

AI-Driven Digital Marketing in Higher Education: A Bibliometric Analysis of College Choice Intention Research, 2022–2026

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ABSTRACT: This study maps the intellectual structure of research on AI-driven digital marketing in higher education and its relationship to college choice intention, where the literatures on AI acceptance and student recruitment have developed separately. Methodology A bibliometric analysis of 430 Scopus-indexed articles (2022–2026) was conducted in VOS viewer. A three-block Boolean search combined digital marketing, artificial intelligence, higher education and college choice constructs, analysed through network, overlay and density visualisations. Findings Output grew from 11 articles in 2022 to 197 in 2025, with 76.28 per cent of the corpus appearing in the final two years. Social Sciences (36.5%) and Computer Science (17.3%) dominate. “Artificial intelligence”, “behavioural intention” and “technology acceptance model” form the conceptual core, whereas enrolment intention, student recruitment and digital trust remain peripheral. China leads output (24.4%), indicating a shift in knowledge production towards Asia and the Middle East. Research limitations Reliance on a single database and on English-language articles may under-represent developments first reported in conference proceedings. Practical implications: Institutions should evaluate chatbots, generative content and virtual tours by their effect on perceived authenticity and trust rather than engagement alone. This is the first study to map digital promotion, artificial intelligence and college choice intention within a single corpus covering the generative AI era, proposing a four-layer framework linking technology quality, information quality, psychological response and behavioural outcomes.

KEYWORDS: AI-driven marketing, artificial intelligence in education, bibliometric analysis, digital trust, enrolment intention, higher education marketing.

INTRODUCTION

Competition among higher education institutions has intensified under three simultaneous pressures: shifting demographics within the college-age population, a proliferation of institutional options, and a profound change in how prospective students search for and evaluate educational information. Welch (Welch, 2024) argues that demographic pressure poses a direct threat to the viability of private universities, while Hemsley (2006) identify global competition as the force driving universities towards a more systematic, data-informed marketing orientation. Against this backdrop, university promotion has evolved well beyond the dissemination of information through conventional advertising. It has become a strategic process concerned with building value propositions, institutional differentiation, reputation, and durable relationships with prospective students (Kotler et al., 2021). Digitalization has extended that process fundamentally, since online platforms no longer serve merely as communication channels but actively shape markets, evaluation mechanisms, and the way educational value is perceived by the public (Williamson, 2020). Artificial intelligence has deepened the transformation further, enabling message personalization at scale, automation of recruitment processes, behavioral prediction, and responsive interaction through chatbots, generative content, and immersive augmented reality experiences (Dwivedi et al., 2023; Kshetri et al., 2024). The convergence of social media, influencer marketing, virtual campus tours, and AI has altered how prospective students particularly Generation Z form perceptions, weigh alternatives, and develop the intention to choose one institution over another.

Empirical work suggests that digital promotional instruments rarely exert a direct effect. Their influence operates instead through a sequence of mechanisms involving trust, brand image, and social influence. Social media marketing shapes enrolment intention via brand engagement, brand awareness, and institutional image (Pasaribu & Achmadi, 2024), while electronic word-of-mouth and online recommendations play a substantial role in how prospective students evaluate institutional alternatives (Ismail et al., 2023). Trust functions as a critical mediating construct, because prospective students must be convinced of an institution's

competence, integrity, and benevolence before committing to a high-stakes enrolment decision (Broadhurst, 2022; Mcknight & Chervany, 2001). The college choice models developed by Chapman (2016) establish that enrolment is a staged process shaped by individual, institutional, and environmental factors a complexity now further inflected by digital experience and interaction. The Technology Acceptance Model adds that acceptance of digital platforms depends on perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use (Davis, 2014), while digital literacy determines a prospective student's capacity to evaluate algorithmically generated information critically (Tilson, 2025). In Indonesia, recruitment pressure on private higher education institutions has grown increasingly acute as institutional competition intensifies, making digital marketing capability a progressively more strategic determinant of competitiveness (Kusumawati, 2019; Sediyanoro, 2025).

Although research on digital marketing, AI adoption, and college choice has each developed rapidly in its own right, the resulting literature remains fragmented and offers no comprehensive account of the field's intellectual structure, collaborative patterns, or conceptual evolution in aggregate. Five significant gaps can be identified. The first is conceptual: no existing study maps digital promotional instruments, AI technologies, and college choice outcomes together within a single integrated framework. The second is temporal: the emergence of generative AI and large language models since 2022 has altered terminology, research objects, and disciplinary orientation at a pace that reviews covering earlier periods could not adequately capture (Dwivedi et al., 2023). The third is methodology: prior studies typically test relationships between variables in isolation, without mapping national collaboration structures, institutional productivity, and keyword evolution within a single comprehensive quantitative-descriptive design. The fourth is geographical: knowledge production tends to concentrate in particular regions, while Asian and developing-country contexts face distinct recruitment pressures, market structures, and digital capacities (Sompal & Lad, 2024; Welch, 2024). The fifth concerns trust and literacy: AI's capacity to personalize messages does not automatically translate into choice intention if prospective students doubt the authenticity of the content or lack the digital literacy required to assess algorithmically generated information (Balcioğlu, 2026; Bosompim et al., 2026; Obadã et al., 2026). Taking together, this fragmentation and these layered gaps point to an urgent need for bibliometric mapping capable of documenting the structure, actors, and frontiers of the field in a measurable and replicable manner.

This study responds to those gaps through two complementary claims to originality. The first concerns domain: to our knowledge, this is the first study to map three constructs that have hitherto developed in parallel digital promotional instruments, artificial intelligence technologies, and college choice intention within a single integrated bibliometric corpus. The second concerns period: the focus on 2022 to 2026 captures specifically the era of generative AI and large language models, which earlier bibliometric studies have not documented comprehensively. On this basis, the study asks how publication output, productivity and collaboration patterns, conceptual structure, thematic density, and temporal evolution have developed in research on digital promotion and artificial intelligence in the formation of college choice intention. The objective is to answer that question through a bibliometric analysis of 430 English-language, Scopus-indexed journal articles published between 2022 and 2026 and extracted on 29 July 2026, with VOSviewer serving as the principal science mapping instrument. Four specific objectives follow from this aim: (1) to measure annual publication growth and disciplinary distribution across the generative AI period; (2) to map the conceptual structure of the field through keyword co-occurrence analysis and identify its core constructs; (3) to examine thematic density and temporal keyword evolution in order to distinguish established themes from emerging research frontiers; and (4) to analyze geographic and institutional productivity together with the structure of international collaboration networks.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a quantitative-descriptive bibliometric design to map the development, conceptual structure, productivity, and scholarly collaboration patterns of research on digital promotion and artificial intelligence in the formation of college choice intentions. Bibliometric analysis was chosen because it permits the measurement of publication performance alongside the mapping of relationships between knowledge elements through the metadata of scholarly documents (Donthu et al., 2021). The full document selection procedure is summarized in Figure 1.

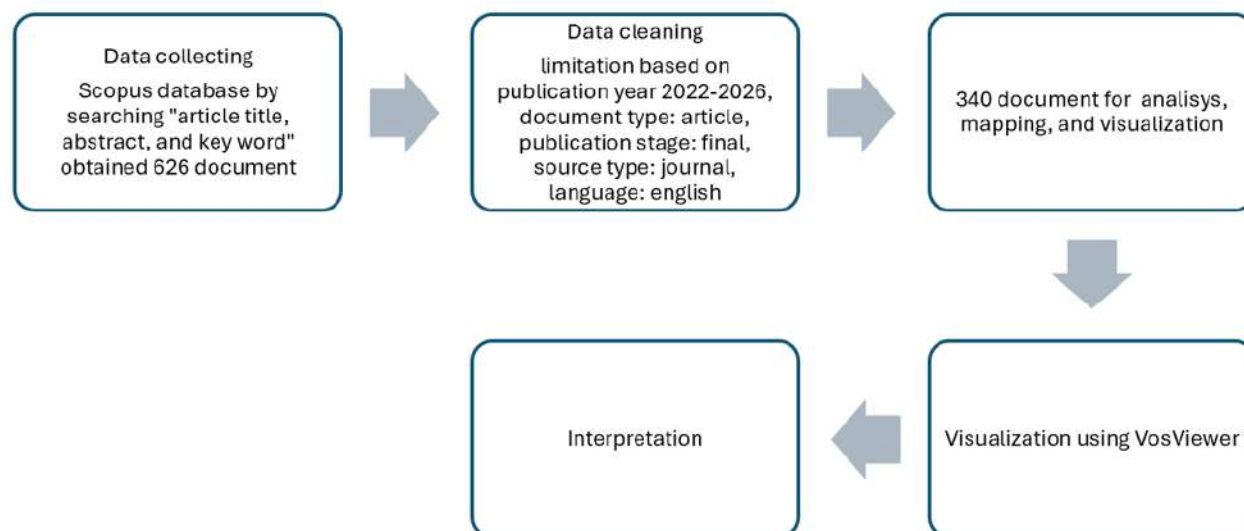


Figure 1. Flowchart of data collection on AI-driven digital marketing

a. Data collection

Data were retrieved on 29 July 2026 for publications appearing between 2022 and 2026. The search strategy was constructed from three concept blocks joined by the AND operator, covering digital marketing, higher education, and choice intention respectively. The first block comprised the terms “digital marketing,” “social media marketing,” “online marketing,” “artificial intelligence,” “AI-driven,” “AI-generated content,” “digital content,” “influencer marketing,” “influencer credibility,” “immersive,” “metaverse,” “virtual tour,” “augmented reality,” “digital trust,” “online trust,” and “digital literacy.” The second block comprised “higher education,” “universities,” “university choice,” “college choice,” “university marketing,” “campus marketing,” “student recruitment,” “prospective student*,” “tertiary education,” and “university admission*.” The third comprised “choice intention,” “enrollment intention,” “enrolment intention,” “college choice,” “university choice,” “institution* choice,” “student decision,” “behavioral intention,” “behavioral intention,” “intention to enroll,” “intention to enroll,” and “university selection.”

b. Data cleaning

Search results were then restricted using the criteria PUBYEAR > 2021 AND PUBYEAR < 2027, source type limited to journals, publication stage limited to final, document type limited to articles, and language limited to English. After all criteria were applied, 430 articles remained as the final corpus. The primary unit of analysis is the journal article; secondary units comprise authors, institutions, countries, subject areas, publication years, and keywords. Data for 2026 are treated as partial, since retrieval took place on 29 July 2026, and the publication count for that year is therefore not compared directly with full preceding years.

c. Data visualisation

Metadata were exported from Scopus in CSV format, including citation information, bibliographic details, abstracts, author keywords, index keywords, affiliations, and author countries, and were then analyzed in VOS viewer. Prior to mapping, the dataset was checked for duplication, metadata completeness, consistency of author names, and uniformity of affiliations, since the integrity of raw data determines the validity of all bibliometric output (Donthu et al., 2021). Keyword normalization was carried out through a thesaurus file that merged variant terms referring to the same concept. Co-occurrence analysis used full counting with a minimum threshold of five occurrences per keyword, association strength normalization, and the clustering algorithm implemented in VOS viewer, so that the mapping procedure can be replicated.

RESULTS

Publication growth and intellectual transformation, 2022–2026

The publication trend presented in Table 1 shows that research on digital promotion, artificial intelligence, and college choice intention grew very rapidly between 2022 and 2025. Output rose from 11 articles in 2022 to 197 in 2025, at successive annual rates of 163.64, 113.79, and 217.74 %. With 76.28 % of the corpus published in the final two years alone, the knowledge landscape mapped here is highly current and still very much in formation. The 131 articles recorded for 2026 must be read as partial data up to 29 July 2026 and therefore do not represent a decline in scholarly productivity. Taken together, these figures indicate that the topic has moved from a relatively marginal domain to an arena of broad academic attention within a remarkably short span, and that the field is undergoing expansion rather than approaching publication stability.

Table 1. Annual publication growth

Year	Articles	Share of dataset	Annual growth
2022	11	2.56%	–
2023	29	6.74%	163.64%
2024	62	14.42%	113.79%
2025	197	45.81%	217.74%
2026*	131	30.47%	–33.50%
Total	430	100.00%	–

**Data for 2026 cover publications up to 29 July 2026 only*

This acceleration is inseparable from the emergence and spread of generative AI, ChatGPT, and large language models, which have simultaneously changed how institutions produce promotional content, how users interact with educational information, and how researchers frame their questions. Dwivedi et al. (2023) note that generative AI expands capacity for personalization, automation, and interaction while raising problems of credibility, bias, and trust that open new research agendas. Davenport et al. (2024) position AI as an instrument enabling organizations universities included to personalize recruitment at scale. The rise in publication output thus reflects a need to understand the behavioral, ethical, institutional, and strategic implications of these technologies concurrently.

Rapid quantitative growth nevertheless carries methodological consequences. Fields dominated by recent publications tend to exhibit unstable terminology, so that a single phenomenon may be dispersed across several distinct nodes in a co-occurrence map. The presence of closely related but incompletely normalized terms “generative AI” alongside “generative artificial intelligence,” or “large language model” alongside “large language models” suggests that the size and position of certain themes may understate their substantive influence. Donhtu (2021) emphasize that the quality of a bibliometric map depends on metadata integrity and classification consistency, and terminological acceleration must therefore be read alongside the shifting scientific vocabulary that follows technological change. Conceptual maturity in this field cannot, in short, be assessed from publication volume alone; it must be traced through the structure of relationships between concepts and the temporal evolution of themes, as the following sections set out.

Disciplinary composition and conceptual structure

The disciplinary distribution presented in Figure 2 confirms the interdisciplinary character of the field, although publications concentrate principally within the social sciences and technology clusters. Social Sciences constitutes the largest category at 36.5 %, followed by Computer Science at 17.3 %, Psychology at 9.7 %, Business, Management and Accounting at 6.8 %, and Arts and Humanities at 6.0 %. The share held by Psychology is consistent with the prominence of constructs such as behavioral intention, acceptance, attitude, self-efficacy, perception, and social influence within the keyword network, while the presence of the business and humanities categories indicates that higher education digital marketing is examined not only as a technological application but also in relation to organizational strategy, brand communication, institutional narrative, and user experience

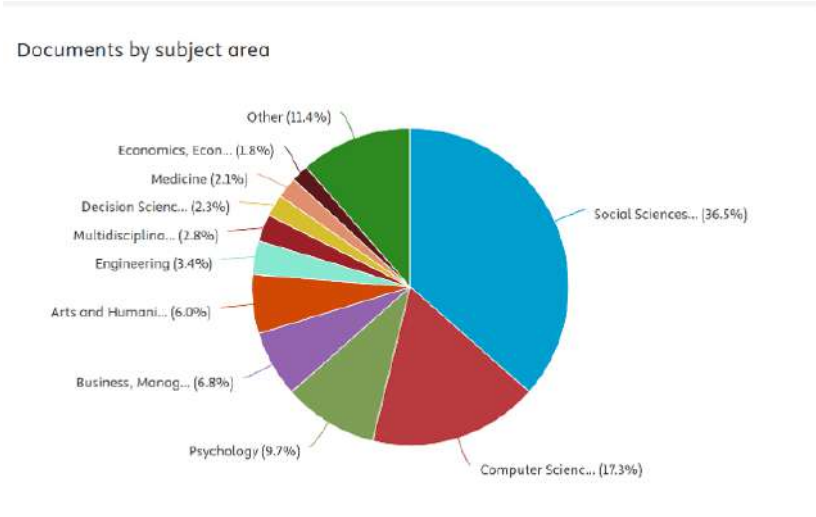


Figure 2. Composition of publications by subject area

This composition demonstrates that AI-based higher education promotion cannot be adequately explained from within any single discipline. A technological perspective is required to understand the functions and capabilities of AI; psychology accounts for user responses to systems; marketing explains the construction of value propositions and conversion; and educational studies supply the institutional context that distinguishes the choice of a university from ordinary consumption decisions. Williamson (2020) positions digital platforms as constitutive of value formation and educational governance rather than as mere channels for delivering messages, which makes a multidisciplinary perspective an analytical prerequisite rather than a supplement.

The keyword co-occurrence network in Figure 3 reveals a dense conceptual structure with “artificial intelligence” as the largest and most central node, indicating that AI serves as the core concept linking most themes within the corpus. “Behavioral intention,” “technology acceptance model,” “ChatGPT,” “students,” and “generative artificial intelligence” occupy the surrounding high-density region. Terms that directly denote marketing and recruitment “student recruitment,” “university marketing,” “prospective students,” and “enrolment intention” do not appear as dominant nodes.

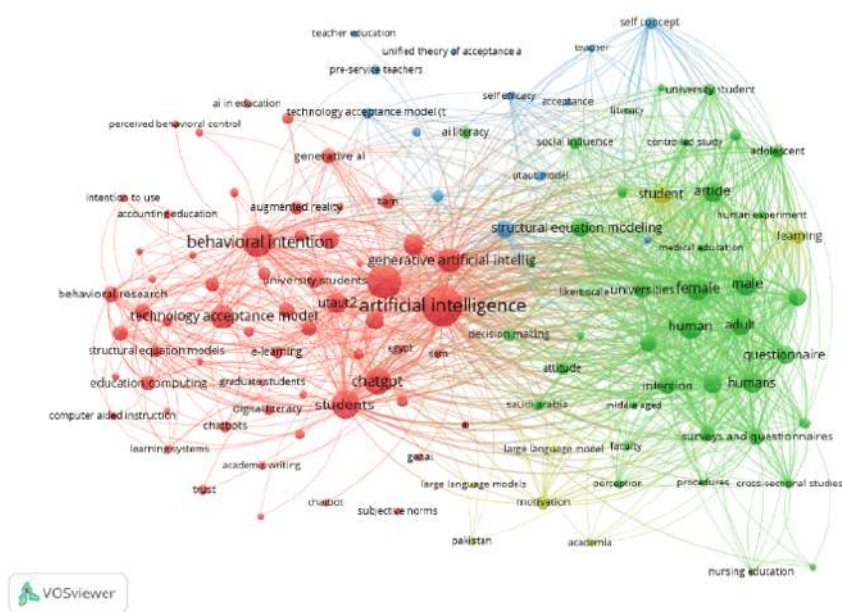


Figure 3. Keyword co-occurrence network

That “trust” appears within the network without occupying a central position identifies what may be its most theoretically significant gap. In AI-based higher education promotion, trust performs a function more fundamental than a favorable disposition towards using a system. McKnight and Chervany (2001) characterize digital trust as encompassing beliefs about the competence, integrity, and benevolence of the party with whom one interacts online. All three dimensions become acutely relevant when prospective students encounter AI-generated content that cannot always be distinguished from human-authored material. Dwivedi et al. (2023) stress that hallucination, bias, and opacity constitute serious risks in the use of generative AI, which implies that the effectiveness of AI-based promotional content should be assessed not only through user engagement but also through perceptions of authenticity, accuracy, and transparency.

Trust formation also operates through the transfer of trust from familiar sources to the institution under evaluation. Balcioglu (2026) explains that trust can migrate from a platform, influencer, alumnus, or social network to a newly encountered entity associated with them. Pan (2025) show that influencer effectiveness depends on expertise, trustworthiness, attractiveness, and message value. A chatbot that responds quickly but inaccurately may therefore damage trust, while an immersive virtual tour that misrepresents actual conditions creates an expectation gap with negative consequences for enrolment decisions. Conversely, transparent AI use that remains consistent with the institution’s actual character can strengthen perceptions of competence and service orientation.

The overlay visualization in Figure 5 places average publication years within a range of approximately 2024.6 to 2025.6, confirming that almost every term in the network is highly recent. Purple and blue tones mark relatively earlier themes, while green through yellow tones mark more recent ones. Keywords such as “adolescent,” “self-concept,” “motivation,” and several generative AI terms are comparatively new, whereas acceptance model terminology sits at a slightly earlier position.

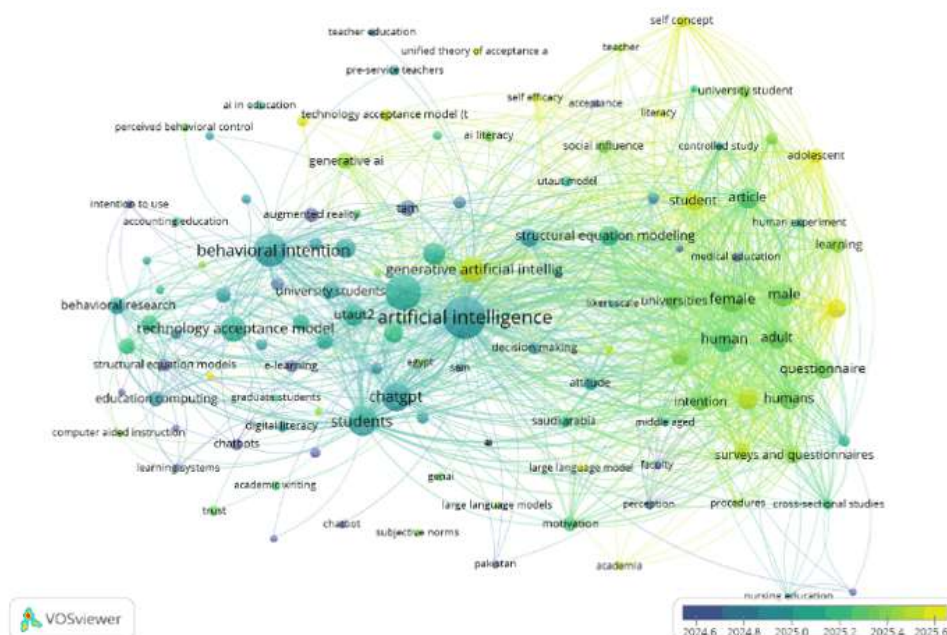


Figure 5 Temporal evolution of keywords

Read together, the density and overlay maps show a field moving from general questions about technology acceptance towards more specific psychological and ethical consequences of AI use, applied to more sharply defined user groups. The most strategically important frontier lies in the still-sparse connections between AI and constructs of institutional decision-making “enrolment intention,” “university choice,” “prospective students,” “institutional image,” and “influencer credibility.” These will need to occupy a stronger position in subsequent research if the field is to shift from studying AI acceptance towards studying the effectiveness of AI in shaping the prospective student’s decision journey.

Geographic and institutional productivity patterns

The geographical distribution in Figure 6 shows China as the most productive country with approximately 105 documents, equivalent to roughly 24.4 % of the 430-article corpus, followed by Saudi Arabia (55), Malaysia (42), India (32), Indonesia (27), and the United States (26). Document counts by country cannot be summed to obtain the corpus total, since a single article may be counted under more than one country where it results from international collaboration.

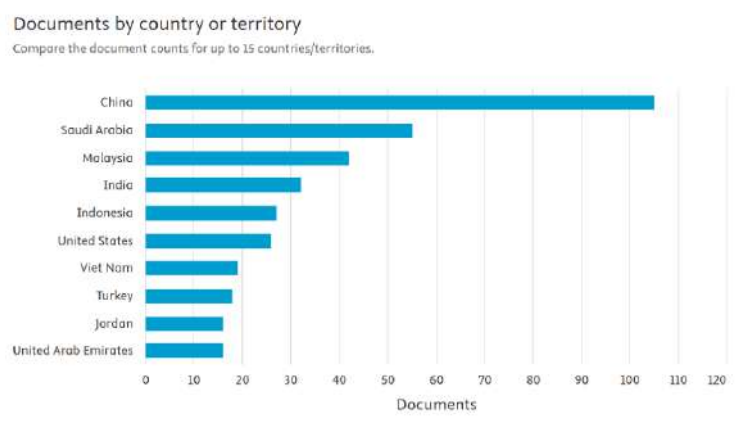


Figure 6. Publication productivity by country or region.

This pattern marks a notable shift: a higher education marketing literature once associated largely with Anglo-Saxon countries is now dominated by Asia and the Middle East. Hemsley-Brown (2006) describe the development of higher education marketing in the context of globalization and inter-institutional competition, but these findings indicate that the center of knowledge production has moved towards regions undergoing digital expansion, recruitment pressure, and growth in AI adoption. Welch (Welch, 2024) identifies demographic change as a strategic pressure on higher education institutions, particularly where the pool of prospective students may contract while competition intensifies a condition highly pertinent to Southeast Asia and the Middle East. Indonesia's position among the top five contributors suggests that the national context possesses a research base sufficiently robust to support further study.

The collaboration map in Figure 7 comprises five principal color clusters. Node size reflects the magnitude of a country's contribution, lines denote co-authorship relationships, and line thickness represents the intensity of collaborative ties. China appears as the largest node within the blue cluster and as one of the main hubs of the global network, while Saudi Arabia occupies a comparably central position within the yellow cluster. China, Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, the United States, and India together act as cross-cluster hubs.

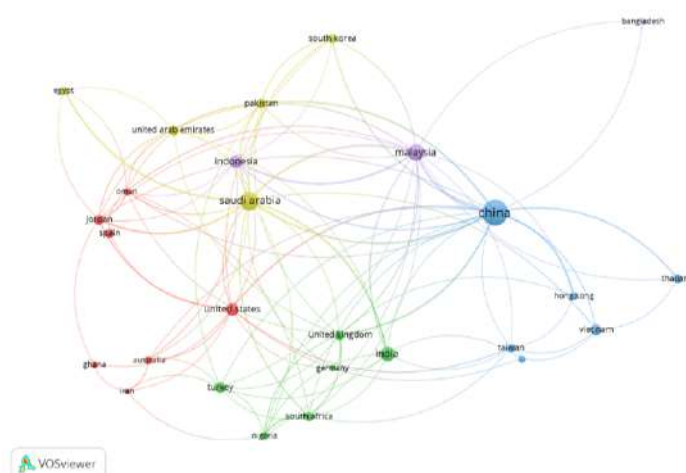


Figure 7. International co-authorship network

The structure demonstrates a genuine international dimension, yet collaboration remains unevenly distributed because tie strength is still concentrated among those principal hubs. Bangladesh, together with several African and European countries, connects through comparatively limited pathways. Regional dominance carries a risk of contextual bias if findings on AI acceptance among enrolled students are generalized to the choice processes of prospective students across different national settings, since culture, technology penetration, the structure of educational costs, parental involvement, and admissions systems may each shape the mechanisms of intention differently. Cross-national collaboration therefore needs to progress beyond co-authorship towards comparative designs that test measurement invariance and differences in path relationships across educational systems.

At institutional level, Figure 8 shows that research productivity is distributed across several universities rather than concentrated in any one institution. King Faisal University ranks first with 10 documents, followed by King Saud University, Beijing Normal University, and the University of Ha'il with seven each. The presence of universities from Saudi Arabia, China, Jordan, Malaysia, the United Kingdom, and Ghana demonstrates the geographical diversity of leading affiliations, with three Saudi Arabian institutions appearing among the ten most productive.

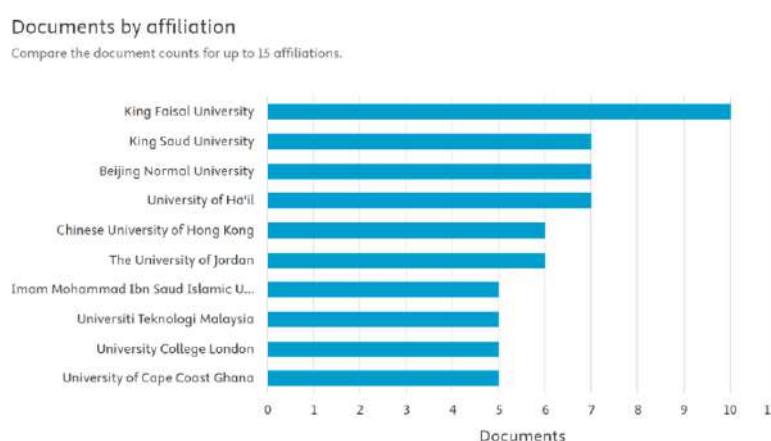


Figure 8. Publication productivity by affiliation

The narrow margin between leading institutions indicates that knowledge production is not monopolized by a single university, but it also suggests that no dominant theoretical centre or school of thought has yet emerged. This carries a risk of duplication, with numerous research groups testing TAM, UTAUT, or TPB on different student samples without achieving adequate conceptual integration. Fragmentation of institutional names at departmental and faculty level within the metadata further complicates interpretation of the inter-institutional collaboration network, as Donthu (2021) emphasize. Strengthening institutional collaboration should therefore aim not merely at raising publication counts but at building prospective student panels, multi-campus longitudinal designs, and cross-national comparative frameworks capable of producing stronger theoretical accumulation.

Theoretical contributions and future research

Taken together, the results yield five theoretical contributions. First, they establish the need to integrate TAM and UTAUT with college choice models: perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use explain evaluations of digital platforms, but the models of Chapman (2016) are required to explain how those evaluations enter the processes of search, comparison, and institutional choice. Second, they position trust and credibility as mediating mechanisms between technological experience and institutional intention a relationship that is empirically relevant yet has received disproportionately little attention in the literature. Third, they reinforce the conceptual separation between technology-use intention and enrolment intention, so that acceptance of a promotional instrument is not conflated with the decision to choose a university. Fourth, they indicate that social influence, word-of-mouth, electronic word-of-mouth, influencers, and family remain consequential even as information search becomes increasingly AI-mediated. Fifth, they position digital literacy as a condition governing a prospective student's capacity to comprehend, verify, and evaluate algorithmically generated information.

More broadly, these findings support a four-layer conceptual framework for subsequent empirical work: (1) technology quality, comprising usefulness, ease of use, personalization, responsiveness, and immersion; (2) information quality, comprising accuracy,

relevance, completeness, transparency, and authenticity; (3) psychological and social response, comprising engagement, trust, credibility, institutional image, and social influence; and (4) behavioral outcomes, comprising further search, enrolment intention, and actual enrolment. This layered framework accommodates the complexity of higher education decision-making more adequately than a model positing a direct relationship between AI use and enrolment intention.

Three research directions follow from the mapping and appear most pressing. First, the unit of analysis and study population require correction: the prominence of “students” within the network indicates that much research recruits enrolled students as respondents, whereas university promotion targets prospective students secondary and vocational school pupils, parents, and educational counsellors situated within the predisposition and search phases. Second, research designs need to extend beyond cross-sectional surveys towards experiments comparing responses to human-authored and AI-generated content, longitudinal studies tracking perceptual change from initial exposure through to the enrolment decision, and analyses of digital behavioral traces including clicks, interaction time, chatbot use, and actual enrolment. Third, work on the ethics and governance of AI in higher education marketing warrants development, including how disclosure that content was AI-generated affects credibility and choice intention, and how digital literacy moderates prospective students’ responses to algorithmically generated material.

DISCUSSION

The findings cohere around a central interpretive observation: the field under examination has grown rapidly but has displaced its own subject. Research on AI in higher education marketing overwhelmingly recruits enrolled students to evaluate technology-acceptance platforms, whereas the field’s stated concern is prospective student recruitment and enrolment intention. The fivefold rise in annual output between 2022 and 2025 is consistent with the pattern described by Donthu et al. (2021) for interdisciplinary domains shaped by technological disruption, yet it has intensified rather than resolved this misalignment. Dwivedi et al. (2023) document how generative AI catalyzed rapid terminological and thematic shifts, which the present findings confirm: the acceleration of output coincided with unstable vocabulary and the absorption of AI as a general research object rather than a purpose-built promotional instrument. The structural gap therefore persists without repositioning prospective students not enrolled ones as the primary unit of analysis, empirical studies will continue to measure technology acceptance at the expense of enrolment intention. Williamson (2020) frames digital platforms as constitutive of educational value formation rather than neutral channels, which makes this analytical correction a theoretical obligation, not merely a design preference.

The theoretical consequence of this displacement is that TAM and UTAUT, the dominant frameworks in the co-occurrence network, are borrowed without the adaptation that the higher education context demands. Davis (2014) derived TAM within workplace adoption contexts; Singh et al. (2026) extend UTAUT through digital financial literacy. Neither framework was constructed to account for the staged, socially embedded, high-stakes nature of institutional choice. Chapman’s (2016) college choice model, which identifies predisposition, search, and choice as phases each governed by individual characteristics, significant others, and institutional communication, supplies precisely the contextual architecture that TAM and UTAUT lack. Pasaribu and Achmadi (2024) confirm that social media marketing influences enrolment intention through consumer brand engagement, brand awareness, and brand image mechanisms that are mediated rather than direct, and that map onto the search and choice phases of Chapman’s model. Ismail et al. (2023) similarly show that word-of-mouth and electronic word-of-mouth shape enrolment decisions alongside institutional characteristics. These findings collectively support the integration of technology evaluation constructs with college choice theory, so that perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use function as antecedents of institutional trust and image rather than as direct predictors of enrolment intention. The four-layer framework proposed here technology quality, information quality, psychological and social response, and behavioral outcomes provides a structural scaffold for that integration.

The peripheral position of trust in the keyword density visualization is the single most practically significant finding of this study, because trust is not one construct among many but the mechanism through which all promotional instruments ultimately operate. McKnight and Chervany (2001) identify competence, integrity, and benevolence as the constitutive dimensions of digital trust; all three are activated when prospective students encounter AI-generated promotional content that cannot always be distinguished from human-authored material. Dwivedi et al. (2023) document that hallucination, bias, and opacity are structural properties of generative AI, which implies that engagement metrics are systematically insufficient as measures of promotional effectiveness. Balciğlu (2026) demonstrates that trust transfers across platforms and referral sources, while Pan et al. (2025) establish that trustworthiness is the most empirically consistent predictor of influencer effectiveness. Obadã et al. (2026) confirm

that AI literacy mediates the relationship between AI exposure and trust-based adoption and word-of-mouth. Applied to higher education promotion, these findings indicate that chatbots, virtual tours, generative content, and influencer partnerships must be evaluated against their effect on perceived institutional integrity: a responsive chatbot that supplies inaccurate information reduces trust; an immersive virtual tour that misrepresents actual campus conditions creates an expectation gap whose reputational cost outlasts the promotional encounter; and transparent AI deployment that remains consistent with the institution's actual character can strengthen perceptions of competence and benevolence. Institutions whose AI use is perceived as manipulative or opaque risk undermining precisely the credibility on which enrolment decisions depend.

Geographical distribution confirms a structural realignment of knowledge production. China's position at 24.4% of the corpus, together with the combined prominence of Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, India, and Indonesia, marks a departure from the Anglo-Saxon concentration documented in earlier higher education marketing literature. Welch (2024) situates this shift within the demographic and competitive pressures facing private universities across East and Southeast Asia; Kusumawati (2019) and Sedyantoro (2025) document those pressures specifically in Indonesia. Indonesia's rank among the five leading countries demonstrates that national scholarship is engaging the international research conversation, but the dominance of TAM-based, enrolled-student designs suggests that the theoretical tools currently available do not yet address the recruitment challenge that Indonesian private institutions face most acutely. The distributed pattern of institutional productivity with King Faisal University leading at ten documents and no single center monopolizing theoretical output presents both an opportunity for collaborative framework-building and a risk of duplication, as Donthu et al. (2021) caution for nascent interdisciplinary domains. Strengthening cross-national collaboration should aim not merely at raising co-authorship counts but at building prospective student panels and comparative designs that test measurement invariance across educational systems, cultural settings, and admissions structures.

This study offers three methodological contributions. It is, to our knowledge, the first bibliometric analysis to integrate digital promotional instruments, AI technologies, and college choice intention within a single Scopus-indexed corpus. It covers specifically the 2022–2026 period of generative AI development, which prior reviews could not have documented comprehensively. And it combines co-occurrence, density, and temporal overlay visualizations to map not only what the field studies but how the relative salience of constructs has shifted, consistent with the multi-method mapping approach advocated by Donthu et al. (2021). Two limitations qualify for these contributions. First, reliance on Scopus and the restriction to English-language journal articles may under-represent developments in AI and educational technology that first appear in conference proceedings, particularly from the region's rapidly growing research communities. Second, the breadth of the three-block Boolean strategy may have admitted articles that use higher education as a peripheral setting rather than as the substantive focus of promotion and student recruitment. Future research should pursue three priorities: repositioning prospective students secondary and vocational school pupils, parents, and educational counsellors as the primary respondent population; adopting longitudinal and experimental designs capable of tracing change in enrolment intention from first promotional exposure through to institutional choice; and advancing the study of AI ethics in recruitment, including how disclosure of AI-generated content affects institutional credibility, how digital literacy moderates prospective students' evaluative responses to algorithmically produced promotional material, and how institutions can deploy AI in ways that enhance rather than erode the trust on which enrolment decisions ultimately rest.

CONCLUSION

This bibliometric analysis establishes that research on digital promotion and artificial intelligence in the formation of college choice intention is expanding rapidly, yet its conceptual centre remains fixed on AI acceptance among enrolled students rather than on the recruitment of prospective students and the enrolment intention that lies at the heart of institutional promotion. The accelerating growth observed across the generative AI period from 2022 to 2026 reflects the widening use of AI across educational contexts, some of which now intersects with marketing, but it has not yet produced an independent and integrated research domain.

Theoretically, the study yields two principal contributions. The first is the case for an integrative model combining TAM and UTAUT with college choice theory, since technology acceptance and the decision to enroll represent constructs that differ psychologically, socially, and institutionally. The second is the identification of digital trust as a critical mediating mechanism: its persistently low density within the keyword network signals the widest gap in the contemporary literature between theoretical relevance and empirical attention.

For higher education institutions, the findings carry a concrete practical implication. The effectiveness of chatbots,

generative AI content, virtual tours, and influencer partnerships cannot be judged by user engagement alone. It must be evaluated through their effect on perceived authenticity, institutional credibility, and the trust of prospective students the factors that determine whether digital interaction converts into genuine enrolment intention.

Two limitations qualify these conclusions. Reliance on Scopus alone, combined with the restriction to English-language journal articles, may under-represent rapid developments in technology fields that often appear first in conference proceedings. In addition, the breadth of the search strategy permitted the inclusion of articles that use higher education as a research setting without addressing promotion or student recruitment explicitly.

Subsequent research should priorities three directions: making prospective rather than enrolled students the primary unit of observation; adopting longitudinal and experimental designs capable of capturing change in intention from promotional exposure through to actual enrolment; and developing the study of AI ethics in recruitment, including how transparency about algorithmically generated content shapes trust and institutional choice.

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Cite this Article: Jusuf, H., Setyawati, I., Lestari, R. (2026). *AI-Driven Digital Marketing in Higher Education: A Bibliometric Analysis of College Choice Intention Research, 2022–2026*. *International Journal of Current Science Research and Review*, 9(9), pp. 5065-5078. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47191/ijcsrr/V9-i9-22>