

Remote Working during COVID-19 Pandemic: Influence of Gender and Stress on Consumers' Shopping Motivations

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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic dramatically increased the number of professionals working remotely during "lockdowns." While remote working prevented some of the economic damage of the pandemic, the closure of schools created a challenge for working families. Women particularly felt this stress, in part when they supervised their children's access to online education at home (Dockterman, 2021). For teachers, the stress of remote working was compounded by the attempt of many schools to deliver education remotely. Teachers were asked to shift quickly to online education, in many cases without the necessary background or technology to make this shift entirely successful. Reports suggested that stress related to remote work was driving workers towards one of the few activities allowed during social isolation: online shopping, especially during work hours on workdays (Charlton & Ward, 2021). However, whether consumers of different genders and levels of stress due to working remotely have changed their shopping motivations is barely addressed.

Purpose

This study aims to examine how stress from remote working will influence people's shopping motivation. The sample used for the study is teachers, because they have almost universally utilized remote working for some portion of the pandemic. The following hypotheses were proposed: H1ab: Women will score higher on their levels of (a) general stress and (b) remote working stress. H2a-e: Women will score higher on shopping motivation subscales of gratification shopping, value shopping, social shopping, idea shopping, and adventure shopping. H3a-e: Participants with lower (vs higher) remote working stress will score lower on shopping motivation subscales of gratification shopping, value shopping, social shopping, idea shopping, and adventure shopping.

Methods

Data were collected nationwide in the US in early fall of 2021. Participants included teachers recruited through Amazon MTurk as well as secondary and university teachers drawn from organizational membership lists in the state of Texas. The questionnaire included questions about the number of courses taught and online teaching modalities they used since March 2020 and if their family members, friends, or themselves experienced serious Covid-19 illness. In addition, a 9-item scale of general psychological stress (Lemyre & Tessier, 2003) and a 5-item scale of remote work stress with measures related to work efficiency, balance of personal life, and technology skills adapted from Ma et al. (2021) were added. The 15-item scale of shopping motivation scale was drawn from Kim and Hong (2011) with measures of motivations related to shopping including gratification, obtaining value, socializing, research (idea) and adventure.

Results

After data cleaning, only teachers who had experienced remote working during the pandemic (n=280) were kept for data analysis, including 108 men and 172 women; M age=47.80; 21 African American, 14 Asian, 195 Caucasian, 33 Hispanic, and 17 other. Cronbach's alpha for each scale ranged from 0.755 to 0.924. Participants themselves (29), students (91), co-workers (91), extended family members (97), and others who they have close contact with (60) experienced serious Covid-19 illness. Participants had experience in using various online teaching modalities: mostly face-to-face with some

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online sessions (46), some face-to-face and some online sessions (64), entirely online with live sessions (140), and entirely online with no live sessions (75).

Based on previous reports of an increase in stress among women during the pandemic, a check of the significance of gender in levels of general psychological stress and remote working stress was conducted. The results showed that women reported significantly more general stress $M_{Men}=3.00; M_{Women}=3.36$ ($p < 0.05$) but did not report significantly different levels of remote working stress. Participants were divided into remote working stress groups based on their median remote working stress score ($n=135$ low, $n=145$ high). MANOVA was conducted with gender and remote working stress groups as independent variables; dependent variables were the subscales of shopping motivations. There were significant effects for gender and remote work stress groups ($p < 0.000$) on gratification shopping, value shopping, social shopping, idea shopping, and adventure shopping. ANOVA revealed that women scored significantly higher than men in gratification shopping $M_{Men}=2.56; M_{Women}=3.04$, value shopping $M_{Men}=3.22; M_{Women}=3.70$ ($p < 0.000$), social shopping $M_{Men}=2.39; M_{Women}=2.76$ and adventure shopping $M_{Men}=2.47; M_{Women}=2.81$ ($p < 0.05$) but were not significantly different in idea shopping $M_{Men}=2.21; M_{Women}=2.47$. Participants who experienced lower remote working stress scored significantly lower on gratification shopping $Low=2.55; High=3.13$, social shopping $Low=2.32; High=2.90$, idea shopping $Low=2.08; High=2.64$, adventure shopping $Low=2.41; High=2.92$ ($p < 0.000$), and value shopping $Low=3.38; High=3.64$ ($p < 0.05$). All hypotheses were supported except H1b and H2d.

Discussion

So many working adults were plunged into a new world of remote working, however, teachers faced a difficult battle, offering an essential service in remote form using technology with many pedagogical drawbacks. The ability to keep working, despite the pandemic, certainly preserved the financial stability of many teachers. However, the results show the added stress related to online or hybrid teaching may have also increased the pressure to consume as a stress reliever. Employers who adopt remote working with an expectation of increased productivity need to account for the additional stress created by remote working and offer wellness training that includes how to relieve the stress in financially responsible ways.

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