



EDUCATIONAL AND COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES TO STRENGTHEN UNIVERSITY POSITIONING IN A COMPETITIVE HIGHER EDUCATION ENVIRONMENT

ESTRATEGIAS EDUCATIVAS Y DE COMUNICACIÓN PARA FORTALECER EL POSICIONAMIENTO UNIVERSITARIO EN UN ENTORNO COMPETITIVO DE EDUCACIÓN SUPERIOR

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ABSTRACT

The article analyzes educational and communication strategies for positioning a university in a competitive higher education environment. The purpose of the study is to identify how stakeholder groups perceive the educational identity of the Russian State University for the Humanities and to determine ways to strengthen its competitiveness. The empirical basis consists of data from an online survey of students, faculty members, representatives of other universities and employers. The questionnaires included closed and open-ended questions designed to reveal associations with the university, its emotional image, strengths and weaknesses of its educational model, expectations regarding the quality of training and graduates' career opportunities. The results show that RSUH is perceived as a humanities university with a distinct academic culture, a supportive educational environment and potential for interdisciplinary development. The study also identifies insufficient visibility of research schools, weak career orientation, limited recognition of research projects and the need to update digital communication. The article defines points of parity and points of difference relevant to educational positioning. It concludes that sustainable university development requires strengthening its own educational identity, integrating humanities knowledge with technology, developing soft skills, individual learning trajectories and preparation for future human-centered professions, rather than copying the strategies of leading institutions.

Keywords:

Higher Education, Educational Positioning, University Communication Strategies, Humanities Education, Stakeholder Perception.

RESUMEN

El artículo analiza las estrategias educativas y de comunicación para posicionar una universidad en un entorno competitivo de educación superior. El objetivo del estudio es identificar cómo los grupos de interés perciben la identidad educativa de la Universidad Estatal Rusa de Humanidades y determinar maneras de fortalecer su competitividad. La base empírica consiste en datos de una encuesta en línea realizada a estudiantes, profesores, representantes de otras universidades y empleadores. Los cuestionarios incluyeron preguntas cerradas y abiertas diseñadas para revelar las asociaciones con la universidad, su imagen emocional, las fortalezas y debilidades de su modelo educativo, las expectativas con respecto a la calidad de la formación y las oportunidades profesionales de los egresados. Los resultados muestran que la RSUH es percibida como una universidad de humanidades con una cultura académica distintiva, un entorno educativo favorable y potencial para el desarrollo interdisciplinario. El estudio también identifica la insuficiente visibilidad de las escuelas de investigación, la débil orientación profesional, el reconocimiento limitado de los proyectos de investigación y la necesidad de actualizar la comunicación digital. El artículo define puntos de paridad y puntos de diferencia relevantes para el posicionamiento educativo. Concluye que el desarrollo sostenible de la universidad requiere fortalecer su propia identidad educativa, integrar el conocimiento humanístico con la tecnología, desarrollar habilidades transversales, trayectorias de aprendizaje individuales y la preparación para futuras profesiones centradas en las personas, en lugar de copiar las estrategias de las instituciones líderes.



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Palabras clave:

Educación Superior, Posicionamiento Educativo, Estrategias de Comunicación Universitaria, Educación en Humanidades, Percepción de los Grupos de Interés.

INTRODUCTION

Modern universities operate in a highly competitive environment where not only the quality of educational programs matters, but also the institution's ability to clearly formulate its identity, communicate its values and build sustainable relationships with different groups of stakeholders. In competing for the attention of applicants, students, faculty members, researchers, employers and partners, a university needs to demonstrate not only academic results, but also a clear educational offer related to the expectations of society and the labor market (Abaev et al., 2025; Altbach et al., 2022). The development of higher education within a university requires the continuous renewal of program content, the introduction of modern educational technologies, support for faculty members and the creation of a learning environment that stimulates students' interest in research, project-based and professional activities (Vasilenko & Zotov, 2020; Vaslavskaya et al., 2026). In addition, effective educational management and institutional quality assurance have become essential components for strengthening universities' competitiveness, promoting continuous improvement processes and aligning educational provision with international accreditation standards (Narimani, 2026; Soria-León, 2025).

In this context, university positioning becomes not only a marketing task, but also a tool of strategic management. It is connected with the development of educational programs, academic reputation, student experience, graduates' career opportunities and the quality of the internal academic environment. Modern digital platforms, interactive learning formats, project laboratories, artificial intelligence tools and learning analytics allow universities not only to improve the quality of education, but also to build a more sustainable connection with students, faculty members and external partners. Likewise, quality management systems supported by accreditation processes contribute to institutional credibility and reinforce stakeholders' confidence in the university's educational mission and long-term development (Narimani, 2026). In higher education, a university brand should be understood as a set of associations, emotions, expectations and perceptions formed by students, graduates, faculty members, employers and the wider public in relation to a particular institution (O'Sullivan et al., 2024).

A university brand includes both tangible and intangible elements. Tangible elements include visual identity, campus architecture, symbols, infrastructure, digital services

and communication channels (Bygstad et al., 2022). Intangible elements include academic reputation, history, cultural identity, values, atmosphere, quality of teaching, trust in educational programs and perceptions of graduates' career prospects (O'Sullivan et al., 2024). Therefore, a university's communication strategy should rely not only on image promotion, but also on real educational practices: teaching quality, accessibility of digital resources, interdisciplinarity, support for individual learning trajectories and the connection between education and students' future professional self-realization (Radaev, 2023).

For humanities universities, this issue is particularly significant. On the one hand, humanities education is often perceived as less applied than technical, engineering and IT fields. On the other hand, it is humanities knowledge that develops critical thinking, communication skills, the ability to interpret meanings, work with values, understand cultural differences, address social conflicts and deal with complex forms of human interaction. In the context of digitalization (Al-Shaer et al., 2025; Sattari-Ardabili & De Hoyos-Guevara, 2026), the development of artificial intelligence and the transformation of professions, these competencies acquire new significance. The use of digital humanities technologies, interdisciplinary educational formats and project-based learning makes it possible to demonstrate the practical value of humanities knowledge and make it more attractive to students, faculty members, employers and academic partners (Mabotha & Ngcamu, 2026).

The Russian State University for the Humanities represents an interesting case for analyzing educational positioning. The university has a stable humanities identity, historical and cultural capital, a wide range of educational programs, strong research areas and a distinctive academic atmosphere. At the same time, it faces challenges typical of universities operating in a competitive higher education environment: the need to strengthen career orientation, digital presence, visibility of research schools and external reputation among employers and academic partners. In this sense, the RSUH case makes it possible to examine how educational and communication strategies can be used to renew the university environment, increase the engagement of students and faculty members, and expand the academic and public influence of a humanities university.

The purpose of the article is to identify the key elements of the educational positioning of the Russian State University for the Humanities and to determine ways to strengthen its competitiveness as a humanities university in a competitive higher education environment.

When a university begins to develop its brand, its administration often appeals to the idea of leadership. However,

a university is a complex institutional structure formed over decades, and its position cannot be changed only through communication decisions. Therefore, university positioning should be analyzed not only through the desired image, but also through the institution's actual role in the higher education system. In this context, positioning should rely on the content of educational programs, teaching quality, the research environment, student experience and the university's ability to respond to social and labor market needs.

Strategic marketing identifies five fundamental positioning strategies: leadership, challenger, differentiation, niche and follower (Gilligan & Wilson, 2009). In higher education, these strategies extend beyond branding approaches and represent alternative ways of defining an institution's educational mission, academic portfolio, research profile and relationships with stakeholders. Universities adopting a leadership strategy rely on established academic prestige and broad public recognition. Challenger institutions seek to distinguish themselves through innovative educational models, disruptive research agendas or alternative approaches to teaching and knowledge transfer. Differentiation emphasizes distinctive academic programs, interdisciplinary research, specialized expertise and unique graduate profiles. Niche positioning focuses on a clearly defined area of specialization, while follower institutions adopt successful practices developed by leading universities and adapt them to their own institutional contexts.

The Russian higher education system illustrates the co-existence of these positioning approaches. Prestigious institutions such as Moscow State University and Saint Petersburg State University exemplify leadership through their historical reputation and academic excellence. Universities such as ITMO and Skoltech pursue challenger strategies by emphasizing technological innovation and cutting-edge research. Other institutions, including RANEPA and Bauman Moscow State Technical University, have differentiated themselves by developing strong identities in public administration and engineering education, respectively. In contrast, universities such as the Russian State University for the Humanities (RSUH) and Plekhanov Russian University of Economics have traditionally followed positioning models that reinforce their established educational identities while selectively incorporating successful practices from more visible institutions.

For many universities outside the leading group, the follower strategy emerges naturally because institutional resources, historical prestige and international visibility are often limited. However, simply replicating educational programs, research initiatives or extracurricular activities from leading universities rarely generates sustainable

competitive advantages. These practices become effective only when they are integrated into the institution's own educational philosophy, academic culture and strategic objectives. Consequently, differentiation has become one of the most effective positioning strategies in contemporary higher education, enabling universities to demonstrate distinctive educational experiences, research capabilities and graduate competencies that respond to evolving societal and labor market demands.

University brand equity can be understood as the value that an institutional brand adds to stakeholders' perceptions of educational quality, academic reputation and graduates' professional opportunities. In higher education, brand equity reflects the accumulated trust generated through teaching excellence, research performance, institutional credibility and the university's capacity to support students throughout their academic and professional development.

According to the classical brand equity model, four core dimensions determine brand value: brand awareness, perceived quality, brand associations and brand loyalty (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2003). Within higher education, brand awareness refers to the recognition of a university among prospective students, parents, employers and academic partners. Perceived quality encompasses evaluations of academic standards, curriculum design, faculty expertise, research capacity and educational services. Brand associations include the values, emotions, symbolic meanings and institutional identity linked to the university, whereas brand loyalty is reflected in the willingness of students, graduates and faculty members to maintain long-term engagement with and recommend the institution (O'Sullivan et al., 2024).

The Russian literature expands this framework by recognizing universities as organizations that simultaneously fulfill educational, scientific, social and service functions (Bakumenko & Shafranskaya, 2025). Consequently, university brand equity is shaped not only by core academic attributes such as reputation, educational quality and research excellence, but also by supporting factors including campus infrastructure, digital services, student support, accommodation, accessibility and institutional communication. These complementary dimensions significantly influence student satisfaction, academic engagement, emotional attachment and institutional loyalty.

Girard & Pinar (2021) further demonstrate that university brand equity operates as an integrated ecosystem in which supporting dimensions reinforce core academic attributes. Their findings highlight dynamic interactions among institutional reputation, perceived quality, learning environment, emotional climate, trust and loyalty, together with complementary services such as libraries,

physical facilities and student amenities. This perspective suggests that successful university positioning requires balancing external reputation with the quality of internal educational experiences, including innovative teaching practices, digital learning environments, effective student support systems and active faculty engagement.

An effective university positioning strategy requires distinguishing between points of parity and points of difference. Points of parity represent the minimum institutional characteristics expected by prospective students, employers and other stakeholders for a university to be considered a credible educational option. In contemporary higher education, these characteristics include high-quality academic programs, effective digital communication, career development services, project-based learning opportunities, access to educational resources and strong connections between education and graduate employability.

Because stakeholder expectations evolve rapidly, points of parity require continuous updating. Services that once differentiated institutions—such as career centers, digital learning platforms, individualized learning pathways and close collaboration with employers—have increasingly become standard components of competitive higher education systems. Nevertheless, universities should avoid relying exclusively on these basic attributes, as excessive similarity reduces institutional distinctiveness and weakens competitive positioning (Azoev, 2024; Vasyukov, 2021).

Points of difference, by contrast, constitute the unique attributes that distinguish one university from its competitors. For humanities institutions, these differentiating characteristics may include interdisciplinary curricula, critical thinking development, the integration of humanities with emerging technologies, preparation for human-centered professions and a distinctive academic culture rooted in social and cultural values.

Effective positioning therefore depends on achieving an appropriate balance between parity and differentiation. While points of parity demonstrate that a university satisfies the fundamental expectations of students and society, points of difference establish a distinctive institutional identity capable of generating sustainable competitive advantage. In the present study, these concepts provide the analytical framework for examining RSUH not merely as an institutional brand, but as a comprehensive educational ecosystem whose competitiveness depends on academic quality, research visibility, student experience and the capacity to connect humanities education with future professional trajectories.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was conducted as a case study based on the Russian State University for the Humanities. The choice of RSUH is due to the fact that the university holds a stable position in the field of humanities education and has a distinct historical and cultural identity, while also facing the need to strengthen its competitiveness in a differentiated higher education system. The RSUH case makes it possible to examine how the educational environment, program content, communication policy and the perceptions of different audiences influence the positioning of a humanities university.

As part of the development of the RSUH positioning concept, an attempt was made to build a visibility strategy for a university that does not hold leading positions in the national higher education system but has potential for differentiation. For RSUH, the challenger strategy does not correspond to the university's current image, since it implies direct opposition to leading institutions. The niche strategy is also difficult to apply, as the university offers a wide range of educational areas, from philosophy, history and philology to media, psychology, management and information technologies. Therefore, the most productive strategy appears to be differentiation based on identifying the university's own educational and research advantages. In an educational context, such a strategy involves not only increasing the university's visibility, but also developing characteristics that are important for students, faculty members, employers and academic partners: the quality of educational programs, the research environment, career support and digital communication.

The empirical part of the study was aimed at identifying the key points of university positioning as perceived by different target audiences. The study used an online survey method. The survey was conducted using the Yandex Forms service, which made it possible to reach different groups of respondents and obtain both quantitative and qualitative data. The study included first-year RSUH students, RSUH faculty members, faculty members and researchers from other universities, representatives of Russian universities, including administrative and managerial staff, students from other universities, and employers. This composition of respondents made it possible to compare the internal perception of the university among participants in the educational process with external assessments from the academic community and the labor market.

A separate questionnaire was developed for each respondent group. The questionnaires included closed and

open-ended questions, perception scales, questions aimed at identifying associations and emotional reactions, as well as questions designed to assess the university's strengths and weaknesses. Special attention was paid not only to image-related characteristics, but also to educational parameters: program quality, learning atmosphere, research reputation, graduates' career prospects and opportunities for student development.

The questionnaires covered the following thematic blocks:

1. reasons for choosing or not choosing RSUH;
2. associations with the university;
3. emotional perception of the university;
4. assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the educational environment;
5. perception of RSUH's place in the higher education system;
6. assessment of the university's research reputation;
7. perceptions of graduates' career prospects;
8. suggestions for developing the university's educational positioning.

The questionnaire for employers additionally assessed their experience of hiring RSUH graduates, perceptions of the quality of their training, professional and personal qualities, as well as awareness of the university's research schools, institutes and research areas. This block made it possible to identify how the university's educational reputation corresponds to employers' expectations and the requirements of the professional environment.

Closed-ended questions were analyzed using descriptive statistics: response frequencies and proportions were calculated. In multiple-choice questions, the number of mentions of each answer option was taken into account. Open-ended responses were analyzed using thematic coding: semantically similar formulations were grouped into categories, after which the most stable associations, assessments and suggestions were identified. The combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis made it possible not only to record the frequency of particular assessments, but also to identify educational expectations, emotional reactions and reputational characteristics associated with the university.

Participation in the survey was voluntary. The data were analyzed in aggregated form. A limitation of the study is its case-study nature: the results reflect perceptions of a particular humanities university and cannot be automatically generalized to all universities operating in a competitive higher education environment. In addition, the study is based on respondents' subjective assessments, which

should be taken into account when interpreting the results. The study did not aim to measure students' actual educational outcomes; its purpose was to analyze perceptions of the educational environment, communication strategies and competitive advantages of the university among different stakeholder groups.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The survey results show that most first-year students highly appreciate the humanities profile of RSUH. Among the reasons for choosing the university, students most often mentioned its reputation, the prestige of the field of study, the availability of an interesting educational program, tuition cost and convenient location (Table 1).

Table 1. Main factors in choosing RSUH among first-year students.

Attraction factor	Number of responses
Availability of an interesting educational program	39
Prestige	29
Tuition cost	28
Opportunities for research work	15
Campus and infrastructure	12
Social life and student events	10
Quality of educational programs	8
Employment opportunities	6
Other, with "friendly atmosphere" mentioned in comments	4

The data show that students' choice of RSUH is primarily associated with the content of educational programs, humanities specialization and the accessibility of education.

Responses to the question about RSUH's place in the educational pyramid showed that students perceive the university as a visible humanities institution that does not belong to the small group of the most prestigious universities but has its own educational appeal. The average score was 2.0. Open-ended comments show that for some students the perception of RSUH changes in a positive direction after they begin their studies.

At the admission stage, RSUH was compared with practice-oriented, economic-humanities and classical universities, which shows that it competes in a broad educational field rather than only within the humanities segment.

Although RSUH was an alternative choice for some students, their perception often improved after entering the university and becoming involved in its educational environment. Students' emotional perception of RSUH is primarily associated with trust, pleasure, a sense of home, calmness, ambition and hope (Table 2).

Table 2: Emotions associated with RSUH among first-year students.

Emotion	Frequency
Trust	23
Pleasure	19
Comfort	17
Ambition	14
Adventure	12
Calmness	11
Traditions	9
Hope	8

The emotional image of RSUH is associated with a safe, supportive and intellectually rich educational environment. Open-ended responses also revealed stable symbolic associations, including "griffin," "library," "museum," "Hogwarts," "humanities world," "kind and interesting teachers," and "freedom of self-expression".

Thus, in students' perception, RSUH appears as a cozy, meaningful and intellectually rich humanities university. Its strengths are atmosphere, faculty members, humanities programs and cultural environment. At the same time, problematic areas include organizational processes, digital infrastructure and the connection between educational programs and career trajectories.

In the questionnaires, RSUH faculty members noted that the university needs to communicate its research and educational achievements more actively. 85% of surveyed faculty members believe that the media coverage of current university projects is insufficient.

Faculty members emphasize that RSUH needs to present its educational and research advantages more clearly within the humanities segment.

In particular, respondents pointed to the need to increase the visibility of strong research schools in psychology, source studies and Russian history.

Faculty members see the mission of RSUH in several areas:

1. training specialists for future human-centered professions, including tutors, coaches, facilitators, practical psychologists, mentors, negotiators and consultants;
2. transmitting humanities and cultural values;
3. providing accessible and high-quality humanities education;
4. creating an intellectual environment for personal development;
5. forming a research and educational humanities center in Russia.

Thus, faculty members emphasize intangible and cultural aspects as the main differences between RSUH and other universities. The most frequently mentioned are tradition and continuity, humanism, tolerance, academic freedom, honesty, respect, historical spirit and intimacy. Among such areas, they mention the Historical and Archival Institute, the Institute of Philology and History, the Vygotsky Institute of Psychology and other divisions.

Among promising areas of research and educational activity, faculty members name digital humanities and artificial intelligence, psychology and cognitive technologies, interdisciplinary humanities projects, studies of the future human being, future forms of employment, psychological health and issues of interaction between countries and civilizations.

These results show that faculty members see RSUH's potential in the development of interdisciplinary areas where humanities expertise is combined with technological, social and anthropological challenges of the present.

Representatives of other universities recognize the high level of humanities education at RSUH, but point to its weak external visibility. Compared with other institutions, RSUH is perceived as a university with a strong humanities tradition, while its international opportunities, research projects and educational achievements remain insufficiently visible to external academic audiences.

Respondents describe RSUH as a respected university with history, but name recognition does not always translate into academic trust or partnership interest. Most respondents found it difficult to identify specific research teams, institutes or research schools associated with the university.

Emotional associations with RSUH are mostly neutral or uncertain, although some respondents mention positive humanities-related images such as art, friendship and tolerance.

In assessing RSUH's position in the educational pyramid, most representatives of other universities do not place it among the leading institutions. Assessments of the competitiveness of its research vary from recognition of a high level to a lack of knowledge about such research.

As competitive advantages of RSUH, representatives of other universities mention a broad range of educational programs, teaching methods, historical reputation and, in some cases, tuition cost.

Responses from students of other universities make it possible to see the external perception of RSUH among a potential audience that considered or could have considered the university during admission.

As the main reasons for not choosing RSUH, respondents named weak reputation, mismatch between educational programs and expectations, as well as certain political and image-related associations. These responses indicate that reputational factors can influence applicants' educational choices no less than program content or tuition cost.

The assessment of the admissions office was generally neutral: respondents did not report a strongly negative experience, but there were no strong positive impressions either. This means that communication with applicants does not yet form a clear educational advantage.

In the educational pyramid, students from other universities most often place RSUH at levels 1 or 2. Emotions associated with the university range from friendliness and traditionalism to irony and distrust. Thus, the external student perception of RSUH is less stable and less positive than the perception of students already studying at the university.

This result is important for the strategy of educational positioning: the university has the potential for positive perception after students become part of its educational environment, but at the stage of university choice its image remains insufficiently strong.

Employers' assessments show that RSUH is generally associated with humanities education, professionalism and fundamental training. 80% of respondents characterized the university positively, using such descriptions as "professional," "humanities-oriented" and "high-quality." However, only 40% had experience hiring RSUH graduates, which indicates a gap between general recognition of the university and practical interaction with its graduates in the labor market.

Overall, in employers' eyes, RSUH is strongly associated with a humanities profile and fundamental education. Positive reviews emphasize the high quality of education in a number of areas, a strong faculty and the university's development potential.

At the same time, some employers point to problems with the relevance of education and insufficient practical orientation. The responses noted that the university is trying to modernize but still lags behind more dynamic educational institutions. For educational positioning, this means that humanities training should be more strongly connected with practical skills, project work and graduates' career trajectories.

When asked about RSUH's place in the educational pyramid, no respondent placed the university at the top of the system. Some employers place RSUH in middle positions, while others place it lower in the educational hierarchy. In

employers' eyes, RSUH is not perceived as an elite university; rather, it is assessed as an institution with a stable humanities reputation but not fully realized potential.

Employers' associative image of RSUH is ambivalent. On the one hand, the university is associated with humanities education, academic tradition, cultural heritage and fundamental knowledge. On the other hand, some respondents perceive it as insufficiently modern and not practice-oriented enough, which reflects a broader stereotype about the limited practical value of humanities education.

The image of an RSUH graduate in employers' eyes is also ambiguous. Employers note good intellectual potential, broad thinking and personal qualities, but these are not sufficient to compensate for gaps in practical skills and applied abilities. About half of the respondents directly or indirectly pointed to deficiencies in training, while not all were able to formulate graduates' strengths.

Employers named a number of universities that they consider the main sources of personnel in their fields. HSE University was mentioned most often and was named as a competitor or reference point by about half of the respondents. Moscow State University and MGIMO were also frequently mentioned, especially in the context of training specialists in international relations, journalism and PR. RUDN University, RANEPA, Plekhanov Russian University of Economics and the Financial University were mentioned by employers from the fields of public administration, economics and business.

A separate block of questions concerned RSUH's research reputation. The results showed that employers can hardly name specific research schools, institutes or research teams associated with the university. Typical responses were "I do not know," "nothing comes to mind," and "difficult to answer." This means that RSUH's research activity is weakly visible to employers and almost does not form part of the university's image in their perception. Only a few responses mentioned the Institute of Mass Media, philological schools and psychological schools.

Despite the weak recognition of RSUH's research areas, employers identified several promising directions for strengthening the university: artificial intelligence and IT in the humanities, digital humanities, the study of social transformations, communication, human resources and the practical value of humanities education. These areas can help connect humanities knowledge with contemporary technological and social challenges.

The survey results show that the main points of differentiation for RSUH should be sought in interdisciplinary educational and research areas that connect humanities knowledge with the challenges of technological, social and professional transformation. These areas include

digital humanities, artificial intelligence in the humanities, psychological health, future employment, intercultural interaction and human-centered technologies.

Employers also emphasize the importance of soft skills: teamwork, responsibility, initiative and communication skills. These qualities belong to the strengths of humanities education and can become an important part of RSUH's educational positioning.

The basis of positioning should be not only communication statements, but also real educational and research practices: international research teams, interdisciplinary programs, individual learning trajectories, soft skills development, projects in digital humanities, psychological health and human-technology interaction.

Based on the study results, the following target points of parity can be formulated for RSUH:

1. a variety of relevant educational programs;
2. an effective career center;
3. strong research schools;
4. an academic culture that supports freedom of thought and students' creative initiative.

The following can be considered points of difference for RSUH:

1. educational programs at the intersection of humanities, social and technological fields;
2. training for future human-centered professions;
3. international interdisciplinary research teams studying the human being, society and future civilizations;
4. a culturally rich educational environment and campuses in central Moscow, perceived by students as "Moscow Hogwarts";
5. individual learning trajectories with an emphasis on the development of soft skills;
6. strong humanities research schools capable of becoming the basis of the university's new educational identity.

Overall, the survey results demonstrate that RSUH is perceived as a comfortable, academically rich and culturally significant university. However, it needs to strengthen career orientation, digital presence and the visibility of its research schools. The development of interdisciplinary programs, project-based and research activities, and cooperation with employers can increase the university's attractiveness and improve its position in the higher education system.

CONCLUSIONS

The study was aimed at analyzing educational and communication strategies for positioning a university in a competitive higher education environment. Based on the case of the Russian State University for the Humanities, the study examined how different stakeholder groups — students, faculty members, representatives of other universities and employers — perceive the university's humanities identity, the quality of its educational environment, its research reputation, graduates' career prospects and its external visibility. This approach made it possible to consider university positioning not only as an image-related issue, but also as a reflection of the content of educational programs, student experience, academic culture and the connection between education and graduates' future professional trajectories.

The RSUH case showed that the university is perceived as an institution with a distinct humanities identity, a cultural atmosphere, a strong academic tradition and significant development potential. For students, RSUH is a comfortable, creative and intellectually rich educational environment; for faculty members, it is a space of academic freedom, humanities values and support for student initiative; for representatives of other universities and employers, it is a well-known but insufficiently visible humanities university in the research, partnership and professional fields. The main challenge identified in the study is the gap between the university's internal educational potential and its external recognition. The need to strengthen digital presence, career orientation, communication with employers, and the promotion of research schools, research projects and interdisciplinary educational programs is especially evident.

The results may also be useful for other humanities universities operating in a competitive higher education environment. Instead of copying the practices of leading institutions, such universities should develop their own educational identity based on strong programs, academic culture, interdisciplinarity, soft skills, individual learning trajectories and the integration of humanities knowledge with modern technologies. Further research may focus on expanding the sample, comparing several humanities universities, analyzing changes in university perception at different stages of study, and assessing the effectiveness of specific educational and communication solutions, including digital platforms, project-based learning, career services and partnerships with employers. This would make it possible to better understand how educational positioning influences applicants' choices, student engagement, graduates' professional success and the university's public impact. The article was prepared within the framework of the RSUH grant "Project-Based Research Teams:

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