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User-Generated-Content and Millennial Moms' Birthplace Decision-Making Process

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Abstract

Consumer reviews and experiences on UGC platforms are interoperable decision-making sources. Revolutionized UGC communication platform has changed millennial moms' birthplace decision-making process. They are rising concerns that UGC may lead to unsafe birth practices and risk the safety of the mother and baby. This preliminary qualitative study objective focused on exploring how other birth experiences shared over the UGC platform influence millennial moms' birthplace decisions. Preliminary findings identified two themes: verification and ratification and visibility and trustworthiness. The study provides in-depth information that aids policymakers, service providers, and marketers in understanding the millennial birthplace decisionmaking process from the consumers' perspective.

Keywords: user-generated-content; decision-making process; experience; information search

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1.0 Introduction

Technology and digitalized communication platforms are inseparable communication norms in nowadays world. People globally are connected and live their daily lives through digital communication channels. Advanced communication mediums such as user-generatedcontent (UGC) platforms (i.e., Facebook, Blogs, and others) offered abundant sources and almost instantaneous access to unlimited information boundlessly. Information and experiences sharing over the UGC platform offer luxurious information access that can influence and aids consumer purchase decision (Geng & Chen, 2021).

Those who lived in the era following the Covid-19 pandemic experienced how digitalization communication channels such as social media and the internet facilitated consumer decisions around the consumption of specific products, particularly service-related products. Digital-savvy generations, such as millennial moms, are the generations of utmost and in-trend in the consumer market that rely on UGC

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in product purchase consumption. Consumer reviews and other experiences sharing via the UGC platform served as a significant source of information for intangible service product decisions (Nilashi et al., 2018).

The proliferation of social media and digital internet communication witnessed increasing use of UGC content in the service decisionmaking process (Gupta, 2019). Li et al. (2020) stated that online reviews help to reduce consumer perceived risk in particular product purchase decisions process and, at the same time, help e-sellers to anticipate and tailor their marketing strategy effectively. Targeting and segmenting the right consumer group is crucial for businesses, primarily service product providers. Understanding the uniqueness of generation cohorts such as millennials gives businesses an advantage. Dash et al. (2021) and Han & Chen (2021) identified that millennial moms are the consumer market that relies on others' opinions and experience in decision-making, especially regarding health-related decision-making.

Millennial moms, unlike previous generations, trust and believe electronic word-of-mouth posted on the UGC platform (Mazzucchelli et al., 2018). Picture, video, and meme material get more attention than traditional content (Bigne et al., 2020). The UGC content (i.e., pictorial and video) helps the consumer evaluate service products better, reduce information asymmetry, and help make decisions (Liu et al., 2019). Considering service products are intangible, consumers cannot evaluate and value them without first experiencing them, so consumers rely on EWOM to make service purchase decisions. Furthermore, even though the millennial generation exhibits a diverse range of characteristics and UGC substantially impacts millennial service decision-making, most past studies on service decision-making have concentrated on the tourism industry.

Health-related services, mainly birthplace services, receive little attention. Even previous research (i.e., Hinton et al., 2018) on childbirth and birthplace has been examined and done through health practitioners and institutional viewpoints rather than consumer perspectives. Moreover, technological innovation has ushered in and altered the environment of healthcare decision-making. Testekin Ouyaba & Kesim (2020) stated that mothers rely on the internet while making childbirth and birthplace decisions, making them informed consumers rather than patients. The advent of consumerism in the healthcare industry has altered the landscape of health decision-making (Temkina, 2019). Mothers nowadays demand to be treated as consumers rather than patients and no longer adhere to paternalistic (doctor-patient) decision styles.

The UGC platforms have revolutionized the decision landscapes by witnessing millennial moms become informed consumers. They are no longer regarded as empty vessels when consulting about birthplace decisions. However, there are rising concerns about how UGC may lead to unsafe birth practices (i.e., unassisted birth, home birth). Viral/false/misleading experiences and information shared on the UGC platform may risk the millennial moms' childbirth process in which wrong decisions can lead to maternal mortality for both mothers and the baby. This phenomenon has concerned many—recent research by Tajuddin et al. (2020) indicated that the rate of unsafe birth practices had shown an increasing number of cases in Malaysia involving the millennial cohort. Increasing cases of unsafe birth practices may lead to higher mortality rates among mothers and babies. This phenomenon must be addressed because it can undermine government efforts to reduce maternal mortality and improve healthcare services to sustain Millennium Development Goals (MDG).

Therefore, in addressing this phenomenon, this preliminary study objective aims to explore and understand how other birthplace experiences shared on UGC platforms influence millennial moms' birthplace decision-making process and to what extent millennial moms trust the credibility of the source of information shared via UGC platforms

2.0 Literature Review

This section provided a brief description of the core notion that underpins this research on how user-generated content (UGC) influences millennial moms' birthplace decision-making process.

2.1 User-Generated-Content

Geng and Chen (2021) defined user-generated content as any content (i.e., images, videos, etc.) created by a user shared on the digital platform that may influence others' consumption decisions. Robust development and technological advancement promote the use of UGC to assist the consumer decision-making process (Gupta, 2019). Consumers nowadays prefer to extract information posted on digital platforms compared to traditional channels. Consumers are drawn to and value content generated by those with similar interests, views, and opinions (Muda & Hamzah, 2020). Meanwhile, Lu et al. (2018) indicated that online reviews influence almost 92% of product purchase decisions. Utilizing the UGC platform benefit the business as consumer indicates a high level of trust in content established on the UGC platform (Zhang et al. 2020).

The content uploaded through the UGC platform contained positive and negative information. Bigne et al. (2020) noted that positive and negative content might generate contradictory reviews and complicate decision-making. Also, according to Eslami et al. (2018), negative and medium-length content is the content consumers find most helpful in making decisions. However, negative content, such as negative EWOM, severely impacts a person's attitude and response toward a particular decision.

In the birthplace decision-making process, such negative content can lead to a catastrophic outcome. Boundless information sources have their pros and cons. Being a digitally native generation offered the millennial generation limitless information source where everything is almost instantaneously accessible (Othman et al., 2022). Nevertheless, such data indicated that how much consumer trust the UGC content and exposure to vast negative content won't do good for the millennial moms' generation when making birthplace decisions.

2.2 User-Generated-Content and Service Decision-Making

Consumers tend to rely more on others' reviews and content shared on UGC platforms in service product decisions as they cannot physically evaluate and value the services (Liu et al., 2019). Prior research on the importance of UGC on service products has been focused primarily on the tourism and travel decision-making process (Zhang et al., 2020). Without physical appearance, service product decision-making can be valued and reviewed through others' reviews and experiences. Research such as Assaker et al. (2019) found that women are more prone to use UGC content in service (travel) decision-making. Consumers tend to use UGC in the travel decision-making process because the UGC platform offers straightforward content information, is cost-saving, and is convenient (Assaker, 2019). On top of that, elements of trust are fundamentals in UGC platforms, particularly in the service product decision-making process (Gupta, 2019). Trustworthiness pioneers the consumer's acts and decisions on a particular decision (Bae & Han, 2020). For service product consumption, the reliance on content trustworthiness is crucial, especially for health product consumption decisions, as it involves high risk and life and death. The point forward briefly discusses birthplace decision-making and the role of UGC in the decision-making process.

2.3 Birthplace Decision-Making

Birthplace is a crucial stage in a woman's life and an important stage in childbirth, and it incorporates a number of considerations and a complex decision-making process (Ayamolowo al., 2020). It significantly affects women's psychological development and health. Research by Hinton et al. (2018) indicated that moms depend primarily on their own birth experiences, the experiences of others (i.e., friends, family, etc.), and information from online platforms when making birthplace decisions. Sperlich & Gabriel (2022) supported the importance of experience in the birthplace decision-making process. Wang et al. (2017) stated that consumer decisions differ significantly between inexperienced and experienced consumers, and the outcome of the decision varies depending on the context of the phenomenon.

Furthermore, looking at the role of UGC in birthplace decision-making, recent research by Testekin Ouyaba and Kesim (2020) and Hinton et al. (2018) uncovered that pregnant women utilized the internet utmost, and information gathered through digital platforms significantly influence their birthplace decision-making process. Hinton et al. (2018) identified that women look for evidence that supports their decision choices, such as types of birth, birthplace, etc. On top of that, a study by Jacob et al. (2019) found that 90% of women stated that information from the UGC platform is reliable and their decision is influenced by it.

Despite that, abundant information on the UGC platform can lead to information overload that may significantly impact decision-making. An extensive systematic review by Khaleel et al. (2019) pooled numerous studies on the effects of information overload on health consumers, indicating the seriousness of the issues and the need to seek relevant information. The current trend of social media influencers sharing and endorsing information seamlessly over the UGC platform is worrisome. Millennial moms might opt for an unsafe birth trend (i.e., hypnobirthing, natural birth, unassisted birth). Thus, it is relevant and vital to investigate and understand the roles of the UGC platform in influencing millennial moms' birthplace decision-making process.

3.0 Research Methodology

This research employed descriptive phenomenological qualitative research inquiry to comprehend how UGC influences millennial moms' birthplace decision-making process. Descriptive phenomenology studies a specific phenomenon's lived experience, providing in-depth and rich information on the phenomenon observed. Preliminary research is conducted on three experienced multiparous millennial moms using in-depth face-to-face interviews. Experienced mothers were selected because this study intended to understand how millennial moms prior birthplace experience influenced subsequent birthplace decision-making processes. Therefore, in line with the phenomenology inquiry, inexperienced or first-time mothers are not considered for this study. The preliminary research participants are selected based on the prerequisite criteria (table 1). The sample size for preliminary research is considered adequate for phenomenological research inquiry. Creswell and Poth (2018) stated that the sampling size for phenomenology work on "Loneliness," used one participant, himself, to describe loneliness. The phenomenological research aims to gauge the in-depth meaning and experience of the observed phenomenon. Therefore, the preliminary sample size is considered adequate, given the nature of the phenomenological context and purpose for preliminary exploration to understand the initial influence of UGC on millennial moms' birthplace decision-making process.

Table1. Participant Prerequisite Criteria
Criteria
Millennial mom aged between 22-35 years.
Resides in Greater Kuala Lumpur Area
Given birth more than once
Given birth in a Government hospital only.
Given birth in a private hospital only.
Given birth in both government and private hospital
Middle-income category

The sample sized are selected using the purposive maximum variation sampling method (MVM) based on the prerequisite criteria (table 1). Heterogeneity of maximum variation sampling focused on documenting the unique variations appearing in different settings and circumstances that led to identifying a common pattern in the observed phenomenon (Palinkas et al., 2015). Maximum variation sampling is employed to capture the diversity of millennial moms' birthplace decision-making across different hospital settings and environments.

The preliminary interview data were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using Colaizzi's descriptive phenomenological analysis. The data analysis follows seven steps outlined in Collaizi's descriptive analysis. The transcribed data were coded and themed accordingly, reflecting the participants' meaning and Experience of using UGC in millennial moms' birthplace decision-making process. Moreover, each selected participant and institution mentioned in this study are assigned pseudo names to protect the confidentiality and adhere to the axiological stance (ethics) in qualitative research inquiry.

4.0 Results

4.1 Participants Profiles

Table 2: Participant's profile (N=3)						
Participant	Age	No. of Children	Birthplace Setting	Education		
Fifi	29	2	Government Hospital	Postgraduate		
Mariam	32	2	Private Hospital	First Degree (Undergraduate)		
Lailer	32	2	Government & Private Hospital	Postgraduate		

4.2 User-Generated-Content and Millennial Moms' Birthplace Decision-Making.

The in-depth interviews revealed the UGC source pattern and credibility (trust) indicated by the millennial moms on the sources they used to decide on birthplace. Initially, two main themes (verification and ratification, visibility & trustworthiness) were identified that indicate how UGC influences millennial moms' birthplace decision-making process. Table 3 outlines the types of user-generated content they refer to during birthplace decision-making.

Table 3. Types of UGC and Level of Credibility						
UGC Content Sources	Participants	Level of Credibility (Trust)	Visit Frequency			
Facebook	Fifi	high	frequent			
	Mariam	moderate	moderate			
	Lailer	moderate	moderate			
Blog	Fifi	high	frequent			
	Mariam	high	frequent			
	Lailer	high	frequent			

The participants in this research highlighted two significant sources of UGC they used to that aids their birthplace decision-making process. During the information search process, participants indicated that they initially utilized internet technology heavily and used Google as the primary search engine that directed them toward the UGC content. As illustration:

"...I certainly 100% depend on Google, the internet, Facebook, and social media. First, Google, type there, we write it, for example, more or less we type like this giving birth at Government K Hospital, then lots will pop-ups when there is a lot we can choose, we read it". (Fifi)

".. definitely at the beginning to decide I just straightaway just Google. Usually I will Google, Google few hospitals and like is said before AZ and KP hospital". (Mariam)

".. I prefer Google, so I just type what I want. For example, I want to type birth experience at AL Hospital so that it will pop up". (Lailer)

Furthermore, a Google search reveals that Facebook and blogs are the most viewed and primary UGC sources millennial moms utilize in making birthplace decisions. Participants reported reading birthplace experiences and reviews of other moms on blogs and pooling birthplace information by joining a specific Facebook virtual community to communicate with others and gain more in-depth insights that help with their birthplace decision-making process. An example Illustration of the phenomenon is as follows.

".. I did join the group, Mommy group or childbirth group. Many people gave their 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 than government hospitals". (Fifi)

4.2.1 Theme 1: Verification and Ratification

Participants in this preliminary research reported utilizing the UGC platform to retract information to verify and rectify the information and reviews they were aware of and heard about the specific birthplace options they explored. Using UGC content, they searched and validated information such as treatment and service quality, specialist availability, doctor reputation, husband presence during delivery, doctor gender preferences, and others. Participants also posited that they validate and rectify word-of-mouth information and experiences shared by their social circle (i.e., friends, family, and colleagues). Doing so permits them to exclude options irrelevant to the birthplace preferences and instill confidence in their birthplace decision. For example, participants stated that information shared by their social circle influenced their birthplace decision, and they searched for it on UGC to validate it before making the birthplace decision:

".. Based on my friends' experiences, they said that AZ and AN hospital is a small medical centers, and KP hospital, on the other hand, has many specialties and specialists. They have a well-known doctor and are regularly featured in the newspaper

as one of the top O&G specialists. So I did search for the article to ensure it. Based on my friend and other experiences shared on my Blog, I decided to give birth at KP Hospital." (Mariam)

"... I asked my friend first, and then I google to get more details about it, and sometimes depending on the situation after I Google it, on the next day, I will rectify it again with my office colleague." (Fifi)

"...my sister-in-law and friends recommended AM Government Hospital and gave good reviews and experiences. Then, I google it, and about 75% of online reviews and experiences shared about AM government hospital gave positive feedback while the rest 25% did not. But, I felt confident with a 75% good review percentage and decided to give birth at AM government hospital." (Lailer)

It appears that others' reviews and experiences have a considerable impact on millennial moms' birthplace decision-making process. The dependence on UGC versus MGC (marketer-generated content) signifies trust and confidence in content produced on the UGC platform. The second theme was discussed further about it.

4.2.2 Theme 2: Trustworthiness and Visibility

Participants indicated that they trust the information and content from the UGC platform as it provides high visibility, reality-checks, and depicts lived experiences of other moms compared to content tailormade by marketers on the MGC platform.

".. 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 experience." (Fifi)

".. yes, I trust the sources. I googled it and read various Blogs, and most gave good reviews on AM Government hospital. Also, I physically visited my sister-in-law to survey the hospital personally and felt confident with what I read and saw and decided to give birth at AM Hospital." (Lailer)

".. I didn't look up any info about birthplace on the Hospital's FB page. I relied on others' experiences shared on Blogs about that particular hospital (birthplace)." (Mariam)

Additionally, although UGC had a crucial role in the Millennial birthplace decision-making process, participants highlighted that they relied heavily upon first-time birthplace decisions where they had no birthplace experience. However, for subsequent birthplace decision-making, the reliance on UGC is reduced significantly. Participants stated that they used their prior birthplace experience to guide their subsequent birthplace decision, yet it also depends on the outcome of the first birthplace experience. Lailer, for example, had a traumatic first birth experience and used the UGC platform immensely to search for the ideal birthplace to avoid having the same traumatic Experience as the previous one.

".. Experience is the best teacher. Because I have gone through such a tragic Experience with my first baby, I don't want it to be repeated. I have to plan it meticulously. So like usual, I search and google, read other experiences, ask around, and even visit the particular hospital to survey it." (Lailer)

5.0 Discussion and Limitation of Study

The preliminary findings of this study paralleled with the findings of Testekin Ouyaba & Kesim (2020) and Hinton et al. (2018), in which millennial moms depend mostly on informal information sources (i.e., UGC) and their own experiences in making birthplace decision-making process. Also, experience does matter in making a birthplace decision. Han & Hwang (2018) supported that experience affects customer decision-making, and the subsequent decision process is dissimilar for experienced and inexperienced purchases Wang et al. (2020). Nevertheless, this study's findings do not represent inexperienced (first-time) moms' decision-making process. Another specific study could be carried out to explore inexperienced moms' decision—making in choosing their birthplace.

6.0 Conclusion

Presumably, UGC is an indispensable platform for the millennial mom generation, where reviews and experiences of others significantly impact and expedite birthplace decisions. Millennial moms view user-generated content as trustworthy and credible information. Their decision is substantially impacted by the content provided on the UGC platform. Therefore, it is essential to comprehend how millennials utilize UGC and how UGC may considerably dominate and affect birthplace decisions. Furthermore, experience matters and substantially influences millennial moms' reliance on UGC information sources in birthplace decisions. It is also noted that millennial moms exhibit features that distinguish them from previous generations. They undoubtedly rely on the experiences of others and digital platforms to connect and make decisions. Understanding how people consume information may thus aid in reducing and preventing false news and deceptive unsafe birth practices that endanger the safety of mothers and babies.

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Paper Contribution to Related Field of Study

The findings of this research provide significant insights into the use of UGC platforms in birthplace decision-making. The findings aid policymakers, service providers, marketers, and behaviorists in understanding how millennials behave and make decisions. It also provides insight for the government to continuously reduce the mortality rate, sustaining the Millennium development goal of providing better

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healthcare quality and focusing on realizing the NKEA components, making the greater Kuala Lumpur area one of the healthcare Metro police cities.

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