

Nordic AI Meet 2026

P1: AI, Society, Governance, Education & Working Life

12. Power, Ideology, and the Twin Transitions: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Digital Sustainability and Sustainable A.I. in Legacy Media

Authors: Joseph Doolen¹

Affiliations: 1. Faculty of Social Sciences, Department of Media and Social Sciences, University of Stavanger, Norway.

Abstract: As data centers devour larger shares of global energy supply and e-waste accumulates at alarming rates, the assumed alignment of the green and digital "twin transitions" demands urgent critical scrutiny. This study interrogates that assumption by analyzing journalistic discourse across three highly digitalized nations (Denmark, Germany, and Norway), exposing how legacy media texts reproduce elite ideological frameworks that naturalize unsustainable digital expansion. The compounding issue of artificial intelligence (A.I.) in recent years provides an example of subject matter with salience and significant public interest.

Drawing on van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach of CDA, I examine how institutional elites (corporate and governmental actors) are indexed as primary definers in news discourse, thereby monopolizing the construction of meaning around digital sustainability (including A.I. sustainability). Their ideological structures are not neutral. They encode specific institutional logics that privilege capital accumulation over ecological accountability, thus shaping public understanding of what "sustainable digitalization" can even mean.

3 research questions drive this inquiry: 1) How do legacy media depict alignment or misalignment between the digital and green transitions? 2) Under what institutional logics do represented actors operate? 3) What values (environmental, economic, cultural) are discursively constructed within twin transition coverage (including sustainable A.I.)?

I argue these media texts are not passive mirrors of reality but active ideological sites where power is exercised through discourse. The framing of digital capital (social, human, cultural, economic) reveals whose interests are served when sustainability is narrated through the lens of growth and technological inevitability. Problem representations embedded in these texts obscure structural contradictions between digital proliferation and ecological survival. This work intervenes at the intersection of media studies, environmental discourse, and critical political economy, contending that dominant discourses of the twin transitions reproduce elite hegemony. Making this visible is the first step toward challenging it.