



CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF CORPORATE PRESS RELEASES: LANGUAGE STRATEGIES IN STARBUCKS' 'AN IMPORTANT UPDATE' DURING ORGANIZATIONAL RESTRUCTURING

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the linguistic and discursive strategies employed in Starbucks' corporate press release "An Important Update" during a period of organizational restructuring. Drawing on Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis, the study also incorporates Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics and Benoit's Image Restoration Theory to examine how language is used to construct meaning, manage stakeholder perceptions, and maintain corporate image. The research adopts a qualitative descriptive approach and analyzes the press release issued by CEO Brian Niccol on September 25, 2025, concerning coffeehouse closures and workforce reductions. The document was purposively selected as the primary corpus and verified through the official Starbucks newsroom and a U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission Form 8-K filing. The analysis was conducted across textual, discursive practice, and social practice dimensions. The findings indicate that the press release functions as a strategic corporate communication tool rather than merely an informational announcement. At the textual level, modality, pronoun choice, passivization, and euphemistic expressions are employed to reduce perceptions of corporate responsibility and preserve the brand's customer-centered identity. At the level of discursive practice, the text addresses multiple stakeholder groups simultaneously by balancing transparency with reassurance. At the social practice level, the press release reflects broader neoliberal and customer-centric ideologies that frame organizational contraction as a process of renewal and long-term improvement. The dominant image management strategy identified is corrective action, supported by limited expressions of mortification. This study demonstrates how corporate press releases strategically deploy language to shape public interpretation and reinforce institutional legitimacy during organizational change.

Keywords: *Critical discourse analysis; corporate press release; language strategies; organizational restructuring; corporate image management.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Corporate press releases are not merely neutral vehicles for disseminating information; rather, they are carefully crafted forms of strategic communication (Damayanti, 2020; Kusumawardani, 2022; Kusuma et al., 2014). Before publication, a

press release typically undergoes drafting, revision, review by communication specialists, legal examination, and regulatory verification. Once released, it often addresses several stakeholder groups simultaneously, including employees, investors, journalists, and the wider public. This simultaneous

circulation makes corporate press releases particularly significant for discourse analysis, as a single statement may influence employee morale, investor confidence, media interpretation, and legal perception at the same time. From the perspective of Critical Discourse Analysis, such texts perform ideological work by shaping meanings, reproducing power relations, and presenting organizational interests as rational or common-sense decisions (Fairclough, 2023; Carpenter & Singh, 2023; Nursita, 2023).

One example of this communicative complexity can be found in Starbucks Corporation's press release "An Important Update", issued by CEO Brian Niccol on September 25, 2025 (Niccol, 2025). In this announcement, Starbucks disclosed the closure of several coffeehouse locations in North America and the elimination of approximately 900 non-retail positions as part of its "Back to Starbucks" restructuring initiative. The press release was also submitted to the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission through a Form 8-K filing, which further expanded its audience and institutional significance. Consequently, the same document was simultaneously directed toward employees concerned about job security and investors assessing the company's financial and reputational trajectory. This dual audience required the text to perform multiple communicative functions, balancing transparency, reassurance, and strategic image management within a single discourse.

Research on corporate crisis communication has increasingly emphasized the role of language in shaping organizational responses to periods of uncertainty (Upadhyay & Upadhyay, 2023). Earlier studies in the rhetorical tradition focused on strategies of image repair, such as denial, evasion of responsibility, reducing offensiveness, corrective action, and mortification (Bate, 2020; Aquino & BuShell, 2020). More recent linguistic approaches have examined how these

strategies are realized through lexical choices, grammatical structures, modality, pronoun use, and narrative framing. Critical Discourse Analysis has become a prominent framework for investigating these processes because it connects textual features with broader social and institutional practices (Vaandering & Reimer, 2021; Mulyaningsih et al., 2026; Behnam & Mahmoudy, 2013). Studies of CEO apology discourse and institutional press releases have demonstrated how corporations strategically construct responsibility, manage emotional appeals, and maintain stakeholder trust through language (Ilas, 2025; Wang et al., 2021; Romadhan et al., 2025).

Despite this growing body of research, several gaps remain. Much of the existing literature has concentrated on apology discourse produced in response to accusations or acknowledged wrongdoing. By contrast, restructuring announcements represent a different genre of corporate communication because they proactively frame organizational decisions rather than directly responding to external allegations (Chhinzer, 2024). In addition, previous discourse-analytic studies have often focused on state-linked institutions or localized crises, leaving the communication strategies of a global consumer-oriented corporation undergoing voluntary restructuring less explored. Methodologically, prior studies have frequently applied analytical frameworks separately, such as using Fairclough's model without image restoration theory or combining rhetorical analysis without detailed linguistic examination. An integrated approach that combines Fairclough's three-dimensional model, Benoit's Image Restoration Theory, and Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics has not yet been fully applied to the analysis of a restructuring-related corporate press release.

The Starbucks case is particularly relevant because of the company's global scale and public visibility. Operating in more

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than 80 countries with over 35,000 locations, Starbucks communicates with a vast network of employees, customers, investors, and communities. Therefore, when the company announced workforce reductions and store closures while simultaneously framing the restructuring as a strategy for renewal and customer-centered improvement, the language employed carried important social and institutional implications. Previous critical discourse studies of Starbucks have shown that the brand frequently constructs an image of care, community, and partnership, while potentially obscuring underlying power relations within its operations (Li, 2022). This makes the press release “An Important Update” an appropriate site for examining how corporate language constructs legitimacy and manages public interpretation during organizational change.

Based on this context, the present study seeks to answer the following research question: How does Starbucks employ linguistic and discursive strategies in its official press release to manage corporate image and shape public narrative during organizational restructuring? To address this question, the study employs Fairclough’s (2023) three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis as the primary analytical framework. This model is complemented by Benoit’s (1995) Image Restoration Theory to identify image repair strategies and by Halliday (2019) Systemic Functional Linguistics to examine modality, transitivity, and other grammatical features. The analysis is conducted across three dimensions: textual analysis, which focuses on linguistic features such as modality, pronoun selection, euphemism, and passivization; discursive practice analysis, which examines the production, distribution, and reception of the press release among different audiences; and social practice analysis, which situates the discourse within the broader context of corporate restructuring and socio-economic change.

Ultimately, this study aims to demonstrate that the language of a restructuring announcement is not simply a neutral reflection of organizational decisions. Rather, it functions as a strategic instrument through which corporate actions are framed, justified, and normalized. By analyzing the linguistic and discursive strategies employed in Starbucks’ “An Important Update”, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of how corporate press releases shape public perception and maintain institutional legitimacy during periods of organizational transformation.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Corporate crisis communication has developed into an interdisciplinary field that examines how organizations use language to protect reputation, shape stakeholder perceptions, and frame challenging events when their legitimacy is under scrutiny (Benoit, 1997; Coombs, 2007). This field is informed by two main traditions: a rhetorical tradition that focuses on image repair strategies, and a linguistic tradition that analyzes how such strategies are realized through language.

Within the linguistic tradition, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a widely used framework because it views language as a form of social practice rather than a neutral medium of communication (Fairclough, 2023; Van Dijk, 2018). Fairclough’s three-dimensional model examines discourse through textual analysis, discursive practice, and social practice, enabling researchers to connect linguistic choices with broader ideological and institutional contexts. To support detailed textual analysis, Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) provides tools for examining modality and transitivity, which reveal how certainty, obligation, agency, and responsibility are constructed in institutional texts (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2019).

From the rhetorical perspective, Image Restoration Theory (IRT) identifies strategies such as denial, evasion of responsibility, reducing offensiveness, corrective action, and mortification (Lim et al., 2026). Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) further explains that the selection of these strategies depends on the level of responsibility attributed to the organization (Coombs, 2007). Previous studies have shown that crisis responses frequently employ linguistic resources such as pronoun choice, modality, emotional appeal, and expressions of corrective action to rebuild trust and manage stakeholder impressions (Ilas, 2025; Wang et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2022).

Despite these contributions, existing research has mainly focused on apology discourse following accusations or acknowledged wrongdoing. Comparatively little attention has been given to restructuring announcements, which proactively frame organizational decisions initiated by the company itself. In addition, prior studies have often applied CDA, SFL, IRT, and SCCT separately, limiting the potential of a more comprehensive analytical approach. This study addresses these gaps by examining Starbucks' "An Important Update" press release through an integrated framework that combines Fairclough's CDA, Halliday's SFL, Benoit's IRT, and Coombs's SCCT. Through this approach, the study explores how linguistic and discursive strategies work together to manage corporate image during organizational restructuring.

3. METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as the primary method. Fairclough's three-dimensional model was applied to examine how Starbucks' press release "An Important Update", issued by CEO Brian Niccol on September 25, 2025, strategically manages corporate image during organizational restructuring. The document

was purposively selected because it constitutes the company's official communication regarding store closures and the elimination of approximately 900 non-retail positions. Its authenticity was verified through the official Starbucks newsroom and the SEC Form 8-K filing.

Data were collected through documentary analysis, with the researcher serving as the primary instrument (Mauliddiyah, 2021; Daruhadi & Sopiati, 2024; Herdayati & Syahrial, 2019). The press release was analyzed paragraph by paragraph using a structured coding protocol based on Fairclough's CDA framework and Benoit's Image Restoration Theory (IRT). The analysis integrated three complementary frameworks: Fairclough's CDA for textual, discursive, and social analysis; Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) for examining modality and transitivity; and Benoit's IRT for identifying image repair strategies.

The analytical procedure followed the interactive model of qualitative analysis proposed by Miles and Huberman (2019), involving data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. The study's trustworthiness was ensured through persistent observation, peer debriefing, and a transparent audit trail. The conceptual model illustrates the interconnected analysis of textual features, discursive practice, and social practice, demonstrating how the press release functions as a deliberate instrument of corporate image management..

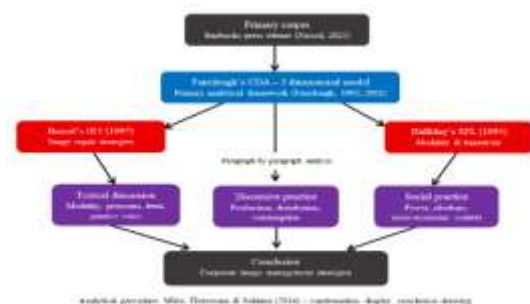


Figure 1. Conceptual Research Framework

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The title of the press release, "An Important Update," is a remarkably understated choice for a document announcing store closures and the elimination of nearly 900 positions. The word "important" signals urgency without specifying the nature of what follows, while "update" belongs to the semantic field of routine information management rather than crisis communication. Together, they perform a normalization function, positioning what is effectively a significant restructuring announcement within the ordinary flow of organizational communication. Fairclough (2023) identifies this kind of lexical generalization as a common strategy in institutional discourse, where content-specific language that might trigger negative affect is replaced by broader, more neutral terminology. The sub-header "To All North America Partners" extends this framing. By deploying "Partners" rather than "employees" or "staff," the text reproduces Starbucks' long-standing ideology of community and shared ownership, positioning employees as co-participants in a shared enterprise at the precise moment that participation is about to be withdrawn from a portion of the readership.

The opening paragraph of the press release, *"I'm grateful for the work everyone is doing to put world-class customer service at the center of everything we do and focus on creating an elevated Starbucks experience for every customer, every time,"* continues the relational groundwork established by the title. The most immediately striking feature is the use of the first-person singular pronoun "I" rather than the corporate "we." Fairclough (2023) argues that pronoun selection in corporate texts is a key marker of synthetic

personalization, the simulation of individual human address within an institutional context designed to foster a sense of direct personal connection with the reader. By opening with "I," Niccol positions himself not as the face of a corporation but as an individual with a personal stake in the work his people are doing, which immediately softens the institutional distance that typically characterizes formal corporate announcements. This is in line with Liu et al. (2022), who found that first-person pronoun use in CEO statements functions to construct an affiliative, engaging corporate voice that draws the audience into a sense of shared identity. The affective phrase "grateful for the work everyone is doing" deploys positive emotion as an interpersonal strategy, constructing a relational dynamic in which the CEO acknowledges the workforce before making any demands or announcements. This is consistent with what Lim et al. (2026) identifies as the groundwork for effective image management: establishing goodwill and credibility before potentially damaging content is introduced. The evaluative adjective "world-class" functions as an intensifier building an aspirational corporate identity, while the closing repetition "every customer, every time" performs total organizational commitment with no room for exception or qualification. Perhaps most analytically significant is what the paragraph does not contain. There are no modal verbs, no hedging devices, and no conditional constructions anywhere in the text. Fairclough (2023) notes that the absence of modality in institutional texts is itself a discursive act: by removing all qualification, the text projects absolute certainty and authority, laying emotional groundwork before the difficult content arrives.

Tabel 1. Result of Paragraph 1

Textual Dimension	Discursive Practice Dimension	Social Practice Dimension
The paragraph opens with "I" rather than the institutional "we,"	Addressed formally to "All North America Partners" but	Choosing "I" over "we" reflects the contemporary expectation in

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personalizing accountability from the outset.
Positive affect dominates through "grateful for the work everyone is doing."
The evaluative adjective "world-class" constructs aspirational brand identity.
The closing repetition "every customer, every time" performs total commitment with zero qualification.
No modal verbs or hedging devices appear anywhere in the paragraph.

simultaneously filed as an SEC public document, the paragraph operates across two distinct audiences at once.
Employees read warmth and recognition.
Investors and media read stable, human-centered leadership during a period of corporate stress.
The deliberate absence of any crisis content manages audience emotion before difficult announcements arrive.

stakeholder capitalism that corporate leaders perform personal rather than institutional accountability.
The phrase "elevated Starbucks experience" naturalizes the brand's commercial premiumization logic within the emotional language of care and service, making corporate identity feel values-driven rather than profit-driven.

The second paragraph, *"While we're making good progress, there is much more to do to build a better, stronger and more resilient Starbucks. As we approach the beginning of our new fiscal year, I'm sharing two decisions we've made in support of our Back to Starbucks plan. Both are grounded in putting our resources closest to the customer so we can create great coffeehouses, offer world-class customer service and grow the business,"* marks the announcement framing transition. The concessive construction "While we're making good progress, there is much more to do" simultaneously defends current performance and justifies the need for further action, reducing resistance to forthcoming negative

content through positive acknowledgment (Fairclough, 2023); the accompanying tricolon "better, stronger and more resilient" reframes what follows as constructive progress rather than crisis response. Naming the "Back to Starbucks plan" converts forthcoming announcements from reactive decisions into the planned conclusions of a pre-existing organizational direction (Lim et al., 2026). The phrase "putting our resources closest to the customer" euphemistically conceals the forthcoming announcement of closures and workforce reductions behind the language of customer service investment, a consistent feature of CEO crisis communications in restructuring contexts (Wang et al., 2021).

Tabel 2. Result of Paragraph 2

Textual Dimension	Discursive Practice Dimension	Social Practice Dimension
The concessive opening "While we're making good progress, there is much more to do" defends current performance while preparing the reader for difficult news. The tricolon "better, stronger and more resilient" reframes what follows as constructive rather than reactive. "I'm sharing" makes the announcement feel collaborative and ongoing. "Putting our resources closest to the	Naming the "Back to Starbucks plan" positions forthcoming decisions as components of a pre-existing strategy rather than reactive crisis measures. Employees receive a signal of coherence and planning. Investors receive a signal of managerial stability and long-term thinking.	"Back to Starbucks" functions as an ideological signifier framing restructuring as cultural restoration rather than financial contraction. The customer-centrism in "putting our resources closest to the customer" reproduces a dominant corporate logic that

customer" euphemistically conceals the forthcoming announcement of closures and job eliminations.	The paragraph bridges the warm emotional opening and the difficult announcements ahead.	legitimizes all organizational decisions through consumer alignment, rendering the workforce impact invisible within the discourse.
The third paragraph, <i>"First, I shared earlier this year that we were carefully reviewing our North America coffeehouse portfolio through the additional lens of our Back to Starbucks plan. Our goal is for every coffeehouse to deliver a warm and welcoming space with a great atmosphere and a seat for every occasion,"</i> grounds the announcement in a backward temporal reference, positioning the review as already underway rather than newly initiated and borrowing authority from earlier texts to make the forthcoming closure announcement appear inevitable (Fairclough, 2023). The adverb "carefully" assigns diligence to the corporate actor while the closing goal statement, built entirely from affective hospitality vocabulary, sustains the brand's emotional identity at the precise moment it prepares to announce location closures. The fourth paragraph, <i>"During the review, we</i>		<i>identified coffeehouses where we're unable to create the physical environment our customers and partners expect, or where we don't see a path to financial performance, and these locations will be closed,"</i> then delivers the closure announcement with deliberate linguistic precision. The modal construction "we're unable to" signals incapacity rather than unwillingness in Halliday's (2019) system of modality, repositioning Starbucks from active decision-maker to respondent to circumstance. The passive construction "these locations will be closed" completes this rhetorical movement by erasing the corporate agent entirely, which Fairclough (2023) identifies such agency deletion as a consequential ideological operation; Ilas (2025) similarly notes that passive constructions consistently redistribute moral responsibility away from named corporate actors.

Tabel 3. Result of Paragraph 3 & 4

Textual Dimension	Discursive Practice Dimension	Social Practice Dimension
P3: "I shared earlier this year" temporally anchors the review before the announcement, establishing it as neither sudden nor reactive. The adverb "carefully" assigns diligence to the corporate actor regardless of what the review found. The goal statement deploys affect-laden sensory language: "warm and welcoming," "great atmosphere," and "a seat for every occasion" belong to hospitality rather than corporate finance.	P3: Referencing a prior communication creates intertextual grounding, positioning the closure announcement as the transparent conclusion of an ongoing process. For employees, this preemptively softens the emotional impact. For external audiences, it demonstrates structured corporate governance and strategic consistency.	P3: The goal statement reproduces Starbucks' "third place" brand philosophy. Invoking this in the context of justifying closures subtly implies that underperforming locations have failed the brand's own community standard, shifting the moral frame from corporate cost-cutting to quality stewardship.

P4: "We're unable to" frames closures as incapacity rather than choice, removing volitional agency from the corporation. The parallel structure provides dual legitimizing criteria: environmental inadequacy and financial non-viability. The passive "these locations will be closed" grammatically erases the agent responsible for the decision.	P4: The passive construction is media-ready language: journalists can quote it without attributing the decision to any named executive. The dual criteria direct media framing toward objective review outcomes rather than corporate choices, distancing leadership from the material consequences for affected employees and communities.	P4: Placing environmental inadequacy before financial non-performance inverts the expected order of corporate priorities, subordinating profit beneath the language of customer and partner care. This reproduces and reinforces the customer-centric ideological logic of Paragraph 2, framing closures as a defense of community values rather than a financial decision.
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The fifth paragraph, *"Each year, we open and close coffeehouses for a variety of reasons, from financial performance to lease expirations. This is a more significant action that we understand will impact partners and customers. Our coffeehouses are centers of the community, and closing any location is difficult,"* performs a balancing act between normalization and acknowledgment. The very next sentence immediately complicates this: "this is a more significant action" is a self-qualifying correction rhetorically unusual in corporate crisis communication, one that Fairclough (2023) identifies as characteristic of texts serving competing institutional interests simultaneously aim

minimizing reputational damage while maintaining credibility with audiences who will recognize minimization when they see it. The verb "understand" signals cognitive awareness of consequences without committing to a stronger affective register, while the closing invocation of coffeehouses as "centers of the community" presents Starbucks as an organization that feels the weight of these decisions. Lim et al. (2026) identifies this mortification-adjacent expression as common in image repair during restructuring, and Li (2022) shows how Starbucks constructs a caring, community-oriented identity that simultaneously obscures the commercial power relations driving its decisions.

Tabel 4. Result of Paragraph 5

Textual Dimension	Discursive Practice Dimension	Social Practice Dimension
The opening normalization "each year, we open and close coffeehouses" situates closures within routine business operations. The self-qualifying "this is a more significant action" immediately complicates that normalization. The verb "understand" signals awareness of consequences without committing to strong affective language. The phrase "centers of the community" invokes communal identity to frame corporate	The paragraph manages a dual discursive function: minimizing severity through normalization while maintaining credibility through acknowledgment. For employee audiences, the acknowledgment of difficulty signals empathy. For investor and media audiences, the normalization frame signals that the closures are within the ordinary scope of business management.	The invocation of coffeehouses as "centers of the community" reproduces the third-place ideology established in Paragraph 3, reinforcing the brand's social identity at the moment of its institutional contraction. The tension between normalization and acknowledgment reflects the broader ideological challenge facing corporations that must simultaneously protect shareholder value and maintain social legitimacy.

emotional positioning.

The sixth paragraph, *"To put it into context: Since we've already opened numerous coffeehouses over the past year, our overall company-operated count in North America will decline by about 1% in fiscal year 2025 after accounting for both openings and closures. We will end the fiscal year with nearly 18,300 total Starbucks locations, company operated and licensed, across the U.S. and Canada. In fiscal year 2026, we'll grow the number of coffeehouses we operate as we continue to invest in our business. Over the next 12 months, we also plan to uplift more than 1,000 locations to introduce greater texture, warmth and layered design,"* deploys quantification as a discursive tool for reframing the scale of the closures. The phrase "to put it into context" is a direct metacommentary on the interpretive frame the reader should apply to what follows, an explicit invitation to view the numbers through a particular lens. Fairclough (2023) notes that such framing directives in institutional texts are significant because they do not merely present information but

actively instruct the reader on how to process it. The statistic "decline by about 1%" is the most consequential figure in the paragraph. By expressing the closures as a percentage of total locations rather than as an absolute number, the text transforms what is materially a significant contraction into a figure that sounds negligible. The forward-looking statements that follow, including the projection of growth in fiscal year 2026 and the plan to uplift more than 1,000 locations, shift the temporal orientation of the entire paragraph from present loss to future gain. Ilas (2025) observes that future-oriented language in CEO crisis communications functions consistently to redirect audience attention away from present difficulties and toward an organizational trajectory of recovery and expansion. The word "uplift" in the closing sentence is particularly notable: it belongs to an affective and aspirational register that frames investment in existing locations as a form of elevation rather than mere maintenance, reinforcing the brand's commitment to the experiential quality established in Paragraphs 1 and 3.

Tabel 5. Result of Paragraph 6

Textual Dimension	Discursive Practice Dimension	Social Practice Dimension
The metacommentary "to put it into context" frames the interpretive lens before data is presented. Expressing closures as "about 1%" minimizes perceived scale through proportional rather than absolute quantification. Future-oriented projections including fiscal 2026 growth and 1,000 location uplifts shift temporal focus from present loss to future gain. The word "uplift" belongs to an affective aspirational register.	Quantification here functions as a credibility strategy, presenting what could be read as a significant contraction as a manageable and already-offset organizational adjustment. The forward-looking statements serve investor and media audiences particularly, signaling that the organization has a clear growth trajectory beyond the immediate crisis moment.	The proportional framing of closures reproduces the ideological logic of corporate normalization, transforming material harm into statistical insignificance. The projection of future investment and growth naturalizes the restructuring as a stage in an ongoing developmental narrative, reproducing the dominant discourse of corporate progress in which contraction is always positioned as the precondition for expansion.

The seventh paragraph, *"Second, we're further reducing non-retail headcount and expenses. This includes the difficult decision to eliminate approximately 900 current non-retail partner roles and close many open positions. As we build toward a better Starbucks, we're investing in green apron partner hours, more partners in stores, exceptional customer service, elevated coffeehouse designs and innovation to create the future. We will continue to carefully manage costs and stay focused on the key areas that drive long-term growth,"* contains the second and more personally consequential announcement of the press release: the elimination of approximately 900 positions. The phrase "further reducing non-retail headcount" is a nominalization, transforming what is in reality the act of dismissing hundreds of people into an abstract managerial process. Fairclough, (2023) identifies nominalization as one of the most common ideological operations in institutional language: by converting human actions into abstract nouns, texts remove the human agents involved in both the doing and the receiving of consequential decisions. This linguistic softening reflects a broader corporate tendency, documented across

industries, to frame workforce reduction as routine strategic adjustment rather than organizational rupture (Chhinzer, 2024). The qualifier "non-retail" is also significant. It draws a distinction between the workforce being reduced and the frontline partners who are being retained and invested in, which serves a dual function: it limits the perceived scope of the reduction for internal audiences while directing external attention toward the organization's continued commitment to its customer-facing workforce. The phrase "the difficult decision" performs the same acknowledgment function observed in Paragraph 5, signaling emotional awareness of the human cost without providing a stronger expression of responsibility or regret. Lim et al. (2026) classifies this as a form of mortification that stops short of full apology, maintaining the appearance of accountability while limiting institutional exposure. The pivot to investment language in the third sentence, including "green apron partner hours," "exceptional customer service," and "elevated coffeehouse designs," reproduces the corrective action strategy, positioning the elimination of 900 positions not as an end point but as the means by which a better organization is being built.

Tabel 6. Result of Paragraph 7

Textual Dimension	Discursive Practice Dimension	Social Practice Dimension
"Reducing non-retail headcount" nominalizes the elimination of 900 positions, removing human agents from both the doing and receiving of the decision.	The nominalization functions to distance leadership from the personal consequences of the layoffs for affected employees and their families.	Nominalizing job eliminations is a well-documented ideological operation in corporate restructuring discourse that transforms the material harm experienced by individual workers into an abstract administrative process.
"The difficult decision" acknowledges emotional cost without committing to stronger accountability.	The investment pivot ensures that media reporting has a forward-looking frame available alongside the job elimination figure.	The simultaneous investment narrative reproduces the dominant logic of creative destruction, in which workforce reduction is naturalized as the necessary precondition for organizational improvement and future growth.
The qualifier "non-retail" limits perceived scope and redirects attention to frontline investment.	For investor audiences, the language of cost management and long-term growth signals financial discipline and strategic coherence.	
Investment language in the third sentence pivots from loss to		

constructive organizational purpose.

The eighth and closing paragraph, *"I know these decisions impact our partners and their families, and we did not make them lightly. I believe these steps are necessary to build a better, stronger and more resilient Starbucks that deepens its impact on the world and creates more opportunities for our partners, suppliers and the communities we serve. To those partners who will be leaving, I want to say a profound thank you. To those continuing on our turnaround journey, I deeply appreciate your commitment to helping us get back to Starbucks,"* returns to the singular "I" that opened the document, completing a structural arc of personal address that frames the entire press release within the CEO's individual voice. The phrase "I know these decisions impact our partners and their families" is the closest the document comes to an explicit acknowledgment of harm. The verb "know" rather than "regret" or "apologize" signals cognitive awareness rather than emotional remorse, maintaining the affective distance that has characterized the document throughout. Lim et al. (2026) identifies full mortification as the image repair strategy that carries the greatest risk alongside the greatest potential for audience forgiveness, and the careful avoidance of direct apology here is consistent with a legal and reputational calculus that prefers expressed awareness

over admitted culpability. The preference for restrained acknowledgment over full mortification is consistent with image repair patterns observed across corporate crisis apologies, where organizations frequently stop short of complete admission to limit reputational and legal exposure (Anani-Bossman, 2025; Ruan et al., 2025). The repetition of the tricolon "better, stronger and more resilient" from Paragraph 2 is a deliberate structural callback that creates narrative cohesion across the document, reinforcing the corrective action frame established at the outset. The closing expressions of gratitude, "a profound thank you" to departing partners and "I deeply appreciate" to those remaining, deploy high-value affective language at the document's most emotionally exposed moment. Wang et al. (2021) note that closing affective gestures in CEO crisis communications function to reestablish relational warmth after the delivery of difficult content, and these final sentences perform precisely that function. The sign-off with Niccol's name and title completes the synthetic personalization strategy that opened with "I" in Paragraph 1, reinforcing the document's framing as a personal communication from an individual leader rather than an institutional announcement from a corporation.

Tabel 7. Result of Paragraph 8

Textual Dimension	Discursive Practice Dimension	Social Practice Dimension
"I know these decisions impact" signals cognitive awareness rather than emotional remorse, maintaining affective distance while acknowledging harm. The tricolon "better, stronger and more resilient" is a structural callback to Paragraph 2, creating narrative cohesion.	The closing paragraph was produced to restore relational warmth after the delivery of difficult content. For departing employees, the thank you functions as a dignifying gesture that softens the experience of dismissal within the corporate narrative.	The careful avoidance of direct apology reflects the broader ideological and legal conventions of corporate crisis communication, in which expressed awareness is preferred over admitted culpability. The closing affective gestures naturalize the asymmetrical power relationship between a CEO

"A profound thank you" and "I deeply appreciate" deploy high-value affective language at the document's most emotionally exposed moment. The personal sign-off completes the synthetic personalization arc opened in Paragraph 1.	For remaining employees and external audiences, the reaffirmation of the organizational vision signals continuity and stability beyond the immediate disruption.	announcing dismissals and the workers receiving them, framing institutional harm within the language of personal gratitude and shared purpose.
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5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that Starbucks' press release "An Important Update" strategically employed linguistic and discursive resources to manage corporate image during organizational restructuring. Through Fairclough's three-dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis, the findings reveal that textual choices such as modality, pronoun selection, passivization, and euphemism worked to reduce perceptions of corporate agency, maintain the brand's customer-centered identity, and frame restructuring as a process of renewal. The dominant image management strategy identified was corrective action, supported by limited expressions of mortification.

Nevertheless, the findings should be interpreted within the study's limitations. The analysis focused on a single corporate press release and relied on an interpretive qualitative approach; therefore, the results cannot be generalized to all corporate restructuring discourse. Future research may expand the corpus to include restructuring announcements from multiple organizations and industries, compare strategies across cultural contexts, and investigate stakeholder reception of such texts. These directions would contribute to a broader understanding of language strategies in corporate press releases within Applied English linguistics and public relations.

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