U.S. scientists have found there's a difference in how consumers in individualistic and collective societies think when making purchases.

Shailendra Pratap Jain of Indiana University, Kalpesh Kaushik Desai of the State University of New York-Binghamton and Huifang Mao of the University of Central Florida tested categorization tendencies through a series of experiments.

The researchers found individualists are less affected than collectivists by the context within which products are placed. For example, when a low-fat cookie was grouped with products in the health food section, collectivists paid more attention to fat content than when the low-fat cookie was shelved taxonomically among all types of cookies. In contrast, individualists perceived the fat content uniformly across contexts.

"Individualists ignore the context and focus only on product features," the researchers said.

The study appears in the June issue of the Journal of Consumer Research.

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