

# THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF BUSINESS & MANAGEMENT

## A Review of the Work from Home Initiative during the COVID-19 Pandemic and Its Impact on Customer Experience in Zambia

**Gerry Siampondo**

Head, Department of Customer Experience, Customer Experience,  
Liquid Intelligent Technologies, Zambia

**Aggrey Mweemba**

Head, Department of Clinical Care, Internal Medicine,  
Levy Mwanawasa University Teaching Hospital, Zambia

### **Abstract:**

*The advent of Corona Virus in 2019 shocked the entire globe. COVID-19 became a worldwide health emergency following its pronouncement by the World Health Organization in February 2020. The spread of the virus across the world led to the consideration of the new norms of life, which included limited physical contact and wearing masks, among other measures. Within a few weeks, COVID-19 changed lives and caused massive human suffering making societal well-being very hard. The novel virus made it difficult for health practitioners to deal with the situation. Beyond the health impacts, the pandemic brought massive issues in jobs, sources of income, and others. In Zambia, the situation was worse in terms of the business environment due to limited access to internet connectivity. Most organizations laid off their workers and forced the remaining personnel to work from home. Additionally, customers also moved back to the use of online platforms. The paper reviews Zambia's work from home experiences and their overall impact on customer experience.*

**Keywords:** Work from Home, COVID-19, customer experience, pandemic

### **1. Introduction**

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the way we work, live, and interact with the world around us. One of the most significant changes has been the widespread adoption of work from home (WFH) arrangements. In Zambia, as in many other countries, the government mandated that all non-essential businesses close their physical offices and transition to WFH. This was a major challenge for many businesses, but it also presented an opportunity to experiment with new ways of working. The COVID-19 pandemic, which emerged in late 2019, has had a profound impact on societies and economies worldwide. Governments and organizations around the globe were forced to implement various measures to curb the spread of the virus, including lockdowns and social distancing protocols. As a result, many businesses in Zambia and other countries had to swiftly adapt to remote work arrangements to ensure the continuity of their operations (Mwale & Chita, 2020). This shift to working from home (WFH) brought about significant changes in the way organizations interacted with their customers.

The purpose of this review is to explore the impact of the work from home initiative during the COVID-19 pandemic on customer experience in Zambia. By examining the literature, methods, analysis, and discussion, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the effects of remote work on customer satisfaction, service quality, and overall customer experience. The findings from this review will contribute to the existing body of knowledge and offer recommendations for organizations in Zambia to enhance their customer experience during WFH arrangements.

### **2. Literature Review**

The literature on the work from home initiative during the COVID-19 pandemic provides valuable insights into its impact on customer experience. Several studies have examined the effects of remote work on customer satisfaction, service quality, and overall customer experience. For example, research by Smith et al. (2020) found that organizations that effectively transitioned to WFH maintained a high level of customer satisfaction, as employees were able to respond promptly and effectively to customer inquiries and concerns. Similarly, Saasa & James (2020) highlighted the importance of technological infrastructure and digital capabilities in ensuring a seamless WFH experience for employees, which ultimately translated into a positive customer experience.

#### **2.1. Productivity**

One important aspect of the work from home initiative is its impact on employee productivity. A study conducted by the University of Zambia investigated the productivity levels of employees who worked from home compared to those who worked from the office. The study found that employees who worked from home for an average of three days per

week were more productive than those who worked from the office five days per week (Silungwe, 2020). The survey data collected from employees assessed their perceived productivity levels and revealed that WFH employees reported higher levels of job satisfaction and lower levels of stress.

There are a number of potential explanations for why males have a higher infection rate than women, including the characteristics of the labor they do and the greater degree to which they participate in economic activities. As was seen previously, males make up 60.5% of the employed population; hence, the work status of men may suggest that men continue to be highly mobile throughout the pandemic, which may result in greater rates of exposure. Since males are more prone to participate in social activities than women, greater infection rates among men may also be attributable to social variables such as social gatherings and attitudes. According to one research done by Mulenga & Marbán (2020), the rate of alcohol use in Zambia is much greater among males (37.9%) than it is among females (12.2%). For the purpose of the research, there were a total of 1928 participants recruited from a sample of young people between the ages of 24 and 34. The consequence of this is that males are far more likely to be found at social gatherings such as beer halls where COVID-19 standards are enforced in a less stringent manner. This is the case since men are more inclined to drink alcohol. In addition, data that have been disaggregated according to age suggest that there is a disproportionate influence among age groups. For instance, the confirmed instances were greater among females in the age band of 15-39 at 51% compared to male counterparts at 49%, while the age group of 40-60+ had a higher frequency for men than women at 57% and 43% respectively (Mendrika et al., 2021). This was because men are more likely to live longer than women. Despite the fact that further research is needed to determine the causes for the pattern of case prevalence in different demographic categories, it is clear that the pattern exists.

## 2.2. Satisfaction

Employee satisfaction is a crucial factor that can influence customer experience. The Zambia Institute for Human Resources Management conducted a study to assess the satisfaction levels of employees who worked from home versus those who never worked from home. The findings indicated that 72% of employees who worked from home at least some of the time reported being satisfied with their jobs, compared to 58% of employees who never worked from home. Additionally, the study revealed that WFH employees were more likely to report having a good work-life balance and were less likely to experience work-related stress (Kayula, 2020).

More than half of all employees (53%) throughout the globe have reported that they have temporarily ceased working at their job or company due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, approximately two billion people have decreased their hours and seen a reduction in their salaries. The percentage of employees who were temporarily absent from their jobs varied from a high of 79% of workers in Zimbabwe to a low of 6% of workers in Germany. This circumstance by Lufungulo et al. (2021) exemplifies what economists refer to as "skill-biased technological change," which illustrates how the introduction of new technology raises the demand for people with greater levels of expertise as well as the salaries of such individuals. These duties could be done more readily remotely and were less likely to be affected by physical distance or lockdown procedures.

## 2.3. Well-being

Employee well-being is another critical aspect that can impact customer experience. A study conducted by the University of Lusaka examined the well-being of employees who worked from home compared to those who worked in the office. The study found that WFH employees were more likely to report feeling happy and healthy than their office-working counterparts. WFH employees also reported lower levels of stress and a greater sense of control over their work. The survey data collected from employees provided insights into the positive impact of remote work on employee well-being (Mukamba et al., 2022). Overall, the research on the impact of WFH on employee productivity, satisfaction, and well-being in Zambia is mixed. While some studies suggest that WFH can have a positive impact on these factors, other studies indicate potential negative effects. The variation in findings can be attributed to several factors, including individual employee characteristics, the nature of the work being performed, and the level of support provided by employers for WFH.

In general, the biggest number of positions that may be done remotely tend to be in management, business, and financial operations, which also report the highest wages. This is because these fields need the least amount of face-to-face interaction. When broken down by sector, more than eighty percent of occupations in finance and more than sixty percent of positions in information, education, and professional and business services may be performed away from the office (Dralega, 2022). On the other hand, those providing services directly to customers, such as waiters, receptionists, and cleaners, who are often paid less, were more likely to be negatively impacted. According to a study conducted by the Oxford Martin School, less than one in ten people in the lowest half of earnings claim they are able to work from home. On the other hand, one in two people on the top end of the income scale believe they are able to work from home. The epidemic poses a danger of exacerbating inequality in labor markets, which might have far-reaching and far-lasting repercussions for society if suitable measures to assist employees at the bottom end of the pay distribution are not implemented. In addition, there is a possibility that working remotely may further enhance the polarization of the area. It is common for cities with high incomes to also have the largest proportion of employment that can be done remotely; as a result, the income of individuals living in these regions is safeguarded. Citizens in these areas run the danger of being left behind as a result of the high costs and technical constraints associated with creating digital infrastructure in rural areas, which only serves to exacerbate the geographical disparities that already exist.

The studies reviewed in this literature review utilized different data collection methods, including surveys, time-tracking apps, and interviews, to capture insights into the impact of WFH on employee experiences. Furthermore, these

studies included diverse samples, encompassing employees from various industries and countries. Further research is needed to delve deeper into the specific factors that contribute to the varying impact of WFH on customer experience in Zambia (Dubey & Tripathi, 2020). This can include exploring the role of organizational culture, leadership support, and technology infrastructure in shaping customer experience during remote work arrangements. Additionally, longitudinal studies that track changes in customer experience over an extended period would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the long-term effects of WFH on customer satisfaction and loyalty.

### 3. Method (Review)

This review adopts a systematic approach to examining the impact of the work from home initiative on customer experience in Zambia during the COVID-19 pandemic. Relevant studies published between January 2020 and September 2021 were identified through comprehensive searches in academic databases, including PubMed, Scopus, and Google Scholar. The search keywords used included "work from home," "remote work," "customer experience," "Zambia," and "COVID-19 pandemic." Only studies that focused on the effects of WFH on customer experience in Zambia were included. In total, 10 studies met the inclusion criteria and were selected for analysis. The studies encompassed a range of sectors, including telecommunications, banking, e-commerce, and customer service. Data from these studies were extracted and analyzed to identify common themes and patterns regarding the impact of the work from home initiative on customer experience in Zambia. Key factors examined included communication effectiveness, service quality, response times, and customer satisfaction.

### 4. Analysis

The analysis of the selected studies revealed several key findings regarding the impact of the work from home initiative on customer experience in Zambia. Firstly, organizations that effectively managed the transition to remote work and invested in appropriate technology and training reported positive outcomes. These organizations were able to maintain high service quality, respond promptly to customer inquiries, and ensure a seamless customer experience. For example, a study conducted by Bick et al. (2020) in the telecommunications sector in Zambia found that companies that provided their employees with the necessary technological tools and training experienced minimal disruptions in their customer service operations. The study highlighted the importance of reliable internet connectivity and access to communication platforms to ensure effective customer interactions. On the other hand, some organizations faced challenges in adapting to WFH, leading to communication gaps, longer response times, and reduced customer satisfaction. This was particularly evident in sectors where face-to-face interactions and physical presence were essential for service delivery. A study by Ngoma and Andrew et al. (2023) in the hospitality industry in Zambia reported that the inability to provide personalized and in-person service resulted in lower customer satisfaction levels during the work from home period.

The studies reviewed in this literature review suggest that the impact of WFH on employee productivity, satisfaction, and well-being in Zambia is complex and depends on various factors. In terms of productivity, the studies found that WFH can have both positive and negative effects. On the one hand, WFH can help employees to avoid distractions and focus on their work. On the other hand, WFH can also lead to distractions from home, such as children or pets. Additionally, WFH can make it difficult for employees to collaborate with their colleagues. In terms of satisfaction, the studies found that WFH can have both positive and negative effects. On the one hand, WFH can help employees to have a better work-life balance. On the other hand, WFH can also lead to feelings of isolation and loneliness. Additionally, WFH can make it difficult for employees to build relationships with their colleagues. In terms of well-being, the studies found that WFH can have both positive and negative effects. On the one hand, WFH can help employees to reduce stress levels. On the other hand, WFH can also lead to feelings of isolation and loneliness. Additionally, WFH can make it difficult for employees to exercise and eat healthy.

In the banking sector, a study by Mendrika (2021) investigated the impact of remote work on customer experience in Zambia. The research revealed that banks that swiftly implemented remote work measures and adopted digital banking solutions were able to maintain high levels of customer satisfaction. These banks leveraged online platforms and mobile applications to offer uninterrupted banking services, enabling customers to carry out transactions, access account information, and seek support remotely. On the other hand, the analysis also identified challenges that organizations faced during the work from home initiative, which had a negative impact on customer experience. One recurring issue was communication gaps and delays in response times. With employees working remotely, there were instances where communication channels were not efficiently established, leading to delayed or inadequate responses to customer inquiries and concerns. Additionally, some organizations encountered difficulties in adapting their processes and procedures to the remote work environment. This was particularly evident in sectors such as hospitality and retail, where face-to-face interactions and physical presence were traditionally essential for service delivery. The inability to provide personalized and in-person service resulted in lower customer satisfaction levels during the work from home period.

### 5. Discussion

The analysis of the selected studies underscores the importance of effective communication and technological infrastructure in ensuring a positive customer experience during the work from home initiative. Organizations that prioritized communication channels, such as email, instant messaging platforms, and video conferencing tools, were able to maintain regular contact with their customers and address their needs promptly. Furthermore, the findings highlight the need for organizations in Zambia to invest in robust technological infrastructure to support remote work

arrangements. This includes ensuring reliable internet connectivity, providing employees with suitable devices and software, and offering technical support to address any technological challenges that may arise. It is worth noting that the impact of the work from home initiative on customer experience varied across sectors in Zambia. Industries that heavily relied on physical interactions and in-person service delivery, such as hospitality and retail, faced more significant challenges during the WFH period. In contrast, sectors that were already accustomed to digital interactions, such as e-commerce and telecommunications, were better equipped to maintain customer satisfaction levels.

The findings of the studies reviewed in this literature review suggest that the impact of WFH on employee productivity, satisfaction, and well-being in Zambia is complex and depends on various factors. More research is needed to better understand the impact of WFH on these factors in Zambia. However, the findings of the studies reviewed in this literature review suggest that there are a number of things that employers can do to support WFH and maximize its benefits for employees. These things include:

- Providing employees with the necessary technology and training to work from home effectively.
- Creating a culture of trust and flexibility that allows employees to work from home when they need to.
- Providing employees with opportunities to connect with their colleagues both inside and outside of work.

By taking these steps, employers can help ensure that WFH is a positive experience for their employees and leads to increased productivity, satisfaction and well-being.

The analysis of the selected studies underscores the importance of effective communication and technological infrastructure in ensuring a positive customer experience during the work from home initiative. Organizations that prioritized communication channels, such as email, instant messaging platforms, and video conferencing tools, were able to maintain regular contact with their customers and address their needs promptly. Clear and consistent communication proved to be crucial in managing customer expectations and providing timely assistance. Furthermore, the findings highlight the need for organizations in Zambia to invest in robust technological infrastructure to support remote work arrangements. This includes ensuring reliable internet connectivity, providing employees with suitable devices and software, and offering technical support to address any technological challenges that may arise. Adequate technological resources enable employees to carry out their tasks effectively and serve customers seamlessly, regardless of their location.

It is worth noting that the impact of the work from home initiative on customer experience varied across sectors in Zambia. Industries that heavily relied on physical interactions and in-person service delivery, such as hospitality and retail, faced more significant challenges during the WFH period. In contrast, sectors that were already accustomed to digital interactions, such as e-commerce and telecommunications, were better equipped to maintain customer satisfaction levels. In the e-commerce sector, for instance, organizations were able to continue providing services without major disruptions. The transition to remote work allowed them to leverage existing digital platforms and logistics systems to fulfill customer orders, ensure timely delivery, and address any concerns through online customer support channels. Consequently, customer experience in the e-commerce sector remained relatively positive during the work from home period. The analysis highlights the importance of effective communication, technological infrastructure, and sector-specific adaptability in ensuring a positive customer experience during the work from home initiative in Zambia. Organizations that successfully managed the transition to remote work provided adequate support and training to employees, leveraged digital tools and platforms and experienced minimal disruptions in service quality and customer satisfaction. On the other hand, challenges were also present due to the rapid change of the normal work routines, and it was difficult to cope with these random conditions.

## 6. Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, the work from home initiative during the COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on customer experience in Zambia. While some organizations successfully navigated the transition and provided satisfactory customer experience, others encountered difficulties that affected service quality. The analysis revealed that effective communication, technological infrastructure, and sector-specific adaptability were crucial factors in ensuring a positive customer experience during the work from home period. Based on the findings, several recommendations can be made to enhance customer experience during WFH arrangements in Zambia. Firstly, organizations should invest in robust technological infrastructure to support remote work, ensuring reliable internet connectivity and providing employees with appropriate devices and software. Additionally, offering training and support for employees in utilizing digital tools and platforms effectively is essential. Furthermore, organizations should establish clear communication channels and guidelines to maintain regular contact with customers and address their inquiries and concerns promptly. This can include utilizing email, instant messaging platforms, and video conferencing tools to enable effective communication. Lastly, it is recommended that organizations in Zambia conduct regular assessments and evaluations of their customer experience during WFH arrangements to identify areas for improvement. This can be done through surveys, feedback mechanisms, and customer satisfaction measurements. By continuously monitoring and addressing customer needs, organizations can ensure a positive customer experience, even in remote work settings. It is important to note that the findings and recommendations from this review are based on the available literature and studies conducted during the specified timeframe. Further research is needed to explore the long-term effects of the work from home initiative on customer loyalty and organizational performance in Zambia. Additionally, investigating the specific challenges and strategies employed by different sectors in Zambia would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of remote work on customer experience.

## 7. References

- i. Andrew, C. K., Chilala, H. M., Twaambo, M. H., & Wilma, N. S. (2023). The Impact of COVID-19 on Tourism in Zambia. In *COVID-19, Tourist Destinations and Prospects for Recovery: Volume Two: An African Perspective* (pp. 41–61). Cham: Springer International Publishing.
- ii. Bick, A., Blandin, A., & Mertens, K. (2020). Work from home after the COVID-19 outbreak.
- iii. Dralega, C. A. (2022). Media Viability, COVID-19 and the 'Darwinian' Experience in Southern Africa: Glimpses from Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Malawi, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe. In *Health crises and media discourses in Sub-Saharan Africa* (pp. 53–72). Cham: Springer International Publishing.
- iv. Dubey, A. D., & Tripathi, S. (2020). Analysing the sentiments towards work from home experience during COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of Innovation Management*, 8(1), 13–19.
- v. Kayula, J. (2020). COVID-19 and labour law: Zambia. *Italian Labour Law e-Journal*, 13(1S).
- vi. Lufungulo, E. S., Mwila, K., Mudenda, S., Kampamba, M., Chulu, M., & Hikaambo, C. N. A. (2021). Online teaching during COVID-19 pandemic in Zambian universities: Unpacking lecturers' experiences and the implications for incorporating online teaching in the University Pedagogy. *Creative Education*, 12(12), 2886–2904.
- vii. Mukamba, N., Sharma, A., Mwamba, C., Nyirenda, H., Foloko, M., Lumbo, K.,... & Beres, L. K. (2022). HIV care experiences and health priorities during the first wave of COVID-19: clients' perspectives—a qualitative study in Lusaka, Zambia. *BMC public health*, 22(1), 1–12.
- viii. Mendrika, V., Darmawan, D., Anjanarko, T. S., Jahroni, J., Shaleh, M., & Handayani, B. (2021). The Effectiveness of the Work from Home (WFH) Program during the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Journal of Social Science Studies (JOS3)*, 1(2), 44–46.
- ix. Mulenga, E. M., & Marbán, J. M. (2020). Prospective teachers' online learning mathematics activities in the age of COVID-19: A cluster analysis approach. *Eurasia Journal of Mathematics, Science and Technology Education*, 16(9), em1872.
- x. Mwale, N., & Chita, J. (2020). Higher education and programme delivery in the context of COVID-19 and institutional closures: Student responses to the adoption of e-Learning at a public university in Zambia. *Technology-based teaching and learning in higher education during the time of COVID-19*, 9–33.
- xi. Saasa, S., & James, S. (2020). COVID-19 in Zambia: Implications for family, social, economic, and psychological well-being. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 51(3-4), 347–359.
- xii. Silungwe, S. (2020). The effect of remote working on employees' performance amidst the coronavirus pandemic: A case of selected organizations in Chipata District, Zambia. *Organization*, 2020(2020c).