

# After COVID-19 lockdown: an exploratory study about the influence of mindfulness-feelings toward an individual's outdoor lifestyle and empowerment

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – This study aimed to detect the relationships between mindfulness and events participation, and then between the later and psychological empowerment.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The proposed model's underlying hypotheses were empirically tested with data collected through an online survey addressed to a convenience sample of frequent leisure participants ( $n = 199$ ). The authors applied the structural equation model (SEM) to confirm the aforementioned relationships. To assess the adequacy of the psychometric properties of the measures, the authors performed a confirmatory factor analysis of the measurement model, with a maximum likelihood estimation method.



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**Findings** – Under the effects of the lockdown period environment, the results express a positive relationship between a mindful state of mind – related to observation/attention – and the yearnings and perceptions about the participation in events. This relationship for consistency was proven to be moderated by the perception of the participation importance to the individual subjective well-being/mental health. Due to participation insights, there was a positive effect on psychological empowerment, supporting the relationship that had been hypothesized.

**Originality/value** – The authors propose and test a new model that contributes to the theory and examines how mindfulness behavior can effect more alluring and intense participation in events and what are the anticipated outcomes in terms of psychological empowerment.

**Keywords** Events participation, Mindfulness, Events and outdoor recreation, Psychological empowerment, Subjective well-being, COVID-19 lockdown

**Paper type** Research paper

## 1. Introduction

Nowadays, outdoor events are one of the most significant and fastest growing type of cultural and social expressions (Krajnović and Gortan-Carlin, 2017). There are several manifestations related to this kind of events: from renowned music festivals to historical events such as medieval representations, as well as food festivals, artistic events and other festivities. Many of the development strategies for cities or regions focus on organizing and promoting this type of events, in order to attract public attention (from residents and visitors), regenerate the local image and obtain economic/social benefits (Pirnar *et al.*, 2019).

From an individual point of view, participating in a specific event generally means an opportunity for learning and personal enhancement, but in most cases, and above all, it is linked to pure leisure and recreational time, associated with positive emotions (e.g. happiness, pleasure and excitement) and deep psychological benefits (e.g. stress reduction, anxiety management, emotional health promotion, improved self-awareness, sleep, pain management and among others) (Pearce, 2009; Wood and Masterman, 2007; Wood and Moss, 2015). These benefits could be stronger, depending on a more mindful participation, thus leading to a greater well-being and psychological empowerment – which represents individual capacities to improve decision-making/problem-solving, critical awareness and participatory behaviors (Zimmerman, 2000). In order to frame these unique capacities, the positive psychology theory (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) is a field of study that seeks to define the concept of “optimal experience.” The terms mindfulness and flow are two of the most well-known materializations of this concept.

Mindfulness can be understood as a psychological process leading to a state of awareness and attention to the internal or external experience which is actually taking place, by retaining control of that attention for as long as possible (Shapiro *et al.*, 2006). On the other hand, flow translates the most intense concentration on a task, the loss of self-awareness, the loss of sense of time and the fusion of consciousness with activity (Csikszentmihalyi, 2013; Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi, 2009). Although both forms translate into beneficial mental states, Sheldon *et al.* (2015) argue that they represent different and incompatible strands. Flowing involves losing self-awareness within a certain activity (e.g. painting a picture), and mindfulness involves maintaining self-awareness during (or even despite) that activity.

The connection between engaging in mindfulness practices and attending events, as well as the advantages that may result, is currently understudied in the literature on leisure and events. Some research has primarily aimed to determine the enhanced learning and information retention capacity that mindfulness activity delivers in a variety of domains, such as nature tourism and involvement in nature-based activities (visiting natural parks–Frauman and Norman, 2004; Manwa *et al.*, 2017; Deringer *et al.*, 2020), cultural tourism and the participation in heritage interpretation activities (visiting museums/heritage–Moscardo, 1996, 1999) and cultural

festivals (Van Winkle and Backman, 2008). However, the relationship between mindfulness, subjective well-being (SWB) and the psychological empowerment that may derive from the participation in events is a field that deserves further study, especially when contextualized by a specific and mainly adverse scenario, such as the recent coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic lockdown associated with social isolation and other similar restrictions.

In the recent years (early 2020 to early 2022), most of the cultural events which are usually held outside were canceled because of the COVID-19 pandemic and, particularly, the imposed social lockdown, which was one of the most widely adopted public health measures aimed to counteract the virus spread (Mair *et al.*, 2020). Sigala (2020) asserts that the duration of the lockdown was sufficient to warrant a shift in consumption patterns, as well as in the wants and motives of the individuals. It has further been suggested that the impacts of the pandemic on mental health and well-being are specifically related to fears, uncertainties and perceived loneliness during social distancing and isolation periods (Holmes *et al.*, 2020; Loades *et al.*, 2020). Social isolation can induce feelings of loneliness, with negative consequences on a person's well-being, such as increased risks of anxiety, depression and even increasing chances of suicidal behavior (Willner *et al.*, 2021; O'Connor *et al.*, 2021). On the other hand, the lockdown resulted in a break of daily routines and with the traditional fast pace of life, providing more time for introspection and generating opportunities to cultivate a more mindful state of mind. According to Jackson *et al.* (2021), there were psychological effects caused by the lockdown (forced and prolonged) on the increased perception of the individual's needs related to escape and evasion (an effect that could be called as "bird out of the cage"), and also on recreation- and socialization-related activities (Lee and Park, 2021). It is therefore assumed that these effects, which come from the activities offered at the events, may have a strong positive influence on increasing the intentions and yearnings to participate in events in order to benefit from the empowerment and sense of well-being that this participation may provide. This type of activity can have a real transformative experiential value for the participants, particularly for their well-being, by reducing feelings of insecurity and loneliness experienced during the period of social isolation (Antchak *et al.*, 2022). In fact, the results from a study related to tourist consumption expectations after COVID-19 lockdown confirmed strong yearnings toward traveling and participating in music festivals or any other kind of cultural event (Borges *et al.*, 2022).

Sigala (2020) posits that more research should be carried out to examine and understand how individuals lived and perceived COVID-19 experiences, as well as their consciousness, mindfulness, capabilities and willingness to understand and act (pro- and reactively) in the post-pandemic era. Considering that these can equally influence their attitudes, behaviors and potential for change. Responding to Sigala's (2020) challenge, the present paper aims to contribute to the theory analyzing how a more mindful behavior, particularly geared toward feelings, can affect a more eager, immersive and intense participation in events in search of well-being and psychological empowerment.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1 Theoretical background related with mindfulness and the attention to feelings

An important study by Killingsworth and Gilbert (2010) revealed that people spend almost half of their active lives (excluding sleeping time) thinking about something other than what they are currently experiencing. This is generally recognized as mindlessness behavior in which rules and routines tend to govern the individual's life, regardless of the present circumstances that affect the person. The mind wandering between past events and feelings (memories) and future possibilities (projections), over which there is little or no control, can be one of the causes of personal unhappiness. In contrast, mindfulness is widely acknowledged as a way to alleviate, reduce or eliminate negative psychological states, bringing balance, well-being and empowerment to the individual (Shapiro *et al.*, 2008).

Mindfulness is conceived as a state of mind that reflects a full awareness of perceptions and apperceptions, and as such, of the feelings that are experienced in the present moment

(Langer and Moldoveanu, 2000; Brown and Ryan, 2003, 2004; Green, 2021). When the conscious assumes a mindfulness state, it overrides the subconscious automatic algorithms anchoring the mind to the present moment; it is a subjective feeling characterized by a state of wakefulness, involvement and full awareness of being in the present.

This understanding of the concept is widely regarded as the most purist, although there is a second current of thought that equates the concept with a double dimension. The work from Bishop *et al.* (2004) is at the basis of this proposal, pointing out the “presence” as the first dimension – or the state of full consciousness focused on the lived experience of the moment; and as a second conceptual dimension, “acceptance” – an emotional regulation factor characterized by an open attitude, uncompromising judgment and total acceptance of the present occurrence. Thus, if, on the one hand, it seems consensual that the mindfulness state of mind implies a sense of living deeply in the present moment, with an awareness of sensorial and mental experience; on the other hand, it also represents a voluntary interruption of automatic cognitive processes of evaluation/judgment, such as those of “right/wrong” or “good/bad.”

The concept of mindfulness is viewed as an intrinsic human characteristic that is practiced moment by moment with a particular intensity and can be improved through learning and training methods, such as meditation (Davidson *et al.*, 2003; Sauer *et al.*, 2013; Shapiro *et al.*, 2008). From the perspective of Langer and Moldoveanu (2000), practicing mindfulness has several tangible benefits, including increased sensitivity to one’s environment, greater openness to new information, more structured perceptions and a greater awareness of various problem-solving perspectives.

There have been several fields of research and application of mindfulness theories, such as physical and mental health, education, business and management, among others (Davis and Hays, 2011). Participation in leisure activities and events is another area of application that is especially relevant to current research (Carruthers and Hood, 2013). According to their impacts, Duerden *et al.* (2018) divide group experiences into three categories: (1) Memorable experiences, (2) Significant experiences and (3) Transforming experiences. Wood and Moss (2015) argue that a higher level of immersion and emotional intensity at the participation in events (which could be connected to a more mindful attention to feelings) creates experiences with potential to change/transform attitudes and behaviors.

With mindfulness research expanding rapidly, different methodological approaches and attempts to operationalize the concept based on different constructs and measurement scales have proliferated. The in-depth review work by Sauer *et al.* (2013) identified 11 different research instruments, highlighting two scales as the most widely and frequently used: the “Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale” (MAAS by Brown and Ryan, 2003) and the “Kentucky Inventory of Mindfulness Skills” (KIMS by Baer *et al.*, 2004).

The MAAS scale presents a single construct focused on the presence or absence of attention and awareness of the present, disregarding attributes that are sometimes associated with mindfulness, such as acceptance, empathy, gratitude and trust (Bishop *et al.*, 2004; Brown and Ryan, 2003). The authors observe that mindfulness implies an absolute surrender to the present occurrence, that is, the state of mindfulness requires total openness of mind and focus on observing reality and this is incompatible with the attempt to alter or put a conceptual framework around it (Brown and Ryan, 2004).

In turn, the KIMS scale assesses the concept of mindfulness according to four constructs (facets or abilities): observe, describe, act with conscience and act without judgment (Baer *et al.*, 2004). The scales do not compete with each other, possibly because of their different structures. Indeed, integral to the results of the simultaneous application of the two scales, Van De Veer *et al.* (2015) concluded that the two scales do not converge and produce, in fact, different outcomes.

When trying to emphasize the mindfulness dimension specifically related to feelings and emotions, as in the case of the current research, it seems that the KIMS scale proves to be more appropriate, either because it’s the first subscale or due to the specific items that it incorporates.

The first subscale of KIMS refers to the dimension/ability to “observe” and is fully justified by the most consensual definition of the concept of mindfulness, which highlights the importance of noticing or paying attention to various internal stimuli – including emotions and feelings, and external ones – such as sounds and smells (Dimidjian and Linehan, 2003).

Feelings are always present in the individual’s daily life, and without a broad and deep awareness of them, the individual can be made to react more automatically. This reactive drive can limit an individual’s ability to find balance and clarity in daily life. The mindfulness state allows the reduction of psychological problems (Didonna, 2009) of reactive avoidance behaviors (Linehan, 1993) and complaints (Brown and Ryan, 2003). Additionally, it stimulates the frequency and intensity of positive emotions; the development of individual resources – physical, cognitive, psychological, social and spiritual; and the development of excellence in “being” – i.e. character traits, and “doing” – i.e. peak performance (Carruthers and Hood, 2013). The relationship between mindfulness and specific feelings of self-control has also been a relevant topic of research, with the results of Van Winkle and Backman (2008) confirming that mindfulness has a significant impact on these types of feelings.

From the review carried out so far, it can be posited that cultivating mindfulness can represent a basis to improve well-being and empowerment. However, it is interesting to explore the extent to which greater awareness and attention to feelings can impact the participation in events, reinforcing the positive emotions extracted from the lived experience. Positive emotions have been identified as cognitive, psychological and social resources that lead to higher, consistent and lasting levels of well-being (Fredrickson and Joiner, 2018). Positive emotions can also be extended after the event through memories, which can bring a lasting and positive emotional effect to the participants (Wood and Masterman, 2007; Wood and Kinnunen, 2020).

Furthermore, it would be relevant to further investigate whether the constraints imposed by the recent COVID-19 lockdown have significantly changed people’s perception of, and preconceptions on, the beneficial outcomes of participating in outdoor public events.

### *2.2 Events’ participation, positive psychology and subjective well-being (SWB)*

The field of positive psychology at the subjective and individual level is about valued subjective present experiences: well-being, contentment and satisfaction (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Mäler (2008) states that the participation in outdoor events carries significant emotional, mental and physical benefits, among which is the creation of happiness feelings, and also opportunities to mindfulness and calm (Brymer *et al.*, 2014). According to Godbey (2009), particularly in the case of outdoor events, the people’s participation contributes to wellness, with the most beneficial outdoor pursuits being those that become part of one’s life and occur on a regular basis. The COVID-19 pandemic and the imposed confinement brought inadvertent negative consequences on people’s well-being. This is particularly true when it comes to urban populations and those who are extremely reliant on outside home leisure (Rice *et al.*, 2020).

In a leisure environment, mindfulness is generally associated with greater receptivity, learning ability, and greater benefit and satisfaction with the activity practiced (Moscardo, 1999). A study on the benefits sought by visitors in their outdoor leisure experiences concluded that the most mindful participants place a great deal of importance primarily on the benefits from learning and excitement, but also on opportunities for escape, reflection, and socialization (Frauman and Norman, 2004). An experience of participation and the promotion of positive social relationships contribute decisively to personal happiness and SWB (Hallal and Hadler, 2006; Haslam *et al.*, 2009). An event experience can be “the catalyst that enables social interaction to go beyond the event time and place” (Wood and Kenyon, 2018, p. 176).

Individual SWB is often referred to as a measure of happiness (Diener, 2000) and, additionally, as a synonym of satisfaction and perceived quality of life (Kim *et al.*, 2015; Uysal *et al.*, 2016). In practice, SWB is a more scientific-sounding term for what people usually refer to as happiness. It has become one of the most researched and recent topics in positive

psychology, and its connection with events is one of several lines of research being conducted. Several research works in the leisure field have focused on the relationship between participation in events and the SWB, namely by exploring the impact of participation on the level of satisfaction, quality of life and perceived happiness (Kuykendall *et al.*, 2015; Armbrecht and Andersson, 2019; Jepson and Stadler, 2017; Jepson *et al.*, 2019; Āado *et al.*, 2020; Jepson and Walters, 2021; Yu *et al.*, 2022).

In this context, the findings of the comprehensive study by Yu *et al.* (2022) synthesize three main approaches to SWB: (1) as a benefit and an impact of the participation in events, (2) its relationship with motivations and satisfaction, and (3) its relationship with the event experience.

The SWB concept is typically defined as the sum of two dimensions: affective (hedonic balance) and cognitive (person's assessments of the various facets of life) (Diener, 2000). SWB is an indicator of mental health, and participation in mass events can strengthen psychological resources and support mental health positively affecting the SBW of attendees (Āado *et al.*, 2020; Keyes, 2006; Packer and Ballantyne, 2011; Piper *et al.*, 2022). In the research by Oliva and Colombo (2021), the participation in events is seen specifically as an opportunity to experience intense and mostly positive emotions, among which the most representative are wonder, transcendence, joy and tranquility.

Additionally, SWB can be understood at two distinct levels – the psychological and the sociological. However, Jepson and Walters (2021) consider these two levels inseparable, representing a crucial relationship for the happiness and survival of the individual. In the context of events participation, it seems to be consensual that socialization stands out both as a motivation and as a benefit (Schofield and Thompson, 2007; Yolal *et al.*, 2012), but the psychological level of SWB must also be highlighted. With higher SWB the participants are more likely to participate in future events (Lundberg and Andersson, 2022).

The SWB concept can be specifically interpreted as a function of three components: (1) presence of positive emotions, (2) absence of negative emotions and (3) ability to control personal life (Davidson and Cotter, 1991). Considering this perception related to the individual's ability to control/dominate the various facets of his/her life, including feelings, we should be close to the concept of psychological empowerment. Here, too, mindfulness can be anchored – as the more attention there is over feelings, the greater control there can be over them.

### 2.3 Psychological empowerment

The theory and applications of empowerment have developed within the framework of a close connection between well-being and the political, social and organizational environment in which the individual inhabits. The term "empowerment" was first introduced by Kanter's work in the 1970s in the organizational context; the author posited that, by providing workers with greater capabilities, organizations could ensure that they would respond more flexibly to different situations, instead of just obeying orders and rules. The aim was to give employees greater control over resources and more access to information and learning, in order to allow them to deal more effectively with their jobs and even raise their status within the organization. With more tools, information and support, people's skills tend to improve, they will increasingly make more informed decisions, feel increased job satisfaction and achieve more, thus benefiting the organization as a whole (Kanter, 1993).

According to Spreitzer (2008) the theoretical development of empowerment has traditionally been in the domain of organizational and management studies, with two main approaches: the social-structural (organizational environment that allows empowerment) and the psychological empowerment (centered on the individual). At an individual level, psychological empowerment can be seen as a combination of personal beliefs of control, involvement in activities to exert control and critical awareness of the individual's surrounding environment (Zimmerman, 2000).

The empowerment concept is intrinsically linked to the notion of “Power,” which is in turn complex and multidimensional (Simons and de Groot, 2015). First, the distinction between two forms of power emerges: the “power over” and the “power for.” In Lukes’ (2005) conceptualization, the first form deals with access and control over: (1) resources (e.g. money, time and information), (2) decision processes and (3) actions. The second form of power is described as a set of individual capacities, translated into critical awareness of oneself, competences, self-esteem and self-efficacy – capacities that can grow under certain stimuli (Aghazamani and Hunt, 2017; Scheyvens and van der Watt, 2021). The growth can be attributed to empowerment, which in that sense can be defined as a multidimensional and dynamic intentional process that aims to provide the individual with greater emotional balance, freedom of action and decision-making capacity, as well as greater capacities to improve and control resources toward his/her overall quality of life (Perkins and Zimmerman, 1995; Anme, 2009). If theoretically the concept of empowerment can be translated into a process, it can also be seen as an outcome. Perkins and Zimmerman (1995) defined empowerment in this last context as the conceptual operationalization that permits examining the effects of the underlying process. Events might be important in helping participants build new knowledge, which could then empower them (Stadler, 2013; Walters *et al.*, 2021).

Another important theoretical distinction is made between psychological and community empowerment. According to Bergsma (2004) and Walters *et al.* (2021), these two formulations shouldn’t be separated because psychological empowerment entails a social orientation by necessity, as evidenced by the frequent benefits that people can obtain through their integration into a particular group or social context. The two formulations above can be viewed as participation outcomes given the social/community-wide nature of events; nevertheless, with reference to the construct proposed below, the emphasis is on psychological empowerment.

Empowerment appears to be crucial in the post-COVID situation as a means of facilitating the outcome of genuine optimistic emotions that things will unquestionably get better in the future. As noted by Spreitzer (2008), there may be a strong connection between empowerment and resilience, and doing so can help people find the meaning and effectiveness they need to keep going.

### 3. Conceptual model and specific objectives of the research

Several prior studies on mindfulness and taking part in events have used a theoretical framework and tested its subjacent hypotheses using a quantitative methodological approach (Moscardo, 1996; Frauman and Norman, 2004; Van Winkle and Backman, 2008), providing an appropriate body of knowledge from which the current study could be developed. Based on the concepts and interrelations explored in the revised literature, three specific research objectives are raised and translated into the following research hypotheses, also schematized in the conceptual model presented in Figure 1:

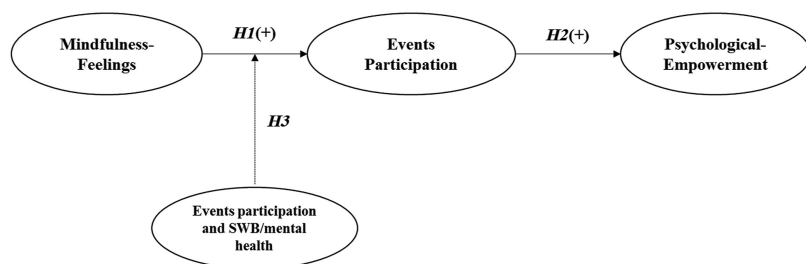


Figure 1.  
Conceptual model

Source(s): Author’s own elaboration

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### (1) Mindfulness – Attention to feelings and Outdoor lifestyle

Self-determination theory (SDT) contends that individuals are intrinsically motivated to engage in behaviors that satisfy their fundamental psychological requirements for autonomy, competence and relatedness (Deci and Ryan, 2012). In order to better understand their needs and preferences, people can increase their self-awareness by paying attention to their feelings (Scheyvens and van der Watt, 2021). People are more likely to engage in outdoor activities readily and enthusiastically when they feel free to pursue pursuits they actually enjoy when they have greater self-awareness (Jepson and Walters, 2021). The goal of positive psychology is to comprehend and foster positive feelings, well-being and thriving (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Jepson and Walters, 2021). Individuals are more likely to engage in activities that make them happy and fulfilled when they pay attention to their feelings and seek out experiences that support their positive emotions (Jepson and Walters, 2021). Encountering nature, having an adventure, and establishing deep social connections are just a few of the pleasant experiences that can result from taking part in outdoor activities. Enhancing mood and better stress management are both possible benefits of feeling one's feelings. The exposure to nature, physical activity and social connections that come with outdoor activities have all been demonstrated to lower stress and increase mood. People may be more inclined to include outdoor activities in their lifestyle if they are aware of the good effects these activities may have on their emotions.

*H1.* Attention to feelings positively affects a person's outdoor lifestyle – participation in events.

### (2) Outdoor lifestyle and Empowerment

Engaging in outdoor activities and events can provide opportunities for individuals to challenge themselves, set and achieve personal goals, and develop a sense of mastery over their environment. As people gain experiences and successes in these outdoor pursuits, their self-efficacy can improve, leading to enhanced psychological empowerment (Walters *et al.*, 2021). Participating in outdoor events often involves acquiring new skills, overcoming challenges and mastering various tasks. As individuals improve their outdoor skills and competence, they may transfer this sense of mastery to other aspects of their lives, contributing to their overall psychological empowerment (Walters *et al.*, 2021). Outdoor activities can offer a sense of accomplishment, especially when individuals conquer difficult tasks or achieve personal bests. Accomplishing goals in an outdoor context can reinforce a person's belief in their abilities and autonomy. The recognition of one's achievements and the independence gained from participating in outdoor events can positively influence their sense of psychological empowerment (Walters *et al.*, 2021).

*H2.* A person's outdoor lifestyle – the participation in events, positively affects psychological empowerment.

### (3) Events participation and SWB/mental health mediation effects

Paying attention to one's feelings and emotions is an essential aspect of emotional regulation (Sheldon *et al.*, 2015). Being attuned to one's emotions allows for better understanding and management of emotional experiences. When individuals can effectively regulate their emotions, they may experience higher levels of well-being and mental health. The hypothesis posits that the relationship between attention to one's feelings and participation in outdoor events is moderated by the importance of these events for an individual's SWB or mental health. This means that the degree to which a person values outdoor events as crucial for their well-being plays a moderating

role in how their attention to feelings affects their engagement in such activities (Duerden *et al.*, 2018). For individuals who highly value outdoor events as significant contributors to their well-being, paying attention to their positive feelings during these activities can reinforce their intrinsic motivation to participate (Duerden *et al.*, 2018). Positive feelings experienced during outdoor events become strong positive reinforcers, leading to increased engagement in these activities. For individuals who perceive outdoor events as crucial for managing their mental health and reducing stress, paying attention to their feelings during such activities can serve as an effective coping mechanism (Duerden *et al.*, 2018). Positive feelings experienced during outdoor events may act as buffers against negative emotions and stress, further reinforcing the link between attention to feelings and increased participation in events (Piper *et al.*, 2022). Individuals who highly value outdoor events for their well-being are more likely to be fully present and engaged during these activities. Paying attention to their feelings can enhance their enjoyment and fulfillment during outdoor events, making them more inclined to participate in such activities in the future (Piper *et al.*, 2022). The relationship between attention to feelings and outdoor lifestyle participation may be moderated by the importance of events for well-being, especially during challenging times. For individuals who consider outdoor events as essential for coping and maintaining mental health, being attentive to their feelings can foster resilience and adaptability, enabling them to continue participating in these activities even in the face of adversity.

*H3.* The importance of participating in events for an individual's SWB/ mental health moderates the relationship between attention to the feelings and a person's outdoor lifestyle – the participation in events.

In the same context, the next hypothesis suggests that event participation acts as a mediator in the relationship between mindfulness-feelings and psychological empowerment. This means that the effect of mindfulness-feelings on psychological empowerment is transmitted through the level of event participation (Green, 2021). Mindfulness can improve emotional regulation, allowing individuals to understand and manage their feelings more effectively. When individuals are better at regulating their emotions, they may be more likely to engage in events as a positive coping strategy, which, in turn, can contribute to their sense of psychological empowerment (Gaan *et al.*, 2023). Mindful individuals are more likely to engage in activities that align with their interests and values (Green, 2021). As they become more attuned to their feelings, they may be drawn to events that evoke positive emotions and a sense of enjoyment. The intrinsic motivation derived from participating in such events can bolster their psychological empowerment. Engaging in events and experiencing success can enhance feelings of competence and mastery. Also, mindful individuals, who are more aware of their emotions, may be more receptive to the positive emotions associated with achievement and accomplishment during event participation. This sense of competence can contribute to their psychological empowerment (Gaan *et al.*, 2023). Event participation often involves social interactions, which can provide support and a sense of belonging. Mindful individuals may be more attentive to the positive feelings generated from social interactions during events, leading to a stronger social support network. The sense of connection and support can positively influence their psychological empowerment (Gaan *et al.*, 2023).

*H4.* The importance of participating in events for an individual's SWB/ mental health mediate the relation between mindfulness-feelings and psychological empowerment.

## 4. Methodology

### 4.1 Data collection

Data were collected through a self-administrated online questionnaire through social networks (Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn), distributed among a convenience sample of frequent

participants in outdoor events, between April and June 2021. The questionnaire was self-administrated through Google forms, indicating the purpose of the research and ensuring the anonymity of the responses (i.e. no element of identification of the respondent was requested). The frequency on a five-point Likert scale of the type of events that the respondent attends was also asked, and the responses regarding frequent and very frequent outdoor events were considered in the sample of the present study, namely cultural, sports, wine and/or gastronomic fairs. In total, 199 questionnaires were completed by Portuguese respondents.

The first section describes the respondent’s demographic characteristics such as age, gender, education, civil status, and professional situation. Most of the respondents were females (63.8%), aged 18–25 (49.2%), with a secondary diploma (49.8%), single (75.9%) and dependent employees (48.7%) (see Table 1). The second part assesses the importance that respondents give to attending events to improve their mental health and feelings of mindfulness. It also analyses how these feelings and the participation in the event can generate psychological empowerment.

#### 4.2 Measures

The measures used in this study were based on previously validated measurement scales. Mindfulness – attention to one’s feelings was evaluated with three items adapted from Baer *et al.* (2004) and Van De Veer *et al.* (2015). The participation in events was evaluated with five items inspired by Boer *et al.* (2012), and psychological empowerment was evaluated with nine items adapted from Cutright and Samper (2014).

### 5. Data analysis and results

We conducted a structural equation model (SEM) using SPSS AMOS 26 to assess the interrelationships between the constructs (Figure 1).

A confirmatory factor analysis of the measurement model, with a maximum likelihood estimation method, was conducted to assess the adequacy of the psychometric properties of the measures. The measurement model fits data well ( $\chi^2 = 240.17$ ,  $df = 114$ , incremental fit index (IFI) = 0.93, Tucker–Lewis index (TLI) = 0.915, comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.93 and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.07), and factor loadings for all items

Variable	Freq. (%)	Variable	Freq. (%)
<i>Gender</i>		<i>Civil Status</i>	
Male	36.2	Single	75.9
Female	63.8	Married	19.1
		Divorced	4.5
		Widowed	0.5
<i>Age</i>		<i>Professional Status</i>	
18–25	49.2	Student	33.2
26–40	31.5	Employee	48.7
>40	19.3	Self-employed	13.1
		Unemployed	4.5
		Domestic worker	0.5
<i>Education</i>			
Up to high school	25.6		
Secondary diploma	49.8		
Undergraduate degree	24.6		
<i>Total = 199</i>			

Source(s): Author’s own elaboration

**Table 1.**  
Sample characteristics

were above the threshold value of 0.5 (Hair *et al.*, 2010). The normality was assessed based on the absolute value of the skewness and kurtosis. Normality is achieved since the absolute values of the skewness and kurtosis of the items are around  $\pm 2$ , showing a reasonably normal distribution (Kline, 2011). Then, construct validity and reliability were established by Cronbach's alpha coefficients, composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) values (Table 2). Cronbach's alpha ( $>0.70$  Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994), CR ( $>0.60$  Bagozzi and Yi, 1988) and AVE ( $>0.50$  Fornell and Larcker, 1981) are all above the recommended threshold values. To avoid common method bias some procedures were considered, such as the questions were written in order to avoid ambiguity (Tourangeau *et al.*, 2000), the items were randomized (MacKenzie *et al.*, 2011; Weijters *et al.*, 2009), and we ran a series of regression models on the selected constructs to calculate the variance inflation factor (VIF) (Kleinbaum *et al.*, 1988). The VIF values ranged from 1.02 to 1.20 suggesting that the common method bias can be considered unproblematic.

Lastly, the model also passed the test for the discriminant validity (Table 3), as the squared AVE values were larger than the correlations shared by the respective paired constructs (Fornell and Larcker, 1981).

### 5.1 Hypotheses testing

To test the hypotheses, we conducted a SEM to assess the relationships among the underlying constructs. The results suggest an acceptable model fit with  $\chi^2 = 282.101$ ,  $df = 115$ ,  $IFI = 0.91$ ,  $TLI = 0.89$ ,  $CFI = 0.91$  and  $RMSEA = 0.08$ . As can be seen in Figure 2, mindfulness (attention to one's feelings) has a significant and positive influence on outdoor lifestyle ( $\beta = 0.24$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), supporting Hypothesis 1 and the outdoor lifestyle has a significant and positive influence on individual's psychological empowerment ( $\beta = 0.24$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), supporting Hypothesis 2. This study shows that the constructs explain 2.8% of the variance in outdoor lifestyle and 7.7% of the variance in individuals' psychological empowerment.

Hypothesis 3 stated that the importance of participating in events for an individual's SWB/mental health moderates the relationship between mindfulness – attention to one's feelings and a person's participation in the event. Moderation occurs when the relationship between variables depends on a third variable, known as a moderator (Aiken and West, 1991). Moderators affect the strength and direction of the relationship between independent and dependent variables (Baron and Kenny, 1986). To handle multicollinearity issues with interaction terms, we used centered means (Aiken and West, 1991). The interaction term is the product of the two centered variables (mindfulness and events participation), resolving

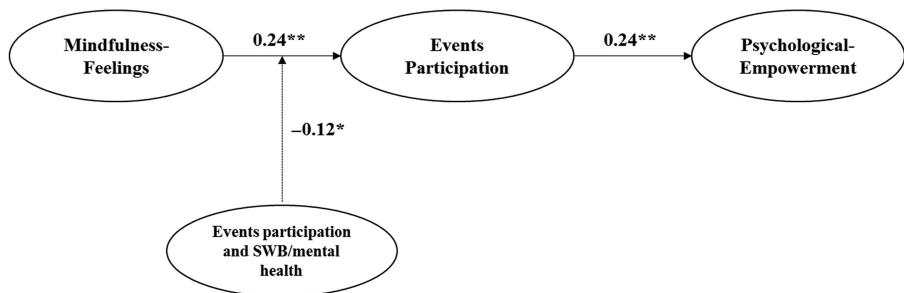


Figure 2.  
Conceptual model

Note(s): \* $p < 0.10$ ; \*\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.01$

Source(s): Author's own elaboration

Constructs/Items	Loadings	Indicator mean	Cronbach's alpha	CR (AVE)	Influence of mindfulness-feelings
<i>Mindfulness (Attention to one's feelings)</i>					<b>181</b>
I intentionally stay aware of my feelings	0.94	4.29	0.79	0.80 (0.59)	
I pay attention to how my emotions affect my thoughts and behavior	0.76	4.24			
I notice when my moods begin to change	0.54	4.42			
<i>Events participation</i>					
I do miss attending events when I am away for a long time	0.77	4.19	0.86	0.87 (0.57)	
Participating in events reminds me of memories and experiences	0.74	4.45			
Participating in events is a way to be with my friends and relate to each other	0.68	4.47			
I am very keen to participate in events	0.79	3.49			
I cannot imagine living without participating in events	0.79	3.63			
<i>Psychological empowerment</i>					
I am often relaxed and in a good mood	0.55	4.22	0.91	0.91 (0.52)	
I enjoy my life	0.68	4.26			
Overall, I am satisfied with my life	0.78	4.06			
In general, I am confident	0.69	3.79			
I can respond to my needs	0.69	3.97			
I am physically and emotionally in good condition	0.76	3.60			
I am well prepared to deal with life and its difficulties	0.79	3.99			
A lot of what I do brings me joy	0.84	3.98			
I am a calm and balanced human being	0.66	3.82			

**Note(s):** Item wording and standardized factor loading, Cronbach's alpha, construct reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) from the confirmatory factor analysis  
**Source(s):** Author's own elaboration

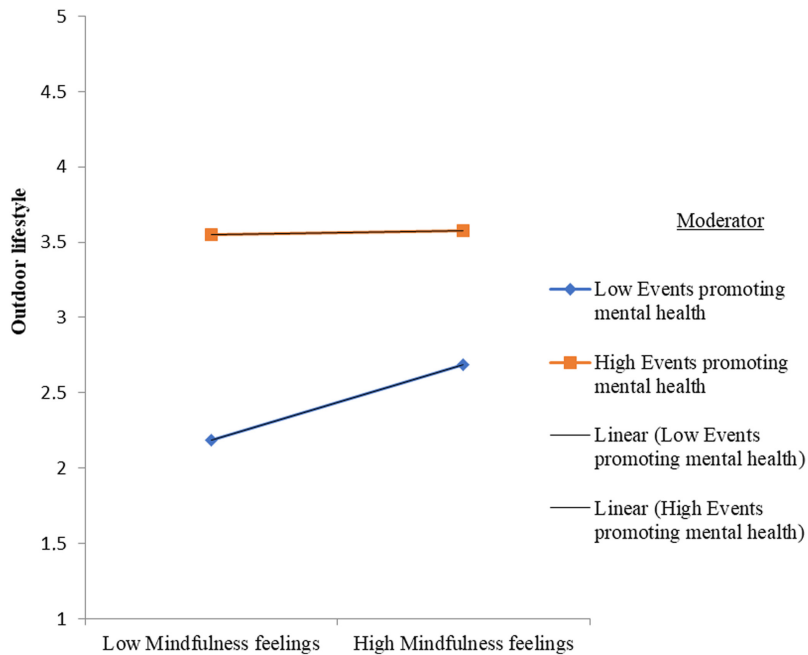
**Table 2.**  
Estimates of the measurement model parameters

Fornell-Larker criterion	1	2	3
1. Outdoor lifestyle	<i>0.755</i>		
2. Mindfulness-feelings	0.142	<i>0.766</i>	
3. Empowerment	0.268	0.507	<i>0.721</i>

**Note(s):** Diagonal elements in italic are the square root of AVE, which is the shared variance within a construct. Off-diagonal elements are the correlations between constructs. To have discriminant validity, diagonal values should be larger than off-diagonal values  
**Source(s):** Author's own elaboration

**Table 3.**  
Discriminant validity assessment

multicollinearity problems. SEMs offer an interesting framework to include interaction in a broader context, thus allowing them to be accurately tested. Moreover, SEM should be preferred when multiple indicators are involved (Cohen *et al.*, 2003; Fürst and Ghisletta, 2009). To further analyze the interaction, a simple slope test was performed (Aiken and West, 1991) by estimating the simple slope of high (one standard deviation above the mean) and low (one standard deviation below the mean) level of the moderator variable. Figure 3 shows the results where the participation in events with a focus on promoting the individual's SWB/



Source(s): Author's own elaboration

**Figure 3.** Moderating effect of participation in events with a focus on promoting the individual's SWB/ mental health on the relationship between mindfulness and outdoor lifestyle

mental health weakens the positive relationship between mindfulness (attention to one's feelings) and outdoor lifestyle ( $\beta = -0.12, p < 0.10$ ) supporting Hypothesis 3. A possible explanation for this result may be related to the time of the sample collection, i.e. in 2021, where restrictions regarding participation in outdoor events were very tight due to the COVID-19 pandemic crisis and, in some cases, even prohibitive.

The Hypothesis 4 suggests that event participation acts as a mediator in the relationship between mindfulness-feelings and psychological empowerment. This means that the effect of mindfulness-feelings on psychological empowerment is transmitted through the level of event participation. The bootstrapping method proposed by Hayes (2018) was employed to determine the statistical significance of the indirect effects of the mediation relationship. Acceptance of a mediation hypothesis is warranted when the empirical confidence interval of the indirect path does not encompass zero, as stated by Zhao *et al.* (2010). To calculate significance values and confidence intervals, we utilized the PROCESS macro developed by Preacher and Hayes (2008).

In Table 4, you can find the indirect effects, standard errors and bias-corrected confidence intervals at a 95% level obtained through bootstrapping. Notably, the confidence intervals of the indirect effects do not include zero, indicating their statistical significance. Event participation, therefore, mediates the relationship, between mindfulness-feelings and psychological empowerment, thus supporting H4.

## 6. Conclusion and discussion

### 6.1 Theoretical implications

This study is a response to Sigala's (2020) challenge which advocates the need to carry out more research on individual perceptions and experiences during the COVID-19 lockdown, as

well as the possible affectation of a mindfulness state on the way individuals act and behave proactively and reactively in the post-pandemic phase.

The results revealed a positive relationship between mindfulness – full attention to feelings – and participation in events, and between the later and psychological empowerment as an outcome. Conceptually, mindfulness was measured through a selected set of items related to the “observe” dimension of the mindfulness concept (first subscale of the KIMS by Baer *et al.*, 2004). The other two concepts were also evaluated using selected items from two validated scales – for the participation in events – items inspired by the scale of Boer *et al.* (2012), and for psychological empowerment – items from the Cutright and Samper (2014) scale.

The conceptual model and its four research hypotheses were thus confirmed with significant values through the results of the empirical study. It should be noted that the interpretation of the results that follows must be framed in the spirit of the COVID-19 lockdown, as the survey was disseminated during that period.

Within the scope of the first relationship tested (H1), it was concluded that there is a positive effect of attention to feelings regarding the participation in events, so this could mean that full attention to feelings, namely, the feeling of powerlessness facing the pandemic and the imposed confinement, as well as the feeling of inability to act/react with regard to events’ participation, may represent, on the one hand, an increased perception of the need to escape, as pointed out by Borges *et al.* (2022) and, on the other hand, the nurturing of anxieties regarding participation (or resumption of participation) in events.

In the proposed theoretical model, this relationship is moderated by the perception of the importance that participating in events has for SWB/mental health (H3), as illustrated by Jepson and Walters (2021). In this case, it is proven that moderation takes on a negative effect, meaning that the greater the degree of importance attributed to participating in events for SWB/mental health, the less strong is the relationship/influence of mindfulness – full attention to the feelings, about the yearnings of participation. In other words, greater awareness and conviction about the importance of participating in events for SWB/mental health weakens the interference of mindfulness with feelings regarding the desire to participate. As reviewed in the literature, this greater awareness and conviction is easily understood within the framework of the prevailing spirit during the lockdown period, since the social isolation to which individuals were subjected exacerbated the yearnings for escape, socialization and recreation (Jackson *et al.*, 2021; Lee and Park, 2021).

The second relationship tested (H2) suggests the positive influence that a person’s outdoor lifestyle – participation in events, has on individual psychological empowerment, which is in line with the position reviewed in the literature (Yolal *et al.*, 2016; Yang, 2008). In practice, it is understood from this positive influence the contribution that this participation has on the greater psychological capacity of functional balance and greater mastery of emotions and feelings and, as such, of greater control over life and, as far as possible, over one’s personal

Mediation effect	Indirect effect	Boot SE	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI	Conclusion
<i>Total</i>	0.4735	0.798	0.3160	0.06309	
Mindfulness-feelings → Event participation → Psychological empowerment	0.03446	0.0247	0.0016	0.0936	Full mediation

**Note(s):** SE = estimated standard error; LLCI = lower limit confidence interval; ULCI = upper limit confidence interval

**Source(s):** Author’s own elaboration

**Table 4.**  
Mediation effect

journey. Finally, the study revealed that event participation acts as a mediator in the relationship between mindfulness-feelings and psychological empowerment (H4), meaning that the effect of mindfulness-feelings on psychological empowerment is transmitted through the level of event participation, thus reinforcing Gaan's *et al.* (2023) perspective.

The above-mentioned conclusions demonstrate that the present study and its results contribute decisively to the literature by providing a new insight into the concepts and relationships explored, thus meeting the main objective of the research.

### 6.2 Practical implications

In addition to contributing to the theory with the presentation and validation of a new model that includes psychological elements in the context of participation in events and the expected consequences in terms of psychological empowerment, this study may also serve as a tool to support planning and management for various stakeholders in the events sector, namely, policymakers, organizers/promoters and marketers.

The model's conclusions reinforce the importance of a greater humanization of events through a more detailed understanding of the participants' psychological and emotional profile. The attributes of the event that are most relevant to the intensification of positive emotions should be reinforced both in terms of design and planning, as well as in the marketing communication of the events. This encourages a more emotionally active participation and a greater involvement in the event. As pointed out by Wood and Masterman (2007), the commitment to greater involvement, interaction and immersion of participants in events will provide a greater emotional effect capable of influencing their loyalty in particular.

On the other hand, the planning of events can be more oriented toward, and centered on, the individual, thus reinforcing his/her psychological experience of empowerment. Participation in events can therefore contribute to increasing the set of individual capacities and competences advocated by Scheyvens and van der Watt (2021), with an emphasis on critical awareness of oneself, self-esteem and self-efficacy. Consequently, events can not only provide entertainment but also play a more active and relevant role in improving general quality of life and well-being.

### 6.3 Limitations and new avenues for research

One of the limitations is related to the sample. Indeed as this study has a limited age distribution, findings should be interpreted within the context of this specific segment, which inhibits the generalizability of results.

Furthermore, we did not specify the type of event, which could also influence the outcome of the study. It is also important to highlight the phase of the pandemic when the questionnaire was issued, and, in future research, it would be appropriate, to test the model, in order to analyze its validity.

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