# Brand Positioning in the Indian Smartphone Market: A Case Study of OnePlus

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**Abstract:** This case study describes the glorious entry of OnePlus into the mobile industry which was already flooded with multiple smartphone players. OnePlus was established as a leading smartphone player by adopting technological and marketing strategies. To compete in the existing market, OnePlus must outperform the competition by exploring the gaps in the mobile industry. OnePlus came into existence at a time when it was widely agreed that no Android phone could compete with Apple phones in terms of quality. But OnePlus has achieved the most impetus in the Rs.30,000 to Rs.50,000 price range. In a very short time frame of four years, OnePlus became the number one smartphone brand in the Indian premium smartphone segment. This case study is based on secondary data which focuses on marketing strategies adopted by the company to enrichment of sales in the Indian smartphone market.

**Keywords:** Marketing Strategy, Mobile industry, OnePlus India, Smartphone.

## 1  INTRODUCTION

OnePlus Technology Co. Ltd has come up into the market and changed peoples' thinking by creating a quality phone. OnePlus is a smartphone manufacturer brand which is founded by Carl Pei and Pete Lau (CEO) in December 2013. Its parent company is BBK Electronics. Oppo holds its majority of shares. The company's success was mainly because they wanted to create high-end phones at affordable prices in the Premium Segment class. Their tagline "Never Settle" perfectly describes the same because they set out to make owning and using a smartphone a unique experience [1].

Its logo is also unique consisting of 1 and a plus sign which represents two important aspects of life. '1' represents the ways things are and '+' represents the desire to go beyond the status. With its logo and tagline, they try to create value in the customers' mind. It deals in Mobile Phones, Phone Accessories, Audio, wearables, TVs, Power and cables, Cases, and protection [2]. The objective is to form OnePlus among other brands and to tell phone customers never to settle for a phone with a poor specification just because they may not be able to purchase one with high-end features. In 2021, OnePlus achieves a $2 billion yearly turnover [3]. The timeline of OnePlus is given in Table 1.

## 2  ONEPLUS IN THE INDIAN MARKET

OnePlus launched its first smartphone in India named OnePlus One on April 23, 2014. It sells exclusively through Amazon. In 2015, OnePlus also changed to the creation of physical shops (Brick and mortar). The niche market was first targeted by OnePlus as it consists of tech enthusiasts and software lovers. Once OnePlus impressed the niche market, with the help of word of mouth, OnePlus grabbed the attention of users of the phone industry globally. It was also the fastest-growing brand in its segment, quarter over quarter. In India, OnePlus is the top-selling premium smartphone brand for the year 2018, according to Counterpoint Market Monitor Service.
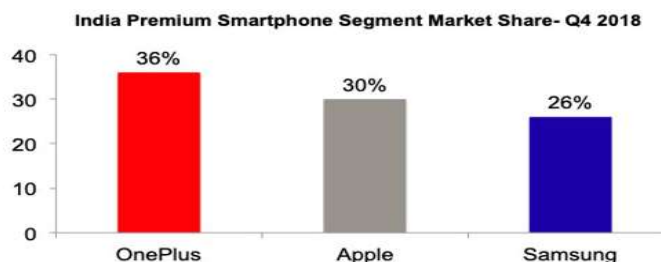


Fig. 1. India Premium Smartphone Segment Market Share – Q4 2018 [4]

## 3  MARKET STRATEGIES ADOPTED BY ONEPLUS

Every product has two kinds of values, the first is tangible value, which is the product's real value, and the second is the perceived value. According to OnePlus, the Indian phone market lacks high-quality devices in the range of Rs. 30,000 to Rs. 70,000. They release high-quality phones after determining this gap. They have chosen the following marketing strategy to compete in the mobile industry [5].

**1. Buzz-Building Exclusivity**

Even though the public was getting a feel for the phone and liking it, OnePlus made the phone scarce when it was first released in India, making it impossible for everyone to purchase it. One could only obtain the phone under OnePlus' practice of exclusivity if one of their users extended an invitation.

Table 1. Timeline of OnePlus

| Year | Description |
|------|-------------|
| 2013 | Founded and its headquarters in Shenzhen China & now majority-owned by Oppo |
| 2014 | Launched First Phone OnePlus One.<br>Launched with Cyanogen OS<br>On December 16, 2014, the Delhi High Court and Supreme Court of India banned OnePlus because of the lawsuit for using Cyanogen OS.<br>On December 21, 2014, the ban was lifted when OnePlus released Oxygen-OS, a more customized OS. |
| 2015 | Launched OnePlus 2 & OnePlus X<br>Started its Oxygen OS<br>Enters in the US as Flagship Killer<br>First OnePlus pop event for better engagement<br>Opens their Stores in India |
| 2016 | Launched OnePlus 3 & 3T as Flagship Killer |
| 2017 | Launched OnePlus 5 & 5T.<br>Launched Star Wars special edition of the OnePlus 5T.<br>Best Selling Phones in Finland for 14 months<br>The first company to use Anti-Glare glass.<br>Starts first Open Ears Forum in London to share their feedback. |
| 2018 | Launched 6 & 6T.<br>Launched OnePlus 6 Avengers Infinity War Special Edition<br>Launched OnePlus 6T McLaren Special Edition<br>In Sweden, they held the first forum where the OnePlus camera team met users face-to-face.<br>The product manager showed his fans early prototypes.<br>Indian team members of the Indian community contributed their feedback.<br>Becomes No. 1in India, in the premium segment surpassing Samsung and Apple.<br>OnePlus Playback<br>Launched with first US carrier. |
| 2019 | Launched OnePlus 7,7 Pro & 7T.<br>OnePlus 7 Pro introduces UFS 3.0 storage speeds & first with a display of 90Hz refresh rate.<br>Entered in the Top 4 premium players globally.<br>First to upgrade the display of 90Hz<br>Launched First TV<br>Gathered feedback from US community members |
| 2020 | Launched 5G Series with OnePlus 8,8 Pro & 8T.<br>Launched second product line OnePlus Nord (Nord 10 5G & Nord 100) in the Indian and European markets.<br>Introduced Warp Charge 30 Wireless and earned an IP68 rating.<br>Upgraded display of 120 Hz in OnePlus 8 Pro<br>Created a virtual open online event in Covid time.<br>Launched One Plus buds.<br>OnePlus revealed OnePlus Concept One in this rear-facing camera system is "hidden" by electrochromic glass. |
| 2021 | Launched OnePlus 9,9R, & 9 Pro.<br>Launched OnePlus NORD series of CE-5G,2-5G,200-5G, CE-2 5G & CE-2 5G Lite.<br>Partnered with Hasselblad and launched phones with Hasselblad Optics.<br>Launched OnePlus watch |
| 2022 | Launched OnePlus 10 Pro,10 R & 10T.<br>Launched a new series OnePlus Ace Pro |

## 2. Ingenious Influencer Marketing Techniques

- They also tied with celebrities, actors, models, and media figures like Priya Bhavani Shankar and Neha Sharma.
- It collaborated with Netflix and the OnePlus users will be the first to see much-awaited Sacred Season Season-2. It is also claimed that the series is shot by the OnePlus 7 Pro. This marketing campaign encouraged many visitors, including avid fans of the series, to visit their social media profiles [5].
- OnePlus also tied with Robert Downey Jr. to endorse the OnePlus 7 Pro.
- OnePlus also tied with Jasprit Bumrah to endorse the wearables product line.

## 3. Word of Mouth

OnePlus had already established itself as a quality phone before entering the Indian market. It provided OnePlus early grip on the phone industry. The first customers of this product began evangelizing for it and telling others about the phone [6].

As more consumers acquired these phones and were pleased with their purchases, each person began to promote the company's reputation and the high-quality goods it sold. So, tech lover becomes brand endorser of OnePlus.

**4. Less money spent on Conventional Marketing**

OnePlus chooses online marketing instead of offline marketing. OnePlus India has over 2.6 million followers on X, 13 million followers on Facebook, and 3.7 million followers on Instagram. OnePlus has also invested a decent amount of money in conventional marketing [7].

**5. Digital Campaigns**

OnePlus also uses various digital campaigns. Some of these are listed below-

- **Smash the Past**-In this contestant was asked to upload their video of smashing their phones so that they would get New OnePlus phones for only one dollar. Due to the media outrage, they changed their name to "Donate the Past".
- **Ladies First** these women were asked to upload their photo with the OnePlus logo. In return, they will get free invitations by which they can buy a OnePlus phone. The campaign was a little problematic, which caused the competition to end in a matter of hours [8].

**6. Innovations and Quality**

OnePlus has made various innovations like Anti-Glare, 60 Hz display, USB-C port, ceramic fingerprint sensor, triple camera system, and LED with 90 Hz refresh rate.

**7. Making Community Members Loyal**

The earliest users of OnePlus were members of its community user user-generated content from community members in the forms of faqs or reviews which helps in converting suspects into prospects and finally into real customers.
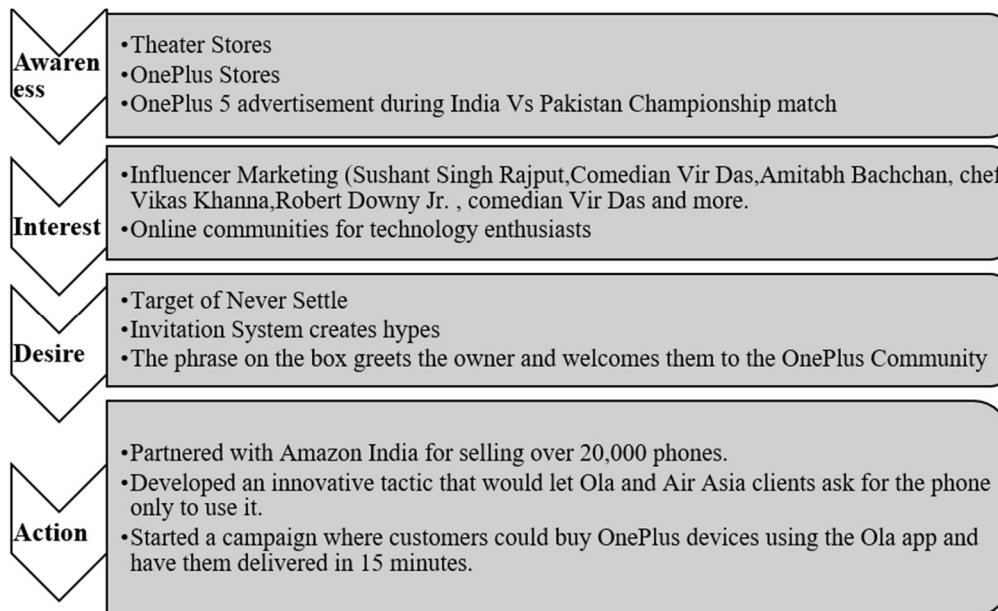
**Awareness**
- Theater Stores
- OnePlus Stores
- OnePlus 5 advertisement during India Vs Pakistan Championship match

**Interest**
- Influencer Marketing (Sushant Singh Rajput,Comedian Vir Das,Amitabh Bachchan, chef Vikas Khanna,Robert Downy Jr. , comedian Vir Das and more.
- Online communities for technology enthusiasts

**Desire**
- Target of Never Settle
- Invitation System creates hypes
- The phrase on the box greets the owner and welcomes them to the OnePlus Community

**Action**
- Partnered with Amazon India for selling over 20,000 phones.
- Developed an innovative tactic that would let Ola and Air Asia clients ask for the phone only to use it.
- Started a campaign where customers could buy OnePlus devices using the Ola app and have them delivered in 15 minutes.

Fig. 2. Promotional Strategy of OnePlus

**Segmentation**
- Geographical-18 countries first where pre order started
- Age-18-35 Years
- Phychographic -lifestyle , Interest by matching with trends
- Income-Middle and Rich income

**Target**
- Youth (14-35 age groups)
- Women (ladies first campaign)
- Urban Market

**Positioning**
- Invitation Policy
- Launching Limited Edition
- introduced Red Cable Club by which membership benefits like cloud storage,extended validity,vouchers is provided.
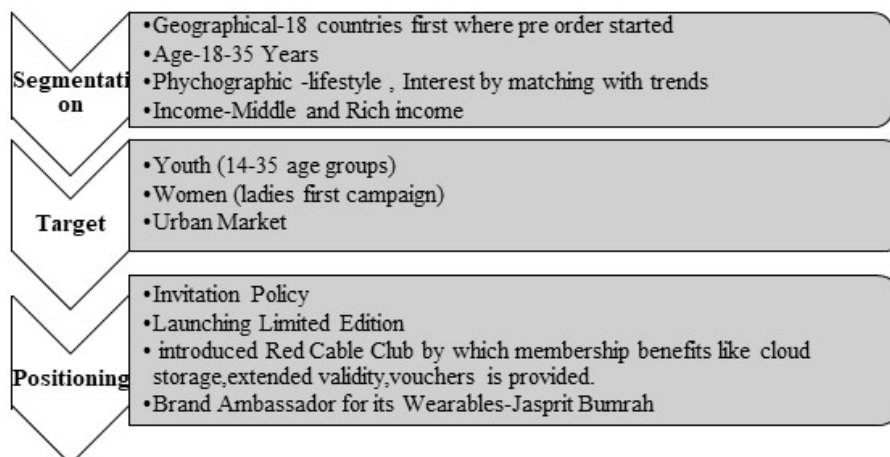- Brand Ambassador for its Wearables-Jasprit Bumrah

Fig. 3. Segmentation, Targeting, and Positioning - STP Strategy

The company has adopted a skimming pricing strategy. When it becomes very popular it gradually changes its pricing strategy to competitive pricing to cover more target customers. OnePlus also diversified its market by launching earbuds, televisions, watches, Wireless chargers, and a power bank [9]-[12].

## 4  FUTURE TREND ANALYSIS AND SUGGESTIONS

From the market research and consumer behavior it is evident that the OnePlus market strategy revolves around the operating system, brand image, innovations, and features. OnePlus aims to become one of the topmost players in 5G brands. With the help of diversification and cross-selling of various products, OnePlus will achieve this. Even in the Television segment, OnePlus becomes 3rd ranked after Xiaomi and Samsung with 123% year-on-year growth in the first half of 2022 according to a report published by Counterpoint Research.

In analyzing the consumer behavior model and market competition there are some of the strategies recommended

- Protect market share by actively capitalizing on media interest, particularly the buzz generated by social media and other digital marketing and community-building tactics that have outperformed rivals through "word-of-mouth" and other means. This is demonstrated by the effective marketing campaigns for OnePlus.
- Invest in research and development to create a gadget with a superior battery and superb overall performance, even if it means charging a little bit more for it (based on all the customer reviews).
- More and more market diversification to target more and more customers.
- Continuous evaluation of the Product life cycle of a product.

The strategy aims to maintain its relevance in the premium market so that it can maintain its status as a flagship phone, maintain its premium pricing, and avoid entering a price war with companies like Xiaomi.

## 5  CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, it can be said that OnePlus' creative marketing strategy has been quite effective in generating amazing sales numbers while also significantly reducing costs. Even though there were several risks involved, OnePlus had the advantage of being the first to take them, which helped it carve out a market for its goods.  By introducing high-quality goods at reasonable prices and doing market diversification with a good marketing strategy. OnePlus progressively ascended the ladder through careful calibrations and tactical approaches to comprehend and meet the needs of the customers, while also analyzing structural gaps and being aware of potential risks. The phrase "High Risks, High Gains" has been shown to be very true in this situation.

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