

Mind the Anchor: Mindfulness Strengthens Anchoring Bias in Marketing Negotiations

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Executive Summary

Mindfulness is widely promoted as a beneficial practice in negotiations, often assumed to improve judgment, emotional regulation, and interpersonal understanding. Yet empirical findings on its effects are mixed. *Mind the Anchor: Mindfulness Strengthens Anchoring Bias in Marketing Negotiations* addresses this puzzle by examining a specific mechanism through which mindfulness can impair negotiation outcomes: increased susceptibility to anchoring bias.

Anchoring bias refers to the disproportionate influence of an initial numerical value (such as a first offer) on subsequent judgments and decisions. In negotiations, this bias is especially powerful, as opening offers strongly shape counteroffers and final outcomes.

While prior research has largely emphasized the advantages of mindfulness (e.g., enhanced awareness, empathy, and cooperation), this study argues that mindfulness may simultaneously undermine negotiators' ability to resist anchors, particularly among inexperienced negotiators. Drawing on dual concern theory, the authors propose that mindfulness reduces self-concern (i.e., the motivation to protect and maximize one's own outcomes) by shifting attention away from the self toward the counterpart. This may weaken goal focus, making negotiators more vulnerable to anchors. The authors theorize that negotiation experience moderates this effect: experienced negotiators are better able to maintain stable goals and self-focus, even in a mindful state.

The hypotheses are tested across two controlled experiments involving a total of 234 participants. In Study 1, participants engaged in a distributive negotiation task after either a mindfulness meditation or a control exercise, with or without exposure to a low opening offer. Results show a significant interaction: mindful negotiators adjusted their counteroffers more strongly toward the anchor than non-mindful negotiators, providing direct evidence that mindfulness can increase anchoring bias.

Study 2 probes the underlying mechanism and boundary condition. Consistent with the theory, mindfulness significantly reduced negotiators' self-concern, and lower self-concern, in turn, increased susceptibility to anchoring. Moreover, negotiation experience moderated this process. For inexperienced negotiators, mindfulness substantially lowered self-concern and heightened anchoring effects. For more experienced negotiators, mindfulness had little to no impact on self-concern or anchoring susceptibility. Additional analyses ruled out alternative explanations, such as increased concern for the counterpart, greater awareness of the anchor, or heightened perceived relevance of the anchor, confirming the central role of self-concern.

The study makes several important contributions. Theoretically, it reconciles conflicting findings in the mindfulness–negotiation literature by showing that mindfulness is not uniformly beneficial; its effects depend on the decision context and the negotiator's experience. Practically, the findings imply that mindfulness should not be prescribed indiscriminately, especially for novice negotiators engaged in value-claiming situations.