

# **Tata Nano to Nano Twist: The study of Business and Marketing Challenges**

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## **Abstract**

*Globalization and technological advancements are the key prime factors that have led to the creation of competitive and complex market place. The aspirations and customer needs are changing at a phenomenal pace, creating immense challenge for the organizations. Subsequently, in the dynamic world effective brand positioning remains inevitable. Effective brand positioning assists the customers to know the real differences among the competing products, eventually leading to a better and justified selection of products by the end user. The following case study on Nano, considered as dream project of Mr. Ratan Tata, was envisioned with an objective to provide affordable mobility solutions to middle class Indians. The case focuses on how the initial strategies for launching and positioning Tata Nano as a "People's Car" backfired and how management recognized its shortcomings and mistakes that led to the wrong positioning of Tata Nano as "Worlds Cheapest Car" among the segment it was created for. And how finally after four years of its commercial launch, understanding the inevitability of positioning management repositioned Tata Nano as a "Smart City Car" by focusing on the youth to rejuvenate its image.*

**Keywords:** Positioning Disaster, Perception, Value for Money, Repositioning.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

It was October 2010. The call was sudden and unexpected. But there could not be any second thought for Delna Avari who was heading Marketing for Passenger Vehicles unit for Tata Motors. She decided to take a call and switched from trucks to little cars all the way from Bangkok to Mumbai "overnight".

Delna Avari had passed her previous years executing varied job roles and responsibilities in Tata Motors Commercial Vehicles section. It so happened that during one of job assignments at Bangkok, she suddenly received an invitation from Ravi Kant, who expressed his intent for coming back to the

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country with an objective of joining the Nano team.

The dream project of Mr. Ratan Tata, Nano, forecasted to bring about a transformation in the automobile sector of our country. Assured to offer stiff competition by setting the benchmarks really high that could become nearly impossible for the competitors to match with it. The aspiration of owning a car with as little as Rupees 1 lac was too encouraging and tempting for millions of middle class Indians. The kind of hype and the extensive media coverage the car received from the very launch since 2009 was something that competitors had never dreamt of.

This came against the backdrop of the dramatic change in the global auto industry. Year 2010 marked a stark shift in balance of power within the global auto industry with the emerging economies around the world like India, China, Eastern Europe and Brazil accounting for more than one half of 73.2 million light vehicles sold worldwide (worldpress.com, 2012). Since then, emerging markets have left no stones unturned and extended their worldwide sales race -for light vehicles (cars, Special Utility Vehicles, vans and light trucks). Complementing it further automotive sector in India emerged as one of the highest expanding automotive sellers across the globe.

The rapid developments in the automotive sector were coupled with stark shifts in demand patterns across vehicle categories. Traditionally, the two wheelers segment have for years dominated the market, approximately constituting 75% of the automobile sales in the country. By 2005, this had seen a distinct reversal with passenger car transactions standing at 1.89 million units in 2012-13. According to the statistics published by Automotive Component Manufacturers of India (ACMA) and SIAM (Society of Indian Automobiles Manufacturers), the market of the passenger car sales stood at 3.23 million in 2012-13 and was set to expand to another 4 million units by 2015.

Augmented middle class and educated youth with their growing propensity of fuel efficient cars, were the prime driving factors for the thriving market of the small cars segment. These were in line with the published report of the McKinsey, (2007) which indicated that the Indian Middle Strata was projected to expand from 50 to 550 million.

Relative to other emerging markets in the world, the small vehicle section was primarily occupied by three major players - Maruti Suzuki, Hyundai Motors and Tata Motors. The three companies primarily dominated the small car segments, by way of strong product line, extensive distribution, servicing reach and well-built brand franchise. The three players had seemed to maintain their market position for years.

With the launch of Tata Nano, Tata Motors targeted the small cars segment. An epitome of innovation and symbol of our country's progressive middle class, Nano attained immortality instantly it was launched by Ratan Tata at Auto Expo in New Delhi in 2008. But those ambitions stalled with the dismal performance of Nano.

Going by the projections of International Road Federation, World Road Statistics, World Bank, World Development Indicators (2007), car purchase in India was projected to grow phenomenally in India in the near decades. An upcoming and competitive market like the small car segment was compelling enough for Nano to satiate the consumer aspirations. Even a booming economy and positive customer sentiment, could not provide the needed impetus and Nano failed to gain a foothold in the segment of small car segment and consequently was repositioned after four years.

## **BACKGROUND HISTORY AND BIRTH OF NANO**

Tata Nano was acknowledged as the favorite venture of the chairman of Tata enterprise Mr. Ratan Tata. Ratan Tata's basic propensity towards developing a people's care was majorly a social concern.

The story of the world's cheapest car was driven by Ratan Tata's motivation to provision affordable four wheelers to Indians. The seeding grounds of Tata Nano (world's lowest priced car) began on a showery day in Bangalore. Mr. Ratan Tata was in the South Indian city on his regular company deal and was returning back to the airport. Following the instructions of his master, the driver of the car took extra care and precautions on the slick roadway. As a usual sight of India's mad traffic, the roads were full of dodging scooters without helmets. They seemed to carry the entire families with fathers at pedals, mothers taking charge of the children riding on their laps.

Suddenly, a scooter curved in front of Mr. Tata losing control, sending the entire family of four falling onto the road. This one incident terrified Ratan Tata extremely and made him realize how vulnerable and unsafe scooter riders commuting on Indian roads were. This further forced him to think of the ways and means of providing safer driving for the Indians. The initial idea generation led to the development of safer scooter and an open sided rural vehicle with two wheels at the rear side. But later on dropped the idea with an understanding that scooter with two wheels at the back looked more of protective cage and were not very wise solutions.

Eventually, he zeroed upon the easiest and most bold idea of having a small car big enough to escort and carry a family similar to the one that fell down before him in Bangalore, but at a price in the reach of the scooter riding family. Thereafter, it was the endless effort of a core team of 500 employees who worked day and night on the concept. The primary concept pillared on four seater without a door that seemed more of a quadric cycle rather than a car. Somewhere down the line, the ideas ran at conflict with Ratan Tata, who envisaged a simple car with four seats, low working expenditures and one which could meet up all the emission and safety standards.

Amidst all the cynicism and doubt from all quarters of the world since the idea of Ratan Tata's vision was shared at Geneva Motor

show in 2003, the Rupees one lac car developed. The car was officially unveiled in the 9<sup>th</sup> Annual Auto Expo on 10<sup>th</sup> January 2008 at Pragati Maidan in New Delhi and was finally commercially launched on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2009.

No one had ever dared to develop a car at such a price. So it was a natural delight that Mr. Ratan Tata drove the Rupees one lac car which he rechristened as the Nano.

The word Nano connoted superior technology and little volume. The car Nano offered spacious passenger department with a comfortable seat for four adults. It carried a fuel efficiency of 23.6 km/litre which was ratified by Automotive Research Association of India (ARAI). This was again along with necessary mandates like low CO<sub>2</sub> emission etc.

The car though a sensation, pierced through media and television glitz and made headlines at the New Delhi Auto Expo on January 10. At the commencement, Mr. Ratan Tata enthusiastically mentioned, "A promise is a promise".

The announcement was enough to create an element of anxiety among the consumers and a sense of sensation around the world. This also played an important role in positioning India from an impoverished economic laggard to one of progressive industrial and technological superpower.

Ever since its launch after 2009 with much zeal and fanfare, the small car Nano has severed from one crisis to another. Be it being at oppositions logger heads in West Bengal, to the last minute exercise of reshuffling of the plant site from Singur to Sanand. Even after the production roll on and opening, not sufficient number of cars were developed from the manufacturing line to meet the large demand of early orders.

Published data from Indian Express(2011), depicted that sales which were predicted to be 20,000 a month came crumbling down the effect quadrupled even more as a consequence of the drop down in the Indian car market due to rising petrol prices and interest rates. The dream car failed to justify the customer

aspirations and adding further capacity utilization at Sanand unit also remained subpar.

The augmenting middle class, higher disposable income of Indian consumers and filings about the car ownership in India were perhaps significant driving factors for the small car market to flourish in our country. This was a clear indication that automobile sector and especially the small car market were ready for bang. In one of the most competitive sectors of our country and a booming marketplace like India, a small car like Nano did have the spark to sell like anything. But it did not because of business, product and positioning challenges like.

### BUSINESS SET BACKS

According to published sources from worldpress.com(2012), just after nine months of unveiling, and within just about weeks before the first batch of cars were scheduled to be rolled out from the assembly, Ratan Tata officially declared that he was moving out of West Bengal where the assembly line work was on the verge of near completion. Chairman Ratan Tata had already invested 15 billion rupees in the project, but had forgotten a very important detail, a must for the big patrons looking forward for venturing into big new investment on land possessed by poor and uneducated farmers in emerging economies.

Even though Tata Motors ensured that they were in compliance with the necessary regulations like Land Acquisition Act and the required compensation being made to the farmers, the farmers seemed in no mood of giving away their land to Tata motors and with possible legal avenues shut, went to streets, resorted to angry protests forcing Ratan Tata to withdraw the project from Singur. Finally Tata decided to move the manufacturing location from Singur to Sanand.

Even though, Ratan Tata managed to relocate the plant from Singur to Sanand, the major issue was the lack of clarity and transparency of the problem between the representatives of the company, the West Bengal government

and representatives of the farmers. To overcome this, Tata's could have negotiated directly with the farmers. The project even promised generation of employment from Singur, as the residents were promised thousands jobs.

### DISASTROUS PRODUCT POSITIONING AND CLAMP DOWN ON PRICE

Positioning is inevitable for companies in emerging markets like India. The very important step after identification of target consumer is the correct positioning of the product in the minds of the consumers. Positioning as concept was originally defined by Trout & Ries (1986) as a plan of action for staking out turf or occupying the window in the minds of the intentioned customers. Positioning is in fact what you actually execute with the intentioned customer. Majority of the companies in developing markets like India positioned their brands by way of three major aspects namely the functional, symbolic and experiential. It could be stated that majority of the cars in passenger cars segment were more or less similar in features with little difference.

Hence it was really pertinent that symbolic and experiential aspects were given due importance. According to H.S. Adithya (2013), there are host of differentiating factors like fuel efficiency, comfort, price, resale value, brand image etc which an average Indian consumer would take into account while choosing one particular brand. The Indian companies have used these aspects for long as distinct or distinguishing planks for crafting their positioning plan of actions.

To reach out to the target segment, Tata Motors too developed a positioning strategy for Nano in India. The car was primarily designed for middle class families who gradually aspired to improve from two wheelers to four wheelers. Those were the families who primarily shied away from purchasing the four wheelers because of the affordability factor. Tata Motors placed

emphasis on 'price factor' and crafted 'Price Positioning Strategy'. The car Tata Nano was hailed as dream car which aspired to fulfill the dreams of affordable mobility medium for middle class families of our country. In fact it was never meant to be cheap car or *lakhtakia gaadi* or *gharib ki gaadi*. Ratan Tata had himself made a point to clarify in various interviews that he never desired Tata Nano to be positioned as a cheap car, it simply happened situationally. As per published sources from Times of India (2013), Ratan Tata had himself admitted that Tata Motors had made a big mistake in the marketing and positioning and eventually it got termed as the cheapest car in the world.

He even admitted that the car should have been marketed towards the owners of two wheelers, since it was primarily conceived for giving people who rode on two wheelers with the whole family, an all weather safe form of affordable transportation and not the cheapest.

The primary reasons for Nano getting placed faultily was because of its positioning approach i.e., the cost positioning approach. Nano got extensively publicized as cheapest car in the world and that associated price dented its reputation. In a country like India, cars are acknowledged as luxury items as buying homes for Indians. For Indians, cars are like our second homes. They do not wish to compromise on that at any cost. They take care of cars like their children. Middle class families are willing to pass through from point A to point B in heavy traffic by scooters but when it comes to four wheelers on the other hand it is a matter of status symbol. It is an acceptance of our growing prosperity and rising pay cheques. Nobody would want to tell his friends that he or she wants to buy a cheap car. Ultimately in the long run it is the brand of the company that gets tarnished opines Jack Trout, global guru in Marketing. The price tag of being a cheap carried with it an inbuilt danger of being looked upon his social group as poor.

It also goes without saying that positioning is important constituent of the total strategy. Other important aspects like product, brand,

price, promotion and distribution need to fall in place and be aligned with that strategy. As mentioned the product Nano was primarily designed for the lower middle and middle class who aspired to progress from two wheeler to a four wheeler at an affordable cost. But unfortunately Nano's positioning and communication strategies were not aligned and didn't gel with each other.

Tata motors committed a big blunder by relying heavily on the non-traditional medium of communication like social media. They went ahead for developing their own website exclusively dedicated to Nano, where one could devise their own Nano and play games. The said medium could hardly be the right way to sell the car which was exclusively meant for lower middle class to create.

This was visibly revealed by way of sales, as reflected from data published (worldpress.com, 2012) wherein half of the Nano purchases came from audiences who purchased it as their second or third cars or probably came from people looking for second car for completing household errands. This clearly violated the positioning principle, which basically targeted towards the people who wished to move from scooters to four wheelers. It could clearly be seen as the right communication and in the right way could not be passed on to the consumers which in a way led to the downfall.

Nano's distribution approach also seemed inconsistent with its product placement approach (tatamotors.com, 2016). There was scarcity of sufficient dealer networks in the rural regions and the smaller towns where the product possessed the highest propensity to sell. The dearth of dealer network meant that company failed to capitalize on the primary zeal and attention. The targeted customers knew how to buy scooters, but lacked sufficient understanding of the way and the process in which cars were purchased.

In India, the processes of buying cars and buying scooters were completely different and people were apparently intimated to get into the process. The distribution strategy subsequently faulted and failed to provide the

last mile support to the customers for whom the car was actually built. The lower income strata were hesitant to walk into Tata Motors large showrooms.

It goes without any doubt that sound understanding of consumer behavior is a primary element for the continued and sustained success of a brand. Though the company Tata Motors was right enough in understanding the functional need of an average Indian middle class customer of low priced four wheelers, they could have leveraged the consumer surveys to gauge the expectations of the consumer, and gaining more clarity on perception v/s expectation. In fact consumer in surveys could be labeled as the first activity in assessing customer responses towards products and services.

### LONG TERM BENEFITS V/S SHORT TERM AFFORDABILITY

As mentioned earlier, purchasing a car and house are special occasions that are celebrated with zeal. It naturally flows within us. Similar views were expressed by Rama Bijapurkar, a known market strategy consultant. According to her, it needs no mental conditioning; neither a qualification that even an illiterate house wife will tell you that low priced cooking oil even in the best of its packaging is not a wise pick in the long run because of its tendency of clinging to the pan sides.

Customers affluent or deprived educated or illiterate for all times choose the alternative that the inbuilt processor in their head computes and presents the one with the largest worth. It needs no rocket science. A tradeoff between the associated benefits, both rational and emotional and the cost and not the price is gauged by normal Indian consumer. Rama clearly explains that this is possibly the grey area where majority of the marketer's loose track.

The value processed and delivered by Tata Nano for youthful, educated qualified and first time intending car owner would be different as calculated by a forty year old middle class Indian self-employed who wishes to scale up from a high end scooter to a car. Probably it

was a mistake to expect Indians to accept the no frills car with full form in 2010.

Even the small quirks did little to satiate the consumers who were already stretched for about year and half after Tata Nano was unveiled by Ratan Tata. It came on roads only half past 2009. The first aid featuring the wait was all about *Nano Aagayi*. There were reported 200000 bookings before the launch and following that deliveries were a small portion of that. Immediately, after it ran on roads, there were instances of a number of the cars catching fire. It was now that the low cost price tag of Tata Nano backfired even more. Nano was seen by consumers as low on quality less reliable and safe.

There were even odd instances of presence of certain foreign objects in the exhaust mechanism and when the vehicle ran beyond certain temperatures these objects caught fire (Business Today, 2014). Apart from this, consumers found certain issues with starting system and found to be inefficient to navigate through difficult areas. All these instances did not go well with the consumer and they responded by way of disappointing statements like, "What can you expect from a Rupee one lac car?"

During these times even revered company like Maruti had tried its hand to bring out a product in close competition to rival Nano, but gradually withdrew its idea because it was very difficult to get a car profitable at that price and also following the changed consumer sentiments and behavior.

It became very obvious that consumers looked for products that scored high on value for the price he paid even if it meant shedding a little extra money from his wallet. Cheap was out. The launch of the new Swift Maruti is point in example. When it rolled the market for the first time, there was a waiting list for the old one. All those who were in waiting line, thought it wise enough to change to the all new Swift which possessed more bells and whistles and was more costly by 35,000 to 40,000 than the older one. Since the car purchasers sought for improved and superior

cars and not a likely substitute for the two wheelers, they chose to wait till he or she perceived to offer the said value.

Another important issue with the Tata Nano was with its resale. The resale market offered rigid contest to the product Nano. A 3- 4 year used car that initially costed 3-4 lacs on road say the likes of Chevrolet Spark and Maruti Alto posed firm competition to Nano known the comparative cost parity that came out of its resale. It would not be wrong to say that Nano failed to present healthy competition to the market leaders in the car resale niche market and therefore pointless to say that there was very small worth that could be digged out from Nano upon its resale either.

### INDIA PRE 2007 AND POST 2009

When Nano was unveiled in 2007, it was a different India with different dynamics altogether. Nokia 1200 priced at Rs 3000 ruled the market and were common and popular handsets. Television sets with distended and bulging backsides were a visible scene in the ordinary Indian households. LCD panels were uncommon and a rare sight. Facebook had just stepped in and Flipkart and Amazon were trying to set its foot in India. Laptops, computers and desktops were the supreme stuff and tablets for Indians were what you consumed when doctors advised you to do so.

In contrast today, Samsung Galaxy a smart phone mobile phone prized greater than 25,000 is all the rage among Indians. LCD's television sets beautifies Indian walls in cities. One hundred million users network through Facebook and yes Flipkart's valuations stand tall at Rs \$ 1 billion. Tablets are visible in the hands of majority of commuters travelling by Rajdhani Express and yes the biggest of all is that you have a Nano in latest avatar prized at 258000. So the lakhtakia was out and Nano Twist was in. Tata Motors and the team Nano after a series of briefing and deliberations went ahead to fix the issues with Nano.

"If you drive Nano, the first thing that comes to your mind is that why do I come about to hear negative about the car? Rata Tata

intended greater and greater masses to experience the car in its place of commenting upon it without using it" says Avari.

Avari and the rescue Nano team were set in full gears to revamp Nano. Tata Motors and the rescue Nano team tried to correct the 4P's, product, place, price and promotion. Tata motors inducted Ranjit Yadav, previously associated with Samsung India mobile phones in October, 2012

When Yadav joined in 2012, Tata Motors enjoyed the status of being the country's third largest car manufacturing company in the country but unfortunately scored low as 12<sup>th</sup> out of 12 in sales contentment survey. Yadav could clearly sense it and was determined to improve the sales and service experience of customers for the company. The restructuring exercise went about by improved dealership experience, new sales outlets opened and the old ones going for a facelift. A new and contemporary distribution system was placed in place, by way of F class showrooms, each only about 500 sq.ft. in size and Tata motors also tied up with Big Bazaar to capitalize on the footfalls every year. There was a Nano parked at every Big Bazaar outlet and the live touch and live experience augmented their decision making, particularly in small towns.

To expedite the loan process and make the process hassle free, Tata Motor's Finance (TMF) introduced a special Tata Nano Finance Scheme, through the customers could seek loan approval just within 48 hours of application. TMF offered finance up to 90% of the cost of Tata Nano. The loans for Tata Nano were made cheaper in comparison to other car finance.

After the network was looked after, the Nano team went back to the customer. Avari who progressed and got advanced to Head Marketing, for all the passenger vehicles of Tata Motors, mentions that they started brainstorming of aspired folks who wished to experience Nano as their first car upon turning eighteen. That is how repositioning of Nano began in 2011. Conversations with Mr. Ratan Tata and Ravi Kant led to the development of a blue print for Nano.

## NANO AND THE TWIST AVTAAR

As a part of materialization of the strategy, cheap was out and awesomeness was in. From the time it was launched and in the course of the ordering phase, the product was chosen by the well to do. Eighty percent of the customers wished Nano as their 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> car (Sinha, Business Today, 2014). This effort was now to be directed to stay on to well of buyer and also to progress down in the age bracket to grab the share of city youth.

As said by Arora marketing head, "Since the time of the Nano's roll out in 2010, twenty percent of the purchase came from customers in the age bracket of 25 to 35. At present, 45 percent are. Apparently, our shopper set has transformed. Our job is to grab in extra of those folks for the sheer logic that 55 percent of the populace is inside the age of 55."

In sequence with the same, were the flows of changes from advertising and engineering perspective. Nano's advertising today positions the product as blast, mix and celebration of music and color in contrast to the first Nano *aa gayi* campaign. The advertisement showcased the brand by way of colorful world and also by way of young achievers who have shared something common with brand's special attitude. The present Nano campaign also managed to rope in Masaba Gupta, daughter of veteran actress Neena Gupta, and respectable figure in the fashion and glamour industry. She was definitely a name who could associate with Nano as she perfectly epitomized women liberation and could connect with the youth as well. As rightly mentioned by Ankush Arora, "We wished to get along with the city crowd on the experience of rejoicing triumph or rejoicing what you stand for".

Nano was repositioned as smart city car. From the product perspective the all new Nano was more refined with improvised steering wheel, a better exhaust system and with additional frills like glove compartment, a latest music system with blue tooth access. The new Nano Twist is also available in bright and vibrant colors. It is complemented with an automatic

manual transmission which goes well along with buyers.

Yes, but obvious, the prices too have augmented Nano's Twist costs takes it to the likes of Maruti Alto, which has consistently maintained the numero uno status of being the largest selling car of the country. Rata Tata when he introduced the first Nano for the first time as Rs 1 lac car famously mentioned, "A promise is a promise". With the latest version of Nano with Nano Twist, it is a different promise. Is it a commitment with a Twist?"

With the current economy of the country growing as equal to partly the velocity at which it was when the first Nano hit the road, it is for the coming time to tell whether Nano Twist will be disruptive or significantly disruptive for the audience.

## ASSIGNMENTS QUESTIONS

1. As mentioned in the case that Tata Nano as a product was not well positioned. According to you what could have been done to provide a perfect product positioning for Nano? Also explain what can be other marketing strategies for Nano.
2. The second half of the case study mentions about the corrective measures which the top management had taken for fixing 4'Ps. Suggest other measure which according to you could have been taken bringing about the desired facelift of the brand Nano.

## Teaching Notes

1. What are the objectives behind teaching the case?
  - The study of product Tata Nano and faulty positioning.
  - The study of consequences of perceiving of what you think is actually what customers want.
  - The study of issues of faulty price positioning versus long term benefits.

- The study of the importance of research surveys in gaining consumer insight.
  - The study of the understanding of the consumer behavior and its importance in the long run.
  - The study of positioning and repositioning of the product Nano.
  - The study of the importance emotional and psychographic factors for successful roll on of the product.
  - The study of the importance of customization and contextualization successful product roll on.
  - The importance of price positioning and its impact on enhancing or detracting the brand goodwill.
2. What are the major issues involved in the case?
- How did a much awaited product Tata Nano lost the plot because of faulty price positioning.
  - Understanding the twin importance of functional and emotional expectations of customers from the product as in the case the middle car Indians wanted a cheap car but they never a desired a car that looked cheap.
  - The issues of customized marketing strategy hitting bang on the target customers.
  - The issues of regular survey of changing customer perception since

what you perceive is not what customers need.

- The issues of supply chain network and improved sales and service experience.
3. How much time each issue should be given for discussion?
- The case needs to be discussed for forty five minutes.
4. Whether the case should be discussed at individual level or group level/ the road analysis plan.
- The case analysis requires the student to have an in depth understanding of the marketing fundamentals like importance of product positioning and repositioning and its significance in successful roll on of the product. The case also throws light of the importance of psychographic factors in the positioning of the product. The students would be able to relate and analyse the case only when they possess background information about the product Nano and also the various associated marketing concepts with the product Nano; like product positioning, consumer insight, psychographic factors and its importance in product positioning and the importance of service satisfaction in enduring product run.
  - Another important aspect of the case analysis is that first the case needs to analyse at the individual level and second at the group level.

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