



23 Years of Research on Market Positioning: A Future Research Agenda

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Abstrak

Pada tingkatan praktis, penentuan posisi pasar sangat penting untuk mencapai keunggulan kompetitif, dan dengan demikian keberhasilan usaha baru dan wirausahawan membutuhkan wawasan yang lebih relevan untuk membantu mereka mendapatkan pijakan di pasar baru atau yang sudah ada. Tujuan dari artikel ini adalah untuk menganalisis dan menilai dengan cermat karya tulis yang ada saat ini mengenai tindakan strategis dalam memposisikan produk atau merek di pasar, dengan demikian secara kritis menilai kembali dan mengevaluasi kembali gagasan mendasar tentang positioning dan pada akhirnya menetapkan definisi yang lebih menyeluruh dari sudut pandang abstrak dan teoritis. Dalam artikel ini, penulis ingin mengeksplorasi penelitian terdahulu yang berkaitan dengan positioning pasar di database Scopus dengan menggunakan kata kunci "*positioning marketing*", "*marketing positioning*", "*positioning*", dan "*strategic positioning*" dari tahun 2000-2023 (23 tahun) dengan menggunakan kriteria "*exclude and include*", dan diperoleh total 140 artikel. Setelah dianalisis, tinjauan literatur mengungkapkan bahwa tidak ada definisi yang koheren untuk positioning dan tidak ada kesepakatan umum di antara para ahli dan praktisi pemasaran tentang arti yang tepat dari konsep tersebut. Oleh karena itu, sebuah definisi komprehensif tentang *positioning* yang mencakup lima perspektif *positioning* yang mendasari (persaingan, kesenjangan/pikiran kosong, persepsi konsumen, diferensiasi, dan keunggulan) disarankan.

Kata Kunci: Pemosisian Pasar, Strategi Pemosisian, Analisis Bibliometrik.

Abstract

On a practical level, market positioning is critical to achieving competitive advantage, and thus the success of new ventures and entrepreneurs needs more relevant insights to help them gain a foothold in new or existing markets. The purpose of this paper is to carefully analyze and assess the current body of written work regarding the strategic act of positioning a product or brand in the market, thereby critically reassessing and re-evaluating the fundamental notion of positioning and ultimately establishing a more all-encompassing and thorough definition from an abstract and theoretical point of view. In this paper, the authors would like to explore past research



related to market positioning in the Scopus database using the keywords “positioning marketing”, “marketing positioning”, “positioning”, and “strategic positioning” from 2000–2023 (23 years) using the criteria of “exclude and include,” and a total of 140 articles were obtained. Once analyzed, the literature review revealed that there is no coherent definition for positioning and that there is no common agreement among marketing experts and practitioners on the precise meaning of the concept. Therefore, a comprehensive definition of positioning covering the five underlying positioning perspectives (competition, gap/empty mind, consumer perception, differentiation, and advantage) is suggested.

Keywords: *Market Positioning, Positioning Strategy, Bibliometric Analysis.*

Introduction

The increasing growth of research related to ‘positioning’ each year is interesting to examine. Exploration of the concept of positioning has been thoroughly examined in global marketing and branding research (Saqib, 2021), including positioning of personal brands (Shafiee et al., 2020), sports brands (Lee et al., 2018), green brands (Wang, 2017), hotel brands (Hu & Trivedi, 2020) and city brands (Larsen, 2018), as well as in B2B contexts (Panda et al., 2019). Since the first article published by Ries and Trout (1972) “Positioning cuts through chaos in marketplace” many industries have failed to ‘campaign’ their products to consumers. Furthermore, today the industry is required not only to promote their products or services to consumers but how to make the product or service enter the minds of consumers. Experts and practitioners consider positioning as a key marketing concept (Aaker, 1996; Hooley et al., 2020; Kapferer, 2008; Keller, 2012; Kotler & Keller, 2016; Renton et al., 2015; Ries & Trout, 2001; Riezebos & Van der Grinten, 2012; Urde & Koch, 2014). Companies strive to achieve competitiveness in the market by differentiating themselves from competitors and gaining a favorable position in customer perception through strategic positioning. In accordance with the definition proposed by Urde and Koch, derived from related literature, positioning is considered as “a managerial procedure aimed at establishing new market positions and strengthening or changing existing ones”. The concept of positioning is particularly relevant in an increasingly competitive market landscape and a saturated market and “over-communicating society” characterized by low attention spans (Ries & Trout, 2001). As the concept of positioning includes elements of strategy, marketing and branding, there are different definitions and theoretical approaches (Urde & Koch, 2014). Although there is a growing body of literature (Saqib, 2021), research on positioning focuses primarily on large companies and brands. On a pragmatic level, the establishment of a strategic position is crucial in achieving a competitive advantage (Renton et al., 2015). Consequently, it becomes an important factor in the triumph of new business endeavors where entrepreneurs require further related observations to facilitate their establishment in nascent or pre-existing markets. In this paper, the authors would like to explore past research related to positioning in the Scopus database using the keywords “marketing positioning”, “marketing positioning”, “positioning”,

and “strategic positioning” from 2000-2023 (23 years) using the “exclude and include” criteria. The search results obtained data from as many as 140 articles. The collected article data was then analyzed using bibliometric analysis using Vos Viewer software version 1.6.19. 1.2. This research answers the question about what are the leading perspectives in the literature in terms of influential journals, authors, countries, and theoretical foundations, making it worth reading for future research. What are future research suggestions related to positioning? This paper aims to know the development of the concept of positioning, to see the flow of positioning literature, and the leading perspectives in the literature in terms of influential journals, authors, countries, and theoretical foundations, so that it is worth reading for future research, and to know the direction of future research. Some of the benefits resulting from writing this paper include: contributing to some literature in marketing management, especially related to positioning, as a source of reference for future researchers to find out topics that are still relevant to research, and see some journals that have influence, authors, and countries that publish research related to positioning. Hopefully, this paper can be used as a reference in making decisions related to positioning, and how companies make positioning as one of the important strategies to pay attention to.

Positioning has received a lot of attention over the past decade and has emerged as a highly influential marketing management paradigm (Saqib, 2021). It is generally accepted that theoretical, practical, and strategic positioning has become one of the key components in modern marketing management, both from an academic point of view and from a practical or business point of view. Blankson et al. (2014) state that positioning decisions determine the direction of a company's overall marketing strategy and that an effective marketing mix can only be developed after a company makes a distinct positioning strategy. By making the wrong positioning decision, a company may develop a misguided marketing mix and thus head in an undesirable direction. Richarme (2007) argues that marketers should adopt positioning as their fifth “P” and use it along with the other four “P's”. Broadly speaking, it is a high-level “P” that sits on the foundation of the other four “Ps” and at the same time serves as a bridge to corporate strategy. Ries & Trout (1980) recognized positioning as a tool of competitive warfare. Therefore, positioning is an important source of competitive advantage. “Positioning starts with a product”. A piece of merchandise, a service, a company, an institution, or even a person. Perhaps yourself. But positioning is not what you do to a product. Positioning is what you do to the mind of the prospect. That is, you position the product in the mind of the prospect (Ries & Trout, 1980). A key aspect of marketing strategy is developing a value proposition and positioning the company's offerings to target customers. The company finds different needs and consumer groups in the market targets those that it can satisfy in a superior way, and then develops a value proposition and positions its offering so that customers can recognize the distinctive benefits of its offering. By clearly articulating its value proposition and positioning, a company can deliver high customer value and satisfaction, leading to high repeat purchases and ultimately to greater company profitability (Kotler & Keller, 2012). Positioning is the act of planning a company's offering and image to occupy a distinct place in the mind of the target market. The goal is to embed the brand in the minds of consumers to maximize potential benefits for the company. Unlike a value

proposition, which articulates all the benefits and costs of an offering, positioning focuses attention on the key benefits that will give consumers a reason to choose the company's offering. Effective positioning helps direct marketing strategy by clarifying the essence of the brand, identifying the goals consumers want to achieve, and showing how the brand does so in a unique way. Everyone in the organization must understand their position and use it as a context for making decisions. Saqib (2021) in his research entitled "Positioning a literature review", revealed that there are "five" keyword perspectives that are often used by many researchers to define positioning, among them:

Table 1. Core Perspective of Positioning

No.	Core Perspective	Meaning	Frequency of Occurrence
1	Competition	Creating an image for the product that is relatively different from competitors	56
2	Empty mind	Find and fill empty slots in the minds of potential buyers	55
3	Consumer perception	Establishes or evokes a change in the consumer's mind about the offering	34
4	Differentiation	Creating a position that can be differentiated from competitors	19
5	Competitive advantage	Gaining a competitive advantage by implementing value creation strategies that current or potential competitors do not concurrently employ.	5

Research Method

This current investigation embraces a methodical literature review employing a hybrid approach that combines content analysis and bibliometric citation techniques. The content analysis aspect of this review qualitatively assesses the chosen literature to draw out and collect a profound understanding of the substantial content within the articles. Consequently, I systematically encode the textual material that corresponds to our research inquiries into pertinent and manageable data portions. On the other hand, the bibliometric technique constitutes the quantitative facet of this study. Bibliometric analysis is widely recognized as a novel methodological jargon for scrutinizing the literature in the domains of positioning. Despite some researchers harboring a certain level of skepticism regarding the usefulness of bibliometric analysis (Paul & Criado, 2020), its significance in conducting a methodical literature review should not be underestimated. Zupic and Cater (2015) delineate bibliometric analysis as a literature review technique that employs statistical and quantitative analyses of published studies. This methodology serves two primary objectives: performance analysis and science mapping. Performance analysis assesses the research and publication performance of individuals and institutions. Science mapping unveils the structure and dynamics of scientific fields. A pivotal advantage of bibliometric

analysis lies in its potent and efficient quantitative technique for reviewing voluminous studies. It offers a systematic, transparent, and replicable literature review (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017); it guides the researcher toward the most influential works; it maps the research field with minimal subjective bias (Zupic & Čater, 2015); and it provides more objective and reliable analyses. Given the exponential growth of academic studies, bibliometric analysis has notably enhanced the quality of reviews. Moreover, this particular study implemented a cartography analysis or visualization technique to visually portray the progression and advancement of research streams and the intellectual structure over 23 years in the positioning field. Consequently, the integration of content analysis, bibliometric analysis, and visualization techniques presented the optimal approach to address the research questions.

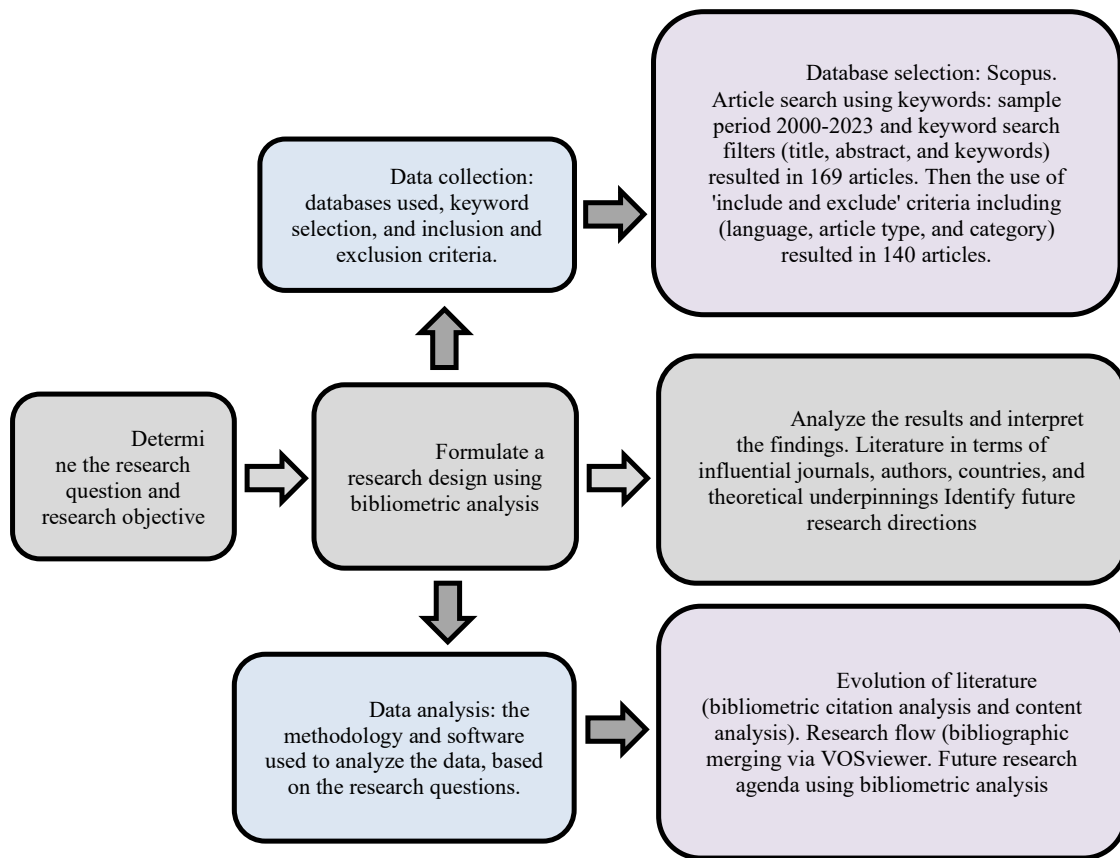


Figure 1. Flowchart of Article Selection

Result and Discussion

Before exploring prominent positions in the relevant literature, it is important to understand the key perspectives that form an important foundation in the placement of influential journals. This sub-material will discuss prominent

authors, countries of origin, as well as the theoretical underpinnings of noteworthy works for future research development.

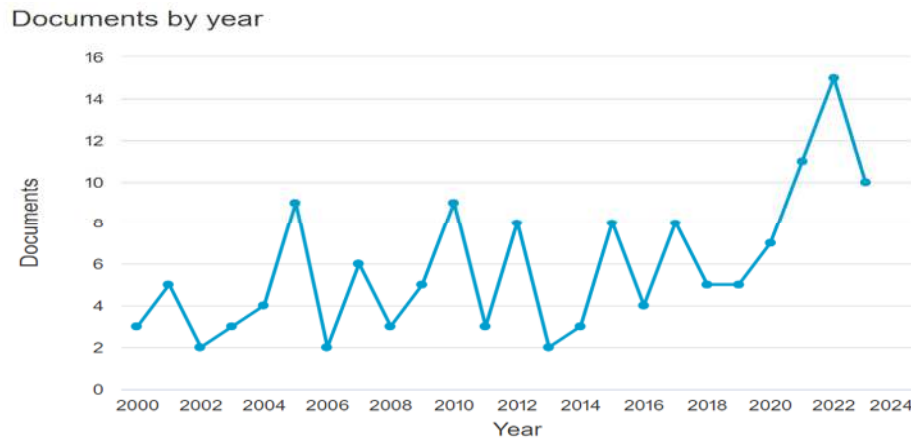


Figure 2. Number of Positioning Article Publications 2000-2023
Source: Scopus data processed, 2023

Research related to market positioning from 2000-2023 tends to fluctuate. The increase in research related to market positioning in 2022 can be caused by several factors, including the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way consumers interact with brands and products. These changes are driving research to understand how consumer behavior is changing, new preferences are emerging, and how brands can adjust their marketing strategies to position themselves more effectively in the changing market. The ongoing development of technology and digitalization has affected the way companies understand and position themselves in the market. Research related to market positioning includes more in-depth data analysis, the use of artificial intelligence (AI) for market mapping, and the use of digital platforms to reach consumers more effectively. Competition in various industries is intensifying, prompting companies to conduct more intensive research related to positioning to differentiate themselves from competitors. Competitive analysis and a deep understanding of the market are key to developing relevant strategies and winning the competition. Emerging market trends such as sustainability, environmental awareness, and shifting consumer values are driving research into how brands and products can be better positioned to respond to evolving consumer demands and preferences. Changes in consumer behavior, technology, and market trends drive research on developing new, more effective marketing strategies. This research may involve better market segmentation, personalization of the consumer experience, or the use of social media platforms and digital marketing.

Table 2. Number of Positioning Publications by Institution

Ranking	Institution	Country	Result
1	University of Pennsylvania	Amerika Serikat	5
2	Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania	Amerika Serikat	5
3	Sejong University	Korea Selatan	5
4	University of Toronto	Amerika Serikat	4
5	University of Strathclyde	Inggris	4
6	University of Nebraska–Lincoln	Amerika Serikat	4
7	Universitat de Barcelona	Spanyol	3
8	National Taiwan University	Taiwan	3
9	City University of New York	Amerika Serikat	3
10	Hong Kong University of Science and Technology	Hong Kong	3
11	Stanford University	Amerika Serikat	3
12	College of Charleston	Amerika Serikat	3

Sources: Scopus data processed, 2023

This categorization was done to check the place of publication for positioning research. Articles related to positioning are published in a total of 12 leading peer-reviewed journals across various periods (as shown in Table 2.1). This figure is very promising for researchers looking to define and select appropriate channels for their positioning manuscripts. Within this group of leading journals, key outlets for positioning research include (the International of Production Economics, European Journal of Marketing, and Marketing Science).

Table 3. The Influential Research on Positioning

Rank	Authors	Topic	Abbreviation	Citations
1	Claveria (2017) <i>Positioning and clustering of the world's top tourist destinations using dimensionality reduction techniques for categorical data</i>	Positioning	JDMM	24
2	Kalafatis (2000) <i>Positioning strategies in business markets</i>	Positioning	JBIM	109
3	Kim (2005) <i>Preference and Positioning Analyses of Overseas Destinations by Mainland Chinese Outbound Pleasure Tourists</i>	Positioning	JTR	150
4	Sajeesh (2010) <i>Positioning and Pricing in a Variety Seeking Market</i>	Positioning and Pricing	MS	43
5	Blankson (2014) <i>Comparisons of media types and congruence</i>	Brand Positioning	JPBM	10

Rank	Authors	Topic	Abbreviation	Citations
	<i>in positioning of service brands</i>			
6	Carmeli (2008) <i>Organisational Crisis-Preparedness: The Importance of Learning from Failures</i>	Organizational Failure	LRP	417
7	Dolnicar (2004) <i>Applying City Perception Analysis (CPA) for Destination Positioning Decisions</i>	Positioning	JTTM	10

Sources: Scopus data processed, 2023

A bibliometric analysis of the data provided shows some important points related to topics of current interest and attention in the academic literature. The topic of positioning is the main focus of several articles in this list, whether it is about positioning tourism destinations, strategies in business markets, analyzing traveler preferences, or positioning service brands. One article focuses on the comparison of media types and suitability in positioning service brands. The publication years of these articles span from 2000 to 2017. This shows that the topic of positioning, be it in a different context or a different focus, is still relevant and in demand over a long enough period. The article on “Organizational Failure” that discusses organizational crises has the highest number of citations (417), indicating that this topic has a significant and important impact on academic literature. The article “Preference and Positioning Analyses of Overseas Destinations by Mainland Chinese Outbound Pleasure Tourists” has a moderately high number of citations (150), indicating a strong interest in traveler preference analysis. These articles were published in leading journals in various fields such as JDMM, JBIM, JTR, MS, JPBM, LRP, and JTTM. The different number of citations indicates the level of influence and relevance of the articles within their respective academic fields. In conclusion, the bibliometric analysis shows that the topic of positioning, be it in the context of business, tourism, or branding, remains a major and relevant focus in the academic literature. Articles with a high number of citations indicate the influence and strong interest of the academic community in the topics and findings discussed in these articles.

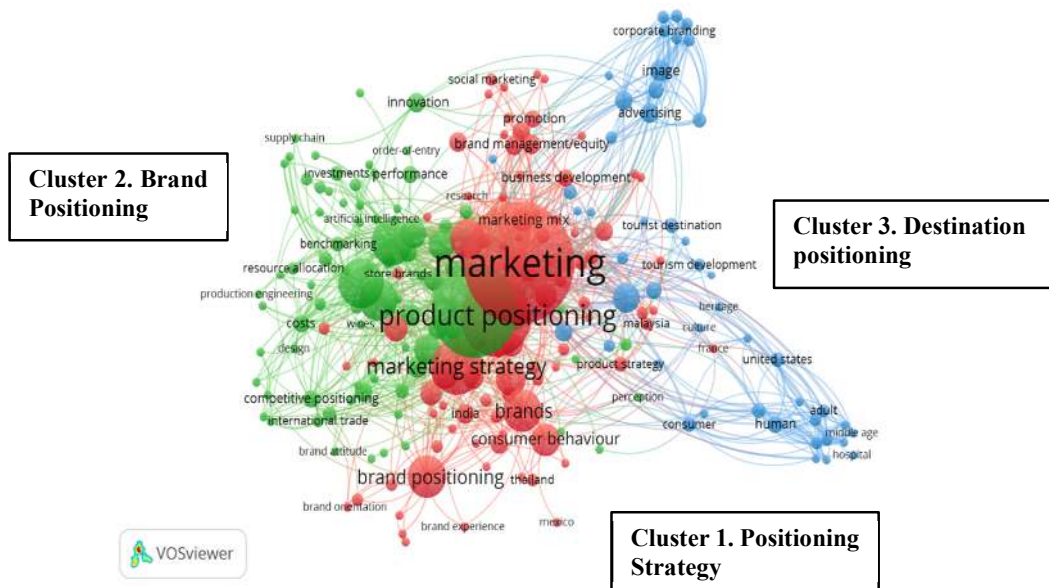


Figure 3. Research Distribution of Positioning Trends 2000-2023
Sources: Scopus data processed, 2023

The results below describe positioning research trends from 2000-2023 taken from Scopus data. Cluster 1. Positioning strategy: in recent years, research on positioning strategy tends to focus on marketing strategies that aim to place a brand or product in the minds of consumers in a unique way and differentiate it from competitors. Research tends to explore the use of market segmentation, differentiation strategies, and the use of technology in the development of positioning strategies. Future research in positioning strategies could take several interesting development directions. Among them are a focus on digital interactions and consumer experiences, multidisciplinary approaches, differentiation strategies, analysis of the influence of global context, sustainability and ethics in strategy, and the use of innovative research methods. In addition, research can explore positioning strategies in the context of specific industries or sectors, integrate aspects of consumer psychology and behavior, and evaluate the implementation and performance of strategies that have been adopted. Overall, this research can provide a deeper understanding of how brands and products can successfully position themselves in the minds of consumers in a changing market.

Cluster 2: brand positioning: in recent years, brand positioning has become an increasingly important topic in marketing literature, focusing on the way a brand defines itself in the minds of consumers to differentiate itself from competitors. Research tends to highlight brand value identification, brand image management, brand integration in marketing strategy, and the influence of technology and social media on brand positioning. A review of future research in the context of brand positioning identifies some important areas to explore: Digital Age and Brand Integration, Consumer Engagement, Utilization of Data and Analytics, Brand Storytelling and Emotion, Brand Differentiation, Brand Positioning on a Global Scale,

Sustainability and Ethics, Influencer and Endorser Influence, Brand Positioning Performance Analysis, and Psychological Factors. In-depth research in these areas will provide a deeper understanding of how brands can build and maintain a strong position in the minds of consumers in a changing market.

Cluster 3. Destination positioning: in recent years, there has been an increased interest in research on destination positioning, which relates to the marketing strategies of specific destinations. Research tends to explore how destinations create image, destination branding, traveler experience, sustainability, and the use of technology in destination marketing. There are possible interconnections and linkages between these research clusters, especially in the context of marketing strategies involving brands, both in the context of products and destinations. Future studies in destination positioning will highlight the influence of technology on destination marketing, sustainability, and traveler experience. Focus will also be given to innovation in destination marketing strategies, adaptation to environmental change, and social responsibility. The use of big data, digital marketing, and diversifying the traveler experience will be important aspects of developing an attractive and sustainable destination. Destination comparison and benchmarking research will also be an important part of improving destination positioning strategies. These studies will provide deep insights into how destinations can manage their image, attract travelers, and stay relevant in the ever-changing tourism environment. A major trend in all clusters involves the influence of technology, especially when it comes to the digitization of marketing and interaction with consumers. A detailed bibliometric analysis can provide a more specialized picture of research trends, the journals that cover these topics the most, as well as comparisons between clusters. This will provide a deeper understanding of the development and focus of research within each domain.

Conclusions

The articles studied cover various aspects of positioning, ranging from tourism destination positioning to marketing strategies and organizational crisis preparedness. This shows the complexity of the topic of positioning in different contexts. The articles had varying numbers of citations. Some articles have a greater influence on the scientific literature compared to others, indicating varying levels of acceptance and relevance among researchers and academics. Some articles focus on specific topics such as tourist preference analysis, pricing strategies, or the use of specific analytical techniques in positioning. This reflects a particular interest in knowledge development in specific areas related to positioning. Contribution to Knowledge: These articles make important contributions to the understanding of positioning in different contexts. From business strategy to branding decisions and crisis management, these articles contribute important insights to the development of theory and practice. Most of the articles analyzed are from different countries, but some key articles are from the United States. This demonstrates the significant contributions of US researchers in the field of positioning across different sectors and contexts. Thus, the main conclusion is that the topic of positioning has significant relevance and impact in various disciplines and industry contexts, with differences in the level of influence and research focus among the articles analyzed.

The United States also plays an important role in contributing to the scholarly literature on positioning.

The development of knowledge on positioning can be enriched by an interdisciplinary approach. Collaboration between various disciplines such as marketing, economics, consumer psychology, anthropology, and communication science can provide a more comprehensive perspective on the concept of positioning. Researchers may consider using more diverse analytical methods, including quantitative and qualitative analysis as well as innovative data analysis techniques. The use of technologies such as machine learning, sentiment analysis, or predictive models can aid in a deeper understanding of consumer preferences and positioning strategies. Conducting more in-depth case studies and field research across different industries and geographical contexts can provide rich insights into successful or unsuccessful positioning strategies and the factors that influence them. Changes in consumer behavior and preferences need to be understood in depth. Research into how technology, social trends, and cultural changes affect consumer perceptions of brands and products, and how that affects positioning, is important. The growth of digital technology has changed the business landscape. Studies on how digitalization affects positioning strategies, including the use of social media, e-commerce, and digital customer experience, are relevant research areas. Focus on sustainability and social responsibility: research on how positioning strategies can be integrated with sustainability and corporate social responsibility principles will be increasingly important. Understanding how consumers react to brands that promote sustainability and social responsibility values is relevant. An understanding of external crises and changes: External changes such as global crises, climate change or political changes also affect positioning. The study of how these changes affect a company's positioning strategy and how best to respond to these changes is an important area of research.

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