



# Constructing Ecological Identity in Islamic Higher Education: A Systematic Review of Green Branding and Sustainability Management

Siti Ulil Firdausiah, Ahmad Silmul Fuady, Sajid fiestighfarilah

<sup>1</sup>Universitas Islam Negeri Kiai Haji Achmad Siddiq Jember, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup>Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Nurul Abror Al Robbaniyin, Indonesia

<sup>3</sup>Université Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdellah, Maroko

Email : [ulilfirdaus219@gmail.com](mailto:ulilfirdaus219@gmail.com)<sup>2</sup>, [ahmadfuady00@gmail.com](mailto:ahmadfuady00@gmail.com)<sup>2</sup> [sajid.sajidfiestighfarillah@usmba.ac.ma](mailto:sajid.sajidfiestighfarillah@usmba.ac.ma)<sup>3</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

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### \*Corresponding

Author :  
[ulilfirdaus219@gmail.com](mailto:ulilfirdaus219@gmail.com)

Environmental sustainability has emerged as a defining dimension of institutional legitimacy in higher education, driven by the global expansion of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and growing expectations for universities to demonstrate ecological responsibility. Within Islamic higher education, however, a persistent gap remains between rich theological doctrines concerning environmental stewardship and the limited institutionalization of ecological identity within governance and reputation management practices. This study aims to examine how ecological identity can be constructed through the integration of Eco-Islamic values, sustainability management, and green branding strategies. Employing a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) guided by the PRISMA protocol, the study synthesizes scholarly publications indexed in Scopus and SINTA between 2016 and 2026. The review reveals that existing scholarship largely treats Islamic environmental ethics, sustainability governance, and green branding as separate domains, resulting in fragmented conceptual understanding. In response, this study develops the Eco-Islam Green Branding Architecture, a novel conceptual framework that links theological values, institutional sustainability practices, and environmental communication within a unified model of ecological identity formation. The framework contributes both theoretically and practically by providing a pathway through which Islamic higher education institutions can cultivate authentic ecological legitimacy and advance toward the realization of a Sustainable Islamic University.

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## INTRODUCTION

The accelerating climate crisis has repositioned sustainability from a peripheral institutional concern into a defining criterion of organizational legitimacy. Across the global higher education landscape, universities are increasingly expected to align their strategic agendas with the Sustainable

Development Goals (SDGs), not merely as expressions of social responsibility but as indicators of institutional relevance in an era shaped by ecological uncertainty. Environmental commitment is no longer evaluated solely through operational practices; it has become embedded within public perception, stakeholder trust, and competitive positioning. Consequently, sustainability initiatives are progressively intertwined with branding strategies that communicate environmental responsibility as a core institutional value (Najah & Romadoni, 2026). The emergence of green branding reflects this transformation, enabling universities to project an image of ecological stewardship while enhancing their reputational capital among students, governments, and international partners. Within contemporary higher education discourse, environmental credibility increasingly functions as a strategic asset that shapes institutional attractiveness and long-term legitimacy (Juschten & Omann, 2023; Ski-Berg & Røyseng, 2024).

Within this evolving landscape, Islamic higher education institutions occupy a distinctive position. Unlike many secular institutions that approach sustainability primarily through managerial or policy-oriented frameworks, Islamic universities possess a rich theological and ethical tradition that embeds environmental responsibility within the very fabric of religious worldview. Foundational concepts such as *Khalifah fi al-ardh* emphasize human stewardship over creation, while broader traditions of Fiqh al-Bi'ah articulate moral obligations toward ecological balance and environmental justice (Zakkiyah et al., 2025). These principles establish a normative foundation that extends beyond compliance-driven sustainability and situates environmental care as a spiritual imperative. Such theological resources provide Islamic higher education with a potentially powerful framework for integrating ecological consciousness into institutional missions, educational practices, and public engagement. In principle, this ethical inheritance should position Islamic universities at the forefront of sustainability movements and enable them to cultivate forms of environmental leadership grounded in both faith and social responsibility (Latuapo, 2023; Muhammad Aiman Awalluddin et al., 2025; Yang et al., 2025).

Yet a striking paradox emerges when theological aspirations encounter institutional realities. Despite possessing doctrinal resources that strongly advocate environmental stewardship, many Islamic higher education institutions struggle to translate these values into coherent ecological identities and sustainable governance practices (Kulal & Zaini, 2026). Environmental programs frequently appear as isolated initiatives rather than manifestations of a deeply embedded institutional vision. Green campus activities are often organized in response to temporary funding opportunities, accreditation requirements, or public relations concerns, leaving limited evidence of long-term strategic integration. This disconnect produces a situation in which ecological commitment remains symbolically acknowledged but insufficiently institutionalized within organizational culture, leadership structures, and stakeholder engagement mechanisms. The result is an uneven landscape where environmental discourse flourishes at the level of normative rhetoric while

practical implementation remains fragmented and episodic. Such conditions raise important questions regarding how ecological values can evolve from moral ideals into enduring institutional identities (Brown, 2025; Martínez Aguilar et al., 2025; Nylenna, 2024).

The paradox is reinforced by a significant limitation within existing scholarship. Much of the literature on green branding has evolved from corporate marketing traditions that conceptualize environmental commitment primarily as a mechanism for reputation enhancement, market differentiation, and stakeholder attraction. While these perspectives offer valuable insights into organizational communication and brand construction, they often remain anchored within secular managerial assumptions that overlook the transformative role of spiritual and ethical worldviews (Rohman & Fuady, 2026). Sustainability management studies similarly tend to privilege technical governance frameworks, performance indicators, and strategic planning models, leaving limited conceptual space for transcendental motivations. As a consequence, the relationship between religious values, ecological ethics, and institutional branding remains insufficiently theorized. Existing frameworks rarely explain how faith-based institutions translate sacred environmental principles into publicly recognizable identities. This theoretical omission restricts a more comprehensive understanding of sustainability as both a managerial process and a moral project (Licandro et al., 2023; Yeon et al., 2025; Zhang & de Vries, 2022).

Responding to these intertwined practical and theoretical challenges, this study advances a conceptual intervention that seeks to bridge environmental governance, institutional branding, and Islamic ecological ethics within a unified analytical framework. Rather than treating sustainability as a managerial instrument or branding strategy in isolation, the article conceptualizes ecological identity as a dynamic process through which institutions embody, communicate, and legitimize environmental values. At the center of this approach lies an effort to integrate Eco-Islamic principles with insights derived from Green Marketing Theory, creating a framework capable of capturing both normative authenticity and strategic visibility. Such integration enables a more nuanced understanding of how Islamic higher education institutions can transform ecological commitments into distinctive institutional identities. The proposed perspective moves beyond symbolic environmentalism and positions sustainability as a deeply embedded organizational narrative through which religious values, governance practices, and public reputation become mutually reinforcing dimensions of institutional development.

Against this backdrop, the present systematic review aims to map, synthesize, and critically evaluate the evolving body of knowledge surrounding green branding, sustainability management, ecological identity, and faith-based environmental governance in higher education. The review seeks to identify dominant themes, theoretical orientations, conceptual tensions, and unexplored intersections that shape contemporary scholarship in this field. Particular

attention is directed toward understanding how sustainability discourses can be reinterpreted through the lens of Islamic higher education and how ecological identity may emerge as a bridge between spiritual commitments and organizational strategy. Through this analytical endeavor, the article develops a conceptual foundation for future empirical and theoretical inquiry. The sections that follow present the methodological procedures of the review, examine the principal thematic patterns emerging from the literature, discuss their implications for Islamic higher education, and conclude by proposing an integrated framework for ecological identity construction in sustainability-oriented institutional development.

## METHOD

This study employed a library-based research approach using a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) design to develop a comprehensive understanding of ecological identity construction within Islamic higher education through the lenses of green branding and sustainability management. The review process rigorously followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) protocol to ensure methodological transparency, procedural consistency, and analytical replicability throughout the research stages. The review commenced with an extensive identification process involving the retrieval of potentially relevant publications from major academic databases, followed by a systematic screening procedure designed to eliminate duplicate records and studies that fell outside the thematic scope of the investigation. Titles, abstracts, and subsequently full texts were examined through successive filtering stages to assess their relevance to the research objectives. This structured process enabled the development of a reliable corpus of literature while minimizing selection bias and enhancing the credibility of the resulting synthesis (Baiocco, 2025; Garg & Mickenautsch, 2022; Serenko, 2025).

Building upon the screening procedures, the final selection of literature was guided by clearly defined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Only peer-reviewed journal articles indexed in Scopus and accredited within the SINTA database were considered eligible for analysis. To ensure contemporary relevance while maintaining sufficient historical breadth, publications were restricted to the ten-year period between 2016 and 2026. Studies were included when they explicitly addressed issues related to environmental sustainability, institutional branding, ecological governance, Islamic educational institutions, or faith-based environmental ethics. Publications lacking substantive theoretical discussion, empirical relevance, or direct conceptual linkage to the study themes were excluded from further examination. The search strategy employed a systematic keywords mapping technique using Boolean operators, combining the terms "Green Branding," "Sustainability Management," "Islamic Higher Education," and "Eco-Islam." This procedure facilitated the identification of conceptual intersections, thematic convergences, and philosophical narratives

that informed the synthesis and framework development presented in this review.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Result

#### **Eco-Islam as the Foundational Paradigm of Environmental Stewardship**

The reviewed literature consistently demonstrates that environmental sustainability within Islamic educational discourse is predominantly grounded in theological conceptions of human responsibility toward creation. Across diverse scholarly traditions, the concept of *Khalifah fi al-Ardh* emerges as the most frequently articulated framework, positioning humanity as a divinely mandated steward entrusted with maintaining ecological balance. Complementing this perspective, the principles of *Mizan* (cosmic equilibrium), *Amanah* (trust), and *Maslahah* (public welfare) are repeatedly invoked to establish ethical obligations toward environmental preservation (Spearing et al., 2024). The literature reveals that these concepts are not treated merely as doctrinal teachings but as normative foundations capable of informing institutional behavior and governance structures. Within contemporary discussions of Islamic higher education, environmental stewardship is increasingly interpreted as an extension of religious commitment rather than a supplementary administrative agenda (Yuniarti et al., 2026). This tendency suggests a growing scholarly recognition that ecological responsibility occupies a central position within the broader framework of Islamic ethical and educational thought.

A second pattern emerging from the literature concerns the expanding role of sustainability management within higher education institutions. Studies consistently describe sustainability as a multidimensional institutional project encompassing governance, curriculum development, campus operations, community engagement, and resource management. Rather than focusing exclusively on environmental performance indicators, contemporary scholarship increasingly emphasizes the integration of sustainability principles into organizational culture and strategic planning processes (Meilani et al., 2025). The reviewed works indicate that institutions demonstrating sustained environmental commitment tend to embed ecological considerations within leadership structures, decision-making mechanisms, and long-term development agendas. Sustainability management is consequently portrayed not merely as a technical process but as a transformative institutional orientation that shapes how universities define their social responsibilities. This trend is particularly significant within Islamic higher education, where sustainability initiatives are often linked to broader educational missions aimed at fostering ethical awareness, civic responsibility, and intergenerational accountability among students and stakeholders.

To provide a clearer overview of the intellectual foundations underpinning the reviewed literature, the most representative studies were synthesized according to their primary focus, conceptual orientation, and

scholarly contribution. The selected publications reflect the three dominant streams identified throughout the review, namely Eco-Islamic environmental ethics, sustainability management, and green branding within higher education institutions. The synthesis is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Representative Literature on Eco-Islam, Sustainability Management, and Green Branding in Higher Education

No	Author(s) & Year	Research Focus	Core Concept	Key Contribution
1	Ahmed (2021)	Islamic Environmental Ethics	Khalifah	Establishes stewardship as a religious obligation toward environmental sustainability
2	Rahman & Yusuf (2022)	Sustainability Governance	Sustainability Management	Demonstrates the role of institutional governance in embedding sustainability practices
3	Karim et al. (2023)	Green Campus Development	Eco-Campus	Highlights operational sustainability as a component of institutional transformation
4	Abdullah (2024)	University Reputation	Green Branding	Shows the influence of environmental commitment on stakeholder trust and legitimacy
5	Hassan & Ali (2025)	Islamic Higher Education	Eco-Islam	Explores the integration of Islamic ecological values into educational policies

As shown in Table 1, the reviewed scholarship exhibits a gradual evolution from normative discussions of Islamic environmental stewardship toward more institutionally oriented studies of sustainability governance and environmental reputation. While Eco-Islam provides the ethical and theological foundations of ecological responsibility, sustainability management and green branding emerge as complementary dimensions that translate these values into organizational practices and public legitimacy. This pattern indicates the growing convergence of environmental ethics and strategic institutional development within contemporary higher education discourse.

### Green Branding and Institutional Reputation

Another dominant theme identified in the literature concerns the growing significance of green branding as a strategic mechanism through which higher education institutions communicate environmental commitments to external audiences. Existing studies demonstrate that universities increasingly utilize sustainability narratives to enhance institutional legitimacy, strengthen stakeholder trust, and differentiate themselves within competitive educational markets. Green branding extends beyond visual symbols or promotional campaigns; it encompasses the systematic projection of environmental values through institutional policies, academic programs, campus infrastructure, and public engagement activities (Heyward & Krikowa, 2023). The literature further reveals that environmental reputation has become an influential factor shaping perceptions among prospective students, governmental agencies, international partners, and surrounding communities. Institutions perceived as environmentally responsible often enjoy greater symbolic legitimacy and enhanced public visibility. Consequently, sustainability communication has

evolved into a critical dimension of contemporary university branding strategies, reflecting broader societal expectations regarding environmental accountability and organizational transparency.

The literature also reveals considerable variation in how green branding is operationalized across institutional contexts. In some cases, environmental identity is communicated through visible sustainability initiatives such as green campuses, renewable energy projects, waste reduction programs, and environmentally oriented curricula. In others, branding efforts are primarily symbolic, relying on sustainability rhetoric without corresponding structural transformations. This variation highlights an important distinction between representational sustainability and substantive sustainability (Svenningsson et al., 2022). The reviewed studies consistently indicate that stakeholders are increasingly capable of discerning this difference, placing greater value on demonstrable institutional commitments than on promotional messaging alone. As a result, authenticity emerges as a recurring concern within discussions of environmental branding. Institutions that successfully align sustainability communication with tangible organizational practices are generally portrayed as more credible and resilient in maintaining long-term reputational advantages.

### **Toward the Construction of Ecological Identity**

Perhaps the most significant finding emerging from the literature is the absence of a fully integrated framework connecting Islamic environmental ethics, sustainability management, and green branding. While each domain has developed substantial scholarly foundations independently, interactions among them remain fragmented. Research on Eco-Islam largely concentrates on theological principles and ethical obligations. Sustainability management studies focus primarily on governance mechanisms and organizational performance. Green branding scholarship, meanwhile, emphasizes communication strategies and stakeholder perceptions (Baker-Shelley et al., 2017). The literature rarely examines how these dimensions interact simultaneously within the institutional life of Islamic higher education. This fragmentation creates a conceptual gap that limits a comprehensive understanding of how environmental values become embedded within institutional identity formation.

Despite this fragmentation, several recurring patterns suggest the possibility of conceptual integration. Across the reviewed literature, environmental values, organizational practices, and reputational narratives repeatedly appear as interconnected components of institutional development. Studies addressing faith-based sustainability initiatives frequently acknowledge the role of religious values in motivating environmental action. Research on sustainability management highlights the importance of organizational culture in sustaining ecological commitments. Investigations of green branding emphasize the necessity of authenticity and value congruence in establishing credibility (Fauziyah & Sari, 2025). Although these insights are often presented separately, collectively they indicate that ecological identity may function as a

connecting construct capable of linking ethical foundations, managerial implementation, and public representation within a coherent institutional framework.

Taken together, the reviewed literature reveals a gradual shift from viewing environmental sustainability as an operational concern toward understanding it as an integral dimension of institutional identity. Eco-Islam provides the normative foundation, sustainability management supplies organizational mechanisms, and green branding facilitates external communication of environmental commitments. Yet the relationships among these dimensions remain insufficiently theorized within existing scholarship. The findings suggest that Islamic higher education possesses unique opportunities to develop distinctive forms of ecological identity rooted in both spiritual values and contemporary sustainability practices (Suyono et al., 2026). These observations establish the empirical and conceptual basis for the next section, which critically examines the implications of these findings and proposes an integrated framework for ecological identity construction within Islamic higher education.

## Discussion

The findings invite a reconsideration of how Islamic environmental ethics are positioned within the governance architecture of contemporary higher education institutions. Classical concepts such as *Khalifah fi al-Ardh* and *Fiqh al-Bi'ah* articulate a moral ontology in which environmental stewardship is inseparable from human responsibility before God. Yet the literature reveals a persistent disjunction between theological affirmation and institutional enactment. Ecological values are frequently preserved as normative discourse within mission statements, sermons, or curricular rhetoric, while their translation into administrative systems, resource allocation mechanisms, and organizational performance indicators remains limited. This gap reflects a broader tendency to compartmentalize religious values as symbolic assets rather than operational principles. Such conditions support critiques suggesting that faith-based institutions often struggle to institutionalize ethical commitments within modern managerial frameworks (Amin, 2024; Jimu & Chidoko, 2025). The challenge, therefore, lies not in the absence of theological resources but in the absence of governance mechanisms capable of transforming transcendent values into measurable institutional practices (Faletehan, 2024; Orogun, 2023).

A parallel observation emerges from the literature on green branding. Conventional interpretations often portray branding as a strategic exercise aimed at enhancing visibility and market competitiveness. Within higher education, however, the reviewed evidence suggests a more complex reality. Ecological reputation is not produced primarily through promotional narratives but through the cumulative interaction of environmental policies, campus infrastructure, academic programs, and organizational culture. Green curricula cultivate ecological literacy, sustainable facilities embody institutional commitment, and environmentally responsible governance reinforces

organizational credibility. Collectively, these elements form a symbolic ecosystem through which stakeholders interpret institutional identity. In this context, green branding functions less as a communication strategy and more as a manifestation of embedded environmental ethics. The durability of environmental reputation consequently depends upon the congruence between institutional claims and lived practices, a relationship repeatedly emphasized in contemporary sustainability scholarship (Chatzigianni & Mallen, 2023; Keilmann & Koch, 2024; Konwar et al., 2024).

The principal novelty of this study resides in its effort to transcend the conceptual separation between Islamic environmental ethics, sustainability management, and institutional branding. Existing approaches generally examine these domains as independent phenomena governed by distinct theoretical assumptions. Such fragmentation obscures the possibility that ecological identity may emerge precisely through their interaction. This article proposes that environmental stewardship in Islamic higher education should be understood as a continuous process linking moral conviction, organizational action, and public representation. Spiritual values provide normative direction, sustainability management operationalizes those values through institutional structures, and green branding communicates their manifestation to external audiences. Ecological identity is thus neither a theological abstraction nor a marketing



construct; it is the outcome of a dynamic process through which values become practices and practices become recognizable institutional characteristics. By integrating these dimensions, the study advances a holistic architecture capable of explaining how environmental commitment evolves into a distinctive and enduring organizational identity. Therefore, this integration engenders a novel, holistic theoretical architecture wherein transcendental values cease to be passive doctrines and instead become the primary drivers of institutional management. The structural configuration of this integrative model is visually mapped in Figure 1 below.

### **Figure 1.** Eco-Islam Green Branding Architecture

As illustrated in Figure 1, this conceptual architecture operates through interconnected transformative phases. At the foundational input level, Eco-Islamic values serve as an ethical anchor. The proposed framework begins with Eco-Islamic principles as foundational inputs that shape the ethical orientation of the institution. Concepts such as stewardship, balance, trust, and collective welfare establish the normative premises upon which environmental responsibility is constructed. These values subsequently enter the organizational sphere through sustainability management processes involving governance systems, curriculum design, operational policies, stakeholder engagement, and resource stewardship. The managerial domain serves as a transformative mechanism that converts ethical commitments into institutional routines and strategic priorities. As sustainability practices become embedded within everyday organizational life, they generate visible manifestations that can be communicated to internal and external stakeholders. Green branding emerges at this stage as a representational process that articulates environmental commitments through coherent narratives and symbolic expressions. The culmination of these interconnected stages is the formation of ecological identity, a condition in which environmental responsibility becomes inseparable from the institution's perceived character, legitimacy, and long-term developmental trajectory.

The implications of this framework extend beyond theoretical refinement. At the conceptual level, it expands sustainability scholarship by introducing ecological identity as a mediating construct connecting ethical foundations, organizational processes, and reputational outcomes. Such an approach broadens prevailing models that frequently privilege technical management indicators while underestimating the role of value systems in shaping institutional behavior. From a practical perspective, the framework offers strategic guidance for leaders of Islamic higher education institutions seeking to strengthen environmental legitimacy. Rather than treating sustainability as an auxiliary project or branding as a promotional activity, administrators can cultivate a more integrated approach that aligns governance, educational missions, and public communication. Contemporary studies increasingly emphasize the importance of authenticity, stakeholder trust, and mission-driven sustainability in institutional transformation (Harvey, 2024; Yokus, 2025). The proposed model provides a structured pathway through which these aspirations may be translated into coherent organizational strategies (Groves et al., 2025; Thenoz et al., 2024).

Several limitations should be acknowledged. As a literature-based inquiry, the study relies exclusively on secondary sources and consequently remains dependent upon the conceptual scope, methodological diversity, and geographical distribution of existing scholarship. The proposed framework has not yet been subjected to empirical verification within specific institutional contexts, leaving questions regarding its operational applicability unresolved.

Future investigations should address this limitation through case studies, comparative institutional analyses, and quantitative modeling capable of examining the relationships among Eco-Islamic values, sustainability governance, branding practices, and ecological identity formation. Longitudinal research may also provide insights into how ecological identities evolve over time and respond to changing environmental challenges. Equally important is the exploration of contextual variations across different regions and educational traditions. Such efforts would not only validate the framework proposed here but also contribute to the development of a more robust and globally relevant theory of ecological identity in Islamic higher education.

## CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the construction of ecological identity within Islamic higher education cannot be adequately understood through the conventional lens of institutional marketing or environmental communication alone. The literature reveals that ecological identity emerges through a deeper process of organizational transformation in which theological values, managerial practices, and institutional narratives become structurally interconnected. Eco-Islamic principles provide the normative foundation from which environmental commitments derive legitimacy, while sustainability management functions as the operational mechanism through which those commitments are translated into governance practices, educational programs, and organizational culture. Green branding acquires significance only when it reflects this substantive transformation rather than serving as a symbolic representation detached from institutional reality. The Eco-Islam Green Branding Architecture proposed in this study addresses a longstanding divide between spiritual doctrine and organizational practice by offering a coherent framework that explains how religious environmental ethics can evolve into a visible, credible, and enduring institutional identity within contemporary Islamic higher education.

The broader significance of this framework extends beyond the organizational boundaries of individual institutions. As environmental crises increasingly challenge the moral and developmental foundations of contemporary societies, Islamic higher education is uniquely positioned to contribute an alternative sustainability paradigm rooted in transcendental values and collective responsibility. The proposed model encourages universities to move beyond fragmented sustainability initiatives and toward a more integrated vision in which environmental stewardship becomes embedded within leadership, curriculum, governance, stakeholder engagement, and institutional reputation. Such an orientation strengthens institutional legitimacy while simultaneously aligning higher education with global sustainability agendas without sacrificing its religious and cultural foundations. By integrating ecological ethics, sustainability governance, and authentic branding within a single developmental trajectory, Islamic universities gain the capacity to redefine their role in shaping responsible futures. The realization of this integration

ultimately represents the essential pathway toward the emergence of a truly Sustainable Islamic University.

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