Proceedings of ICADSS 2026 Symposium: Interpreting Culture: Context in Art, Literature, and Mass Media
DOI: 10.54254/2753-7064/2026.HT36271

Communication Strategies of ESG Narratives in Multinational Corporations: A Case Study of L'Oréal's ESG Communication in the Chinese Market

Ziyi Liu

School of French Studies, Sichuan International Studies University, Chongqing, China
20202302110005@stu.sisu.edu.cn

Abstract. With the in-depth promotion of the concept of sustainable development and the continuous implementation of China's "dual carbon" goal, environment, society and governance (ESG) has become an important part of enterprises to enhance brand value and market competitiveness. In this context, how multinational enterprises carry out ESG communication in combination with the Chinese market environment has become an important issue in brand communication research. Based on ESG communication theory, localization communication theory and brand identity theory, this paper studies the communication strategies of L'Oréal's environmental responsibility, female empowerment communication, public welfare communication and localization communication. The study found that L'Oréal effectively realized the local communication of ESG concept and brand value building through the localized operation of social media platforms, the expression of culturally adaptive content and the emotional and young communication mode, and enhanced consumers' brand identity and trust. This paper helps to enrich the research perspective of ESG communication and provide reference for multinational enterprises to carry out sustainable development communication practices in the Chinese market.

Keywords: Communication strategies, multinational corporations, ESG communication, L'Oréal'

1. Introduction

In recent years, ESG has gradually become an important standard to measure the sustainable development ability of enterprises [1]. Under the background of the continuous popularization of the concept of global sustainable development, ESG not only profoundly affects the investment value and market reputation of enterprises, but also gradually becomes the core component of brand communication. In the context of China's "dual carbon" goal, the concept of green development has been deepening into all fields of society, and consumers, especially young consumer groups, are paying increasing attention to corporate environmental responsibility, social responsibility and governance capacity.

At the same time, the consumption concept of Chinese consumers has also changed significantly. Consumers no longer only pay attention to product quality and price but pay more attention to

© 2026 The Authors. This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License 4.0 (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7064/2026.HT36271

whether enterprises practice the concept of sustainable development, whether they actively undertake social responsibilities and whether they have good brand values. In this context, ESG communication has gradually become an important path for enterprises to build brand image, deepen consumer brand identification and enhance comprehensive market competitiveness.

As a well-known French multinational enterprise, L'Oréal has long regarded China as an important strategic market and established a relatively complete ESG system earlier. In recent years, through sustainable development strategies such as "L'Oréal for the Future" [2]. L'Oréal has continuously carried out environmental protection communication, female empowerment communication and public welfare communication, and localized expression in the context of Chinese social media, providing a typical case for studying ESG communication of multinational enterprises.

Theoretically, the existing ESG research mainly focuses on the fields of enterprise management, investment evaluation and information disclosure, while the research on ESG communication and its localization expression from the perspective of communication is relatively limited [3, 4]. This paper combines the localization communication theory and brand identity theory to analyze the ESG communication of multinational enterprises, which helps to enrich relevant research perspectives.

From the practical level, the norms and requirements of corporate social responsibility in the domestic market continue to upgrade, and how to realize the efficient implementation and effective communication of ESG concept has become an important issue that multinational enterprises need to solve urgently. This paper takes L'Oréal as a case to analyze its ESG communication practice in the Chinese market, which can provide reference for other multinational enterprises to carry out ESG communication.

2. Theoretical foundation and literature review

2.1. ESG communication theory

The concept of ESG was first proposed by the United Nations Global Compact, which emphasizes that enterprises should pay attention to the development of Environment, Social and Governance dimensions at the same time [1]. Traditional corporate communication focuses on product functions and competitive market advantages, while ESG communication focuses on the transmission of corporate values, the practice of social responsibility and the communication of sustainable development concepts.

Relevant research believes that effective ESG communication can enhance consumers' awareness of corporate responsibility image and further enhance brand reputation and consumer trust. With the development of social media, ESG communication has gradually shifted from one-way information release by enterprises to interactive communication with consumers [3, 4].

2.2. Localization communication theory

The theory of Glocalization holds that globalization and localization are not opposed, but a process of mutual integration [5]. When multinational enterprises carry out global communication, they need to adhere to the unified tone of global brands and combine the cultural environment of different countries and regions to complete communication adaptation.

For the Chinese market, localized communication is not only reflected in the level of language conversion, but also reflected in the adjustment of communication content, communication channels and expression of values. Enterprises need to combine the cultural background and media usage

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7064/2026.HT36271

habits of Chinese consumers to recreate the global communication content, so as to improve the communication effect.

2.3. Brand identification theory

According to the brand identification theory, consumers' recognition of a brand comes not only from the functional attributes of the product itself, but also from the acceptance of brand values and cultural connotation. Aaker points out that the important components of brand equity include brand awareness, brand association and brand loyalty [6].

In the process of ESG communication, by spreading the concept of environmental protection, social responsibility and public welfare values, enterprises can enhance consumers' positive evaluation of the brand and further form brand identification. Therefore, the brand identity theory provides an important theoretical basis for analyzing the communication effect of ESG [7].

3. Analysis of L'Oréal's ESG communication practices in the Chinese market

3.1. Environmental responsibility communication

Environmental responsibility is one of the important contents of L'Oréal ESG communication. In recent years, Chinese consumers have paid increasing attention to environmental protection and sustainable development, and green consumption has gradually become a new consumption trend. In order to comply with this trend, L'Oréal continues to export the concept of environmental protection in the process of communication and shows the public its practical results in the field of environmental responsibility by relying on a number of measures such as sustainable packaging, empty bottle recycling and low-carbon operation.

L'Oréal has launched a number of environmental projects in the Chinese market, such as promoting sustainable packaging materials, reducing plastic use and carrying out empty bottle recycling activities [8]. At the same time, the brand uses Weibo, Xiaohongshu and other social media platforms to release environmental protection themed content and integrates the concept of green consumption into consumers' daily life scenes. For example, brands share eco-friendly skin-care tips and advocate resource recycling, so that consumers can intuitively understand the concept of sustainable development practiced by enterprises in daily scenarios [9].

As shown in Table 1, compared with traditional corporate propaganda, L'Oréal pays more attention to visual expression and lifestyle communication. Through short videos, graphic content and user interaction, brands transform abstract ESG concepts into life practices that are easy for consumers to accept, thus improving communication effects.

Table 1. Major ESG communication practices of L'Oréal in the Chinese market

ESG Dimension	Communication Focus	Specific Practices
Environment	Sustainable packaging, empty-container recycling, carbon reduction	Sustainable packaging promotion, circular economy initiatives
Social	Women's empowerment, public welfare programs	Support for female scientists, charitable cooperation projects
Governance	Corporate transparency and sustainability strategy	ESG reports and long-term sustainability planning

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7064/2026.HT36271

3.2. Women's empowerment and social responsibility communication

In addition to environmental responsibility, women's empowerment is the most representative core content of L'Oréal ESG communication. As a beauty company with female consumers as its main target market, L'Oréal has long paid attention to social issues such as female education, career development and female scientific research personnel training.

Among them, the "For Women in Science" project has become one of the most representative social responsibility projects of L'Oréal. The project focuses on honoring female research practitioners and supporting the development of female research careers, conveying the core concept of gender equality and the realization of female value to the society [2]. In the process of communication, L'Oréal not only shows the results of the project, but also arouses the emotional resonance of the public by telling the growth experience and struggle stories of female researchers.

In the Chinese market, female consumers pay more and more attention to brand values and social responsibility performance. Therefore, L'Oréal continuously strengthens keywords such as independence, growth, and self-confidence in communication, and combines the brand concept with women's personal growth experience. This way of communication goes beyond traditional product marketing and pays more attention to the communication of values and the expression of social responsibility.

3.3. Public welfare communication and brand image building

Public welfare communication is also an important part of L'Oréal ESG communication. In recent years, L'Oréal has actively participated in educational support, social welfare and public welfare cooperation projects to enhance its corporate social responsibility image through public welfare activities.

Unlike commercial advertising, public welfare communication pays more attention to social value creation. L'Oréal shows the public its positive contribution to social development through public welfare projects, thus enhancing consumers' trust and identity with the brand [10]. For example, in the communication of some public welfare projects, L'Oréal emphasizes the concept of common development between enterprises and society and expands its communication influence through social media.

In terms of communication effect, public welfare practice can continuously optimize the public image of enterprises and consolidate the brand reputation. When consumers believe that the enterprise truly undertakes social responsibility, it is easier to form a positive brand attitude.

4. Analysis of L'Oréal's localized ESG communication strategies

4.1. Localization through social media platforms

With the continuous development of China's digital media ecology, the way consumers obtain brand information has shown obvious platform-based and diversified characteristics [9]. Compared with traditional media, social media has not only become an important channel for brand communication, but also gradually become an important platform for consumers to understand corporate values and participate in brand interaction. Therefore, when L'Oréal promoted ESG communication in the Chinese market, it did not follow the global unified communication mode but combined with the communication characteristics of Chinese social media platforms to build a communication system with local characteristics.

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7064/2026.HT36271

Specifically, L'Oréal has developed differentiated communication strategies according to the user structure, content form and communication mechanism characteristics of different social media platforms. Weibo has a strong function of topic aggregation and public issue discussion, and brands usually release official content around social issues such as environmental protection, female empowerment and public welfare activities. Xiaohongshu gathers a large number of young users who pay attention to beauty, lifestyle and consumer experience. L'Oréal integrates ESG concepts such as green consumption, environmentally friendly packaging and sustainable lifestyle into consumers' daily life scenes through brand official accounts, expert cooperation and real user sharing, making the abstract concept of sustainable development more concrete and life-oriented. Douyin (TikTok China) is dominated by short video content, which is characterized by fast transmission speed, strong interactivity and high entertainment attributes. L'Oréal transforms environmental protection concept and social responsibility content into more interesting communication content through creative short video, public welfare challenges, brand live broadcast and other forms, so as to improve the enthusiasm of consumers to watch, like comment and share. Further expand the coverage of ESG communication [3, 4].

At the same time, complementary effects are formed between different platforms, enabling brands to reach different age groups and consumer groups. For example, Weibo undertakes the functions of brand issue communication and social discussion, Xiaohongshu strengthens consumers' word-of-mouth communication and value recognition, and Douyin further expands brand influence and interactive communication effect.

Compared with traditional corporate social responsibility communication, which mainly relies on official websites or annual reports, L'Oréal pays more attention to the interactive attributes of social media and encourages consumers to participate in ESG practices through communication in comment areas, online public welfare activities, and user UGC content sharing, so as to achieve two-way communication between the brand and consumers. This interactive communication mode makes consumers not only recipients of ESG information, but also gradually become disseminators and participants, which improves consumers' sense of identity with the brand's sustainable development concept, and enhances the authenticity and credibility of brand communication. In recent years, Chinese consumers pay more and more attention to corporate values and the performance of social responsibility. This platform localization strategy enables ESG content to reach the target audience more accurately and improve communication efficiency. In addition, the interactive attributes of social media fully mobilize the enthusiasm of consumers to participate, realizing the transformation of ESG communication from one-way output to two-way interaction.

4.2. Cultural adaptation of communication content

In addition to the localization of communication channels, L'Oréal pays more attention to the cultural adaptation of ESG communication content in the Chinese market. It does not simply copy the global unified communication content, but makes adjustments according to the values, social and cultural background and hot issues of Chinese consumers on the basis of maintaining the consistency of global sustainable development strategy. So that ESG concept can better integrate into the context of the Chinese market.

First of all, in terms of environmental responsibility communication, L'Oréal puts more emphasis on green consumption and sustainable lifestyle, rather than just introducing its own environmental protection achievements. For example, in the process of product communication, brands will combine specific practices such as environmentally friendly packaging, empty product recycling and green production to guide consumers to form green consumption awareness, so that consumers can

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7064/2026.HT36271

feel the connection between personal consumption behavior and environmental protection. This method of communication is more suitable for the increasing environmental awareness of Chinese consumers in recent years and also makes the ESG concept more relevant to daily life.

Secondly, in terms of social responsibility communication, L'Oréal, combined with its own brand positioning, focuses on social issues such as female growth, female employment, female scientific and technological personnel training and public welfare education. As a world-renowned beauty company, L'Oréal has long carried out public welfare projects to support women's development. In the Chinese market, it focuses more on women's career development, self-growth and social value realization. These issues have a high degree of consistency with the current social hot topics such as women's development, professional equality and personal growth, which are widely concerned by the Chinese society, so they are more likely to resonate with consumers and improve the sense of identity of brand social responsibility communication.

In addition, L'Oréal has also made localized adjustments in the way of communication and expression. Compared with international communication, which emphasizes system building, corporate governance and global sustainable goals, the Chinese market pays more attention to story-based expression and enhances the human touch and appeal of communication content through real people's cases, records of public welfare activities and ordinary consumers' participation experiences. This narrative method is in line with the communication characteristics of Chinese consumers who prefer real experience and emotional resonance, and also helps to lower the understanding threshold of ESG concept itself and improve consumers' acceptance of brand value concept.

In general, L'Oréal has achieved effective connection between global ESG strategy and Chinese local culture through cultural adaptation of communication content. On the one hand, it maintains the core value of sustainable development of the enterprise; on the other hand, it makes localized adjustments to the communication theme, expression mode and communication language in combination with the value demands of Chinese consumers and the media environment, so as to improve the pertinence and effectiveness of ESG communication. This communication mode of "global strategy and local expression" not only enhances consumers' understanding and recognition of the brand ESG concept, but also further enhances the social image and competitive advantage of the brand in the Chinese market [11].

5. Brand identification constructed through L'Oréal's ESG communication

5.1. Emotional communication and brand identification among potential consumers

For potential consumers who have not yet established fixed consumption habits, emotional communication is an important way to build brand identification. In the process of female empowerment communication and public welfare communication, L'Oréal adopts a large number of character stories and growth narratives to convey brand values through the experiences of specific individuals.

Compared with directly publicizing the achievements of corporate responsibility, this narrative is more likely to resonate with consumers. While paying attention to issues such as women's growth and social welfare, consumers gradually form a positive perception of brand values, thus enhancing brand favorability. At the same time, emotional communication can reduce consumers' resistance to commercial publicity, so that ESG concept can be integrated into brand communication in a more natural and real way. By telling real cases and public welfare practices, brands not only convey the attitude of enterprises to fulfill social responsibilities but also enhance consumers' trust in brand

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7064/2026.HT36271

values. Especially in the social media environment, emotional stories are more likely to trigger user comments, sharing and secondary communication, further expanding the influence of brand communication and laying a foundation for potential consumers to establish brand identification [7].

5.2. Youth-oriented communication and brand identification among existing consumers

For consumers who have paid attention to or purchased L'Oréal products, brand identification is more reflected in continuous interaction and emotional maintenance. To this end, L'Oréal adopts young communication forms such as short videos, KOL cooperation and online interactive activities to integrate ESG content into audiences' daily media use scenarios.

This way of communication not only improves the communication effect of ESG content but also enhances the sense of consumer participation and brand belonging. Through continuous interaction, consumers form a deeper identification with brand values and further enhance brand loyalty. In addition, younger expressions can be more in line with the fragmented and interactive media use habits of the current young consumer group, so that ESG communication can get rid of the stereotype of traditional corporate publicity and enhance the appeal of communication in a more relaxed and vivid way. In the process of participating in brand interaction, public welfare activities and environmental protection initiatives, consumers gradually change from information recipients to participants and disseminators of brand concepts, thus further strengthening the emotional connection between brands and consumers. For a long time, such brand identification based on common values not only helps to enhance consumers' repeated purchase intention but also enhances the brand's competitive advantage in the market.

6. Conclusion

Through the analysis of the ESG communication practice of L'Oréal in the Chinese market, it can be found that ESG has become an important part of the brand communication of multinational enterprises. L'Oréal has built a relatively complete ESG communication system through environmental responsibility communication, female empowerment communication and public welfare communication. At the same time, combined with the characteristics of the Chinese market, the brand has made localized adjustments in terms of communication channels and communication content, realizing the local expression of the global ESG concept.

In addition, emotional narrative and younger expression effectively promote the establishment of consumers' brand identification, making ESG communication break through the simple function of information transmission and upgrade to an important carrier of brand value building. In the future, multinational enterprises still need to pay attention to the consistency between communication content and actual actions when carrying out ESG communication, so as to avoid problems such as "greenwashing", so as to improve the authenticity and credibility of communication.

References

[1] United Nations Global Compact. (2023). *Communication on progress (CoP): Guide for participants.* New York: United Nations Global Compact.
[2] L'Oréal Groupe. (2024). *L'Oréal for the future progress report 2024.* Clichy: L'Oréal Groupe.
[3] European Commission. (2023). *Corporate sustainability reporting directive (CSRD).* Brussels: European Commission.
[4] KPMG. (2023). *ESG assurance maturity index 2023.* Amsterdam: KPMG International.
[5] Robertson, R. (1995). Globalisation or glocalisation? *Journal of International Communication, 1*(1), 33–52.
[6] Aaker, D. A. (1996). *Building strong brands*. New York: Free Press.

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7064/2026.HT36271

[7] Keller, K. L. (2013). *Strategic brand management* (4th ed.). Harlow: Pearson Education.
[8] L'Oréal. (2026). *2025 universal registration document including the annual financial report, the integrated report and the sustainability report*. Clichy: L'Oréal.
[9] China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC). (2025). *The 55th statistical report on China's internet development*. Beijing: CNNIC.
[10] Porter, M. E., & Kramer, M. R. (2011). Creating shared value. *Harvard Business Review, 89*(1/2), 62–77.
[11] Deloitte. (2024). *Sustainability and consumer behaviour survey 2024*. London: Deloitte.