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Exploring Millennial Mom Information Search Stages in the Birthplace Decision-Making Process: A Phenomenological Study

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Abstract

Birthplace is a vital decision phase in a woman's life. Deciding a birthplace involved a meticulous information search. Previously, health professionals had played a significant role in providing the required information and influencing the birthplace decision through the paternalistic approach. The existing research is not tailored to understand the birthplace decision process from consumers' perspectives. Most studies employed the health decision model and tailored it to medical outcomes. Incorporating and exploring the consumer EBM model delve in-depth into how millennial moms utilize information sources and their own experiences for their birthplace decision. This study's objective focused on exploring millennial moms lived experiences in information search stages in choosing their birthplace. This study employed qualitative descriptive phenomenology. Six participants were involved. The participants are selected based on the pre-determined selection criteria using maximum variation sampling techniques. Data are collected using semi-structured in-depth interviews and analyzed using Colaizzi's descriptive phenomenology analysis. The finding indicated four main themes: (i) Consumer perspective, (ii) internal information search, (iii) external information source, and (iv) Experience influence level of involvement of the information Search Stages. This study is beneficial to service providers, policymakers, marketers, and behaviorists to tailor their products, disseminate service information, and target their audience.

Keywords: Information Search, Consumer Decision-Making, Millennial Mom, Birthplace, Internet.

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Introduction

Information searches affect consumer behavior, including their purchases and decision-making. Consumers' purchasing decisions are complicated, as they are impacted by many factors and involve several stages, and numerous researchers have attempted to construct models that would describe the consumer decision-making process while considering the complexities involved (Akalamkam et al., 2017). For many years, prior scholars such as Peter and Olson (2008), Solomon (2007), Blackwell et al. (2001), and Walter and Blaise (1989) debated that consumer decision-making is a process that involves information processing and various decision models have been developed since then based on these arguments. The grand model of the EBM decision-making process (five stages model) is one of the most well-known and widely utilized in consumer decision-making. The decision stages

are (1) need recognition, (2) information search, (3) alternative evaluation, (4) purchase decision, and (5) post-purchase decision (Qazzaffi, 2019). Among the stages, scholars agreed that information search is one of the crucial phases in understanding consumer purchase decisions (Stankevich, 2017; Dudovskiy, 2013). It is acknowledged that before purchasing, customers will perform information searches to reduce the uncertainty and perceived risk associated with the purchase. Before making any purchasing decisions, they research through various (both online and offline) platforms (Jang et al., 2017).

Moreover, information search is essential to comprehend high-involvement product consumption, such as the purchase of service products. (i.e., healthcare, tourism, etc.). Tassiello and Tillotson (2020) emphasized and debated that the phases of information search are crucial for service consumers' purchase decisions, where information search stages aid consumers in examining and evaluating the options and alternatives they consider when making purchasing decisions. In matters pertaining to childbirth and the selection of birthplace, the information search stage is vital. This stage enables mothers to investigate pertinent information, which in turn assists mothers in deciding a birthplace. (Sanders, 2018). Mothers utilized information sought from various information channels to prepare themselves for what to expect throughout the childbearing and childbirth process (Kamali et al., 2018). Searching and accessing credible and reliable information on health-related consumption (i.e., particularly related to childbirth and birthplace decisions) is crucial because the information obtained influences the experience and the outcome (satisfied/dissatisfied) of childbirth (birthplace), respectively (Javanmardi et al., 2018).

Kamali et al. (2018) noted that tailoring information to mothers is crucial for supporting mothers in making decisions regarding childbirth and birthplace. To achieve the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of reducing maternal mortality by promoting safe and healthy childbirth, it is crucial to comprehend how millennial moms decide on a birthing location. Earlier studies, such as those conducted by Emami et al. (2010) and Beigi et al. (2009), discovered that providing adequate and appropriate health information can significantly reduce maternal mortality. Health information, which is easily accessible via internet platforms, has become a favorite source of information for women looking for other birth experiences, childbirth, and birthplace-related information, assisting them in making informed decisions. (Javanmardi et al., 2018).

Besides that, Vedeler et al. (2021) contended that the experience of giving birth is a significant event in a woman's life that has repercussions that last throughout a women's entire existence. The birthplace decision process is a complex and crucial aspect of childbirth (Javanmardi et al., 2018). It significantly impacts the psychological development and well-being of women (mothers) (Fenaroli et al., 2019; Karlstrom et al., 2015; Simkin, 1991). It has been studied worldwide, and various facets and findings have been reported (Seijmonsbergen-Schermer et al., 2020). Various researchers in Malaysia (i.e., Ismail et al., 2021; Ahmad et al., 2019; Norhayati et al., 2017) have conducted childbirth studies. Still, relatively few (i.e., Ismail et al., 2022) have looked into birthplace, and hardly any research has been done to comprehend and explore the birthplace decision-making process, particularly focusing on the millennial generation cohort in Malaysia.

Arguably, research on birthplace and childbirth has been extensively investigated through medical and organizational practitioner lenses rather than the consumer perspective. Scholars such as Temkina (2019) and Temkina & Rivkin-Fish (2021) argued that mothers nowadays, particularly millennial moms demand to be treated as consumers rather than patients when receiving maternity services (birthplace). Temkina (2019) debated that childbirth and birthplace are not car rental services, and women demanded active participation and acted as informed consumers. With the rise of consumerism, digital internet platforms, and consumer-centric approaches in healthcare services, health scholars attempted to include the patient as part of the decision process. For that reason, health scholars have applied a patient-centric approach (i.e., shared and informed decision-making) to engage the patient with childbirth and birthplace decisions accordingly. However, it was discovered that despite the mutual engagement and information access entrusted in the shared and informed decision-making decision model, women stated that their preferences and decisions were based on the advice of health experts, where women reportedly felt excluded and lacked autonomy in childbirth and place of birth decisions. (Phill & Kelly, 2019).

Additionally, the changing landscape of healthcare services towards a patient-centric approach is also empowered by the ease of access to health information and content sharing by other users (i.e., user-generated-content) over the internet and social media platforms which the dearth of birthplace information and experience sharing is almost instantaneous (Sercekus et al., 2021; Hinton et al., 2018). Therefore, in making birthplace decisions, it is known that mothers are exposed to various information, which prepares them for maternal responsibilities and expectations during childbirth (Kamali et al., 2018). Nonetheless, boundless information sources have their takes. Too much and unlimited information can lead to errors in health-related decisions (Marewski & Gigerenzer, 2022), particularly in the birthplace decisions of millennial moms. Viral stories, trends, and misinformation circulated on the internet and social media possibly influences the millennial mom's decision-making process and swirls their birthplace decision, thereby creating complex expectations for childbirth and birthplace services (sanders, 2018).

Therefore, false and misleading health information (i.e., viral/bad reviews on childbirth in private/government hospitals) perpetuates severe and negative health consequences. (Li et al., 2016; Luce et al., 2016). It may also result in unsafe birthing choices, such as unassisted homebirth, which endangers the lives of mothers and infants. It was reported that the maternal mortality rate in Malaysia has increased over the past few years, from 21.1% in 2020 to 24.9% in 2021 and a skyrocketing 68.2% in 2022. (DOSM, 2022). On top of this, Ahmad Tajuddin et al. (2020) reported an increase in unassisted homebirth practices in Malaysia around the same time. According to the study by Ahmad Tajuddin et al. (2020), the growing number of unassisted homebirth in Malaysia is because women (mothers) opted for unassisted homebirth because they desire autonomy (control), less medical intervention, privacy, and a comfortable birthing environment. Consequently, one must recognize and interact with young (millennial) moms as consumers rather than patients. The birthplace decision process should be examined through the lens of consumer decision-making rather than the medical or health model or theory. To date, the EBM consumer decision model has the potential to aid in investigating how millennial moms approach their birthplace decision-making process.

All of and above, this study's objectives intended to explore the millennial moms' experiences in conducting the information search process in choosing their birthplace. In capturing and documenting the phenomenon investigated, the research context is directed to answer questions such as (i) how millennial moms visualize themselves when conducting birthplace decision-making information searches. (ii) what types of information (sources) do millennial moms utilize when choosing a birthplace? and (iii) how does experience affect millennial moms' search for birthplace information? This study provides in-depth insights into the information search processes of millennial mothers and how they utilize their previous birth experiences (information) for subsequent birthplace selection. The findings of this study will benefit service providers, policymakers, marketers, and behaviorists by enabling them to tailor their product offerings better, disseminate their service information, and capture their target segment. Understanding the information trends and flows of millennial moms could aid in lowering the maternal mortality rate and achieving the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of providing better quality healthcare.

Literature Review

The Millennials: Who are They?

Scholars used various terms interchangeably when discussing the millennial generation, including Generation (Gen Y), Nexters, Net Generation, Generation Next, and Nexus Generation (Ng et al., 2010; Shaw and Fairhurst, 2008). Researchers identify millennials as individuals born between 1980 and 2000 (Gurau, 2012; Young & Hinesly, 2012; Weingarten, 2009). The millennial generation has grown rapidly and now accounts for most of the market (Ewehard et al., 2019; Padveen, 2017; Devaney, 2015). With creative and unique purchase behavior, they are prevailing in the world's digital consumer market (Friederichsen, 2017). Millennials differ from previous generations in their consumption pattern because of their upbringing in the digital world (Hall et al., 2017). (Ralph, 2017). Millennials make up 23 percent of the global population, with Asia having the highest

proportion (24 percent) (MSCI, 2021), making them the largest consumer segment (Fromm, 2022). In Malaysia, according to the 2020 national census, millennials made up 11 million of the population, of which approximately 6 million were female millennials (DOSM, 2021). They contribute significantly to Malaysia's economy. They offer industry players, particularly in the healthcare industry, access to a substantial potential market and a lucrative market segment (Page et al., 2022).

Among the apparent characteristics of the millennial generation are they are assertive (Noor et al., 2020), valued-conscious/valued experiences (Chopra et al., 2021; Saura et al., 2019), heavy internet and social media user (Harun & Husin, 2019; Issa & Isais, 2016), attached to smartphone and devices (Chung & Al-Khaleed, 2021; Silvia, 2019), seek support and gratification from other on social networking sites (Flecha-Ortíz et al., 2019), knowledgeable (Noor et al., 2019) and, an active Participation/Involvement (Flecha-Ortíz et al., 2019). Researchers have concluded that the characteristics of the millennial generation are distinct from those of previous generations. Their upbringing in a digital and technologically advanced society has shaped their personalities to the point where they depend on digital communication platforms, and technology is an integral part of their lives.

The Internet, Social Networking Sites (SNS), and Millennial Consumption and Decision-Making

The advent of the internet and social media has brought about a new reality. Depending on the specifics of the circumstance and the nature of the phenomena, making decisions may be a breeze or an arduous process (Madara et al., 2018). Prior research has shown immense interest in the millennial generation as they mature and the surrounding environment (macroeconomic) changes and moves with them (Kurz et al., 2019). Millennial generations offered a sense of uniqueness regarding how they shop, communicate, act, and behave (Dash et al., 2021). The unique features thus shaped their decision process accordingly.

Millennials are the generation of customers who gravitate toward the latest technological platforms like the internet, social media, and mobile technology (Kim & Park, 2020). With the advent of internet social media, a sizable portion of the world's population has turned to this medium as their primary source of news and information, shaping their views, experiences, decisions, and beliefs on virtually every imaginable phenomenon (Miller et al., 2016). Globally, there are 5.48 billion (68.6%) internet users reported in 2022, with 4.74 billion (59.3%) active social media users, and the main reason for internet use is information search (58.4%), with the millennial generation encompassing the majority of internet users around the world (Kemp, 2022).

Moreover, in the Malaysian context, a Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) survey revealed that Malaysia had 88.7% of internet users in 2020, with millennials accounting for 67.1% of total users (MCMC, 2020). Malaysians are increasingly using the internet. According to Kemp (2022), Malaysia has 29.55 million internet users as of January 2022, with the millennial generation continuing to dominate the chart. Based on the most recent Meltwater 2022 market survey report, 37% of Malaysian internet users use social media platforms to gather information (research) before making a purchase decision (Amurthalingam, 2023). The internet and social media have a significant impact on millennial consumers. Several scholars have extensively researched how the internet and social networking sites (i.e., social media) influence millennial purchasing and decision behavior.

Pop et al. (2021) and Ana & Istudor (2019) discovered that user-generated content (UGC) influences the travel behavior and decisions of Millennials and that Millennials place the most trust in UGC sources during the consumer decision-making information search stage. Similarly, social media platforms such as Snap Chat are identified as interactive communication platforms that engage and influence millennials' decision-making via online content sharing by other social media users (Dones et al., 2018). In addition, the millennial consumer generation stated that the internet and user-generated content are essential information sources, especially for service product decisions. Jariangprasert et al. (2019) discovered that millennial consumers in Thailand relied heavily on online reviews and ratings on Facebook and Instagram when evaluating and choosing restaurants. Another

study by Muslim et al. (2020) similarly reported that millennials in Malaysia used the internet and social media platform in selecting travel agencies for pilgrimage (umrah) booking.

Thus far, the millennial generation is a unique and challenging market segment for businesses due to their adaptability and the rapid evolution of technology. Businesses must adopt millennial personality traits, adapt to technological change, and implement the digital marketing 4.0 strategy to target millennials effectively (Kotler, 2016). Aside from this, it is essential to comprehend how millennials choose or decide upon particular products. Numerous studies have examined millennial characteristics and consumer behavior, but relatively few have examined the decision-making process, particularly millennial service product selection. Additionally, Voramontri and Klieb (2019) and Ewehard et al. (2019) were among the researchers who looked into how millennials make decisions. They incorporated the well-known consumer decision-making theory, namely the "consumer decision-making process," which was initially developed by Engel, Kollard, and Blackwell (EKB) and later revised into Engel, Blackwell, and Miniard Decision (EBM) Model.

Engel, Blackwell, and Miniard (EBM) Consumer Decision-Making Process Model and Information Search Stages

For many years, prior scholars such as Peter and Olson (2008), Solomon (2007), and Blackwell et al. (2001) debated that consumer decision-making is a process that involves information processing, and various decision models have been developed since then based on these arguments. The grand model of the EBM decision-making process is one of the most well-known and widely utilized decision models.

The initial model developed in 1968 was referred to as the Engel, Kollard, and Blackwell (EKB) model, which was later revised to the more comprehensive EBM model (Mehta et al., 2020). EKB model consisted of five consumer decision-making stages (figure 2.1): (1) need recognition, (2) Information search, (3) alternative evaluation, (4) purchase, and (5) Post-purchase evaluation/outcome (Poppelaars et al., 2020). According to Ashman et al. (2015), the EKB model significantly applies to comprehending consumer purchase decisions. The later revision of the EKB model, known as the EBM model (1995), extended the decision process by adding up two more stages (figure 2.2), consumption and divestment stages (Ewerhard et al., 2019). The EBM model consists of four elements which are (1) information input, (2) Information process, (3) decision process, and (4) variables that influence the decision process (Muhammad & Ghulam, 2019).

Furthermore, in the consumer decision-making process, information search stages are critical stages of the entire consumer decision-making process, where the decision and choice made are dependent on the information (i.e., cues, experience) acquired by the consumer on related product purchase consumption (Voramontri & Klieb, 2019). The information search stage is a phase in which consumers look and search for relevant and related information and knowledge about a particular product they intend to consume and purchase (Pop et al., 2021; Akalamkam & Mitra, 2018). The information search stages comprised internal and external sources (Qazzafi, 2019). The information might come from internal (memory) and external sources, and the external search will be executed if the internal information is insufficient and the information process lasts until adequate information about the problem is fully satisfied (Voramontri & Klieb, 2019). Moreover, Nash (2019) added that external sources are not limited to printed material, traditional media, the internet, and social media platforms have broadened the knowledge and information reach.

The internet and digital communication platforms have changed the landscape of consumer behavior and decision-making tremendously (Unni, 2020; Moorehouse et al., 2017). Before the advent of internet technology, prior scholars (i.e., Blackwell et al., 2006; Klein & Ford, 2003) stated that consumers relied on traditional media and sources of information to search for product information and evaluate product choices. However, the advent of internet technology and digital communication platforms have significantly changed consumer information search behavior and patterns, where information searched is tailored to consumer preferences (Akalamkam et al., 2017; Roscoe et al., 2016). Moreover, Unni (2020) discussed how external digital sources of information, such as internet digital communication platforms like consumer reviews and user-generated content

(UGC), play a significant role in consumer purchase decisions, especially in service product decision-making (Ismail et al., 2022; Nur'afifah et al., 2021).

Furthermore, numerous scholars have debated the significance and impact of external information searches on consumer decision-making. When the risk associated with a product purchase decision is high, reliance on external information sources increases, whereas when the risk is low, less extensive external searches are conducted (Tajdini, 2021). Additionally, Garcia-Melon et al. (2020), Xiang (2018), and Coromina & Camprube (2016) argued that the consumer-perceived risk is greater for unfamiliar service product purchases and that consumers engaged in intensive information search behavior. Additionally, a study by Cao et al. (2020) confirmed that inexperienced consumers are more receptive and engaged in information searches than experienced consumers. Hence, consumer engagement in information search stages in the consumer decision-making process might be varied according to the familiarity with product purchase and the perceived risk involved with the product purchase (Chocarro et al., 2021; Pentz et al., 2020). Health-related service products (e.g., birthplace) are associated with high-risk product consumption decisions. Before making decisions, it is necessary to conduct a thorough search for and acquire relevant information (Voramontri & Klieb, 2019). Especially regarding service product decisions such as birthplace, information searches are context-dependent, as birthplace preferences, practices, and outcomes differ among nations (Efendi et al., 2019; Mirghafourvand et al., 2019).

Overview of Birthplace Information and Decision-Making

Birthplace decision-making is complex and crucial to women's childbirth experiences (Grigg et al., 2015; Hendrix et al., 2009). In some cultures, it has significant socio-cultural implications (Kornelson, 2010; Kildea, 2006). Even though women experience the same phenomenon, they decide differently (Miller & Shriver, 2012). Childbirth and birthplace studies have garnered global interest, and pregnancy and childbirth information is actively sought worldwide (Zhu et al., 2019). Existing studies on birthplace and childbirth explored the decision-making centered on medical points of view on how the information flows and is the exchange between health professionals and patients (mothers). The prior studies discussed and investigated the evolution of medical (maternity services) decision-making from a paternalistic towards a patient-centered decision approach (Pomey et al., 2019). Eminent health researchers have long debated and discussed the information access mothers need in choosing childbirth and birthplace services. A decision model such as shared decision-making (SDM) and informed Decision making was among the common and widely applied in understanding childbirth and birthplace decision-making (i.e., George et al., 2022; López-Toribio et al., 2021; O'Brian et al., 2021).

Shared decision-making (SDM) and informed decision-making model focused on the information flow and participation between the patient (mothers) and health expert (i.e., doctor, midwives, etc.) in health-related (birthplace) decision-making (Deherder et al., 2022; Yuill et al., 2020). A shared decision-making model focuses on a process wherein healthcare professionals and patients take into account available information about a medical issue and collaborate to make a decision that takes the patient's preferences and values into account (López-Toribio et al., 2021; Villarme & Kelly, 2020). Meanwhile, Kloester et al. (2022) stated that for an informed decision-making model, the autonomy is on the hand of the patient (mother), or in essence, the mother (woman) itself is a decision-maker compared to SDM, the decision made through agreement or consent of both health experts and patient. The transition of childbirth and birthplace decision-making has evolved from paternalistic (doctors dominate the decision) into shared and informed decision-making. The information flow and participation evolved significantly, where the woman (mothers) have more autonomy and voice over the childbirth and birthplace decision, thanks to the evolution of digital information platforms (Sercekus et al., 2021).

The Internet and digital platforms have contributed in some way to the rise of consumerism and patient-centered care in health-related decision-making, especially the birthplace decision. Digital platforms, the internet, and social media enable moms to obtain and search for innumerable decision-making resources. Previous literature discovered that mothers utilized the internet and social media (UGC) as a valuable and trustworthy source of information that helped them make

childbirth and birthplace decisions (Sercekus et al., 2021; Hinton et al., 2018). The common types of information mothers seek on the digital platform are about fetus development, pregnancy complication, activity during pregnancy, and childbirth delivery (Javanmardi et al., 2018; Kamali et al., 2017). Also, mothers utilized social media platforms not only to look for information but also as a medium to obtain social support from other mothers on their childbirth and birthplace decision journeys (Price et al., 2018).

The existing literature acknowledges the importance of information sources and processes in decision-making in childbirth and birthplace. Nonetheless, the findings and discussion are rooted and heavily viewed from the patient's perspective, medical interaction, and relationship. A specific study that delved in-depth into the decision information processes emphasizing the consumer perspectives needs to be carried out to understand further the changing nature and landscape as well as preferences of the growing market of the digital generation (millennial mom) in deciding childbirth and birthplace decision-making consumption. This study addresses the fundamental structure and knowledge in exploring millennial moms' information process stages on choosing their birthplace.

Research Methodology

To achieve the objective of this study, a qualitative descriptive phenomenology research inquiry is applied. Eminent scholars such as Creswell (2012), Denzin & Lincoln (2011), and Corbin & Strauss (2007) consented that qualitative inquiry is the most effective method for studying the human experience of a specific phenomenon. Creswell (2012) suggested that the researcher should choose the paradigm best suited to comprehend the investigated phenomenon when designing the research methodology. A qualitative research paradigm investigates and comprehends participants' experiences, perspectives, and meanings regarding a particular phenomenon. (Hammarberg et al., 2016). This study examines the human experience of choosing a birthing location. The preliminary purpose is to explore and understand the in-depth meaning of the lived experience of millennial moms on how millennial moms execute information searches in selecting birthplace. Qualitative designs are valuable methods that facilitate the researcher to gauge an in-depth, rich description of the complexity of the phenomenon studied, tracking the unique or unexpected events and illuminating the participant experience and interpretation comprehensively (Merriam & Tisdale, 2015).

A phenomenological descriptive research approach in this study enables the researcher to reveal the fundamental structure of the phenomenon under investigation thoroughly (Morrow et al., 2015). In descriptive phenomenology, the researcher's objective is to obtain transcendental subjectivity (Lopez & Willis, 2004). It is described as a state in which the researcher's influence on the inquiry is continuously reviewed, and biases and presumptions are neutralized not to influence the subject being studied (Shorey & Ng, 2022). This study aimed to investigate the common experience of the millennial mom's information search stages in the decision-making process when choosing a birthplace. To illustrate the essence of the observed phenomenon in this study, millennial moms collectively understand that the birthplace decision-making process consists of choices between private or government hospital maternity services and that the birth experience varies individually.

Sampling and Data Collection

Purposive sampling was used to collect data for this study. More specifically, maximum variation sampling is applied to screen through and further identify suitable participants to understand the meaning of the millennial mom's information search in choosing birthplace. Purposive sampling was widely used in qualitative research inquiry, and it has been known as a technique to gather in-depth and rich information on a particular phenomenon (Palinkas et al., 2015). Maximum variation sampling, also known as heterogeneous sampling (Etikan et al., 2016), is constructed based on identifying crucial dimensions of variations in the participants that differ from each other (Benoot et al., 2016).

Maximum Variation focused on documenting the unique variations appearing in different conditions and situations that led to identifying a common pattern in the studied phenomenon (Palinkas et al., 2015). In this study, maximum variation sampling enables the researcher to capture the diversity of millennial moms' birthplace decision-making (information search) across different hospital settings and environments. Therefore, careful participants' criteria are outlined based on the pre-determined criteria to ensure that richness and in-depth data are gathered from the appropriate sample. The participants' criteria for this study are as follows:

| Participant Criterion | Descriptions |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Age | 22-35 Years (Millennial Age Cohort) |
| Marital Status | Married |
| Location | Greater Kuala Lumpur area (GKL) |
| Childbirth/No. of Children | Normal Vaginal Birth (Low-Risk)/ Multiparous Mom (More than one child) |
| Income Class | Middle-income |
| Birthplace Setting | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Given Birth at Government Hospital Only 2. Given Birth at Private Hospital Only 3. Given Birth at both government and Private Hospital |
| Birthplace Setting Experience | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Positive Birthplace Experience 2. Negative Birthplace Experience 3. Both Positive and Negative Birth Experiences |

Table 1: Participant Sample Criterion

The sample size of this study consisted of six experienced (multiparous) millennial moms. The number of participants is finalized after data saturation is achieved through multiple in-depth interview sessions with the participants. Moreover, members' checking techniques obtain data validation and trustworthiness. The analyzed data are returned to participants, where each participant validates the analyzed data and consents their approval that the findings reflect their experiences and the meaning of the studied phenomenon (Stahl & King, 2020). Additionally, the sample size of this study is adequate based on the argument of various eminent researchers, such as Creswell & Poth (2018) stated that 5-25 participants are ideal for phenomenological research. Morse (1994) agreed that six participants are sufficient for phenomenology. Meanwhile, Ellis (2016) agreed that 6-20 participants are considered adequate, and the researcher needs to consider practical issues such as money, time, and participant access when conducting phenomenological research.

Furthermore, the data collected are transcribed verbatim and analyzed using the seven steps of Colaizzi's descriptive phenomenological analysis. The data are scrutinized into relevant coding and themes. In addition, following the axiological stance of phenomenological research, pseudonyms were assigned to participants in this study to ensure confidentiality and privacy. Thereby assure that research ethics were appropriately applied throughout this study.

Results and Analysis

This section discussed the analysis and findings obtained from the study's participants. From Colaizzi's descriptive analysis, four main themes emerged. The themes are (i) consumer perspectives, (ii) internal information search (Memory/experiences), (iii) external information search (user-generated content (UGC), Word-of-mouth (WOM), electronic-word-of-mouth (EWOM), and Marketer-generated-content (MGC), and (iv) Involvement level and experiences.

Participants Profiles

| Participant | Age | No. of Children | Birthplace Setting (Hospital) | Birthplace Experiences |
|---------------|-----|-----------------|-------------------------------|---|
| Fifi | 29 | 2 | Government | Positive Birthplace Experience (both child deliveries) |
| Wawa | 29 | 2 | Government | Positive Birthplace Experience (both child deliveries) |
| Ena | 32 | 3 | Private | Positive Birthplace Experience (both child deliveries) |
| Maryam | 32 | 2 | Private | Positive Birthplace Experience (both child deliveries) |
| Fazura | 30 | 2 | Private & Government | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Negative birthplace experience for 1st child delivery (private) Positive birthplace experience for second child delivery (government hospital) |
| Lailer | 32 | 2 | Private & Government | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Traumatic birthplace experience for 1st child delivery (government) Positive birthplace experience for second child delivery (private hospital) |

Table 2: Participant Profile

The participants' diversity in birthplace settings and experiences is crucial in this study. It enables the researchers to identify and explore the common pattern of information search behavior and understand how participants utilized their birthplace and others' birthplace experiences in making birthplace decisions. The details of the findings (themes) are discussed as follows.

Themes (1): Consumer Perspectives

Participants were asked about how they perceived or positioned themselves when deciding a place to give birth (birthplace). All participants unanimously positioned and viewed themselves as consumers, not patients, when executing the decision-making process (information search). They also stated that childbirth (pregnancy) is not a disease; the decision process is unique and dissimilar to other product consumption decision processes. For instance:

(Ena)

“childbirth is not a disease; it is a gift.”

“.. I positioned myself as a consumer rather than a patient because we don't think about the process if we are sick. The reason why I said customer is because I think we go to this place to get the service right, and of course, I want to have the best service even though it is free because I chose a government hospital, but I still consider how the service is in term of the treatment. So, I positioned myself as a consumer. We still can decide on our own.”

(Lailer)

“.. it is a unique experience. The decision process is not the same at all and cannot be compared with the way you choose other services”.

“.. it is a totally different process because it involved a matter of lives.”

“.. at that time, of course, I positioned myself as a customer, not a patient, because if customers we can choose, but if as a patient, we don't have the option”.

“.. as a customer, we have the right to choose where we want to give birth. I have the freedom to choose”.

Information Search

As told by the participants, searching for birthplace information is the stage that requires more time and a high level of involvement throughout the entire birthplace decision-making process. Being part of the millennial generation, generally known as the Y generation, information is easily accessible and widely available regardless of the time and location. Participants revealed that their first child's information search process was much more intense and prolonged. It is because they have never experienced childbirth and birthplace selection before. Thus, they mainly relied on other birth experiences and crowdsourcing information.

Moreover, inexperience, lack of knowledge, and feeling of excitement at the same time thrive their effort to search for birthplace information actively. They look for childbirth and birthplace-related information daily whenever they have the time. Technology such as smartphones, tablets, and computers makes information conveniently accessible and is the most convenient way to search for information. Maryam said that technological advances such as smartphones and internet social media make her information search for her birthplace more effortless and convenient. She can access the info that she wants effortlessly anytime, anywhere, and everywhere:

“.. I use the phone so because while we are sleeping, I mean on the way to fall asleep, so just Google the info, but sometimes I research while at the office, right so while you have nothing to do, you just Google it”. (Maryam).

The information search process for birthplace decision-making is categorized into two different information sources. Participants' transcripts revealed they relied on internal and external information sources in their birthplace.

Theme 2: Internal Information Search

The internal information source is the information participants retrieved from their experiences and memory from previous birth. According to the participants, the internal information source is heavily referred to for subsequent childbirth. Prior childbirth experience equipped the mothers with the essential knowledge of how and what needs to be done to choose the birthplace. Participants shared that the birthplace selection depends on previous birth experience satisfaction for the subsequent birthplace decision. Wawa, who experienced both childbirths at the same government hospital, stated that her first childbirth experience was good and received exceptional service throughout the process. The decent experience of her first childbirth stored in her memory assists her second child's birthplace selection:

“.. when my first experience is ok, then I just proceed with my next baby at the same place as well”. (Wawa)

Furthermore, Internal information also reduces the time and effort spent on the birthplace decision-making process. The data stored as a memory acted as a cue that helped millennial moms lessen this stage's effort. The birthplace decision is made without taking a long time and meticulous consideration, like the previous first birthplace decision. Ena, as an example, said that her second and third birthplace decision was made effortlessly. She used her first pleasant birth experience as the benchmark for subsequent birthplace decisions:

(Ena)

“.. survey was done for the first child only, for second and third just straightaway with the same doctor at the same hospital, no info searching anymore”.

However, the effort and time spent on an information search may vary individually depending on the participants' outcomes and whether it was a pleasant experience. Take Laila's birthplace experience as an example. Laila said that her second child's birthplace information search is much more intense and time-consuming than her first child's birthplace decision because of the unpleasant first birth experience at a government hospital. She further mentioned that she couldn't

entirely rely on her previous birth experience for her second child's birthplace decision as the previous childbirth was not thoroughly deliberate:

(Laila)

".. for the second baby, the search is what people call more deliberate in terms of detail selection in choosing a hospital I intended to give birth to. So, I have listed several factors that I have taken into based on my first experience".

".. I don't really plan and think for my first child".

Ascribe to that, birthplace information for her second child was mainly obtained from the crowdsourcing platform. Hence, when asked about the birthplace setting she intended to visit, she spontaneously mentioned her brand cues were on hospital delivery alone. Moreover, cues in internal information sources consisted of mindset and brand cues on the birthplace option, which the participants may have known before experiencing the birthplace decision process itself. Participants were asked about their first-time birthplace decision-making experience. How do they know about birthplace settings available in the market other than by referring to or listening to others' experiences and suggestions? They responded that they knew about it all along. When talking about the place, it was in their mind to give birth automatically options between government or private hospital pop-ups in their head as the birthplace options. Government or private hospitals are pictured as the brand cues whenever the topic of birthplace is discussed. Additionally, when participants were asked about the birthplace option they intended to go to, Fifi responded that her preferences and mindset were on government hospital services. Yet, she does know about private hospital services, but they were not on her bucket list at that time:

(Fifi)

".. I've decided to give birth at a government hospital, and praise God, everything works out well. I never think about giving birth at a private hospital because the service provided at the government hospital is sufficient for me, and it is all okay."

The information search stages go along side by side with internal and external information sources. Participants in their interviews mentioned that crowdsourcing information such as social networking sites (SNS) and internet technology plays a robust information platform in influencing their birthplace decision making. Digitalized information platform brings huge differences in birthplace selection for millennial mom compared to the prior generations. Internet technology and social media help millennial moms obtain the timely and latest information regarding the current updates, trends, and practices of childbirth and birthplace worldwide.

Theme 3: External Information Source

External sources comprised information obtained from others' birth experiences, reviews and opinions, and suggestions from participants' social circles regarding childbirth and birthplace experience. The interview shows three types of information sources referred by the participant to obtain the information needed for birthplace decisions. The sources identified in this study are user-generated content (UGC), electronic/word of mouth (EWOM/WOM), and marketer-generated content (MGC). Participants revealed that mainstream external information sources were obtained from user-generated content (UGC) and word of mouth (WOM), while the participants least referred to MGC info sources.

Unlimited access provided via the world wide web brings unlimited information access to fingertips. The expansion of technological access has led to more comprehensive informal information connectivity for participants that helped them be involved in the decision-making process. Internet technology also enables the participants to make an informed decision, not just rely on the healthcare professional's paternalistic decision-making approach. Nowadays, consumers cannot be treated as empty vessels with internet technology. They have prepared themselves with substantial knowledge and information before consulting with the healthcare professional.

Participants explained that they used to equip themselves with passive details they had read beforehand and validated the information obtained.

(Fifi)

“.. I have done research before. Then I just go there. We research, we read, then we refer to what people call passive info. I mean, no response on it. So, I want to confirm everything about the information that I obtained. I asked the doctor about it. So, the doctor gives a response and everything, so there is two-way communication. So, we are satisfied with what we asked. We feel that we can ask for more. Final preparation, ready with the information before meeting the doctor”.

Furthermore, the most common tools for information search are via the Google search engine. Participants in this study mentioned that Google was a synonym for them when they talked about where to look for others' experiences and birthplace information virtually. For instance:

(Wawa)

“.. I will open Google, and I will straight away type others' birth experience at KPJ Kajang, something like that, and then I will see which one comes up first”.

(Maryam)

“.. definitely at the beginning to decide, I straightaway just Google. Usually I will Google, Google few hospitals like is said before AzZahra and KPJ”.

Internet searching is the new norm for millennial moms to further explore and understand others' birth experiences at a particular birthplace setting. They also explained what types of information they usually searched for and which sites they visited the most while surfing the internet for informal details. In addition, participants mentioned how they used to join social media virtual groups (i.e., Facebook page, etc.) to obtain insights and other's childbirth and birthplace experiences and information. The findings are as in Table 3.

Table 3: Millennial Mom Birthplace Types and Sources of Information

| No | Findings | Example Transcription |
|----|---|--|
| 1 | Internet Searches Sources: Blogs & Google | “.. I searched on the blog and Googled it, so I just looked at the comments. I mean, anyone experience that has given birth to their child at AP Hospital. So, from there, I can give my rating of 100%, or maybe 75%, stating that their experience is ok and the rest of the balance saying not ok maybe because of the service”. (Lailer) |
| 2 | Social Media Searches Joining a virtual group (Facebook Group) | “.. Facebook group to know about their experience, like theirs, like basically, they shared about pregnancy, what's need to care, something like that”. (Maryam) “.. I did join the group, Mommy group, or childbirth group. Many people gave their own reviews, saying that giving birth here is good. Lots of pros and cons were shared, and mostly they suggested that we give birth at a private hospital. All of them chose private but why them? They said that the services provided by the nurses and doctors there are better things like that compared to government hospitals”. (Fifi) |
| 3 | Types of Information Searched: I. Female Doctor Availability | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | <p>II. Doctor's background & Reputation</p> <p>III. Husband Presence During Labor</p> <p>IV. The Birthplace Cost/Fees</p> <p>V. Others' childbirth and birthplace experiences</p> | <p>I. “.. I google blog, a blog for those who have been there at AB Kajang, so based on experience, share on that blog. Some said actually there are lots of specialists at AB Kajang itself. Still, because I want a female doctor, they said the female doctor there is strict, but she gives a detailed check-up. That is what they shared, what service they get from there”. (Maryam)</p> <p>II. “.. I searched for the fact about the service. Is it true that the doctor's service is okay up to what I have been told by my friend, which is the service is good, and her explanation is okay. So, from that, I just Google Dr. Habibah and looked for other experiences with her, and mostly they said okay, and she is really good”. (Ena)</p> <p>III. “.. I really looked at it (husband's presence), in fact, it is the first thing I look for, and then I saw lots of people saying this, reviews are saying can, and some say cannot”. (Fifi)</p> <p>IV. “.. At that time, I have options at PSR hospital and AL Hospital, and then one more is AB, is it? I'm not sure if it is AB or not, but I think AB is listed as well. So, after I have looked at these three hospitals and listed out the hospital within KL radius, I look at the cost of it”. (Laila)</p> <p>V.</p> |
| 3 | <p>I. UGC and Social Media as a Credible Source of Information</p> <p>II. Whatsapp is a convenient EWOM information search and sharing platform</p> | <p>I. “.. for me, I trust the source. I trusted it because actually, what has been shared, the information given in social media is based on their individual experiences (Wawa)</p> <p>II. “.. with my close friends during my study time, so we rarely see each other, but we always WhatsApp, sharing info. Experience sharing obtained from other moms, I informed my WhatsApp group members, just like FB group for moms”. (Laila)</p> |

Apart from being a digital-savvy generation, millennial moms still comfortably relied on information sources they obtained from individually meeting with their close family members and friends. This type of external info source is valuable for participants, and the sharing session is much more detailed and intimate than social media and internet sources. Indeed, social media and the internet have eased their birthplace decision-making process. Still, the information process is much more thorough when paired with a physical sharing session to observe the expression and body language simultaneously. For example, information sharing between mother and daughter undoubtedly is the most memorable bonding session. Wawa said that she doesn't rely that much on social media or internet information sources because she prefers to converse with her mother:

“.. the most medium to gather information is through sharing with other moms because my mother gave birth at KPJ Kajang. So, like government hospitals, we already know what to expect right, basically through sharing moments, not that much for online searching”. (Wawa)

Apart from that, participants were concerned about the information they obtained. They mentioned how viral news, stories, and trends shared over social media regarding birthplace influenced and swayed their decided birthplace facility and settings.

(Wawa)

“.. Frankly, within the time one or two months before I delivered my first baby, at that moment, it was viral about a case that happened in AP Hospital regarding the nurses in the labor room and so forth, bad condition of the labor room. Definitely, at that time, I was already 50-50”.

Theme 4: Experience Influence Level of Involvement/Intensity of the information Search Stages.

The phenomenological method permits researchers to holistically investigate a phenomenon's underlying meanings and descriptions. This study revealed crucial aspects positivist researchers have not previously emphasized or examined. Experiences significantly influenced and altered the birthplace decision-making process of millennial moms, particularly during the information search stages. Participants reported that the information search process for their first child's birthplace was intense, thorough, and time-consuming. However, the information search process for subsequent child birthplace decisions is simple and sometimes non-existent. For instances:

(Ena)

“.. survey was done for the first child only, for second and third just straightaway with the same doctor at the same hospital, no info searching anymore”.

Nonetheless, the intensity and involvement of millennial moms in the information search stage of choosing their birthplace were also influenced by the outcome of previous first-child birthplace experiences. Due to her prior traumatic first child birthplace experiences in AP Government Hospitals, participants such as Lailer stated that her information search stages in the birthplace decision-making process for her second child were meticulously compared to her first child's birthplace decision.

“.. for the second baby, it is more meticulous regarding hospital selection and birthplace. I have listed several factors that I need to consider based on my first experience”.

(Lailer)

Research Limitations and Future Directions

This study was limited to the Greater Kuala Lumpur Area and focused on low-risk, normal vaginal childbirth delivery (GKL). This study does not examine the perspectives of millennial moms who gave birth using a different method (i.e., cesarean, forceps, etc.). Understanding how high-risk millennial moms with different types of childbirth delivery undertake the birthplace decision-making process will benefit many (including service providers, marketers, and policymakers) in the future direction of this research. Also, for more rich and in-depth insight and understanding of the birthplace decision-making process, future research should be carried out to explore the whole decision process stages to gain holistic information on the details process of birthplace selection. Apart from that, an extension study could be carried out in the future focusing on the generation following generation after the millennial (i.e., Generation Z) as they are maturing and dominating the market in a couple of years, taking over the consumer market and influences after the millennial generation.

Discussions

Millennial moms mentioned that their information sources might vary for several reasons and situations. They all mentioned that they relied entirely on external information cues for their first-time birthplace decision-making since they had never experienced it before. External information platforms such as others' birth experiences (i.e., family, friends, colleagues), the internet, and social media assisted and, to some extent, influenced their birthplace decision-making. Voramontri and Klieb (2019) found that internet social media significantly impacted individual decision-making and served as an essential information source for service product decision-making (Pop et al., 2022; Usui et al., 2018). This study revealed that participants utilized the internet as a primary source of information, particularly during the first childbirth decision-making process. Scholars in the health sciences supported the finding. Respondents (mothers) in their study mentioned the Internet (EWOM) as a vital information source that greatly influenced their birth-related decision-making (Sercekus et al., 2021; Tastekin and Kesim, 2021; Jacobs et al., 2019; Hinton et al., 2018).

Furthermore, millennial moms shared that external information sources from WOM and EWOM help them evaluate and scrutinize the information. Their family, friends, and colleagues' recommendations and experiences weighed their decision and helped them discard the unnecessary information. Family and friends' support and input are crucial for mothers during childbirth (Davis, 2019). Sanders and Crozier (2018) stated that moms are not empty vessels. They have equipped themselves with informal information from external sources that helped them sail smoothly during childbirth. Thus, millennial moms' decision-making process depends on their preferences and how they process the information they have at the end of the road. Additionally, the initial EBM model does not highlight the advent of social networking sites and internet technology as part of the decision process (information search stages) model; the phases are stagnant (rigid) and non-customizable according to specific circumstances and disregard the role of experiences in a decision process model (Bray, 2008; Erasmus et al., 2001). Nevertheless, recent research by Voramontri & Klieb (2019) discovered that the EBM model is still relevant and applicable to understanding the service decision-making process.

The implication of the Research

The research findings are valuable to the service provider and marketer in the sense of Understanding consumer behavior is crucial for businesses because it enables them to make more proficient product and service decisions. By comprehending why consumers purchase particular services and how they experience them, healthcare providers can better tailor their offerings to the wants and needs of their target market. Apart from that, this study is crucial in terms of expanding knowledge and extending the application of the consumer decision-making process (EBM Model) to comprehend the health (birthplace) decision process. In addition, understanding the information searches of millennial moms is crucial for service providers, marketers, and policymakers to ensure that they channel product information, brand awareness, marketing campaigns, and activities effectively, utilizing the marketing 4.0 revolution to effectively tap the lucrative and substantial market opportunity offered by millennial moms. Thus, detailed depictions of the meaning and experiences of how millennial moms conduct information searches on a place to give birth provide crucial knowledge that can be used to develop millennial consumer behavior typology thoroughly.

Conclusions

This study aimed to investigate the phenomenon of millennial moms' information search in consumer decision-making in depth. This study illustrates the significance and experiences of the decision-making process of millennial mothers through four major themes. In the context of the birthplace decision, a constructivist epistemological perspective is employed to comprehend the information search process fully. Numerous eminent academics have utilized the consumer decision-making process model in the past to anticipate and investigate tangible goods products. Still, service product consumption, particularly health-related decisions, is given little thought. In addition, this study found that millennial moms trust the internet and social media more than conventional media as their

primary sources of information. Furthermore, the millennial moms prior birth experience outcomes influenced the information search process stages for subsequent birthplace decisions. The degree to which millennial moms engage in extensive online information searches is conditional on specific circumstances and lived experiences.

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