

DIGITAL READINESS AS A MEDIATOR OF DIGITAL COMPETENCE ON INNOVATIVE WORK BEHAVIOR IN CONTENT CREATORS

Devi Eka Aprilinda

Management Program, Faculty of Economics and Business, Universitas PGRI Madiun

email: devi_2203102246@mhs.unipma.ac.id

Abstract

This study aims to examine the effect of Digital Competence on Digital Readiness, the effect of Digital Readiness on Innovative Work Behavior, the direct effect of Digital Competence on Innovative Work Behavior, and the mediating role of Digital Readiness in the relationship between Digital Competence and Innovative Work Behavior among Generation Z freelance content creators on TikTok. This study applies a quantitative approach with a cross-sectional survey design involving 140 respondents selected through purposive and snowball sampling. Data were collected through an online questionnaire and analyzed using multiple regression analysis and the Sobel Test with the assistance of IBM SPSS Statistics. The results show that Digital Competence has a positive and significant effect on Digital Readiness, and Digital Readiness has a positive and significant effect on Innovative Work Behavior, while Digital Competence has no significant direct effect on Innovative Work Behavior. Digital Readiness is proven to fully mediate the effect of Digital Competence on Innovative Work Behavior. These findings indicate that digital capability alone is not sufficient to drive innovative work behavior unless accompanied by individuals' psychological readiness to accept and utilize digital technology developments.

Keywords: Digital Competence, Digital Readiness, Innovative Work Behavior, Freelance Content Creator, Generation Z

A. INTRODUCTION

Work in the digital era no longer revolves solely around permanent employees inside formal organizations. As digital transformation accelerates, growing numbers of people build careers independently, outside conventional employment structures, a trend closely tied to the expansion of platform-based work and the digital economy. Within this landscape, digital competence, psychological readiness for technological change, and innovative work behavior have become central concerns for human resource development, extending even to occupations that did not exist before technological disruption reshaped the labor market.

This shift is visible at a global scale. According to Goldman Sachs Research (2023), the creator economy already exceeds USD 250 billion in value and is forecast to reach USD 480 billion by 2027, propelled by more than 50 million independent creators who earn a living primarily through short-video content. Indonesia mirrors this trend: the Association of Indonesian Internet Service Providers (APJII, 2026) recorded 229,428,417 internet users in the first half of 2025, an 80.66 percent penetration rate, with Generation Z accounting for the largest share of users at 25.54 percent.

TikTok stands out as the platform most associated with this phenomenon. APJII (2026) identifies TikTok as Indonesia's most frequently used social media application, at 31.8 percent usage, led predominantly by Generation Z users; DataReportal and We Are Social (2025) place TikTok's Indonesian monthly active users above 160 million as of March 2025, the platform's largest market in Southeast Asia. Indonesia's Ministry of Creative Economy further estimates 17 million domestic content creators, 8 million of whom earn above the regional minimum wage, with the digital creative sector contributing roughly IDR 450 trillion to the national economy.

Growth in creator numbers, however, has not been matched by readiness at the workforce level. The Ministry of Manpower of the Republic of Indonesia (2024) found that only 19 percent of Indonesian workers hold digital skills, with a mere 6 percent rated adequately skilled, well below the 58 percent recorded across high-income Asia-Pacific economies; the country also ranks 43rd of 67 countries in global digital competitiveness (IMD, 2024). Notably absent from these statistics is any official measurement of psychological readiness among independent digital workers freelance content creators receive no organizational training or infrastructure support, yet must adapt to technological change largely on their own. This gap forms the starting point of the present study.

Building on this background, the study addresses four questions: whether Digital Competence affects Digital Readiness among Generation Z freelance content creators on TikTok, whether Digital Readiness affects Innovative Work Behavior, whether Digital Competence affects

Innovative Work Behavior, and whether Digital Readiness mediates the relationship between Digital Competence and Innovative Work Behavior. Accordingly, the study seeks to test and provide empirical evidence for each of these four relationships. Theoretically, the results are expected to enrich human resource management literature concerning digital competence, digital readiness, and innovative work behavior among independent digital workers; practically, they are expected to help freelance content creators, students, and future researchers better understand how digital capability and psychological readiness jointly shape innovative work behavior in the digital economy.

Conceptual Framework

Digital Competence is understood here as the capacity to use digital technology effectively, critically, creatively, safely, and responsibly, spanning information search and evaluation, communication and collaboration, data handling, content production, and digital safety (Ferrari, 2013; Vuorikari et al., 2016). Digital Readiness denotes an individual's preparedness to accept, operate, adjust to, and benefit from developments in digital technology, comprising readiness in knowledge, attitude, and skill (Parasuraman, 2000; Chen et al., 2024). Innovative Work Behavior refers to the deliberate generation, introduction, and application of new ideas within a work role in order to enhance performance (Janssen, 2000; de Jong & den Hartog, 2010).

The research model rests on Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986; 1997) as its grand theory, which explains behavior as the product of reciprocal interaction between personal factors, behavior, and environment, with self-efficacy as the central mechanism. Two supporting theories complete the framework: Technology Readiness Theory (Parasuraman, 2000), which positions technology readiness as an antecedent of technology adoption, and Dynamic Capability Theory (Teece, 2007; Teece et al., 1997), which explains that the capacity to integrate and reconfigure competence in response to a changing environment strengthens the self-efficacy needed to produce and apply innovative ideas. On this theoretical basis, and drawing on supporting empirical studies

(Kaur, 2025; Chen et al., 2024; Noerchoidah et al., 2026; Azzahra et al., 2025; Carvalho et al., 2023), Digital Competence is positioned as the independent variable (X), Digital Readiness as the mediating variable (M), and Innovative Work Behavior as the dependent variable (Y), as illustrated in Figure 1.

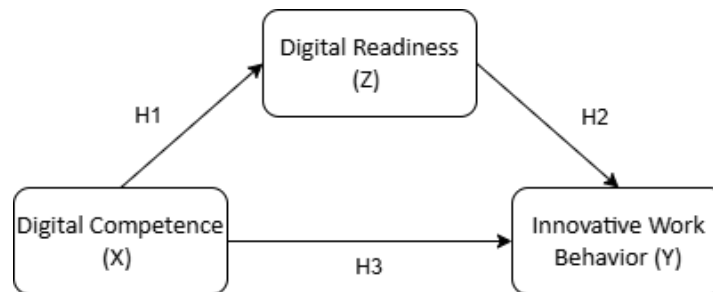


Figure 1. *Conceptual Framework*

As depicted in Figure 1, Digital Competence is hypothesized to shape Digital Readiness (H1), Digital Readiness is hypothesized to shape Innovative Work Behavior (H2), and Digital Competence is hypothesized to have its own direct link to Innovative Work Behavior (H3). The framework further proposes that Digital Readiness mediates the relationship between Digital Competence and Innovative Work Behavior (H4): that is, Digital Competence is expected to influence Innovative Work Behavior not only directly but also indirectly, by first strengthening a content creator's readiness to accept and apply digital technology.

B. METHOD

This research is quantitative in nature and adopts a cross-sectional survey design, collecting data from every respondent within a single time frame (Cooper & Schindler, 2014). A quantitative approach suits the aim of testing the hypothesized relationships among variables in numerical, statistical terms; more specifically, the study follows a causal research design because it involves both a direct relationship and a mediated, indirect relationship, examined through path analysis, partial regression testing, and the Sobel Test, all processed with IBM SPSS Statistics.

The population comprises Generation Z freelance content creators individuals born between 1997 and 2008, aged 18 to 29 during the study period who independently and actively produce content on TikTok, whether as a primary or secondary occupation, anywhere in Indonesia. Because this group is widely dispersed, constantly changing, and lacks a fixed sampling frame, it is treated as an infinite population (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). Applying the rule of thumb proposed by Hair et al. (2022) and Roscoe (1975) a minimum of ten respondents per indicator and given that the study covers 12 indicators across its three variables (5 for Digital Competence, 4 for Digital Readiness, 3 for Innovative Work Behavior), at least 120 respondents were required. Data collection targeted 130 to 140 respondents to safeguard representativeness and offset incomplete responses or outliers, ultimately yielding 140 valid respondents.

Respondents were selected through non-probability sampling, specifically purposive sampling paired with snowball sampling. Eligible respondents were Generation Z individuals aged 18-29 who had independently posted TikTok content at least weekly for a minimum of three months, used digital devices or technology in producing that content, were based in Indonesia, and consented to complete the questionnaire voluntarily. Excluded were individuals employed by a company or institution to produce content, those with under three months of experience as a content creator, and those born outside the 1997-2008 range. Respondents who met these criteria were then asked to refer other eligible Generation Z freelance content creators within their networks, extending the questionnaire's reach efficiently.

Data collection ran from April to July 2026 using an online questionnaire (Google Forms) distributed through social media. Each variable was measured on a four-point Likert scale: 25 items for Digital Competence, 20 items for Digital Readiness, and 16 items for Innovative Work Behavior. Two of the four Digital Readiness dimensions Discomfort and Insecurity are negatively worded and were reverse-scored before composite scores were computed, so that a higher score consistently reflects greater digital readiness.

Instrument testing preceded hypothesis testing: item validity was assessed with Pearson product-moment correlation (an item is considered valid if r-count exceeds the r-table value of 0.166), and reliability with Cronbach's Alpha (considered reliable above 0.7). Classical assumption testing covered normality (One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test), multicollinearity (Tolerance and Variance Inflation Factor values), and heteroscedasticity. Hypotheses were then tested through path analysis across two substructures substructure 1 estimating the total effect of Digital Competence on Innovative Work Behavior without the mediator, and sub-structure 2 estimating the combined effects of Digital Competence and Digital Readiness on Innovative Work Behavior each assessed via partial t-test and the coefficient of determination (R^2). The mediating role of Digital Readiness was additionally verified with the Sobel Test, taking $p < 0.05$ as the threshold for a significant indirect effect.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Respondents for this study were drawn from Generation Z freelance content creators active on TikTok throughout Indonesia. Applying purposive sampling alongside snowball sampling between April and July 2026 through an online questionnaire yielded 140 valid responses. Birth-year distribution peaked among those born in 2001 (24 respondents, 17.14%) and 2000 (22 respondents, 15.71%), suggesting the sample skews toward a relatively mature productive-age group with substantial daily and occupational exposure to digital technology.

All items measuring the three research variables proved valid, with corrected item-total correlation coefficients surpassing the r-table benchmark of 0.166 at $\alpha = 0.05$. Reliability coefficients (Cronbach's Alpha) reached 0.931 for Digital Competence, 0.935 for Digital Readiness, and 0.992 for Innovative Work Behavior comfortably above the 0.7 threshold and indicating strong internal consistency across all three instruments.

The regression model satisfied the prerequisites for hypothesis testing. Residual normality was confirmed by a Kolmogorov-Smirnov Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) value of 0.227, above the 0.05

cutoff. Multicollinearity diagnostics returned Tolerance values of 0.611 and VIF values of 1.636 for both Digital Competence and Digital Readiness, comfortably inside the acceptable range (Tolerance > 0.10; VIF < 10), ruling out multicollinearity between the independent variables.

Hypothesis testing proceeded through two path-analysis sub-structures, each evaluated with a partial t-test (two-tailed t-table value of 1.978 at $df = 104$), together with the Sobel Test for the mediation hypothesis. Sub-structure 1 the simple regression of Digital Competence on Innovative Work Behavior without the mediator is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Path Analysis Results Sub-structure 1 (Total Effect)

Relationship	t-value	Sig.	Result
Digital Competence → Innovative Work Behavior (total effect, without mediator)	3.289	0.001	Significant

Source: Output of IBM SPSS Statistics, 2026

The total effect is significant ($t = 3.289$; Sig. = 0.001; $R^2 = 0.073$): before Digital Readiness enters the picture, Digital Competence already relates significantly to Innovative Work Behavior. The effect of Digital Competence on Digital Readiness (H1) is reported separately in Table 2.

Table 2. Regression Result for Hypothesis 1 (H1)

Relationship	t-value	Sig.	Result (H1)
Digital Competence → Digital Readiness	9.367	0.000	Accepted

Source: Output of IBM SPSS Statistics, 2026

Effect of Digital Competence on Digital Readiness (H1)

The regression result ($t = 9.367$; Sig. = 0.000 < 0.05) confirms that Digital Competence exerts a positive and significant influence on Digital Readiness among Generation Z freelance

content creators: stronger command of digital tools corresponds with greater preparedness to face and capitalize on technological change. Respondent scores were highest for filtering relevant information for video research and adapting communication style to audience characteristics, while items on technical editing trimming footage and applying suitable audio effects scored lowest, suggesting that information-related and audience-facing competencies outpace hands-on production skills. This pattern aligns with Tzafilkou et al. (2022), who treat information literacy, communication, and content creation as core pillars of digital competence, and with Perifanou et al. (2021) and Laanpere et al. (2021), who link digital competence to an individual's capacity to adapt within a shifting digital environment.

Sub-structure 2, the multiple regression of Digital Competence and Digital Readiness together on Innovative Work Behavior, is summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Path Analysis Results Sub-structure 2 (Hypotheses 2 and 3)

Relationship	t-value	Sig.	Result
Digital Readiness → Innovative Work Behavior (H2)	2.430	0.016	Accepted
Digital Competence → Innovative Work Behavior, direct effect (H3)	1.102	0.273	Rejected

Source: Output of IBM SPSS Statistics, 2026

Effect of Digital Readiness on Innovative Work Behavior (H2)

Digital Readiness shows a positive and significant effect on Innovative Work Behavior ($t = 2.430$; $\text{Sig.} = 0.016 < 0.05$): creators who feel more prepared to accept, learn, use, and adjust to digital technology are more inclined toward innovative work conduct. Readiness appears to loosen resistance to new tools, encourage experimentation with emerging features, and ease adaptation of existing workflows conditions that, together, foster the generation of fresher ideas, concepts, and

working methods. The result is consistent with Vial (2021) and Höyng and Lau (2023), both of whom argue that digital transformation hinges not merely on technical skill but on the psychological readiness needed to convert technology into innovative results.

Direct Effect of Digital Competence on Innovative Work Behavior (H3)

By contrast, Digital Competence shows no significant direct effect on Innovative Work Behavior once Digital Readiness is held constant ($t = 1.102$; $\text{Sig.} = 0.273 > 0.05$). Technical proficiency, in other words, does not by itself translate into new ideas, new methods, or innovation within content-creation work; it supports task execution without guaranteeing innovative output. This points to other, unmeasured drivers of innovative work behavior motivation to innovate, self-efficacy, workplace support, autonomy, and opportunity to apply new ideas a view echoed in Huu's (2023) systematic review, which situates digital competence alongside factors such as digital autonomy and working conditions when explaining innovative work behavior.

Because the total effect in Table 1 is significant while the direct effect in Table 3 is not, Digital Readiness is a strong candidate for a full mediator. This was confirmed through the Sobel Test and a supplementary interaction-based regression, summarized in Table 4.

Table 4. Mediation Test Results for Hypothesis 4 (H4)

Test	t / z-value	Sig.	Result (H4)
Sobel Test: Digital Competence → Digital Readiness → Innovative Work Behavior	2.344	< 0.05	Accepted
Supplementary test: Digital Competence × Digital Readiness interaction → Innovative Work Behavior	3.870	0.000	Accepted

Source: Output of IBM SPSS Statistics, 2026

Mediating Role of Digital Readiness (H4)

The Sobel Test result ($z = 2.344 > 1.978$; $p < 0.05$) indicates a significant indirect effect of Digital Competence on Innovative Work Behavior through Digital Readiness. A supplementary regression using the Digital Competence $\times$ Digital Readiness interaction term to predict Innovative Work Behavior reinforces this conclusion ($t = 3.870$; Sig. = 0.000) the figure cited in the discussion and conclusion chapters of the underlying thesis when confirming Digital Readiness's mediating role. Read together with the total-effect and direct-effect results in Tables 1 and 3, the path analysis, the Sobel Test, and this supplementary test converge on the same conclusion: Digital Readiness fully mediates the effect of Digital Competence on Innovative Work Behavior.

The coefficient of determination (R^2) for sub-structure 2 reached 0.333, indicating that Digital Competence and Digital Readiness jointly explain 33.3 percent of the variance in Innovative Work Behavior, while the remaining 66.7 percent stems from factors outside this research model.

Practically, this means digital skill among freelance content creators does not translate into innovative behavior on its own. It first has to build the creator's readiness to accept, apply, and adjust to new digital tools; that readiness then becomes the driver of innovative behavior generating new ideas, developing concepts, adapting trends, adopting new technology, and solving production problems. Digital Readiness therefore operates as the pivotal link between digital capability and innovative work behavior among Generation Z freelance content creators, a pattern also reported by Kaur (2025) and Azzahra et al. (2025) in different organizational settings

D. CONCLUSIONS

Drawing on data from 140 Generation Z freelance content creators selected through purposive sampling, this study finds that Digital Competence exerts a positive and significant influence on Digital Readiness: creators who are more digitally capable also tend to be more prepared to face technological change. Digital Competence, however, does not significantly

influence Innovative Work Behavior on its own, functioning instead as a baseline capacity for carrying out digital work rather than a direct trigger for innovation. Digital Readiness, conversely, significantly and positively affects Innovative Work Behavior: greater readiness to accept, learn, use, and adjust to digital technology corresponds with a stronger tendency toward innovative work conduct. Multiple lines of evidence a significant total effect prior to mediation ($t = 3.289$; $\text{Sig.} = 0.001$), a direct effect that turns non-significant once the mediator is included, a significant Sobel Test result ($z = 2.344$; $p < 0.05$), and a significant mediation coefficient ($t = 3.870$; $\text{Sig.} = 0.000$) jointly confirm that Digital Readiness fully mediates the relationship between Digital Competence and Innovative Work Behavior. In sum, digital skill is necessary but insufficient on its own to generate innovative work behavior among freelance content creators; readiness to embrace change, test new tools, experiment, and view technological developments as opportunities for new ideas and methods must accompany it. These conclusions carry several caveats: the sample was confined to 140 Generation Z TikTok creators; only three variables were examined, leaving out other plausible predictors of innovative work behavior such as self-efficacy, creativity, digital autonomy, motivation to innovate, and work engagement; the data rely on self-report; and the cross-sectional design captures a single point in time rather than change over time.

E. SUGGESTIONS

For freelance content creators, continued investment in Digital Competence is advisable, particularly in the technical aspects of production trimming clips and applying suitable audio effects which scored lowest in this study; practice, tutorials, and self-directed learning can help close this gap. Because Digital Readiness proved to be the pivotal mechanism linking digital capability to innovative behavior, creators are also encouraged to deliberately build that readiness, for instance by trying new application features, tracking algorithm changes, and experimenting with emerging digital tools. For future research, extending the model to include additional predictors of Innovative Work Behavior self-efficacy, creativity, digital autonomy, motivation to

innovate, digital learning, work engagement, perceived organizational support, and job autonomy would help clarify what else shapes innovative conduct among digital workers; broadening the sample beyond Generation Z TikTok creators to other platforms, generations, or longitudinal designs would further test the model's generalizability and its stability over time.

REFERENCES

- Asosiasi Penyelenggara Jasa Internet Indonesia (APJII). (2026). Survei Internet APJII 2026. <https://survei.apjii.or.id/>
- Azzahra, F., Salendu, A., & Sengkananingrum, A. N. (2025). *Does digital readiness matter? The mediating role of digital readiness between organizational culture and innovative work behavior among SMEs in Indonesia*. *Indonesian Journal of Business and Entrepreneurship*, 11(2), 368. <https://doi.org/10.17358/ijbe.11.2.368>
- Badan Pusat Statistik (BPS). (2020). Jumlah penduduk menurut wilayah, klasifikasi generasi, dan jenis kelamin, Indonesia tahun 2020. <https://sensus.bps.go.id/topik/tabular/sp2020/2/0/0>
- Bandura, A. (1997). Self-efficacy: *The exercise of control*. W.H. Freeman and Company.
- Bandura, A., Ross, D., & Ross, S. A. (1986). *Transmission of aggression through imitation of aggressive models*. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 63(3), 575-582. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0045925>
- Carvalho, L. P. de, Poletto, T., Ramos, C. C., Rodrigues, F. de A., de Carvalho, V. D. H., & Nepomuceno, T. C. C. (2023). *Predictors of digital competence of public university employees and the impact on innovative work behavior*. *Administrative Sciences*, 13(5), 131. <https://doi.org/10.3390/admsci13050131>
- Chen, X., Chang-Richards, A., Ling, F. Y. Y., Yiu, K. T. W., Pelosi, A., & Yang, N. (2024). *Effects of digital readiness on digital competence of AEC companies: A dual-stage PLS-SEM-ANN analysis*. *Building Research and Information*, 52(8), 905-922. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09613218.2024.2343825>
- Cooper, D. R., & Schindler, P. S. (2014). *Business research methods (12th ed.)*. McGraw-Hill Education.
- de Jong, J., & den Hartog, D. (2010). *Measuring innovative work behaviour*. *Creativity and Innovation Management*, 19(1), 23-36. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8691.2010.00547.x>
- Ferrari, A. (2013). DIGCOMP: *A framework for developing and understanding digital competence in Europe* (Y. Punie & B. N. Brečko, Eds.). *Publications Office of the European Union*. <https://doi.org/10.2788/52966>

- Ghozali, I. (2021). *Aplikasi analisis multivariate dengan program IBM SPSS 26* (10th ed.). Badan Penerbit Universitas Diponegoro.
- Goldman Sachs Research. (2023). *The creator economy could approach half-a-trillion dollars by 2027*. <https://www.goldmansachs.com/insights/articles/the-creator-economy-could-approach-half-a-trillion-dollars-by-2027>
- Hair, J. F., Hult, G. T. M., Ringle, C. M., & Sarstedt, M. (2022). *A primer on partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM)* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Höyng, M., & Lau, A. (2023). *Being ready for digital transformation: How to enhance employees' intentional digital readiness*. *Computers in Human Behavior Reports*, 11, 100314. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chbr.2023.100314>
- Janssen, O. (2000). *Job demands, perceptions of effort-reward fairness and innovative work behaviour*. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 73(3), 287-302. <https://doi.org/10.1348/096317900167038>
- Kaur, S. (2025). *Digital leadership in the hybrid work era: Its impact on employee innovation and the mediating role of digital readiness*. *Scientific Societal & Behavioral Research Journal*, 1(2), 35-46. <https://doi.org/10.63329/av3nz12314>
- Kementerian Ketenagakerjaan Republik Indonesia. (2024). Kementerian Ketenagakerjaan. <https://peraturan.bpk.go.id/Details/306728>
- Noerchoidah, Rossitika, A. R., Istikhoroh, S., Harjanti, D., & Sitepu, R. B. (2026). *Membangun innovative work behavior di era digital: Kompetensi digital, agility karyawan, dan lingkungan kerja digital*. *Jurnal Ilmu Manajemen*, 129-142. <https://doi.org/10.26740/jim.v14n1.p129-142>
- Parasuraman, A. (2000). *Technology readiness index (TRI): A multiple-item scale to measure readiness to embrace new technologies*. *Journal of Service Research*, 2(4), 307-320. <https://doi.org/10.1177/109467050024001>
- Sekaran, U., & Bougie, R. (2016). *Research methods for business: A skill-building approach* (7th ed.). Wiley.
- Sugiyono. (2019). *Metode penelitian kuantitatif, kualitatif, dan R&D*. Alfabeta.
- Teece, D. J. (2007). *Explicating dynamic capabilities: The nature and microfoundations of (sustainable) enterprise performance*. *Strategic Management Journal*, 28(13), 1319-1350. <https://doi.org/10.1002/smj.640>
- Teece, D. J., Pisano, G., & Shuen, A. (1997). *Dynamic capabilities and strategic management*. *Strategic Management Journal*, 18(7), 509-533.
- Van Laar, E., Van Deursen, A. J. A. M., Van Dijk, J. A. G. M., & De Haan, J. (2017). *The relation between 21st-century skills and digital skills: A systematic literature review*. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 72, 577-588.
- Vial, G. (2021). *Understanding digital transformation: A review and a research agenda*. *Managing Digital Transformation*, 13-66.