Article

Transforming International Student Recruitment: The Role of AI, Personalization, and Trust in Jordanian Higher Education

Rand Al-Dmour
The University of Jordan, Amman, Jordan

Hani Al-Dmour
The University of Jordan, Amman, Jordan

Yazeed Al-Dmour
The University of Jordan, Amman, Jordan

Ahmed Al-Dmour
Al-Ahliyya Amman University, Jordan

ABSTRACT

In this study, we examine the role of AI-driven marketing in international student recruitment, focusing on how perceived usefulness, trust, and personalization influence decision-making. Grounded in the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), the Trust-Based Decision-Making Model, and the Personalization–Privacy Paradox, we studied how AI-powered recruitment tools—such as chatbots, predictive analytics, and personalized content—impact student engagement and enrollment intentions. Based on the responses from 350 prospective international students, the findings indicate that AI-driven marketing enhances student recruitment by improving accessibility, engagement, and transparency. However, trust in AI remains critical, as concerns about data privacy and algorithmic bias significantly influence students' willingness to apply it. Additionally, AI-powered personalization significantly affects decision-making by making recruitment more efficient and tailored to students' preferences; however, it also raises ethical concerns regarding privacy and data protection.

Corresponding Author: Hani Al-Dmour, Professor of Marketing, School of Business, The University of Jordan, Amman, Jordan, dmourh@ju.edu.jo;

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INTRODUCTION

The increasing globalization of higher education has intensified competition among universities, making it imperative to adopt innovative marketing strategies that enhance international student recruitment. Traditional methods—such as education fairs, standardized email campaigns, and printed brochures—are becoming less effective as digital-native students demand personalized, interactive, and data-driven engagement (Gottschalk & Weise, 2023). In response, artificial intelligence (AI) and social media-driven marketing strategies have emerged as transformative tools that enable universities to optimize outreach, enhance engagement, and streamline the admissions process (Hu et al., 2024; Cingillioglu et al., 2024). AI-powered recruitment tools, including chatbots, predictive analytics, and personalized content delivery systems, allow universities to provide real-time, tailored experiences that align with prospective students' academic aspirations and preferences (Krishnasamy, 2024).

As Jordanian universities strive to enhance their standing in the global higher education market, integrating AI-driven marketing strategies is becoming increasingly crucial. The Jordanian Ministry of Digital Economy and Entrepreneurship (MoDEE) has introduced a national AI strategy and implementation plan (2023- 2027), highlighting the role of AI in transforming higher education and enhancing student engagement (MoDEE, 2023). While AI has been explored in teaching, learning, and administrative processes, its application in marketing and student recruitment remains underdeveloped in Jordanian universities. Understanding the extent to which AI-powered tools enhance institutional outreach, social media engagement, and trust in student decision-making is essential for maximizing their effectiveness. (Al-Dmour et al., 2024; Abaddi, 2023).

The role of AI in international student recruitment extends beyond automating admissions processes—it reshapes how universities engage with students through personalized recommendations, AI-enhanced social media campaigns, and interactive digital experiences (Saadi et al., 2020). AI chatbots facilitate real-time conversations with prospective students, providing instant responses to queries regarding academic programs, scholarships, and visa requirements (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019; Zhu, 2019). AI-driven recommendation engines analyze student preferences, academic backgrounds, and career goals to suggest customized study options (Huang & Rust, 2021).

Moreover, predictive analytics enable universities to forecast enrollment trends, personalize communication strategies, and optimize recruitment efforts, ensuring targeted and data-driven decision-making (Nguyen & LeBlanc, 2021).

However, the effectiveness of AI-driven marketing strategies is heavily influenced by two critical factors: perceived personalization and trust. Perceived personalization refers to how students recognize AI-powered engagement as relevant, tailored, and aligned with their academic and personal aspirations (Saadi et al., 2020). Universities that integrate AI-generated content, such as dynamic course recommendations, financial aid insights, and language-specific support, create stronger student–university relationships, increasing engagement and enrollment intent (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019; Zhu, 2019). At the same time, trust in AI-driven recruitment remains a significant challenge. While AI improves efficiency and accessibility, concerns about data privacy, algorithmic bias, and the impersonality of automated interactions may deter students from fully engaging with AI-powered platforms (Czerwinski et al., 2021). Research suggests that students are more likely to interact with AI-enhanced recruitment systems when they perceive them as ethical, transparent, and seamlessly integrated with human oversight (Nguyen & LeBlanc, 2021).

Social media engagement further amplifies the effectiveness of AI-driven recruitment strategies by enabling real-time interactions, peer recommendations, and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM). Platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, and TikTok allow universities to reach global audiences, leveraging AI to analyze engagement patterns and optimize content delivery (Jin & Schneider, 2019; Bulchand-Gidumal et al., 2024). AI-powered algorithms assess prospective students' behavior on social media, personalizing advertisements and recommending relevant academic programs. Additionally, AI-enhanced video marketing, virtual campus tours, and influencer partnerships increase institutional visibility and foster stronger student engagement. However, data security concerns and the ethical use of AI in social media targeting must be addressed to ensure trust and compliance with global data protection regulations (Nguyen., 2024).

Despite the increasing reliance on AI in student recruitment globally, Jordanian universities continue to rely on traditional marketing approaches, including education agents, static advertising, and mass email campaigns. The lack of empirical research on AI-driven marketing in Jordanian higher education leaves a gap in understanding its effectiveness, challenges, and potential impact on student enrollment trends. This study addresses these gaps by examining how AI-driven marketing strategies influence international student engagement, decision-making, and trust in Jordanian universities. To explore these dynamics, this study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How does AI-powered marketing influence international students' decision-making and university selection?
2. To what extent does perceived personalization enhance student engagement, trust, and application intent?
3. How does trust in AI-driven recruitment processes affect students' willingness to apply to universities via AI-enhanced marketing?

4. What role does social media engagement play in amplifying AI-driven recruitment strategies and shaping student perceptions?

By addressing these research questions, this study contributes to the higher education marketing literature by integrating theoretical perspectives such as the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (Davis, 1989), the Trust-Based Decision-Making Model (Gonçalves et al., 2024), and the Personalization–Privacy Paradox (Chaffey & Ellis–Chadwick, 2019). Unlike conventional applications of TAM, which focus primarily on usability and perceived usefulness, this study extends its framework by examining how AI-driven personalization and trust shape student engagement and recruitment effectiveness (Nguyen & LeBlanc, 2023). Furthermore, this research expands the personalization–privacy paradox by examining how AI-powered recruitment strategies strike a balance between tailored marketing and ethical concerns related to data privacy and security (Bekkestad & Solvang, 2023). These insights provide a structured approach to understanding AI's role in student decision-making and offer practical recommendations for universities seeking to implement transparent, trustworthy, and personalized AI-driven recruitment strategies (Phelps et al., 2024).

In addition to its theoretical contributions, this study provides practical insights for university administrators, marketing professionals, and policymakers seeking to increase international student recruitment through AI-driven marketing strategies. By adopting AI-powered approaches that prioritize personalization, trust, and social media engagement, Jordanian universities can enhance student experiences, refine recruitment campaigns, and strengthen their global competitiveness. As AI-driven marketing continues to shape higher education recruitment, understanding its impact on student decision-making is essential for institutions aiming to attract, engage, and convert international applicants in an increasingly digital and data-driven landscape.

Jordan's Higher Education and International Student Recruitment

Jordan's higher education system has undergone significant development, positioning the country as an emerging academic hub in the Middle East. The country is home to well-established public universities, such as the University of Jordan and the Jordan University of Science and Technology, as well as numerous private institutions that offer specialized programs tailored to diverse student needs (Al-Dmour et al., 2024a). Government initiatives have focused on enhancing academic quality, fostering international partnerships, and improving research capabilities, resulting in increased global recognition of Jordanian degrees (Al-Dmour et al., 2024b). Despite these advancements, Jordan continues to face challenges in attracting and retaining international students, particularly in an increasingly competitive global education market dominated by well-funded recruitment strategies in North America, Europe, and Australia (Qashou et al., 2025).

One of the primary challenges is the limited global awareness of Jordanian universities among prospective international students. Many applicants are unfamiliar with the academic programs, research facilities, and scholarship opportunities Jordanian institutions offer (Al-Dmour et al., 2024). Additionally, financial constraints on digital marketing and international recruitment campaigns hinder universities from effectively promoting their programs compared with institutions in established study destinations (Tawalbeh, 2021). The increasing reliance on AI-driven recruitment and social media marketing in global higher education presents another challenge, as many Jordanian universities have yet to fully integrate AI-powered tools such as chatbots, predictive analytics, and personalized content delivery into their outreach strategies (Saadi et al., 2024). The lack of AI-driven engagement methods places Jordanian institutions at a competitive disadvantage in attracting international students.

Another significant barrier to international student recruitment is the perception of limited postgraduate opportunities. While Jordan has invested in graduate employability programs, entrepreneurship initiatives, and skill development efforts, these opportunities are not widely recognized among international students (Al-Tarawneh et al., 2024). Uncertainty regarding career prospects, postgraduate visa policies, and regional job market access may discourage students from considering Jordan a study destination. Addressing these concerns through transparent communication, AI-driven career guidance, and targeted student engagement could help reshape perceptions and build trust in Jordan's higher education system (Nguyen & LeBlanc, 2023). To enhance global competitiveness, Jordanian universities must embrace AI-driven marketing strategies that improve international outreach and engagement. AI-powered chatbots, predictive analytics, and personalized recommendation engines can streamline the application process and increase student confidence in decision-making (Iftikhar, 2024). AI-enhanced social media campaigns and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) strategies can further expand the visibility of Jordanian institutions, leveraging digital engagement trends to reach prospective students worldwide (Budhwar et al., 2024). By adopting AI-driven digital marketing solutions and student-centered recruitment approaches, Jordan's higher education sector can increase its international presence, attract diverse students, and solidify its reputation as a leading regional academic destination.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The increasing adoption of AI-driven marketing in international student recruitment has transformed how universities attract, engage, and convert prospective students. AI-powered tools such as predictive analytics, chatbots, and automated recommendation engines enable universities to personalize recruitment strategies, improve decision-making efficiency, and enhance student trust (Katsamak et al., 2024; Pawar et al., 2024; Tang et al., 2023). However, the effectiveness of AI-driven recruitment depends on how students perceive AI-generated personalization, their trust in AI-mediated interactions, and how AI influences their final decision-making choices (Qolamani & Mohammed, 2023).

This study investigates the role of AI-driven marketing in international student recruitment, focusing on the mediating effects of perceived personalization, trust, and social media engagement on student decision-making. It integrates the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), the Trust-Based Decision-Making Model, and the Personalization–Privacy Paradox to establish a comprehensive theoretical foundation. These frameworks provide structured insights into how students adopt AI-powered recruitment tools, how trust influences engagement, and how AI-driven personalization affects decision-making.

AI-Driven Marketing and Student Decision Choice

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (Davis, 1991) is widely used to explain how individuals adopt new technologies based on perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use. In the context of AI-driven recruitment, perceived usefulness refers to how AI-powered marketing tools, such as chatbots, recommendation engines, and predictive analytics, enhance students' university selection process by providing relevant program recommendations, financial aid information, and real-time admissions support (Dixon-Saxon & Buckley, 2020; Krishnasamy, 2024). Perceived ease of use is related to how intuitive, user-friendly, and accessible AI-driven recruitment platforms influence students' willingness to engage with them (Van Esch et al., 2019; Niu et al., 2024). Recent studies have confirmed that when students perceive AI-driven recruitment as beneficial and easy to navigate, they are more likely to engage with AI-driven marketing strategies and make a final enrollment decision on the basis of AI-generated insights (Sadeghi & Niu, 2024). Thus, we propose the following:

H1: AI-driven marketing positively influences students' decision-making.

Perceived Personalization as a Mediator between AI-Driven Marketing and Student Decision Choice

AI-driven marketing enhances student recruitment by offering highly personalized engagement through customized program recommendations, financial aid alerts, and AI-powered chatbots that provide real-time support (Saadi et al., 2020). Perceived personalization in AI-driven recruitment refers to how students feel that AI-generated content aligns with their academic goals and preferences. The personalization–privacy paradox (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019) suggests that while AI-powered personalization enhances engagement and decision-making efficiency, it also raises concerns about data privacy, algorithmic bias, and excessive tracking. If AI-generated recommendations are perceived as beneficial, adaptive, and nonintrusive, they enhance students' trust in AI-powered recruitment platforms and facilitate a smoother decision-making process (Badmus et al., 2024; Maheshwari, 2024). However, if personalization is excessive, generic, or invasive, students may disengage from AI-driven interactions (Nguyen

& LeBlanc, 2001). Empirical research has shown that students are more likely to trust and engage with AI-driven recruitment platforms when personalization enhances their experience rather than manipulates their choices (Han et al., 2024). AI-driven recruitment systems that successfully integrate personalization help students feel more confident in their decision-making process (Li & Jiang, 2024). Thus, we hypothesize the following:

H2: Perceived personalization mediates the relationship between AI-driven marketing and students' decision-making choices.

Trust as a Mediator between AI-Driven Marketing and Student Decision Choice

Trust is a crucial psychological factor influencing whether students engage with and rely on AI-powered recruitment. The Trust-Based Decision-Making Model (Gonçalves et al., 2024) posits that individuals are more likely to accept technology-driven solutions when they perceive them as fair, transparent, and unbiased. For students to trust AI-driven recruitment, they must believe that AI interactions are reliable, ethical, and unbiased (Tasel-Jurkovic & Altinbasak-Farina, 2024). However, concerns regarding data security, algorithmic discrimination, and the impersonality of AI-driven interactions can lead to skepticism about AI-powered recruitment efforts (Pan et al., 2024). Expectation confirmation theory (ECT) (Oliver, 1980) suggests trust is built when students' expectations of AI-driven recruitment systems align with or exceed their initial assumptions. Universities that implement transparent AI recruitment policies to ensure data protection and combine AI automation with human oversight are more successful in fostering trust and engagement (Ngo et al., 2024). Studies indicate that universities that disclose AI decision-making processes and emphasize fairness in AI-generated recruitment efforts experience higher student trust and application rates (Ohanians, 2024). Thus, we hypothesize the following:
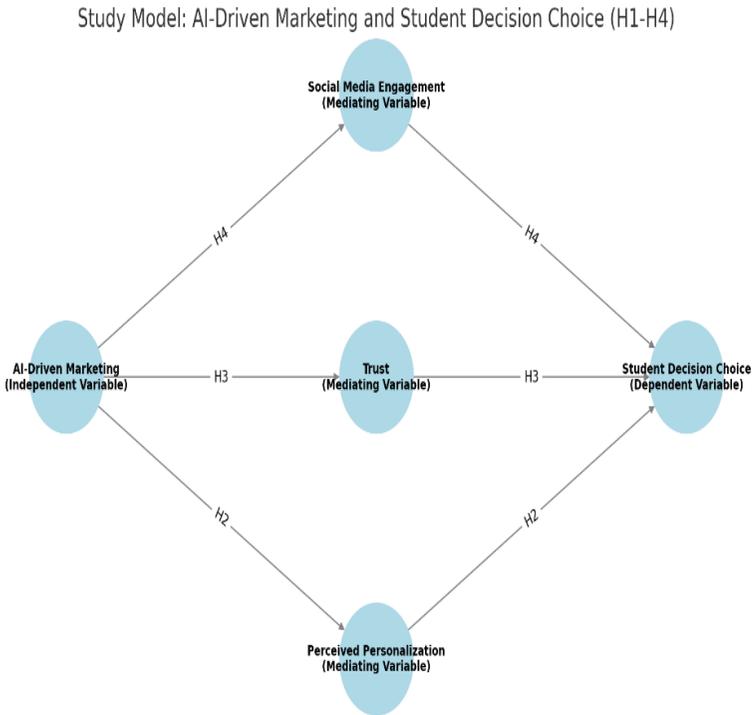
H3: Trust mediates the relationship between AI-driven marketing and student decision-making choices.

Social Media Engagement as a Mediator between AI-Driven Marketing and Student Decision-making

Social media platforms are key amplifiers of AI-driven recruitment, allowing universities to engage prospective students through AI-powered chatbots, predictive advertising, and AI-enhanced content marketing (Budhwar et al., 2022; Pawar et al., 2023). AI-driven social media marketing enables universities to track student engagement, analyze behavioral data, and tailor recruitment content to individual users based on their interactions. Social identity theory (SIT) (Trepte, 2013) posits that peer influence and social group interactions have a significant effect on decision-making. When combined with influencer-driven engagement,

peer recommendations, and AI-generated personalized content, AI-powered social media marketing enhances trust, engagement, and students' likelihood of applying (Badmus et al., 2024). Expectation confirmation theory (ECT) (Oliver, 1980) further suggests that social media engagement positively affects decision-making when it aligns with or exceeds students' expectations. If AI-driven social media marketing is perceived as genuine, informative, and engaging, it strengthens trust in the institution and its recruitment strategy (McDuff & Czerwinski, 2021; Iyelolu et al., 2024). Conversely, if AI-powered social media engagement appears too automated, impersonal, or misleading, it may diminish trust and disengage students (Eswaran, U., & Eswaran, 2025). Thus, we propose the following:

H4: Social media engagement mediates the relationship between AI-driven marketing and students' decision-making choices.

Study Model: AI-Driven Marketing and Student Decision Choice (H1-H4)

The proposed model examines the relationships among these constructs, with AI-driven marketing as the independent variable and student decision choice as the dependent variable. Perceived personalization, trust, and social media engagement mediate the relationships among these variables. Structural equation modeling (SEM) will be utilized to analyze these relationships. This methodology

provides valuable insights into the direct and indirect effects of AI-driven marketing on student decision-making. By incorporating mediating variables, this study seeks to understand how personalization, trust, and social media engagement influence students' choices in international student recruitment. Figure 1 presents the study's conceptual model, depicting the interconnections between AI-driven marketing, perceived personalization, trust, social media engagement, and student decision-making. The hypothesized relationships among these constructs are illustrated through directional arrows, which represent four hypotheses (H1-H4). This model offers a structured framework for examining the influence of AI-driven recruitment strategies on students' university selection decisions.

METHOD

This study employs a quantitative surevey research methodology to investigate the impact of AI-driven marketing on the decision-making of international students in recruitment. The research examines how perceived personalization, trust, and social media engagement mediate the relationship between AI-powered recruitment strategies and students' university selection decisions. Data were collected through a structured online survey distributed via university marketing platforms and social media channels. The survey targeted prospective international students considering universities that utilize AI-driven recruitment strategies. Three hundred fifty valid responses were obtained, ensuring diverse samples across different academic disciplines, geographic locations, and exposure levels to AI-driven recruitment. This sample size is adequate for partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM), which is well suited for analyzing complex relationships with small to moderate sample sizes (Hair et al., 2021).

The questionnaire captured students' perceptions of AI-driven marketing, their engagement with recruitment platforms, their trust in AI-based admissions interactions, and their final decision-making choices. It was guided by established theoretical frameworks, including the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), the Trust-Based Decision-Making Model, and the Personalization–Privacy Paradox. The instrument was structured into five key sections, each designed to evaluate different aspects of AI-driven marketing in student recruitment:

1. **Demographic Information** – This section collected details on age, gender, educational background, and familiarity with AI-based recruitment. Research suggests that demographic characteristics influence technology adoption and trust (Weck & Afanassieva, 2023; Van der Schaa et al., 2003).
2. **AI-Driven Marketing Exposure** – Measures students' awareness of and interaction with AI-driven recruitment tools, including chatbots, AI-powered recommendation engines, and predictive analytics, adapted from prior research on technology acceptance in higher education (Aithal et al., 2024; Saaida., 2023, Krishnasamy, 2024).

3. **Perceived Personalization** – Examining how AI-driven recruitment platforms customize information to match students' preferences, influencing engagement and decision-making confidence (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019; Saadi et al., 2020; Ellikkal, & Rajamohan, 2024).
4. **Trust in AI-Powered Recruitment** – Assess students' perceptions of reliability, transparency, and ethical AI practices in recruitment systems (Nguyen & LeBlanc, 2001; Phelps et al., 2024).
5. **Social Media Engagement** – Evaluates how AI-driven social media marketing campaigns, influencer-driven recruitment, and student-generated content influence trust and decision-making (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Budhwar et al., 2024).
6. **Student Decision Choice** – Captured final enrollment intent on the basis of AI-driven marketing influences and grounded in the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and Expectation Confirmation Theory (ECT) (Oliver, 1980; Wang et al., 2024).

All the constructs were measured via a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) to capture nuanced perceptions. Comprehensive information regarding the variables and questions can be found in Appendix 1. The survey's content validity and reliability were rigorously assessed through a pilot study with 30 participants and consultations with experts to ensure the accuracy and relevance of the questionnaire items. To minimize potential biases, participant anonymity was ensured, and statistical methods were employed to control for the temporal separation of the constructs. Advanced statistical techniques were employed to analyze the collected data, ensuring a comprehensive and robust examination of the dataset. The study employed structural equation modeling (SEM) via SmartPLS 4, a statistical tool that facilitates the analysis of complex relationships and provides thorough validation of the proposed hypotheses. The analysis was conducted in two primary stages, measurement model assessment and structural model assessment, each serving a crucial role in confirming the reliability and validity of the theoretical framework.

The measurement model assessment focused on evaluating the reliability, internal consistency, and validity of the study constructs. Cronbach's alpha (CA) and composite reliability (CR) were computed to determine the internal consistency of the constructs, with all values exceeding the acceptable threshold of 0.7, indicating high reliability (Hair et al., 2021). To establish convergent validity, the average variance extracted (AVE) was measured for each construct, ensuring that the indicators effectively represented the underlying theoretical dimensions. All the AVE values exceeded 0.50, indicating that the latent variables accounted for a significant proportion of the variance in their respective indicators. In addition, discriminant validity was tested via the Fornell–Larcker criterion, ensuring that each construct was statistically distinct from others in the model. The heterotrait–monotrait (HTMT) ratio was also applied to further validate construct distinctiveness, with all values remaining below the conservative threshold of 0.85. After confirming the measurement model

adequacy, a structural model assessment was conducted to test the hypothesized relationships. Path coefficients, t statistics, and p values were computed to assess the direct and indirect effects of AI-driven marketing, perceived personalization, trust, social media engagement, and students' decision-making choices. The significance of the mediating effects was tested by bootstrapping with 5,000 replications, allowing for an in-depth examination of how perceived personalization, trust, and social media engagement influence the relationship between AI-driven marketing and student decision-making. The mediation analysis provided more profound insights into the indirect pathways through which AI-driven recruitment strategies influence student behavior, ensuring that the proposed theoretical relationships were empirically substantiated.

To prevent potential issues related to multicollinearity, variance inflation factor (VIF) values were computed for all predictor variables, confirming that they fell within the acceptable range (Hair et al., 2011). The results indicated no concerns about multicollinearity, reinforcing the model's robustness. The standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) and normed fit index (NFI) were evaluated as key model fit indicators, suggesting strong alignment between the theoretical framework and empirical data. Ethical approval was obtained from the university's research ethics committee. The participants provided informed consent, were assured of confidentiality and anonymity, and participated voluntarily. Measures such as participant anonymity and temporal separation of constructs were incorporated to minimize response biases and enhance the validity of the findings (Kock et al., 2021).

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the 350 respondents, including their gender, age, field of study, program type, university preference, and nationality. The sample comprises 60.0% Arab students (n = 210) and 40.0% international students from other countries (n = 140), providing diverse perspectives on adopting AI-driven marketing in international student recruitment. With respect to gender, female participants constitute the majority (56.0%), whereas male students represent 44.0% of the sample. The largest age group is 18–20 years (61.4%), followed by 21–23 years (22.9%), indicating that most respondents are in the early stages of their higher education journey. When examining fields of study, business students make up the largest group (31.4%), followed by humanities (38.6%), science (18.6%), and engineering (11.4%).

Regarding educational program type, 57.1% of the respondents were undergraduate students, 31.4% were master's students, and 11.4% were doctoral students, indicating a balanced representation of different academic levels. Regarding university preference, 62.9% of the students preferred public universities, whereas 37.1% opted for private institutions, reflecting a significant inclination toward public higher education. This diverse demographic profile enhances the understanding of how different student groups interact with AI-driven recruitment tools and provides valuable insights into how AI marketing influences their decision-making process.

Table 1: Demographic profile of the student respondents

Characteristics	Frequency	Percent (%)
Gender		
Male	154	44.0
Female	196	56.0
Total	350	100.0
Age		
18–20 years old	215	61.4
21–23 years old	80	22.9
24–26 years old	45	12.9
27 years old and above	10	2.8
Total	350	100.0
Field of Study		
Engineering	40	11.4
Business	110	31.4
Science	65	18.6
Humanities	135	38.6
Total	350	100.0
Program Type		
Undergraduate	200	57.1
Graduate (Master's)	110	31.4
Doctoral	40	11.4
Total	350	100.0
Preferred University		
Public	220	62.9
Private	130	37.1
Total	350	100.0
Nationality		
Arab	210	60.0
Other Countries	140	40.0
Total	350	100.0

Student adoption of AI-driven recruitment tools: Usage patterns

Based on the findings of this study, this section examines the adoption patterns of AI-driven recruitment tools among international students choosing Jordanian universities. By analyzing frequency distributions and response rates, this study offers insights into how AI recruitment technologies influence student decision-making and their effectiveness in attracting international applicants to Jordanian institutions. The study findings are presented in Table 2. The use of AI recruitment tools among students indicates a growing reliance on AI-driven recruitment technologies among international students selecting Jordanian universities. AI-powered chatbots were the most frequently used tool, with 60% of the students (210 respondents) engaging with virtual assistants for admissions support. This reflects the growing use of AI chatbots by Jordanian universities to

provide real-time answers, automate application processes, and facilitate international student inquiries.

Table 2: AI Recruitment Tool Usage among Students

AI Recruitment Tool	Frequency	Response Rate (%)
AI-powered chatbots (e.g., virtual assistants for admissions inquiries)	210	60.0%
AI-powered recommendation engines (e.g., course/program suggestions)	175	50.0%
Predictive analytics (e.g., AI predicting best-fit universities)	140	40.0%

Given that many international applicants face visa requirements, tuition fees, and program eligibility challenges, AI chatbots are crucial in reducing communication barriers and enhancing accessibility for foreign students. Fifty percent of the students (175 respondents) utilized AI-powered recommendation engines, highlighting the increasing importance of personalized academic guidance. International students often struggle to navigate university choices, program offerings, and scholarship opportunities. AI-driven recommendation systems help students match their academic interests and qualifications with those of the most suitable Jordanian institutions, improving decision-making efficiency and reducing uncertainty. Forty percent of the students (140 respondents) adopted predictive analytics, indicating that a significant proportion of international applicants rely on AI-generated insights to assess their chances of admission. These tools analyze past applicant data, acceptance trends, and student profiles to predict the best-fit universities for prospective international students. However, trust in AI-based university selection remains a key factor, as some students may prefer direct interaction with admissions offices or education consultants to validate AI-generated recommendations. Ten percent of the students (35 respondents) did not use any AI recruitment tools, suggesting that some international students still favor traditional methods of university selection, such as education fairs, direct contact with university representatives, and word-of-mouth recommendations from peers and family. This segment may consist of applicants who lack familiarity with AI technologies or prefer personalized human guidance in their admissions journey. These findings highlight the increasing role of AI-driven tools in student recruitment, with chatbots and recommendation engines emerging as the most widely adopted solutions. Institutions seeking to enhance their outreach and engagement should continue to invest in AI-powered personalization, transparency, and social media integration to improve student recruitment experiences.

DATA ANALYSIS

Measurement Model Assessment

The measurement model was assessed for reliability, internal consistency, and validity across the study constructs. The Cronbach's alpha (CA) values ranged between 0.815 and 0.910, whereas the composite reliability (CR) values ranged between 0.860 and 0.940, surpassing the acceptable thresholds of 0.7 and 0.8, respectively (Hair et al., 2021). The average variance extracted (AVE) values ranged from 0.620--0.770, exceeding the recommended minimum of 0.50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), confirming convergent validity.

Table 3: Reliability and validity assessment

Construct	(CA)	(CR)	(AVE)
AI-Driven Marketing(AIM)	0.815	0.860	0.650
Perceived Personalization (PP)	0.835	0.880	0.670
Trust in AI-Powered Recruitment (TP)	0.870	0.920	0.710
Social Media Engagement (SM)	0.890	0.940	0.750
Student Decision Choice (SD)	0.880	0.930	0.770

Convergent validity was established by examining the indicator loadings and AVE values (Hair et al., 2021). All indicator loadings were statistically significant ($p < 0.001$) and exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.708, with values ranging from 0.770 to 0.880. Discriminant validity was assessed via the Fornell–Larcker criterion, which requires the square root of the AVE for each construct to exceed its correlations with other constructs. The heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio confirmed that all construct pairs had values below 0.85, indicating a substantial distinction between them.

Table 4 Discriminant validity assessment (Fornell–Larcker criterion)

Construct	AIM	PP	TTP	SM	SD
AI-Driven Marketing(AIM)	**0.806**				
Perceived Personalization (PP)	0.720	**0.819**			
Trust in AI-Powered Recruitment (TP)	0.732	0.750	**0.837**		
Social Media Engagement (SM)	0.715	0.742	0.760	**0.866**	
Student Decision Choice (SD)	0.740	0.755	0.770	0.785	**0.842**

Results of Regression Analysis

The structural model was evaluated via path coefficients, t statistics, p values, and variance inflation factors (VIFs). Factor loadings and model fit indicators, such as the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) and normed fit index (NFI), were used to ensure model robustness. The results in Table 5 show that the VIF values range from 1.680--2.480, indicating no concerns about multicollinearity and ensuring that the regression estimates remain unbiased (Hair et al., 2011).

Table 5 Factor Loadings, VIFs, and Model Fit

Code	Loadings	Mean	STDEV	T values	VIF	SUMMER	NFI
AI-Driven Marketing Exposure (AIM)							
AIM1	0.812	4.23	0.022	37.98	1.76	0.056	0.810
AIM2	0.798	4.35	0.031	26.50	1.72		
AIM3	0.804	4.38	0.033	24.00	1.78		
AIM4	0.790	4.32	0.032	26.10	1.68		
AIM5	0.796	4.38	0.030	27.30	1.91		
Perceived Personalization (PP)							
PP1	0.822	4.12	0.029	29.40	2.19		
PP2	0.784	4.26	0.036	21.10	1.90		
PP3	0.837	4.19	0.021	42.50	2.29		
PP4	0.857	4.24	0.021	41.70	2.48		
PP5	0.802	4.27	0.032	26.60	1.95		
Trust in AI-Powered Recruitment (TP)							
TP1	0.880	4.12	0.019	48.50	2.74		
TP2	0.815	4.35	0.029	30.20	2.15		
TP3	0.825	4.38	0.028	31.50	2.20		
TP4	0.834	4.40	0.027	32.80	2.25		
TP5	0.845	4.43	0.026	34.00	2.30		
Social Media Engagement (SM)							
SM1	0.780	4.28	0.034	23.30	1.75		
SM2	0.815	4.34	0.030	27.50	1.91		
SM3	0.835	4.36	0.026	33.00	2.38		
SM4	0.850	4.41	0.027	32.70	2.37		
SM5	0.871	4.45	0.023	39.70	2.41		
Student Decision-Making (SD)							
SD1	0.800	4.32	0.030	28.00	2.10		
SD2	0.815	4.35	0.029	30.20	2.15		
SD3	0.825	4.38	0.028	31.50	2.20		
SD4	0.834	4.40	0.027	32.80	2.25		
SD5	0.845	4.43	0.026	34.00	2.30		

The model fit indicators confirm good model adequacy: SRMR = 0.056 (below the acceptable threshold of 0.08) and NFI = 0.810 (above the acceptable threshold of 0.80) (Schermelleh-Engel et al., 2003). These findings suggest that the measurement model meets the validity and reliability criteria, supporting the robustness of the structural model. Table 6 presents the regression results and hypothesis testing. The findings strongly support H1 (AI-driven marketing enhances student decision-making), with a path coefficient of 0.460, demonstrating that AI-powered recruitment tools significantly influence students' university selection. Personalized recommendations, AI-driven chatbots, and automated content delivery streamline the application process, improving accessibility and engagement. This aligns with the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), highlighting perceived usefulness and ease of use as key factors in technology adoption. H2 (Perceived personalization mediates the relationship between AI-driven marketing and student decision-making) was confirmed (β = 0.390), indicating that students who perceive AI-driven recruitment strategies as tailored to their preferences will likely make confident enrollment decisions.

Table 6 Path Coefficients and Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Path Relationship	(β)	T-Statistic	P Value
H1	AI-Driven Marketing → Student Decision Choice	0.460	6.210	<0.001
H2	AI-Driven Marketing → Perceived Personalization → Student Decision Choice	0.390	5.410	<0.001
H3	AI-Driven Marketing → Trust → Student Decision Choice	0.405	5.720	<0.001
H4	AI-Driven Marketing → Social Media Engagement → Student Decision Choice	0.378	5.290	<0.001

This finding supports the personalization–privacy paradox, which suggests that well-calibrated AI-driven personalization enhances user trust while mitigating privacy concerns. H3 (Trust in AI-powered recruitment strengthens student decision-making) receives strong support (β = 0.405), confirming that transparency, reliability, and ethical AI practices are critical in shaping students' trust in AI-driven marketing. Institutions that ensure data security, algorithmic

fairness, and human oversight are more likely to build credibility, leading to higher enrollment intent. This aligns with the Trust-Based Decision-Making Model, which emphasizes trust as a fundamental component of user adoption. H4 (Social media engagement amplifies the impact of AI-driven marketing on student decision-making) was validated ($\beta = 0.378$), highlighting the importance of AI-powered social media campaigns, influencer endorsements, and peer-generated content in shaping students' perceptions. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube enhance the effectiveness of AI-driven recruitment strategies by fostering interactive and community-driven engagement, reinforcing the role of eWOM (electronic word-of-mouth) in decision-making.

These results emphasize the synergistic effects of AI-driven marketing, personalization, trust, and social media engagement in enhancing student recruitment. Institutions that effectively integrate these strategies can strengthen their global competitiveness, enhance student experiences, and optimize digital marketing efforts in higher education**.**

Table 7: Explanatory power and predictive performance

Construct	R²	Q² (Construct)	Q² (Item)	PLS-SEM RMSE
Student Decision Choice	0.54	0.42	0.38	0.860
Perceived Personalization	0.47	0.39	0.36	0.872
Trust in AI	0.50	0.41	0.37	0.840
Social Media Engagement	0.45	0.38	0.34	0.854

Explanatory power and predictive performance

The structural model's explanatory power was assessed via the coefficient of determination (R^2), which measures the proportion of variance in the dependent variable that is explained by the independent variables. As shown in Table 7, AI-driven marketing, perceived personalization, trust, and social media engagement collectively accounted for 54% of the variance in student decision choice ($R^2 = 0.54$). Similarly, Perceived Personalization ($R^2 = 0.47$) and Trust in AI ($R^2 = 0.50$) demonstrate moderate explanatory power, indicating that these constructs significantly influence student enrollment decisions. Social media engagement ($R^2 = 0.45$) also contributed to predicting student behavior, reinforcing the impact of AI-powered recruitment strategies. The model's predictive performance was further evaluated via the use of the Q^2 values obtained through the blindfolding procedure. As shown in Table 6, Student Decision Choice ($Q^2 = 0.42$), Perceived Personalization ($Q^2 = 0.39$), and Trust in AI ($Q^2 = 0.41$) all yielded strong predictive relevance, confirming the model's robustness in forecasting key student engagement outcomes.

Effect size analysis

An effect size (f²) analysis was conducted to assess the impact of each construct further. The results indicate that AI-driven marketing has a substantial effect on student decision-making ($f^2 = 0.49$), demonstrating its role in shaping students' university selection process. Perceived Personalization ($f^2 = 0.41$) had a moderate effect, suggesting that tailored AI-driven recommendations significantly enhance decision confidence. Trust in AI ($f^2 = 0.45$) reinforced the importance of transparency and the ethical use of AI in influencing student engagement. Social media engagement ($f^2 = 0.52$) had the greatest effect on student decision-making, highlighting the role of peer recommendations, influencer content, and AI-powered engagement strategies in recruitment success. These findings emphasize the interconnected role of AI-driven personalization, trust, and social media engagement in optimizing student recruitment strategies. AI enhances enrollment by providing data-driven insights, facilitating real-time interactions, and offering personalized support, thereby streamlining decision-making and reducing uncertainty. Trust in AI-powered recruitment platforms fosters confidence in automated admissions processes, ensuring transparency and fairness. Social media engagement amplifies these effects by leveraging user-generated content (UGC), electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), and real-time AI-driven interactions, strengthening students' trust and interest in universities via AI-based recruitment methods.

For higher education institutions, integrating AI-driven marketing, trust-enhancing strategies, and social media engagement into recruitment processes is essential for enhancing global competitiveness and positioning universities as innovative, student-centric institutions.

DISCUSSION

This study examined the transformative impact of AI-driven marketing, social media engagement, and trust on enhancing international student recruitment at Jordanian universities. The findings validated all the hypothesized relationships in the proposed model by employing partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) and analyzing survey data from 350 prospective international students. The results highlight the substantial impact of AI-powered marketing tools, including chatbots, predictive analytics, and personalized recommendations, on student engagement and decision-making. Additionally, perceived personalization, trust in AI, and social media engagement emerged as crucial mediating factors shaping how students interact with and respond to AI-enhanced recruitment strategies.

Key Findings Based on the Hypotheses

(1) AI-driven marketing enhances student decision-making

The findings supported Hypothesis 1 (H1), demonstrating that AI-driven marketing significantly enhances student decision-making by providing real-time, tailored support. AI-powered chatbots, recommendation engines, and predictive

analytics simplify the application process by offering personalized guidance on academic programs, scholarships, and admissions. These results align with the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), which highlights the role of perceived usefulness and ease of use in technology adoption (Davis, 1989). Similar studies have confirmed that AI-generated recommendations increase confidence in decision-making by reducing information overload and improving accessibility (Nguyen & LeBlanc, 2023). For Jordanian universities, leveraging AI-driven marketing represents a strategic advantage in attracting global applicants while ensuring a seamless recruitment experience.

(2) Perceived Personalization Strengthens Student Engagement

Hypothesis 2 (H2) was supported, indicating that perceived personalization plays a critical mediating role in the relationship between AI-driven marketing and student engagement. AI-powered recruitment platforms that provide personalized content, such as program suggestions, scholarship alerts, and AI-driven chat assistance, enhance students' sense of relevance and connection with universities. This aligns with the personalization–privacy paradox, emphasizing the need for AI-generated content to balance customization with ethical data use (Phelps et al., 2024). Studies by Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2023) confirm that universities implementing AI-driven personalization strategies experience greater student engagement and application intent. For Jordanian institutions, investing in AI-powered personalization ensures a competitive edge in student recruitment while fostering stronger relationships between applicants and universities.

(3) Trust in AI-Driven Recruitment Influences Student Decisions

Hypothesis 3 (H3) suggests that trust has a significant influence on students' engagement with AI-powered recruitment tools. When AI-driven marketing strategies are perceived as transparent, ethical, and reliable, students are likely to trust and adopt these technologies in their application journey. The Trust-Based Decision-Making Model (Nguyen & LeBlanc, 2023) supports this finding, emphasizing that trust in AI is crucial for mitigating algorithmic bias and alleviating data privacy concerns. Prior research by McDuff and Czerwinski (2021) highlights the importance of ethical AI design in fostering trust. Jordanian universities can enhance trust in AI-driven recruitment by implementing robust data security measures, ensuring algorithmic fairness, and maintaining human oversight in AI-powered admissions interactions.

(4) Social Media Engagement Amplifies AI-Driven Recruitment

Hypothesis 4 (H4) was validated, highlighting the role of AI-enhanced social media engagement in student recruitment. AI-driven marketing campaigns on platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and LinkedIn facilitate real-time engagement, peer interactions, and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM). Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) explains how peer recommendations and social media influence students' perceptions of university credibility. Recent studies by Budhwar et al. (2024) confirm that AI-driven social media marketing enhances institutional branding and student trust. For Jordanian universities,

integrating AI-powered social media strategies, such as influencer collaboration, AI-generated video content, and chatbot-assisted engagement, can expand global reach and strengthen student recruitment outcomes.

Implications: Theoretical and Practical Contributions

This study advances the theoretical understanding by integrating AI-driven marketing into established models such as the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and the Trust-Based Decision-Making Model. By extending the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), the research demonstrates that AI-driven personalization and trust are fundamental determinants of technology adoption in student recruitment. Unlike conventional applications of TAM, which focus primarily on usability and perceived usefulness, this study incorporates AI-driven engagement as a key variable influencing decision-making. Moreover, by applying the Trust-Based Decision-Making Model, this study offers insights into how transparency in AI, data security, and ethical considerations influence students' perceptions of AI-powered recruitment platforms. The findings also reinforce the Personalization–Privacy Paradox, underscoring the need for universities to strike a balance between AI-driven customization and responsible data use. Unlike prior research that examines AI-driven marketing in isolation, this study focuses on its intersection with social media engagement, providing a more comprehensive framework for understanding digital recruitment strategies.

Ultimately, this research addresses a critical gap by examining AI-driven student recruitment in the context of an emerging market. While most AI marketing studies focus on developed economies, this study contextualizes AI adoption in Jordanian higher education, offering valuable insights into how universities in digitally transitioning regions can leverage AI for recruitment success. From a practical perspective, this study provides actionable recommendations for universities, policymakers, and higher education marketers seeking to optimize AI-driven student recruitment:

1. To increase AI-driven personalization, universities should invest in AI-powered recommendation engines, chatbots, and predictive analytics to provide personalized recruitment experiences. Customizing outreach efforts on the basis of student preferences can enhance engagement and increase confidence in decision-making.

2. **Building Trust in AI-Powered Recruitment** – Institutions must prioritize data privacy, transparency, and the ethical use of AI in recruitment strategies. Communicating AI decision-making processes, ensuring unbiased AI-generated recommendations, and integrating human oversight can strengthen student trust.

3. **Leveraging AI-enhanced social media engagement** – Universities should optimize AI-driven social media marketing through influencer partnerships, AI-generated video campaigns, and student testimonial-driven content. AI-powered analytics can help tailor digital recruitment strategies to maximize engagement.

4. **Strengthening** digital literacy among university staff—Higher education institutions should provide training on AI-driven recruitment strategies, ethical considerations for AI, and data-driven decision-making. Equipping admissions teams with AI literacy ensures the effective implementation of AI-powered marketing.

5. **Establishing AI Policy Guidelines in Higher Education** – Policymakers should develop standardized regulations governing AI use in student recruitment. Ethical AI frameworks, data protection policies, and fairness guidelines ensure the responsible implementation of AI while maintaining student trust.

By adopting these recommendations, Jordanian universities can enhance their AI-driven recruitment strategies, strengthen institutional branding, and improve student engagement. AI-powered marketing presents a unique opportunity to modernize recruitment efforts while ensuring transparency and inclusivity.

Study Limitations and Future Research Directions

While this study provides valuable insights into the role of AI-driven marketing, social media engagement, and trust in international student recruitment, several limitations should be acknowledged when the findings are interpreted. First, the study primarily examines AI-driven recruitment strategies in the context of higher education, which may limit the applicability of the findings to other domains, such as corporate talent acquisition, government-led educational programs, or vocational training institutes. Future research could expand on this work by examining AI-driven marketing strategies across various sectors to understand how AI influences decision-making in different industries. A comparative analysis between higher education institutions and corporate recruiters could offer a broader perspective on AI's role in digital outreach and candidate engagement.

Second, the study employs a cross-sectional research design, meaning that the data were collected simultaneously. This approach does not capture the evolving nature of AI adoption in the student recruitment process. As AI technologies, data-driven marketing strategies, and students' digital behaviors evolve, future longitudinal studies could provide deeper insights into how AI-driven recruitment strategies influence engagement and enrollment decisions. Investigating shifts in student perceptions, trust in AI, and adoption rates of AI-powered tools in recruitment would be valuable for tracking long-term trends and effectiveness. Third, while this study focuses on perceived personalization, trust, and social media engagement as key mediators, other factors, such as regulatory policies, ethical considerations, and cultural attitudes toward AI-driven recruitment, could further enhance the understanding of AI's impact on international student decision-making. Future research should explore the role of AI governance, fairness in AI-generated recommendations, and the ethical use of student data to ensure transparency and trust in AI-powered recruitment. Given that attitudes toward the adoption of AI may differ across cultural and regional

contexts, examining these variations across different geographic markets would provide a more nuanced understanding of AI-driven marketing in education.

Additionally, the study relies on self-report survey data, which may be subject to biases such as social desirability, recall bias, or limited direct experience with AI-driven recruitment tools. Future research could complement survey-based findings with experimental or observational methodologies, analyzing real-time interactions between prospective students and AI-powered recruitment systems. Such approaches would objectively assess AI's impact on student engagement, decision-making confidence, and enrollment behaviors. By addressing these limitations, future research can build upon this study to develop more comprehensive strategies for leveraging AI in student recruitment. Further exploration of AI's role in transparency, ethical AI adoption, and data privacy compliance will ensure that AI-driven recruitment remains effective, trustworthy, and inclusive in the evolving digital landscape of higher education marketing.

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Appendix 1

Code	Construct /Variables	References
AI-Driven Marketing Exposure (AIM)		Zhang et al., 2023; King & He, 2024; Krishnasamy, (2024); Oraif 2024)
AIM1	I am aware of the AI-driven recruitment strategies universities use.	
AIM2	AI-driven recruitment tools provide relevant information about academic programs.	
AIM3	AI-powered chatbots effectively assist with university admission queries.	
AIM4	AI-driven recommendation engines (e.g., course suggestions) enhance my decision-making.	
AIM5	AI-enhanced email campaigns and targeted ads have influenced my university choices.	
Perceived Personalization (PP)		Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2023; Saadi et al., 2024;Mutambik (2024),Yang, E., & Beil, 2024, Makinde, et al., 2024
PP1	AI-driven recruitment platforms provide information tailored to my academic interests.	
PP2	AI-powered tools customize program recommendations based on my previous searches.	
PP3	AI-based recruitment strategies increase my sense of connection with a university.	
PP4	AI-driven marketing improves my engagement with university-related content.	
PP5	AI-powered recruitment platforms feel more relevant to me than traditional methods.	
Trust in AI-Powered Recruitment (TP)		Nguyen & LeBlanc, 2023; Phelps e al., 2024), Han, et al., (2024)
TP1	I trust AI-driven recruitment tools to provide accurate and unbiased information.	
TP2	AI-powered recruitment tools prioritize data privacy and security.	
TP3	Universities using AI-powered marketing are transparent about how they handle student data.	
TP4	I feel comfortable interacting with AI-based recruitment platforms.	
TP5	AI-enhanced recruitment tools should include human oversight to ensure fairness.	
Social Media Engagement (SM)		Budhwar et al., 2024; Gonzalez et al., 2023),Budhwar et al., 2022, Amato, et al., 2024
SM1	AI-driven social media ads increase my awareness of universities.	
SM2	AI-powered chatbots on social media provide useful information.	
SM3	AI-enhanced influencer marketing (e.g., student testimonials) affects my perception of a university.	
SM4	AI-driven social media engagement improves my trust in a university's recruitment process.	
SM5	AI-powered recommendation algorithms on social media help me discover suitable universities.	
Student Decision-Making (SD)		Alyammah, 2024;Vedapradha, e al., 2024,Nazaretsky, et al., 202
SD1	AI-driven recruitment strategies positively influence my university application decision.	
SD2	AI-powered tools help me compare different universities more efficiently.	
SD3	I am more likely to apply to a university with AI-driven recruitment strategies.	
SD4	AI-enhanced marketing makes my decision-making process more manageable.	
SD5	AI-powered tools increase my confidence in choosing a university.	