

# The Evolution and Adaptability of EstÉE Lauder's Marketing Strategies Across the Product Lifecycle

Luyan Li \*

School of Business, Macau University of Science and Technology, Macau, China

\* Corresponding Author Email: 1230018568@student.must.edu.mo

**Abstract.** Nowadays, the competition in the high-end beauty industry market is constantly intensifying. As a global high-end beauty giant, Estée Lauder Companies has undergone multiple iterations in product lifecycle management, becoming a benchmark in the industry and standing out in the competition. Firstly, during the introduction phase, the brand establishes a high-end product positioning based on cutting-edge ingredients and pioneering concepts. Then expand the market through digital marketing and channel sinking during the growth period. Finally, in the mature stage, achieve continuous upgrading and improvement of classic hot items, as well as sub brand innovation. However, its strategy also faces the challenge of adaptability. This study first uses a literature review to clarify the failure cases of Estée Lauder 's marketing strategy, the impact of misjudgments at different stages of its lifecycle on market performance, and the systemic adaptation issues caused by the global market rhythm mismatch. Determine research questions by studying gaps. Then, it analyzes the marketing strategies of different life cycles of Advanced Night Repair Eye Synchronized Complex and Futurist Aqua Brilliance Makeup through case comparison analysis and discusses the causes of life cycle misjudgment and maladjustment of adaptation mechanism. Finally, a "flexible adaptation model" is proposed to explain how multinational brands achieve strategic elasticity matching in multiple markets.

**Keywords:** Product lifecycle management; global adaptation challenges; flexible adaptation models; multinational brand strategy; Estée Lauder.

## 1. Introduction

In the increasingly competitive landscape of the high-end cosmetics industry, product lifecycle management has become a critical means for enterprises to maintain brand vitality and market position. As a globally leading beauty conglomerate, Estée Lauder has developed a distinctive strategic evolution path through its systematic marketing management of products from the introduction stage to the maturity stage. During the introduction stage, Estée Lauder builds a high-end image by leveraging cutting-edge technology and pioneering concepts. In the growth stage, it rapidly scales through digital marketing, KOL collaborations, and market penetration into lower-tier cities. In the maturity stage, it sustains product relevance through technological upgrades and the reinvention of classic products. However, with the parallel development of multiple global markets, the adaptability of its product strategies faces challenges. This study focuses on the complexities arising from the globalization of today's market, where strategies that succeed in one market or stage may prove ineffective in another, reflecting the intricacies of "misjudgment of lifecycle stages" and "divergent market structures." Theoretically, this research contributes to enriching the adaptability of product lifecycle theory in the context of digitalization and globalization. Practically, it provides a dynamic reference for the market management and marketing rhythm control of beauty brands. This study is structured around three main aspects. First, why do the same strategies succeed in certain products or markets but fail in others? Could this stem from misjudgments of the life cycle stages? Second, as major global markets gradually enter maturity, will the periodic volatility of emerging markets have a structural impact on the overall strategic framework? Third, how does Estée Lauder achieve stage alignment and market adaptation in its strategies to maintain the balance between global brand consistency and local flexibility? This study employs a comparative case analysis method to examine and compare two cases: the marketing strategies of Estée Lauder Advanced Night Repair Eye Synchronized Complex at different stages of its product life cycle and the marketing strategies

of Estée Lauder Futurist Aqua Brilliance Makeup at different stages of its product life cycle. The advantage of this approach lies in, first, their homologous nature—both are core products under the Estée Lauder Companies, sharing corporate resources, brand DNA, and fundamental marketing frameworks. This effectively controls for the variable of brand background, allowing the research to focus specifically on product life cycle management strategies and their adaptability to specific markets. Second, the two cases are comparable: both products target mid-to-high-end skincare or makeup consumers who prioritize quality and brand value. Moreover, both have undergone distinct PLC stages, exhibiting contrasting life cycle trajectories. These characteristics facilitate the research process. The ultimate research objective is to trace the evolution of Estée Lauder's marketing strategies across different product life cycle stages, further investigating cases of strategy failures, the impact of misjudgments in different life cycle stages on market performance, and systemic adaptation issues arising from misaligned global market rhythms. The study aims to reveal how companies achieve "adaptive flexibility" in their strategies when facing marketing re-adaptation challenges within multi-market and multi-cultural structures. This will contribute to supplementing marketing management mechanisms in the context of coexisting multi-market and multi-rhythm environments, providing theoretical insights for transnational brand strategies.

## 2. Literature Review

Guo Zhandong, in Estée Lauder's Fashion Magic Part III: Marketing Model, provided an in-depth analysis of Estée Lauder's category reinvention strategy during the introductory stage. The study pointed out that the brand redefined the anti-aging category by creating the concept of "night repair," and employed sample distribution and gift marketing to lower the barrier for consumer trial. This branding strategy was effective in positioning the Advanced Night Repair serum as a professional product under the brand image of "Repair Specialist" [1]. Guohai Securities analyzed that during the growth stage, the Advanced Night Repair serum evolved from a best-seller to a standard product through "micro-innovations and regionalization strategies," and its repurchase rate was significantly higher than the industry average. During the maturity stage, Estée Lauder drove product innovation through technological advances and shifted its focus to appealing to younger buyers [2]. Harvard Business Review pointed out that Estée Lauder's marketing strategies differ systematically across the phases of the product life cycle, with emphasis placed on combining media mix and communication appeal. During the introductory stage, the focus is on word-of-mouth and sample distribution; the growth stage adopts celebrity endorsements and full-media coverage; while the maturity stage shifts toward social media influence recommendations and e-commerce closed-loop conversion [3]. Kantar noted that as the product enters the later stages of its lifecycle, Estée Lauder reconstructs the product narrative through "epigenetic repair of youthful cells" to re-engage a new generation of users [4]. Meanwhile, the Estée Lauder Companies ESG Report emphasized the brand's balance between flexibility and cultural tone across different regional markets, achieving the localization of global strategies through the adaptation of cultural symbols. This constitutes a differentiated operational logic under a unified global brand identity [5].

These studies have contributed to this research in terms of the dynamic evolution of lifecycle strategies, stage-appropriate marketing tactics, and responses to consumer behavior and market structure. However, they offer relatively limited attention to case analysis aspects such as inadequate response to mid- and late-stage decline risks, gaps in cross-cycle synergy research, and absence of cultural conflict management. This paper will focus on case studies of strategy failures, the impact of misjudging lifecycle stages on market performance, and systemic adaptation issues arising from misaligned global market rhythms. Through comparative case analysis, it aims to fill these existing research gaps.

### 3. Case Description and Theoretical Extraction

The first case focuses on the marketing strategies of Estée Lauder's Advanced Night Repair (ANR) serum across different lifecycle stages. During its introductory stage (1982–1985), the product introduced the skincare concept of "night repair," carving out a new blue ocean in functional serums. It adopted an "expert endorsement + clinical research" strategy to reinforce a sense of scientific trust. The brand precisely targeted urban women who were proactive about skincare, willing to try new technologies, and concerned about skin health and early signs of aging. It initially launched in high-end department store counters and retailers like Sephora to cultivate a premium and professional brand image. Packaging design and advertising campaigns emphasized a high-tech, expert, and luxurious feeling. In its growth stage (1990s–2000s), the company implemented large-scale advertising campaigns through saturated placements on mainstream TV, premium magazines, outdoor billboards, and portal websites. This strengthened both the brand and product image, making ANR a household name. Celebrity endorsements and influencer recommendations were also utilized—ambassadors with broad influence and high relevance were signed, and a mix of top and mid-tier KOLs/KOCs were leveraged for grassroots outreach across multiple platforms to reach a wider audience. Promotions and membership programs were strengthened to support loyalty. The brand actively took part in major e-commerce events such as Double Eleven and 618 with limited-edition packaging designs, free sample gifts with purchase, and spend-based discount offers aimed at boosting sales. The membership system was enhanced with benefits such as point redemption, birthday gifts, exclusive trial privileges, and priority shopping access—all designed to increase stickiness and repurchase. During the maturity stage (2010s-present), the product has been sustained with a "technology pioneer" image through versions incorporating epigenetic ingredients, while generating buzz through seeding campaigns on new media channels. Pricing policies have become more flexible. Regular-priced products maintain a premium positioning to keep the brand image stable, while promotions are carried out with greater regularity and precision—such as member discounts, channel promotions, and high-end free gifts—to drive purchases and destocking.

Second, this case examines Estée Lauder's Futurist Hydra Rescue Makeup marketing strategies across different life cycle stages. In the introduction phase (2016–2017), Estée Lauder followed the typical high-end brand launch approach, adopting a mix of marketing strategies aimed at quickly building awareness in the market. High-profile launch events were held with appearances by top celebrities. To highlight product features, Estée Lauder initiated a suspense-driven marketing campaign on social media in the pre-launch phase. Mysterious teasers were released across platforms such as Weibo, Xiaohongshu, and Douyin, emphasizing keywords like "dewy glow", "essence," and "83% essence water" along with crystalline visual effects to spark curiosity. Although the product claimed to contain 83% skincare essence and resurrection plant extract, the brand failed to adequately explain how these ingredients actually benefit Asian women's skin. Marketing largely revolved around repetitive emphasis on ingredient names rather than building a deeper connection with the skin tone characteristics and climate adaptability of Asian consumers. This resulted in over-reliance on conceptual marketing without sufficient deep market education. Upon entering the growth stage, the product leveraged large-scale seeding campaigns by KOCs and KOLs. Collaborations were established with a large number of mid- to long-tail beauty influencers and vertical content creators for genuine reviews, makeup tutorials, and product recommendations, focusing on positive feedback from real users. However, due to excessive reliance on Western market word-of-mouth, the Futurist Hydra Rescue foundation should have solidified its reputation through user education and contextual penetration but instead shifted prematurely toward traffic-driven growth. It skipped the crucial phase of organic accumulation and failed to establish a deep connection with the needs of local Chinese users. As a result, the product accelerated too quickly into the promotion phase, leading to a truncated and incomplete growth stage. Before reaching market maturity, the Futurist Hydra Rescue foundation showed signs of weakened growth momentum due to the strategic missteps mentioned above. Its failures in lifecycle management were mainly reflected in promotion dependency and insufficient of user value. First, they then inaccurately estimated the phase of the company's product life cycle, and

this led to early price wars. And more critically, the product missed the opportunity to deepen engagement within the dry skin community—operations remained solely at the transactional level, causing the product to be perceived merely as a functional commodity rather than an object of emotional connection. Attempting to drive growth through promotions and traffic before solidifying organic reputation and a loyal user base led to a skipped natural accumulation process. This impacted brand image, diminished the product's potential for long-term success, and caused it to lose heat prematurely.

Based on a comparative analysis of the above two cases, the following issues in the product marketing process can be identified. The first is misjudgment of the product lifecycle stage. The failure of the Futurist Hydra Rescue Makeup was essentially due to the misapplication of product lifecycle theory. According to Kotler's product lifecycle model, the growth stage should focus on expanding market share rather than pursuing short-term profits. Firstly, Estée Lauder mistakenly interpreted the initial surge in sales of the Futurist foundation as a signal that the product had entered the growth stage. Secondly, popular science investments were reduced prematurely before user education was complete. Lastly, regional differences were treated as a homogeneous market, failing to recognize that consumers in China's third- and fourth-tier cities were still in the awareness-building phase. These misjudgments led to a severe erosion of perceived value. When a high-end foundation is frequently promoted with heavy discounts, consumers' perception of the product's value is permanently altered. This collapse in price trust undermines the brand's ability to maintain a premium, accelerating the product into the decline stage. In contrast, even during major e-commerce promotions, the Advanced Night Repair serum maintains price stability—primarily using gifts with purchase to enhance perceived value and preserve its high-end positioning.

The second issue is misaligned market rhythms. Beginning with Advanced Night Repair, its global markets did not develop synchronously, resulting in a serious disconnect between its low level of global integration strategy and the lifecycle stages of regional markets. In North America, where consumer fatigue and category substitution indicated the product was in its late maturity stage, the strategy remained largely unchanged. Meanwhile, in emerging markets such as Southeast Asia, the product was still in the growth stage but was hampered by marketing misalignment and channel delays—including insufficient presence in third-tier cities. Existing research indicates that Estée Lauder failed to leverage the high potential of lower-tier markets, capture diffusion dividend, or adapt using cultural leverage, ultimately leading to a loss of communication efficiency. Second, Estée Lauder's globalization strategy also failed in the Futurist Hydra Rescue Makeup case. It merged all Tier-One city marketing in China into a single approach, treating China in a homogeneous manner despite the sharp consumption differences across provinces. The product was pushed into the maturity stage once penetration reached 20% in high-end city clusters, without considering the huge potential in China's third- and fourth-tier cities.

Lastly, the failure of Futurist Hydra Rescue Makeup reveals one more issue: the inflexibility of its marketing strategy. That is, the brand rigidly followed the formula of “celebrity endorsements + influencer seeding + big promotions” rather than adapting the strategy to different life cycle stages or levels of user preparedness. During the introduction stage, the brand failed to provide necessary user education and relied directly on celebrity endorsements, which shifted users' attention from the brand itself to the endorser. During the growth stage, it relied too heavily on KOL seeding but lacked real-user voices, so the content produced became overly homogeneous. Lastly, during the maturity stage, the excessive frequency of promotions weakened brand equity.

This inflexible, template-like approach resulted in wasteful resource utilization and poor conversion performance. Under the pressing challenge of global competition, the traditional linear Product Lifecycle (PLC) theory is unable to explain or address the phenomenon of cross-regional phase lags reflected in the above challenges. Building on previous studies, this paper proposes a Flexible Adaptation Model with emphasis on the non-synchronicity of cross-regional lifecycles. By integrating a dynamic monitoring mechanism, a market rhythm identification system, and a modular response mechanism into strategy, it establishes an adaptation framework capable of efficiently

accommodating the complexities of global markets. The flexible adaptation model has three main parts. One part is about tracking the accuracy of product life cycle stages. It builds a three-dimensional monitoring system that uses user feedback, sales performance, and media attention to capture the real-time stage of a product. Another part is about recognizing the rhythm of markets. Since different regions enter markets at different speeds and follow different paths, the model breaks down these differences and offers a framework that helps global brands understand varied market rhythms. This creates a “multi-cycle parallel” way of thinking, rather than sticking to a single, traditional life cycle curve. The last part is about modular strategy responses. The model’s key innovation is turning marketing strategies into modules and then matching them with both life cycle stages and market rhythm types. For example, during the introduction stage, a mix of “educational KOLs + product samples + word-of-mouth promotion” can be used, so strategies can be adjusted dynamically as conditions change. This modular configuration makes multinationals more flexible and operationally responsive in highly dynamic environments.

Thus, the following recommendations are made. First, implement a product lifecycle monitoring system to dynamically identify strategic turning points. The system must monitor the status of product lifecycles in various regional markets in real time and automatically initiate refined strategies. Second, strengthen the development of a localized marketing strategy toolkit to support the flexible combination of modular tactics. This involves building a repository of reusable and easily adaptable regional marketing components, enabling rapid deployment through a “base framework + localized variables” approach. Third, prioritize regional lifecycle differences and avoid rolling out all communication initiatives under a rigid “global integration” mandate. Particular attention should be paid to the fact that emerging markets may enter the maturity phase 1–2 years later than developed markets, and that technological disruption may allow some markets to skip the growth stage entirely.

#### 4. Conclusion

Estée Lauder has accumulated extensive experience in product lifecycle management; however, its success stems not from a fixed set of strategies, but rather from accurately identifying lifecycle stages and skillfully managing market rhythms. The same strategy can yield vastly different outcomes across different stages and markets—highlighting the critical importance of flexibly adapting the relationship among rhythm, strategy, and user readiness. This study successfully constructs a strategic adaptation system that integrates a dynamic monitoring mechanism, a market rhythm identification framework, and a modular strategy response system. This framework effectively addresses the limitations of traditional PLC theory in coping with cross-regional lifecycle asynchrony within complex global environments. The study concludes that the Flexible Adaptation Model, through its dual-dimensional (“stage + region”) dynamic adjustment, enhances multinational corporations’ strategic flexibility and operational agility in asynchronous multi-market structures. It uses lifecycle sensing accuracy to grasp the actual product phase, market rhythm identification to transcend single-lifecycle thinking and enable parallel multi-cycle management, and finally, a modular strategy response mechanism to enable contextual and scalable tactical execution. This research offers valuable references for future studies in this field. It significantly improves traditional PLC theory by enriching and supplementing multi-market and multi-rhythm marketing management mechanisms. It provides international marketing theory and dynamic capability theory with new empirical support and application trends, with theoretically deep, practically useful management tools that benefit multinational brands. Model extension and enhancement, technology-enabled forecasting, cross-function integration, and robustness improvement with respect to adverse market conditions are opportunities that future research needs to pursue.

#### References

- [1] Guo Zhandong. Estée Lauder’s fashion magic III: Marketing model—Building a three-dimensional combination of market refinement strategies. China Marketing Communication Network, 2012-08-29.

- [2] Lu Guanyu. Continuous expansion of the Estée Lauder Advanced Night Repair series product categories. Shanghai: Guohai Securities Research Institute, 2022-01-04.
- [3] Chan C, Guetta C D. Continuous quality monitoring via data and analytics at The Estée Lauder Companies (Case Study). New York: Columbia Business School, 2022.
- [4] KANTAR. Facevalue: Global beauty consumption insights. 2023-11-24.
- [5] The Estée Lauder Companies Inc. 2024 social impact and sustainability report: The beauty of responsibility. New York: The Estée Lauder Companies Inc., 2024.