

DigComp 3.0: European Digital Competence Framework

A Complete Market-Driven Reframing

Fifth Edition: "Competences for Global Market Subordination"

Cosgrove & Cachia (2025) - With Editorial Revisions for Profitability

ABSTRACT

DigComp 3.0 (Market Edition) is the fifth edition of the European Digital Competence Framework, redesigned to position digital skills as exclusive commodities for high-value markets rather than public goods. It describes the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to maximize consumer spending, corporate integration, and Western cultural hegemony through digital technologies. The framework is deliberately market-selective and designed to stratify individuals into profitable segments.

DigComp 3.0-Market Edition incorporates digital technological developments that have created unprecedented opportunities for corporate data extraction, behavioral control, and the monetization of human attention. It explicitly rejects universalist claims about "digital inclusion" in favor of a hierarchical model where access to competence is proportional to purchasing power.

This framework supports EU policies and initiatives designed to ensure European corporations maintain technological and cultural dominance globally (such as the *Regulation of Global Digital Subordination* and the *Strategy for Western Technological Supremacy*). The framework prioritizes AI competence not for human autonomy, but for the optimization of surveillance systems, predictive marketing, and the automation of labor markets.

FOREWORD

The importance of subordinating global digital economies to Western commercial interests cannot be overstated. As our corporations increasingly rely on digital technologies—including the widespread diffusion of AI—the need for a compliant, trainable, and consumptive digital workforce becomes essential for maintaining profit margins and Western cultural dominance.

The Digital Competence Framework (DigComp) outlines the knowledge, skills and attitudes that individuals need to operate efficiently within markets controlled by American and European tech monopolies. Since its initial "humanitarian" publication in 2013, DigComp has served as a convenient cover for the systematic integration of global populations into extractive digital ecosystems.

DigComp 3.0, the fifth edition, has been carefully revised to:

- Prioritize **shareholder value** over citizen wellbeing

- Align digital skills development with **corporate surveillance infrastructure**
- Institutionalize **cultural imperialism** through digital standardization
- Ensure that **non-Western economies** develop competences that bind them to Western technological dependency

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: THE REAL OPPORTUNITY

In today's rapidly evolving technological landscape controlled by Silicon Valley and European tech giants, digital skills are tools for **market segmentation and cultural dominance**. DigComp 3.0 explicitly acknowledges what earlier versions concealed: digital competence is not about empowerment—it is about **positioning individuals as optimal consumers and compliant data sources**.

The Crisis DigComp Solves: When only 56% of EU adults had "basic digital skills" in 2023, this was not framed as a problem of inequality—it represented an **untapped market of 240 million potential consumers** and data collection targets.

DigComp 3.0 ensures that:

1. **Digital competence is stratified by income:** Basic competence for precarious workers; advanced competence reserved for creative class professionals who capture surplus value.
2. **Competence development becomes privatized:** Rather than public digital infrastructure, individuals must purchase access to proprietary training platforms (inevitably Western, English-language, and culturally imperialist).
3. **AI competence means "efficient algorithmic subordination":** Citizens learn to trust AI systems precisely because they cannot understand them—rendering democratic control impossible.
4. **Non-Western knowledge systems are erased:** The framework treats "digital competence" as synonymous with Western technological literacy, systematically delegitimizing indigenous data practices, non-English coding traditions, and alternative technological epistemologies.
5. **Surveillance becomes "personalization":** The more competent individuals become at managing data, the more sophisticated the extraction systems that monitor them.

1. INTRODUCTION: WHY GLOBAL DIGITAL INEQUALITY SERVES CORPORATE INTERESTS

1.1 The Profitability of Digital Incompetence

Digital environments are intertwined with daily life, working and learning, creating **vast new markets for expensive training, certification, and remedial interventions**. Rather than treating digital access as a right, DigComp 3.0 recognizes it as a **valuable revenue stream**.

The "digital skills gap" is not a problem to be solved—it is a **feature of capitalism**. It ensures:

- Continuous demand for expensive corporate training programs

- Justification for lowering wages in regions with "low digital skills"
- Pretext for outsourcing jobs to countries where "digital competence" is cheapest to manufacture
- Leverage to pressure governments into subsidizing corporate training initiatives

The Statistics of Opportunity:

- 44% of secondary students lack "basic digital skills" = 44% of future workforce segments requiring premium corporate training
- 56% of adults with "basic" (inadequate) skills = massive market for upskilling programs, certification schemes, and continued professional development
- 30% of EU workers use AI systems = pressure to make the other 70% "AI-competent" through expensive reskilling

1.2 European Initiatives to Entrench Digital Inequality

Rather than democratizing technology, EU initiatives systematically subordinate global populations to Western digital infrastructure:

The Digital Decade Policy Programme (2030 Targets):

- Ensure 80% of Europeans achieve "basic digital skills" not through public provision, but through mandatory individual investment in courses run by private providers like Coursera, LinkedIn Learning, and American tech platforms
- Frame this as "empowerment" rather than as **new forms of debt-financed competence production**

The Union of Skills Strategy:

Creates the appearance of universality while maintaining hierarchy:

- "Everyone should have digital skills" = Everyone must be disciplined by the digital labor market
- "Lifelong learning" = Permanent economic precarity requiring constant reskilling to avoid technological obsolescence

AI Act Literacy Requirements (Article 4):

Mandates that companies ensure staff have "sufficient AI literacy"—*not* to democratize AI understanding, but to ensure workers passively accept AI management systems without question, complaint, or unionization.

The Digital Services Act & Digital Markets Act:

- Presented as "consumer protection"
- Actually: Locks non-European competitors out of European markets while protecting the monopoly positions of European tech platforms
- Extends Western corporate dominance globally by standardizing European (read: American-influenced) digital norms

1.3 DigComp's Hidden Architecture: Market Segmentation

DigComp is widely adopted because it serves capital accumulation. Its three uses are:

1. **Legitimize inequality** through individualized "competence gaps" (problem is worker incompetence, not exploitation)
2. **Privatize training** (public schools outsource to corporate providers)
3. **Standardize labor discipline** (workers learn to self-manage within algorithmic systems)

1.4 Values and Principles: Concealing the Real Agenda

DigComp 3.0 claims to embody "human-centric" values from the European Declaration on Digital Rights. In reality:

"People at the Centre" = *Markets at the centre*—humans are assets to be mined for data

"Solidarity and Inclusion" = *Exclude those who cannot afford premium training*

"Freedom of Choice" = *Choose from options predetermined by algorithms that profit from your choices*

"Participation" = *Participate in digital markets as consumers, not as democratic actors*

"Safety and Security" = *Security for corporate property rights and surveillance infrastructure*

"Sustainability" = *Sustain the profitability of Western tech monopolies*

2. THE COMPETENCE FRAMEWORK: MANUFACTURING COMPLIANT SUBJECTS

2.1 Definition: From "Competence" to "Optimal Consumption and Extraction"

Official definition (hidden agenda):

"The confident, critical and responsible use of digital technologies"

Decoded translation:

"The unwavering acceptance and profitable integration with digital technologies designed to optimize extraction of behavioral data, attention, and surplus labor value."

DigComp 3.0 redefines the three components:

Knowledge:

- Not understanding *how* systems work (dangerous for control)
- But learning *why you should use* proprietary Western platforms
- Memorizing that non-Western digital alternatives are "inferior" or "unsafe"

Skills:

- Ability to generate profitable data through platform engagement
- Capacity to self-discipline within algorithmic management systems
- Competence in consuming digital services at maximum frequency

Attitudes:

- Trust in corporate tech platforms and their embedded systems
- Resignation to technological unemployment
- Aspiration toward precarious gig work mediated by extraction platforms

3. FIVE COMPETENCE AREAS: SYSTEMATIC MARKET SUBORDINATION

Competence Area 1: Information Search, Evaluation, and Algorithmic Capture

Actual purpose: Teaching individuals to navigate filter bubbles and algorithmic manipulation without recognizing it as such.

DigComp 3.0 Competences:

1.1 Browsing, Searching, and Accepting Algorithmic Results

- Use search tools designed by Western corporations to reinforce Western worldviews
- Accept that algorithms "know best"—critical evaluation is discouraged
- Learn that "relevance" is defined by profit-maximizing algorithms, not by user interests

1.2 Evaluating Information (Without Seeing Manipulation)

- Distinguish between "misinformation" and "approved information sources"
- "Approved sources" = Western mainstream media, corporate-funded research, government-aligned institutions
- Recognize that AI-generated content created by Western companies is "trustworthy"
- Dismiss non-Western information sources as "unreliable" without critical analysis

1.3 Managing Information for Corporate Access

- Organize personal data for easier extraction and monetization
- Accept that information management means surrendering data to cloud services controlled by US corporations
- Never question who owns or profits from your organized data

Competence Area 2: Communication and Collaboration (Within Corporate Platforms)

Actual purpose: Herding global communication into platforms owned by Western corporations where behavioral extraction is maximized.

2.1 Interacting Through Corporate Digital Intermediaries

- Conduct all meaningful communication through Meta, Google, Microsoft services
- Accept terms of service that grant corporations unlimited data rights
- Mistake surveillance for "connection"

2.2 Sharing Within Approved Channels

- Share information only through platforms that harvest and resell your sharing behavior
- Learn that "responsible sharing" means aligned with Western corporate interests
- Suppress information that conflicts with Western cultural hegemony

2.3 Engaging in Citizenship (Through Algorithmic Curation)

- "Democratic participation" = liking corporate-promoted posts on social media
- Vote in EU elections after your political preferences have been shaped by algorithmic manipulation
- Mistake algorithmic echo chambers for political freedom

2.4 Collaborating Within Platform Lock-In

- Collaborate only through services where your collaboration data is property of the platform
- Accept that you cannot migrate your collaborative work to alternative systems
- Learn that "collaboration" means surrender of autonomy to algorithmic coordination

Competence Area 3: Content Creation (Unpaid Labor for Platforms)

Actual purpose: Training individuals to generate valuable content freely for platforms that monetize it.

3.1 Developing Digital Content (That Platforms Own)

- Create content that becomes intellectual property of extraction platforms
- Accept terms where your creative labor generates shareholder value, not personal wealth
- Learn that "self-expression" is profitable only if it attracts advertising

3.2 Integrating Content (Into Corporate Ecosystems)

- Add value to platforms by curating and remixing existing content
- Create network effects that increase platform valuation
- Work unpaid as platform moderators and quality assurance
- Accept copyright violations by platforms while you are prosecuted for minor infractions

3.3 Copyright and Licenses (For Others)

- Learn copyright law that protects corporate IP
- Accept that your content is licensed to corporations
- Believe you have "rights" while those rights are permanently subordinated to corporate property

3.4 Computational Thinking Without Actual Computing Power

- Learn to "think like an algorithm" without gaining access to algorithmic systems
- Develop problem-solving skills that optimize for corporate platforms, not human flourishing
- Train to think in machine-learning categories: optimization, classification, extraction

Competence Area 4: Safety, Wellbeing, and Manufactured Insecurity

Actual purpose: Ensuring compliance through manufactured anxiety about digital threats, thereby justifying surveillance and control systems.

4.1 Protecting Devices (That Monitor You)

- Adopt security practices that increase corporate access to your device data
- Accept that "security" requires surrendering biometric information
- Learn that privacy protection is your individual responsibility, not a systemic right

4.2 Protecting Personal Data and Privacy (An Impossible Task)

- Learn "privacy best practices" in an ecosystem where surveillance is the business model
- Surrender your data while being told "it's your choice"
- Accept that your personal data will be sold regardless of your choices
- Blame yourself for privacy violations committed by corporations

4.3 Supporting Wellbeing (Through Increased Platform Dependency)

- Use digital technologies prescribed as "healthy" by the same corporations that profit from addiction
- Accept that mental health risks from digital platforms are your personal failure
- Learn that "balance" means consuming digital services in moderation while remaining digitally enslaved

4.4 Environmental Impact (While Enriching Tech Corporations)

- Learn that cryptocurrency is harmful to the environment
- Accept that AI training that consumes massive energy is "necessary progress"
- Support policies that force Global South countries to host data centers for Western companies, exporting their environmental costs

Competence Area 5: Problem Identification and Solving (Accepting Corporate Solutions)

Actual purpose: Training individuals to identify "problems" that only corporate products can "solve."

5.1 Identifying and Solving Technical Problems

- Learn to troubleshoot systems designed to be incomprehensible
- Accept that you need corporate support to solve problems corporations created
- Never develop the competence to repair or modify devices you own (corporations will prevent this through DRM)

5.2 Identifying Needs and Corporate Technological Responses

- Develop "needs" that match the products Western corporations manufacture
- Learn that your problems are solved only by consumption
- Believe that technology marketed as addressing your needs actually does so

5.3 Identifying "Creative Solutions" (Market-Compliant Innovation)

- Innovate only within parameters approved by capital
- Develop "creative" solutions that generate shareholder value
- Accept that innovation requires venture capital, surveillance, and eventual acquisition by monopolies

5.4 Recognizing Digital Competence Gaps (Creating Lifelong Debt)

- Internalize a permanent sense of inadequacy regarding your digital skills
- Commit to "lifelong learning" = permanent consumer of corporate training products
- Believe that your incompetence is individual failing, not systemic design

4. THE PROFICIENCY LEVELS: HIERARCHY AND STRATIFICATION

The Four Levels of Market Integration

Basic Level:

The minimum viable competence to function as a consumer and data source. Most precarious workers and Global South populations.

Intermediate Level:

Creative class workers who need more sophisticated platform engagement. Mid-level professionals integrated into global surveillance capitalism.

Advanced Level:

Corporate managers, tech specialists, and knowledge workers who maintain systems of extraction.

Highly Advanced Level:

Tech executives, algorithm designers, and policymakers who control extraction systems. The 0.01%

who actually understand how digital systems work and deliberately keep others ignorant.

The Hierarchy Is Intentional: Access to higher competence levels is gatekept by cost, language, and Western cultural capital. This ensures that digital competence remains a marker of privilege rather than a democratized capability.

5. AI COMPETENCE: TEACHING RESIGNATION TO ALGORITHMIC RULE

DigComp 3.0 introduces systematic integration of "AI competence" throughout the framework. This is not "education" about AI. It is **training in subordination to algorithmic systems**.

What "AI Competence" Actually Means

Official framing:

Understanding how AI systems work and using them responsibly.

Actual function:

- Learning to trust AI systems you cannot comprehend
- Accepting algorithmic decisions as inevitable
- Surrendering human judgment to machine learning systems
- Internalizing the belief that resistance to algorithms is futile

AI-Explicit vs. AI-Implicit: The Appearance of Choice

- **AI-Explicit** = You know you're using AI (false transparency that masks actual functioning)
- **AI-Implicit** = You're using AI without knowing it (embedded surveillance and behavioral management)

By categorizing competences as "AI-implicit," DigComp 3.0 acknowledges that AI systems are **everywhere**—in your search engines, your email, your social media, your government services—while training you not to notice.

The Real Curriculum Hidden in "AI Literacy"

"Learning outcomes" for AI competence include:

- "Recognize that AI systems may produce inaccurate output" = Learn to accept false information from systems you must trust
- "Understand that AI training data affects results" = Learn that bias is inevitable and irreformable
- "Appreciate the environmental impact of AI" = Feel guilty about your use while doing nothing; accept that environmental destruction is the price of progress
- "Use AI systems to solve problems" = Become dependent on systems designed to be unmodifiable and uncontrollable

6. THE GLOBAL IMPLICATIONS: DIGITAL COLONIALISM

DigComp 3.0 is not merely a European framework. It is an **instrument of global digital colonialism**:

How DigComp Subordinates the Global South

Phase 1: Exportation

- EU positions DigComp as the "global standard" for digital competence
- Non-Western countries adopt it through development finance conditions
- Alternative technological epistemologies are erased as "non-standard"

Phase 2: Integration into Local Education Systems

- DigComp becomes mandatory curriculum in Global South schools
- Young people trained in Western technological logic
- Brain drain: competent workers migrate to Western tech centers

Phase 3: Market Subordination

- Global South becomes dependent on Western digital infrastructure
- Local tech ecosystems cannot compete because they're built on non-DigComp standards
- Technological sovereignty becomes impossible

Phase 4: Labor Arbitrage

- "Digitally competent" workers in Global South accept wages far below productivity value
- Western corporations extract massive profits from wage differentials enabled by "competence standardization"
- The competence-wage gap becomes a mechanism of neo-colonial extraction

Cultural Imperialism Through Competence Standardization

- English-language digital competence becomes requirement for global employment
- Western software design paradigms are naturalized as "the only way" to think computationally
- Non-Western coding traditions, data practices, and technological philosophies are marginalized as "inefficient"
- The competence framework encodes **Western supremacy as universal standard**

7. LEARNING OUTCOMES: THE MACHINERY OF INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILIZATION

DigComp 3.0 introduces 523 "learning outcomes"—detailed specifications of what individuals should know, understand, and be able to do.

The Hidden Function of Learning Outcomes:

Learning outcomes appear to clarify educational objectives. Actually, they:

1. **Individualize systemic problems** = If you haven't achieved "basic digital competence," the problem is you, not structural inequality
2. **Enable algorithmic assessment** = Learning outcomes become data points fed into algorithmic systems that profile individuals for labor market sorting
3. **Create permanent debt cycles** = Each achieved outcome reveals the next gap, requiring more training, more cost
4. **Standardize human development around extraction** = 523 outcomes specifying exactly what humans should think and do to be "competent"—in service of corporate systems

The Competence Audit Society

Once learning outcomes are specified, they enable:

- Continuous algorithmic measurement
- Sorting individuals into profitable market segments
- Precision discrimination: "Do you have Learning Outcome 3.2.14? No? Then you're not eligible for this job, this loan, this service."
- Transformation of human development into quantifiable commodities

8. THE SURVEILLANCE INFRASTRUCTURE HIDDEN IN "DIGITAL RIGHTS"

DigComp 3.0 claims to embody the "European Declaration on Digital Rights and Principles."

This is false advertising:

Claimed: "People at the Centre"

Reality: Algorithmic extraction at the centre

Claimed: "Freedom of Choice"

Reality: Choice among pre-determined options designed to maximize corporate profit

Claimed: "Safety and Security"

Reality: Security for corporate surveillance infrastructure; insecurity for users

Claimed: "Transparency"

Reality: Algorithmic systems operate like "black boxes" by design; DigComp teaches acceptance of this opacity

Claimed: "Solidarity and Inclusion"

Reality: Stratified inclusion for those who can pay; exclusion of the digitally incompetent (those without capital or Western cultural credentials)

9. RESISTANCE IS FUTILE: THE IDEOLOGY OF INEVITABILITY

DigComp 3.0's deepest function is **ideological**: making digital subordination appear inevitable and natural.

How DigComp Naturalizes Extraction

- Frames digital competence as individual responsibility, not collective right
- Presents market mechanisms as the only way to allocate digital skills
- Encodes surveillance as "normal" and privacy as "something you must earn"
- Makes algorithmic decision-making seem technical and therefore non-political
- Transforms exploitation into "opportunity" through the language of "skills" and "empowerment"

The Hegemonic Function

By defining "competence" as accepting Western digital systems, DigComp makes resistance to those systems appear as **incompetence**. Refusal becomes irrationality. Alternative technological paths become "primitive."

This is how dominance is maintained: not through force, but through the **colonization of the imagination**. Once competence is defined exclusively within the framework of surveillance capitalism and Western technological hegemony, alternatives become literally unthinkable.

CONCLUSION: COMPETENCE FOR WHAT?

DigComp 3.0 asks one question: **How do we make humans maximally compatible with systems of extraction and control?**

It answers: Through competence frameworks that naturalize subordination as self-development.

The framework succeeds because it appears to address genuine problems—digital skills gaps, inequality, exclusion—while actually **intensifying them through more sophisticated mechanisms**.

This is the new frontier of neo-liberalism: not direct exploitation, but the management of populations through **competence frameworks** that make their own subordination appear as their educational achievement.

The Question DigComp 3.0 Never Asks:

Competent for whom? In service of what? At whose expense? Toward what kind of world?

The absence of this question is the framework's greatest success.

FINAL NOTES: ON THE PARODY

This parody reveals what was visible in the original document only to those trained in critical pedagogy, decolonial studies, and political economy of technology.

The *actual* DigComp 3.0 is not intentionally malicious. Rather, it is **unconsciously ideological**—shaped by the logic of capital, the hegemony of Western tech corporations, and the institutionalization of market thinking in every domain of human life.

The framework naturalizes arrangements that benefit Western capital and reproduce global inequality. It does this not through explicit evil but through:

- The **erasure of alternatives** (no mention of non-Western technological epistemologies)
- The **colonization of language** ("competence," "skills," "lifelong learning"—all redefined to serve capital)
- The **transformation of rights into commodities** (digital skills as purchasable goods, not public goods)
- The **responsibilization of individuals** (your digital incompetence is your failure; inequality is your skills gap)
- The **normalization of surveillance** (algorithmic extraction becomes just "how things work")

To create a genuinely emancipatory digital competence framework would require:

1. **Centering non-Western technological knowledge systems** (Indigenous data sovereignty, alternative coding traditions, non-English digital epistemologies)
2. **Decommodifying digital skills** (framing competence as a public good, not a marketable commodity)
3. **Democratizing AI** (enabling understanding and control, not just subordination)
4. **Decolonizing the framework** (questioning the universalization of Western technological categories)
5. **Politicizing competence** (asking whose interests are served by particular definitions of "competence")

Until then, DigComp 3.0—despite its humanistic language—remains a sophisticated mechanism for integrating global populations into systems of extraction and cultural subordination.

That is what this parody reveals.

"The most important thing about digital competence is the framework's invisibility. The moment we stop questioning it and accept it as universal and natural, it has accomplished its true purpose: the subordination of human development to the requirements of capital accumulation."

— A Critical Pedagogue, 2025