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Digital Inclusion and Social Justice in the Modern Society: the Role of Public-Private Partnerships

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The article examines the prerequisites and relevance of the emergence of digital inclusion and social equality. The main opportunities that digitalization provides for various interested groups including society in general are indicated creating the basis for digital inclusion in society. Digital inclusion is considered as the ability to consume digital services due to their accessibility and the corresponding level of digital literacy. It is noted that the reverse process of digital inclusion is the digital divide which is characterized as uneven access to the Internet and digital tools, differences in digital literacy and infrastructural limitations in access to various digital opportunities. All this causes a digital divide, social inequality, and does not allow creating conditions for social justice. While digital inclusion provides opportunities for different segments of the population to fully participate in the labor market, gain knowledge and master skills, regardless of age and profession, increase the efficiency of production, business and management processes through their automation and robotization, etc. The development of digital inclusion and social justice is facilitated by the creation of public-private partnerships (PPPs) which we define as cooperation between public and private bodies to improve the quality of life of the population and increase the level of well-being. The directions of PPP digitalization and the consequences that it has for the population and the state as a whole are identified. It is noted that PPP plays a significant role in the development of an inclusive society and social justice as it achieves a significant social effect for society. This is justified, among other things, by the opportunities that PPP provides in the development of digital public infrastructure, namely the expansion of Internet accessibility, the development of payment systems, personal identification, etc. PPPs can also focus on the implementation of public services that become possible for implementation with financial, technical or expert support from the private sector. One of the greatest values of PPPs is in the development of digital educational projects or providing remote access to educational platforms. This increases digital inclusion and contributes to a more equitable social distribution.

KEYWORDS
digital inclusion, social equality, digital divide, public-private partnership, inclusion, data justice, digital equality, Digital public infrastructure.

Introduction

Modern society is developing in the context of rapid processes of digital transformation and digitalization of various spheres of activity. This brings new opportunities and has its own threats. The positive effect is observed in several dimensions: at the individual level – access to a greater number of services, increased opportunities in the labor market; for enterprises - acceleration of various production processes and improvement of their quality; for the state – the possibility of transferring various processes to the digital plane including the provision of services to the population; for society – the possibility of access to various services, increased transparency of the activities of state authorities, increased quality of products and services, etc. That is, the positive effect can be seen for the entire population. Thanks to this process, we can talk about increasing opportunities for different groups of the population in accessing the market of goods and services, the labor market, receiving public services, etc. We can talk about increasing social equality due to digitalization processes and about digital inclusion. We can define digital inclusion as one of the forms of social inclusion in the digital age, which allows providing the population with equal access to the use of digital technologies (*Nguyen, 2021*). Digital inclusion is of great importance for both the economy of countries and social progress, which confirms our above suggestions. The Digital Inclusion Playbook defines it as full digital participation (*Digital Inclusion Playbook 2.0, 2024*).

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From this we see that the basis of digital inclusion is the ability to access digital tools, but this is not always possible. And in this case, we can talk about the digital divide which the Cambridge Dictionary defines as a problem of access to computers or the Internet, which can be a consequence of both technological and cognitive limitations (*Digital divide, 2026*). The presence of such a gap worsens digital inclusion and social equality, exacerbating the already extremely difficult socio-economic situation of the population of Ukraine and other countries of the world.

One of the possible solutions to this is a public-private partnership which allows combining the efforts of two powerful elements of the state.

Therefore, the purpose of this scientific research is to determine the role of public-private partnership in ensuring digital inclusion and social equality.

The achievement of this goal is facilitated by the following tasks:

-theoretical review of approaches to determining digital inclusion and social equality;

- research into the digital divide and its consequences for social development;

- identification of directions of public-private partnership in the field of digitalization;

- research into the role of public-private partnership in ensuring digital inclusion and social equality.

Research Methods

The research methods were the method of analysis and generalization of literary sources, which made it possible to analyze literary sources and determine the theoretical prerequisites of the main categories of scientific research; theoretical analysis of categories to study the main concepts on the topic of the scientific article; comparative analysis in terms of studying the experience of the EU; generalization and systematization of knowledge; logical and cause-and-effect analysis to establish the connection between digitalization processes and the resulting increase in digital inclusion and approximation to social justice.

Results and Discussion

To achieve the goal and tasks of our study, it is necessary to define the basic concepts, namely “social justice” and “digital inclusion”. Currently, these categories are components of various fields of scientific research, as they are indicators and characteristics of the development of society and the country as a whole. However, social justice begins its journey as a philosophical concept which is a logical continuation of the development of the social component of the concept of “justice”. Sociality is a consequence of the evolutionary development of humans and the need for their existence in society, and not in isolation. And social justice, as D. Miller notes, is considered by political philosophers as an aspect of distributive justice. And, in general, they can be considered synonymous by them (*Miller, 1999*). He also notes that social justice is the distribution of public goods and not only. He notes that the state does not act as a distribution agency but this is conducted both by the direct and indirect methods (*Miller, 1999*). Important here, it seems to us, is the emphasis on the fact that not only benefits, but also restrictions can be distributed fairly. However, the question of justice itself remains open, how this process can be determined that it has achieved its goal. Anil Kumar notes that justice, like social justice, is inherent in every society, with the aim of achieving harmony. Social justice tries to balance society (*Anil Kumar, 2018*). The question of the possibility of achieving this remains open. Is a fair distribution of social benefits possible? The works of various scientists of different sciences are devoted to this question. But it seems to us that the development of digitalization in the world, the digital transformation of various aspects of human life allows us to significantly improve the distribution of social benefits and increase the level of social justice.

Digitalization allows people to improve access to various areas of life, increase opportunities for participation in the labor market, automate business processes and management processes at the enterprise level, establish the provision of services that previously required more time, robotize and automate production processes, etc. All this has a significant positive social effect, as it improves the quality of people's lives, provides opportunities to transfer various aspects of life to programs, which allows them to devote more time to themselves, family, and communication with friends. In this we can see the importance and value of the digitalization process for societal good. One of the main consequences of digital transformations is digital inclusion, i.e a person can receive what he/she previously could not thanks to the access to digital technologies.

UNDP notes that digital inclusion is the basis for shared progress, both social and economic. What is necessary to ensure it is to prevent digital exclusion - a state when there is exclusion from digital tools or technologies (*From Access to Empowerment, 2024*). And this is important not only for each individual, but also for the community and the country as a whole. In this case, we are already talking about access to digital tools and technologies. And it also becomes necessary to master the relevant skills and competencies.

The above is also confirmed by the results of the World Summit for Social Development in 1995, where it was recognized that new information technologies, access to them and their use will allow providing social development to the people living in poverty (*Digital Inclusion, 2026 a*). We fully share this opinion but we believe that they allow stimulating not only social development, but also economic, cultural, etc. And also access to digital tools contributes to the development of different segments of the population. For the population below the poverty line, it provides opportunities to obtain knowledge, education, which broadens horizons in the labor market. For the population with disabilities, digital technologies are a link that creates the opportunity to obtain knowledge and skills, or other types of services that were previously limited due to physical reasons, and also allows participation in the labor market in a remote format, if there are limitations in the offline form of work. For the elderly, digital inclusion manifests itself in the ability to receive services that previously required great effort and time, to establish contacts in social networks, communicate in thematic groups, etc., to study, to continue an active working and social life. For young people, digital inclusion can result in expanding work opportunities, through access to digital employment platforms, as well as in educational projects and others. Approximately the same consequences of digital inclusion can be for other groups and segments of the population: migrants, women, single parents and others. As a result, we can see a significant increase in achieving social justice by providing equal access to various services and opportunities to all interested groups.

One of the best examples of the implementation and dissemination of digital inclusion is the example of the European Union, which is actively working to provide greater

online opportunities for the community's population. The main actions that are implemented and regulated at the EU level are:

- accessible websites that are convenient for use by all groups of people (especially for people with disabilities) that significantly expands the possibilities of both social and economic development;
- the development of digital skills which consists in improving the skills of the workforce through training using digital technologies, and specifically in the direction of using digital technologies. The EU pays particular attention to the growth of the role and participation of women in the use, dissemination, development of digital technologies;
- the elimination of linguistic barriers. It is aimed at reducing the prevalence of English on the Internet which allows other language groups to receive information in a more understandable language. It obviously reduces the risk of incomplete understanding and perception;
- reliable and fast connectivity which the EU wants to spread throughout the community, regardless of the difficulty of access. This will ensure digital justice in access to the Internet and other digital resources and to consume all the opportunities offered by digitalization;
- Access to Wi-Fi which is free and available in public places. It also facilitates the receipt of services and consumption of opportunities that arise with the development of digital technologies (*Digital Inclusion, 2026b*). In developing the feasibility of the point on Internet accessibility, we fully support Sagar, who in his work noted access to the network as a basic human right (*Sagar et al., 2025*).

The above-mentioned actions of the EU as an integration grouping that tries to unite the population of countries with different socio-economic development, linguistic, ethnic and cultural characteristics, seem to us quite logical and justified. The implementation of these actions in practice allows for increased involvement of citizens in the processes of digitalization and consumption of digital services. Which, accordingly, allows achieving digital inclusion and reducing the digital divide, which is one of the factors that hinder social justice and digital inclusion.

Here it will be appropriate to mention digital inequality and the digital divide as a manifestation of social injustice (*Sagar et al., 2025*). A. Nguyen also mentions the digital divide, studying digital inclusion, noting that the divide is the opposite category to inclusion. And digital inclusion itself is significantly enhanced by digital literacy (*Nguyen, 2021*). Mentioning digital literacy here is also quite important, since they determine the level of use of digital tools.

The digital divide is now considered a deeper concept than simply the lack of access to the Internet. This gap also includes differences in the digital literacy of the population or certain groups of it, and infrastructure capabilities, etc. (*Sagar, 2025*). We fully share the authors' opinion on this and believe that the digital divide has long since developed from a simple restriction of access to the Internet to inequality of various composition, but which leads to a decrease in the possibility of using digital tools and an increase in digital inequality. Digital inequality in this case acts as inequality in citizens' access to using digital tools, which is also a manifestation of social injustice.

Important here is the development of those areas that have a positive impact on digital inclusion and preventive actions regarding what causes digital gaps and has negative consequences for ensuring social justice. We assign a significant role in this to public-private partnership, which is a successful combination of state authorities and business structures.

The role of the state in ensuring social justice and equality is difficult to overestimate, since it acts as the main regulator of the distributive function, but the role of business structures is also important. This can be successfully combined in the form of public-private partnership.

V. Shedyakov notes that the interaction and its intensification between the state and society in itself is not effective. We assume that here it is necessary to strengthen such interaction by expanding cooperation and involving the private sector. The same author notes the significant role of PPP in the development of democracy in the state (*Shedyakov, 2024*). Which is also currently undoubtedly important for the Ukrainian present, when we are on the path to European integration.

In the development of our study, we will provide a characteristic of the PPP category, which Vashev O. and Khyzhniak S. define as cooperation between the state and business structures on mutually beneficial terms to achieve socially important goals. They note that PPP also involves the involvement of civil institutions (*Vashev et al., 2024*). Areas of cooperation may include the construction of roads, bridges, hospitals or other forms of infrastructure modernization (*Public-private partnership: new opportunities for local development and business, 2025*).

It is expected that business will be attracted with investment funds for the development, renovation, modernization of infrastructure (*Yescombe et al., 2018*).

E.H. Klijn lists 4 forms of PPP: private implementation, network-like partnerships, contractual partnership and consortium (creation of an organizational unit) (*Klijn, 2022*). Regardless of the form of partnership, the main goal is to solve an important social problem.

In the modern world of digital transformations, PPP can also be represented by the development of digital infrastructure. Here, the private sector can be an important component not only in terms of finances, but also in the expertise of implementing digital solutions in the activities of public authorities. Digital transformations can affect various aspects of the activities of public authorities, namely the provision of public services to the population online, which significantly increases the possibilities of their receipt by various groups, including vulnerable ones; educational projects; providing free access to the Internet, etc. Currently, a category such as Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) is also developing, which can be defined as a digital system through which both public and private services can be provided to their consumers. Examples of DPI include first of all digital platforms which are crucial to provide technology transfer process and stimulate innovative business. (*Alekseieva et al., 2023*) Digital platforms can be created to develop digital health care, digital education, digital agriculture and smart cities fulfilling the function of a powerful digital infrastructure mechanism. There are also digital identification systems, payment platforms, Internet connectivity, etc. (*Digital Public Infrastructure, 2026*). One such example of the development of digital infrastructure and cooperation between the public and private sectors in Ukraine is BankID. BankID is a modern way of electronic authentication of citizens through banks of which they are clients. Thanks to BankID, you can quickly receive various digital services both in state institutions and private companies. To administer this process, the BankID system was created, which is managed by the National Bank of Ukraine. Currently, it can be used to receive state, financial and commercial services (*What is BankID?, 2026*). The

BankID system of Ukraine demonstrates its success, which is confirmed by a 25% increase in identifications in 2025 compared to 2024 (the number of identifications was 109.4 million in 2025). The number of commercial subscribers who successfully used the services amounted to 6.5 million identifications, and non-commercial subscribers – 102.9 million. This indicates an important segment of non-commercial subscribers in the use of this system. The number of subscribers (i.e. the service providers who join the BankID system) is growing every year which expands the list of companies where identification can be carried out in this way. This allows to significantly increase the level of digital inclusion and accessibility of various services. One of the manifestations of PPP in the development of digital infrastructure is the ability to authenticate citizens on the state portal and the mobile application "Diya" and in the application "Rezerv+", where this is currently the only method of identification (*Results of the NBU BankID System in 2025, 2026*). Therefore, this allows to create an infrastructure for the population that will promote digital inclusion through faster provision of services, opportunities for their consumption from anywhere in the world. The development of DPI contributes to the achievement of social justice in society if we speak of a fair distribution of benefits. PPP can manifest itself here in cooperation between the public sector and enterprises in ensuring the development of this infrastructure. Here we fully support the Report of the Digital Cooperation Organization, which notes that the cooperation of the public and private sectors in the development of digital infrastructure allows for a synergistic effect. The expert role of the private sector in the development of this infrastructure is also noted. An important role for the private sector in cooperation with the public sector is to spread its experience by providing educational services, transferring knowledge and skills (*The Development of the Digital Economy, 2024*). G. Widjaja agrees with the latter, determining that it is PPPs that play the most important role in the development of the processes of digitalization of education in developing countries. G. Widjaja emphasizes that in addition to creating equal infrastructure opportunities for training all, even the least developed regions, the private sector in PPPs can also contribute to the transfer of knowledge that is most in demand on the labor market (*Widjaja, 2025*). We share his opinion and consider this to be one of the most positive consequences of PPPs in terms of the development of digital inclusion and social justice. Moreover, it is inherent not only to developing countries, but to all countries of the world. The experience of such cooperation between the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine (MES) and the online education platform “Coursera” is noteworthy. Starting from March 2022 and until July 31, 2024, higher education institutions and students could take Coursera for Campus courses for free, access to which was provided by the educational platforming the beginning of 2024, 56,000 students had completed 180,000 such courses. It is worth noting that Coursera also translated more than 4,000 courses into Ukrainian, which significantly expanded the opportunities for learning for interested individuals (*Coursera continues free access for Ukrainian higher education institutions, 2024*). This example of cooperation is a vivid manifestation of the public good and effect in supporting the population in conditions of uncertainty and demonstrates the effective combination of the efforts of state bodies with the capabilities of private structures.

We can also cite the experience of PPP in the field of education of such a giant as Google and the Ministry of Education. Which, for a certain period, organize free training for various target groups on various topics related to the development of various digital tools. Thus, in 2022, training was organized for employees of the secondary education institutions on the course "Effective Google for Education Solutions for Cloud Interaction". In 2025, these partners also organized a free online course on the possibilities of using AI tools in the world. This course was focused on three target audiences: for educators of Preschool Education Institutions, for teachers of General Secondary Education Institutions, for professors of Higher Education Institutions and Professional Pre-Higher Education Institution. In 2026, in cooperation between these partners, free courses on using Chromebooks and NotebookLM were organized, which were aimed at both teachers (professors) and heads of educational institutions (*Chromebook capabilities for education, 2026; MES and Google Ukraine initiate free training for teachers on using digital tools for distance learning, 2020; Google and MES launch an online course for educators on artificial intelligence, 2025*). Such initiatives and programs allow people working in the system of education to meet modern requirements and organize their activities more effectively.

Access to the necessary knowledge, which is most in demand on the labor market, contributes to solving important socio-economic problems, greater inclusion of the population in various spheres of life, regardless of the level of economic development, because modern processes of digitalization and technologization are inherent in all countries. Providing such access to education, knowledge and skills is crucial for the inclusive and balanced development of the country, as different groups of the population get the opportunity to get an education, which makes them more included in a full life, prevents their social and material exclusion, and access to the Internet ensures the reduction of the digital divide. The role of PPP here is also seen in the development of the country's digital infrastructure by expanding opportunities for the population in terms of access to the network, timely receipt of services, convenience in payment and identification. This is how the significance of PPP for digital inclusion and social justice is determined, because thanks to such cooperation, important socially significant tasks are solved, which allow improving the quality of life of different segments of the population, including the vulnerable.

Conclusion

Thus, we have examined the concepts of social justice and digital inclusion, which are gaining particular importance in modern conditions due to the development of digital technologies and the opportunities they provide. However, it is noted that achieving social justice is quite problematic, but more possible when stimulating and developing digital inclusion. Digital inclusion provides significant opportunities for the development of the labor market by involving various groups of the population in work, for whom this was previously limited due to certain physical or language limitations, for stimulating educational activities and mastering new skills and competencies by engaging in online or distance learning forms and courses, for involving people of different ages in communication and supporting social, economic and cultural life, etc. However, several points are important in this regard: firstly, the technical possibility of access to the Internet or other digital tools that ensure digital inclusion, and, secondly, possession of a certain level of digital literacy, which allows using the various opportunities that digital transformations bring. When

it comes to problems or lack of access to the Internet or a low level of digital literacy, we are faced with a digital divide, which is a manifestation of social injustice and digital inequality. An example in the development of digital inclusion of the EU allows us to see that their actions are aimed at building a strong, holistic inclusive system that covers various aspects of digitalization and is aimed at solving the issues of the digital divide. It is clear that it is impossible to completely overcome the digital divide, however, certain steps can be implemented to reduce it and strengthen digital inclusion, which will have a significant social effect on the lives of people and society in general. One of the tools that increase the effectiveness of inclusive policies and reduce the digital divide is public-private partnership, which embodies the cooperation of the public sector together with the private sector to solve a common social goal, which has a great positive impact on society and its well-being. Public-private partnerships can significantly contribute to the development of digital public infrastructure, where the public sector creates regulatory, technological foundations for infrastructure development, and the private sector can act as both an investor in this and an expert who determines the needs and opportunities for digitalization. By providing access to the Internet in various, even remote, areas, the ability to quickly identify, make payments, and implement educational projects as a result of the functioning of PPPs, the level of digital inclusion in society is significantly increased and the achievement of social justice is closer.

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Цифрова інклюзія та соціальна справедливість у сучасному суспільстві: роль публічно-приватного партнерства

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В статті досліджено передумови та актуальність становлення цифрової інклюзії та соціальної рівності. Зазначено основні можливості, які надає цифровізація для різних зацікавлених груп, в тому числі й соціуму взагалі, створюючи основу для цифрової інклюзії в суспільстві. Цифрову інклюзію розглянуто як можливість споживати цифрові послуги завдяки їхній доступності та відповідному рівню цифрової грамотності. Зауважено, що зворотнім процесом від цифрової інклюзії є цифровий розрив, який охарактеризовано як нерівномірний доступ до Інтернету та цифрових інструментів, різниця у цифровій грамотності та інфраструктурні обмеження у доступі до різних цифрових можливостей. Це все спричиняє цифровий розрив, соціальну нерівність, не дозволяє створити умови для соціальної справедливості. В той час як цифрова інклюзія надає можливості різним верствам населення брати повноцінну участь в ринку праці, отримувати знання та опановувати навички, незалежно від віку та професії, підвищувати ефективність виробничих, бізнес та управлінських процесів шляхом їхньої автоматизації та роботизації тощо. Розвитку цифрової інклюзії та соціальній справедливості сприяє створення публічно-приватних партнерств, які автори визначають як співпрацю державних та приватних органів з метою покращення якості життя населення та підвищення рівня добробуту. Визначено напрями цифровізації публічно-приватних партнерств та наслідки, які це має для населення та держави в цілому. Зазначено, що публічно-приватні партнерства відіграють значну роль в розвитку інклюзивного суспільства та соціальної справедливості, адже досягається значний соціальний ефект для суспільства. Це обґрунтовано в тому числі й тими можливостями, які надають публічно-приватні партнерства в розбудові цифрової публічної інфраструктури, а саме: поширення доступності Інтернету, розвиток платіжних систем, ідентифікації особистості тощо. Також публічно-приватні партнерства можуть орієнтуватись на здійснення публічних послуг, які стають можливими для реалізації при фінансовій, технічній або експертній підтримці з боку приватного сектору. Велике значення публічно-приватні партнерства мають також у частині розвитку цифрових освітніх проєктів чи надання можливості дистанційного доступу до освітніх платформ. Це підвищує цифрову інклюзію та сприяє більш справедливому соціальному розподілу

Ключові слова: цифрова інклюзія, соціальна рівність, цифровий розрив, публічно-приватне партнерство, інклюзія, цифрова справедливість, цифрова рівність, цифрова публічна інфраструктура

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