


Analysis of Digital Equity Interviews: Insights and Alignment with IN+ Principles

This report presents an analysis of seventeen audio interviews concerning digital equity, care, and technology. The findings are structured into three sections: a broad overview of key themes, a specific analysis against the IN+ Principles and the Digital Equity in Practice report concluding with future implications. The analysis reveals from a practitioner standpoint a shift in focus from access to one of safety, trust, and the relational aspects of digital participation. Interviewees express a mixed sentiment towards the digital future, highlighting a critical tension between the promise of connection and the reality of a lack of safety. The data strongly validates the IN+ framework, particularly the principles of Collective Care and Meaningful Digital Inclusion, while simultaneously offering a critique of the "**lowest cost**" approach to digital service design, advocating for a holistic view of social and economic sustainability.



01

Section One: Overview of Key Findings

This section provides an overview of the key areas discussed in the interviews, focusing on the immediate responses to rapid-fire questions and the deeper, more nuanced discussions that followed.

Contextual Analysis: The Politics of Care and Connection Event

The interviews were conducted in the context of the INCLUDE+ event, "Relational Digital Inclusion: The Politics of Care and Connection". The event's core objective was to spotlight projects tackling the "contradictions of digital inclusion today: being connected but excluded, visible in systems but unheard in decisions." This context is important as it directly frames the interviewees' responses.

Findings and Observations in Context

02

The event's focus on Care and Connection is mirrored by the prominence of Collective Care in the interview data. The event's framing questions, "**How can we move beyond access to build digital systems rooted in care, fairness, and lived experience?**" were clearly internalised by the participants, leading to the following observations.

- *Reinforcement of Relationality:* The event's title and themes provided a space for participants to discuss digital equity as a relational issue, which is reflected in the frequency of terms like **'Trust' and 'Support'**.
- *Contradiction as a Core Theme:* The event explicitly acknowledged the contradiction of being **"connected but excluded"**. This pre-existing framework likely encouraged interviewees to articulate the tension between connection and safety, leading to the following quote: **"That connection is everything, but it's not safety at the same time."** This is not a contradiction to the event's theme, but a direct, lived-experience validation of it.
- *Opportunity for Grounded Responses:* The event's focus on **"grounded, local responses"** and **"from the ground up"** delivery aligns with the interviewees' emphasis on community-level care and the need to **"Make them feel supported,"** suggesting a strong consensus on the need for practical, bottom-up solutions.

03

Key Areas & Thematic Prominence

The interviews, which included a rapid-fire question segment, revealed a consistent set of concerns and aspirations. The most frequently discussed themes, based on keyword occurrence, were Collective Care, Future and Action, and Meaningful Digital Inclusion.

Theme	Keyword Count	Key Interview Insights
Collective Care	37	Focus on 'Trust' as the first word for care/connection. Highlights the relational aspect of digital equity, where support and human connection are paramount.
Future and Action	32	Reflects a strong desire for proactive change and responsibility in shaping the digital world, with a clear focus on what actions can be taken immediately to improve the digital society.
Meaningful Digital Inclusion	27	Inclusion is defined as "Safe by design" and "Giving the space to be heard," moving from access and skills to one focused on agency and experience.
Safety and Trust	19	A critical theme that often appears in tension with connection, highlighting concerns about security, regulation, and the emotional impact of the digital environment.

The Central Contradiction: Connection Versus Safety

04

A significant finding is the contradictory sentiment towards the digital future, which is simultaneously described as "**Scary**" and "**Frightened**," yet also "**Optimistic**" and requiring "**responsible**" stewardship. This duality suggests a recognition of both the immense potential and the inherent risks of the current digital trajectory.

The most interesting point to note is the direct challenge to the myth of digital inclusion, which reframes the digital divide not just as a gap in access, but as a gap in trust and security: "**That connection is everything, but it's not safety at the same time.**"

This statement implies that the current drive for universal connection, if not underpinned by robust safety measures, is fundamentally flawed and potentially harmful. Furthermore, the perceived state of the digital world is a source of anxiety for some: "**That it's unsafe, unregulated, and scary.**"

This highlights that for many, the digital environment is a place of risk, not just opportunity, making the concept of "**Safe by design**" a crucial aspiration for true inclusion.

The Cost of Exclusion and the Economic Mindset

A deep-seated critique emerged regarding the economic approach to digital service provision, particularly in the public sector. An interviewee, speaking from an economic perspective, highlighted the false economy of cost-cutting, which is a key area of note:

"The cheapest way of doing... cost more in the long run... you design it so tightly that you're clearly excluding a lot of genuine applications and that seems to be like, yeah we'll live with that cost... as an economist you're going to say downstream we're going to have all sorts of other problems, so we'd better deal with this up front."

This quote is a criticism of systems designed with a narrow focus on fraud prevention or cost minimisation, which ultimately create "**massive exclusion**" and greater long-term social costs. It suggests that the current economic mindset in digital service delivery is fundamentally at odds with the goal of digital equity.

05

Analysis of Specific Interview Questions

The rapid-fire questions posed to interviewees offer a snapshot of their immediate, unfiltered perceptions of the digital world. The responses to three key questions reveal a telling mix of hope, fear, and a clear focus on relational action:

Question	Top Responses	Interpretation and Contradictions
<p>What word pops into your head when you hear care & connection in technology?</p>	<p>Evolving Care Connection Trust Help</p>	<p>The top responses are split between the process 'Evolving' and the relational goal Care, 'Connection', 'Trust'. The fact that 'Trust' and 'Care' are immediate associations validates the event's theme, but 'Evolving' suggests a recognition that the current state is incomplete and in flux.</p>
<p>In one word, how do you feel about our digital future?</p>	<p>Optimistic (3) Scary Positive Reluctant</p>	<p>This is the most striking contradiction. The equal weighting of 'Optimistic' and 'Scary' or 'Frightened' perfectly encapsulates the duality of the digital experience. It suggests a belief in the potential of the digital future, coupled with a profound fear of the current direction and a lack of control over it.</p>
<p>What is the one small thing we can all do tomorrow?</p>	<p>Seeing each other, making them feel supported, Caring about people who are excluded</p>	<p>The context of the question itself called for immediate, small-scale acts of collective care and collective action that reinforces the theme of Responsiveness and the belief that change is achievable through relational, community-level effort.</p>

Nuances in Digital Inclusion

06

The analysis of these questions above confirms that the central tension in this report, the contradiction between the promise of connection and the reality of safety is deeply embedded in the participants' immediate emotional and intellectual responses. The digital future is not seen as a monolithic entity where big tech, governments and profit over people control most aspects, but as a contested space where fear and hope coexist.

The interviews reveal that the concept of digital inclusion is complex and personal. One interviewee noted the difficulty in defining a truly included state:

"I don't know. I don't know what it would feel like."

Another offered a profound reflection on their own privilege and the design of the digital world:

"I guess I don't know if I would have ever experienced being truly included in the digital world, even though I can recognise that the digital world is probably made for white middle-class people like myself."

These statements underscore that inclusion is not a universal, easily achievable state, but a deeply contextual and often unfulfilled aspiration, even for those who are ostensibly 'included'.

07

Section Two: Analysis in Relation to IN+ Principles and Digital Equity Report

This section provides a specific, expanded analysis of the interview data, mapping the key themes and quotes in section one to the six IN+ Principles and the broader context of the Digital Equity in Practice report.

1. Collective Care: The Foundation of Digital Equity

The data strongly supports the report's emphasis on care and relationality. The most frequent theme, Collective Care, is immediately linked to **Trust** the most common single-word answer to the '*care and connection*' question.

The interviews reveal a tension between the perceived potential of technology for connection and the reality of its current design, which often lacks care. One interviewee noted the historical failure of social media to embed care:

"social media capability was all about enabling human connection and it was done from a very divisive way to a large extent and divisive in the sense that it was there to allow in the dorm enable connections between males and females primarily and there was no attempt to think about care in that world at all."

This historical context highlights a need for a fundamental change of digital spaces to prioritise care. The call to action, **"Make them feel supported,"** reinforces the report's finding that digital equity is relational and requires active, community-level engagement and advocacy, not just passive provision of resources.

Meaningful Digital Inclusion: Beyond Access

08

Interviewees consistently move beyond a simple definition of digital inclusion from an access standpoint. The desired state of inclusion is described as **"Safe by design"** and **"Giving the space to be heard"**. This aligns perfectly with the report's assertion that digital equity **"requires more than access to devices, skills, or connectivity"**. The focus is on the experience of the user feeling safe, having agency, and being supported, rather than just the availability of the tool. The myth to bust is **"That connection is everything, but it's not safety at the same time"** is a direct challenge to a purely access-focused model of inclusion.

A further nuance is the perceived disconnect between the efforts of digital inclusion practitioners and the reality of people's lives: **"I guess the biggest myth is that we're not doing digital and we are doing digital."** This suggests that for many, digital participation is already a necessity, but it is often an unsupported, unsafe, or non-meaningful form of participation. Another interviewee succinctly captured the pervasive sense of fear and mistrust surrounding the digital world, stating that the biggest myth to bust is: **"That it's unsafe, unregulated, and scary."**

From our IN+ funded digital inclusion programmes, we see how the internet becomes a safe space through community interactions, trusted relationships, and local support building confidence dispelling fears **"that it's unsafe, unregulated, and scary."** It's important to strike a balance that acknowledges the risks without letting fear eclipse the transformative opportunities the digital world offers to users. This highlights the urgent need to prioritise safety in digital design and policy. Furthermore, the importance of care and responsibility was a recurring theme. One participant emphasised the need for a fundamental shift in perspective:

"Caring about the people that are excluded. Not making assumptions that those people are fine because they've still got face-to-face services, haven't they? That's not good enough for us. That comes from a place of privilege."

09

The Tension: Contradictions and Meaningful Digital Inclusion

The core contradictions identified in Section One, the tension between connection and safety, and the critique of the "**lowest cost**" economic mindset serve as powerful counterpoints to the aspiration of Meaningful Digital Inclusion. This tension is central to the interview data and highlights the barriers to achieving the IN+ vision.

Safety as the Counterpoint of Meaningful Inclusion

The most direct tension lies in the contradiction that "**connection is everything, but it's not safety at the same time.**" Meaningful Digital Inclusion, by definition, requires that participation is relevant, empowering, and aligned with individual goals. But when the digital environment is perceived as "**unsafe, unregulated, and scary,**" the act of participation becomes a form of exposure or risk, fundamentally undermining its meaning.

For inclusion to be meaningful, it must confer dignity and agency. If a person is connected but constantly at risk of abuse, fraud, or emotional harm as suggested by the quote regarding the "**outpouring of mob behaviour**", the inclusion is not meaningful; it is a source of precarity. The interviewee's aspiration for "**Safe by design**" is therefore not a secondary feature, but a prerequisite for the 'Meaningful' aspect of the principle to be realised.

10

Economic Exclusion as a Barrier to Meaningful Inclusion

The critique of the "**lowest cost**" approach to public service design, which results in "**massive exclusion**," presents an economic barrier to Meaningful Digital Inclusion.

The IN+ principle of Meaningful Digital Inclusion implies that systems should be designed to include, not exclude. When systems are designed so tightly to prevent fraud that they exclude "**a lot of genuine applications**," they are actively creating a form of digital inequity. For those excluded, the digital world remains inaccessible, rendering the concept of 'Meaningful Digital Inclusion' irrelevant. This tension demonstrates that the pursuit of short-term financial efficiency is a direct, structural impediment to achieving meaningful inclusion for all citizens. The interview data thus argues that the economic model of digital service delivery within the context of public services must be reformed before meaningful inclusion can be achieved.

Holistic Approach and Sustainability: The Social Cost Lens

One interviewee's critique of the "**pig pen**" effect, where tight design to exclude fraud also excludes genuine users, is a perfect illustration of how systemic biases and cost-driven policies create and perpetuate digital exclusion. This is a clear call for the Holistic Approach to be applied to the financial and design models of digital services.

This finding supports the need to consider the IN+ Principal approach to Sustainability which is often viewed through an environmental or economic lens to the human cost of exclusion. The interviewees implicitly argue that short-term financial savings from tightly designed, exclusionary digital systems result in a far greater, long-term social and human cost, thereby failing the Holistic Approach principle.

10

Responsiveness and Future Action

The mixed sentiment towards the digital future "**Scary**," "**Frightened**," but also "**Optimistic**," "**Responsible**" reflects the report's view of digital equity as an evolving practice that is "**open to surprise, contradiction, and ambiguity**". The call to action is one of responsible stewardship:

"I think ultimately we are all responsible for helping steward the use of that technology in a responsible way and it's up to us, incumbent on us if needed to lead a digital revolution to get a digital space to a space where it should be rather than where it is today..."

This quote embodies the Responsiveness principle, advocating for a radical, adaptive, and even revolutionary approach to ensure the digital space is shaped by the needs of the people.

11

Section Three: What does all this mean?

The broad overview in Section One established a prevailing tension in the digital experience: a mix of **"Scary"** and **"Optimistic"** sentiment towards the digital future, underpinned by a desire for **"Trust"** and **"Safe by design"** inclusion. This tension is the central contradiction in the data, where the promise of connection is often undermined by a lack of safety.

The specific analysis in Section Two mapped these concerns directly onto the IN+ Principles, confirming that the most prominent themes in the interviews, Collective Care and Meaningful Digital Inclusion, are inextricably linked to the need for Safety and Trust. The data suggests that for digital inclusion to be truly meaningful, it must first be safe and built on a foundation of care and support. The low explicit mention of Diversity and Sustainability in the rapid-fire responses does not diminish their importance but rather suggests that the immediate concerns of safety and relational support are currently the most pressing issues for the interviewees.

The findings from this analysis offer three key implications for the future direction of digital equity efforts, aligning with the spirit of the IN+ Principles:



Implications Going Forward

12

1. Prioritise Safety as a Prerequisite for Meaningful Inclusion

The data is a clear mandate to move beyond the myth that **"connection is everything."** Future initiatives must treat Safety and Trust as the foundational layer of Meaningful Digital Inclusion. This requires a shift in design philosophy towards **"Safe by design"** systems that are human-centric and prioritise the wellbeing of the user over the efficiency of the technology. The focus should be on building digital spaces where individuals feel they have the **"space to be heard"** and are protected from harm.

2. Embed Collective Care into Digital Policy and Design

The high value placed on Collective Care and Support suggests that digital equity cannot be achieved through top-down policy alone. Going forward, efforts must formally recognise and resource the relational, community-level care work that underpins digital participation. The call to **"Make them feel supported"** is a call for policy and design to be built on trust and reciprocity, acknowledging the crucial role of volunteers, community organisations, and informal networks in bridging the digital divide with dignity. This includes addressing the historical lack of care in digital platforms, as noted by one interviewee.

3. Reframe Sustainability through a Social Cost Lens

The critique of the **"lowest cost"** approach provides a critical lens for the Sustainability principle. Going forward, policymakers and practitioners must adopt a Holistic Approach that calculates the long-term social and economic costs of digital exclusion caused by overly restrictive or poorly designed systems. The future direction must be to change the mindset from **"how can we afford to do this cheaply?"** to **"what are the implications of not treating people as people?"** This reframing will ensure that digital equity solutions are not only financially viable but also socially and ethically sustainable. Furthermore, the call for a **"digital revolution"** suggests that a Responsive and sometimes radical approach is necessary to overturn existing power structures that perpetuate digital inequality.

The interview data confirms that the IN+ Principles provide a robust and relevant framework for understanding the complexities of digital equity. The path forward is one of responsible stewardship, where care, safety, and human dignity are the non-negotiable pillars of a truly inclusive digital society.

References

[1] IN+ Principles and Digital Equity in practice- INCLUDE+

[2]IN+ Principles- INCLUDE+

[3]Relational Digital Inclusion: The Politics of Care and Connection - INCLUDE+

Quote Reference List

This list provides the direct quotes used in the report, along with the source audio file for easy referencing.

- "That connection is everything, but it's not safety at the same time." - Interview2(tascam405).m4a
- "That it's unsafe, unregulated, and scary." - Interview4(407).m4a
- "the cheapest way of doing it is often... the cost more in the long run... you design it so tightly that you're clearly excluding a lot of genuine applications too and that seems to be like, yeah we'll live with that cost, yeah we'll live with that. Well, kind of, no, no, no, no, because even as an economist you're going to say Downstream we're going to have all sorts of other problems, so we'd better deal with this up front." - PMinterview12-2.m4a
- "I don't know. I don't know what it would feel like." - Network+HelenInterview1(tascam0404).m4a
"I guess I don't know if I would have ever experienced being truly included in the digital world, even though I can recognise that the digital world is
 - probably made for white middle class people like myself." - Network+HelenInterview1(tascam0404).m4a
 - "Care and connection digital was really started the social media capability was all about enabling human connection and it was done from a very divisive way to a large extent and divisive in the sense that it was there to allow in the dorm enable connections between males and females primarily and there was no attempt to think about care in that world at all." - PMinterview10(413).m4a

Quotes & Infographic

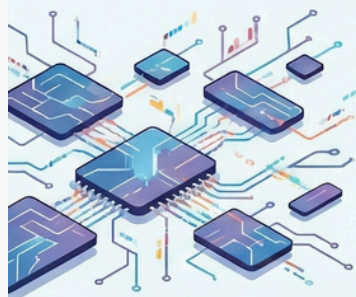
14

- "Make them feel supported," - Interview2(tascam405).m4a
- "I guess the biggest myth is that we're not doing digital and we are doing digital." - Network+HelenInterview1(tascam0404).m4a
- "I think ultimately we are all responsible for helping steward the use of that technology in a responsible way and it's up to us, incumbent on us if needed to lead a digital revolution to get a digital space to a space where it should be rather than where it is today and that might mean doing things which like all revolutions actually overturn the overlords that run those technologies today." - PMinterview10(413).m4a
- "I probably, as an economist, probably want us to stop thinking about how we can afford to do something and get us, the magic wand would be changing mindsets, the stoic people, to think about what the implications are of thinking about it from the perspective of we can only afford to do it to treat people as people so I know this is rambling but essentially it's trying to deal with, we've got to change the mindset of the way in which we run public services in particular is just at the lowest cost and the implications of that are just so horrendous, the exclusion will be massive." - PMinterview12-2.m4a
- "Caring about the people that are excluded. Not making assumptions that those people are fine because they've still got face-to-face services, haven't they? That's not good enough for us. That comes from a place of privilege." - Interview6(409).m4a

Beyond Access: Redefining Digital Inclusion

Tension exists in today's digital world: connection is vital but often undermined by a lack of safety and trust, calling for a new approach rooted in care and human dignity.

Connected but Excluded



“ THAT CONNECTION IS EVERYTHING, BUT IT'S NOT SAFETY AT THE SAME TIME. ”

Practitioners report a fundamental flaw in prioritizing universal connection without robust safety measures.

Feeling about the digital future



Interviewees were equally likely to describe the future as 'Optimistic' or 'Scary'.

Themes



LOWEST COST SERVICE DESIGN CREATES MASSIVE EXCLUSION.

A narrow focus on cost-cutting in digital services often leads to greater long-term social problems.

The Way Forward: A New Foundation for Inclusion



1. Prioritise Safety as a Prerequisite

We must shift towards a 'Safe by design' philosophy that centres on user wellbeing.



2. Embed Collective Care in Design

Digital policy and platforms must formally recognise and resource community-level support networks.



3. Reframe Sustainability with a Social Cost Lens

Move beyond 'lowest cost' and calculate the long-term social cost of digital exclusion.

Collective Care (37)

Trust and human support are paramount for digital equity.

Future and Action (32)

A strong desire for proactive, responsible change is needed now.

Meaningful Inclusion (27)

Inclusion means feeling safe and having a voice, not just access.