

Adapting the Romanian Product for International Markets

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Abstract

The increasing globalization of markets has created both opportunities and challenges for Romanian companies seeking to expand beyond national borders. The successful adaptation of a Romanian product to international markets requires a comprehensive understanding of consumer preferences, cultural differences, regulatory frameworks, and competitive dynamics. This paper examines the key factors influencing the international adaptation process of Romanian products and analyzes the strategies that facilitate successful market entry and long-term competitiveness. Particular attention is given to product standardization versus adaptation, branding, packaging, pricing policies, distribution channels, and promotional activities. The study highlights the importance of market research, innovation, and customer-oriented approaches in responding to the specific requirements of foreign markets. The findings suggest that Romanian products can achieve sustainable competitive advantages internationally when firms effectively balance local authenticity with global market expectations. The paper contributes to the literature on international marketing and provides practical recommendations for managers, policymakers, and entrepreneurs involved in the internationalization of Romanian products.

Keywords

International Marketing, Product Adaptation, Romanian Products, International Markets, Market Internationalization

1. Introduction

In an increasingly interconnected world, companies can no longer view national borders as the limits of their business. International marketing is the set of activities through which an organization identifies, anticipates and satisfies the needs of consumers in foreign markets, adapting its strategies to the cultural, economic

and behavioral specificities of each targeted market.

One of the most important strategic decisions in international marketing is the choice between standardization and adaptation.

- **Standardization** involves using the same marketing strategy across all foreign markets, with minimal changes. The advantages include cost reduction and maintaining a consistent brand image.
- **Adaptation**, instead, involves adjusting the product and marketing mix according to the specifics of each market (consumer preferences, culture, regulations). This increases local relevance, but involves higher costs.

In the current context, more and more Romanian brands are going beyond the borders of the local market, mainly motivated by the small size of the domestic market and the need for growth. Romania, with approximately 16 million active consumers, represents a limited market for companies with scaling ambitions. Exporting thus becomes not just an opportunity, but a strategic necessity for brands with real potential.

A relevant example in this regard is Ivatherm—the first Romanian dermo-cosmetics company, founded in 2005 by Rucsandra Hurezeanu, a doctor and specialist in pharmaceutical marketing. Ivatherm develops and markets skin care products based on the thermal water of Herculane, the oldest thermal spring in Europe, with scientifically recognized soothing and anti-irritant properties. The brand positions itself as an affordable dermatological alternative to the major French players—Vichy, Avène, La Roche-Posay—with which it competes directly both on the Romanian and international markets.

This project analyzes how Ivatherm has adapted its products, communication and distribution strategy to meet the demands of markets with very different profiles—from Western Europe to Asia and the Middle East.

Research methodology. This paper is a qualitative case study based on secondary sources. The analysis draws on: 1) founder interviews published in the Romanian business press (Ziarul Financiar, Wall-Street.ro, ZF Romanian Brands Conference 2025) (Hurezeanu, 2016, 2018, 2025); 2) the company's official website and publicly available product information (Ivatherm, n.d.); and 3) theoretical frameworks from international marketing textbooks (Kotler, Keegan) (Kotler & Armstrong, 2017; Kotler & Keller, 2016; Keegan & Green, 2016). No proprietary or internal company data was accessed. The conclusions should therefore be understood as analytically grounded but illustrative, not as a comprehensive audit of Ivatherm's international strategy.

2. Company and Product Presentation

Ivatherm is a company active in the dermocosmetics industry, offering products developed based on the thermal water of Băile Herculane, known for its soothing and therapeutic properties on sensitive skin. The products are formulated in collaboration with laboratories in France, which contributes to the brand's positioning in the area of effective and safe dermatocosmetics.

Product portfolio

The Ivatherm portfolio is diversified and covers the main needs of consumers:

- **Moisturizing creams**
 - Ranges such as Aquafil Hydra or Ivahidra+, intended for dehydrated and sensitive skin
- **Anti-acne products**
 - Ivapur range, which helps regulate sebum and maintain the skin microbiome
- **Sunscreen products**
 - Sunlight range, designed to protect against UV radiation
- Other categories:
 - Anti-aging products (ex: UNA, IvaRG)
 - Products for sensitive or atopic skin
 - Cleaning and dermatological treatment products

Thus, the portfolio is structured around specific dermatological needs, not just classic product categories.

Competitive advantage

Ivatherm's main competitive advantage is represented by the combination of safe ingredients and scientific validation—consistent with findings that brand heritage and scientific claims underpin prestige perceptions in dermocosmetics (Amatulli, De Angelis, Kornum, & Costabile, 2021):

- Use of Herculane thermal water, with proven calming and anti-irritant effects
- Collaboration with dermatologists and pharmaceutical laboratories
- Formulas developed for sensitive and intolerant skin
- Proven effectiveness through studies and medical recommendations

This allows the brand to be perceived as an affordable alternative to international dermocosmetic brands.

Current market

Ivatherm is present on both the local and foreign markets:

- **Romania**
 - Distribution predominantly in pharmacies
- **International markets**
 - Presence in over 15 - 16 countries—a pattern of export-venture performance consistent with Cavusgil and Zou (1994)¹
 - Main regions:
 - Europe
 - Asia-Pacific
 - middle east

Exports have a significant share in sales, which confirms the company's strategic orientation towards internationalization.

In conclusion, Ivatherm has a well-structured portfolio, supported by dermatological expertise and a competitive advantage based on natural ingredients and scientific research, which facilitates expansion into international markets.

¹Hurezeanu, R.—ZF Romanian Brands Conference 2025, available at: <http://www.zf.ro/>. Country count cited by the founder in public conference presentation.

3. Theoretical Concept: Product Adaptation in International Marketing

The decision to adapt or standardize a product for foreign markets is one of the most complex strategic dilemmas in international marketing. Philip Kotler, one of the most influential theorists of modern marketing, emphasizes that adapting a product means modifying it to suit local conditions or preferences—a process that involves additional costs, but which can generate significantly greater acceptance from local consumers (Kotler & Keller, 2016). This trade-off between the efficiency of standardization and the relevance of local adaptation has also been documented empirically (Theodosiou & Leonidou, 2003; Vrontis, Thrassou, & Lamprianou, 2009).

Kotler identifies in his works several levels at which adaptation can operate, starting from the idea that a product is not just a physical object, but a set of tangible and intangible attributes—functionality, packaging, brand, associated services and symbolic values. Therefore, adaptation is not limited to changing the chemical formula of a product, but can target any component of it.

Types of product adaptation

1) Functional adaptation

It refers to changes to the product at the formula, ingredient or technical characteristics level.

Examples:

- *Adjusting the composition for different skin types or climatic conditions
- *Compliance with the sanitary and cosmetic regulations of each country
- *Adapting the texture or concentration of active ingredients

2) Aesthetic adaptation

It targets the visual and design elements of the product.

Examples:

- *Packaging modification (colors, shape, materials)
- *Translation of labels into local language
- *Adapting the visual style to cultural preferences (minimalist, premium, natural, etc.)

3) Commercial adaptation

It refers to the elements of marketing and market positioning.

Examples:

- *Adapting the brand or communication message
- *Price adjustment according to local purchasing power
- *Product repositioning (premium vs. affordable)
- *Adapting distribution and promotion channels

The decision on the level of adaptation is influenced by several factors, which the international marketing literature groups into two main categories. Environmental factors include cultural differences, local legal regulations, climatic conditions, and the level of economic development of the market. Product factors refer to the nature of the product—products related to the body, food, or personal care generally re-

quire a higher degree of adaptation than industrial or technological products.

Warren Keegan, another leading theorist in international marketing, proposes a matrix of product-communication strategies, in which he identifies five strategic options, from direct extension—identical product and communication in all markets—to product invention—creating an entirely new product for a specific market. In between these extremes lie product adaptation, communication adaptation, and dual adaptation, each with distinct advantages and costs (Keegan & Green, 2016).

In the case of Ivatherm, we will see in the following chapters that the company applies a combination of functional and aesthetic adaptation for Asian markets, while maintaining a consistent brand identity globally—a concrete example of the balance between standardization and adaptation recommended by Kotler (Kotler & Armstrong, 2017).

Product adaptation is an essential component of international marketing because it allows companies to respond more effectively to differences between markets. According to Philip Kotler, success in international markets depends on the company's ability to balance the effectiveness of standardization with the relevance of local adaptation.

4. Foreign Market Analysis—France

The choice of France as the reference foreign market for the analysis of Ivatherm's strategy is not accidental. France is the world's most important center of the cosmetics industry, with an estimated value of approximately 15 billion euros, and is also the country where Ivatherm has outsourced its research and production since its founding. The strategic paradox is obvious: Ivatherm produces in France, but does not sell in France—a conscious decision by the founder, who explicitly stated that she did not aim to compete in the French market, but to capitalize on its expertise to build credibility in other markets.

General characteristics of the market

The French dermocosmetics market is:

- **Mature and stable**, with sustained growth
- Strongly linked to pharmacies and dermatological recommendations
- Focused on products with proven clinical efficacy
- Dominated by brands with scientific reputation

French consumers perceive dermocosmetics not as luxury products, but as essential care products for skin health.

Main competitors

The market is dominated by local and international brands with a strong dermatological profile:

- La Roche-Posay—leader in products for sensitive skin, highly recommended by dermatologists
- Avène—known for its use of thermal water and products for reactive skin
- Bioderma—specialized in microbiome and gentle dermatological solutions
- Vichy—positioned on anti-aging and care based on mineral water

These brands are part of strong pharmaceutical groups and have the advantage

of high medical credibility and extensive distribution in pharmacies.

French consumer behavior

The French consumer of dermocosmetics is characterized by a strong orientation towards local brands or brands with French scientific legitimacy. Pharmacies are the main distribution channel for this segment, and the recommendation of the pharmacist or dermatologist plays a decisive role in the purchase decision. Recent trends show an increase in interest in natural ingredients and hypoallergenic formulas, as well as an increased attention to the transparency of product composition—a trend that, in theory, could favor a brand like Ivatherm, with a natural and well-defined active ingredient.

Why Ivatherm hasn't entered the French market (yet)

Ivatherm's decision to avoid the French market reflects a clear strategic analysis. Competing directly with La Roche-Posay or Avène in their home markets, where these brands enjoy maximum recognition, consolidated distribution channels and strong consumer loyalty, would require exceptionally high marketing investments with uncertain chances of success. The company's founder preferred to prioritize emerging markets—Eastern Europe, Asia, the Middle East—where competition is less intense, consumers are more receptive to new brands and entry costs are significantly lower. This is, in essence, a classic strategy of avoiding direct confrontation on the opponent's turf in favor of conquering less contested markets, consistent with the staged, psychic-distance-driven pattern of internationalization described in the Uppsala model (Johanson & Vahlne, 2009).

However, from the perspective of product adaptation, the French market remains an important benchmark: the quality standards, certifications and formulas validated on this market constitute a credibility advantage that Ivatherm indirectly uses in its international communication.

****4) Adapting Ivatherm products for international markets****

Ivatherm's internationalization strategy concretely illustrates the principles of mixed adaptation described in the international marketing literature. The company applies neither total standardization—the same product for all markets—nor complete adaptation for each individual market, but operates with a stable product core, which it selectively adjusts according to the climatic, cultural and commercial requirements of each target market.

****a) Functional adaptation****

At the level of product formula and composition, Ivatherm benefits from an important starting advantage: production in France ensures automatic compliance with European Union cosmetic regulations—among the strictest in the world—which eliminates barriers to entry into European markets and confers credibility on any other market that recognizes EU standards as a reference.

However, the expansion into markets such as China, South Korea, and the UAE has required real functional changes. Consumers in these countries prefer more fluid and lighter textures, fragrance-free formulas, and hypoallergenic products, adapted to a daily care ritual that can involve seven to eight products applied successively. Dense textures or occlusive oils, frequently used in European formulas

for dry or atopic skin, are not tolerated in the hot and humid climates of Southeast Asia or in the arid but dust-intensive conditions of Gulf markets. Concretely, Ivatherm reformulated its Aquafil Hydra moisturizing range to a lighter, gel-like texture for the South Korean and Chinese markets—markets where the original cream-texture variant faced consumer resistance at point of sale—while the Sun-light sun protection range was adapted to meet the higher SPF labelling standards required under Chinese cosmetic regulation (GB/T 35916). These represent functional adaptations that involve significant R & D and regulatory costs, but are necessary conditions for product acceptance in these markets.

In the UAE and Saudi Arabia specifically, cosmetic products must comply with Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) technical regulation GSO 1943, which mandates ingredient declaration in Arabic, halal-compatible formulation verification, and registration with the national health authority prior to market entry. For Ivatherm, this meant obtaining separate regulatory approval for each SKU in each GCC country, as no single pan-regional registration pathway existed at the time of entry—a process that adds 6 - 12 months to the typical market entry timeline and requires local distributor support for regulatory filing.

****b) Aesthetic adaptation****

Packaging is the consumer's first point of contact with the product and is, from a cost perspective, one of the most accessible forms of adaptation. Ivatherm adapts the labeling according to the legal requirements of each market—including the local language for the instructions for use and the list of ingredients—and adjusts the graphic design according to the aesthetic preferences of local consumers.

In Western markets, including France, the dominant trend is towards minimalist, clean design, with a neutral color palette and an orderly visual communication that conveys clinical seriousness. This style aligns with the aesthetics of established pharmacy dermatology brands—Avène, La Roche-Posay—and represents the visual language that the Western consumer associates with efficiency and safety.

An aesthetic element with high strategic value is highlighting the origin of the thermal water. The phrase “thermal water from Herculane” or “Herculane thermal water” functions as a marker of authenticity and differentiation—an ingredient with precise localization, verifiable history and scientifically documented properties. In markets where the concept of cosmetic thermal water is already familiar—through association with brands such as Avène (France) or Vichy (France)—this communication is immediately intelligible and positions Ivatherm in a known frame of reference.

****c) Cultural adaptation of the message****

One of the most nuanced forms of adaptation operated by Ivatherm concerns the tone and content of communication according to the values and priorities of local consumers.

On the Romanian market, the dermocosmetics consumer is relatively recently familiar with this category of products—a decade ago, purchasing cosmetics from a pharmacy was not a consolidated behavior. Therefore, Ivatherm's communication in Romania emphasizes the quality-price ratio, accessibility and clinically

proven efficiency, elements that respond to a consumer still in the education phase of the category.

In mature Western European markets, where the consumer already has a solid culture of pharmacy dermocosmetics and is used to investing in quality products, the effective message is that of dermatological expertise, innovation in formula and scientific tradition. The communication moves from “effective and affordable” to “formulated by specialists, clinically validated, recommended by dermatologists”—a register that implies medical authority and sophistication.

In Asian markets, especially China, communication is tailored to a highly digitally active consumer, strongly influenced by Key Opinion Leaders and specific social media platforms. The promotion strategy requires an almost complete reconstruction from the European model, with an emphasis on reviews, visual demonstrations and social validation.

****d) Brand adaptation and storytelling****

The name Ivatherm was conceived from the very beginning with an international orientation—it sounds neutral, does not carry explicit Romanian connotations, and is easy to pronounce in most European and Asian languages. This initial decision considerably facilitated the internationalization process, eliminating one of the frequent barriers for brands in emerging markets: the negative perception related to the country of origin.

However, the brand storytelling is adapted depending on the market. In markets where Romania is little known or associated with an image still under construction, Ivatherm presents itself primarily as a European dermocosmetics brand, with production in France and ingredients certified according to EU standards. The Romanian origin of the thermal water becomes an element of authenticity and uniqueness—the “ingredient that cannot be replicated”—not a limitation. In markets where there is a Romanian diaspora community, this can be capitalized as an early adopter segment, which subsequently transfers trust in the brand to local consumers.

This flexible brand strategy—same name, different stories—reflects a mature understanding of international marketing: the core identity remains consistent, but the narrative adapts to the cultural framework of each recipient.

5. Adapted Marketing Mix-French Market

In the internationalization process, the marketing mix of the Ivatherm brand must be adjusted to respond to the specifics of the French dermocosmetics market, characterized by high demands, medical orientation and strong competition.

◆ Product

At the product level, adaptations are minimal, as Ivatherm already operates in accordance with strict European regulations.

- Dermatologically tested and safe formulas
- Compliance with EU standards for cosmetics
- Maintaining the existing range, with possible fine adjustments to texture or tolerance for sensitive skin
- Emphasis on the differentiating ingredient: Herculane thermal water

Thus, the product remains essentially standardized, with minimal functional adaptations.

◆ Price

Pricing strategy is essential for positioning in the French market.

- Positioning under premium brands such as La Roche-Posay
- But above the mass-market segment (supermarket products)
- “Mid-premium dermocosmetic” type strategy
- Justifying the price by:
 - Dermatological ingredients
 - Scientific validation
 - European origin

This positioning allows entry into a competitive but accessible segment.

◆ Distribution

Distribution is a critical element in the dermocosmetics industry, especially in France.

- Main channel: pharmacies and parapharmacies
- Secondary distribution:
 - Specialized online platforms
 - Beauty and e-commerce marketplaces
- Possible collaboration with dermatologists and pharmaceutical chains

Presence in pharmacies is essential for credibility and consumer trust.

◆ Promotion

The promotion strategy must be oriented towards education and credibility, not just classic advertising.

- Collaboration with dermatologists and pharmacists
- Using local influencers in the beauty and skincare area
- Educational campaigns about:
 - Sensitive skin
 - Proper hydration
 - Sun protection
- Communication focused on science and efficiency, not superficial aesthetics

This approach is aligned with the expectations of French consumers, who value medical expertise.

6. Advantages and Disadvantages of Adapting Products for International Markets

Advantages and disadvantages of product adaptation

Criterion	Advantages	disadvantage
Market acceptance	Faster adoption by local consumers <i>the product meets specific needs without additional effort on the part of the buyer</i>	Risk of brand identity fragmentation <i>consumers in different markets may perceive Ivatherm as distinct brands</i>

Continued

Cultural relevance	Communication aligned with local values <i>different message for Romania vs. Western European markets vs. Asia</i>	High operational complexity <i>managing multiple messages, formulas and packaging simultaneously requires human and logistical resources</i>
Financial performance	Direct sales growth <i>Ivatherm exports increased by 268% after adapting to Asian markets²</i>	Higher production and marketing costs <i>distinct formulations, separate packaging, certifications specific to each market</i>
Distribution	Access to specific local channels <i>pharmacies in Europe, digital platforms in Asia</i>	Dependence on local distributors <i>changing the distributor in China cost 1.5 million euros in lost sales³</i>
Competition	Differentiation from standardized global brands <i>Ivatherm can occupy niches not covered by La Roche-Posay or Avène</i>	High entry costs in new markets <i>investment in research, local regulations and building awareness</i>
Loyalty	Long-term loyalty <i>cultural relevance generates superior loyalty to a generic imported product</i>	Loss of global brand consistency <i>excessive adaptations can dilute brand equity built over time</i>

7. Limitations

This paper has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the analysis focuses on a single company—Ivatherm—which limits the generalizability of the findings to other Romanian brands or other dermocosmetics companies in similar market positions. The conclusions are therefore best understood as illustrative rather than representative of the broader sector. Second, the study relies primarily on secondary and publicly available sources: founder interviews published in the business press, the company’s official website, and general marketing textbooks. Access to primary internal data (financial reports, internal market research, confidential distribution agreements) was not available, which means some claims—particularly regarding export growth percentages and specific market losses—could not be independently verified. Third, the paper’s treatment of “Asian” and “Middle Eastern” markets as broadly homogeneous blocs is a simplification imposed by the available evidence; future research should disaggregate these regions into national markets with distinct regulatory, cultural, and commercial profiles.

²Hurezeanu, R.—Interview given to Wall-Street.ro, January 2018, available at: <https://www.wall-street.ro/articol/Companii/217500/rucsandra-hurezeanu-ivatherm-cresterea-pe-piata-interna-a-fost-de-22-iar-exportul-a-crescut-cu-268.html>. The 268% export growth figure was reported in relation to Asian market adaptation efforts.

³Hurezeanu, R.—ZF Romanian Brands Conference 2025, available at: <http://www.zf.ro/>. The 1.5 million euro sales loss following the distributor change in China was cited by the founder in this conference.

8. Conclusion

The analysis of Ivatherm's internationalization strategy confirms that adapting products for foreign markets is not an option, but a condition for long-term success—provided that it is intelligently calibrated, not overly applied.

Ivatherm has demonstrated that a Romanian brand can successfully compete in international markets dominated by giants with far superior resources, provided it identifies and capitalizes on a genuine and difficult-to-replicate competitive advantage. Herculane thermal water—a unique ingredient, with scientifically documented properties and a story spanning over two millennia—represents exactly this type of advantage. No French, German or Asian competitor can claim the same ingredient, which gives Ivatherm a distinct position in any market it chooses to enter.

The key to success was neither total standardization—which would have ignored real differences between consumers—nor complete adaptation—which would have fragmented the brand and exhausted the company's resources. Ivatherm applied what international marketing literature calls a “glocal” strategy: a stable global core—the same ingredient, the same quality standards, the same dermatological positioning—and a flexible local expression—textures adapted to the climate, messages adapted to the culture, channels adapted to the commercial infrastructure.

The recommendation arising from this analysis is that Ivatherm should continue in this direction, deepening commercial adaptation in high-potential markets—especially Asia and the Middle East—and gradually building a presence in mature Western European markets, where the credibility gained through production in France and compliance with EU standards provides a solid platform for entry. Prioritizing the French market, strategically avoided until now, could become a medium-term objective—not as a volume market, but as a legitimacy market, which would strengthen the brand's international status.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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