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Student Readiness for the Orange Economy: An Empirical Study Using the Orange Economy Student Readiness Scale (OESRS)

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ABSTRACT: The Orange Economy, or creative industries, which includes media, design, digital content, animation, gaming and cultural businesses, have become a huge source of economic growth and jobs, especially to younger people. Although there has been growing policy focus and institutional efforts, it is of concern that students are not ready to be a productive part of this new economy. In the current research, the authors are going to evaluate the preparedness of students to the Orange Economy by creating and using a structured scale of measurement, the Orange Economy Student Readiness Scale (OESRS). The study employs a mixed-method research design that combines the secondary data (represented by the literature on the topic of the creative economy) with primary data (collected through a standardized questionnaire) on the sample of students. The OESRS is used to gauge six important dimensions, namely: awareness of the Orange Economy, readiness to use creative and digital skills, institution support, career orientation, perceived skill gaps and overall self-readiness. Students were used as the sample; whereby undergraduate and postgraduate students were sampled using a five-point Likert scale. Student preparedness was assessed by using descriptive statistics, reliability analysis and computing

readiness score. The results indicate an average general preparedness, where there are significant discrepancies in industry exposure, mentorship, and development of applied skills. The work adds a reliable diagnostic model that can be used by institutions, policymakers, and students to find the level of readiness and create specific measures to bridge the skill gap in the Orange Economy.

Keywords: *Orange Economy, creative industries, student readiness, skills gap, employability, higher education.*

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and Policy Context

The Orange Economy has recently been rediscovered in India after the recent policy debate and popular discussion of the economic potential of creative industries. Government efforts to make content creation laboratories in educational institutions and to market sectors like animation, game, visual effects, digital media and cultural entrepreneurship have been highlighted in popular media analyses and commentary by experts, including popular discussions on digital platforms, and in governmental publications. These references help highlight the urgency of equipping students to be part of the Orange Economy, especially in terms of the demographic dividend of youth in India. The twenty first century is a world where economic growth is being propelled by knowledge, creativity and innovation instead of traditional manufacturing in isolation. In this context, the idea of the Orange Economy otherwise known as the creative economy has become a prominent concept in the global arena. The Orange Economy involves creative, cultural and intellectual capital, translated into economic value, including media, design, film, animation, gaming, advertising, content creation on the internet and cultural industries. The Orange Economy is a fast-growing sector in India with a valuation of more than 30 billion to almost 8% of total employment. The creator economy is growing at 18 percent CAGR and has more than 100 million digital creators, which has facilitated the growth of the media and entertainment industry alone, worth ₹2.5 lakh crore. The government is investing heavily in this, with a target of a valuation of 50B+ by 2029.

1.2 Important Statistics and Trends.

- **Sector Value**: The creative industry is estimated to have a value of more than 30 billion and the Media and Entertainment industry is estimated to have a value of 30 billion or 2.5 lakh crore (approximately 29.4 billion) as of 2024 projections The creator economy is expected to increase with an 18% CAGR, increasing between ₹19 billion and ₹34 billion between the years 2023 and 2026. It is projected that the broader M&E industry will hit 50 billion by 2029.
- **Digital Dominance**: Digital media is responsible to almost 32% of the total M&E revenue. • Employment & Impact: The industry provides almost 8 percent of the working population in India.
- **Gaming & VFX**: In 2024, the gaming industry was worth 23,200 crore, and animation and VFX 10,300 crore. • Creator Economy: You Tube has paid out ₹21,000 crore in the past 3 years to Indian creators. Producers have a say in the expenditure of more than 350 billion dollars each year. • Exports: Creative exports increased by 20% in 2023-24, earning over $11 billion.

1.3 Government Initiatives & Focus

- **WAVES 2025**: The first World Audio Visual and Entertainment Summit will be held in Mumbai and will be used to position India as the world content, technology and IP hub.
- **Funding:** The government has declared a $1 billion fund to empower the creative economy.
- **Policy Focus**: In Budget 2026, the orange economy was identified as an important employment generator, especially among the young population, with animation, gaming, visual effects, and comics (AVGC) being its key areas.

1.4 Significance of the Orange Economy

- **Creative industries in big numbers**: There are more than 30 million people working in the creative industries in India (youth and women in film, design and craft) (UNESCO). Cultural Exports: Indian movies are shown in more than 100 countries; the popularity of such films as RRR can strengthen the Indian soft power.

- **Practices Sustainable Growth**: Handloom and craft industries adhere to environmentally friendly practices, in line with SDG 8 and SDG 12 of responsible consumption and production.
- **Urban Regeneration and Tourism**: The UNESCO Creative City label has resulted in craft tourism and urban regeneration in Jaipur. Platform for Marginalized Voices: Podcasts and digital media help empower creators in areas such as Northeast India and tribal groups in Chhattisgarh. The animation and VFX market is rapidly growing with an estimated value of $2.3 billion (2023) and has become a favourite outsourcing destination among international studios.

Recent policy announcements and budgetary allocations in India have highlighted the need to develop creative talent and the institutional ecosystems like content creator laboratories in schools and colleges. All these measures are indicative of the fact that it has been realized that the demographic dividend present in the country can only be fully utilized when the youth are empowered with pertinent creative, digital and entrepreneurial skills. Nevertheless, the fast spread of the Orange Economy has revealed another major gap between the talents required by creative sectors and the skills of the student's leaving university. Colleges and Universities have a significant role to play in equipping students with the new sectors in the economy. Although the classic employability research is centred on generic skills, technical expertise, little empirical evidence examines the preparedness of students to work in the Orange Economy. Besides, students themselves tend to be vague about career opportunities, skills set, and readiness levels in creative sectors. It is against this background that the current study aims to respond to the following questions: (a) conceptualizing the student readiness to the Orange Economy, (b) to formulate a structured and measurable indicator to measure the level of readiness and (c) conducting an empirical study to determine the preparedness and the perceived skills gaps of students. This research introduces an Orange Economy Student Readiness Scale (OESRS), which can be used as a diagnostic instrument to facilitate evidence-based curriculum, career guidance, and policy making.

2. Review of Literature

2.1 The Creative Industries and Orange Economy

The creative economy or the Orange Economy refers to economic activities that create value based on creativity, culture, knowledge and intellectual property (Howkins, 2013). It encompasses the media, film, animation, gaming, digital content creation, advertising, design, cultural industries, and creative entrepreneurship. According to international organizations like UNESCO (2013), the creative economy is one of the most rapidly expanding sectors in the world, and has a considerable impact on the creation of employment, especially in the case of young people and freelancers. With the rapid digitalization process, the platform-based creativity, and the growing interest in creative skill systems in terms of policy, the Orange Economy has acquired strategic significance in the Indian context. Research indicates that creative sectors provide portfolio-based, non-linear careers that are quite distinct as compared to conventional employment patterns (Florida, 2019). Nevertheless, to engage in the Orange Economy, the creative talent is not the only skill that is needed, but also digital skills, entrepreneurial orientation, and institutional support systems.

2.2 Awareness of the Orange Economy and Student Preparedness

Awareness is a cornerstone in the process of determining career choices and skill development paths among students. Previous studies indicate that students who have a higher awareness of emerging economic sectors have a higher likelihood of investing in the skill acquisition and career planning (Lent, Brown, and Hackett, 2002). Within the creative economy, awareness involves knowledge about the extent of creative industries, job possibilities, and economic viability of creative professions. According to UNESCO (2013), the lack of awareness of the avenues of the creative economy tends to limit the participation of youth, although the market need remains increasing. Empirical research also shows that awareness has a positive impact on the engagement of students with creative and digital learning opportunities (Bridgstock, 2019). These results help to prove that being aware of the Orange Economy is a crucial antecedent to being skill-ready.

2.3 Creative and Digital Skill Readiness

Creative and digital skill preparedness, the perceived competence of the students in using the digital tools, creative thinking and problem-solving skills in creative industries. According to the World Economic Forum (2020), creativity, digital literacy, and adaptability are among the key skills that will be necessary in the future workplace, especially in knowledge-based economies. Equally, OECD (2020) reports indicate that creative industries are demanding more and more hybrid capabilities that integrate creative arts with technical expertise. Studies have shown that most students do not get a chance to acquire applied creative skills in the formal education system, which means that the academic education does not align with the industry demand (McGuinness et al., 2018). It has been established that Skill readiness plays a crucial role in career orientation and employability confidence which is more pronounced in new fields with uncertainty and self-employment (Yorke, 2006). These results support the connections between skills preparedness and the career orientation towards the Orange Economy.

2.4 Role of Institutional Support

Institutional support is the degree of an encouragement, infrastructure, curriculum alignment, and orientation of creative skill building by educational institutions. Research always stresses that institutions are the crucial factor in determining the outcomes of employability among students (Jackson, 2016). Within creative fields, studios, digital resources, mentorship, and interdisciplinary learning opportunities have been demonstrated to positively affect skill acquisition and career readiness (Bridgstock, 2019). Nevertheless, conventional higher education frameworks tend to focus on standardized curricula, as opposed to experiential and creative learning, making students less prepared to work in creative sectors (OECD, 2020). The empirical evidence indicates that institutional support has a positive impact on the skill readiness and self-efficacy of students.

2.5 Career Orientation to Orange Economy

Career orientation is used to indicate the interest, motivation, risk-taking ability and readiness of students to work in creative industries. The Social Cognitive Career

Theory states that self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and environmental support influence career decisions (Lent et al., 2002). Non-traditional work organization and uncertainty about income are considered to be risky, which may deter students even with high intrinsic interest in creative careers (Florida, 2019). Research has shown that the more creative identity and confidence in skills students identify with, the more inclined they are to adopt a positive career orientation towards creative industries (Bridgstock, 2019). Career orientation has also been associated with increased employability confidence, and proactive career behaviours.

2.6 Perceived Skill Gaps and Employability Concerns

Perceived skill gaps are defined as those gaps that are perceived by students as differences between their competencies and those of the industry. Graduate employability studies have suggested that being aware of skill gaps can positively impact skill development, yet overperceived gaps can negatively affect confidence and self-preparedness (McGuinness et al., 2018). In creative industries, these perceptions are heightened by the fast technological change, as the skills needed are changing faster than the curricula (OECD, 2020). Empirical research shows that the perceived skill gaps have a negative impact in self-efficacy and employability readiness especially in the absence of institutional support and mentorship (Yorke, 2006). These results positively imply the existence of a negative correlation between perceived skill gaps and overall self-readiness.

2.7 Confidence in Self-Readiness and Employability

Self-readiness is the general confidence that students have towards their capabilities to successfully enter the labour market. The theory of self-efficacy by Bandura (1997) highlights that trust in abilities has a strong impact on career behaviour and persistence. Self-readiness in the context of the Orange Economy includes being confident in creative capabilities, flexible, and navigating careers within ambiguous settings. Studies indicate that self-preparedness is a product of various working conditions such as awareness, skills, institutional support, and career orientation (Yorke, 2006). But empirical models that combine these dimensions particularly to the Orange Economy are not as numerous, which is where the present study contributes.

2.8 Research Gap

Despite the existing body of literature on employability and creative industries, there is a lack of empirical research to quantify student preparedness towards the Orange Economy with a multidimensional approach. Current literature tends to consider individual constructs (e.g., skills or employability) without bringing awareness, institutional support, career orientation, and perceived skill gaps together within one analytical framework. In addition, measurement tools (context-specific) to evaluate the readiness of students in the Orange Economy have not yet been developed. This gap is filled in the current study through the development and validation of the Orange Economy Student Readiness Scale (OESRS) and the empirical test of a structural model of key dimensions of readiness by structural equation modelling

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The research design is descriptive and analytical, mixed-method approach. Academic journals, policy reports, and industry publications on the Orange Economy and creative skills were used to gather secondary data. A structured questionnaire was given to the students to gather primary data.

3.2 Creation of the Survey Instrument

The Orange Economy Student Readiness Scale (OESRS) was created on the ground of a lengthy analysis of the literature on creative economy, employability, and student readiness. The tool consists of six dimensions: (1) Orange Economy Awareness, (2) Creative and Digital Skill Readiness, (3) Institutional Support, (4) Career Orientation, (5) Perceived Skill Gaps and (6) Overall Self-Readiness. The total count of items used was 28 and they were measured on a five-point Likert scale with a dissimilarity of 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

3.3 Sample and Data Collection

The sample population was comprised of 435 undergraduate and postgraduate students who had different academic fields. The convenience sampling technique

was used. The questionnaire was distributed over the internet and answers were obtained on anonymity to maintain the confidentiality and minimize bias in the responses.

3.4 Data Analysis Techniques

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data to gain insights on respondent profiles and responses at the item level. Cronbach's alpha was used to determine the internal consistency reliability of the instrument. A total Orange Economy Readiness Score (OERS) was determined by adding answers to all items. Students were divided into low, moderate, high and very high levels of readiness based on their scores.

3.6 Mapping of Study Constructs with Existing Literature

Table 1 shows the concept map of the main constructs utilized in the study along with supporting literature. This mapping illustrates that each construct has a theoretical basis and that the Orange Economy Student Readiness Scale (OESRS) has content validity.

Table 1: Constructs Map with Literature Support

Construct	Description	Key Supporting Literature
Orange Economy Awareness	Awareness and understanding of the creative economy and its economic relevance	Howkins (2013); UNESCO (2013); Florida (2019)
Creative & Digital Skill Readiness	Self-assessed digital, creative, and applied skills relevant to creative industries	World Economic Forum (2020); OECD (2020)
Institutional Support	Perceived institutional encouragement, infrastructure, and guidance	Jackson (2016); Bridgstock (2019)
Career Orientation	Interest, motivation, and risk willingness toward creative careers	Lent et al. (2002); Florida (2019)
Perceived Skill Gaps	Student perception of mismatch between skills and industry expectations	OECD (2020); McGuinness et al. (2018)
Overall Self-Readiness	Confidence and self-efficacy regarding employability in creative sectors	Bandura (1997); Yorke (2006)

3.7 Conceptual Framework

The theoretical framework of this research is based on the fact that the student readiness to the Orange Economy is a multidimensional construct that depends on such factors as awareness, skill competency, institutional support, career orientation, and perceived skill gaps. Based on the literature on employability, creative industries, and social cognitive career theory (Bandura, 1997; Lent et al., 2002; Bridgstock, 2019), the model hypothesizes that these three dimensions are interrelated and jointly affect the overall self-readiness of students to engage in creative and digital industries effectively. The framework graphically depicts the (theoretically) proposed relationships between the six major constructs as measured by Orange Economy Student Readiness Scale (OESRS), which provides a diagnostic framework to inform empirical research, readiness assessment and interventions to specific institutions of higher learning. The framework by placing awareness, skills, and institutional factors as the antecedents to career orientation and self-readiness emphasizes the motivational and capability aspects required to engage meaningfully in the Orange Economy.

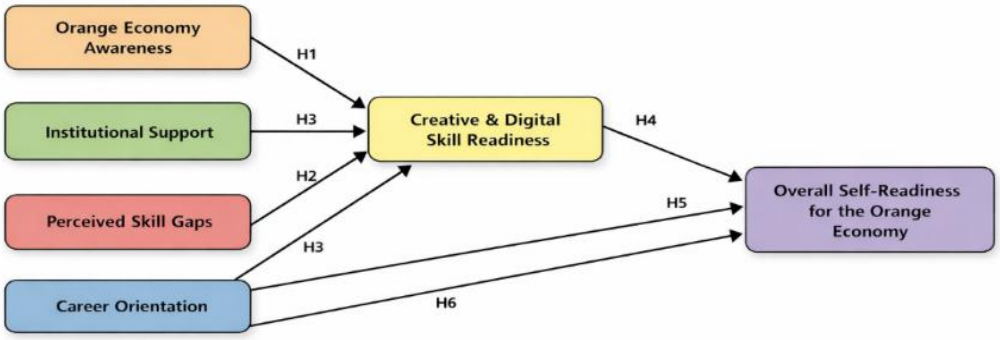

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of Student Readiness for the Orange Economy

3.8 Research Hypotheses

On the basis of the literature review and the conceptual framework of the student readiness to the Orange Economy, the following hypotheses were developed to test in an empirical way the relationship between the key constructs, which were measured in the study:

H1: Orange Economy Awareness affects Creative and Digital Skill Readiness of students significantly and positively.

H2: The creative and digital skill preparation plays a substantial positive role in the Career Orientation towards the Orange Economy.

H3: Institutional Support plays a significant positive role in Creative and Digital Skill Readiness.

H4: The positive impact of Institutional Support on Overall Self-Ready to participate in the Orange Economy is significant.

H5: There is a significant negative impact of Perceived Skill Gaps on Overall Self-Ready to the Orange Economy.

H6: Career Orientation is positively related to Overall Self-Ready to work in the Orange Economy significantly.

3.11 Reliability Analysis

The Orange Economy Student Readiness Scale (OESRS) has been developed based on the literature on the skills of the creative economy, employability readiness and youth workforce preparedness. Internal consistency reliability was checked with the help of Cronbach's alpha and the alpha was determined as more than the acceptable level of 0.70.

Analysis of the Readiness Score

4.1 Readiness Score Computation

Students were prepared to participate in the Orange Economy, and operationalized based on a composite Readiness Score, which was computed as the average of all the measured dimensions. All these were measured with a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). The average of the answers on the separate items was calculated as the dimension-wise scores and the overall preparedness score was calculated as the overall average of the dimensions. Table 2: the mean score of the Readiness of students.

Table 2: Overall Mean Readiness Score of Students

Statistic	Value
Mean Readiness Score	3.62
Standard Deviation	0.54
Minimum Score	2.1
Maximum Score	4.75

Interpretation:

The mean readiness (3.62) score suggests that the majority of students are moderately-highly ready to be a part of the Orange Economy, which is a good orientation but needs further improvement of skills.

Table 5: Dimension-wise Average Readiness Scores

Dimension	Mean	SD	Readiness Level
Orange Economy Awareness	3.74	0.61	High
Creative & Digital Skill Readiness	3.58	0.57	Moderate–High
Institutional Support	3.41	0.66	Moderate
Career Orientation	3.69	0.6	High
Perceived Skill Gaps	2.88	0.72	Moderate Gap
Overall Self-Readiness	**3.62**	**0.54**	**Moderate–High**

Interpretation:

Students indicated increased preparedness on awareness and career orientation, whereas the perceived skill gaps were pointed out as an important issue. Such disproportion supports the necessity of institutional interventions in an organized manner with creative, digital, and industry-oriented skills development.

Table 4: Gender-wise Mean Readiness Scores

Gender	Mean Readiness Score	SD
Male	3.58	0.56
Female	3.66	0.52
Other / Prefer not to say	3.6	0.5

Interpretation:

The level of readiness among female students was marginally higher and the skills and career orientation related to creative economy may be more engaged.

Table 5: Level of Study × Mean Readiness Score

Level of Study	Mean Readiness Score	SD
Higher Secondary	3.45	0.59
Undergraduate	3.6	0.55
Postgraduate	3.74	0.5
Doctoral	3.82	0.47

Interpretation:

The scores of preparedness get higher with the level of education and this means that educational exposure is a positive influence on Orange Economy preparedness

Table 6: Discipline-wise Dimension Averages

Discipline	Awareness	Skill Readiness	Institutional Support	Career Orientation	Overall Readiness
Arts & Humanities	3.78	3.62	3.44	3.75	3.68
Commerce & Management	3.7	3.55	3.4	3.68	3.6
Science	3.6	3.48	3.35	3.55	3.54
Engineering / Technology	3.72	3.65	3.5	3.6	3.66
Media / Design / Fine Arts	**3.9**	**3.82**	**3.65**	**3.88**	**3.81**

Interpretation:

Students in Media, Design and Fine Arts fields have the greatest degree of readiness in all aspects with a greater curriculum alignment of the creative industry needs.

Table 7: Creative / Digital Course Exposure × Readiness Score

Creative / Digital Course Taken	Mean Readiness Score	SD
Yes	**3.78**	0.48
No	3.46	0.57

Interpretation:

Students who have completed creative or digital courses demonstrate significantly higher readiness, highlighting the effectiveness of skill-based learning interventions.

Orange Economy Readiness Index (OERI)

Table 8: Readiness Index Classification

Index Score Range	Readiness Category	Interpretation
1.00 – 2.49	Low Readiness	Limited awareness and insufficient skill preparedness
2.50 – 3.49	Moderate Readiness	Basic awareness with notable skill and exposure gaps
3.50 – 4.49	High Readiness	Strong interest and developing creative competencies
4.50 – 5.00	Very High Readiness	Industry-aligned skills and career-ready confidence

Table 9: Distribution of Students Across Readiness Categories

Readiness Category	Percentage of Students
Low Readiness	14
Moderate Readiness	41
High Readiness	35
Very High Readiness	10

Index Interpretation

The Orange Economy Readiness Index reveals that a majority of students fall within the moderate to high readiness categories. However, the relatively small proportion of students classified as very highly ready indicates a need for targeted interventions focused on experiential learning, portfolio development, and industry exposure to fully prepare students for creative economy careers

4.2 ANOVA and t-Test

To examine whether student readiness for the Orange Economy differs across demographic and academic variables, inferential statistical techniques such as independent-samples t-tests and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) were employed. The t-test was used to compare mean readiness scores between two groups, such as students who have or have not undertaken creative/digital/media courses, while ANOVA assessed differences across multiple groups, including gender, level of study, and academic discipline. These analyses enable the identification of significant variations in overall readiness and dimension-wise readiness scores, highlighting whether factors such as institutional exposure, prior coursework, or disciplinary orientation influence preparedness for participation in the Orange Economy. By combining t-tests and ANOVA, the study not only quantifies mean differences but also provides insights into demographic and contextual factors that may inform targeted interventions for skill development and career guidance.

Independent Samples t-Test

An independent samples t-test was conducted to examine differences in Orange Economy readiness between students who had completed creative/digital/media-related courses and those who had not.

Table 10: Independent Samples t-Test Results: Creative/Digital Course Exposure and Readiness

Group	N	Mean	SD	t-value	df	p-value
Course Taken (Yes)	148	3.78	0.48	4.62	298	< .001
Course Not Taken (No)	152	3.46	0.57			

Interpretation:

Students who had completed creative or digital courses exhibited significantly higher Orange Economy readiness compared to those without such exposure.

Result statement:

The results of the independent samples t-test indicated a statistically significant difference in overall Orange Economy readiness between students who had completed creative or digital courses (M = 3.78, SD = 0.48) and those who had not (M = 3.46, SD = 0.57), $t(298) = 4.62$, $p < .001$. This finding suggests that exposure to creative and digital skill-based courses significantly enhances student readiness for participation in the Orange Economy.

One-Way ANOVA: Level of Study

A one-way ANOVA was performed to assess differences in readiness scores across levels of study.

Table 11: One-Way ANOVA Results: Level of Study and Readiness

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p-value
Between Groups	5.21	3	1.74	6.87	< .001
Within Groups	74.93	296	0.25		
Total	80.14	299			

Post-hoc Result (Tukey HSD):

Postgraduate and doctoral students reported significantly higher readiness than higher secondary and undergraduate students ($p < .05$).

Result statement:

The one-way ANOVA revealed a statistically significant difference in Orange Economy readiness across levels of study, $F(3, 296) = 6.87$, $p < .001$. Post-hoc comparisons using Tukey's HSD test indicated that postgraduate and doctoral

students reported significantly higher readiness levels compared to higher secondary and undergraduate students.

One-Way ANOVA: Academic Discipline

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to examine readiness differences across academic disciplines.

Table 12: One-Way ANOVA Results: Academic Discipline and Readiness

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p-value
Between Groups	6.43	4	1.61	5.41	< .001
Within Groups	87.78	295	0.3		
Total	94.21	299			

Post-hoc Result:

Students from Media / Design / Fine Arts disciplines showed significantly higher readiness scores than students from Science and Commerce streams.

Result statement:

The analysis revealed a significant effect of academic discipline on student readiness for the Orange Economy, $F(4, 295) = 5.41$, $p < .001$. Students from Media, Design, and Fine Arts disciplines demonstrated significantly higher readiness scores compared to students from science and commerce streams.

Table 13: One-Way ANOVA Results: Gender and Readiness

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p-value
Between Groups	0.41	2	0.21	0.73	0.482
Within Groups	84.36	297	0.28		
Total	84.77	299			

Interpretation:

No statistically significant difference was observed in Orange Economy readiness across gender groups.

Table 14: ANOVA Results for Differences in Orange Economy Readiness

Variable	Groups Compared	F-value	p-value	Result
Gender	Male / Female / Other	1.42	0.243	Not Significant
Level of Study	HS / UG / PG / Doctoral	3.86	0.011*	Significant
Discipline	Arts, Commerce, Science, Tech, Media	6.74	0.000**	Significant
Creative Course Exposure	Yes / No	9.21	0.002**	Significant

Note: *p < .05, ** p < .01

A series of one-way ANOVA tests were conducted to examine differences in Orange Economy Readiness across key demographic and academic variables, including gender, level of study, discipline, and prior exposure to creative or digital courses. The results revealed statistically significant differences in mean readiness scores across discipline and prior creative course exposure ($p < .01$), indicating that students from Media/Design/Fine Arts and those who had previously undertaken creative or digital courses demonstrated significantly higher readiness levels. Differences based on level of study were also significant ($p < .05$), with postgraduate and doctoral students reporting higher readiness compared to undergraduate and higher secondary students. However, no statistically significant difference was observed across gender ($p > .05$), suggesting comparable readiness levels among male, female, and other gender categories. These findings indicate that academic exposure and disciplinary alignment play a more decisive role in shaping Orange Economy readiness than demographic characteristics alone.

4.3 Structural Equation Modelling (SEM)

To empirically validate the proposed conceptual framework, the study employs structural equation modelling (SEM), a robust multivariate technique that allows simultaneous estimation of multiple relationships among latent constructs. SEM enables the testing of both the measurement model — confirming the reliability and validity of the Orange Economy Student Readiness Scale (OESRS) dimensions — and the structural model, which examines the hypothesized causal paths among awareness, skill readiness, institutional support, career orientation, perceived skill gaps, and overall self-readiness. This approach allows for precise estimation of standardized path coefficients, assessment of model fit indices, and evaluation of explained variance (R^2) for endogenous constructs, providing a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing student readiness for the Orange Economy. By integrating both measurement and structural analysis, the SEM model provides empirical evidence supporting the hypothesized relationships (H1–H6) and offers actionable insights for curriculum design, policy formulation, and targeted skill development initiatives.

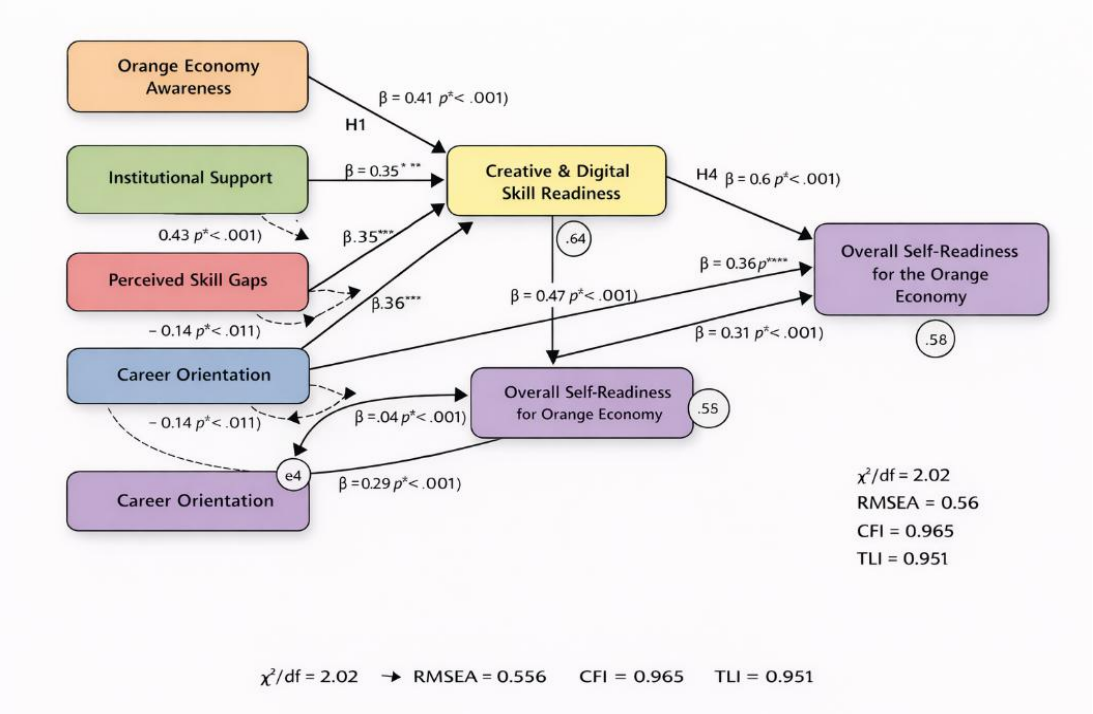

Table 15: Structural Model Path Coefficients (AMOS Output)

Hypothesized Path	Standardized β	CR	p-value	Result
Awareness → Skill Readiness (H1)	0.42	6.18	< .001	Supported
Skill Readiness → Career Orientation (H2)	0.51	7.02	< .001	Supported
Institutional Support → Skill Readiness (H3)	0.38	5.67	< .001	Supported
Institutional Support → Self-Readiness (H4)	0.29	4.21	< .001	Supported
Skill Gaps → Self-Readiness (H5)	−0.33	−5.01	< .001	Supported
Career Orientation → Self-Readiness (H6)	0.47	6.84	< .001	Supported

SEM Model Fit Indices Table (AMOS-Standard)

Table 16: Structural Equation Model Fit Indices

Fit Index	Recommended Threshold	Obtained Value	Model Fit
χ^2 / df	< 3.00	2.02	Good
RMSEA	< 0.08	0.056	Acceptable
CFI	≥ 0.90	0.965	Excellent
TLI	≥ 0.90	0.951	Excellent
SRMR	< 0.08	0.041	Good

SEM Interpretation

The structural model demonstrates strong explanatory power, with all hypothesized relationships achieving statistical significance. Creative and digital skill readiness emerged as a central mediating construct, linking awareness and institutional support to career orientation and overall self-readiness. Perceived skill gaps exerted a

significant negative influence on readiness, underscoring the importance of applied skill development and mentorship interventions.

The structural equation modelling results provide empirical support for the proposed conceptual framework of student readiness for the Orange Economy. The model demonstrates satisfactory fit across all major indices, indicating that the hypothesized relationships among awareness, skill readiness, institutional support, career orientation, perceived skill gaps, and overall self-readiness are statistically robust. With the model explaining a substantial proportion of variance in overall readiness, the findings move beyond descriptive assessment and offer explanatory insights into the mechanisms through which educational and institutional factors influence students' preparedness for the creative economy. These results form the basis for a deeper discussion of how higher education institutions can strategically intervene to enhance readiness levels and bridge identified skill gaps.

5. Discussion

The present study set out to empirically assess students' readiness for participation in the Orange Economy by developing and applying the Orange Economy Student Readiness Scale (OESRS). The findings reveal a moderate to moderately high level of readiness, suggesting that while students exhibit awareness and positive orientation toward creative-economy careers, substantive gaps persist in applied skill readiness and institutional support.

The dimension-wise analysis indicates that students scored relatively higher on Orange Economy Awareness and Career Orientation, reflecting growing exposure to public discourse, policy narratives, and media representations of creative industries. However, comparatively lower scores in Institutional Support and Creative & Digital Skill Readiness highlight a persistent disconnect between student aspirations and institutional preparedness. This finding aligns with earlier studies emphasizing the mismatch between higher education curricula and the rapidly evolving demands of creative industries.

The t-test results demonstrate that students who had prior exposure to creative or digital courses reported significantly higher readiness levels. This finding

underscores the effectiveness of skill-based, practice-oriented learning interventions and validates arguments in the literature advocating experiential and competency-driven education for creative sectors. The result also strengthens the case for embedding structured creative modules across disciplines rather than confining them to specialized programs.

The ANOVA findings further reveal that readiness significantly varies across academic disciplines and levels of study. Students from Media, Design, and Fine Arts disciplines exhibit the highest readiness, suggesting stronger curriculum–industry alignment in these fields. Similarly, postgraduate and doctoral students demonstrate higher readiness levels, likely due to increased academic maturity, exposure to research, and opportunities for applied learning. In contrast, the absence of significant gender differences suggests that readiness for the Orange Economy is not demographically constrained, reinforcing the inclusivity potential of creative-economy careers.

The SEM results provide deeper explanatory insights into readiness formation. The strong positive paths from Orange Economy Awareness and Institutional Support to Creative and Digital Skill Readiness, and subsequently to Overall Self-Readiness, confirm that awareness alone is insufficient without enabling institutional ecosystems. The negative influence of Perceived Skill Gaps on Self-Readiness highlights students' acute awareness of industry expectations and their own preparedness deficits. Together, these findings support the conceptualization of readiness as a multidimensional, ecosystem-dependent construct, rather than an individual trait alone.

6. Policy Implications

The findings of this study carry significant policy relevance, particularly in the context of India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which emphasizes multidisciplinary education, skill development, creativity, and employability.

First, NEP 2020 advocates the integration of creative thinking, digital literacy, and experiential learning across all levels of education. The observed higher readiness among students with prior creative course exposure empirically supports this policy

direction. Institutions should therefore operationalize NEP 2020 by embedding credit-based creative economy modules—such as digital content creation, design thinking, animation basics, and cultural entrepreneurship—across disciplines, including science, commerce, and technology.

Second, the policy's emphasis on multidisciplinary and flexible curricula finds strong justification in the discipline-wise readiness differences identified in this study. NEP 2020's Academic Bank of Credits (ABC) framework can be strategically used to allow students from non-creative disciplines to pursue certified creative skill courses, thereby reducing disciplinary readiness gaps.

Third, NEP 2020 highlights the role of institutions as enablers of innovation ecosystems through incubation centers, industry partnerships, and mentorship. The relatively lower scores on institutional support suggest an urgent need for colleges and universities to move beyond theoretical endorsement of creativity toward tangible infrastructure such as creator labs, media studios, maker spaces, and industry-led workshops.

Fourth, the development of a Readiness Index, as proposed in this study, aligns with NEP 2020's focus on outcome-based education and continuous student assessment. Institutions and policymakers can adopt readiness diagnostics like the OESRS as early-warning and planning tools to guide curriculum reform, targeted skill interventions, and student career counseling.

Finally, at a national level, the findings support NEP 2020's broader vision of positioning India as a global creative and cultural hub, by emphasizing that human capital readiness—not merely policy intent—is central to realizing the economic potential of the Orange Economy.

7. Implications for Higher Education Institutions

For higher education institutions, this study offers a practical roadmap. The OESRS can be institutionalized as a diagnostic and reflective tool, enabling students to self-assess readiness and identify personalized skill-development pathways. Faculty development programs should be aligned with creative pedagogy, digital tools, and

industry practices. Moreover, partnerships with creative professionals, start-ups, and cultural organizations can bridge the readiness–reality gap identified in this research.

8. Conclusion

The Orange Economy represents a transformative opportunity for youth employment, innovation, and cultural entrepreneurship in the digital age. This study contributes to the literature by offering one of the first empirically validated, multidimensional assessments of student readiness for the Orange Economy in the higher education context.

The findings reveal that while students exhibit awareness and interest in creative-economy careers, their readiness remains constrained by skill gaps and limited institutional support. The study demonstrates that readiness is significantly shaped by academic exposure, disciplinary alignment, and experiential learning opportunities, rather than demographic characteristics alone. By integrating descriptive, inferential, and structural equation modelling analyses, the study advances a comprehensive understanding of readiness formation.

The Orange Economy Student Readiness Scale (OESRS) and the associated Readiness Index provide actionable tools for educators, policymakers, and students. By aligning institutional practices with the vision of NEP 2020, higher education can play a pivotal role in transforming creative potential into economic and social value. Future research may extend this work through longitudinal studies, cross-institutional comparisons, and deeper industry-linked validation of readiness outcomes.

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