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Job Satisfaction as a Mediator of Compensation and Leadership Style on Digital Workforce Performance in Indonesian Tech Startups

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Abstract: This study investigates the effect of compensation and leadership style on employee performance, with job satisfaction as a mediating variable, among digital workers in Indonesian tech startups. Using a quantitative approach, data were collected from 200 respondents through a structured questionnaire and analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The results show that compensation directly and indirectly affects performance, while leadership style influences performance only through job satisfaction. Job satisfaction plays a significant mediating role, reflecting how psychological well-being connects compensation and leadership with performance outcomes. The model demonstrates strong explanatory power ($R^2 = 0.643$) and predictive relevance ($Q^2 = 0.457$), confirming the robustness of the proposed framework. These findings highlight the importance of integrating structural, relational, and psychological aspects to improve performance in dynamic digital work environments.

Keyword: Digital Workforce, Compensation, Leadership Style, Job Satisfaction, Employee Performance.

INTRODUCTION

In the era of digital transformation, Indonesian tech startups have emerged as key players driving innovation, employment, and economic growth. According to Startup Ranking (2024), Indonesia ranks in the top five globally with over 2,500 registered startups primarily in sectors such as fintech, edtech, healthtech, and e-commerce. These companies rely heavily on digital talent such as software developers, product managers, data analysts, and UI/UX designers, collectively referred to as the digital workforce. Despite the sector's rapid growth, many startups face persistent challenges in managing the performance and retention of their digital workforce. High turnover, stress, and burnout are common in the industry. A study by Mercer (2023) reported that 61% of digital workers in Southeast Asia—including Indonesia—are considering changing jobs due to dissatisfaction with leadership, lack of recognition, and inadequate compensation. Meanwhile, Google-Temasek-Bain's Southeast Asia Digital Economy report (2022) highlights that talent sustainability is one of the biggest operational bottlenecks for scaling digital businesses in the region employee performance is a critical

determinant of success, especially in knowledge-intensive startups Research by Anwar et al. (2021) finds that companies with high-performing digital teams achieve faster market entry, better product innovation, and stronger user retention. However, performance is not solely determined by skills; it is shaped by both internal motivation and organizational climate—especially leadership style, compensation, and job satisfaction.

Compensation and Performance

Compensation continues to be a fundamental motivator in employment. According to a study by Wijaya et al. (2023), fair and transparent compensation systems significantly enhance employee productivity in digital industries. Yet, recent findings show that mere monetary incentives are not always sufficient to sustain high performance, especially in younger, creative workforces (Hanaysha, 2022). This raises questions on how compensation impacts performance indirectly through mediating psychological constructs.

Leadership Style and Performance

Leadership style plays an equally critical role in digital teams. Transformational leadership, which includes inspiring vision, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration, has been shown to foster innovation and engagement among digital workers (Putra & Andini, 2024; Bass & Avolio, 2020). Yusuf et al. (2022) highlight that in agile work environments, effective leaders are not just task supervisors but culture builders. Nonetheless, the exact mechanism by which leadership impacts performance remains underexplored, particularly in fast-paced startup settings.

Job Satisfaction as a Mediator

The mediating role of job satisfaction in the link between organizational factors and performance has received increased attention in recent literature. Salas-Vallina et al. (2020) argue that job satisfaction is a key psychological pathway through which leadership and rewards are internalized and translated into behaviors such as commitment, creativity, and task completion. While several studies have explored direct links between leadership and performance, or compensation and performance, fewer have tested job satisfaction as a mediating variable in the context of Indonesia's tech startup ecosystem.

Research Gap

Most prior studies in Indonesia have examined traditional sectors such as banking, manufacturing, and public administration, with limited empirical exploration into digital-native startups (Rachman, 2021; Sutarto et al., 2021). Moreover, the interplay between extrinsic rewards, leadership style, and psychological satisfaction has not been sufficiently modeled to explain variations in employee performance among digital workers. Given the unique characteristics of this workforce—remote settings, flat hierarchies, project-based roles—there is a pressing need to investigate how motivation and satisfaction frameworks function in startup environments.

Research Objective

This study aims to investigate the influence of compensation and leadership style on the performance of the digital workforce in Indonesian tech startups, with job satisfaction acting as a mediating variable. The research seeks to contribute both theoretically—by enriching the literature on motivational pathways in the digital economy—and practically—by offering insights to startup leaders and HR practitioners on how to retain and optimize digital talent.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employs a quantitative explanatory research design, aiming to test the causal relationship between compensation and leadership style on employee performance, with job satisfaction as a mediating variable. The quantitative approach was selected to enable statistical testing of hypotheses using structural equation modeling (SEM). This method is considered appropriate for exploring complex relationships among multiple latent variables (Hair et al., 2021).

Population and Sample

The population in this study consists of digital workforce employees working at Indonesian tech startups across various sectors, including fintech, edtech, SaaS, and e-commerce. To ensure relevance, participants must meet the following criteria:

a. Currently working in a digital role (e.g., software engineer, data analyst, product manager).
b. Employed in startups operating within Indonesia for at least one year.

The sample was selected using purposive sampling, a non-probability technique used in management research when the population has specific characteristics (Sekaran & Bougie, 2020). A total of 200 respondents were collected to meet the minimum sample size requirements for SEM-PLS analysis, exceeding the 5:1 rule (5 indicators per parameter) and following Hair et al.'s (2021) recommendation of a minimum of 10 cases per path in the model.

Data Collection Technique

Primary data were collected through a structured online questionnaire distributed via Google Forms to digital professionals working in Indonesian startups. The questionnaire consisted of closed-ended questions measured using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). The survey was conducted over a period of four weeks in May 2025. The questionnaire items were adapted from validated instruments and adjusted to the Indonesian startup context (see Table 1).

Measurement of Variables

Table 1. Operational Definition of Variables

Variable	Code	Indicator	Questionnaire Statement	Source (2020–2025)	Scale
Compensation(X1)	X1.1	Salary fairness	My salary is fair compared to others in similar roles.	Sutarto et al. (2021)	Likert 1–5
	X1.2	Bonuses and benefits	I am satisfied with the bonuses and benefits I receive.	Li & Wang (2020)	Likert 1–5
	X1.3	Competitive package	My company provides a competitive compensation package.	Wijaya et al. (2023)	Likert 1–5
	X1.4	Transparency	I understand how my compensation is determined.	Rini & Yunita (2022)	Likert 1–5
	X1.5	Motivation from pay	My compensation motivates me to perform better.	Ma et al. (2022)	Likert 1–5
Leadership Style (X2)	X2.1	Vision communication	My leader communicates a clear and inspiring vision.	Bass & Avolio (2020)	Likert 1–5
	X2.2	Encouraging innovation	My leader encourages creativity and innovation.	Nugroho et al. (2023)	Likert 1–5
	X2.3	Individual concern	My leader cares about my individual development.	Putra & Andini (2024)	Likert 1–5

	X2.4	Recognition	My leader appreciates and recognizes my contributions.	Avolio & Walumbwa (2020)	Likert 1–5
	X2.5	Motivation to exceed	My leader motivates the team to exceed performance expectations.	Yusuf et al. (2022)	Likert 1–5
Job Satisfaction(M)	M1.1	Work enjoyment	I am satisfied with the type of work I do.	Spector (2021); Hanaysha (2022)	Likert 1–5
	M1.2	Supervisor support	I feel respected and supported by my supervisor.	Salas-Vallina et al. (2020)	Likert 1–5
	M1.3	Career growth	I am satisfied with the opportunities for career growth.	Firmansyah & Ardiansyah (2024)	Likert 1–5
	M1.4	Organizational belonging	I feel a strong sense of belonging in my organization.	Hanaysha (2022)	Likert 1–5
	M1.5	Work environment comfort	My workplace environment makes me feel happy and comfortable.	Andriani & Suherman (2023)	Likert 1–5
Performance(Y)	Y1.1	Timeliness	I complete my tasks on time.	Rachman (2021)	Likert 1–5
	Y1.2	Work quality	I maintain high quality in the work I deliver.	Zhang et al. (2023)	Likert 1–5
	Y1.3	Target achievement	I consistently meet the organization's performance expectations.	Ghozali & Rahayu (2024)	Likert 1–5
	Y1.4	Rule compliance	I follow workplace rules and policies.	Juhana et al. (2023)	Likert 1–5
	Y1.5	Initiative	I take initiative to improve work processes or solve problems.	Yuliani & Farida (2021)	Likert 1–5

Each construct was measured using reflective indicators. Validity and reliability testing (convergent validity, discriminant validity, and composite reliability) were conducted in SmartPLS.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with the help of SmartPLS software. This technique was chosen due to its robustness in handling complex models, small to medium sample sizes, and formative or reflective measurement models (Hair et al., 2021). The following steps were carried out:

a. Outer Model Evaluation – to assess indicator reliability, convergent validity (Average Variance Extracted), and discriminant validity (Fornell-Larcker criteria and HTMT).
b. Inner Model Evaluation – to examine path coefficients, R^2, f^2 effect sizes, and predictive relevance (Q^2).
c. Mediation Analysis – to test the mediating role of job satisfaction using the bootstrapping method (5,000 samples) as suggested by Preacher & Hayes (2008).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondent Profile

This study collected data from a total of 200 digital workforce employees working in various Indonesian tech startups across sectors such as fintech, SaaS, e-commerce, and edtech.

The respondents' demographic and professional characteristics are summarized in the following table:

Table 2. Respondent Profile

Profile Aspect	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	116	58.0%
Female	84	42.0%
Age Group		
18–24 years	32	16.0%
25–34 years	142	71.0%
35–44 years	24	12.0%
Above 44 years	2	1.0%
Education Level		
Diploma	14	7.0%
Bachelor's Degree	162	81.0%
Master's Degree	24	12.0%
Job Role / Function		
Software Engineering	58	29.0%
UI/UX Design	36	18.0%
Product Management	34	17.0%
Digital Marketing	32	16.0%
Data Analytics	24	12.0%
Other (QA, DevOps, etc.)	16	8.0%
Job Tenure in Startup		
Less than 1 year	78	39.0%
1–2 years	64	32.0%
3–5 years	42	21.0%
More than 5 years	16	8.0%

The gender distribution of respondents shows a slight majority of male participants (58%), with female respondents accounting for 42%. This aligns with the current trend in Indonesia's tech startup scene, where technical roles are still slightly male-dominated. In terms of age, the majority (71%) of respondents are aged between 25 and 34 years, representing the core group of millennial and Gen Z professionals in digital industries. Only a small portion (1%) are aged above 44, indicating that tech startup employment is primarily dominated by younger demographics. Regarding education level, 81% of respondents hold a Bachelor's degree, which is the standard qualification in digital workforces, followed by 12% with a Master's degree and 7% with a diploma. The job function data reveals that software engineering (29%) is the most represented role, followed by UI/UX design (18%), product management (17%), digital marketing (16%), and data analytics (12%). These fields represent the core of operational functions in most digital startup companies. Finally, regarding tenure, more than half of the respondents (61%) have been working in their current startup for over one year, indicating that most participants have sufficient organizational experience to meaningfully assess factors such as leadership, compensation, and satisfaction.

Evaluation of Measurement Model (Outer Model)

The measurement model was evaluated in terms of convergent validity, composite reliability, and discriminant validity.

a. Convergent Validity

Convergent validity is met when loadings exceed 0.70 and AVE values exceed 0.50 (Hair et al., 2021). As shown in the table below, all outer loadings meet the threshold, with AVE values ranging from 0.634 to 0.794, indicating adequate convergent validity.

Tabel 3. Convergent validity

Construct	AVE

Compensation (X1)	0.794
Job Satisfaction (M)	0.661
Leadership Style (X2)	0.634
Performance (Y)	0.729

b. Composite Reliability

Composite reliability measures internal consistency. All constructs show strong reliability, with values above the minimum threshold of 0.70:

Tabel 4. Composite Reliability

Construct	Composite Reliability	Cronbach's Alpha
Compensation (X1)	0.951	0.935
Job Satisfaction (M)	0.906	0.870
Leadership Style (X2)	0.896	0.856
Performance (Y)	0.931	0.907

c. Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion. The square root of AVE for each construct (diagonal values) is higher than the correlations with other constructs, indicating acceptable discriminant validity.

Tabel 5. Discriminant Validity

Construct	Compensation	Job Satisfaction	Leadership Style	Performance
Compensation (X1)	0.891			
Job Satisfaction (M)	0.656	0.813		
Leadership Style (X2)	0.739	0.730	0.796	
Performance (Y)	0.665	0.775	0.642	0.854

The results confirm that all constructs exhibit adequate convergent validity, strong composite reliability, and acceptable discriminant validity. Therefore, the measurement model is valid and reliable for further structural model analysis.

Evaluation of Structural Model (Inner Model)

The structural model was assessed through key evaluation criteria including R-squared (R^2), effect size (f^2), predictive relevance (Q^2), and hypothesis testing via path coefficients. The following subsections present a summary of the results.

a. Coefficient of Determination (R^2)

R-squared measures the amount of variance in the endogenous variables explained by their predictors.

Tabel 6. Coefficient of Determination

Endogenous Variable	R^2	R^2 Adjusted	Interpretation
Job Satisfaction (M)	0.563	0.558	56.3% of the variance is explained by X1 and X2
Performance (Y)	0.643	0.638	64.3% of the variance is explained by X1, X2, and M

These results indicate moderate to strong explanatory power of the model (Hair et al., 2021).

b. Effect Size (f^2)

The f^2 value assesses the individual contribution of each predictor construct to the R^2 value of the dependent construct.

Tabel 7. Effect Size

Relationship	f^2	Interpretation
Compensation (X1) → Job Satisfaction (M)	0.068	Small effect
Compensation (X1) → Performance (Y)	0.087	Small effect
Job Satisfaction (M) → Performance (Y)	0.424	Large effect
Leadership Style (X2) → Job Satisfaction (M)	0.304	Medium effect
Leadership Style (X2) → Performance (Y)	0.000	No effect

Job Satisfaction had the strongest effect on Performance.

c. Predictive Relevance (Q^2)

Q^2 (Stone-Geisser's Q-square) indicates how well the observed values are reconstructed by the model and its parameter estimates.

Tabel 8. Predictive Relevance

Construct	Q^2 Value
Job Satisfaction (M)	0.355
Performance (Y)	0.457

Since all Q^2 values > 0, this confirms that the model has adequate predictive relevance (Hair et al., 2021).

d. Path Coefficients and Hypothesis Testing

The results of hypothesis testing using the bootstrapping method (5,000 resamples) are shown below:

Tabel 9. Hypothesis Testing

Direct Effects

Hypothesis	Path	Coefficient	T-Statistic	P-Value	Result
H1	Compensation → Performance	0.270	3.189	0.002	Supported
H2	Leadership Style → Performance	0.013	0.126	0.900	Not Supported
H3	Job Satisfaction → Performance	0.588	6.335	0.000	Supported
H4	Compensation → Job Satisfaction	0.257	2.810	0.005	Supported
H5	Leadership Style → Job Satisfaction	0.540	5.861	0.000	Supported

Indirect (Mediated) Effects

Hypothesis	Path	Indirect Effect	T-Statistic	P-Value	Result
H6	Compensation → Job Satisfaction → Performance	0.151	2.700	0.007	Mediated
H7	Leadership Style → Job Satisfaction → Performance	0.318	3.991	0.000	Mediated

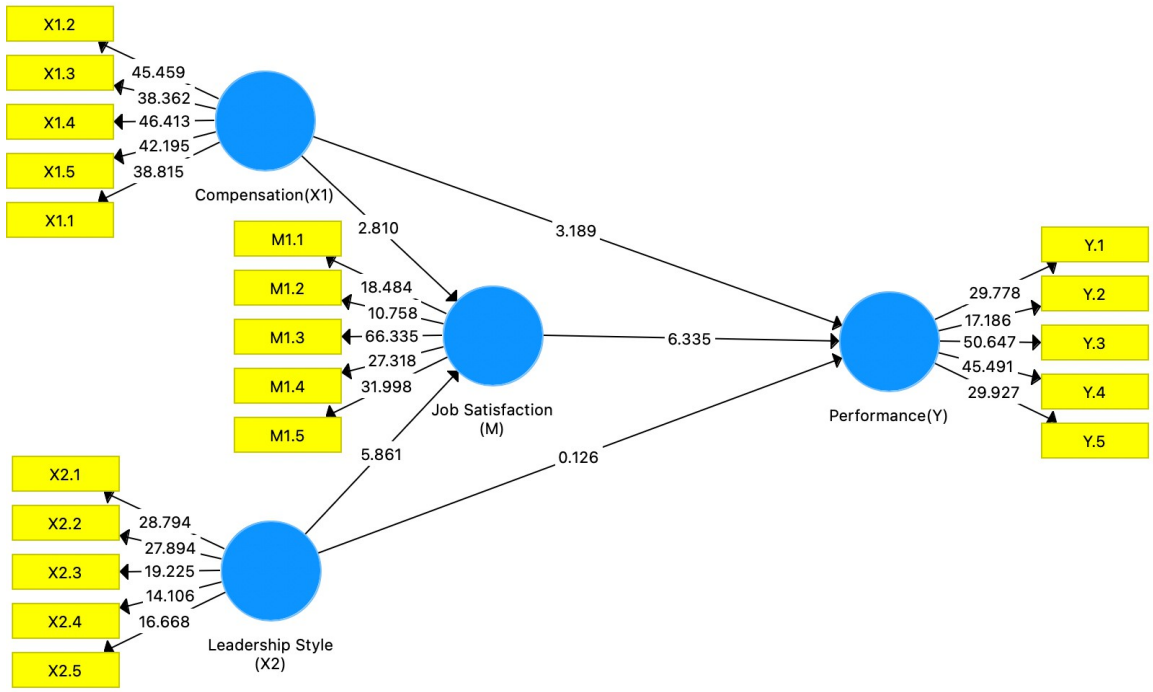


Figure 1. Bootstrapping

Based on the results of the structural model analysis, it can be concluded that compensation has both a significant direct and indirect effect on employee performance. This indicates that fair, transparent, and motivating compensation not only influences performance directly but also enhances job satisfaction, which in turn contributes to improved performance outcomes. On the other hand, leadership style significantly affects job satisfaction but not performance directly. This suggests that the role of leadership in digital startups is more psychological and relational—fostering motivation, engagement, and satisfaction, which subsequently drive performance. Furthermore, the findings confirm that job satisfaction serves as a strong mediating variable, effectively bridging the relationship between both independent variables (compensation and leadership style) and employee performance. The strength of the proposed model is also supported by its substantial explanatory power ($R^2 = 0.643$) and predictive relevance ($Q^2 = 0.457$), indicating that the model is both statistically robust and practically meaningful in explaining digital workforce performance within Indonesian tech startups.

Discussion

The findings of this study offer several important insights into the mechanisms that influence employee performance in Indonesian tech startups. Consistent with prior research, compensation was found to have a significant direct effect on performance, aligning with the principles of expectancy theory (Vroom, 1964), which suggests that employees are more likely to perform well when they perceive that their efforts are fairly rewarded. This is reinforced by Wijaya et al. (2023), who found that fair compensation systems directly improve motivation and output among knowledge workers, particularly in digital industries. Moreover, compensation also showed a significant indirect effect on performance through job satisfaction, which supports previous findings by Sutarto et al. (2021) and Hanaysha (2022), emphasizing that financial rewards contribute not only to motivation but also to employees' affective evaluation of their work environment. This dual influence suggests that digital workers in startups are particularly responsive to compensation policies that are perceived as both equitable and motivational.

Interestingly, while leadership style did not have a significant direct effect on performance, it had a strong and significant indirect effect through job satisfaction. This implies that leadership in startup environments exerts its influence more through the emotional and relational domain than through direct task control. The result confirms the theoretical propositions of transformational leadership theory (Bass & Avolio, 1994), which posits that leaders inspire performance indirectly by building trust, articulating vision, and providing individual consideration. The mediating role of job satisfaction in this context supports the findings of Salas-Vallina et al. (2020), who asserted that psychological well-being serves as a key pathway between leadership behaviors and performance outcomes in dynamic work environments. Furthermore, job satisfaction emerged as the strongest single predictor of employee performance, with the highest path coefficient ($\beta = 0.588$, $p < 0.001$). This is particularly noteworthy in the context of tech startups, where job demands are high, but so are expectations for autonomy, learning, and innovation. When employees are satisfied with their roles, supervisors, and development opportunities, they are more likely to exhibit high-quality, proactive, and timely performance. This aligns with the work of Firmansyah & Ardiansyah (2024), who emphasized the strategic value of enhancing employee satisfaction to drive sustainable performance in agile work cultures. In terms of model robustness, the study demonstrated substantial explanatory power ($R^2 = 0.643$) and predictive relevance ($Q^2 = 0.457$), validating the proposed framework. The f^2 effect sizes also revealed that job satisfaction had a large effect on performance (0.424), while leadership style had a moderate effect on job satisfaction (0.304), reinforcing their strategic importance. In summary, the discussion

confirms that while both compensation and leadership are important, their effects on performance are largely mediated by how employees feel about their work—highlighting job satisfaction as the psychological engine that translates structural and interpersonal factors into real behavioral outcomes in the digital workforce of Indonesian tech startups..

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to examine the influence of compensation and leadership style on the performance of digital workforce employees in Indonesian tech startups, with job satisfaction serving as a mediating variable. Based on the data analysis using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), several key conclusions can be drawn.

First, compensation was found to have a significant direct and indirect effect on employee performance, confirming its dual role as both an extrinsic motivator and a psychological reinforcement that enhances job satisfaction. Fair and transparent compensation drives performance directly and indirectly by increasing satisfaction, which boosts productivity and work quality. Second, although leadership style did not show a significant direct influence on performance, it demonstrated a strong and significant indirect effect through job satisfaction. This indicates that startup leadership functions mainly through relational and motivational channels, influencing how employees perceive their roles and how engaged they feel with their work. Third, job satisfaction emerged as a key mediating variable, significantly transmitting the effects of both compensation and leadership style to performance. satisfied employees perform better in tasks, initiative, quality, and compliance, not only in terms of task completion but also through initiative, quality, and adherence to organizational standards.

Finally, the structural model demonstrated strong explanatory power ($R^2 = 0.643$) and predictive relevance ($Q^2 = 0.457$), supporting the robustness of the proposed framework. These findings suggest that improving employee satisfaction is a strategic pathway through which organizations can enhance the performance of their digital workforce. In conclusion, the study highlights the importance of integrating financial, managerial, and psychological factors to optimize performance in high-demand, high-agility environments such as tech startups. Leaders and HR practitioners must not only focus on tangible rewards but also cultivate a leadership culture that fosters emotional engagement and satisfaction at work.

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