the downfalls should be understood as well to avoid societal concerns.

A chunk of my connections here is made through invitations to professors and researchers as a part of the project's key informant interview. I learned a lot from this process and beyond the scope of the project. I learned about:

1. Europe's regulations' top to bottom movement and its challenges in local implementation.
2. Different views of food and nutrition between state councils, affecting different initiatives rolled out.
3. Germany's slow adoption of technology in food purchases comparing to Malaysia – for good and for bad.

Overall, Professor Joachim has guided me throughout my stay from data collection for the project, gaining an important experience as a student tutor to preparing for PhD applications.

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Germany as whole:

Germany was never in my list to further my studies, but after these 6 months, I can confidently say that I will come back to pursue my PhD. The research environment is very supportive and is much more advanced than in Malaysia. There are specific areas of food research that I discovered that don't exist in Malaysia – for example Food Sociology.

Germany is such a beautiful country. I particularly enjoyed the architectures and nature. I had the chance to visit Kassel, Cologne, Nurnberg and Frankfurt. Each city has its story to tell. I also had the chance to visit the Nazi Rally Museum as I find it's important to learn the history that took place in the past, as a reminder and understand the political and societal turmoil due to this. I also managed to experience 3 different weathers – spring, summer and autumn.

Although I felt sad to leave my new friends, colleagues, and the many things I had grown fond of in Germany, I was equally happy and excited to return home to my family, whom I had deeply missed. I am truly grateful to ATSAF for this incredible opportunity—not only to expand my knowledge and skills, but also to immerse myself in a new culture and gain a broader international perspective on the world.

