Article

Building Sustainable Societies: The Role of Technology in Empowering Momtrepreneurs of Children with Special Needs

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Abstract: This study investigates the technology usage patterns among mothers of children with special needs, focusing on their proficiency, frequency, and purposes of computer and internet use. The aim of this study is to reveal the level of technology use of mothers with disabled children and the difficulties they experience in this regard. In addition, this study is expected to reveal the level of knowledge that mothers have about both the use of technological devices and their applications and to guide projects and development programs to be carried out for mothers. Utilizing a qualitative research methodology, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 16 mothers whose children attend Famagusta Special Education and Job Training School. The findings reveal that while a significant portion of the participants are beginners or lack confidence in using computers, 87.5 percent of the respondents utilize the internet regularly, primarily for accessing information related to their children's disabilities and for entertainment purposes. Despite some mothers having received formal training in computer usage, the majority indicated a need for further education to enhance their technological skills. This study underscores the necessity of tailored programs to support these mothers in effectively leveraging technology for their personal and familial needs, contributing to broader discussions on gender equality and empowerment within the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Keywords: entrepreneurship; mothers with special needs children; technology usage; parental support; sustainable development goals

1. Introduction

In terms of employment, more work autonomy, career flexibility, and work–life balance are leading the pack for women from all over the world to attain financial autonomy, empowerment, fulfillment, and prioritize family life [1]. Some women turn to entrepreneurship as an option that can offer work autonomy, career flexibility, and work–life balance because some of them might not have the prospect of picking up from where they stopped in their careers after nursing children. The increasing integration of technology into daily life has significantly impacted various aspects of personal and professional experiences, especially for women managing the dual responsibilities of motherhood and entrepreneurship. Especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, many momtrepreneurs turned to innovative technologies such as electronic payments and cloud computing to sustain their businesses amidst the challenges [2–4]. By leveraging social networks and e-commerce platforms, they can expand their reach and enhance customer engagement, which is vital for business success in today's digital landscape.

Prior research has shown that many momtrepreneurs are motivated by the desire for work autonomy, flexibility, and the ability to prioritize family while achieving financial

independence [5–7]. However, the added responsibilities of caring for a child with disabilities complicate their entrepreneurial journey. They frequently face societal stereotypes, stigma, and a lack of support, which can negatively affect their mental health and economic stability [8].

This research focuses on a specific group known as "momtrepreneurs", particularly those who are mothers of children with special needs. These women often encounter distinct challenges that can impede their ability to effectively utilize technology in both their personal and business pursuits. There is a special category of female entrepreneurs classified as "momtrepreneurs" [9]. Moreover, this study aims to explore the technology usage of mothers with special needs children, focusing on their competence with computers, the frequency and purposes of their technology use, and their training in computer and internet skills. By gaining insights into these dynamics, this research seeks to inform the creation of targeted support programs that empower these mothers and enhance their entrepreneurial efforts.

To gain a broader understanding of the lives of mothers with children with disabilities, this study aims to assess their status in relation to technology use. There are three research questions in this study, and they are as follows:

1. What is the level of competence of mothers of children with special needs in using technology and their purposes of using technology?
2. What is the computer and internet usage proficiency and education of mothers of children with special needs?
3. What are the purposes of internet use and social networking use for mothers of children with special needs?

In this study, the level of technology use of mothers with disabled children and the difficulties they experience in this direction are revealed. In light of these findings, the knowledge levels of mothers regarding both the use of technological devices and applications were examined. It is foreseen that the findings obtained will guide projects and development programs to be carried out for mothers by revealing the knowledge levels of mothers with disabled children regarding the use of technology. The situation to be revealed in terms of active participation of mothers in business life is important.

2. Momtrepreneurship and Technology: Empowering Mothers to Balance Business and Family

The mother entrepreneurship movement introduced women entrepreneurs with children to the world and has been accepted as a unique part of entrepreneurship. Women entrepreneurs have defined entrepreneurship as a practice that allows them to find a balance between work and family responsibilities [10]. According to [11], the term "momtrepreneurship" is another form of entrepreneurship that combines work–life balance. In other words, "momtrepreneurs" are businesswomen who set up their own businesses in order to gain the possible network and support.

Momtrepreneurs are women who navigate the demands of both motherhood and business ownership, managing their entrepreneurial ventures while also fulfilling their family and childcare responsibilities [12]. Mothers who are entrepreneurs and have children with disabilities often need to arrange their business schedules around their child's medical appointments, therapy sessions, and other specific needs. This requires a great deal of flexibility and the capability to set their own working hours, which is crucial for these mothers in managing their entrepreneurial efforts [13].

The concept of "momtrepreneurs" has gained significant attention at the intersection of entrepreneurship and family studies, particularly due to the role of technology in facilitating this dual endeavor. Momtpreneurs, who are mothers running their own businesses, increasingly rely on various technological tools and platforms to navigate both their professional and personal lives effectively. The adoption of technologies is essential for the growth of mompreneurs' businesses. These technologies serve as a backbone for operations, allowing for better connectivity with customers, suppliers, and stakeholders.

Recent studies suggest that technology has been pivotal in their entrepreneurial success, providing tools that help mompreneurs overcome traditional barriers associated with time, financial constraints, and access to markets [12].

The flexibility that technology provides enables mompreneurs to design work environments and schedules that align with their family obligations, particularly when caring for young children. This flexibility allows them to balance both business and family responsibilities without compromising their effectiveness in either role [12]. As technological advancements continue, their ability to support mompreneurs is expected to grow, offering new and innovative tools to help them thrive in both their entrepreneurial and personal lives.

Momtrepreneurship and the Sustainable Development Goals: Addressing Disability and Empowerment

Supporting women's entrepreneurship, reducing violence against women as a sexual product, and improving women's economic and social status—for example, increasing women's bargaining power within the household—contributes to the reduction of poverty and inequality by developing the country's economy as a product of development in terms of economic empowerment [14,15]. In the current social structure, women's entrepreneurship has priority among very limited opportunities both as a social activity and as an income-generating activity [16]. An entrepreneurial mother steps into unknown territory and pursues success despite all the difficulties [17–19]. Studies conducted in Canada, New Zealand, and the UK indicated that "momtrepreneurs" are primarily driven by the motivation to be able to take care of their children [20]. Initiating and doing business along with motherhood while raising a disabled child (or children) is extremely difficult for momtrepreneurs. Parenting a child (or children) with disabilities impacts women's well-being in various ways, and women may face the following problems [21]:

(1) Societal stereotypes;
(2) Prejudices;
(3) Stigma;
(4) Psychological health struggles;
(5) Economic difficulties;
(6) Lack of social and family support.

The motivations behind momtrepreneurship, particularly in countries with comparable socioeconomic conditions, illustrate a nuanced relationship between necessity and opportunity. Research shows that many female entrepreneurs, especially mothers, are frequently influenced by push factors such as financial need and the desire for flexibility to manage family obligations. For example, a study of female online microbusiness owners in China revealed that those motivated by necessity often focus on achieving financial stability for their families, while those driven by opportunity tend to emphasize personal satisfaction and independence [22]. This is consistent with findings indicating that women in less developed economies are more likely to start businesses out of necessity, driven by survival and family needs [23]. Furthermore, the motivations of momtrepreneurs frequently include a quest for autonomy and the capacity to juggle work and family responsibilities, reflecting broader societal norms that impact their entrepreneurial paths [24]. Recognizing these motivations is essential, as they not only affect individual business success but also play a significant role in the economic advancement of regions where women encounter distinct challenges [25].

To have a comprehensive understanding of the challenges confronting momtrepreneurs with disabled children and proffer solutions, there exists a need for an entrepreneurship training program that will be specially tailored for socially vulnerable momtrepreneurs who have children with disabilities. The adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2015 by all UN member states offered a joint plan for people and the planet, now and in years to come. At the center of this agenda are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which require pressing calls for all actions by all developing

and developed countries in a global collaboration. Technology has been acknowledged as vital for all aspects of the 2030 Agenda because technology in several forms, inclusive of ICTs, has continually transformed and redefined every aspect of human endeavor [26].

Focusing on SDG 5, which centered on gender equality and women empowerment, leveraging technology to promote gender equality and women empowerment includes a certain target on the application of technology and ICTs to actualize women empowerment. Momtrepreneurship is part of emerging and contemporary issues in gender equality [4], women empowerment, marketing [2], and feminism [27]. Ref. [28] noted the global advent of mompreneurship, which requires maintaining a balance between motherhood responsibilities and business by women business owners, in the past twenty years. There are several antecedents of mompreneurs, and these antecedents include balancing work–family life; fulfillment of their ambitions, passions, and creativity; intrinsic needs such as social status, autonomy, and independence; income generation; societal contributions; and opportunity recognitions [29]. The challenges confronting "moms" running home-based businesses include balancing work and family life, outsourcing, utilizing technology, taking breaks to nurse children or attend to family matters, keeping on track and motivated, managing finances, dealing with mailing and shipping efficiently, sustaining privacy, ensuring customer satisfaction, finding customers, managing separation, and networking with other momtrepreneurs [8]. If momtrepreneurs are facing these enormous challenges, one then begins to be inquisitive about another category of momtrepreneurs who have children with disabilities, not only because they are socially vulnerable, but because little or nothing has been implemented to assist them in navigating through these challenges that have yet to be empirically identified. Part of the inquisitiveness about momtrepreneurs who have children with disabilities is the significant role technology in its forms can play, training this set of momtrepreneurs on how to promote their well-being and also mentoring them to mentor other momtrepreneurs who have children with disabilities. Another SDG closely linked to momtrepreneurs who have children with disabilities is SDG 10, which tries to diminish inequality within and among countries through empowerment and advancement of political, economic, and social inclusion of all, inclusive of people with disabilities.

In addition to these, many studies show that mothers with disabled children face difficulties in their working lives. While they experience problems related to the care of their children, it is revealed that their competitiveness against the difficulties of the labor market is not sufficient [30–32].

3. Research Methodology and Procedures

This study employed qualitative research methods, using semi-structured interviews to gather data from mothers of children with special needs. The aim was to gain a holistic understanding of the participants' perspectives in their natural environment. The interview questions were developed based on expert feedback and refined through pilot testing to ensure clarity and relevance.

In March 2024, the number of mothers in need of special education in the Famagusta region of Cyprus was 16 mothers in total, and all of these mothers were included in our study group and our research was conducted. In this context, 16 mothers with children attending Special Education and Vocational Training School were selected using purposive random sampling. Prior to data collection, participants were informed of the study's purpose, confidentiality measures, and voluntary nature. Interviews were conducted face-to-face, with Google Meeting used for initial appointments and preparation. Interviews were recorded with participant consent for accurate data capture.

For the analysis of qualitative data, interviews were conducted with the participants using the interview form, which is a data collection tool. According to the views of the interviewed participants, the answers given to each question were categorized one by one and placed in tables. After this initial categorization, the data were re-examined by the researcher, and basic themes and categories were created. These determined themes and categories were reviewed again considering the relevant literature, and the categories show-

ing similar patterns were combined, while those showing differences were grouped under separate categories and coded. The administrator who responded to these categories was written in a numbered manner next to them. In the expressed part, the sentences extracted from the categories were written as examples. Individual interviews were conducted by visiting schools during the available times of the administrators. The interviews with the administrators were conducted in an environment where one-on-one conversations could take place. The data obtained from the answers to the research interview questions were analyzed with content analysis. In content analysis, data are analyzed in four stages [33].

1. Coding of Data: In this first stage of content analysis, after each participant was given a number and the interview transcripts were made, the data obtained from the participants were examined within the framework of this research and divided into meaningful sections, and the meaning they expressed conceptually was named and coded. The code list, which was previously prepared based on the conceptual framework of the research and the interview questions, was given its final form after examining all the data. This code list served as a key list in organizing the data. Data outside the research questions were excluded from coding. Later, the coding keys and interview transcripts were read separately by the researchers, and the issues of "consensus" and "difference" were discussed and the necessary arrangements were made. The reliability formula suggested in [26] for the reliability calculation was calculated to be 93% on average. Reliability calculations above 70% are considered reliable for the research [26]. The result obtained here was considered reliable for our research. The codes that showed agreement in the codings made by the researchers were taken as the basis for reaching the themes.
2. Finding Themes: At this stage, the codes determined during the data coding stage were each accepted as a separate category and evaluated as separate themes.
3. Organizing and Defining Data According to Codes and Themes: At this stage, the participants' views were explained in a language that the reader can understand and were presented to the reader firsthand.
4. Interpreting the Findings: The detailed and presented findings were interpreted by the researcher, and some results were explained at this final stage.

4. Results

This study investigates the technology usage patterns of 16 mothers who have children with special needs. The participants' ages ranged from 25 to 50 years, with varying educational backgrounds, including primary, secondary, associate, and university education, as well as one individual without formal education. This study aimed to explore the mothers' computer and internet skills, their purposes for using technology, and their engagement with social networking platforms. The results, summarized in tables, highlight the mothers' technological competencies, training experiences, and online activities, revealing a need for further training and support programs tailored to their specific needs.

A total of 16 mothers whose children attend Famagusta Special Education and Job Training School participated in our study. It was determined that one of the mothers participating in the study was 25–29 years old, two of them were 30–34 years old, four of them were 35–39 years old, five of them were 40–44 years old, and four of them were 45–50 years old; four of them had primary school education, two of them had secondary school education, one of them had an associate degree, three of them had university education, and one of them had no education.

For the reliability calculation of our study, the reliability formula suggested by [26] was used, and the average was calculated as 9.2%. Reliability calculations above 70% are considered reliable for the research [26].

The study results shown in Figures 1 and 2 summarize the key findings from our research on the technology usage patterns of mothers with children with special needs. The data highlight their varying levels of computer and internet competency, the purposes for which they use technology, and their engagement with social networking platforms.

Figure 1 focuses on their technological skills, training, and the amount of time they spend using computers and the internet. It also explores how long they have been using these technologies and their self-reported levels of expertise. Figure 2 presents an overview of how these mothers use the internet for various purposes, including accessing information about their children's disabilities, conducting research, and interacting on social media. It also provides insights into the technological tools they use for internet access and their preferences for learning how to use these tools for free. These results highlight the importance of further training and support programs tailored to their specific needs.
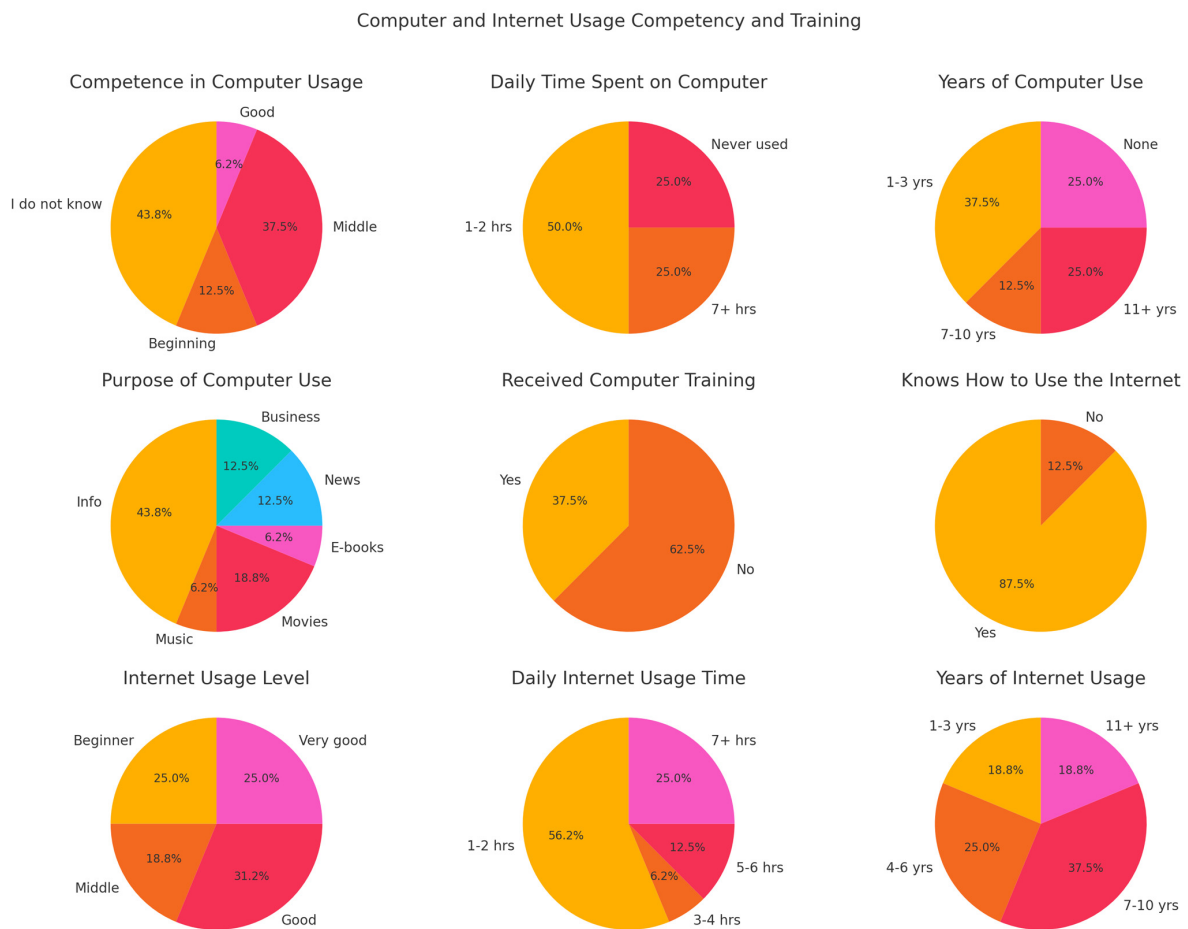

Figure 1. Computer and internet usage competency and training.

Figure 1 outlines the levels of computer and internet competency, training, and usage habits among mothers with children with special needs. A significant portion of the participants (43.8%) lack basic computer skills, with only 6.2% feeling confident in their abilities. Most mothers use computers primarily for accessing information (43.8%), and many spend 1–2 h daily using them (50%). While 87.5% of mothers report knowing how to use the internet, their internet skills range from beginner to advanced levels, with a large proportion (56.2%) using it for 1–2 h daily. Interestingly, 62.5% of participants have not received formal computer training, highlighting the need for educational programs to improve their technological skills.

Figure 2 provides insights into the internet usage patterns, purposes, and social networking behaviors of mothers with children with special needs. The majority of mothers use the internet for essential purposes such as accessing news (6.2%) and conducting research on special education (12.5%). A large proportion of participants use the internet to find information about their children's disabilities, with Google (43.8%) and Facebook (25.0%) being the most frequently used sites. Most mothers (62.5%) use smartphones for internet access,

and 75% of them use technology to monitor their children's development. Additionally, 81.2% of mothers express a desire to learn how to use computers, tablets, and smartphones for free, emphasizing their motivation to improve their technological proficiency.
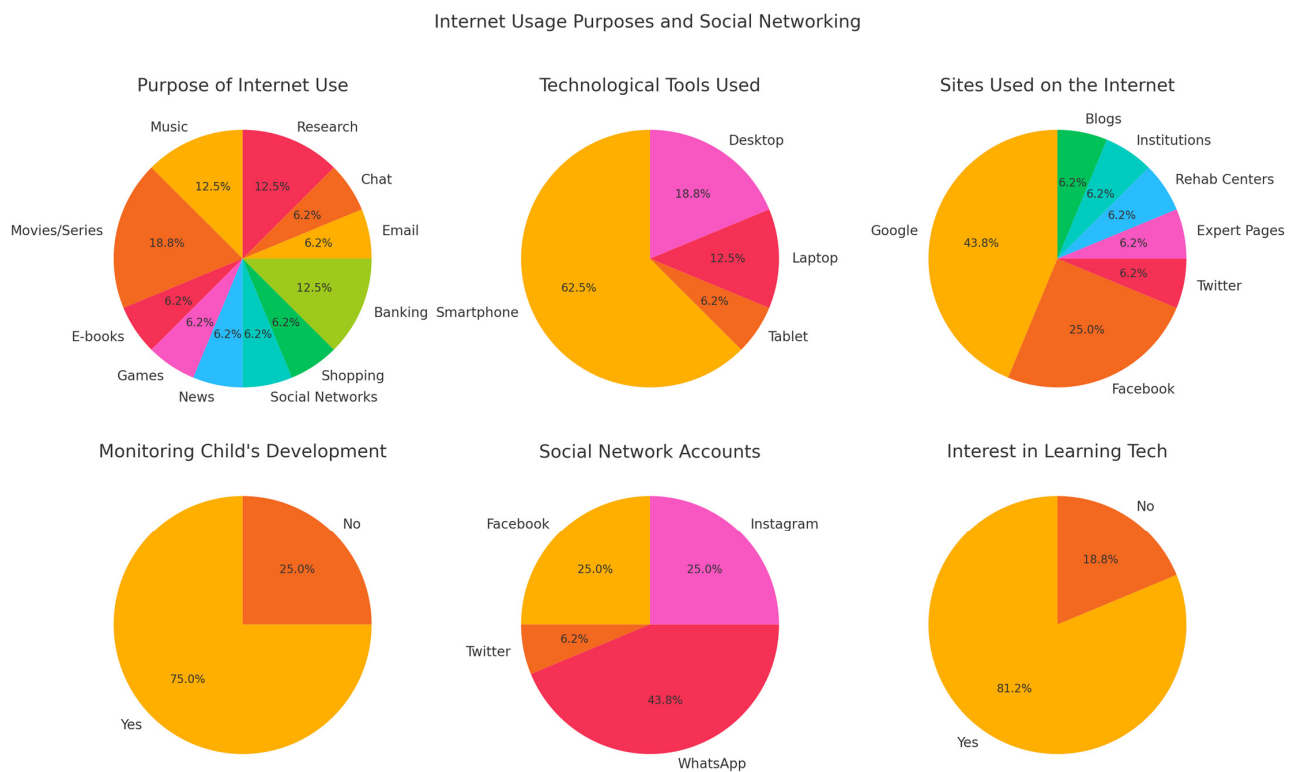

Figure 2. Internet usage purposes and social networking.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

This study provides valuable insights into the technology usage patterns, challenges, and entrepreneurial motivations of mothers with children with special needs, specifically in the context of mompreneurship. The results highlight several critical points, both in terms of the potential for technology to empower these mothers and the barriers that currently inhibit their full participation in entrepreneurship.

The findings reveal a significant gap in computer proficiency among the participants, with 43.75% of the mothers reporting they do not know how to use computers and only 6.25% claiming to be proficient. The low confidence in their technology skills limits their ability to engage in more complex entrepreneurial activities, such as e-commerce or digital marketing, which are crucial for scaling businesses in today's economy. In this context, it would be appropriate to provide more training to mothers and improve their computer training. These results are consistent with the results of [2]. While most mothers use the internet for accessing information (43.75%) and social networking, their use of technology is generally confined to basic activities like searching for information about their children's disabilities.

The relatively limited use of technology, despite the high access to smartphones (100% of participants), suggests a need for more targeted training programs that cater to both their entrepreneurial and caregiving roles. Technology could be a powerful tool to enable mompreneurs to overcome the constraints of traditional employment and better balance their responsibilities. Yet, the data show that many mothers (62.5%) have not received formal training, which indicates a significant educational gap that needs addressing. In light of these results, it is of great importance that the Ministry of National Education and Local Municipalities provide support to improve mothers' computer education. These results are similar to the results of [24].

Mothers of children with special needs are primarily driven by the need for flexibility, work–life balance, and financial independence. However, the additional responsibilities of caregiving place considerable strain on their ability to fully engage in entrepreneurial ventures. This aligns with the existing literature on necessity-driven entrepreneurship in socioeconomically similar contexts, where women often start businesses out of a need to support their families rather than as a choice driven by opportunity. In line with studies on marginalized entrepreneurial groups, our data show that mompreneurs face unique challenges, including societal stereotypes, lack of support, and psychological health struggles. These difficulties are compounded by their caregiving responsibilities, which make it harder for them to invest in their businesses or expand their operations. These results are similar to those of [29]. The data underscore that mothers with children with special needs are at an even greater disadvantage, facing higher levels of economic vulnerability and lower access to social networks compared to the broader population of female entrepreneurs. These results are parallel to the results of [34].

5.1. Practical Implications and Sustainable Development Goals

From practical and policy perspectives, these results indicate that efforts should prioritize enhancing access to technology and providing training opportunities for this group. Developing tailored support programs, as this study's data strongly indicate, would significantly enhance the entrepreneurial potential of mothers with special needs children. Such programs could provide targeted skills training, mentorship, and access to financial resources to help these women overcome the challenges they face. Given that a majority (81.25%) of participants expressed a desire to learn technology for free, there is clear demand for accessible education initiatives that not only teach technology but also offer guidance on integrating these tools into their businesses. These results are similar to those of [8]. Given the added layer of difficulty faced by mompreneurs with children with disabilities, it is essential to develop policies that provide financial assistance, access to childcare, and healthcare support. By incorporating flexible financing options, tax incentives, and grants, governments can help these women overcome financial barriers, allowing them to sustain and grow their businesses. These results are parallel to the results of [9]. Furthermore, policies that encourage the creation of community support networks would alleviate some of the psychological and social challenges mompreneurs face. As technology continues to evolve, its role in enabling mompreneurs to balance their personal and professional responsibilities will likely become even more critical. Encouraging the development of online platforms that provide peer support, networking opportunities, and business resources can offer an additional layer of empowerment. These results are similar to those of [28].

The findings emphasize the need for gender-specific interventions to support mothers of children with disabilities, contributing to the empowerment of women. By addressing the unique technological and entrepreneurial barriers these women face, this study aligns with the target of promoting gender equality and enhancing women's participation in economic activities through the use of technology, as outlined in SDG 5. Our study also supports the objectives of SDG 10 by shedding light on the social and economic inequalities faced by mothers of children with disabilities. These mothers experience heightened barriers to entrepreneurship due to their caregiving responsibilities and lack of access to resources like training and financial support. By promoting policies and programs that empower this vulnerable group, we can work toward reducing inequalities both within and across communities. Moreover, this study's emphasis on improving technology access and skills for mompreneurs aligns with SDG 8, which promotes inclusive and sustainable economic growth and decent work for all. These results are similar to those of [27,35]. By equipping mothers with better technological skills, they can enhance their entrepreneurial efforts, create sustainable businesses, and contribute to economic growth, even from home-based settings.

5.2. Future Research

The findings from this study suggest several avenues for future research. There is a need for longitudinal studies that examine how improvements in technological competency affect the business outcomes of mompreneurs over time. Additionally, research exploring the specific psychological impacts of entrepreneurship on mothers with children with special needs would provide a deeper understanding of the mental health challenges they face and inform the design of holistic support programs.

In conclusion, while technology presents significant opportunities for empowering mompreneurs, particularly those with special needs children, the data reveal considerable barriers that must be addressed. By implementing targeted training, increasing access to supportive networks, and promoting inclusive policies, society can better harness the entrepreneurial potential of these women, contributing not only to their economic empowerment but also to broader goals of gender equality and social inclusion within the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals.

5.3. Research Limitations

This study is based on a relatively small sample size of 16 mothers whose children attend the Famagusta Special Education and Job Training School. This limited sample size may not be representative of the broader population of momtrepreneurs with special needs children, potentially restricting the generalizability of the findings. A larger, more diverse sample would be necessary to draw more robust conclusions.

Furthermore, this study is cross-sectional, providing a snapshot of the current situation but lacking longitudinal data to track changes over time. Longitudinal studies would be essential to understand how improvements in technological competency affect the business outcomes and personal well-being of momtrepreneurs over an extended period.

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