



**PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY ON THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF
MILLENNIAL MOMS DECISION-MAKING PROCESS IN CHOOSING
BIRTHPLACE**

By

FARAH RAIHANA BINTI HAJI ISMAIL

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia,
in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

November 2022

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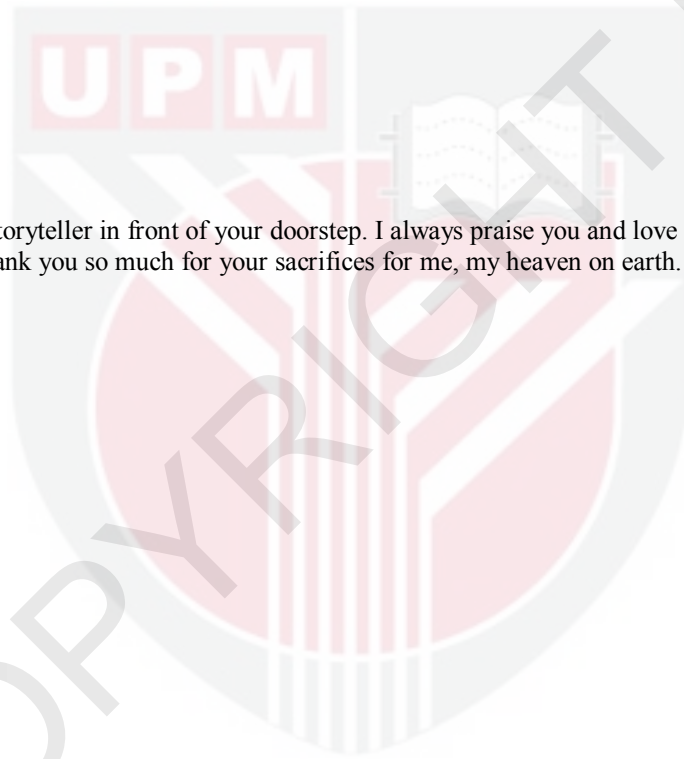


DEDICATION

***JUNDAIDAH HASIM
ISMAIL YUSOF
FARAH HAZWANI ISMAIL
KAMAL SYAHRIZAL ISMAIL
FARAH NUR AINA ISMAIL***

IN LOVING MEMORIES OF MY LATE SWEET GIRL NUR AMBI ZETTY

I am a storyteller in front of your doorstep. I always praise you and love you.
Thank you so much for your sacrifices for me, my heaven on earth.



Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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FARAH RAIHANA BINTI HAJI ISMAIL

November 2022

Chairman : Professor Amer Hamzah bin Jantan, PhD
School : Business and Economics

The decision of birthplace is one of the most important phases in a woman's life. It has a significant impact on women's psychological development and well-being. In Malaysia, millennial moms significantly contributed to the birth rate. Malaysia's vital statistics show the average age of the mother at first live birth in Malaysia was among the millennial mom generation. Millennial moms, who contributed to a sizable proportion of childbirth in Malaysia, exhibit distinct characteristics, shifting the demographic landscape, particularly in healthcare service decision-making. The birthplace decision-making process has evolved significantly due to technological advancements. As a digital-savvy generation, millennial moms rely mostly on digital communication platforms (i.e., SNS, Google) in making health-related (birthplace) decisions. In the era of digital evidence-informed healthcare, information is almost instantaneous. The digitalization communication platform has altered consumer decisions, preferences, and behavioral patterns, with millennial moms fixating on other moms' reviews and experiences to make birthplace consumption decisions. The online sharing of experiences and testimonials facilitates millennial moms to make more informed birthplace decisions. The rise of consumer-centric healthcare services saw millennial moms treated as consumers rather than patients, moving away from a paternalistic decision-making approach in choosing their birthplace.

However, scarce details are known on the details process of how millennial moms make the birthplace decision. Existing birthplace studies were evaluated from a medical and organizational perspective, omitting the consumer-centric approach as part of the decision-making process. Meanwhile, the prior consumer decision process model (i.e., Engel, Blakewell, and Miniard, EBM) does not consider the proliferation of online sharing, reviews, virtual communication, and non-cognitive aspects as part of the decision process. To address this issue, the main objective of this study is to explore the lived experience of millennial moms' consumer decision-making process in choosing

their birthplace. This study employed qualitative descriptive phenomenological research inquiry.

The data is collected using in-depth interviews and informal observation (i.e., field notes). Colaizzi's descriptive phenomenology was applied to analyze the data. A final total of six participants were involved in this study. The number of participants for this study is determined upon reaching the saturation point of the phenomenology inquiry. Participants were selected using maximum variation sampling based on the pre-requisite criteria (i.e., experienced millennial moms, had a positive/negative/both birthplace experience), middle-income earners, gave birth at a government hospital/ private hospital/both government and private hospitals. Findings in this study identified the details decision-making stages where eight major themes emerged; (1) need recognition, (2) information stage, (3) alternative evaluation, (4) pre-decision, (5) decision, (6) post-service evaluation, (7) consumer continuum of involvement, and (8) variables influences decision process.

This study yielded three major conclusions. First, the decision stages are not fixed to order, which prior birth experience helps expedite the decision process and reduce the number of decision cycles. Second, the participant's level of involvement in birthplace decision-making varied according to the outcome of the birthplace experience. It has been discovered that the more satisfying the birthplace experience, the lower the level of involvement in the decision-making process. Third, the decision-making process of Millennial moms is dissimilar and unique from other service product decision-making processes. The study has provided comprehensive and valuable insights that will benefit policymakers, service providers, and marketers in understanding the consumer birthplace decision-making process. Further, the study's findings provided a roadmap that will assist service providers in effectively tailoring their maternity service product offerings.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

KAJIAN FENOMENOLOGI MENGENAI PENGALAMAN HIDUP PROSES MEMBUAT KEPUTUSAN IBU MILENIUM DALAM MEMILIH TEMPAT BERSALIN

Oleh

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Keputusan tempat bersalin adalah salah satu fasa terpenting dalam kehidupan wanita. Ia mempunyai impak yang besar terhadap perkembangan psikologi dan kesejahteraan wanita. Di Malaysia, ibu milenial menyumbang kepada jumlah ketara kepada kadar kelahiran. Statistik Vital Malaysia menunjukkan purata umur ibu pada kelahiran hidup pertama di Malaysia adalah antara generasi ibu milenium. Ibu milenial, yang menyumbang kepada sebahagian besar kelahiran di Malaysia, mempamerkan karakter yang berbeza, mengubah landskap demografi, terutamanya dalam membuat keputusan perkhidmatan penjagaan kesihatan. Proses membuat keputusan tempat kelahiran telah berkembang dengan ketara dipicu oleh kemajuan teknologi. Sebagai generasi yang bijak digital, ibu milenium kebanyakannya bergantung pada platform komunikasi digital (iaitu, SNS, Google) dalam membuat keputusan berkaitan kesihatan (tempat bersalin). Dalam era penjagaan kesihatan berasaskan informasi digital, maklumat adalah hampir spontan. Platform komunikasi pendigitalan telah mengubah keputusan, pilihan dan corak tingkah laku pengguna, dengan ibu milenium tertumpu pada ulasan dan pengalaman ibu lain untuk membuat keputusan tempat bersalin. Perkongsian pengalaman dan testimoni dalam talian memudahkan ibu milenium membuat keputusan tempat bersalin yang lebih termaklum. Peningkatan perkhidmatan penjagaan kesihatan yang mengutamakan pelanggan menyaksikan ibu milenium dilayan sebagai pengguna dan bukannya pesakit, berubah daripada pendekatan membuat keputusan secara paternalistik dalam memilih tempat bersalin.

Walau bagaimanapun, butiran yang terhad diketahui mengenai proses perincian bagaimana ibu milenium membuat keputusan tempat bersalin. Kajian tempat bersalin yang sedia ada dinilai dari perspektif perubatan dan organisasi, mengetepikan pendekatan berpaksikan pengguna sebagai sebahagian daripada proses membuat keputusan. Sementara itu, model proses keputusan pengguna terdahulu (iaitu, Engel, Blakewell, dan Minniard, EBM) tidak melihat percambahan perkongsian dalam talian,

ulasan, komunikasi maya dan aspek bukan kognitif sebagai sebahagian daripada proses keputusan. Untuk menangani isu ini, objektif utama kajian ini adalah untuk meneroka pengalaman hidup ibu millennium dalam proses membuat keputusan memilih tempat bersalin mereka.

Kajian ini menggunakan inkuiri kajian kualitatif fenomenologi deskriptif. Data dikumpul menggunakan temu bual terperinci dan pemerhatian tidak formal (iaitu, nota lapangan). Colaizzi Fenomenologi deskriptif digunakan untuk menganalisis data. Seramai enam peserta akhir terlibat dalam kajian ini. Bilangan peserta untuk kajian ini ditentukan apabila mencapai titik tepu inkuiri fenomenologi. Peserta dipilih menggunakan pensampelan variasi maksimum berdasarkan kriteria pra-syarat (iaitu, ibu milenium yang berpengalaman, mempunyai pengalaman tempat bersalin yang positif/negatif/kedua-duanya, berpendapatan sederhana, bersalin di hospital kerajaan/hospital swasta/kerajaan dan hospital swasta. Penemuan dalam kajian ini mengenal pasti proses terperinci membuat keputusan di mana lapan tema utama muncul; (1) pengiktirafan keperluan, (2) pencarian maklumat, (3) penilaian alternatif, (4) pra-keputusan, (5) keputusan, (6) penilaian selepas perkhidmatan, (7) penglibatan berterusan pengguna, dan (8) pembolehubah mempengaruhi proses keputusan.

Kajian ini menghasilkan tiga kesimpulan utama. Pertama, peringkat keputusan tidak ditetapkan mengikut turutan, yang mana pengalaman melahirkan terdahulu membantu mempercepatkan proses keputusan dan mengurangkan bilangan kitaran keputusan. Kedua, tahap penglibatan peserta dalam membuat keputusan untuk tempat kelahiran berbeza-beza mengikut hasil pengalaman tempat bersalin. Didapati bahawa semakin baik pengalaman bersalin, lebih rendah tahap penglibatan sepanjang proses membuat keputusan. Ketiga, proses membuat keputusan ibu Milenium adalah unik dan berbeza daripada proses membuat keputusan produk perkhidmatan lain. Kajian ini telah memberikan pandangan yang komprehensif dan berharga yang akan memberi manfaat kepada pembuat dasar, penyedia perkhidmatan dan pemasar dalam memahami proses membuat keputusan tempat bersalin dari aspek pengguna. Selanjutnya, penemuan kajian menyediakan petunjuk yang akan membantu penyedia perkhidmatan dalam memfokuskan penawaran produk perkhidmatan bersalin mereka dengan berkesan.

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"I am grateful to all of you who always make me happy, for you are the charming gardeners that blossom my wandering souls."

This thesis was submitted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CBM	Consumer Behavior Model
CDMP	Consumer Decision-Making Process
CDMS	Consumer Decision-Making Style
DOSM	Department of Statistics Malaysia
EBM	Engel, Blackwell & Miniard
EWOM	Electronic Word of Mouth
GKL	Greater Kuala Lumpur
GKV	Greater Klang Valley
GCT	Generation Cohort Theory
GBS	Group B Streptococcus
MGC	Marketer Generated Content
MVS	Maximm Variation Sampling
PAC	Patient Assessment Centre
PPD	Post-Partum Depression
SNS	Social Networking Sites
UGC	User Generated Content
VR	Virtual Reality
WOM	Word of Mouth

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

The experience of giving birth is a significant event in a woman's life that has repercussions that last throughout a woman's entire existence (Vedeler et al., 2021; Lundgren, 2004). The birthplace decision is a complex and crucial aspect of the childbirth process (Grigg et al., 2015). 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 all over the world, and various facets and findings have been reported (Seijmonsbergen-Schermer et al., 2020). Also, 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.

In the year 2020, the total population of Malaysia was recorded as 32.7 million (DOSM, 2021). From the total population that was reported, approximately 6 million were female millennials (DOSM, 2021). The female millennial number is projected to increase over the course of the next few years and will constitute a sizeable portion of the Malaysian population market (Noor et al., 2022). Apart from the number of female millennials in Malaysia, a significant proportion of them are millennial moms. Based on the most recent Malaysia vital statistics for 2022, Malaysia recorded 439 744 live births in 2021, with millennial moms being the average age cohort (27.9 years) of first live birth among 146 531 Malaysian mothers (DOSM, 2022). From the 2022 Health Fact Report, in the top 10 causes of hospitalization recorded, the leading causes of hospitalization in Malaysian government facilities are pregnancy and childbirth, while pregnancy and childbirth are ranked second cause in the private hospital (see Table 1.2) (MOH, 2022). As of 2022, there are 146 public hospitals, 209 private hospitals, and 17 private maternity homes in Malaysia to care for expectant mothers (see Table 1.1) (MOH, 2022).

Table 1.1 : No. of Health Facility in Malaysia (2019-2022)

Health Facility/ Indicator	2019	2020	2021
Government (Total)	144 Facilities	146 Facilities	146 Facilities
• Hospital	(135)	135	135
• Special Medical Institutions	(9)	11	11
Private (Licensed)			
• Hospital	(208)	(202)	(209)
• Maternity Homes	(18)	(17)	(17)

(Source : MOH 2020; 2021; 2022)

Table 1.2 : Principal Cause of Hospitalization in Malaysia (Childbirth & Pregnancy)

Health Facility/ Indicator	2019	2020	2021
Government (Rank)	(20.94%) (Main cause/Rank 1 st)	(22.24%) (Main cause/Rank 1 st)	(19.63%) (Main cause/Rank 1 st)
Private (Rank)	(6.89%) (Rank 6 th)	(8.99%) (Rank 4 th)	(10.61%) (Rank 2 nd)

(Source : MOH 2020; 2021; 2022)

Based on the Malaysia Health Facts Report, the number of healthcare facilities in Malaysia is increasing to meet rising demand. It also revealed an upward trend in private facility admissions for childbirth. From 2019 to 2022, Table 1.2 displays the trends of the principal causes of hospitalization in government and private health facilities in Malaysia. As per available data, childbirth and pregnancy continue to be the leading causes of hospitalization at public health facilities. Nonetheless, admission to private facilities for childbirth and pregnancy has been increasing, with more admissions increasing each year compared to government facilities, which have seen a decrease in admission cases for childbirth and pregnancy.

Given the current phenomenon and trend in Malaysia's healthcare, with the millennial moms cohort dominating the childbirth rate in Malaysia (see Table 1.3) and being a growing consumer cohort for childbirth services, changing hospitalization trends may be influenced by millennial moms' decision preferences and consumer behavior characteristics. A phenomenological study on millennial moms' decision behavior (process) can address this phenomenon in terms of exploring and understanding the birthplace decision-making process extensively, and why the birthplace preferences are shifting and provide more insights into the millennial mom decision process extensively that will benefit the health provider

Table 1.3 : Vital Statistics (Childbirth)

Indicators	2019	2020	2021
Birth Rate	487 957	470 195	439 744
Millennial Age (mean)	27.9 Years	28 Years	27.9 Years
Total no. of Mothers	159 710	139 501	146 531

(Source : DOSM 2022)

Additionally, in establishing and sustaining maternity healthcare services, health institutions (government & private) need to effectively monitor their target market (customer) service satisfaction (Al-Kubaisi & Radeef, 2017). The health provider must attentively comprehend their target market (customer) attributes, especially the millennial mom cohort.

1.2 The Millennials, Who are they

When discussing the millennial generation, scholars used a variety of terminology interchangeably, including Generation (Gen Y), Nexters, Net Generation, Generation Next, and Nexus Generation (Ng et al., 2010; Shaw and Fairhurst, 2008; Martin, 2005; Howe & Martin, 2005). Researchers have defined millennials as people born between 1980 and 2000 (Gurau, 2012; Young & Hinesly, 2012; Weingarten, 2009). The millennial generation is a booming market that has expanded exponentially over time and has reached its dominant market share (Ewehard et al., 2019; Padveen, 2017; Devaney, 2015). They are taking over the global digital consumption market with new purchasing experiences (Friederichsen, 2017). Due to their upbringing in a digital world (Hall et al., 2017), millennials' consumption habits differ from those of previous generations (Ralph, 2017).

Moreover, millennials account for 23 percent of the world's population (see figure 1.1), with Asia having the highest proportion of millennials (24%) (MSCI, 2021), making them the largest consumer group (Fromm, 2022). In Malaysia, based on the national census survey 2020, millennials constituted 11 million of the Malaysian population, and approximately 6 million were female millennials (DOSM, 2021). They play a significant role in Malaysia's economy. They provide industry players, particularly those in the healthcare sector, with a substantial potential market and a lucrative market segment (Page et al., 2022).

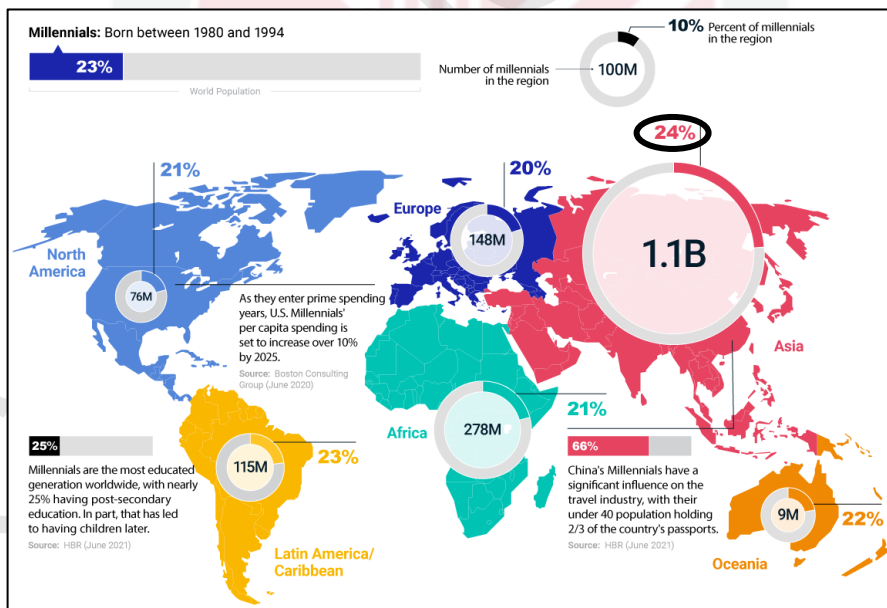


Figure 1.1 : Millennial by Region (2021)
(Source : MSCI 2021)

Being part of an important consumer segment in the global market (Moreno et al., 2017), numerous research has discovered key important shared characteristics among the millennial generation market, their behavior, and consumption patterns. Given the fact that millennials were brought up in an era of rapid technological advancement, this generation is referred to as the "digitally savvy" generation (Munsch, 2021). As a corollary, millennial consumers exhibit characteristics and purchase behavior that are markedly dissimilar from those of their predecessors. The main apparent millennial consumer characteristics as shown in the table below (Table 1.4).

Table 1.4 : Main Millennial Consumer Traits

Millennial Characteristics	Author(s)
Assertive	(Noor et al., 2022; Kim et al., 2020; Hussey et al., 2016)
Valued experience/ value-conscious (i.e., emotion)	(Chopra et al., 2021; Saura et al., 2019; Rodrigues & Rodrigues, 2019; Flecha-Ortiz et al., 2019)
Seek social support and gratification from the online community	(Fernandes et al., 2021; Flecha-Ortiz et al., 2019; Hussey et al., 2016)
Heavy smartphone and other gadget users	(Chung & Al-Khaleed, 2021; Silvia, 2019; Hussey et al., 2016)
Heavy internet and social media user	(Harun & Husin, 2019; Saura et al., 2019; Rissanen & Luoma-Aho, 2016; Issa & Isais, 2016)
Well-educated/Knowledgeable	Noor et al., 2022; William et al., 2014)
Active Participation/Involvement	(Flecha-Ortiz et al., 2019; Hussey et al., 2015)
Not a loyal (brand) customer	(Chuah et al., 2017; Bilgihan, 2016)

Researchers have determined that the characteristics of the millennial generation differ from those of previous generations (Kim et al., 2020). Growing up in a digital and technologically advanced society has shaped their characteristics, such that they are reliant on digital communication platforms, and technology is ingrained in their lives. In a subsequent subsection, the influence of digital technology on millennials' consumption behavior and decisions will be discussed.

1.2.1 The Internet, Social Networking Sites (SNS), and the Consumption and Decision-Making Behavior of Millennials

The advent of the internet and social media has brought about a new reality in which, 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; McKenzie et al., 2019). The unique features thus shaped their decision process accordingly.

Millennials are the consumer generation prone to smart technology platforms such as the internet, social media, and mobile technology (Kim et al., 2020). The advent of internet social media has resulted in a significant portion of the world's population turning to this medium as their primary source of news and information, shaping their views and experiences, decisions, and beliefs on virtually all such phenomena thinkable (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).

Meanwhile, narrowing down to the Malaysian context, a survey by the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) reported that Malaysia recorded 88.7% of internet users in 2020, where 67.1% of the total users are millennials generation (MCMC, 2020). Malaysia's internet users are increasing year after year. Kemp (2022) reported that as of January 2022, Malaysia has 29.55 million internet users, and still, the millennial cohort is dominating the chart.

Furthermore, according to Meltwater's 2022 market survey report, 37% of internet users in Malaysia utilize social media platforms to gather information (research) before making a purchase decision (Amurthalingam, 2023). The internet and social media significantly influence millennial consumers. Various scholars have extensively researched how the internet and social networking sites (i.e., social media) influence millennial purchase and decision behavior. Table 1.5 summarises some previous findings on the influence of the internet and social networking sites on millennial purchase and decision behavior:

Table 1.5 : Example of Findings Research on the influence of Internet Social Media on the Consumption Decision of Millennials

Findings	Author(s)
The Snapchat platform offers user gratification that engages millennial consumers with content sharing and influences their purchase decision and intention for impulsive purchases.	Dones et al. (2018)
Social media influencers had a significant impact on millennial travel decisions. Millennials trust the influencer's information (credibility).	Ana-Pop et al. (2021)
UGC influence Millennial travel behavior and decision. Millennials trust UGC the most during the information stage.	Ana & Istudor (2019)
Social media and online interpersonal influence millennial Green product purchase intention	Bedard & Tolmie (2018)
Millennials in Thailand are likelier to choose a restaurant based on user-generated content (UGC) than restaurant marketer-generated content (MGC). They used reviews from Facebook and Instagram to make restaurant selections.	Jariangprasert et al., (2019)

Table 1.6 : Example of Findings Research on The influence of Internet Social Media on the Consumption Decision of Millennials (Malaysia Context)

Findings	Author(s)
Internet fashion bloggers influence online fashion product followers regarding lifestyle, morals, and fashion style.	Zain et al. (2018)
Millennials in Malaysia use social media to plan domestic vacations. Other users' comments and reviews are crucial for millennials' travel decision-making.	Moorthy et al. (2021)
Online advertising does not trigger the millennial purchase decision, but influence from UGC/ peers (i.e., family, friends, etc.) does influence the decision process	Tang & Chan (2017)
Online content sharing on social media influences millennial Umrah travel agency booking decisions.	Muslim et al., (2020)
The credibility of UGC and EWOM content influences the purchasing decisions of Malaysian Millennials. If they trust the source, they will buy the reviewed product. A visually appealing Vlogger can influence the viewer.	Muda & Hamzah (2021)

The millennial generation is a unique and tricky market segment for businesses because of how well they adapt and how quickly technology changes. Businesses must embrace millennial character traits, adapt to technological change, and utilize the digital marketing 4.0 strategy to successfully target the millennials (Kotler, 2016). Apart from that, it is crucial to understand how millennials decide or choose particular products. Substantial research has investigated millennial characteristics and consumer behavior, but few have examined the decision process, particularly millennial service product decision-making.

However, scholars such as Voramontri and Klieb (2019) and Ewehard et al. (2019) investigated the millennial decision process. 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). They later revised to Engel, Blackwell, and Miniard Decision (EBM) Model. The following chapter (Literature Review) expands on the model's detailed specifications. Nonetheless, previous research findings on the decision process are not extensive and limited to specific tangible product consumption.

Moreover, in the healthcare sector, particularly regarding childbirth and birthplace selection, the internet and social networking are inevitable in mothers' decisions, particularly millennial mothers. Prior discussions have highlighted the significant market and characteristics of millennial consumers. The sub-section forward will discuss the impact of digital communications platforms and internet technology on maternity and birthplace services.

1.3 Birthplace Decision-Making

Choosing a birthplace is an important step in every woman's childbearing process, and emotions and social culture may influence the type of birthplace women should consider

(Grigg et al., 2015; C. Grigg et al., 2014; Kornelsen et al., 2010). The birthplace experience is crucial as it significantly influence moms' satisfaction (mental health) and future childbirth decision (Takayam et al., 2019; Okwuikpo et al., 2019). Childbirth can take place in a variety of settings, including hospitals, birthing centers, and at home, but many women agree that the most common practice and perceived safest birthplace setting is a hospital birth (Reitsma et al., 2017; Slujis et al., 2015).

Birth can occur in a hospital, birth center, or home, requiring a lengthy decision-making process (Hendrix et al., 2009; Edwards, 2008). Prior research on birthplace decision-making was rooted in medical and health sciences perspectives, overlooking the consumer point of view in the decision process. Temkina and Rivkin-Fish (2019) and Temkina (2019) addressed that women wanted to be treated and interact with physicians as consumers rather than patients. This notion is not extensively explored within healthcare (i.e., childbirth/birthplace) and consumer behavior studies. The evolution of marketing 4.0 and the consumer-centric approach in the healthcare sector required service providers to target and segment their prospects creatively. Marketing 4.0 is critical for addressing the millennial generation by leveraging a full gamut of internet technology and social media platforms to reach and influence millennial purchase decisions (Dash et al., 2021; Kotler et al., 2016), particularly for service products such as birthplace decisions.

Health and medical practitioners have taken an interest in studies on the use of the internet and social media in the birthplace and childbirth. Health providers are aware of the changes and are focusing on comprehending how internet resources may influence or change healthcare services. Though, the scope is limited and focuses on mothers as patients rather than consumers. Furthermore, existing studies do not focus on the distinct differences between generations, particularly the generation of millennial moms. Table 1.7 summarises some of the study findings on using the internet and digital platforms in birthplace decision-making.

Table 1.7 : Study findings on using the internet and digital platforms in birthplace decision-making

Findings	Author(s)	Methodology/ (Age/Location)
The Internet is the main source of information for pregnant women searching for childbirth information, namely Blogs and web pages. Trust and reliable source.	Sercekus et al. (2021)	Descriptive Study (Age 18 and above/ Turkiye)
Internet is the second main source (51%) after physicians (61%) for pregnant women search for childbirth and birthplace information	Ahmadian et al. (2021)	Quantitative Survey (Not specified/ Iran)
The Internet is a popular source of information about pregnancy and childbirth information. Useful and reliable source. First-time mothers utilize the internet more than multi-experience moms	Sayakhot & Carolan-Olah (2016)	Systematic Review (Not specified)

Table 1.7 : Continued

Women posted their birthplace experiences on social media (Instagram) to share their journey and inform their preferences, decision, and obstacle, as well as the procedure they went through	Sanders (2018)	Qualitative interpretative repertoires (Not specified)
Social media assist childbirth preparation in terms of information sources. Telegram is the most used social media platform. Social media (Telegram) improve childbirth and birthplace experience.	Mousavi et al. (2022)	Quasi-experiential (Primiparous, Millennial aged 18-35/ Iran)

The advent of technology has transformed healthcare decision-making from technocratic paternalism to digital consumer-centricity. As previously discussed, prior research has demonstrated that women (millennial moms) who are reportedly actively involved in their childbirth and birthplace decision process become informed consumers instead of empty vessels (patients). Modern moms value the support and information they receive from the online community (Lupton, 2016). Wallwiener et al. (2016) discovered that internet-based information significantly influenced mothers' decisions regarding pregnancy and birthplace. On the online platform, mothers reportedly gain valuable, experiential, and practical childbirth insights from the experiences of others (Johnson, 2015).

Therefore, healthcare providers must adapt to the Marketing 4.0 evolution by utilizing the internet and social media to personalize their services and effectively educate mothers. They must recognize and adapt that the Internet and online information sharing profoundly impact millennial moms' childbirth and birthplace decisions (Mousavi et al., 2022; Sanders, 2016).

Evidently, the existing study highlighted how mothers use the Internet and social media platforms to obtain information that facilitates them for their childbirth and birthplace journey (decision). Scant attention has been paid to how the digital mom (millennial generation) decides on childbirth and birthplace. Why and how they choose one birthplace setting over another, as well as how digital moms (millennial consumers) make their selections, are not well understood. It may provide impactful insights for industry and business players to comprehend this substantial and lucrative segment better and promote safe birthing practices to ensure the safety of both babies and mothers.

1.4 Problem Statement

The problem statement is discussed from two perspectives: contextual and theoretical debates. From the contextual stand, it is understood that prior scholars debated that birthplace is a crucial phase in women's life and an important phase in the childbirth process (Rost et al., 2022; Vedeler et al., 2021; Yuil et al., 2020; Oladapo et al., 2018; Grigg et al., 2015).

Previously, extensive research has focused on the studies on birthplace setting (i.e., Coxon et al., 2017; Hollowell et al., 2015; Murray-Davie et al., 2014), childbirth experience (i.e., Tabaghdehi et al., 2020; Overgaard et al., 2012) and factors that influence childbirth and birthplace decision-making (i.e., Borrelli et al., 2017; Coxon et al., 2014). However, scholars such as Rost et al. (2022), Grigg et al. (2014), Murray-Davis et al. (2014), Hadjigeorgiou et al. (2012), Patterson (2009), and Madi and Crow (2003) argued that the extensive research wasn't focused on the birthplace decision-making in details.

Women have been viewed as patients rather than consumers for many years, with less participation in health decision-making (Boote et al., 2002), particularly in childbirth and birthplace decision-making (Temkina, 2020). Recent developments have led to the commercialization of healthcare services, wherein women no longer adhere to a paternalistic approach to decision-making and desire to participate in the decision-making process (Temkina & Rivkin-Fish, 2020; Temkina, 2018; McIntyre et al., 2012; Kennedy, 2008).

Furthermore, because of their significant size and influence on the market, millennial moms' birthplace decision-making is important to investigate. In 2020, Malaysia recorded 11 million millennials out of a total population of 32.7 million Malaysians, with 6 million identified as female millennials (DOSM, 2020). A significant portion of Malaysia's six million female millennials are millennial mothers, and their age cohort is reported as the mean age in Malaysia's population that actively gave birth (DOSM, 2022). With rising numbers of millennial generation cohorts giving birth in Malaysia (DOSM, 2017;2018;2019;2020;2021), the shift toward commercialization and consumer-centricity has altered the role of women in birthplace decisions (Temkina, 2020).

In addition, notable changes are occurring in the case of childbirth admissions to Malaysian healthcare facilities. Government hospitals have seen an increase in the number of birth admissions each year for a number of decades. However, admission cases for childbirth in government health facilities have recently begun to decline, while the number of childbirth cases in private hospitals is rising (MOH, 2022). The age cohort characteristics and preferences may influence and contribute to the pattern and trend of childbirth admissions in Malaysian health facilities, where the millennial cohort accounts for the majority of childbirth cases in Malaysia (MOH, 2022). Millennials are widely regarded as a digital-native generation. Technological advancement (i.e., the internet and social media) has become the primary source of healthcare information, significantly influencing health decisions (Shang et al., 2021; Li et al., 2016).

Additionally, numerous scholars (i.e., Mousavi et al., 2022; Sercekus et al., 2021; Hinton et al., 2018) identified that the internet and social media are the primary and credible sources that influence millennial moms' childbirth and birthplace decision-making. Mothers reportedly turned to the internet and social media channels to obtain childbirth and birthplace information, validate and seek support from other (moms) virtual users (Xie et al., 2021; Gleeson et al., 2019). Internet and social media facilitated millennial moms' birthplace decision-making in terms of ease and boundless information reach.

It does, however, have a reason. The credibility and validity of the information sought online may contain misinformation, clouding their birthplace decision-making and posing a risk to the safety and well-being of the millennial mom and baby. Too much and unlimited information can lead to errors in health-related decisions (Marewski & Gigerenzer, 2022), particularly in the birthplace decisions of millennial moms. A study by (Hinton et al., 2018) discovered that women use diverse information sources to construct their decision perspectives, with most of their information coming from the online platform (internet). Nothing seems strange until too much information, viral stories, trends, and misinformation ominously influence the millennial mom's decision-making process and swirl their birthplace decision.

Incidentally, millennial moms are exposed to a broad range of childbirth and birthplace experiences and narratives on the internet and social media, which may result in an inaccurate reality and representation of childbirth and birthplace, thereby creating complex expectations for childbirth and birthplace services (Sanders, 2018). Consequently, false and misleading health information (i.e., viral/bad reviews on childbirth in private/government hospitals) perpetuates severe and negative health impacts (Li et al., 2016; Luce et al., 2016). It also may lead to an unsafe birthing decision such as unassisted homebirth, which endangers the mothers' and babies' lives. This phenomenon might have something to do with the changing trend of opting for private maternity services and swirling away from the government health facilities in Malaysia. A study focus must be centered on this digital-savvy millennial generation. This study will provide in-depth insights into the millennial mom's decision-making process in choosing a birthplace.

Nonetheless, research on the millennial generation focusing on the birthplace decision process is scarce. Existing studies on millennials and birthplaces do not focus on the decision-making process. Instead, it focuses on an information platform that assists millennial moms with labor and birthplace issues (i.e., Campbell, 2020; Hussey et al., 2016; Zimmerle, 2008). Several studies on childbirth have been conducted in Malaysia, but they do not emphasize the birthplace decision-making process. Instead, it investigates the perception of care quality (Norhayati et al., 2017) and the perception of unassisted birth (Ismail et al., 2019).

In addition, prior research on the millennial consumer generation primarily focused on online retail consumption behavior (Klein & Sharma, 2020; Ewehard et al., 2019; Hall et al., 2017) and consumer behavior involving the consumption of physical goods (Klein & Sharma, 2020). Existing research on the decision-making process of millennials was limited, with research focusing on a fraction of decision stages rather than emphasizing and exploring the decision process in depth (i.e., Ewehard et al., 2019; Ishak et al., 2019; Schiopu, 2016). On top of that, studies on how the millennial generation makes decisions have not examined health-related services, and virtually no research has been conducted to understand how millennials make health-related decisions. The theoretical debate is discussed in the point forward.

Figure 1.2 below illustrates the state of the birthplace decision-making process among the relevant existing theoretical approach in the decision-making process research,

helping the reader understand the theoretical issues/gap of exploring the millennial mom's birthplace decision-making process through the lenses of consumers. The birthplace decision-making process is dangling between the consumer decision-making process model, the service consumption decision model, and the health decision-making model.

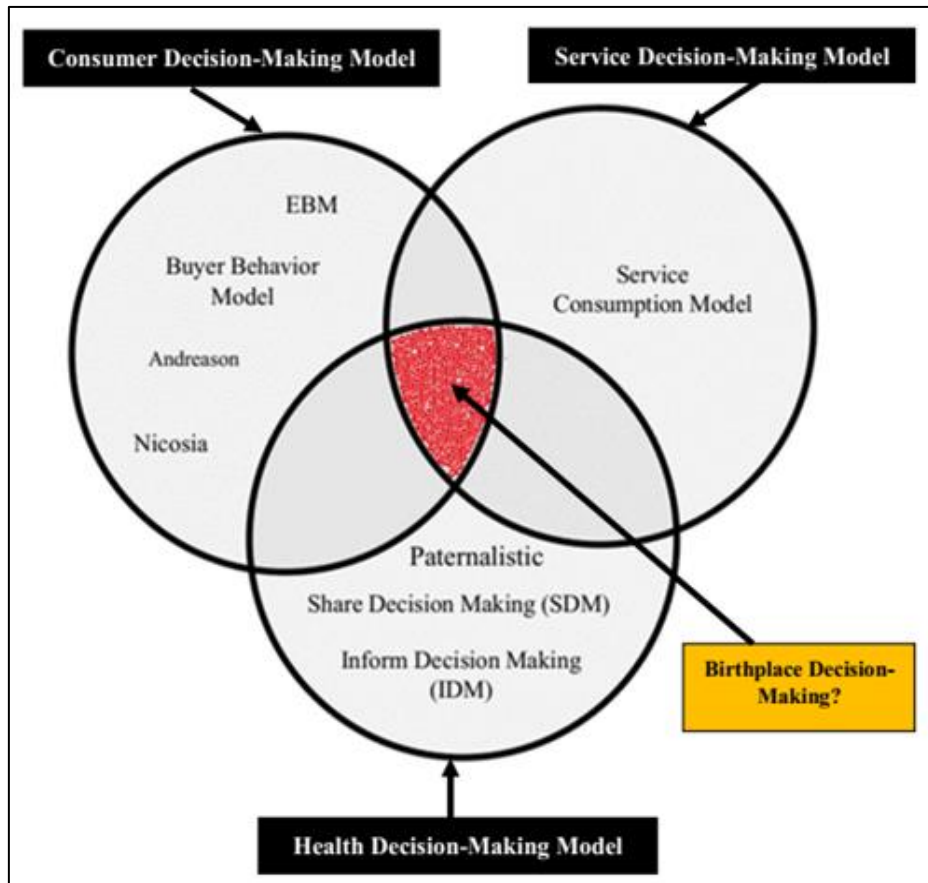


Figure 1.2 : Illustration of Theoretical Gaps

From a theoretical standpoint, birthplace studies have been extensively researched and examined through health and medical lenses (i.e., Bekuma et al., 2020; Chen et al., 2018; Hinton et al., 2018; Sander, 2018). Primarily, the studies on birthplace and childbirth were conducted using health decision models such as (SDM) shared decision-making model (Vedam et al., 2019), paternalistic (Rodriguez-Osorio et al., 2018), and (IDM) informed decision-making model (Kloester et al., 2022).

In comprehending the birthplace decision-making process, it should be noted that health sciences scholars did not specify or concentrate on particular generational cohort differences. Existing literature on health decision-making, such as the SDM (shared-

decision making) model, paternalistic and informed decision-making model, was solely based on communicating and sharing information between health practitioners and patients (Yui et al., 2020; Lin & Fagerlin, 2014).

Furthermore, the majority of previous studies do not appear to examine or investigate the birthplace phenomenon from a consumer perspective. The health decision-making model is primarily concerned with the patient's perspective and is intended to investigate and comprehend the phenomenon's (childbirth and birthplace) outcome from an organizational standpoint. Temkina & Rivkin-Fish (2020) and Temkina (2018) argued that modern mothers (i.e., millennial moms) no longer adhere to the term "patient" and prefer to be treated as "consumers" instead. In addressing childbirth and birthplace events, the current health model does not reflect a consumer-centric approach (Temkina, 2018).

On the other hand, from the perspective of consumer and service research, the researcher examined and compared the existing consumer decision-making process and service decision model in light of exploring and comprehending the birthplace decision-making process from consumer perspectives. This is to understand the existing findings and decision processes better to holistically explore the lived experience of millennial moms' birthplace selection decision process through the lenses of a consumer point of view.

From the consumer perspective, a well-known consumer decision-making model known as the grand model (i.e., EKB/EBM model) is widely applied in consumer behavior research (Voramontri et al., 2019). EBM grand model is the most comprehensive and influential decision model (Kokkinaki & Gemtou, 2014; Mohammadi & Mohamed, 2011; Mandl et al., 2010; Erasmus et al., 2001). Now, the debate is why not directly apply the existing EBM model to comprehend the millennial mom birthplace decision-making process?

Various scholars have widely criticized the EBM Model for being too complex with poorly defined variables (Karimi, 2013), sequential, linear, and rigid (Hall et al., 2017; Mix & Katzberg, 2015; Bray, 2008; Erasmus et al., 2001; Loudon & Bitta, 1993). According to Smallman (2010) and Sirakaya and Woodside (2005), the traditional consumer buying process (EBM) model was not explicitly designed to comprehend service product consumption and cannot distinguish between tangible and intangible product features thoroughly.

In addition, the consumer buying process model (i.e., EBM) is positivistic. The buying process is assumed to follow the same (static) decision stages. In contrast, in reality, the decision process cannot be generalized to examine different types of products and sectors, in which different decision processes may apply for different types of product consumption (Ewehard et al., 2019).

In the case of birthplace, a mother may face a different set of birthplace decisions for her first and subsequent child, and the outcome of prior birth (positive or negative experience) may influence the subsequent birthplace decision process. Besides that, Hall

et al. (2017), Ferrer et al. (2016), and Mix & Katzbborg (2015) argued that the EBM model overlooked the element of experience in the decision process model. Meanwhile, Karimi et al. (2015) stated that consumers frequently skip some decision stages, in which experience may alter the decision process, and the decision process for experienced and non-experienced consumers may differ accordingly (Ryu and Han, 2011; Morais and Lin, 2010). Similarly, the EBM model was chastised for failing to account for non-cognitive influence in the consumer decision process model. It was positivistic, with sentiments such as emotion and feeling frequently snubbed. Childbirth and birthplace have been shown to impact women's psychological development significantly. Thereby, millennial moms' birthplace decisions are infused with emotion and feeling.

Lastly, the birthplace is categorized under the service consumption field, but the existing service consumption decision process model is arguably not designed to understand the consumer decision-making perspective. Rather, the decision model, known as the service consumption model, was developed for the service provider to assess the consumer that patronizes their service product (Tsiotsou & Wirtz, 2015). All of the above signified the theoretical gaps among three different approaches and perspectives. None of the mentioned theoretical approaches can be applied directly to uncover and examine the millennial mom birthplace consumer decision-making process. Thus, an exploratory study is needed. This research intended to explore and identify the decision process of millennial moms in choosing their birthplace by incorporating the elements of consumer perspective as part of the decision process model.

1.5 Research Aim (Purpose of the Study)

This research aims to explore and understand the essence of the meaning and the lived experience of the millennial moms' generation in deciding on birthplace through the lenses of consumer standpoints.

1.6 Research Objectives

1. To explore the consumer decision-making process of millennial moms in choosing their birthplace.
2. To investigate how prior birth experiences influence the level of involvement of the birthplace decision-making process.
3. To examine the variables influencing the millennial mom birthplace decision process.

1.7 Research Questions

1. How does a millennial mom decide on selecting a birthplace?
 - (i) What are the decision processes involved in making birthplace decisions?

- (ii) What factors do millennial moms consider in the birthplace decision-making process?
2. How does the prior birth experience influence the level of involvement of millennial moms' birthplace decision process?
3. What are the variables that influence the millennial mom's birthplace decision process?

1.8 Significance of the Study

This research is critical for several reasons. To begin, it seeks to explore and understand the meaning of millennial moms' consumer decision-making process in choosing a birthplace, and it integrates the concept of consumer views into extensive birthplace studies that have been examined and researched through health and medical sciences. Second, this research is essential in investigating and deciphering how technological advancement, internet technology, and social media influence the decision-making process of millennial moms. The buyer decision model (i.e., EBM) does not incorporate or anticipate the use of digital communication platforms as part of the decision-making process.

In addition, millennial moms are digital natives who have adapted well to technology and digital communication platforms. They relied primarily on the Internet and social media reviews. The internet and social media serve as their "GOOGLE," enabling them to become informed consumers whose preferences and decisions differ from those of previous generations. Consequently, it is essential to investigate how the internet and social media platforms influence their birthplace decision and the decision-making process involved in selecting a birthplace. Given the dynamic nature of the healthcare industry, in which government and private facilities offer birthplace and childbirth services, it is essential to keep up with the digital generation (millennial mothers) to sustain the operation over time. Consequently, the development of digital marketing 4.0 necessitated that businesses and service providers segment and target potential market prospects online comprehensively.

Thirdly, this study integrates and extends prior knowledge of the grand model theory (EBM) and explores its applicability to the service product spectrum. This study highlights the expectations of millennial moms for consumer-like treatment and active participation in birthplace decision-making. Embracing millennial characteristics into the process, emphasizing active participation in decision-making, and integrating consumer perspectives into health-related decisions (birthplace) ensures that millennial moms' birthplace options will not remain an artificial construct. This study draws largely on the EBM model for several reasons. EBM is generally viewed as the most comprehensive model of consumer decision-making because it depicts nearly all stages necessary to examine the consumer product purchase decision. Comparatively to the service consumption and healthcare models, both are intended to assist and comprehend consumer behaviour from an organisational standpoint. EBM, meanwhile, is exclusively consumer-centric and provides customer insight. Accordingly, its applicability to numerous product consumption decisions is reasonable. For instance, a researcher in the

tourism and leisure industry has adopted and modified the EBM model in an attempt to understand tourist behaviour and decision making, and asserted that EBM is applicable. Still it requires modification to reflect the service product consumption decision. Resultantly, this study enhances and strengthens the existing literature on three different contexts (i.e., healthcare, consumer decision-making model (EBM), service consumption, and millennial generation) by creating and linking empirical and practical experiences with theoretical writings to promote discussion on the birthplace decision-making process from the perspective of consumerism and active participation approach within the consumer behavior and health sciences literature.

1.9 Scope of the Study

This study aims to explore and better understand the meaning and lived experiences of millennial moms' consumer decision-making when choosing a birthplace. The study focused on the hospital birthplace setting as it was a common practice worldwide and the safest birthplace agreed upon by various scholars. This study involved six experienced multiparous millennial moms from varied backgrounds who gave birth vaginally (low-risk pregnancy) and lived in the Greater Kuala Lumpur districts. For several reasons, this study focused on the millennial mom generation in Greater Kuala Lumpur (GKL). The GKL area had the highest number of live births in 2021. (DOSM, 2022). Second, the GKL area has a large number of healthcare facilities, such as private hospitals, maternity homes, and easy access. Third, GKL is designated as a healthcare metropolis under Malaysia's NKEA (11th program) to improve healthcare quality. Finally, GKV saw an increase in the middle-income cohort, which is relevant to this study.

Additionally, primiparous mothers with high-risk pregnancies were omitted from this study. This is because this study examines how prior experience affects subsequent birthplace decisions. High-risk pregnancy moms may require a complex medical procedure, which may significantly affect the normal (low-risk) childbirth birthplace decision process. This study draws largely on the EBM model for several reasons. EBM is generally viewed as the most comprehensive consumer decision-making model because it depicts nearly all stages necessary to examine the consumer product purchase decision. Comparatively to the service consumption and healthcare models, both are intended to assist and comprehend consumer behavior from an organizational standpoint. EBM, meanwhile, is exclusively consumer-centric and provides customer insight. Accordingly, its applicability to numerous product consumption decisions is reasonable. For instance, a tourism and leisure industry researcher has adopted and modified the EBM model to understand tourist behavior and decision-making and asserted that EBM is applicable. Still, it requires modification to reflect the service product consumption decision. Last, this research employed a phenomenological approach and in-depth interviews to collect the data. The data collected are scrutinized and narrowed down into meaningful text descriptions to portray the decision-making process meticulously.

1.10 Limitations of the Study

Marshall and Rossman (2006) stated that regardless of the research design, all studies must have some shortcomings. This research has potential constraints and limitations that can be addressed respectively (Cresswell, 2009). Firstly, the findings of this study cannot be extrapolated to women who have never given birth. It is because nulliparous women do not know how childbirth will impact their birthplace preferences and decision-making, as they have never given birth. A specific study is required to understand the perspective of first-time millennial moms to gather a more comprehensive view of their consumer decision-making process in choosing a birthplace. Besides, this study does not consider specific intercultural differences when examining the millennial mom's purchasing decision-making process. The study identified two implications: a lack of accessibility and a long time to create relationships with people of different ethnicities. Thus, broadening the study to include multi-ethnic perspectives would yield greater details and comprehension of the millennial generation.

1.11 Summary of the Chapter

This chapter discussed the study's background and how millennials make consumer decisions. This chapter overviews the millennial generation and how consumer and birthplace decision-making has changed over time. It shows the importance of understanding the meaning and experiences of millennial moms' decision-making process as consumers by explaining the study's importance, scope, and limits. In the next chapter, the literature review is discussed.

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