

Employees' Perceptions of Remote Work During the COVID-19 Pandemic: The Case of Kuwait

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Abstract:

Background: In both public and private organizations, the COVID-19 pandemic has created a new challenge for human resource managers, namely creating an optimal environment that allows employees to continue working towards achieving organizational objectives. Across the world, the pandemic is requiring firms to enable information workers to engage in remote work. This was also the case for the state of Kuwait. This research aims to examine the perceptions of employees towards remote work in Kuwait, incorporating an investigation of the differences due to age and gender as well as the significance of the social impact.

Materials and Methods: We first performed a review of the literature to assess the benefits, drawbacks, and current practices of remote work. Then, we performed qualitative and quantitative analyses, comprising a focus group and an online questionnaire, respectively. The questionnaire collected the opinions of employees in Kuwait, with valid 622 responses received. The data from the questionnaire were then subjected to statistical analysis.

Results: This study finds that both positive and neutral perceptions of remote work existed among the participants. Specifically, remote work was considered to increase employees' satisfaction, productivity, work efficiency, and interactions, while facilitating unbiased employer evaluation and helping to safeguard employees from COVID-19. Male respondents were found to hold slightly more positive perceptions than female respondents, although this was not statistically significant. Some slight differences were also found in terms of participants' ages.

Conclusion: This explanatory study explored employees' perceptions of remote work in Kuwait during the COVID-19 pandemic. While the participants expressed both positive and neutral perceptions, there were some social issues that arose. The circumstances brought about by the pandemic offer a unique opportunity to investigate the potential for a greater scope for remote work in Kuwait.

Key Word: Remote Working; Online Working; Telecommuting, Human Resources; Perceptions; COVID-19.

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I. Introduction

Erupting at the start of 2020, the outbreak of COVID-19 and its ensuing pandemic brought unprecedented changes on a worldwide scale. To fight this infectious disease, the WHO [1] recommended a set of health measures, including face coverings, sanitation, quarantines, and social distancing – the latter extended the work environment, leading to changes in how people work, such as remote work. Remote work, or telecommuting, refers to a working arrangement with considerable flexibility in that the employees do not need to be at their usual place of work and can work from anywhere, including their own homes [2]. While the concept existed prior to the pandemic, the abovementioned health measures led to a surge in online remote work in 2020/2021. As a result, human resource (HR) managers in both private and public organisations have had to take on the novel task of ensuring the optimal environment to allow employees to continue working while achieving organisational objectives. In particular, the swift transition required HR managers to train employees in record time to be able to effectively work online while keeping productivity at the same level [3]. Since then, remote work has gained popularity as it offers numerous benefits to both employees and employers, with many organisations having been forced to undergo a rapid shift from conventional face-to-face work to a fully online remote workforce.

Remote work has seen gradual development over the last two decades, with some organisations allowing employees to work from home as and when necessary, on a voluntary basis [4]. However, the pandemic accelerated the adoption of remote work within a short space of time. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [5] found in a survey that certain industries, especially knowledge-intensive ones

like the technology sector, are more amenable to remote work than industries reliant on workers' physical presence. Nonetheless, the lockdowns enforced as part of COVID-19 health measures caused societies globally to undergo large-scale changes. Organisations and their employees have thus had to function despite physical separation, facilitated by certain technological as well as legal and digital security conditions. In the long term, the popularity of remote work will depend on how organisations can benefit from it, including the curtailment of employees' commuting times, advantages in recruiting and retaining talent, and enhanced productivity [6]. The potential for a large-scale shift in business practices is affecting organisations across the board, whether they previously implemented remote working practices [5].

The propensity for remote work is likely to be affected by several variables, including gender and culture [7]. Indeed, the literature has found that both age and gender influence employees' perceptions of using technology at work [8], and studies have revealed differences in how male and female employees use technology across various cross-cultural and national contexts [9, 10]. However, the effects of individual characteristics, including gender and age, on employees' perception of remote work in the context of Kuwait have not yet been examined. Such an insight would inform the development of enhanced strategies and the implementation of systems that could shape improved working conditions and HR practices. While the previous research has found that the usage of and attitude towards remote work tends to be influenced by gender, cultural variables could to some extent have more explanatory power in certain contexts. Hence, this paper aims to capture the perceptions of employees towards remote work in Kuwait, incorporating the gender differences and social factors, aiming for the improved integration of remote work in business practices.

The contributions of this study will add to the literature on remote work. Despite the mandatory nature of remote work in Kuwait during the pandemic, how COVID-19 influenced employees' job satisfaction after they had left the traditional office space has thus far remained unexplored. Considering this, the current work seeks to examine employees' perceptions of remote working during the pandemic. This study is the first of its kind in the context of Kuwait, with no similar investigation having been performed at the time of writing. Two research approaches are used: quantitative research, via an online questionnaire survey, and qualitative research, through a focus group. The study findings should offer valuable insights for organisations that are looking to offer their employees flexible work on a permanent basis, i.e., beyond the pandemic lockdowns. The study's objectives are examining which factors influenced the swift adoption of remote work during the crisis and identifying significant differences between employees based on their attributes. It also aims to shed light on the opportunities and challenges offered by the incorporation of flexible work practices such as remote work. Hence, this research formulates the following research questions:

1. What are participants' perceptions of remote work?
2. Does participants' gender influence their perceptions of remote work?
3. Does participants' age influence their perceptions of remote work?

This paper is organized as follows. After the introduction to the topic in Section 1, Section 2 performs the literature review. Section 3 outlines the methodology, including the case study of employees' perceptions of remote work in Kuwait. Section 4 presents the results, and Section 5 gives the discussion. Finally, Section 6 draws the conclusions and provides avenues for future research.

II. Literature Review

When organizations implement remote work, their employees perform their duties from a location that isn't their employer's office [6]. The term also refers to unconventional work environments that have technical connections in places that allow employees to do their normal tasks outside of the traditional office [11]. Substantial previous research in several fields has explored remote work and its practices [12]. For example, a study investigated virtual teams' network structure and how the positions of individuals within the networks of virtual team's influence performance [13]. The conditions instigated by the COVID-19 pandemic brought a fresh wave of academic and practical interest in the strategies of remote work. Findings from survey data have shown that the lockdowns significantly shaped collaboration among employees in information firms as they were less able to attend meetings [14], used email more than in-person communication [14], worked more with their close associates than those with whom they had weak ties [15], and showed siloed and unstable communication patterns [16]. It should be noted, however, that these studies were non-causal in nature, as is the case with a broad swathe of previous remote work research [12]. Hence, they were not suitable for teasing the effects of remote work from the confounding factors brought about by the pandemic, including disrupted focus incurred by COVID-19-related anxiety or the burden of caregiving placed on employees in their home environment.

The study of [4] explored remote working experiences among employees in the United States and Taiwan to elucidate the linkages between proactive coping, future time orientation, and perceived work productivity. Similarly, [17], based on an online survey of 522 employees working remotely due to the pandemic, revealed a relationship between the characteristics of virtual work and employees' wellbeing and

performance, mediated by the experienced challenges. They found a positive correlation between social support and reduced challenges in remote work and a negative correlation between job autonomy and loneliness. Furthermore, higher work-home interference was found to be caused by the presence of a high workload and monitoring, with the workload being further related to reduced employee procrastination. These relationships were significantly moderated by self-discipline. Meanwhile, [18] found that prior to the pandemic, only about a quarter of US employees worked remotely; during the pandemic, this rose to one-third [19]. Finally, research performed before COVID-19 revealed that remote work positively influences job satisfaction [11]. Yet how these relationships have been changed by the circumstances brought about by the pandemic remain unknown.

What is currently known about remote work bases almost entirely on findings from contexts in which remote work was not mandatory but rather an infrequent exception considered by some employees of an organization. As [20] note, significant differences are likely to exist between individuals who undertake remote work on a large scale and those who do so occasionally, with substantial effects on the outcomes. Moreover, as remote work was previously voluntary to a great extent, previous studies on remote work may have been subject to selection bias [21]. Hence, the benefits linked to remote work identified in previous research may be vastly more applicable to employees interested in remote work, or those with the ability to do their tasks remotely under any conditions [22].

The survey by [3] identified some of the challenges and opportunities that remote work offers. At the onset of the pandemic, employees tended to struggle with new online tools and experienced difficulties in arranging their work tasks around family responsibilities and daily routines. The authors did, however, find that the respondents were able to adjust quite quickly, gathering the requisite knowledge and experience to use online collaboration tools such as video conferencing applications. They also highlighted the benefits of removing the need to waste time commuting, while citing certain disadvantages, including the absence of face-to-face meetings as well as informal and unscheduled discussions with colleagues. Furthermore, [23], who explored the lockdown's implications for digital work tools, showed that it was a facilitator for remote work while also significantly affecting individuals' work and daily lives. At the same time, the author revealed that employees also experienced difficulties, for example due to time constraints and their personal responsibilities, e.g., childcare, and increased demand on shared home computer facilities and internet usage as other family members were in the same situation. Finally, [14] noted that while the pandemic has had a positive influence on working hour flexibility, and it has adversely affected daily patterns of work.

The Advantages and Disadvantages of Remote Work

Both employees and employers can benefit from remote work. [2] stated that employees working remotely tend to have an improved work-life balance, lower commutes, and enhanced career opportunities. Meanwhile, the benefits to the organization encompass greater employee productivity, satisfaction, and retention as well as reduced expenditure on physical resources. Organizations and their employees have a range of choices regarding the nature of such flexible work arrangements, e.g., full, or part-time and permanent or temporary [2]. [6] points out that both employees and their organizations are likely to prefer remote work due to its distinct benefits, such as reduced commutes, improved continuity for the business, cost-savings for office space, and advantages in recruiting and retaining talent. However, remote work severely curtails face-to-face communication, and as [24] showed, employees do not fully replace their office-based interactions with colleagues with video or phone calls. Their research demonstrated that when an organization moves to wide-scale remote work, there is a reduction in observed synchronous communication, e.g., video conferences and scheduled meetings and audio/video calls. Nonetheless, [11] assert that remote work offers the benefits of enhanced productivity thanks to reduced distraction, increased morale among employees, and greater employee autonomy. Overall, however, remote work has not come as far as predicted at its inception 50 years ago [25].

In relation to the above, [24] revealed that employees working remotely tend to communicate more through asynchronous media, such as emails and instant messaging. Several empirical studies as well as media richness theory and media synchronicity theory indicate that this form of communication is likely to introduce difficulties as complex meanings are lost [24]. Meanwhile, [26] state that remote work during the pandemic can be linked to a reduction in employees' self-reported productivity. A report by [5] also found that employees working remotely during the crisis likely have little childcare support and experience both social isolation and a disrupted work-life balance, leading to reduced work productivity throughout the organizational levels. In addition, employees have been forced to become more self-reliant in tackling these challenges and maintaining their performance at work. For instance, they must adopt new ways to communicate with customers while managing their home-related distractions to remain productive [5]. As a result, it is likely that employees' different attributes may influence them in dealing with uncertainty and changes to their environment, leading to varying performing outcomes.

The study of [27] examined how the pandemic was affecting employees with flexible work arrangements in terms of their productivity and career outcomes. They hereby showed how the pandemic was

likely to affect employees' careers as well as advance the adoption of flexible employment practices. Similarly, [28] showed how lockdowns were causing office employees to find innovative ways to work remotely using digital work tools, e.g., video conferencing tools and collaboration platforms. A recent study also demonstrated that lockdowns reduce commutes and the pollution caused by commuter traffic, which is likely to have a significant positive effect on climate change [29]. [30] showed that employees have learned how to communicate and collaborate more flexibly thanks to the lockdowns, thereby introducing new and flexible management forms and ways to work independently. Numerous organizations are thus implementing new frameworks for organizational management based on online tools that grant employees remote access to the necessary resources. There is, however, insufficient empirical evidence on how the widespread adoption of remote work is affecting productivity. While some studies [31, 5] have shown reduced productivity, others discern productivity gains – at least in the short term. In light of this, additional research is warranted to allow definitive conclusions to be drawn. Particularly, the positive results found thus far are helping to challenge the widely held view that remote workers are less productive, thereby enhancing the attractiveness of remote work for HR managers.

Remote Work and Gender Differences

A crucial part of this research niche is clarifying whether remote work is more likely to widen or narrow the gender divide in organizations while shaking up the prevailing corporate culture. Specifically, we may ask the following questions: Are men or women more likely to adopt remote work? How will this affect their careers, compensation, and training opportunities, and in which direction will it take the gender pay gap? What does this imply for gender equality in the home? These issues were investigated by [32], who highlighted the importance of national and workplace-level policies as they can shape the organizational response to employee requests for greater flexibility in addition to tackling the gender-based inequality inherent to remote work performed at home. The authors found that enhancing gender equality improved employees' wellbeing and productivity. Surveying employees of Slovenian firms, [33] explored the gender differences among remotely working employees in terms of their work satisfaction, engagement, and efficiency during the pandemic. They underlined the need to examine the individual dimensions of satisfaction, engagement, and efficiency through the perspective of gender differences, revealing significant differences between male and female employees. Concluding, they recommended that organizations need help to reduce the pandemic's adverse impact on employees.

The pandemic has had a differential impact on men and women. First, the widespread closure of schools and childcare facilities meant that parents had to take on childcare and child supervision responsibilities, including home schooling. This burden, which was most frequently borne by women, was by itself difficult and was further compounded by the need to continue working remotely [34, 35]. In addition, the lack of domestic helpers due to the lockdowns increased the burden of housework [36], and, according to [37], while the pandemic increased men's willingness to take on household responsibilities, they did not do so to the same extent as women. Hence, during the lockdown, fathers are likely to have had the ability to focus more on their work tasks than mothers. Thus, compared to male employees, the performance and productivity of female employees are more likely to have been affected by the pandemic [37], triggering reduced work satisfaction, engagement, and efficiency.

III. Perceptions of Remote Work by Employees in Kuwait

The concept of remote work is relatively new in Kuwait because of the country's focus on a traditional work environment as well as the influence of gender and cultural issues and business types. Nevertheless, the pandemic, which has been faced by countries across the globe, also forced Kuwait to introduce a new dimension of remote work. In light of this, the current research aims to investigate which factors have been at play in this sudden and unprecedented shift to remote work against the background of the pandemic, hoping to shed light on the opportunities and challenges.

Research Instruments

This research used both quantitative and qualitative approaches via a survey and a focus group, respectively. The questionnaire statements, which were developed with both the survey and the focus group in mind, were based on the Goal Question Metric (GQM) approach, which is a well-founded top-down method for generating goal-oriented software metrics [38]. The quantitative questionnaire development and the qualitative focus group discussion were both coordinated by the researcher. The questionnaire was distributed online, with the questions and scales tailored to suit the study context of employees working in Kuwait. It comprised two parts. Part 1 gathered respondents' demographic data, such as their gender and age. Part 2 measured their perceptions of remote working using 8 questions and a five-point Likert scale for the responses (1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly Agree).

The focus group session was coordinated by the researcher, who began by outlining the study's objective for the 15 employees who had been selected to be the focus group participants. The participants were also informed of the importance of feedback in improving the questionnaire. Informed consent was obtained from the participants, and they were assured that their responses and personal information would be kept confidential and solely used for the study purpose. It should be noted that some of the participants were already familiar with each other, which had a seemingly positive effect on the group dynamics. The structure of the focus group discussion was based on the questionnaire statements, and the analysis of the feedback was performed employing Nyumba et al.'s [39] "three coding- framework"; this further informed the statements used in the final version of the questionnaire. The focus group discussion lasted around 45 minutes. Two weeks before the main survey, its feasibility, clarity, and validity were assessed using a pilot study surveying 20 employees from a variety of public and private organizations. Some changes were made to the questionnaire based on the results of the pilot study, whereby some questions were rephrased to enhance their clarity. Finally, the survey questionnaire was administered online, with the responses being collected over a seven-day period.

Statistical Tools

The results collected during the survey were analyzed using SPSS to yield the frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations (SD). Two statistical tests were also used, namely an independent-sample t-test and an analysis of variance (ANOVA). The former aimed to identify a statistically significant difference between the means for the independent variables of male and female respondents. The one-way ANOVA allowed the comparison of the three age groups by comparing their means for statistical significance. These statistical tests were appropriate as the data were parametric. In all cases, 0.05 was chosen to signify statistical significance. The statistical analysis permitted the objective assessment of any differences that emerged between the study variables.

Study Sample

The study participants were employees (workers) from various public and private institutions in Kuwait. The online questionnaire was randomly distributed to many employees in Kuwait via SurveyMonkey and 622 valid responses were received for the statistical analysis. Of the participants, 423 were female and 199 were male and they fell into 3 age groups: 414 participants were below 40 years old, 148 were 40 to 55 years old, and 60 participants were above 55 years old.

IV. Results

Participants' Demographic Data

Table (1) presents the participants' demographic data. Male and female participants are categorized into their age groups of "below 40 years", "40-55 years", and "above 55 years".

Table no 1: Participants' Gender and Age (Frequency)

Gender	Age (Number of Participants)			Total
	Less than 40	40-55	More than 55	
Male	146	45	8	199
Female	268	103	52	423
Total	414	148	60	622

Participants' Perceptions of Remote Working

Part 2 of the questionnaire measured the respondents' perceptions of remote work. Tables (2) and (3) outline their perceptions in relation to their gender and age, respectively. Based on the results in Table (2), there is no significant difference between the perceptions of male and female respondents concerning remote work according to the t-test. Regarding the mean values for the responses to questions 1 to 8, the participants, irrespective of their gender, hold positive perceptions of remote work in terms of its benefits and effectiveness.

Table no 2: Participants' Perception of Remote Working: (Gender Differences) - t-test

	Question	Gender	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)	Mean	SD	Sig.
Q1	Remote work improves both my	male	8.4%	9.2%	9.8%	3.2%	1.4%	3.63	1.109	.885

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	happiness and my job satisfaction	female	17.0%	20.8%	18.2%	9.6%	2.2%	3.60	1.106	
Q2	I feel that working remotely is more productive	male	9.4%	9.9%	8.0%	2.4%	2.2%	3.69	1.172	.773
		female	19.4%	22.2%	15.4%	7.6%	3.2%	3.69	1.138	
Q3	Remote work increases my interactions with other employees	male	12.6%	11.4%	6.0%	0.08%	1.2%	4.04	1.012	.581
		female	24.0%	27.0%	10.8%	4.4%	1.6%	3.99	.994	
Q4	I get fair evaluation by my employer when working remotely	male	9.8%	13.4%	6.0%	1.6%	1.2%	3.91	1.014	.168
		female	14.0%	30.6%	13.0%	8.0%	2.2%	3.68	1.031	
Q5	Working remotely is a good protection from Covid-19 virus	male	14.3%	11.4%	3.8%	0.06%	1.8%	4.13	1.068	.184
		female	26.8%	28.6%	6.6%	4.0%	1.4%	4.11	.954	
Q6	I have an incredibly fast dependable internet connection to allow me to work online efficiently	male	5.6%	6.0%	11.0%	4.4%	5.0%	3.09	1.286	.586
		female	9.2%	13.0%	21.2%	15.0%	9.4%	2.96	1.230	
Q7	I get distracted while working from home because of my family	male	2.4%	6.9%	11.4%	5.4%	6.0%	2.82	1.186	.701
		female	6.9%	12.6%	22.0%	17.4%	8.4%	2.90	1.170	
Q8	Remote work keeps me away from working with the opposite gender	male	4.2%	7.8%	10.0%	6.0%	3.6%	3.09	1.186	.890
		female	10.8%	19.4%	22.0%	11.2%	4.4%	3.31	1.121	

The responses to the first 6 questions showed that remote work increases employees' satisfaction, productivity, interactions, unbiased employer evaluation, safety against COVID-19, and work efficiency, respectively. The responses hereby revealed that the participants hold positive or neutral perceptions, as shown by the mean values. Moreover, male respondents had slightly more positive perceptions than female respondents in this regard.

Regarding the differences in perception in terms of participants' age, the one-way ANOVA for the results of questions 1 to 6, shown in Table (3), demonstrate no significant differences. Considering the mean values for the responses to questions 1 to 6, the conclusion may be drawn that employees, irrespective of age, hold positive or neutral perceptions of remote work and whether it increases employees' satisfaction, productivity, interactions, unbiased employer evaluation, safety against COVID-19, and work efficiency. However, for questions 7 and 8, which concerned gender and family issues, there were statistically significant differences between the three age groups ($p < 0.05$). Specifically, question 7 asked participants whether they were distracted from their work by family at home, with the participants expressing neutral perceptions. Question 8 asked the participants whether remote work kept them from working with the opposite gender and indicated that participants held slightly positive perceptions for the age groups "40-55 years" (mean = 3.53), and "above 55 years" (mean = 3.62). Meanwhile, participants from the age group "below 40 years" held a neutral perception (mean = 3.09).

Table no 3: Participants' Perception of M-learning: (Age Differences) – ANOVA test

	Questions	Age	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean	SD	Sig.
Q1	Remote work improves both my happiness and my job satisfaction	less than 40	18.0%	18.6%	20.2%	8.2%	2.2%	3.63	1.102	.404
		40-55	6.2%	7.6%	5.6%	2.6%	1.2%	3.65	1.144	
		more than 55	1.2%	3.8%	2.2%	2.0%	0.02%	3.40	1.035	
Q2	I feel that working remotely is more productive	less than 40	20.4%	20.8%	16.8%	5.8%	3.2%	3.74	1.124	.084
		40-55	7.1%	7.6%	6.6%	2.6%	1.4%	3.70	1.188	
		more than 55	1.4%	3.6%	2.0%	1.6%	0.08%	3.34	1.185	
Q3	Remote work increases my interactions with other employees	less than 40	26.8%	23.8%	12.0%	2.4%	1.8%	4.06	.992	.062
		40-55	8.4%	4.9%	3.4%	1.2%	0.04%	4.06	.935	

		more than 55	1.4%	24	1.4%	1.2%	0.06%	3.55	1.100	
Q4	I get fair evaluation by my employer when working remotely	less than 40	16.0%	29.9%	14.6%	5.0%	1.8%	3.79	.976	.071
		40-55	6.0%	10.6%	3.0%	2.6%	1.0%	3.78	1.088	
		more than 55	1.8%	3.6%	1.4%	2.0%	0.06%	3.43	1.211	
Q5	Working remotely is a good protection from Covid-19 virus	less than 40	29.2%	28.7%	7.8%	2.4%	1.4%	4.15	.968	.144
		40-55	9.8%	9.2%	1.8%	1.8%	0.06%	4.11	1.020	
		more than 55	2.2%	26	1.2%	0.0%	0.8%	3.85	1.063	
Q6	I have an incredibly fast dependable internet connection to allow me to work online efficiently	less than 40	10.6%	12.2%	23.4%	12.2	9.0%	3.04	1.237	.327
		40-55	2.4%	4.2%	6.8%	5.2%	4.0%	2.85	1.253	
		more than 55	1.4%	2.4%	1.8%	2.0%	1.4%	3.09	1.316	
Q7	I get distracted while working from home because of my family	less than 40	6.4%	12.6%	22.2%	15.4%	10.6%	2.83	1.185	.023
		40-55	1.4%	6.6%	8.6%	5.4%	3.2%	2.81	1.095	
		more than 55	2.0%	2.2%	2.6%	2.0%	0.06%	3.32	1.218	
Q8	Remote work keeps me away from working with the opposite gender	less than 40	7.4%	17.0%	23.2%	13.2%	6.4%	3.09	1.126	.000
		40-55	5.6%	6.4%	7.4%	2.4%	1.4%	3.53	1.145	
		more than 55	2.0%	3.8%	1.8%	1.6%	0.02%	3.62	1.074	

V. Discussions

Across the world, the COVID-19 pandemic has triggered a rapid transition towards remote work, especially for information workers; this has also been the case in Kuwait. This research aimed to explore employees' perceptions of remote work due to the pandemic in Kuwait, including an investigation into the differences emerging due to employees' gender and age as well as the social impact of remote work.

Regarding the first research question, "What are participants' perceptions of remote work?", the finding is that employees, irrespective of gender and age, have a slightly positive or neutral perception of remote work. The finding here that remote work increases employees' interactions and collaborations with colleagues (mean=3.99) contradicts that of [24], who showed that in-person communication is reduced through remote work as employees do not substitute their face-to-face exchanges with digital alternatives. In addition, this study finds that employees are more productive during remote work (mean=3.69); this is in line with [11], who discovered enhanced productivity and morale and reduced distractions among employees performing remote work. Nonetheless, [26] revealed a reduction in self-reported employee productivity, which may have been associated with the conditions of the pandemic. The extant empirical evidence on the impact of large-scale remote work on employee productivity is furthermore lacking, with some studies [31, 5] showing reduced productivity and other findings increases in the short term. This study also finds that the respondents experienced increased satisfaction during remote work (mean=3.63), consistent with [11], who revealed a positive relationship in this regard. Meanwhile, [2] asserts that employers who can enable their employees to work offsite can promote their work-life balance, benefitting the organization through enhanced employee satisfaction, productivity, and retention as well as cost savings due to the reduced expenditure on physical resources.

In relation to the second research question, "Does participants' gender influence their perceptions of remote work?", the study found no statistically significant differences in respondents' perceptions related to gender. As Table (2) shows, in response to question 7, "I am distracted by my family while working from home", both male and female respondents expressed a neutral perception; however, female respondents reported being slightly more distracted (mean=2.90) than the male respondents (Mean=2.82), although the difference was not statistically significant. It has been established that women tend to take on more responsibilities in the home due to longstanding gender inequalities, especially during the pandemic with the closure of schools and childcare facilities [34]. This circumstance gains even more prominence in the context of Kuwait [8]. Regarding question 8, "Remote work keeps me from working with people of the opposite gender", male respondents expressed a neutral perception (mean=3.09), while female respondents (mean=3.31) stated that female employees are more likely to work with other women than men. In this stream of research, Al-Kandari (2010), among others, examined why women use online platforms in the Arab GCC countries, and revealed that they offered a channel for self-expression. Specifically, women stated that these platforms gave them more scope to participate, such as by asking questions and discussing topics, in a way that was not possible in traditional male-dominated social settings. The reasons for such restricted conservative cultural environments have also been

explored in the research [40]. Baker et al. (2007) stated that Saudi Arabia is an example of a country that practices gender-based cultural traditions [41]. For example, the Saudi educational system has gender segregation due to cultural and religious norms, in contrast to the practices of western cultures. These differences inevitably have a significant impact on individuals' norms and attitudes, affecting their perceptions.

Moving on to the third research question, "Does participants' age influence their perceptions of remote work?", the statistical analysis of the responses to questions 1 to 6 in Table (3) revealed no significant differences related to participants' age. Meanwhile, questions 7 and 8, which elicited respondents' views on gender and family issues, demonstrated statistically significant differences between the three age groups ($p < 0.05$). Specifically, question 7 asked about participants being distracted from work in the home environment, with the participants expressing neutral perceptions. Question 8, asking whether remote work kept respondents from working with the opposite gender, found that participants held slightly positive perceptions if they came from the age groups of "40-55 years" (mean = 3.53) and "above 55 years" (mean = 3.62). Participants from the age group "below 40", on the other hand, expressed a neutral perception (mean = 3.09).

VI. Conclusion and Future Directions

Against the backdrop of a worldwide pandemic, HR managers in public and private organizations need to tackle the unique challenge of ensuring the optimal environment to enable employees to continue their jobs while achieving organizational objectives. The upending of the conventional office-based work environment has occurred worldwide, including in Kuwait. This study has aimed to explore the perceptions of employees in organizations in Kuwait of the advantages and disadvantages of remote working, incorporating the differences caused by gender and age as well as the social impact of flexible work during the pandemic.

This study, which took place during the pandemic, identified the opportunities and challenges inherent in remote work for employees and employers through qualitative and quantitative research. Hereby, a focus group was first held, after which an online questionnaire survey was used to gather information from 622 employees working in organizations in Kuwait. The findings from both the focus group and the questionnaire showed that the participants, irrespective of gender and age, held generally positive or neutral opinions about remote work during the pandemic. Specifically, they reported that remote work increases their satisfaction, productivity, and interactions with colleagues, enables unbiased employer evaluation, keeps them safe from COVID-19, and strengthens their work efficiency. Hereby, the male respondents were found to hold slightly positive perceptions than the female respondents in this regard.

The findings also demonstrated that the remote work during the pandemic brought several challenges, most of which were psychological in nature, such as feelings of loneliness and the absence of regular face-to-face interactions and informal meetings. Remote work was found to have some advantages, however, which mainly related to the lack of a commute and its associated costs. This contributed to productivity, yet it also adversely impacted the work-life balance. The respondents' family situations emerged as a factor influencing their capacity to work from home, especially considering schools and childcare facilities' closure. No statistically significant gender differences were observed in this regard. Another finding is that the national internet infrastructure is still in need of improvement as there is insufficient bandwidth to allow interrupted online video conferencing. Overall, the pandemic has offered a unique opportunity to explore the advantages and disadvantages of remote work and the potential for future enhancement.

Future studies might consider other social and cultural factors that are likely to affect employees' attitudes towards remote work and the systems that support it, thereby providing valuable guidance for organizations. An exploration of employees' other characteristics could also show to what extent technology improves remote work, enabling the achievement of greater acceptance, satisfaction, and engagement among employers and employees.

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