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Consumer Involvement Profiles in Superfood Purchasing: Evidence from Peri-Urban Areas of Hanoi

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Abstract

The increasing popularity of superfoods has created a need to better understand how consumers evaluate purchase decisions and whether distinct involvement profiles exist within emerging markets. This study identifies consumer involvement profiles in superfood purchasing among consumers in peri-urban areas of Hanoi, Vietnam. Data were collected from 139 consumers and analyzed using a two-stage clustering approach combining hierarchical cluster analysis (Ward's method) and K-means clustering. The results revealed three distinct consumer involvement profiles. The first segment, Comprehensive Evaluators (4.3%), demonstrated exceptionally high involvement across all purchase decision criteria. The second segment, Health-Conscious Evaluators (22.3%), placed greater emphasis on nutritional information, product certification, perceived risk, and convenience while showing lower sensitivity to advertising and consumption trends. The third segment, Passive Consumers (73.4%), exhibited consistently low involvement across most decision criteria. Payment methods emerged as the strongest factor distinguishing the segments, whereas price showed the weakest discriminating power. Furthermore, age, gender, and income were not significantly associated with cluster membership. The findings suggest that superfood consumers are differentiated primarily by their involvement in evaluating product and purchasing attributes rather than by demographic characteristics. This study contributes to the literature on consumer involvement and food consumption behavior by identifying heterogeneous involvement profiles and provides implications for segmentation and targeted marketing strategies in emerging superfood markets.

Keywords: Consumer involvement, Consumer profiles, Food choice behavior, Hanoi, Market segmentation, Superfood purchasing.

1. Introduction

Growing consumer interest in health, nutrition, and disease prevention has substantially transformed contemporary food markets, leading to increased demand for foods perceived to offer superior health benefits (Mena et al., 2024). Among these, superfoods have emerged as a prominent category due to their high concentrations of bioactive compounds, antioxidants, vitamins, and minerals associated with positive health outcomes (Fernández-Ríos et al., 2022). The expansion of the superfood market has been driven by rising health consciousness, changing dietary lifestyles, and widespread access to nutrition-related information through digital media and social networks (Annunziata & Vecchio, 2013; Asioli et al., 2017). As consumers become increasingly selective regarding food choices, understanding how they evaluate superfood products and make purchasing decisions has become an important research and managerial concern (Franco Lucas et al., 2023).

Previous studies have identified numerous factors affecting healthy food purchasing decisions, including perceived health benefits, nutritional information, product quality, price, convenience, trust, branding, and social influence (Asioli et al., 2017; Rana & Paul, 2017). However, consumers do not attach equal importance to these factors. Consumer involvement theory suggests that individuals differ in the degree of personal relevance and cognitive engagement associated with a product category, leading to substantial variation in information processing and decision-making behavior (Laurent & Kapferer, 1985; Zaichkowsky, 1985). Highly involved consumers tend to actively evaluate multiple product attributes and seek extensive information before purchase, whereas less involved consumers often rely on simplified decision rules or habitual purchasing patterns (Michaelidou & Dibb, 2008; Verbeke, 2005). Consequently, consumer involvement provides a useful theoretical perspective for understanding heterogeneity in superfood purchasing behavior.

Despite growing scholarly interest in healthy and functional food consumption, several research gaps remain. First, most studies employ variable-centered approaches that focus on the net effects of individual determinants while implicitly assuming consumer homogeneity (Hair et al., 2016; Howard & Hoffman, 2018). Such approaches may overlook meaningful differences among consumers and conceal distinct involvement profiles. Second, empirical evidence on superfood consumption remains concentrated in developed economies, with relatively limited attention given to emerging markets (Franco Lucas et al., 2023). Third, research focusing on peri-urban consumers

is particularly scarce, despite their unique socioeconomic characteristics and increasing exposure to modern retail systems and health-related information (Margolies et al., 2026).

To address these gaps, this study investigates consumer involvement profiles in superfood purchasing among consumers in peri-urban areas of Hanoi, Vietnam. Using a two-stage clustering approach combining hierarchical cluster analysis and K-means clustering, the study identifies distinct groups of consumers based on their evaluation of purchase decision criteria. By adopting a person-centered perspective, this research contributes to the literature on consumer involvement and food choice behavior while providing practical insights for market segmentation and targeted marketing strategies in emerging superfood markets.

2. Literature Review

Consumer involvement has long been recognized as a fundamental mechanism underlying information processing and purchase decision-making. According to involvement theory, consumers differ substantially in the degree of personal relevance they attach to products, which subsequently affects their motivation to search for information, evaluate alternatives, and assess potential risks (Laurent & Kapferer, 1985; Zaichkowsky, 1985). Highly involved consumers typically engage in extensive cognitive processing and systematic evaluation of product attributes, whereas low-involvement consumers rely more heavily on heuristics and routine decision-making (Klein & Sharma, 2022). Within food markets, involvement has been consistently associated with greater attention to nutritional information, food safety, product quality, and health-related claims, suggesting that involvement constitutes an important determinant of food choice behavior (Iqbal et al., 2021; Michaelidou & Dibb, 2008; Verbeke, 2005). Recent research further demonstrates that health consciousness and food safety concerns influence healthy food consumption indirectly through consumer involvement, reinforcing its role as a central explanatory construct in health-oriented purchasing decisions (Mena et al., 2024).

The relevance of involvement is particularly evident in the context of healthy and functional foods (Marcìa-Fuentes et al., 2026). Contemporary consumers increasingly evaluate food products not only based on price and taste but also according to health benefits, nutritional value, convenience, trustworthiness, certifications, sustainability attributes, and product information quality (Ahmad, 2026). Recent evidence suggests that health, convenience, and information-related considerations are among the most influential drivers of food choice across different consumer groups. Studies examining organic foods, functional foods, and health-oriented food products similarly report that consumers actively assess multiple intrinsic and extrinsic product attributes when making purchase decisions (Asioli et al., 2017; Rana & Paul, 2017). Superfoods represent a particularly information-intensive category because their perceived value depends heavily on nutritional claims, certifications, health benefits, and retailer credibility. Consequently, superfood purchasing is likely to involve substantial variation in consumer engagement and evaluation processes (Gassler & Teuber, 2025).

Despite extensive research on healthy food consumption, a growing body of literature questions the assumption that consumers respond uniformly to food-related attributes. Recent segmentation studies consistently reveal the existence of distinct consumer groups characterized by different motivations, values, and decision-making patterns. For example, studies on sustainable food consumption have identified heterogeneous consumer segments that prioritize environmental, health, or ethical considerations differently (Clarke et al., 2024; Franco Lucas et al., 2023). Similarly, research on healthy food choices has identified multiple consumer profiles ranging from highly health-conscious consumers to indifferent or convenience-oriented consumers (Esfandiari Bahraseman et al., 2025). These findings suggest that healthy food markets are characterized by substantial heterogeneity and that aggregate analyses may conceal important differences in consumer behavior.

Nevertheless, research on superfood consumption remains relatively limited, particularly in emerging economies. Existing studies have predominantly employed variable-centered approaches that estimate the net effects of individual determinants on purchase intentions or consumption behavior while implicitly assuming population homogeneity (Hair et al., 2021; Howard & Hoffman, 2018). Such approaches provide valuable insights regarding average relationships but offer a limited understanding of how consumers differ in their evaluation structures. Moreover, empirical evidence concerning superfood consumers in peri-urban settings remains scarce despite the growing importance of these markets in rapidly urbanizing economies (Margolies et al., 2026). Building on consumer involvement theory and recent calls for person-centered approaches in food consumer research, this study adopts cluster analysis to identify distinct consumer involvement profiles based on purchase decision criteria. By uncovering latent patterns of evaluation among superfood consumers, the study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of food choice heterogeneity and extends the emerging literature on consumer segmentation in health-oriented food markets.

3. Methodology

This study employed a quantitative research design to identify consumer involvement profiles in superfood purchasing among consumers residing in peri-urban areas of Hanoi, Vietnam. Data were through a structured questionnaire administered to individuals with prior experience purchasing or consuming superfood products. To ensure the relevance of respondents to the research objective, a screening question was included at the beginning of the survey, and only consumers who confirmed familiarity with superfood products were invited to participate. A combination of purposive and convenience sampling techniques was employed to access potential respondents in supermarkets, retail stores, traditional markets, and other locations where superfood products were available. After data screening and removal of incomplete questionnaires, a total of 139 valid responses were retained for analysis. The demographic composition of the sample is presented in Table 1. The majority of respondents were between 18 and 24 years old (66.9%), followed by consumers younger than 18 years (15.8%), aged 24–35 years (11.5%), and above 35 years (5.8%). Female respondents accounted for 60.4% of the sample, while males represented 39.6%. Regarding monthly income, the largest proportion of respondents reported earning less than VND 2 million per month (42.4%), reflecting the relatively young age structure of the sample.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of respondents by age group.

Variable	Category	<18	18–24	24–35	>35
Gender	Female	14[a] (10.1%)	59[a] (42.4%)	5[a] (3.6%)	6[a] (4.3%)
	Male	8[a] (5.8%)	34[a] (24.5%)	11[a] (7.9%)	2[a] (1.4%)
Monthly income (million VND)	<2	20[a] (14.4%)	38[b] (27.3%)	1[c] (0.7%)	0 (0.0%)
	2–4	2[a] (1.4%)	19[a] (13.7%)	1[a] (0.7%)	1[a] (0.7%)
	4–8	1[a] (0.7%)	18[a] (12.9%)	2[a] (1.4%)	2[a] (1.4%)
	8–12	1[a] (0.7%)	11[a] (7.9%)	8[b] (5.8%)	3[ab] (2.2%)
	12–20	1[a] (0.7%)	5[a] (3.6%)	2[a] (1.4%)	2[a] (1.4%)
	>20	1 (0.7%)	2[a] (1.4%)	3[b] (2.2%)	1 (0.7%)

Note: Within each row, column proportions that do not share a common superscript differ significantly at $p < .05$ based on Bonferroni-adjusted pairwise comparisons. 1 million VND was approximately equivalent to USD 40.

The survey instrument focused on purchase decision criteria considered by consumers when purchasing superfood products. Drawing upon previous studies on food choice behavior, health-oriented consumption, and consumer decision-making, respondents were asked to indicate whether each criterion was taken into consideration during the purchase process. Fifteen binary variables were included, namely product variety, consumption volume, price, place of purchase, nutritional information and certification, packaging and labeling, retailer brand, payment methods, after-sales service, convenience, personal consumption habits, perceived risk, advertising information, family influence, and consumption trends. Each variable was coded as 1 when the criterion was considered during purchase decisions and 0 otherwise.

Prior to analysis, all variables were standardized using a z-score transformation to ensure comparability and equal contribution of each criterion to the segmentation procedure. Following established recommendations in market segmentation research (Clarke et al., 2024; Franco Lucas et al., 2023; Wedel & Kamakura, 1997), a two-stage clustering approach was adopted. Hierarchical cluster analysis using Ward's method and squared Euclidean distance was first conducted to explore the underlying structure of the data and determine the appropriate number of groups. The agglomeration schedule and dendrogram were subsequently examined to identify the most interpretable solution. The resulting cluster centers were then used as initial seeds for K-means clustering, which refined group membership and enhanced within-group homogeneity while maximizing between-group differences. The final solution was evaluated based on interpretability, segment size, distances between cluster centers, and ANOVA results. Consistent with standard practice in cluster analysis, ANOVA statistics were interpreted descriptively because the clustering algorithm is designed to maximize between-group variation. To further characterize the identified consumer involvement profiles, cross-tabulation and Chi-square analyses were performed to examine differences in demographic characteristics across segments. Cramer's V and Gamma statistics were additionally employed to assess the strength and direction of significant associations.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Determination of the Cluster Solution

The hierarchical clustering results provided initial evidence for the existence of heterogeneous consumer involvement patterns in superfood purchasing. Examination of the agglomeration schedule and dendrogram revealed a noticeable increase in fusion coefficients when the solution moved from three to two clusters, suggesting that a three-cluster solution offered the most meaningful balance between parsimony and interpretability. The subsequent K-means procedure confirmed this structure and resulted in three distinct consumer segments comprising 6, 31, and 102 respondents, respectively (Figure 1).

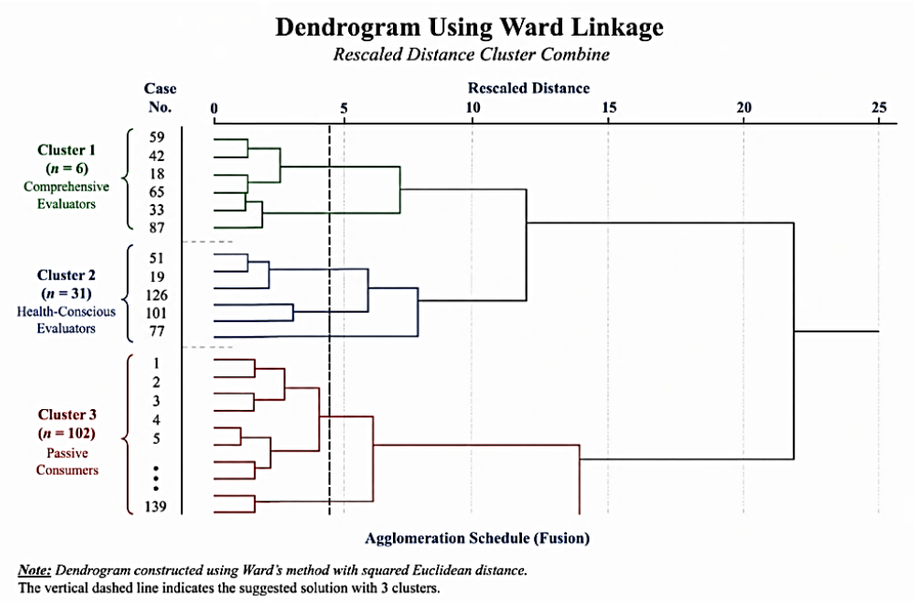

Figure 1. Dendrogram of hierarchical cluster analysis.

The distances between final cluster centers further support the robustness of the segmentation solution. As shown in Table 2, the greatest separation was observed between Cluster 1 and Cluster 3 (distance = 10.805), indicating substantial differences in the way consumers evaluate superfood purchase decisions. The relatively large

distances among all cluster pairs suggest that the identified segments represent genuinely distinct involvement profiles rather than minor variations within a homogeneous population. Such findings are consistent with previous segmentation research emphasizing the heterogeneous nature of food-related decision-making and the importance of identifying latent consumer groups beyond aggregate behavioral patterns (Asioli et al., 2017; Schäufele-Elbers & Janssen, 2023).

Table 2. Distance between final cluster centers.

Cluster	1	2	3
1	–	8.462	10.805
2	8.462	–	3.513
3	10.805	3.513	–

4.2. Characteristics of Consumer Involvement Profiles

The final cluster centers reveal substantial variation in the importance assigned to purchase decision criteria (Table 3). Based on these patterns, the three segments were labeled Comprehensive Evaluators, Health-Conscious Evaluators, and Passive Consumers.

Table 3. Final cluster centers.

Purchase Decision Criterion	Comprehensive Evaluators	Health-Conscious Evaluators	Passive Consumers
Product variety	1.957	0.690	-0.325
Consumption volume	2.162	0.511	-0.283
Price	1.335	0.311	-0.173
Place of purchase	2.430	0.690	-0.353
Nutritional information and certification	1.624	1.048	-0.414
Packaging and labeling	2.430	0.782	-0.381
Retailer brand	2.504	0.633	-0.340
Payment methods	4.032	-0.246	-0.162
After-sales service	2.977	0.307	-0.269
Convenience	2.362	0.836	-0.393
Personal consumption habits	1.822	0.677	-0.313
Perceived risk	1.899	0.962	-0.404
Advertising information	3.241	0.037	-0.202
Family influence	2.362	0.208	-0.202
Consumption trends	3.241	-0.192	-0.132

The first segment, Comprehensive Evaluators, represents only 4.3% of the sample but demonstrates exceptionally high involvement across virtually all purchase decision criteria. Respondents in this segment reported the highest standardized scores for payment methods, advertising information, consumption trends, retailer brand, after-sales service, and place of purchase. Such consumers appear to engage in extensive information processing and evaluate both intrinsic and extrinsic product attributes before making purchasing decisions. This behavioral pattern closely resembles the concept of high-involvement consumers proposed by (Zaichkowsky, 1985), who suggested that highly involved individuals devote substantial cognitive effort to product evaluation and decision-making.

The second segment, Health-Conscious Evaluators, accounts for 22.3% of respondents and exhibits moderate involvement levels. Unlike the first segment, these consumers place particular emphasis on nutritional information and certification, convenience, perceived risk, and personal consumption habits while showing comparatively limited concern for advertising information and consumption trends. This profile suggests a pragmatic and health-oriented evaluation strategy in which consumers prioritize attributes directly associated with product quality and health outcomes. Similar patterns have been observed in studies of functional foods and organic food consumption, where health-conscious consumers rely heavily on informational cues and risk reduction mechanisms when evaluating products (Rana & Paul, 2017; Verbeke, 2005).

The largest segment, Passive Consumers, comprises 73.4% of the sample and is characterized by consistently below-average scores across all purchase decision criteria. These consumers appear to devote relatively little effort to evaluating superfood attributes and may rely on habitual purchasing behavior or simplified decision heuristics. Such findings are consistent with low-involvement decision-making models, which argue that many consumers engage in limited information search and attribute evaluation when perceived risks and personal relevance are relatively low (Michaelidou & Dibb, 2008).

4.3. Relative Importance of Purchase Decision Criteria

The ANOVA results (Table 4) indicate that all fifteen purchase decision criteria contributed significantly to segment differentiation ($p < .001$). However, the magnitude of differentiation varied substantially across criteria. Payment methods emerged as the strongest discriminating factor ($F = 193.472$), followed by advertising information ($F = 64.627$), nutritional information and certification ($F = 64.772$), perceived risk ($F = 64.101$), and consumption trends ($F = 62.281$).

Table 4. ANOVA results for clustering variables.

Purchase Decision Criterion	Cluster Mean Square	Error Mean Square	F-value	p-value
Product variety	24.269	0.658	36.894	<0.001
Consumption volume	22.145	0.689	32.138	<0.001
Price	8.367	0.892	9.383	<0.001
Place of purchase	31.460	0.552	56.985	<0.001
Nutritional info and certification	33.661	0.520	64.772	<0.001
Packaging and labeling	34.591	0.506	68.359	<0.001
Retailer brand	30.899	0.560	55.145	<0.001
Payment methods	51.055	0.264	193.472	<0.001
After-sales service	31.735	0.548	57.909	<0.001
Convenience	35.452	0.493	71.861	<0.001
Personal consumption habits	22.049	0.690	31.934	<0.001
Perceived risk	33.482	0.522	64.101	<0.001
Advertising information	33.623	0.520	64.627	<0.001
Family influence	19.489	0.728	26.768	<0.001
Consumption trends	32.986	0.530	62.281	<0.001

Note: All variables are significant at $p < .001$. Results were reported descriptively because cluster means were optimized during K-means estimation.

The dominant role of payment methods is particularly noteworthy. While previous studies on healthy food consumption typically emphasize nutritional benefits and health claims as primary decision drivers (Franco Lucas et al., 2023), the present findings suggest that transactional convenience may constitute an equally important component of consumer involvement in emerging markets. This result likely reflects the rapid digitalization of retail systems and the increasing adoption of cashless payment technologies in Vietnam. Consumers exhibiting higher involvement appear to evaluate not only product-related attributes but also the broader purchasing experience.

By contrast, price exhibited the lowest F-value among all clustering variables ($F = 9.383$), indicating comparatively limited discriminatory power. Although price remains an important consideration in food purchasing decisions, the findings suggest that differences among involvement profiles are driven more strongly by information-related, convenience-related, and risk-related considerations than by purely economic factors. This observation aligns with recent evidence indicating that health-oriented consumers often prioritize perceived value and product credibility over price considerations when purchasing functional and health-promoting foods (Contini et al., 2020).

4.4. Demographic Profiling of Consumer Segments

Cross-tabulation analyses revealed no statistically significant associations between cluster membership and gender, age, or income. The corresponding Chi-square statistics were non-significant, and effect sizes measured by Cramer's V remained weak across all demographic variables (Table 5). These findings suggest that the identified involvement profiles cannot be adequately explained by conventional demographic characteristics.

Table 5. Demographic profiling of consumer involvement profiles.

Variable	Statistic	p-value	Effect Size
Gender	$\chi^2(2)=2.144$	0.342	V=0.124
Age	$\chi^2(6)=6.573$	0.362	V=0.154
Income	$\chi^2(10)=12.948$	0.227	V=0.216
Income (Gamma)	$\gamma=0.321$	0.022	—

The absence of significant demographic differences reinforces a growing body of literature arguing that food purchasing behavior is increasingly shaped by psychographic and behavioral factors rather than demographic attributes alone (Asioli et al., 2017; Grunert et al., 2014). Consumers belonging to different age groups, genders, and income categories may nevertheless exhibit similar levels of involvement when evaluating superfood products (Ares & Gámbaro, 2007). Consequently, market segmentation strategies based solely on demographic criteria may fail to capture meaningful differences in consumer decision-making processes.

Interestingly, income displayed a weak but significant positive Gamma coefficient ($\gamma = .321$, $p = 0.022$), suggesting a modest tendency for higher-income consumers to belong to more involved segments. However, given the absence of significant Chi-square results and the relatively small effect size, this relationship should be interpreted cautiously.

4.5. Theoretical and Managerial Implications

The findings contribute to consumer involvement theory by demonstrating that superfood consumers are not a homogeneous group but instead comprise distinct involvement profiles characterized by different evaluation structures (Franco Lucas et al., 2023). Consistent with person-centered approaches in consumer research, the results show that heterogeneity emerges primarily from differences in information processing and attribute evaluation rather than demographic characteristics (Howard & Hoffman, 2018). This finding extends previous research on healthy food consumption by highlighting the importance of examining latent consumer segments rather than relying exclusively on variable-centered approaches.

From a managerial perspective, the results suggest that marketing strategies should be tailored to the specific involvement profiles identified in this study. Comprehensive Evaluators require extensive product information, advanced service features, and integrated communication strategies. Health-Conscious Evaluators are likely to respond more favorably to evidence-based health claims, certifications, and educational content emphasizing product quality and safety. In contrast, Passive Consumers may require awareness-building initiatives and

simplified communication messages designed to increase engagement with superfood products. Accordingly, segmentation strategies based on consumer involvement profiles may provide a more effective basis for market targeting than traditional demographic segmentation approaches (Table 6).

Table 6. Summary of consumer involvement profiles.

Cluster	Key Characteristics	Managerial Interpretation
Comprehensive Evaluators (4.3%)	Extremely high evaluation of all purchase criteria, especially payment methods, advertising, consumption trends, retailer brand, and after-sales service	Niche segment requiring comprehensive value propositions and advanced marketing engagement
Health-Conscious Evaluators (22.3%)	Strong emphasis on nutritional information, perceived risk, convenience, and product attributes; less influenced by advertising and trends	Target segment for evidence-based communication and health-focused positioning
Passive Consumers (73.4%)	Low involvement across most purchase decision criteria	The mainstream market requires awareness-building and simplified communication

5. Conclusion

This study examined consumer involvement profiles in superfood purchasing among consumers in peri-urban areas of Hanoi, Vietnam. Using a two-stage clustering approach, the findings revealed three distinct segments characterized by different patterns of evaluating purchase decision criteria: Comprehensive Evaluators, Health-Conscious Evaluators, and Passive Consumers. The results demonstrate that superfood consumers are far from homogeneous and differ substantially in the extent to which they consider product, informational, transactional, and social attributes during the purchasing process.

Among the evaluated criteria, payment methods emerged as the strongest discriminator between segments, whereas price exhibited the weakest differentiating power. Furthermore, demographic characteristics, including age, gender, and income, showed limited ability to explain cluster membership, suggesting that consumer involvement profiles are more closely associated with behavioral and cognitive evaluation patterns than with conventional demographic attributes.

The study contributes to the literature by extending consumer involvement theory to the context of superfood consumption and by demonstrating the value of a person-centered approach in uncovering latent heterogeneity among consumers. The findings further suggest that involvement-based segmentation may provide a more meaningful basis for understanding food purchasing behavior than demographic segmentation alone. From a managerial perspective, the results indicate that marketing strategies should be tailored to the specific involvement characteristics of different consumer segments. Information-rich communication, credible health claims, and convenient purchasing mechanisms are likely to be more effective than uniform marketing approaches targeting consumers solely on demographic grounds.

Despite these contributions, the findings should be interpreted in light of the study's limitations, including the use of non-probability sampling and the focus on a single geographical context. Future research may extend the analysis to broader populations and incorporate additional psychological constructs to further explore the determinants of consumer involvement in health-oriented food markets.

Institutional Review Board Statement:

This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the author's institutions and the principles of the 1964 Declaration of Helsinki and its subsequent amendments or comparable ethical standards. In accordance with institutional guidelines, formal ethical approval was not required for this study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to participation. Participation was voluntary, and all responses were collected anonymously.

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