



## Regular Article

## Discursive construction of Ghana's digital agenda in (vice) presidential discourse: A corpus-assisted study

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## ARTICLE INFO

## Keywords:

Digitalization  
 Discursive construction  
 Presidential discourse  
 Corpus-assisted approach  
 Ghana

## ABSTRACT

The electronic age lends itself to a deliberate action towards digitalization and this has led to the surge in discourses of and around digital economies. Scholarly claims of vagueness in African countries' pursuit of the digital agenda and the political leverage of digitalization discourses by social actors are examined by this research to unveil the discursive constructions of Ghana's digital agenda and its social actors. Using corpus methods and Discourse-Historical Approach to discourse analysis, the study employs a five-year corpus of speech by Ghana's vice president as a primary data for the study. The analysis reveals three main ideologically motivated themes: digitalization as beneficial in several aspects of Ghana's society, manifestations of Ghana's digital exploits, and principal officers' ideological stance on digitalization. Digitalization is presented as both a preventive and curative measure to Ghana's economic challenges. The dominant collocates of 'digital' include address, revolution, divide, through, platforms and port. Social actors are positioned as visionary and pro-digitalization, with discursive strategies like anthroponyms, personal pronouns, perspectivization, and evaluative predicates employed to construct a political identity that aligns leadership legitimacy with digital transformation. The findings affirm the ideological motivations behind digitalization in Ghana, supporting claims that policy actors use digital discourse to construct political personas. Contrary to critiques of vagueness in African digital agendas, the study finds Ghana's digitalization discourse to be coherent, policy-driven, and ideologically transparent. The study concludes that digitalization as a policy and ideology is clearly conceptualized in Ghana's presidential discourses, and the discourse around digitalization is political.

## 1. Introduction

Discourses surrounding the impact of digitalization on development are gaining attention as the world is gradually going digital. Advances in Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools and the shift towards paperless, cashless societies are glaring signs of digital transformation. Digitalization, which is conceptualized as the restructuring of the various domains of life around digital and media communication (Brennen & Kreiss, 2016), is logically linked to transformation as the two, digitalization/digital and transformation, have become inseparable (Herberger & Dötsch, 2021). Closely linked to digitalization is sustainable development. While the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) do not explicitly mention digitalization, scholars and policymakers alike recognize its centrality in achieving progress across key sectors such as Health (Geissler, 2021), Education (Pelters, 2021; Seeler et al., 2021) and Industry (Gobble, 2018).

Governments and political actors are at the forefront of this digital transformation, as they seek to persuade citizens and leverage political power to continue the digital drive. In Africa, many governments and leaders have pushed and continue to implement e-government policies as means of digital transformations of their countries. Adam (2020) observes that across fifty-one (51) African countries, the agenda for digital transformation often reflect in three main areas: ICT access, ICT use, and ICT skill development. These have been carried out in the quest to enhance public sector service delivery, to reduce corruption and to provide wider access for citizens to ICTs. Besides governments and political actors, inter-governmental organizations, foreign agencies, transnational corporations, and civil society organizations also play influential roles in advancing digitalization across the continent (Schelenz & Schopp, 2018). Notably, the African Union (AU) have championed the digitalization drive in Africa and have formulated digital transformation agenda for all member countries (African Union

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Received 14 January 2025; Received in revised form 29 November 2025; Accepted 8 January 2026

Available online 22 January 2026

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[AU], 2020). Such initiatives have spurred on the discourse of digitalization across the continent.

In the case of Ghana, discourses on digitalization dominate in so many domains of life – communication, health, banking and politics. This perhaps have been advanced due to the several government initiatives on digitalization. Kpessa-Whyte and Dzisah (2022) note that due to Ghanaian governments' prioritization of the digital agenda in education, justice, agriculture, health, immigration, finance and trade, the expression *digitalization* has become a buzzword in policy circles. Over the past two decades, successive governments have invested in digital addressing systems or Global Positioning Systems (GPS), digitalized National Health Insurance Scheme, and the implementation of the biometric national identity system popularly known as the "Ghana Card". These initiatives not only mark the country's digital drive but also signal the ideological orientation of key political actors, particularly the presidency, in shaping Ghana's digital future.

Interestingly, Kpessa-Whyte and Dzisah (2022) suggest that in Ghana, policy makers and the presidency pursue the digital agenda to leverage on it, not only economically, but also in their posturing. This implies that the discourse around digitalization in Ghana may be ideologically vested to construct policy makers like the presidency. This makes the study of political discourses on digitalization central to understanding how digitalization is framed, legitimized and ideologically mobilized. It is the argument of this paper that the proliferation of digitalization technologies in Ghana has led to the pervasiveness of its discourse which has become a primary persuasive strategy in political discourses as politicians leverage on the benefits of digitalization for political power.

While prior studies have examined Ghanaian presidential discourses – focusing on rhetorical strategies (Gyasi & Sarfo-Kantankah, 2021; Israel & Botchwey, 2017), discursive construction of ideology (Ayaawan & Opoku, 2020), and identity (Edu-Buandoh & Nkansah, 2018; Fordjour, 2024), among others – the discursive construction of digitalization in the discourses remains significantly under-researched. Despite the prominence of digitalization in Ghana's national discourse and its strategic deployment in political rhetoric, there is a notable gap in research on how this agenda is linguistically and ideologically constructed in presidential discourses. Scholarly discussions on the discourse of digitalization in Ghana have largely been limited to other thematic concerns other than linguistic: digital platforms (Sarku et al., 2021), their impact on the economy (Addo, 2021; Senyo et al., 2021), politics and corruption (Adam, 2020), and institutional concerns (Ayakwah et al., 2021). Moreover, Schelenz and Schopp (2018, p. 1415) have argued that Africa's digitalization agenda remains vague, raising the question about how digitalization discourses are discursively shaped and legitimized by political actors. This study responds to this gap by investigating the discursive construction of digitalization in presidential discourses and the ideological posturing of political social actors. Using corpus-assisted discourse analysis and the Discourse Historical Approach as analytical approaches, the study sought to identify and analyze dominant discursive themes and patterns related to digitalization in selected presidential speeches in Ghana, and to assess how language is strategically employed in the discourse to legitimize the digitalization agenda and construct political authority and acceptance. It answers two related questions: what are the recurring patterns and themes in relation to digitalization, and how do social actors discursively construct and ideologically position themselves in the discourses? Informed by the principles of corpus-assisted discourse analysis, this study contributes to the growing field of digitalization in political discourses in African contexts and provides insights into the linguistic strategies through which national agendas are constructed and legitimized.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Presidential discourse

Presidential discourse forms part of the larger body of discourses classified as political discourse. van Dijk (1998) suggests political discourses are conceptualized in terms of the main participants, practices, functions, implications, context and events, although "the easiest, and not altogether misguided, [consideration] is that political discourse is identified by its actors or authors, viz politicians" (p. 12). Thus, politicians like presidents and vice presidents are key actors who extensively produce political presidential discourses. The expression presidential discourse has often been associated with the speeches or statements employed by presidents to communicate with their stakeholders (Mourão & Baptista, 2022; Savchuk, 2024; Sikanku, 2022). It encompasses communication styles and rhetorical strategies engaged by presidents to present official narratives to their audience. Some researchers (Asafo-Adjei et al., 2023) consider presidential discourses as separate from vice-presidential discourses; however, the existence of the significant assertion in scholarship of the similarity and unity of the roles (Warsaw, 2009), relationships (Prémont, 2024) and linguistic features (Ulfa et al., 2024) between the president and vice president makes the consideration of them as belonging to the same and broader presidential discourse logical. Indeed, vice-presidential discourse is often positioned to support, complement, or further enhance the president's position, rather than articulate independent authority or vision; this makes the vice-presidential discourse part of the presidential discourse. Some examples of presidential discourses include ceremonial national statements and other epideictic speeches, agonistic speeches, presidential statements, celebratory statements, presidential crisis statements, and presidential address, among others (Mourão & Baptista, 2022; Savchuk, 2024). Presidential discourses do not only serve as a vehicle by which presidents and vice-presidents inform their citizens about their policies and decisions but also as a means of shaping national conversations and influencing public opinion.

Like several political discourses, presidential discourses are inherently ideological and the ideologies bound the content and characteristic of presidential discourses (Fetzer, 2013; Szczygłowska, 2022). Mourão and Baptista (2022) point to the fact that ideologies are intertwined with presidential discourses such that they provide the frameworks for interpreting and understanding the discourses. These ideologies in presidential discourse do not only reflect the individual political actor's personal attitude and values (Hamed, 2021; Sikanku, 2022; Szczygłowska, 2022) but also the political organizations' values (van Dijk, 1998), national values (Latupeirissa et al., 2019), and sometimes continent-wise regional values (Orjuela & Chenou, 2019) which guide presidential decisions, policies and aspirations.

### 2.2. Presidential discourse and digitalization

Presidential discourses have been greatly influenced by digitalization not only as a tool of and a policy in the discourses but also as an ideology of the discourse. As a tool, digital platforms including e-government platforms and social media like Facebook, Instagram, and X (formerly Twitter), among others have become essential spaces that several presidents employ to reach out to the public and other stakeholders. It has become necessary in recent political spaces for all presidents and vice-presidents to have social media handles where they have frequent direct interactions with their stakeholders. As a policy, many presidents and their governments have continued to prioritize digitalization of their country through ICT and government businesses.

Despite the advances made in this area, Africa seems to lag behind and many countries have the mobile as the face of digital (Schelenz & Schopp, 2018). The slow pace of digitalization on the continent is caused by the poor access and sometimes unavailability of internet services. In Ghana, Kpessa-Whyte and Dzisah (2022) report that several presidents

and governments continue to initiate and enact digitalization policies like National Cyber Security Policy and Strategy; National Telecommunications Policy; Electronic Transactions, Act 772, Electronic Communications Act, 775; and Mobile Number Portability Regulations, among others, despite the low appetite for digitalized services by Ghanaians which is caused by poor access and unavailability of internet services, and high cost of internet devices and services. Ayakwah et al. (2021) note that the several digital platforms and processes currently operating in Ghana, including Mobile Money Interoperability, Digital Enrollment and Renewal of Health Insurance by NHIA (National Health Insurance Agency), Paperless Port System and the launch of Ghana Property Address System Software have been pursued to address some basic social and economic needs of Ghanaians. Sarku et al. (2021) add that the existence of websites, apps and social media platforms that aid government institutions like Ghana Meteorological Agency to provide timely information on climate change to stakeholders in agriculture has strengthened Ghana's response to climate change. Beside enabling easy access to information, digital platforms contribute to the general growth of the economy (Addo, 2021).

Further, digitalization could be an important ideology that influences presidential discourses that characterize nations and state building. The influence of such an ideology has birthed concepts like smart cities, digital twin cities, e-government, smart nations, and digital governance, among others in the characterization of nations (Chung et al., 2022; Deng et al., 2021; Hashim, 2024). Indeed, Chung et al. (2022) assert that in nations where digitalization is a national ideology and engrained into the nationhood, digitalization is pursued as a national agenda regardless of regime change and the presidents acclaim this ideology in their discourses. For example, Deng et al. (2021, p. 126) report that Chinese President Xi places special emphasis on the modernization of the national governance system and governance capacity through digitalization and this agenda aligns with the broader trend of digital transformation of the country. Thus, digitalization as an ideology is not regarded as merely a process of computerizing government offices and services but extends to the quest to revolutionize governance and government services into every fabric of the nation (Hashim, 2024) such that smaller cities are more enthusiastic about the prospect the e-revolution brings to their cities in the provision of services for their citizens (Boz & Cay, 2024). While this may be the case in several continents, evidence in the literature indicates that digitalization in Africa is often perceived as tool for improving economic and social welfare of the citizens (Schelenz & Schopp, 2018) other than an ideology that determines and defines all government decisions and administration of services in all social institutions. In Ghana, Sikanku (2022) notes that digitalization has not been one of the major recurring themes in the presidential discourse of state of the nation address in Ghana although digitalization finds its voice as service to the health and economic agenda of the nation. In fact, even in academic research on the subject in Ghana, less attention has been given to the construct of digitalization and ideological stances in presidential discourses. Besides identifying the topical underrepresentation of digitalization in presidential speeches (Sikanku, 2022), the exploration of the digitalization services in Ghana (Ayakwah et al., 2021), the state policies and institutional challenges (Kpessa-Whyte & Dzisah, 2022), among others, the silence on the posturing of political leaders and the ideologies manifested in the discourses around digitalization remains a research gap and a source of curiosity for academic exploration. It is, therefore, pertinent that this study responds to this need through the analytical lens of corpus-assisted discourse analysis to understand the construction and representation of digitization as an ideology in Ghanaian presidential discourse.

### 3. Methods

#### 3.1. Design and corpus description

Drawing on the principles of Corpus Linguistics, the study applied

corpus-assisted approach to discourse analysis. Corpus methods are useful for identifying recurrent linguistic patterns and thematic structures in large data (Baker, 2006). Corpus analytic tools such as Wordlist, Keyword, Concordance or Keywords in Context (KWIC), and Collocation enabled the analysis of the data. Though WordSmith and AntConc remain two of the frequently used corpus software in corpus discourse studies, this research used AntConc (4.2.4) for the analysis.

The study used a specialized corpus selected from speeches delivered by the Vice President (VP) of Ghana, Dr. Mahamudu Bawumia between 2019 and 2024. The data for the study were retrieved from <https://bawumia.com/speeches/>, a newly launched website of the vice president which archives transcripts of his speeches. In building the specialized corpus, the speeches were filtered to include only those speeches that contained explicit references to digitalization. The initial keyword searches using the wildcard forms *digital\** and *digit\** were used to select the relevant speeches. A total of 23 speeches were selected and compiled into a corpus of 106,716 running words (tokens). The corpus was processed using the AntConc (4.2.4) open-access corpus analysis tool. The texts were saved in plain text format for compatibility with the software. The non-verbal elements and formatting inconsistencies were cleaned to ensure analytical consistency.

The choice of Dr. Bawumia's speeches rests on the fact that, as a vice president, he produces presidential discourses that speaks to the agenda of the nation. In the socio-political context of Ghana, the VP is the head of the Economic Management Team, which makes him the main authority on economic development, including digitalization. Dr. Mahamudu Bawumia's professional background as an economist (PhD) and former deputy governor of Bank of Ghana coupled with his vice-presidential position make his speeches a rich source of data for investigating how digitalization is ideologically constructed and legitimized in Ghana's digital agenda. Discourses on government business in relation to digitalization are rich sources of data for a discourse study. More importantly, the VP has been the main architect and manager of Ghana's digitalization drive, and this has earned him the label "Mr. Digital", reported by international media organizations like the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) (Chibelushi, 2024).

#### 3.2. Data analysis procedure

In line with corpus-assisted discourse analysis and Discourse-Historical Approach (Wodak, 2015), the analysis combined keyword and collocation techniques with qualitative interpretation of contextual meanings and ideological representations in the speeches.

The analysis of the data first involved the identification of frequently occurring lexical items using the KWIC/Concordance analysis of the data. The wildcard search terms *digital\** and *digit\** were employed to capture all the morphological variants in the data: digitalization, digitized, digital and digitizing. This enabled the detection of recurring patterns in the immediate co-text of these terms. A total of 566 hits were found for the two search items with the following distribution and

**Table 1**  
VP's mentions of *Digitalization* and *Digitization* (and variant forms).

Digitalization		Digitization	
Lexemes	Freq.	Lexemes	Freq.
1. Digital	245	1. Digitize/digitize	8
2. Digitalize/digitalize	8	2. Digitized/digitized	19
3. Digitalized/digitalized	22	3. Digitization/digitization	104
4. Digitalization/digitalization	148	4. Digitizing/digitizing	7
5. Digitalizing	2	5. *Digitilisation ( <i>sic</i> )	1
6. Digitally	2		
<b>Total</b>	<b>427 hits</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>139 hits</b>

N.B: Lexeme 5 for Digitization is marked because it is an irregular form which does not conform to any spelling form of the intended word.

frequencies (see Table 1).

The inclusion of *digitization* and *digitalization* in the analysis was influenced by both data and literature. A preliminary reading of the corpus revealed that digitization and digitalization were both used to refer to Ghana's digital transformation. Literature on innovation and digital transformation confirm the significance of these two different, but related terms (Gobble, 2018; Herberger & Dötsch, 2021): digitization refers to data conversion from manual to digital forms and digitalization refers to the use of digitized data and the integration of technologies in various sectors (Gobble, 2018). In essence, digitization is a prerequisite for digitalization, making these two terms relevant for the current analysis.

Further, using AntConc's collocation tool, the study identified co-occurring words and phrases associated keywords. Collocational patterns were used to identify dominant themes and discursive constructions within the data and this informed the thematic categorization of the data. Finally, to explore how social actors are discursively positioned, the analysis assessed how digitalization is used to legitimize the social actor's authority, and embed ideological positions through DHA strategies including nomination, predication, argumentation and perspectivization.

#### 4. Theoretical approach - Discourse Historical Approach (DHA)

The study adopts DHA to interpret and analyze the posturing of social actors in the discourse and to complement the findings from the corpus analysis. As a problem-oriented approach, Discourse Historical Approach is particularly suited for political discourse like the presidential discourse because it foregrounds the role of socio-political context, intertextuality and historical situatedness in shaping discourses ideologically. In the words of Wodak (2009), the aim of employing DHA in the analysis of discourses is to “demystify discourses by deciphering ideologies” (p 2). This speaks to the aim of the current study. The Discourse Historical Approach analysis is often multi-layered: first, the analyst identifies the specific content of the discourse (e.g. digitalization); second, the discursive strategies are examined, and finally, the linguistic means and realizations are discussed (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009; Wodak, 2009). Reisigl and Wodak (2009) presents five discursive strategies of DHA, outlining the specific objectives and devices for analysis. These are presented in Fig. 1 below.

The use of DHA in this study is justified on two main grounds. First, the central concern of the research to unveil how digitalization is discursively constructed makes it prudent to use DHA as it provides tools

Strategy	Objectives	Devices
referential / nomination	discursive construction of social actors, objects/phenomena/events, and processes/actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• membership categorization devices, deictics,</li> <li>• tropes such as metaphors, metonymies and synecdoches</li> <li>• verbs and nouns used to denote processes and actions</li> </ul>
predication	discursive qualification of social actors, objects, phenomena/events/processes, and actions (more or less positively or negatively)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• stereotypical, evaluative attributions of negative or positive traits (e.g., in the form of adjectives, appositions, prepositional phrases, relative clauses, conjunctive clauses, infinitive clauses and participial clauses or groups)</li> <li>• explicit predicates or predicative nouns/adjectives/ pronouns</li> <li>• collocations</li> <li>• explicit comparisons, similes, metaphors and other rhetorical figures (including metonymies, hyperboles, litotes, euphemisms)</li> <li>• allusions, evocations, and presuppositions/ implicatures</li> <li>• other</li> </ul>
argumentation	justification and questioning of claims of truth and normative rightness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>topoi</i> (formal or more content-related)</li> <li>• fallacies</li> </ul>
Perspectivization/ framing or discourse representation	positioning speaker's or writer's point of view and expressing involvement or distance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• deictics</li> <li>• direct, indirect or free indirect speech</li> <li>• quotation marks, discourse markers/particles</li> <li>• metaphors</li> <li>• animating prosody</li> <li>• other</li> </ul>
intensification, mitigation	Modifying (intensifying or mitigating) the illocutionary force and thus the epistemic or deontic status of utterances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• diminutives or augmentatives</li> <li>• (modal) particles, tag questions, use of the subjunctive, hesitations, vague expressions, etc.</li> <li>• hyperboles, litotes,</li> <li>• indirect speech acts (e.g., question instead of assertion)</li> <li>• verbs of saying, feeling, thinking</li> <li>• other</li> </ul>

Fig. 1. Five types of discursive strategies (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009).

Left Context	Hit	Right Context
and make us globally competitive. <b>The</b> Fourth Industrial Revolution (the	<b>digital</b>	revolution) is upon us, <b>and</b> Africa cannot afford to
who has not filed at <b>the</b> end of each year. ·	<b>Digital</b>	Address System · Financial Inclusion <b>and</b> the move towards electronic
with TIN numbers, we took <b>the</b> decision to designate the	<b>Digital</b>	National ID card number <b>as</b> the TIN number. In
there is more than that. <b>The</b> greater benefit is that	<b>digital</b>	financial inclusion would soon <b>become</b> the central element of
tender issued and backed by <b>the</b> central bank. With the	<b>digital</b>	currency, citizens and residents <b>both</b> the banked and unbanked
integrate the rich databases from <b>the</b> Ghana Card, the TIN,	<b>Digital</b>	Address system, Passport and <b>DVLA</b> databases amongst others. The
I want us to bridge <b>the</b> digital divide and apply	<b>digital</b>	technology and artificial intelligence <b>for</b> the transformation of healthcare,
and Natural Resources Minister on <b>the</b> Governing Board of the	<b>Digital</b>	Earth Africa Program, a <b>GEO</b> initiative. Other Ghanaians are
As the conference theme suggests, <b>the</b> world has been going	<b>digital</b>	and as you might <b>have</b> realized already, under the
erience also highlighted some of <b>the</b> endless possibilities in leveraging	<b>digital</b>	technology to drive an <b>inclusive</b> growth powered by greater
is a major addition to <b>the</b> Government's portfolio of	<b>digital</b>	initiatives already implemented. Some <b>key</b> earlier ones include: Digitalizati
medical delivery o Digitalization at <b>the</b> scholarship secretariat o Unified	<b>digital</b>	common property tax platform o Online filing and payment
mass issuance should resume at <b>the</b> end of April. On	<b>Digital</b>	Property Addressing, the process of tagging all 4 million houses
The Free SHS policy o <b>The</b> Free TVET policy The	<b>Digital</b>	Property Address System – o <b>Sinohydro</b> Bauxite barter agreement o
that same argument for say <b>the</b> National ID card or	<b>digital</b>	address system, or MMI. <b>The</b> people will just stare
too expensive. It goes against <b>the</b> very ethos of our	<b>digitalization</b>	journey. The industry cannot <b>continue</b> to operate at the
projects are already positively impacting <b>the</b> lives of Ghanaians. Our	<b>Digitalization</b>	agenda is not only <b>focused</b> on transforming how citizens
economic activities. I concluded in <b>the</b> book, inter alia, that	<b>digitalization</b>	was the path to <b>modernizing</b> and transforming the Ghanaian
To digitalize the work of <b>the</b> Department across the country	<b>Digitalization</b>	will provide a <b>consolidated platform</b> for the operation of

Fig. 2. Concordance of digital/digitalization.

for examining how language is used to perform ideological functions. Secondly, DHA's historical orientation aligns with the Ghanaian case where digitalization is embedded in broader national and developmental discourses shaped by contextual history and global trends. Again, DHA is used to complement the corpus analysis by providing a critical lens through which patterns revealed by the corpus tools can be contextualized and interpreted.

### 5. Findings and discussions

Ghana's digital agenda was represented in the corpus in different lexemes, such as: *digital*, *digitalization*, *digitize(d)*, *digitize(d)*, *digitization*, and *digitization*. Table 1 shows the recurrent use of lexemes related to digitalization, with the word digital being the most frequent with 245 hits. This was followed by 148 uses of the word *digitalization* (and *digitalization*), making *digital* and *digitalization* the two most frequently used forms. As such, digital and digitalization are used in this section to generally refer to the phenomenon under study. The analysis presented reflects two broad areas of enquiry in the study: the recurring patterns and themes in the discourse on (and around) digitalization, and discursive construction of social actors and how they are ideologically positioned.

Table 2

The salient collocates of *digital* (inc. *digitalized* and *digitalization*) and their frequencies.

Left Collocates	Right Collocates
Through (29), Build (12), System (11), Emerging (8), Using (13)	Address (50), System (44), Economy (28), Revolution (20), Transformation (18), Platform (20), Payments (15), Technology (15), Property (13), inclusion (11), initiatives (10), Divide (6), E- (16)

#### 5.1. Recurring patterns and themes in the corpus

##### 5.1.1. Concordance and collocation of digitalization

To reveal what was said about digital and digitalization in the corpus, the Concordance and Collation of the wildcard search terms were explored. Fig. 2 is a concordance of some hits of the forms of digital (i.e digital\*), showing the keyword in the context of use.

From the figure above, it is realized that the concordance analysis of the node terms *digital* and *digitalization* (highlighted in green) reveal a patterned constellation of the lexical items on either side of the node. The colored inks on the left and right context mark a five-word span on both sides of the word. Following Baker et al. (2013) and previous application of corpus-assisted approach to Ghanaian political discourse (Sarfo-Kantankah, 2021, 2022), a span of five collocates on each side

was used because they provide adequate textual context to the analysis (Baker et al., 2013).

The left and right collocates of *digital* and *digitalization* coalesce around recurring lexical items such as *fourth industrial revolution*, *transformation of healthcare*, *address system*, *national ID card*, *currency*, and *inclusive growth*. Through the strategy of predication, the revolution brought by digitalization is positively valorized as the fourth industrial revolution that is transformative, progressive and essential for all aspects of Ghana's national development. Also, the nominations of digitalization-linked policies such as *digital national ID card* (line 3), *digital currency* (line 5), and *digital address system* (line 6, 15) serves not as merely to list technologies but to foreground them as emblematic markers of state-led modernization. These references function interdiscursively as symbols of administrative efficiency and institutional reform to revolutionize governance and government services, often associated with global discourses of e-governance and digital capitalism (Hashim, 2024). The pattern from the concordance complements the collocates to generate themes.

Using the collocation tool of the Software, the salient collocates of digital/digitalization are summarized in Table 2.

From the table, *address* (50) is the highest ranked right collocate of the word *digital* as the phrase *digital address* appeared several times in corpus. Tied at the top with *address* is *system* which has a frequency of 44 as a right collocate but also appeared as a left collocate in expressions like: "Building a new *system* for *digital* transformation". As a right collocate, *system* forms lexical bundles with *digital* and *address* – *digital address system*. In the corpus, the expression *digital address system* is mostly used in discussions concerning the implementation of GPS across the country. The dominance of the consistent lexical bundle *digital address system* points to a strategic discursive emphasis of this particular policy intervention. It is depicted as a key policy that depicts the digital agenda of the government. This digital policy interdiscursively contributes to the broader global narratives around digital transformation and state efficiency. Specifically, the policy exemplifies and aligns with the ICT Use domain within national and international agendas (Adam, 2020). The lexical bundle also not only identifies the policy as a flagship initiative by the government but also legitimizes the digital agenda through a discourse of technological progress and state-led innovation. Other recurrent and topical collocates of *digital* and *digitalization* (subsequently discussed) such as *digital economy*, *digital revolution*, *through digitalization ...*, *using digitalization ...*, *build and use digital ...*, *digital platforms*, and *digital divide*, among others, reveal additional discursive themes around economic transformation, inclusion and innovation. These linguistic patterns reflect an effort to frame digitalization not only as infrastructure but also an evolving ideological underpinning of national agenda for growth.

A search of the collocates of *digitize*, *digitized* and *digitization* also revealed related and interventionist strand of discourse thematically. The most frequent collocates including *NHIA* (National Health Insurance Authority), *passport*, *process*, *distribution* and *addressing* suggest an institutional framing of digital transformation. Here, the discourse foregrounds how digitization is deployed to streamline government processes, particularly in sectors like health and immigration. The presence of evaluative and situational collocates like *dealt*, *how*, and *severe* points to discursive construction of inefficiencies or conditions that digitalization is positioned to resolve.

Further, the differentiation between the terms *digitization* (the technical conversion of processes) and *digitalization* (the broader societal and institutional transformation) in the corpus echoes the how these are conceptualized, as argued in literature (Gobble, 2018). Digitization is constructed as a necessary precondition for the digital transformation of governance structures.

## 5.2. Ideologies expressed around digitalization

### 5.2.1. Preventive and curative interventions of digitization

The collocational and concordance of the lemma *digitize* (including *digitized* and *digitization*) reveal a consistent pattern in which the term is embedded with discourses of intervention. The frequent collocates were *NHIA*, *how*, *dealt*, *addressing*, *passport*, *operations*, and *severe*, indicate the framing of digitization as both preventive and curative mechanism in addressing menaces in some sectors of the economy. This pattern reflects a broader argumentative strategy rooted in the topos of threat and solution where institutions such as the NHIA and Passport Office are depicted as sites of dysfunction or moral decay while digitization is constructed as the rational and incorruptible solution to the decay. Historically, Ghana's NHIA and passport office have been associated with corrupt practices of middlemen often called *goro boys* who provide corrupt means of securing services from the institutions and interfere in good governance practices (Yakubu, 2018). The corruption associated with the institutions are presented as a threat which digitalization can solve through the paperless systems. This construction delegitimizes pre-digital institutional order and legitimizes digital intervention as preventive and curative. This construct is clearly emphasized in the following excerpt from the Vice-President's speech in April 2022:

#### Example 1 (VP, April 2022)

In 2017 the passport office processed a total of 16,232 applications with revenue of GHC1.1m. In 2021, the passport office received and processed 498,963 online passport applications with a total revenue of GHC56.7m. **Digitization has dealt** a severe blow to corruption at the Passport Office.

The excerpt above exemplifies the transformation digitalization brings to bear as the pre-digital past is contrasted with a digitally reformed present. The VP's use of the metaphor *dealt a severe blow to corruption* introduces the framing of digitalization as an agentive force capable of dealing with endemic institutional failure. This highlights the curative ability of digitalization as a weapon and reform tool in Ghana, as confirmed by Addo (2021). Interdiscursively, these narratives align with national and international digital governance agendas where digitalization is tied to anti-corruption, transparency and modernization (Ayakwah et al., 2021; AU, 2020).

### 5.2.2. Digitalization as a vehicle for development and sustainability

Beyond the preventive and curative framing, digitalization is also constructed as a central vehicle for development and sustainability. This interpretive framing emerges from examining the salient left collocates including *through*, *build*, *emerging* and *using*. These verbs and prepositions foreground instrumentality and directionality. These lexical patterns, we argue, suggest that digitalization is not an end in itself but a means to achieve broader national goals. This construct is exemplified in Excerpt 2 below.

#### Example 2 (VP, February 2024)

I made the decision, with the blessings and support of the President, to focus on the critical but underdeveloped systems that would **expand the economy, improve systems, and create jobs through digitalization.**

I want us to apply digital technology, STEM, robotics and artificial intelligence for the transformation of **agriculture, healthcare, education, manufacturing, fintech and public service delivery.**

The excerpt above makes reference to a developmental triad in Ghana's digital transformation agenda: *expand the economy, improve systems, and create jobs*. These function discursively as a summary of topos of development. Through this triad, digitalization is presented as the solution to structural failings that have historically plague Ghana (youth unemployment, inefficient public services and poor

infrastructure) and resonate with recent socio-economic challenges including the growing phenomenon of graduate unemployment and emigration aspirations among the youth (Zreik et al., 2024). Critically, phrases like *through digitalization* suggests means-end reasoning and operates as a causal marker to construct the holistic impact of digitalization as the conduit through which transformational outcomes in agriculture, healthcare, education, and business, among others, can be achieved.

### 5.2.3. Manifestations of Ghana's digital transformation

Another theme that dominates the corpus is the manifestation of Ghana's digital transformation, represented through a range of state-implemented digital platforms and services the VP stresses. These manifestations function not only as indicators of progress but symbolic artifacts that legitimize the digitalization agenda and the political actors driving it. The dominant right collocates of *digital* and *digitalization* emphasized the manifestation of concern. These include *address, system, economy, revolution, transformation, ports* and *DVLA*. As asserted earlier, the recurring lexical bundle is *digital address system* and emphasizes the assumption that digitalization equals tangible infrastructure.

The recurrent *digital address system* and *national identification card* are arguably two of the main emblematic proofs of Ghana's digitalization transformations. Their discursive salience suggests a broader strategy of predication where these technologies are framed as essential and modern solutions that symbolize the realization of the country's digital future. The VP articulates this in the Example 3 below:

Example 3 (VP, February 2024)

This is why we have deliberately partnered with the private sector to undertake all the major digitization projects such as: **National ID Card, Digital Address System, Mobile Money Interoperability ... Digitization of the Hospitals, Medical Records, Passport Office, Paperless Ports and Drone delivery system**

In the Example 3 above, the VP engages in enumeration of several manifestations of the impact of digitalization in the country. This enumeration is used by the VP to construct a multi-sectoral vision of transformation through digitalization. The long list of projects as nominatives creates an image of overwhelming momentum for digitalization as omnipresent and irreversible in every sector of the country.

Table 3

Reference terms of the social actors, predications and linguistic realization.

Social Actor	Predication	Linguistic Realization
President (Akufo-Addo and/or Kufuor)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A visionary leader and believer in digitalization</li> <li>- The initiator of the digitalization agenda</li> <li>- Supportive of the VPs role in promoting the digital agenda</li> </ul>	<p>... <i>Our progress in digital transformation justifies the vision of President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo</i> (VP, November 2021)</p> <p>... <i>the digitalization agenda of His Excellency, President Nana-Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo which has already delivered a number of successful projects including the Digital Address System</i> (VP, February 2022)</p>
Vice President (Bawumia)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Champion and overseer of digitalization initiatives</li> <li>- Represents the future</li> <li>- Innovative and impactful</li> </ul>	<p>... <i>given the opportunity to initiate, champion or oversee many problem-solving policy initiatives including: Many of digitalization initiatives that I have just discussed</i> (VP, February 2024)</p> <p>... <i>the choice Ghanaians face in 2024 is between Vice-President Bawumia and former President Mahama. It is fundamentally a choice between the future and the past</i> (VP, February 2024).</p>

The National ID Card, also known as Ghana Card, is considered an essential tool for digital integration and governance in Ghana. Its relevance is seen through the government's agenda to link all other databases, from banking to elections, to the card and this emphasizes the foundational position of the card in the country's digital infrastructure (Thiel, 2020). Other important manifestations of digitalization, as listed by the VP, include the Mobile Money, Paperless Ports and the Drone Delivery System. These reflect multisectoral manifestations and contribute to the broader public service reform through digitalization in the country. What is ideologically significant is that these manifestations are not presented as isolated technologies but as symbols of a digitally competent state.

### 5.3. Discursive construction of social actors and their ideological positions

#### 5.3.1. Nomination and predication of social actors in the corpus

The objective of nomination strategies is to discursively construct social actors through naming and membership categorization devices like anthroponyms and deictics. Predication also qualifies social actors by assigning evaluative attributing traits to actors to ideologically position them within the discursive field (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009). By analyzing anthroponyms and evaluative attributions, we seek to investigate how the VP positions himself and the President and others in relation to their ideological position on digitalization.

In the data, nomination is used as a strategy to construct the self of the VP. One salient nominative device was explored in the corpus – anthroponyms. The corpus shows that the VP frequently refers himself as vice-president rather than using his personal name. This reflects the use of professional anthroponym (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009) to foreground institutional legitimacy over individual identity. A similar observation is made with the term president used in reference to both President Akufo-Addo and, historically, President Kufour.

Regarding predication, by investigating how *President* (including the marked form *Vice President*) is predicated in the discourse, the study reveals how social actors are discursively constructed to align them with the values and goals of digitalization. Table 3 illustrates the reference terms of the social actors, their predication and some linguistic realizations.

From Tables 3, it can be observed that the use of *president* and vice *president* by the speaker contributed to the ideological construction the social actors. These attributions are positive and paint the actors as visionaries, innovators, champions and agents of change who are pro-digitalization. Again, the evaluative attributions not only position the self favorably but a broader ideological function to construct competence and technocratic legitimacy within the ruling party's (NPP) digital agenda.

Again, digitalization is discursively framed as a visionary enterprise and problem-solving enterprise. The agency of this enterprise is, however, explicitly assigned to pro-NPP actors. The use of verbs such as *initiate, champion, oversee, and deliver*, in addition to nominal constructions such as *vision, progress, and agenda*, illustrate the deployment of predication strategies that construct the self as capable, forward-looking and responsive. This discursive pattern also links digitalization to competence, leadership and modernity which are central to contemporary political legitimacy.

#### 5.3.2. Contextual shifts in perspectivization as discursive positioning

A critical insight from the corpus is the temporal shift in perspectivization of the Vice President from 2021 to 2024. Early speeches of the VP emphasized the president's (Nana Akufo-Addo) vision and leadership in initiating digital reforms. However, in the lead-up to the 2024 elections when he was contesting to be elected as the president of the country, the vice president increasingly appropriates agency too himself. This portrays him as both *architect* and *executor* of Ghana's digital transformation. This is exemplified in Examples 4 and 5 below.

## Example 4 (VP, April 2022)

On coming into office, we moved quickly with the issuance of biometric national ID cards (The Ghanacard) to the population. The Ghanacard project was initiated by *President Kufuor* but abandoned for 8 years.

## Example 5 (VP, February 2024)

... the choice Ghanaians face in 2024 is between Vice-President Bawumia and *former President Mahama*. It is fundamentally a choice between the *future* and the *past*.

The examples above demonstrates the shift in perspectivization. From the DHA perspective, this shift is as a result of changing sociopolitical contexts. In earlier speeches, the VP maintains deference to the sitting president. However, with Akufo-Addo completing his second term and the VP, Bawumia, becoming the presidential candidate of the ruling party, the discourse recalibrates to enhance his personal credibility and visionary leadership. Perhaps the effectiveness and consistency of the strategy persuaded all others to label him as “Mr. Digital” in the roundup to the 2024 elections in Ghana (Chibelushi, 2024).

## 5.3.3. Constructing self and/vs other as principal actors on digitalization

The findings from the corpus confirm that the discourse of digitalization is deeply interwoven with ideological self-positioning of the principal political actors. The discourse strategies of nomination and predication realized in the corpus reveal the discursive construction of social actors and the ideological position of the Self in relation to digitalization. It revealed the VP constructs himself, the President and his political party as having a pro-digitalization ideology in contrast to members of the opposition.

A typical construction of this pro-digitalization stance is realized in several concordance lines through the use of the inclusive pronoun *we*. In Example 4, the VP lauds the initiative of President Kufuor in introducing the Biometric National ID Card. It is notable that in referring to the coming into office of President Kufuor, the speaker uses the inclusive ‘we’ (*On coming into office, we moved quickly with the issuance of biometric national ID cards ...*). This is used by the vice president to align himself with previous New Patriotic Party (NPP) to claim ownership of the digitalization achievements of the party which he belongs. This strategy instantiates membership categorization strategy that draws on the party identity to present digitalization as a historically consistent ideological project of the NPP.

The sense of belongingness may also justify the referent of Kufuor as “President” and not “Former President”. From an ideological point of view, the positioning of the NPP as pro-digitalization is emphasized by the speaker, and that digitalization has been an agenda for the nation from previous presidents, particularly NPP presidents, till his tenure of office as the VP of the country. Indeed, a cursory examination of Example 4 above reveal that the term *president* (without the qualifier *former*) is used to refer to Kufuor despite his being out of office since 2008. This lexical de-temporalization strategically constructs Kufuor as still ideologically present and this allows the speaker, the VP, to insert himself retroactively into a legacy of digital innovation. The inclusive “we” symbolically collapses temporal boundaries to legitimize the speaker’s digitalization agenda through historical continuity.

This strategy is sharply contrasted against the mentioning of the leader of the opposition party, John Mahama. As an opposition, he is frequently referred to with the lexical marker *former*. This temporal deixis is not ideologically neutral as it functions to position the opposition leader as a symbol of the past – a dichotomy between digital progress (Self) and analog regression (other). This is exemplified in Examples 5 and 6.

## Example 5 (VP, February 2024)

... the choice Ghanaians face in 2024 is between Vice-President Bawumia and *former President Mahama*. It is fundamentally a choice between the *future* and the *past*.

Example 6 (7<sup>th</sup> February 2024)

Ladies and Gentlemen, many people have said that I am the *most impactful Vice President* in Ghana since independence. I do not intend to compare what I have achieved as Vice President under President Akufo-Addo to *that of a Vice President who could not, perhaps, make a mark*.

The explicit temporal opposition is repeated throughout the data by the repeated co-occurring pattern between Vice President Bawumia and future-oriented terms like *next, transform, digital* and *innovative*, among others versus former President Mahama and expression of failure or abandonment (*could not make a mark, abandoned for 8 years*). In Example 6, for instance, the implicature communicated is politically loaded and contextually evident as the VP makes reference to John Mahama’s vice presidency under the late former president, Prof. John Evans Atta Mills. The VP valorizes his own impact and renders the former president Mahama, the other, as ineffective through the subtle use of negative predication by omission and contrast.

## 5.4. Conclusion

The study investigated the discursive construction of Ghana’s digitalization agenda and the ideological posturing of social actors at the forefront of the agenda in Ghana. The study responded to the significant gap of the lack of a linguistic and discourse-oriented analysis of digitalization in (vice)presidential discourses in Ghana. Situated in a corpus-assisted discourse analysis and grounded in Discourse Historical Approach (DHA), the study analyzed a curated corpus of Ghana’s vice president. The analysis employed collocation and concordance tools to identify salient lexical patterns around the terms digital, digitalization, and digitization. Drawing on DHA strategies, the study explored the discursive construction of key social actors and their ideological positions in the discourse. The study revealed that digitalization is not merely presented as a technical or developmental initiative but is ideologically constructed as a key driving force that is integral to governance and national development. Collocates such as address, system, revolution, platform and ports formed some of the consistent lexical bundles that functionally materialized and legitimized the digital transformation agenda of the country. Three major discursive constructions that characterized digitalization were found. First, digitalization is constructed as a preventive and curative intervention. Thus, it is considered a corrective tool that addresses entrenched systematic inefficiencies. Second, digitalization is presented as a vehicle for development and sustainability. The discourse linked digitalization with multisectoral transformations in the country. Finally, the digital agenda manifests in policy implementations that evoke legitimacy and national progress. Social actors are ideologically positioned as visionary, and pro-digitalization. The use of discursive strategies like anthroponyms, personal pronouns, perspectivization and evaluative predicates revealed a strategic construction of the political identity that ties leadership legitimacy to digital transformation.

The findings assert Kpessa-Whyte and Dzisah (2022) claims that Ghana’s policy makers like the presidency pursue the digital agenda to leverage not only on economic strides but also in their posturing to the public. The digitalization discourse is, therefore, ideologically vested and a means of constructing self for the policy makers. However, Schelenz and Schopp’s (2018) claim of vagueness in African digitalization agenda is refuted by the study. The study revealed that in the Ghanaian context, digitalization is discursively framed with clarity, policy coherence and continuity. Future studies may explore the comparative analyses of how digitalization is constructed across political parties, and other African national contexts.

## CRediT authorship contribution statement

**Rexford Boateng Gyasi:** Writing – original draft, Conceptualization.  
**Kingsley Cyril Mintah:** Writing – review & editing, Methodology, Formal analysis.

## Data availability statement

The study used open data available on <https://bawumia.com/speeches/>

## Declaration of the use of AI assisted technologies

The authors declare that they did not use any AI tool to prepare the manuscript but minimally to proofread the manuscript.

## Funding statement

This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

## Ethics statement

Ethical approval is not applicable to this manuscript.

## Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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