

How Do Rectors of Foundation Universities in Istanbul Position Their Institutions? A Discourse Analysis of Rector Messages Regarding Mission and Vision

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How Do Rectors of Foundation Universities in Istanbul Position Their Institutions? A Discourse Analysis of Rector Messages Regarding Mission and Vision

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Abstract

The main purpose of this research is to determine how the Rectors of foundation universities in Istanbul position their universities and to determine which positioning strategies are used by analysing the Rector messages. Rectors' messages on the websites of foundation universities were analysed using discourse analysis. The data of this study were analyzed using discourse analysis, which examines how language is used to construct meaning and convey institutional positioning. Discourse analysis focuses on understanding the underlying implications and social contexts of the rector messages, exploring how language reflects and shapes the universities' mission, vision, and positioning strategies. The study consists of Rector messages selected from Istanbul foundation universities. The findings of the study show that foundation universities in Istanbul mostly position themselves according to the attribute as a result of clearly defining their goals. For this purpose, universities that clearly express their goals both influence the students who are their target group and distinguish themselves from other competitors. Universities that clearly articulate their goals can both attract their target audience, students, and differentiate themselves from competitors. However, the strategy of positioning by product user, which involves defining a product or service based on the specific characteristics, needs, or behaviors of its intended users, is the least commonly used approach in the higher education sector. This is likely because positioning by product user requires a deep understanding of the diverse and evolving preferences of potential students, which can be difficult to pinpoint given the broad and varied nature of university applicants. Universities may perceive this strategy as risky, as it demands precise market segmentation and may alienate other potential students who do not fit the specific user profile being targeted. Therefore, many universities may prefer more general positioning strategies that appeal to a broader audience to minimize perceived risks and maximize their appeal to a wider range of prospective students.

Keywords: Foundation universities, Discourse analysis, Positioning strategies

Introduction

In today's fiercely competitive marketplace, organizations should take a careful strategy when presenting their products or services to their customers. It is largely up to the organization to determine how the product or service is perceived by customers. Positioning is one of the most frequently used strategies to help consumers to distinguish and prefer a product or service from others. Positioning strategies, which are effective in both goods and services sectors, are very important in the marketing efforts of organizations. Factors such as population growth and social diversification have led to the emergence of the concept of "positioning". The concept of positioning initially gained importance in the goods market, but over time it has become effective in the service sector as well. Service organizations, including universities, place significant emphasis on their research activities in their marketing strategies (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006). While the current analysis focuses on the mission and vision statements of universities, it overlooks the critical role of research. Universities contribute to knowledge creation and innovation through their research endeavors, which are also a vital component of their

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positioning (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2008). Research activities not only enhance the academic reputation of the institution but also attract potential students, faculty, and funding opportunities, making them an essential element of strategic communication and marketing efforts (Ivy, 2001). Therefore, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how universities market themselves, it is important to also consider how they highlight and incorporate their research functions in their strategic communications. Service organizations such as universities also give an important place to this concept in their marketing strategies. Positioning means placing products in a certain position in the minds of customers. However, it is still a new phenomenon for universities, which are not used to the competitive environment, to develop strategies and communicate in this field (Karaçor, 2009).

According to Bingham and Raffield (1990), positioning is the total of perceptions that reveal the difference of an organization's outputs compared to other competitors. According to Maggard (1976), positioning is the differentiation of the organization according to the qualities and price of the organization's outputs because of competition between organizations. Kotler and Keller (2009) expands on the existing definitions of positioning by describing it as “a strategic plan designed to establish a lasting impression in the minds of the target group”. For positioning to be done correctly, organizations must first create a positive image in the minds of the target group. For this reason, it is necessary to determine the target group well and determine what they put forward differently from their competitors. For universities to create a lasting impression in the minds of their target groups, they need to effectively communicate their mission, vision, and unique value propositions through various channels, whether through written materials, oral presentations, or other promotional efforts. In this way, they can gain the trust of the target group. Rector messages are frequently seen to have a big impact on the people who are intended to hear them, including as professors, alumni, present and potential students, and other stakeholders (Goss, 2002). These claims have the power to influence how people view and anticipate the university. Many aspects need to be taken into account in order to quantify and better comprehend this impact. First and foremost, it's critical to determine who actively participates in responding to director messages, for example, by way of direct feedback, interactions on social media, or website visits (Morris & Baddoo, 2007). Furthermore, the timing and context of these messages are critical; messages sent at significant times, such as the start of a new academic year or significant university events, may be more pertinent (Smith, 2010). Evaluating how these messages affect audience perceptions and behaviors is part of assessing the impact.

Universities can establish credibility and trust with their target audience, which includes potential students, parents, faculty, and funding agencies, by integrating research activities into their marketing efforts. Universities can prove their dedication to knowledge production, innovation, and societal contribution—all important elements that stakeholders take into account when selecting an institution—by demonstrating their research strengths. When the institution produces research that demonstrates high-quality instruction, faculty competence, and active involvement with contemporary concerns, it further strengthens the trust of the target population. Therefore, emphasizing research skills in strategic communications can improve the university's standing and increase stakeholder trust.

In other words, universities must effectively market their organizations verbally and in writing if they hope to leave a lasting impact on the members of their target audience. They can win the target group's trust in this way. In this way, Rector's written words have a big effect on the intended audience. Each Rector's message should be designed in harmony with other communication strategies and published in appropriate media (Avraham & Ketter, 2012).

Positioning strategies are an important topic in the marketing literature. Blankson and Kalafatis (2004) made a comprehensive review on positioning strategies in their study. The classifications of positioning strategies are given in Table 1.

Table 1. Classification of positioning strategies

Researchers	Positioning Strategies	Sector
Aaker and Shansby (1982)	(1)Attributes; (2)price/quality; (3)competition; (4)application; (5)product user; (6)product class	None
Crawford (1985)	(1)Features; (2)benefits (direct/indirect); (3) surrogates	Many sectors including goods and services
Easingwood and Mahajan (1989)	(1)Reputation capabilities of organization; (2) argumentation of product offering; (3) people advantage; (4)more attractive package offering; (5)superior product through technology; (6)accessibility; (7) extra attention given to individual requirements through customization; (8) satisfaction of more user needs within sector	Financial services
Arnott (1992)	(1)Sensory; (2)price; (3)usage; (4)user; (5) association/comparison; (6)communications (7)people; (8)process; (9)access; (10) experience; (11)assurance; (12) reliability; (13)empathy; (14) innovation; (15) technology; (16)social accountability	Financial services
Kalra & Goodstein (1998)	(1)Value-orientation; (2)comparisonwith premium player; (3)uniqueattribute; (4) meaningless attribute; (5)endorsement by product-relevant celebrities; (6)premium versus premium brand comparison	Durable consumer goods
Hooley et al. (1998)	(1)Low price/high price; (2)premium quality/ basic quality; (3) innovation imitation; (4) superior service/ limited service; (5) differentiated benefits/undifferentiated features; (6) tailored offering/standard offering.	None
Kalafatis et al. (2000)	(1)Pricing; (2)easy to do business; (3)personal contact; (4)product performance; (5) range of offerings; (6)presence; (7)safety; (8) leadership; (9)distinct identity; (10)status; (11)country identity;(12)differentiation;(13) attractiveness	Commodity products
Kim and Mauborgne (2000)	(1)Customer productivity; (2)simplicity; (3) convenience; (4) risk reduction; (5) funand image; (6)environmental friendliness	None
Romaniuk (2001)	(1)Price; (2) relationship/services benefit; (3) security benefit;(4)user type;(5)accessibility benefit; (6)perceived quality	Financial services
Punj and Moon (2002)	(1)Product market definition; (2)market/ company structure; (3)market share condition; (4)product category's lifecycle stage; (5) consumer knowledge	None
Morgan et al. (2003)	(1)Production process orientation; (2) marketing capabilities; (3)quality orientation; (4)price-cost leadership; (5) products cope and development; (6) differentiation focus	Industrial Manufacturing Firms
Blankson and Kalafatis (2004)	(1)Top of the range; (2)service; (3)value for money; (4) reliability; (5)attractiveness; (6) country of origin(7) the brand name; (8) selectivity	10 Sectors including goods and services
Burton and Easingwood (2006)	(1)Customer productivity; (2)simplicity; (3) convenience; (4) risk(functional, socialand psychological); (5)environmental friendliness; (6)hedonicbenefit (image, emotional benefit)	Service sectors
Florek and Janiszewska (2007)	(1) concentrated; (2) exclusive; (3) interrelated and (4) uniform positioning	None
Diwan and Bodla (2011)	(1) Visual artistic; (2) contemporary features; (3) basic features; (4) security measure; (5) brand image, (6) dealer network and services; (7) promotional campaign; (8) cost and finance	Automotive

As seen in Table 1, the classifications of positioning strategies differ according to the sector in which they are located. Positioning strategies can be classified according to management or customer perspective. However, the research design (theoretical or experimental) and the sectors in which they are located also play an important role in this classification. From a conceptual point of view, positioning strategies may not be appropriate for a particular industry and may not cover all positive characteristics of potential customers. Experimental positioning strategies are shaped by the unique characteristics of the industry. Some of the empirical positioning strategies are general in nature, with the aim of collecting data across various sectors (Blankson & Kalafatis, 2004; Crawford, 1985). Others aim to create a new strategy in a specific sector; for example, automotive sector (Diwan & Bodla, 2011), financial sector (Arnott, 1992; Easingwood & Mahajan, 1989; Romaniuk, 2001), commodity products (Kalafatis et al., 2000), durable consumer goods sector (Kalra & Goodstein, 1998) and industrial manufacturing firms (Morgan et al., 2003). As shown in Table 1, there are differences between strategies that are general or specific to a sector.

There are established strategies in service sectors, especially in the financial sector (Arnott, 1992; Easingwood & Mahajan, 1989; Romaniuk, 2001). Although the financial sector is close to the higher education service in terms of the characteristics of the service sector, the guidance of students' minds and their active participation in the educational process are important factors that distinguish the higher education service from the financial sector (Lovelock, 1983). Higher education differs significantly from the financial sector despite sharing some traits with it, such as the supply of intangible services and an emphasis on establishing trust and long-term relationships with clients. Encouraging students' intellectual growth and involving them actively in the learning process are crucial elements of higher education. Higher education services aim to enhance students' critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills; these services are transformative and developmental, in contrast to the financial sector, where services are usually transactional and focused on financial management or investment. Higher education services are distinguished from the financial industry by their distinct focus on knowledge development, human growth, and active involvement (Grönroos, 2007).

In addition, the perception of risk and the characteristics that enable service delivery lead to differences in these two sectors. For example, the campus environment of a university and the qualities related to the city where it is located can make an institution more favorable (Arambewela et al., 2006; Kethüda, 2017). While these characteristics may influence the preference for higher education services, there appears to be a lack of positioning strategies that explicitly incorporate these factors.

The six-dimensional positioning strategies developed by Aaker and Shansby (1982) are a widely accepted classification in the literature. This six-dimensional positioning strategy helps to develop an effective positioning for organizations that want to achieve long-term success. This sub-positioning strategy is named as attribute, application, product user, product class, price/quality and competitive positioning strategy. Aaker and Shansby (1982) argue that positioning strategies play a major role in determining the market position of a product or service. To illustrate this, they describe several positioning strategies developed by researchers, which are explained below.

Positioning strategy by attribute: One of the most frequently used positioning strategies, positioning by attribute focusing on how the target group benefits from the product offered by the organization (Sutherland & Sylvester, 2000). A product or brand is associated with certain features, qualities or advantages. For example, in educational institutions, Rensselaer Institute of Technology positions itself with technological creativity, Brown University with an open-minded approach, and Columbia College of Chicago with innovations in the arts (Lowry & Owens, 2001).

In the strategy of positioning by attribute, emphasizing the unique qualities of brands is intended to connect with target groups. According to Aaker and Shansby (1982), organizations need to effectively manage the process of identifying and emphasizing the benefits that appeal to their target group in order to establish a strong market position (pp. 57-58). In terms of higher education organizations, they need to see what their competitors cannot see. For this reason, the needs of the organization's outputs should be identified, related to the benefit of the target group and compared with the outputs of competitors.

However, positioning efforts based on multiple attributes can lead to a complex and ambiguous brand image. It is observed that products are sometimes tried to be positioned according to many attributes at the same time. In this context, organizations need to manage the process well while determining the benefit of the target group. The use of slogan-motto by organizations positioning according to the feature or quality causes a positive image on the target group.

Positioning strategy by price-quality: This positioning strategy involves pricing products according to their quality level. In this context, not only quality but also cost is involved in an organization. Aaker and Shansby (1982) state, 'The cost of services, products, and goods is evaluated based on their features and quality' (pp. 57-58). Organizations evaluate themselves and position themselves according to their price and quality. High-quality products are usually sold at higher prices and prestigious communication strategies are used to convey this quality to consumers. For example, calling the University of Michigan the "Harvard of the Midwest" helps the university to be perceived as a high-quality education and a prestigious organization (Harrison-Walker, 2009: 107). Sears Holding Store, on the other hand, tries to maintain its low price and high value position and follows a careful strategy so that its efforts to create a positive image in the fashion industry do not harm its "value" position (Worthy, 1992).

In terms of higher education organizations, when a foundation university employs a positioning strategy based on the price-quality relationship, it aims to balance tuition fees with the quality of education it provides. This approach is supported by higher education literature, which suggests that universities often use such strategies to position themselves effectively in the market (Litten, 1980). For example, a foundation university adopting a high price-high quality strategy is positioned in the upper segment by offering its students high-quality academic staff, modern campus facilities, international exchange programs, and extensive internship opportunities. This positioning strategy is well-documented in the literature, which highlights how universities use high fees and high quality as a way to distinguish themselves and attract students seeking premium educational experiences (Maringe & Gibbs, 2009; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Litten, 1980; Chapman & Pyvis, 2006). The medium price-medium quality strategy, on the other hand, appeals to a wide range of students by offering a good education at a reasonable price and stands out with its price-performance balance. The low price-high quality strategy aims to make high-quality education more accessible by offering top-notch educational resources at more affordable prices. This approach can align with principles of equity and accessibility in education. For instance, ABC foundation university provides state-of-the-art laboratories, exceptional academic staff, and international collaborations without charging high tuition fees. However, this strategy can complicate traditional perceptions, where high fees are often associated with high-quality, suggesting that a low price might be perceived as a compromise on quality (Kotler & Fox, 1995; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002).

Positioning strategy by competition: This positioning strategy is defined as a strategy that organizations use to show themselves superior as a result of comparing themselves with other organizations (Aaker & Shansby, 1982). In other words, organizations reveal their best sides in order to influence the target group. For this purpose, they constantly compare themselves with other organizations. For example Harrison-Walker (2009) notes that Avis, while promoting itself as 'No. 2' in the car rental industry and acknowledging Hertz's leadership, 'makes more efforts to increase customer satisfaction' (p. 107). Competitive positioning is usually done by comparing a brand to its competitors in terms of price/quality or features. For example, Pontiac has positioned some of its vehicles by comparing them to premium foreign vehicles in terms of pricing and fuel efficiency (Stephens, 2023).

Competitive positioning strategy allows brands to make themselves more respected by comparing themselves to their competitors and helps to convey a clearer message to the target group. In the case of higher education organizations, they often engage in comparative positioning strategies to enhance their perceived prestige. For example, universities may highlight their higher ranking in national or international league tables, emphasize unique academic programs, or showcase partnerships with renowned institutions to distinguish themselves from their competitors. Additionally, they may draw attention to their faculty's credentials, research output, and state-of-the-art facilities in comparison to

other institutions to strengthen their reputation and appeal to prospective students and stakeholders (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006).

Most positioning strategies use competition as an explicit or implicit baseline. This positioning approach is important for two key reasons. First, competing firms often position themselves based on specific attributes or a price/quality comparison, which can create complex differentiation challenges in product evaluation (Aaker & Shansby, 1982). To address this, organizations frequently compare themselves with competitors to clarify their unique market position and facilitate the positioning process (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Comparative advertising where a competitor is explicitly mentioned and compared based on one or more attributes can be an effective strategy to establish a distinct position in the market relative to competitors (Ries & Trout, 2001).

Positioning strategy by application: With this positioning strategy, the superiority of an organization or brand in a certain area of use is revealed. For this purpose, positioning is made for where, how and how the data of the organization are used (Aaker, 1996). For example, Cornell University positions itself as a university preferred by leaders in the field of hotel management (Enz, 2011).

The strategy of positioning by use conveys a message of quality and expertise in a specific field of use to the target group (Lowry & Owens, 2001: 33). In higher education organizations that adopt a positioning strategy based on the future success of their graduates, it is important to track and assess the career outcomes of their alumni. This involves having an effective graduate tracking system to monitor the professional achievements and status of graduates in the job market. By doing so, the institution can evaluate the value of its education and adjust its positioning strategy accordingly.

Positioning by product user: In this positioning strategy, the connection of the organization's data with the user profile is associated (Aaker & Shansby, 1982; Harrison-wolker, 2009). In other words, the symbols of the culture of the target group's need to be positioned correctly (Büyükkelik, 2004). For example, St. Leo College and Heritage College focus on specific user groups and reflect the cultural values of that group (Lowry & Owens, 2001: 40). While St. Leo College is positioned as a weekend college in Florida, catering to working individuals who have not completed their university education, Heritage College serves a multicultural population deprived of education, especially Native Americans living in the Yakima Valley (Litten, 1980).

According to Sevier (2002), "organizations that prefer positioning strategies according to the user reveal their different aspects compared to their competitors" (p. 28). In both examples, organizations clarify their markets and positions by focusing on a specific user group.

In this context, for higher education organizations, the relationship between the products offered by the organizations and the target group is determined. For this reason, organizations using the strategy of positioning according to the user take into account the individual needs of the target group in order to better reflect their culture.

Positioning strategy by product class: In this positioning strategy, consumers' perceptions are shaped by emphasizing a product's place in a particular category. Some organizations position products that do not belong to them as belonging to the market (Harrison-Wolker, 2009:107). According to Aaker and Shansby (1982), 'Maxim's freeze-dried coffee is presented as an alternative to instant coffee and regular coffee,' while '7-Up marketed itself as a soft drink with a "fresh taste" and later changed consumer perception by positioning itself in the cola category' (p. 57-58). Although University of Phoenix positions itself as a member of the university community, it is actually a for-profit distance education company (Kinsler, 2006).

In the strategy of positioning by product category, although it enables brands to reach target groups by showing them as belonging to a certain category, it causes distrust in the long run when there is a lack of transparency (Harrison-Walker, 2009: 107). In terms of higher education organizations, it is seen that organizations reveal the different aspects of their outputs compared to other organizations. In this

context, it can be said that organizations using this positioning position their outputs as belonging to the market category and mention the features of the organizations that make them stand out. In addition, the opening of universities by well-known companies in the market is a positioning strategy according to the product class.

These classifications above explain the strategies used by institutions to position themselves in the most appropriate way for their target groups. In the context of Türkiye's higher education landscape, understanding these positioning strategies becomes increasingly relevant. According to the Council of Higher Education (Yüksek Öğretim Kurulu (YOK)) (CoHE, 2023) 2022-2023 data, there are 208 Higher Education Institutions in Türkiye, of which 128 are State and 80 are foundation universities.

Of these 80 foundation universities, 44 are located in Istanbul. Each University has a Rector appointed by the President and Rectors play an important role in determining the image of universities. Rectors can create a positive or negative image on the target group, students, through written and verbal messages. A positive image in the minds of the target group may indicate that the right positioning strategies are used (Polat, 2011). For foundation universities to gain competitive advantage, reach the target group, strengthen their brand image and ensure financial sustainability, they need to use positioning strategies correctly. Within the scope of this research, a discourse analysis will be conducted on positioning strategies by examining the messages of the Rectors of foundation universities in Istanbul. For an organization to compete better with its competitors and be successful in the changing and chaotic global market environment in which it operates, it must be able to make positioning strategies correctly. Organizations that position their universities correctly can better differentiate themselves from their competitors.

The purpose of this research is to determine how the Rectors of foundation universities in Istanbul position their universities and to determine which positioning strategies are used by analyzing the Rector messages.

Method

Research Design

In this study, the messages of the Rectors of foundation universities in Istanbul were analyzed through discourse analysis. Discourse analysis is a method used in social sciences and questions what the phenomena and concepts in the social world we live in mean to people. In this context, authentic oral and written texts are analyzed in their own contexts. With discourse analysis, the details of spoken and written texts are investigated by focusing on how and why words are said rather than their meanings (Dijk, 1997). In this study, the messages of the Rectors of foundation universities were analyzed and how the Rectors positioned their universities was evaluated in detail.

Research Documents

The documents of this study consist of the Rector's messages on the websites of foundation universities in Istanbul, 2024. Table 2 below shows the information about the documents of the research as code, gender and date of establishment. Rector messages published on the official websites of universities are the participants of this study. Rector messages are important communication tools that express the mission, vision, values and strategic goals of universities. The analysis of these messages is crucial to understand how universities position themselves, what values they emphasize and what image they want to present to the society. However, the names of universities and rectors were kept confidential due to impartiality and ethical standards. This method avoids bias towards a specific institution or person and protects the safety of the research participants (rectors) by shifting the focus of the research to general trends and strategies rather than individual leaders or institutions.

Data Collection

The data of this study consists of the messages of the Rector of the foundation universities in Istanbul. According to the 2022-2023 data of the Council of Higher Education, since there are 44 foundation universities in Istanbul, the websites of each university were examined to reach all universe, but 14 of them could not be reached. Among the reasons for this are that the websites of the institutions are not

up-to-date or there are messages from the Dean instead of the Rector. As a result of the examination, a total of 30 Rector's messages were reached. Written texts were used in this study as a means of data collection in order to produce findings based on discourse analysis. Texts that address the research topics and are pertinent to the study's core theme were chosen with attention. The data source includes the rector messages written on the websites of foundation universities. These texts were selected an eight-step process for conducting discourse analysis in the context of information systems (IS) research (Bondarouk and Ruel, 2004).

As can be seen in Table 2, 8 of the 30 Rectors are women and 22 are men. In this case, there are mostly male rectors in foundation universities in Istanbul. When the foundation universities in Istanbul are examined, it is seen that they were established between 1993-2018. In this case, it has been observed that the history of the first foundation university established in Istanbul dates back to 31 years, while the newest foundation university has a history of 6 years.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using a Bondarouk and Ruel's (2004) eight-stage discourse analysis method was then applied. These stages are identifying a theory, operationalization, sampling, conducting interviews, transcription, member check, analysis, and debriefing. Social constructionism and institutional identity theories serve as the foundation for the discourse analysis theoretical framework in this work. The idea of social constructionism looks at how organizations create and display themselves in social settings. The main focus of institutional identity theory is on how universities show themselves to society, the ideals they uphold, and how they position themselves.

Table 2. Information about the documents of the research

Code	Date of establishment of university
RM1	1997
RM2	2011
RM3	2003
RM4	1996
RM5	1997
RM6	2010
RM7	1998
RM8	2008
RM9	2016
RM10	1996
RM11	2016
RM12	2007
RM13	2016
RM14	1996
RM15	1993
RM16	2011
RM17	1999
RM18	1997
RM19	2010
RM20	1997
RM21	2008
RM22	2012
RM23	2016

RM24	2010
RM25	1996
RM26	2007
RM27	2018
RM28	2015
RM29	2018
RM30	2006

The notions of "institutional identity" and "strategic communication" were broken down into distinct parts in the discourse analysis, including mission, vision, values, and strategic goals. To be used in the analysis of rector communications, these components were codified, and for every component, a specific category was created. For instance, the university's self-assigned role and place in society were looked at under the "mission" category. Rector statements that are posted on the websites of Istanbul's foundation universities make up the study's sample. Based on data from the Higher Education Council for 2022–2023 there are forty-four foundation universities in Istanbul. However, 14 institutions' websites were inaccessible for various reasons, including not being updated or featuring statements from deans rather than rectors. Consequently, thirty rector messages in all were gathered for examination. Instead of conducting interviews for this study, an analysis of previously published textual materials (Rector messages) was done. In terms of how colleges position themselves, the principles they highlight, and the image they project to society, the statements were scrutinized to guarantee diversity and consistency. There was no direct participant control procedure used in this investigation. To avoid any bias and ethical transgressions, the names of the rectors and universities were kept private in compliance with ethical norms. The thirty messages from rectors were gathered, and they were examined using the predetermined theoretical framework. The books were broken down into codes, such as mission, vision, values, and strategic goals, and each code's meaning was deciphered. During this process, key themes about the positioning of universities and the most important aspects of strategic communication were identified.

For this purpose, criteria were determined according to the six-dimensional positioning strategies developed by Aaker and Shansby (1982), which are widely accepted in the literature. This framework was selected above others because it provides a comprehensive approach that takes into account many aspects of positioning that are pertinent to universities, such as how they set themselves apart from the competition in terms of features, perks, and competitive environment. Although other frameworks were taken into consideration, they were judged less appropriate because of their restricted scope or limited suitability for the various positioning techniques that have been observed in the education sector. As the dataset utilized in the research was pre-written, there was no need for transcribing. Nonetheless, linguistic elements (such as emphasis, repetitions, and confusing expressions) that were included in the messages' original texts were meticulously noted and utilized during the analysis process. For this purpose, the criteria for positioning strategies are included in Table 3 below.

Credibility

Inclusion and exclusion criteria were taken into account while selecting the study group of the research. For this purpose, all foundation universities in Istanbul were included in this study. However, due to the rapid increase in competition as a result of globalization, state universities in Istanbul were excluded from this study. It is aimed to confirm the authenticity of the Rector's messages on the corporate websites of the foundation universities in Istanbul by accessing them.

Table 3. Criteria for positioning strategies

Criterion	Description	Reference
Positioning foundation universities by attributes	Determining the needs of the outputs of the organization.	Aaker & Shansby (1982)
	Associating the needs of the organization's outputs with the benefit of the target group.	Aaker & Shansby (1982)
	Associating the outputs of the organization with the outputs of its competitors.	Aaker & Shansby (1982)
Positioning foundation universities by price-quality	Positioning the outputs of the organization according to the relationship between high price and high quality.	Kotler & Keller (2016)
Positioning foundation universities by competition	Specifying the different aspects of the organization's outputs from competing organizations.	Aaker & Shansby (1982)
	Comparison of organizational outputs with outputs of competing organizations.	Kotler & Keller (2016)
Positioning of foundation universities by application	Status of graduates in business life.	Gronroos (2007)
	Organizations to have an alumni tracking system.	Gronroos (2007)
Positioning foundation universities by product user	Associating the output of the organization with the user base.	Aaker & Shansby (1982)
	Mentioning the symbols of the user's culture.	Aaker & Shansby (1982)
Positioning of foundation universities by product class	Positioning the outputs of organizations as belonging to the market category.	Kotler & Keller (2016)

Credibility is defined as the researcher's consistency in the processes of collecting, analyzing and interpreting data (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013: 292). In other words, ensuring credibility increases confidence in the study. In order to increase the credibility of this study, the data were transferred from the websites of the institutions as they were and expert opinions were consulted.

Confirmability

A confirmability criterion should be provided to ensure the accuracy and consistency of the findings obtained. For this reason, it is necessary to take into account the opinions and thoughts of experts. Confirmability is the verification of the findings of the research by the data collected and the conditions studied. For this, the researcher should clearly and in detail state the methods and technical stages of the research (Houser, 2015). In order to enhance the confirmability of this research, feedback was obtained from two experts in Educational Administration: a senior academic with extensive experience in the field and a PhD student actively conducting research in the same area. Their insights provided an

additional layer of validation and ensured that the findings align with current academic perspectives (Bondarouk and Ruel, 2004). After receiving expert opinions, the Rector's messages obtained from the websites of Foundation Universities were turned into a file. Their messages were examined in detail and the places considered important were underlined. Subsequently, based on the definitions made by Aaker and Shansby (1982) regarding the positioning strategies they developed, the criteria for each positioning strategy were determined and presented to the Expert. After obtaining expert approval, the data for positioning strategies are explained in table 4 in the form of criteria and codes.

Transferability

The provision of comprehensive accounts of the research context and participants bolstered transferability by enabling others to evaluate the findings' relevance in various contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In order to address transferability, this study includes extensive information regarding the data sources and gathering techniques. After looking through the websites of 44 universities, the study was able to examine messages from the Rectors of Foundation Universities in Istanbul, totaling thirty messages. Though thirty messages remain, a substantial fraction of the universe is represented, even though fourteen universities are inaccessible because of out-of-date websites or letters from deans. The findings' relevance to other comparable contexts or university settings can be evaluated by outlining the data gathering procedure and the justifications for data removal.

Dependability

A thorough record of the research procedure, including the choices and techniques used, was maintained to guarantee reliability. Lincoln and Guba (1985) noted that regular peer debriefings were held to guarantee conformity with study aims and that an audit trail was kept to enable others to examine the procedure. The study's dependability is guaranteed by a careful and organized method to data collecting and reporting. The study accessed and examined the Rector's messages from the websites of Istanbul's Foundation Universities in accordance with a well-defined process. An audit trail was kept, which recorded the steps taken to determine communications that were accessible as well as the rationale behind leaving out specific colleges. To guarantee accuracy and consistency in the data collection procedure, reviews were carried out on a regular basis. The thorough documentation enables replication in comparable circumstances and offers a strong foundation for the validity of the findings.

Findings

How foundation universities in Istanbul position themselves has been examined in depth with discourse analysis. For this purpose, the positioning strategies developed by Aaker and Shansby (1982:57), such as feature, product used, competition, user, category and price-quality, are presented in table 4 below. The criteria for these strategies have been determined for each positioning strategy. In this context, it has been classified by evaluating how the Rectors position the universities in their messages.

As can be seen in Table 4, the findings regarding the six-dimensional positioning strategy developed by Aaker and Shansby (1982:57) were determined by examining the Rector's messages. In this context, how the foundation universities in Istanbul position their universities in the Rector's messages was evaluated according to the criteria in each strategy. According to the expressions in the messages of the rectors, an "x" was placed for those who met the criteria and a "-" was placed for those who did not meet the criteria. As can be seen from Table 4, it was seen that the characteristics within the criteria were met in all of the Rector's messages.

When Table 4 is examined, it is understood that foundation universities mostly position themselves according to their characteristics. It can be said that universities that clearly express their goals can be more effective on the target community. However, as a result of the rapidly increasing competition among foundation universities, positioning according to competition also has an important role. However, it has been observed that foundation universities position themselves according to the least number of users. It can be said that universities prioritize their attributes over competitive or user-centered positioning; however, more information is required to make more certain judgments. This involves a thorough examination of promotional materials, input from instructors and students, and comparison shopping with other educational establishments. Quantitative methods like surveys and

long-term research would also be very helpful in gaining understanding of how well positioning techniques work and how they affect different results. A more thorough and accurate evaluation of the colleges' positioning strategies can be attained by adding these other components.

1) Positioning foundation universities by attributes

According to the messages of the Rectors working in the foundation universities in Istanbul, the universities are mostly positioned according to quality. In this context, it can be said that the needs of the students, who are mostly the target group, are determined, the target group is related according to the benefit, and the outputs of the organization are compared with the outputs of their competitors. Determining the mission and vision is at the forefront in the Rector's messages, which are positioned according to their characteristics. For this purpose, it has been observed that goal-setting words such as targeting, planning and training are frequently used.

In his RM3 message, one of the Rector's messages, he expresses the mission of the school in detail and positions it according to the feature as follows.

"With an understanding of education that supports the multifaceted and interdisciplinary development of students; We raise individuals who adapt quickly to the age and professional life, who can lead, who have a scientific perspective, who are interested in art and sports, who are socially developed, who respect social and universal values, who are sensitive to the environment, who have problem-solving skills, and who adopt lifelong learning as a principle."
(RM3)

From the rector's messages, RM7, RM16 and RM 29 use the target identifying words when positioning themselves according to the attributes are as follows.

"With its deep-rooted history, unique qualifications, pioneering education models, strong technological infrastructure and R&D activities, it aims to train scientists who will produce added value for our country and the world and to bring them together with the world." (RM7)

"... We aim to raise individuals with high self-confidence and self-confidence in their fields, and to bring Turkish language and culture to the place it deserves." (RM16)

"... With the vision of the university senior management from the field of health, we aim to raise our students as the leaders of the future. They are educated and prepared for the future as individuals who are at peace with themselves and their environment, have a leading personality, produce knowledge, solve problems, question and analyze." (RM29)

Table 4. Findings on positioning strategy

Positioning strategies	RM1	RM2	RM3	RM	RM	RM	RM	RM	RM	RM	RM	RM	RM	RM	RM	RM	RM	RM	RM	RM	RM	RM	RM	RM	RM	RM	RM	RM	RM	RM	RM	RM	RM	Total
Attributes																													21					
Determining the needs of the outputs of the organization	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	-	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Associating the needs of the organization's outputs with the benefit of the target group	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	-	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Associating the outputs of the organization with the outputs of competing organizations	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	-	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Application																													9					
Monitoring the status of graduates who are outputs of the organization in business life				X				-	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X																	
Competition																													14					
Specifying the different aspects of the organization's outputs from competing organizations						X	X	-					X		X	X	X										X	X	X		X			
Comparison of organizational outputs with outputs of rival organizations						X	X	-					X		X	X	X										X	X	X		X			
Product user																													6					
Associating the output of the organization with the user base					X			-					X	X	X	X										X								
Mentioning the symbols of the user's culture					X			-					X	X	X	X									X									
Product class																													9					
Positioning the outputs of organizations as belonging to the market category				X			X	-					X	X											X		X	X					X	
Talking about the features of organizations that make them stand out				X			X	-					X	X											X		X	X					X	
Price/quality																													8					
Positioning the organization's outputs according to the high price high quality relations								-					X												X		X							

As we conclude, it is clear that the rectors are deeply committed to developing future leaders who are not only well qualified academically but also socially conscious and flexible enough to meet the ever-evolving demands of the workplace. By prioritizing technical innovations, research and development, and multidisciplinary education, these universities establish themselves as essential players in the advancement of both national and global society.

2) Positioning of foundation universities by application

According to the messages of the Rectors working in the foundation universities in Istanbul, it has been observed that the positioning according to category and usage in universities is made with the same frequency. In this context, it can be said that organizations attach importance to making a difference while presenting their products to the market and are interested in the future positions of the outputs of the organization. It can be said that universities, which position themselves according to usage, examine the status of graduates in business life and have a good monitoring system. In this context, visions for the future are the keywords used in this positioning strategy.

In their messages, RM10, RM13 and RM14 talk about future goals not only for the inputs of the organization but also for the business life of the graduates, who are the outputs of the organization. The Rector's messages using positioning strategies according to usage are explained below.

"We bring business life to our university with the career events we organize to bring our students and graduates to the business world. In addition, in addition to the internship periods, we ensure that our students graduate from our university as individuals with experience by working in the fields of practice within our university." (RM10)

"... Together with the steps we will take to ensure that you graduate with experience and ability as well as a valid diploma in the business world and leave unforgettable memories when you look back..." (RM13)

"... to prepare graduates well for business life and the professional world in terms of intellectual, humanistic and cultural aspects." (RM14)

As we conclude, it is evident that foundation universities emphasize practical, hands-on experience for students in order to position themselves as intermediaries between academics and the professional world. They hope to provide graduates with the knowledge and experience needed to thrive in the corporate world through career fairs, internships, and practical experiences conducted on campus. Their dedication to equipping students for both career success and lifetime achievement is evident in their emphasis on experiential learning in addition to academic advancement.

3) Positioning foundation universities by competition

According to the messages of the Rectors working in the foundation universities in Istanbul, the universities are positioned according to the competition the most. In this context, when the Rector's messages are examined, it can be said that their organizations are mostly in competition with each other and compare themselves with the outputs of other organizations. In other words, it can be said that the outputs of the organizations of the universities that position themselves according to the competition reveal different aspects from their competitors and compare them with the outputs of rival organizations. This positioning strategy has similar characteristics to the uniform positioning strategy. In both strategies, emphasizing the best features of the institutions also reveals the positioning strategy according to the competition.

From the Rector's messages, RM1, RM8, RM14, RM17, RM18 and RM21 are given below where they position themselves in relation to the competition.

"... Our university prepares our young people for global competition." (RM1)

"... To take the place we deserve in the global competitive environment can only be qualified education and training..." (RM8)

"It is always the goal of self-improvement, contributing to the world academy, and constantly being in developments. It has created an important, valuable and unique place for itself in Türkiye's higher education community." (RM14)

"... They are trained as graduates who can compete with all their contemporaries in the world." (RM17)

"... To be an "Entrepreneurial, Innovative and Competitive University", to work for a better campus with our decision-making mechanisms, to redefine institutionalization..." (RM18)

"... In today's conditions, academic formation is no longer a sufficient condition, although it is a necessary condition for competition." (RM21)

The statements from the rectors emphasize the strategic focus on innovation, entrepreneurship, and ongoing improvement that their universities have with regard to global competition. Universities with missions in line with global standards and the necessity to stay relevant in a cutthroat academic environment are universities like RM1, RM8, RM17, and RM18. These universities place a high priority on training students to compete internationally. On the other hand, RM14 highlights the institution's well-established place in Turkey's higher education system and its contribution to the international academic community. The emphasis on innovation and competition may also be related to the periods of founding of the universities, with the latter concentrating on retaining their impact and the former trying to stand out from the crowd. Furthermore, the rectors' gender may have an impact on their leadership philosophies and areas of strategic concentration, especially in relation to diversity and entrepreneurship. Overall, these universities match their missions with more general trends in higher education with the overall goal of producing graduates prepared for success on the national and worldwide stage.

4) Positioning of foundation Universities by product user

Among the positioning strategies, positioning according to the user is the least done positioning strategy among the Rector's messages. It can be said that the reason for this is the idea that not all of them may be affected by this positioning strategy, since the personal aspects of the target group are at the forefront in the positioning made according to the user. In other words, the reasons why students, who are the target group, come together for a common purpose are affected by the cultural characteristics they adopt. Therefore, foundation universities, which position themselves according to the user, generally emphasize social activities, student clubs and activities that will strengthen the bonds between students in their messages.

In their messages, the Rector explained that they position themselves in relation to the user, emphasizing orientation days, committees, social settings, and activities that bring students together for a common goal.

"I kindly ask you to participate in the activities where you will have the opportunity to meet with student clubs and student support units of our University and be informed about the "University Orientation Days" Program, which will be held in the first week of the new semester." (RM6)

"... We have established a Student Satisfaction Commission in order to increase student satisfaction and to control it closely." (RM13)

"... The voices of everyone who has contributed, who have listened to lectures or lectured in their classrooms, who have spent the morning in their library, and who have participated

in heated conversations in their courtyards, have remained and will remain at the Gate of Science as a pleasant voice." (RM15)

"... In order to meet the needs of those who want to learn Turkish, it makes great efforts to use new materials in education in accordance with the scientific developments in the current field of education. (RM16)

"... With our Career Center and Dean of Students Office within our university, within the scope of the "Preparation for Business Life Program", our students are offered "Career and Life Course", "Happy Life Program" and "Entrepreneurship Course." (RM17)

As we conclude, it is clear that the rectors of RM6, RM13, RM15, RM16, and RM17 stress the significance of creating a welcoming and stimulating campus community. They highlight activities like committees for student satisfaction, orientation days, and other efforts to improve student happiness and integration. These universities show a dedication to building a lively and inclusive academic community by emphasizing events that foster student interaction and assist their professional and personal growth. Their initiatives are part of a larger initiative to guarantee that students have a happy and supportive university experience in addition to helping them get ready for their future employment.

5) Positioning of foundation Universities by product class

In positioning strategies related to the product class, it is seen that institutions position themselves according to the areas they are experts in. Therefore, it can be said that organizations that position themselves according to the product category highlight the areas in which they are experts, and the organizations position their outputs as if they belong to the market category. In addition, they must have a deep-rooted history as well as a corporate identity.

RM11, RM12, RM14 and RM30 emphasised in their messages that they positioned themselves according to the product category by highlighting their strong background, good standards and areas of expertise.

"... As a university, we set out with the vision of bringing a new perspective to the Turkish higher education system. Big... As the face of the community reflected in higher education, we set out with the mission imposed on us by our glorious heritage." (RM11)

"The seven main objectives determined as a result of the meetings held with horizontal and vertical participation for the first time at our university, as well as the 23 targets and 132 metrics defined in line with these objectives, constitute the roadmap for the next 5 years." (RM12)

"From the very beginning, aiming to be a good world university at international standards..." (RM14)

"... Our university, which has branded medical education with the quality of Florence Nightingale, has trained 684 physicians and 141 specialist physicians so far as Türkiye's first health university in the field of health sciences." (RM30)

As we conclude, it is clear that these rectors are dedicated to establishing challenging objectives and upholding a vision that embodies a respect for their institutional history as well as a willingness to innovate. While RM12 presents a methodical strategy with precise goals and indicators for the following five years, RM11 talks about a revolutionary vision meant to redefine higher education in Türkiye. A major emphasis on excellence in medical education is highlighted in RM30, whereas RM14 underscores the goal of achieving international standards. When taken as a whole, these declarations highlight a calculated decision to increase their universities' influence and reputation on a worldwide scale by means of meticulous preparation and a commitment to provide top-notch instruction.

6) Positioning of Foundation Universities by price-quality

According to the messages of the Rectors working in the foundation universities in Istanbul, they emphasize the areas in which they are experts in a certain field in the foundation universities that position themselves according to the price-quality strategy. In this positioning strategy, which is similar to uniform positioning strategies, institutions position themselves by emphasizing their best features. In other words, it can be said that the outputs of the organization are positioned according to the relationship between high price and high quality.

RM12, RM14, RM17, RM22 and RM 30 have positioned themselves according to the price-quality strategy by mentioning the firsts in their messages. Below are the messages of the rectors who position themselves in this strategy.

"... Seven main objectives determined as a result of the meetings held with horizontal and vertical participation for the first time in our university..." (RM12)

"We are also proud to be the only university in Türkiye that has received its accreditation as a result of 10 years of work." (RM14)

"... The International Student Exchange Network (ISEP), in which our university is included for the first time in Türkiye, allows our students to study at nearly 200 universities in 25 different countries." (RM17)

"... In 2014, we became the first university in the world to implement Flipped Learning in all its programs." (RM22)

"... the founder of Florence Nightingale Hospital, who was the first to bring cardiovascular surgery to Türkiye..." (RM30)

As we conclude, it is clear that these rectors are committed to elevating their colleges to the forefront of innovation and global education. While RM14 recognizes the university's remarkable accomplishment of gaining accreditation after ten years of work, RM12 emphasizes an organized strategy with seven major objectives and benchmarks defined by inclusive engagement. The International Student Exchange Program (ISEP), which allows students to study abroad at nearly 200 universities in 25 countries, is one way that RM17 highlights its university's global reach. RM22 takes pride in stating that they were the first in the world to adopt Flipped Learning, demonstrating their dedication to innovating in teaching techniques. Furthermore, by highlighting the historical significance of Florence Nightingale Hospital's founder in improving cardiovascular surgery in Turkey, RM30 highlights a tradition of excellence in medical education. The aforementioned remarks demonstrate a comprehensive approach to augment the worldwide influence of their establishments via inventiveness, global integration, and a profound reverence for scholarly and historical accomplishments.

Conclusion

The rapid increase in globalization increases the competition in educational organizations as in every organization. This situation brings with it the originality among the organizations. Otherwise, when each organization does something similar to each other, they will not be able to reveal their different aspects from their competitors. Therefore, the fact that universities make a correct positioning for them to stand out also significantly affects the students, who are the target group. In other words, it is necessary to determine which strategy is most appropriate according to the goals of the institutions and the needs of their target groups.

With this research, it was examined how the rectors of foundation universities in Istanbul/Türkiye positioned their universities. In this context, the Rector's messages on the corporate websites of foundation universities were analysed by discourse analysis method. According to CoHE (2023) data, there are 44 foundation universities in Istanbul. In this research, 30 out of 44 foundation universities were reached because of issues such as outdated or inaccessible websites, as well as the presence of

messages from Deans instead of Rectors. According to the Rector's messages examined, it was determined according to which criteria the foundation universities positioned themselves.

In this study, the six-dimensional positioning strategy developed by Aaker and Shansby (1982:57) and the positioning strategies used by the rectors in their messages were determined. These are named as attribute, application, product user, product class, price/quality and competition. These themed positioning strategies are similar to the studies in the literature in many ways.

These are campus life experience, internationalization, quality in teaching, excellence, academic work done by the school, graduate expectations, location, and price. When the Rector's messages in this study were examined, it was determined that the positioning strategies determined by Kethüda (2021) were like campus life experience, excellence, graduate expectations and price, and Aaker and Shansby's (1982:57) positioning strategies according to product class, application and price/quality.

Lowry and Owens (2001) stated that in terms of the quality education provided by universities; Judson et al. (2006) and Duarte et al. (2010) in terms of students' better understanding of university life such as dormitory facilities, campus facilities, social activities or scholarship opportunities provided by the school; Baker et al. (1996) found that a quality organization, job opportunities provided to graduates with organizational outputs, and educational recognition of the school; Kemp et al. (1998), on the other hand, in addition to these factors, in terms of price and the location of the school; Megan et al. (2011) describe the school's statements about careers and culturally integration; Harsha and Shah (2011), on the other hand, have included in their research that the school has a deep-rooted history and can position itself by revealing the prestige of the school or the aspects of the school that it is an expert in the field of education.

Çatı et al. (2016) found that, in general, foundation universities tend to focus on physical facilities and social and sports activities, rather than concentrating on academic achievement, which is more prominently emphasized by state universities. In addition, both foundation universities and state universities have allocated a large place in the introduction video to the fields of physical facilities and social and sports activities. It has been observed that scholarship and dormitory opportunities, as well as applied education and job opportunities, are more prominent in foundation universities.

One of the positioning strategies, the financial dimension, is like tuition and quality education. When the quality of educational institutions is evaluated in terms of price/quality, it is understood that a quality education should be provided not only financially but also in a quality education in schools. As a result, Aaker and Shansby's (1982) "price/quality" positioning strategy is like high price, high quality, and excellence in teaching. Furthermore, the basis of the positioning strategies "value for money" as defined by Blankson and Kalafatis (2004), "price" as defined by Romaniuk (2001), "price-cost leadership" as defined by Morgan et al. (2003), and "cost and finance" as defined by Diwan and Bodla (2011) are the same. In this research, it was seen that 8 out of 30 Rectors positioned their messages according to price/quality. It has been observed that the universities that are positioned according to price/quality mostly have a deep-rooted history.

Another finding obtained is that 21 out of 30 messages have a positioning strategy according to their characteristics. In this case, when the messages of the Rector in Foundation Universities are examined, they often mentioned their goals for the school in order to impress the students, who are the target group. In this context, the future goals of Foundation Universities are emphasized in the messages of the Rectors. As a result of increasing competition, some Foundation Universities have difficulties in maintaining quality and financial sustainability. Another finding obtained from the research showed that 14 out of 30 messages were positioned according to the competition. In this case, the importance of resource management and strategic planning emerges. For this reason, the positioning strategies of Foundation Universities should be in line with the goals of increasing the quality and accessibility in education.

The positioning strategies of foundation universities are very important in terms of both national and international competition. For this reason, foundation universities have a specific mission and vision to differentiate themselves. The correct use of positioning strategies helps universities attract more students. It enhances their ability to provide high-quality academic and social education and elevates their brand value. For this reason, the positioning strategies of foundation universities are important in terms of national and international competition. These universities have specific mission and vision to differentiate and gain an advantage in the market. If used correctly, positioning strategies can attract more students to universities. These strategies can enhance universities' reputation by improving their ability to provide high-quality academic and social education and by elevating their brand value. For this reason, the correct selection and implementation of the positioning strategies of foundation universities is an important component affecting the success of organizations.

Correctly made positioning strategies also positively affect the image of university organizations. In this context, the Rector's messages, which are one of the channels showing the positioning strategies used by foundation universities in Türkiye, were examined by discourse analysis methods.

As a result, universities that make the right positioning can easily influence the students who are their target group than their other competitors, and graduate students who have organizational outputs represent their universities better in the future with the positioning they have adopted in their education life. Although positioning strategies are classified by different names by many researchers, the strategies have similar aspects. These similarities can be expressed as follows. Positioning, considering the characteristics of a particular group or subset, can be used as a positioning strategy for a specific group (Florek & Janiszewska, 2007: 111). An example of this category is the positioning of students studying in a particular field according to their expectations. Meeting the specific needs of the target group is the focus of this approach. In this respect, it can be said that it is similar to the positioning strategy according to attributes.

According to the various characteristics of the target group, a positioning strategy for different groups includes various positionings. For example, different approaches can be used to communicate with students of different age groups. The needs of specific subgroups are the focus of this approach. Positioning according to the common characteristics of the different targeted groups is known as the associated positioning strategy. This strategy allows an organization to position itself by focusing on its areas of expertise or strengths in a particular area. Therefore, it can be said that it is similar to positioning relative to the user. In other words, the different characteristics of the target group are considered by the positioning strategy according to different groups and shape the marketing and communication strategies. For example, the needs and preferences that differ according to age groups are very important in determining the communication strategies of institutions. A more classic and reliable image may come to the fore when appealing to the mature age group, but a dynamic and innovative approach may be preferred when addressing young students. In keeping with the diversity of the target group, this approach offers customized solutions for each group. However, the associated positioning strategy highlights a company's strengths or expertise in a particular area. This strategy aims to build stronger connections with customers by shaping our company's highlights according to a specific target group. In the light of the findings obtained from the research, future research on the positioning strategies of foundation universities may provide important information to increase the competitiveness of these universities and maintain their long-term success. Some suggestions for research in these areas are given below.

This research is limited to the messages of the Rector of the foundation universities in Istanbul. Based on this, a more comprehensive study can be made on how state and foundation universities position themselves. According to the findings of the research, according to the data obtained, the least used positioning strategy is the positioning strategy according to the user. In other words, it has been observed that 6 out of 30 universities have a positioning strategy according to the user. Research can be done on this. Another suggestion for researchers is to examine the effects of universities that use all or at least one of the positioning strategies on the target group.

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