
GREEN ECONOMY AND BRAND IMAGE DEVELOPMENT IN SMES AT ISLAMIC BOARDING SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

The growth of the green economy is encouraging businesses, including pesantren-based MSMEs, to adopt sustainable business practices to enhance their competitiveness and brand image. This study aims to analyse the role of the green business model in enhancing the brand image of Mercalam products as a pesantren-based SME in the era of the green economy. Although various studies have discussed green business and brand image in SMEs, research specifically examining the application of the green business model in pesantren-based SMEs remains limited. Furthermore, the integration of green economy principles and Islamic values as shapers of brand image has not been extensively studied. This study contributes to enriching the literature on the green economy amongst pesantren-based SMEs and provides a model for strengthening brand image based on sustainability and Islamic values. The study employs a qualitative approach using a case study method focused on Mercalam, located in Pasak Village, Sungai Ambawang Sub-district, Kubu Raya Regency. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation of production processes, business management, and the sustainability practices implemented. The results indicate that the green business model is implemented through the use of local raw materials, efficient production processes, responsible waste management, and the empowerment of the surrounding community. These practices reinforce consumers' positive perceptions of Mercalam as an environmentally friendly SME that is committed to.

Keywords: Green Business Model, Islamic Boarding School-Based SMEs, Brand Image, Economic Sustainability

A. INTRODUCTION

The development of global environmental issues over the past few decades has driven a paradigm shift in development towards a green economy that emphasises a balance between economic growth, environmental sustainability, and social welfare (Ammar et al., 2024). In this context, businesses are no longer solely focused on financial profit but are also required to adopt sustainable business practices that minimise environmental impact whilst delivering social value to the community. This shift in focus has also influenced the dynamics of the business world, including the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) sector, which plays a strategic role in the national economy (Hidayat, 2021).

MSMEs, as the backbone of the Indonesian economy, are expected to adapt to the demands of a green economy through the application of the principles of resource efficiency, waste management, and the use of environmentally friendly raw materials (Farhani et al., 2025). The implementation of sustainable business practices not only impacts the operational sustainability of businesses but also has the potential to strengthen brand image. In an era of increasingly fierce competition, consumers tend to view products produced through processes that are responsible towards the environment and society in a positive light (Saputra & Saggaff, 2024).

One example of the implementation of sustainable business practices at the SME level can be found in businesses based at Islamic boarding schools (Susanty et al., 2025). Pesantren-based SMEs function not only as economic units but also as a means of community empowerment and the reinforcement of ethical values in business activities (Qalbia & Saputra, 2023). The integration of religious values, social responsibility and sustainability principles provides distinctive characteristics that have the potential to strengthen the identity and brand image of the products produced (Ajeng et al., 2025).

Research conducted by Saputra and Saggaff (2024) examined the implementation of green marketing strategies and their impact on brand image and customer loyalty. The results of the study indicate that the application of marketing strategies focused on environmental concern is capable of enhancing consumers' positive perceptions of a brand and leads to increased customer loyalty. These findings confirm that environmental sustainability has become a key consideration in modern consumer behaviour. However, this study focused primarily on aspects of green marketing and did not specifically examine the application of a green business model as part of a brand image development strategy for pesantren-based SMEs.

Farhani et al. (2025) investigated the application of the circular economy and green innovation in MSMEs as a means of enhancing business sustainability. The research findings indicate that the application of circular economy principles through efficient resource management and waste reduction has a positive impact on business sustainability and competitiveness. This study demonstrates that environmentally friendly business practices can serve as a key strategy in addressing the demands of sustainable development. However, the study focused primarily on operational aspects and business innovation, and therefore did not examine how these green economic practices contribute to the formation and strengthening of brand image amongst consumers.

Research by Susanty et al. (2025) examines sustainable business transformation within the pesantren environment through the optimisation of business processes that support economic and social sustainability. The findings indicate that pesantrens have significant potential to develop business units oriented towards sustainability principles through the strengthening of business governance and the empowerment of the surrounding community. This research makes an important contribution to explaining the role of Islamic boarding schools as economic actors capable of supporting sustainable development. However, the study focuses more on the transformation of business processes and has not yet examined the relationship between the implementation of green business models and the formation of the brand image of products produced by boarding school MSMEs.

Based on these previous studies, it is evident that research on green marketing, the circular economy, green innovation, and sustainable business transformation has been extensive. Nevertheless, there remains a lack of research specifically analysing the relationship between the application of green business models and brand image

development in pesantren-based SMEs. Furthermore, the integration of green economy principles with Islamic values as elements shaping brand image has not received much attention in previous research. Therefore, this study offers novelty by analysing how the implementation of a green business model—through the utilisation of local raw materials, production efficiency, waste management, and community empowerment—can contribute to the formation of brand image in pesantren-based SMEs. This study also enriches the literature on the green economy by incorporating the dimension of Islamic values as a distinguishing factor in the development of the brand identity of pesantren-based SMEs.

Mercalam, as a pesantren-based SME operating in the spice processing sector, demonstrates efforts to apply the principles of the green business model in its business activities. These practices are reflected in the use of local raw materials, production process efficiency, waste management, and the empowerment of the local community. Nevertheless, empirical studies specifically analysing the relationship between the implementation of the green business model and brand image formation in pesantren-based SMEs remain relatively limited.

Given this situation, this study aims to analyse in depth the role of the green business model in enhancing the brand image of Mercalam's products as a pesantren-based SME in the era of the green economy. The research focuses on how the application of sustainability principles in business activities can shape positive consumer perceptions and strengthen a brand identity oriented towards environmental and social responsibility. Furthermore, this study also seeks to examine the relationship between sustainable business practices and efforts to enhance the competitiveness of SMEs in the face of market dynamics that increasingly emphasise sustainability values.

B. METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using the case study method to gain an in-depth understanding of the implementation of the green business model at the Mercalam Islamic boarding school SME. This approach was chosen as it enables the researcher to explore the phenomenon contextually and comprehensively, particularly regarding sustainable business practices and brand image formation within a boarding school-based business environment. The research location was the Mercalam business unit situated in Pasak Village, Sungai Ambawang Sub-district, Kubu Raya Regency. The research subjects included business managers, workers, and parties involved in production and business management activities. Research informants were selected using purposive sampling, taking into account their direct involvement in Mercalam's business activities. The informants comprised the owner of the Mercalam business, the production manager, two production workers, one local raw material supplier, and one regular customer. The selection of these informants aimed to obtain comprehensive information regarding the implementation of the green business model and its impact on brand image formation.

Data collection techniques included observation, in-depth interviews and documentation. Observation was used to directly observe the production process, resource management, and the sustainability practices implemented. Interviews were conducted using a semi-structured approach to gather information on the application of the green business model, business values, and perceptions of brand image. Documentation was used to supplement the data in the form of activity logs, photographs of the production process, and other supporting information.

Data analysis was carried out using qualitative descriptive methods through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. The data obtained were selected, categorised, and interpreted to identify patterns in the implementation of the green business model and its impact on brand image. Data validity was ensured through source and method triangulation to guarantee the consistency and validity of the research findings.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research findings indicate that Mercalam has implemented the principles of *the green business model* in its business activities through the management of raw materials, production processes, waste management, and the sustainable strengthening of the business's social aspects. The implementation of this business model demonstrates that Mercalam is not only focused on economic profit but has also begun to integrate sustainability values into all its business activities. This practice represents an adaptation by pesantren-based SMEs to the development of the green economy, which increasingly emphasises the importance of balancing economic growth, environmental sustainability and social responsibility in the business world.

The business practices implemented by Mercalam reflect the '*triple bottom line*' approach introduced by John Elkington, a business concept that emphasises a balance between *profit*, *planet* and *people* (Haryanti, 2021) . This finding is consistent with the research by Haryanti (2021), which explains that the triple bottom line approach is capable of creating a balance between profit, people and the planet as the foundation for business sustainability. In the context of Mercalam, these three aspects are implemented through production efficiency, the empowerment of local communities and responsible environmental management. In this context, business success is not only measured by an increase in financial profit, but also by the extent to which the business is able to have a positive impact on the environment and the surrounding community. This approach demonstrates that sustainable business activities can serve as a long-term strategy to strengthen business competitiveness whilst building a positive image amidst growing consumer awareness of environmental issues.

At the raw material procurement stage, Mercalam utilises local spices sourced directly from farmers in the surrounding area. The use of these local raw materials is a form of support for resource sustainability whilst strengthening economic ties between businesses and the local community. As well as helping to maintain the stability of the raw material supply, this approach also has a positive impact on increasing local farmers'

incomes through mutually supportive business partnerships. This demonstrates that Mercalam's business activities are integral to efforts to empower the local community's economy based on local potential.

The use of raw materials from the immediate vicinity also helps to reduce the environmental impact caused by long-distance distribution. A shorter distribution process is considered capable of reducing fuel consumption and transport costs, making it more efficient and environmentally friendly. Furthermore, the utilisation of natural materials from the surrounding environment demonstrates the business's commitment to maintaining product quality whilst reducing reliance on ready-made raw materials or production inputs that have the potential to harm the environment. This forms an important part of implementing green economy principles at the level of pesantren-based SMEs.

Mercalam's adoption of a *green business model* demonstrates that the concept of sustainable business can be effectively implemented even on a relatively small and simple scale. The involvement of the local community in the production chain and the use of local resources show that business sustainability is not only about environmental aspects but also concerns the social and economic sustainability of the community. Consequently, the business practices carried out by Mercalam not only support business continuity but also strengthen the enterprise's identity as a pesantren-based SME oriented towards ethical values, environmental stewardship and the sustainable empowerment of the community.

In the production process, Mercalam implements efficient processing methods by minimising energy use and reducing the amount of waste generated during production activities. These efforts form part of the application of the principle of *eco-efficiency*—a concept popularised by the *World Business Council for Sustainable Development* that emphasises the importance of creating economic value through the more efficient and environmentally friendly use of resources (Safitri et al., 2022). The application of this principle demonstrates that production efficiency is not merely understood as an effort to reduce operational costs, but also as a form of corporate responsibility in safeguarding environmental sustainability amidst growing attention to green economy issues.

Mercalam's production efficiency practices are evident in the use of raw materials tailored to production needs, thereby reducing material wastage. Furthermore, the production process utilises simple equipment whilst still prioritising energy efficiency. These measures demonstrate a more prudent approach to resource management within the business. In the context of pesantren-based MSMEs, the implementation of such efficiency measures is crucial because, as well as supporting business sustainability, it fosters more economical production patterns that are responsible towards the surrounding environment.

Natural material residues from production are also managed to prevent environmental pollution. Waste management involves reusing any remaining materials that are still usable and ensuring that production waste is not disposed of haphazardly.

These practices reflect the business operators' awareness of the importance of maintaining environmental cleanliness and reducing the negative impacts of production activities. Responsible waste management serves as an indicator that the implementation of *the green business model* at Mercalam is not merely conceptual but has been effectively integrated into the day-to-day operational activities of the business.

In addition to focusing on environmental aspects, Mercalam's business activities also involve the local community in the production process and business management. This community involvement yields social benefits in the form of job opportunities and increased community participation in locally-based economic activities. The presence of Mercalam indirectly helps to strengthen social ties between the business and the surrounding community through mutually supportive cooperation. This situation demonstrates that the existence of pesantren-based MSMEs serves not only as business units but also as a means of community economic empowerment.

Community involvement in business activities also raises environmental awareness and fosters a collective sense of responsibility towards business sustainability. Through production activities that apply environmentally friendly principles, the community is beginning to understand the importance of maintaining a balance between economic activity and environmental conservation. This demonstrates that the implementation of *a green business model* at Mercalam not only improves the quality of the business but also contributes to building a business culture that is more mindful of the environment and social sustainability. Consequently, the production practices implemented by Mercalam represent a concrete example of the green economy in action at the level of pesantren-based MSMEs.

Table 1. Implementation of the Green Business Model at Mercalam

Aspects of the Green Business Model	Form of Implementation		Impact on Brand Image
Raw Materials	Using local spices from nearby farmers		Perception of natural and sustainable products
Production process	Efficient production with minimal waste		Image of an environmentally friendly business
Waste management	Waste is managed responsibly		Building consumer trust
Product packaging	Moving towards environmentally friendly packaging		Sustainable brand identity
Social aspects	Empowerment of local communities		Image of an ethical and responsible business

The findings in Table 1 show that the implementation of *the green business model* at Mercalam is not only geared towards improving operational efficiency, but also

emphasises the importance of integrating environmental and social aspects into all business activities. This is evident in how Mercalam manages raw materials, production processes and waste management, as well as the involvement of the local community in its business activities. This approach demonstrates that business sustainability is not understood solely in the context of achieving economic profit, but also encompasses responsibility towards the environment and society as part of an interconnected business system.

From an environmental perspective, the implementation of a *green business model* is reflected in the use of natural and local raw materials, the reduction of production waste, and efforts to use resources efficiently in the production process. These practices demonstrate a business's commitment to minimising negative impacts on the environment whilst ensuring the sustainability of the resources utilised. In the context of the green economy, these measures are important because environmentally friendly production activities are seen as capable of increasing the added value of products whilst building consumer confidence in the quality and accountability of the business.

Meanwhile, on the social front, Mercalam involves the local community in production activities and business management as a form of community-based economic empowerment. The involvement of the local community not only provides economic benefits through the creation of job opportunities but also strengthens social ties between business operators and the surrounding community. This situation demonstrates that the existence of pesantren-based SMEs makes a broader contribution, namely as a means of strengthening the local economy whilst also serving as a vehicle for fostering a shared awareness of the importance of business and environmental sustainability.

The integration of these economic, environmental and social aspects indirectly shapes a positive business image in the eyes of consumers. Consumers tend to rate products more highly when they are produced through responsible and sustainability-oriented processes. A business image that is environmentally friendly, ethical and socially responsible is a key factor in building a strong *brand image* amidst increasingly competitive business environments. Consequently, the implementation of a *green business model* not only impacts the sustainability of business operations but also serves as a strategy to strengthen brand identity and product competitiveness. The results of this study support the findings of Saputra and Saggaff (2024), which indicate that environmentally friendly business practices influence the formation of a positive brand image. Consumers are increasingly considering sustainability as a factor in their purchasing decisions; consequently, a green business model can serve as a strategic tool in building brand image.

The analysis shows that Mercalam's business practices align with the fundamental principles of green business, which emphasise a balance between economic, environmental and social aspects. In economic terms, the use of local raw materials and production efficiency support business sustainability. In environmental terms, waste

management and the use of natural materials demonstrate a commitment to environmentally friendly production. In social terms, engagement with the local community reflects the business's social responsibility.

Table 2. Alignment of Mercalam's Practices with Green Business Principles

Green Business Principles	Research Findings	Implications
Profit	Cost efficiency through the use of local raw materials	Supporting the economic sustainability of businesses
Planet	Environmentally friendly production and waste management	Reducing ecological impact
People	Community engagement	Enhancing social responsibility

These results demonstrate that the concept of *green business* can be effectively implemented at the level of local SMEs, even with the use of relatively simple technology. These findings prove that the application of sustainable business principles does not necessarily depend on modern technology or large-scale investment, but can begin through business management that is more mindful of environmental, social and resource efficiency aspects. In the context of Mercalam, sustainable practices are realised through simple measures such as the use of local raw materials, the reduction of production waste, energy efficiency, and the involvement of the local community in business activities.

The implementation of these concepts demonstrates that local SMEs have the capacity to adapt to the development of the green economy in line with their own capabilities and business conditions. Although production processes remain relatively simple, sustainability values can still be integrated into day-to-day operational activities. This indicates that the success of implementing *green business practices* is not solely determined by technological sophistication, but is also influenced by business owners' awareness of the need to manage resources responsibly and sustainably.

The implementation of the *green business* concept in locally-based SMEs also has a positive impact on strengthening business identity. Business practices that take environmental and social aspects into account can foster a positive consumer perception of the products produced. Consumers tend to value products more highly when they are produced through environmentally friendly processes and offer social value to the surrounding community. This makes the implementation of *green business* a strategy that can enhance product value whilst strengthening the competitiveness of SMEs in an increasingly competitive market.

In the context of pesantren-based SMEs, the adoption of sustainable business practices also holds broader significance as it relates to the integration of ethical values and social responsibility into business activities. This makes *green business* practices not merely an economic strategy, but also an integral part of putting into practice the values

of social benefit and care for the environment and the community. Consequently, locally-based SMEs have a significant opportunity to develop into enterprises that are not only economically productive but also contribute to sustainable development.

The adoption of a *green business model* has a positive impact on shaping Mercalam's *brand image* as a pesantren-based SME committed to sustainability. Business practices that take environmental and social aspects into account indirectly foster positive consumer perceptions of the products produced. Consumers view Mercalam's products as high-quality, natural, and produced through processes that are more environmentally responsible. This perception is a key factor in building brand image amidst growing public awareness of the importance of consuming environmentally friendly and sustainable products.

The positive image that has been established stems not only from the quality of the products, but also from the production processes employed. The use of natural and locally sourced raw materials conveys the impression that Mercalam products possess authenticity and are safer for consumption. Furthermore, the implementation of production efficiency and responsible waste management demonstrates the company's commitment to environmental conservation. These factors create added value for the products, as consumers do not merely purchase them based on their functionality, but also on the values and principles underpinning the business.

Consumers' positive perceptions of the sustainable business practices implemented by Mercalam have helped to boost trust in the brand. Consumer trust is a key factor in building long-term relationships between businesses and customers. In the context of increasingly fierce business competition, consumers tend to choose products that have a positive image and demonstrate social and environmental responsibility. Therefore, the implementation of a *green business model* can be an effective strategy for strengthening consumer loyalty whilst enhancing the business's competitiveness in the market.

In addition to boosting consumer trust, the adoption of a *green business model* also reinforces Mercalam's brand identity as an SME committed to sustainability. This identity is evident in how the business is run, striking a balance between economic profit, environmental concern and social benefits for the local community. The nature of the business, which prioritises the principle of sustainability, sets it apart from other products that have not yet adopted a similar concept. Consequently, Mercalam's *brand image* is not merely that of an ordinary spice product, but also of a product imbued with ethical values and environmental consciousness.

Mercalam's character as a pesantren-based SME is one of the factors that strengthens the brand's differentiation amidst increasingly competitive business conditions. The presence of the Islamic boarding school as the business's backdrop provides a distinct identity that is not solely oriented towards economic activity, but also integrates ethical values, social responsibility and environmental concern into the business activities carried out. This makes Mercalam's business character more distinctive compared to similar products that focus solely on commercial aspects.

The integration of ethical values into business activities is evident in how the production process and business management are carried out, taking into account the principles of honesty, responsibility and benefit to the surrounding community. In the context of pesantren MSMEs, business activities are not merely understood as a means of generating economic profit, but also as part of an effort to create business blessings through fair and responsible business practices. These values indirectly shape consumers' positive perception of Mercalam products as items that are not only of high quality but also grounded in moral principles throughout their management.

Social responsibility is also a key aspect in shaping the Mercalam brand identity. The involvement of the local community in the production process and business management demonstrates that Mercalam strives to provide economic benefits to the surrounding community. These community empowerment practices show that the business is not solely focused on business growth, but also contributes to strengthening the community-based local economy. This reinforces the business's image as an SME that demonstrates social responsibility and is capable of fostering harmonious relationships with the local community.

Environmental responsibility, manifested through the use of local raw materials, production efficiency and waste management, further reinforces Mercalam's brand character as a sustainability-oriented business. The combination of religious values and sustainable business practices creates a unique brand *positioning* amidst competition from similar products. Consumers view Mercalam not merely as an ordinary spice product, but as one produced with due regard for ethical values, environmental sustainability and social responsibility. This serves as a distinct advantage in building a strong and distinctive brand image in the market.

The fusion of the Islamic boarding school identity and the concept of *green business* provides an opportunity for Mercalam to broaden its market appeal, particularly amongst consumers who are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of ethical and environmentally friendly products. A brand position built on religious values and sustainability can boost consumer trust whilst strengthening loyalty to the product. Thus, Mercalam's character as a pesantren-based SME is not only a business identity but also a brand differentiation strategy capable of enhancing competitiveness and long-term business sustainability.

The research findings indicate that the implementation of a green business model in pesantren-based SMEs has the potential to enhance business competitiveness whilst supporting sustainable development. Business practices that integrate economic efficiency, social responsibility and environmental concern have been shown to contribute to the formation of a positive and sustainable brand image.

D. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the implementation of a green business model at the Mercalam pesantren-based SMEs is achieved through the utilisation of local raw materials, production process efficiency, responsible waste management, and the empowerment of the local community. The implementation of these practices reflects

the integration of economic, environmental and social aspects, which is in line with the principles of the green economy and the Triple Bottom Line concept. The research findings also indicate that the sustainable business practices implemented by Mercalam have succeeded in shaping positive consumer perceptions, thereby strengthening the brand image as an environmentally friendly, ethical and sustainability-oriented pesantren-based SME.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the development of research on the green economy and green business models in the context of pesantren-based SMEs. The research findings expand our understanding that the formation of a brand image is influenced not only by product quality and marketing strategies but also by the implementation of sustainable business practices that integrate environmental and social aspects with Islamic values. Thus, this study enriches the literature on the relationship between green business models and brand image development from an Islamic economic perspective. In practical terms, the research findings imply that pesantren-based SMEs need to incorporate the principle of sustainability into their business development and brand-building strategies. The implementation of environmentally friendly practices, community empowerment, and the reinforcement of Islamic ethical values can serve as a competitive advantage that enhances consumer trust and strengthens the business's position amidst growing public awareness of sustainable products.

This study has limitations as it focuses solely on a single case study, namely Mercalam; consequently, the findings cannot yet be generalised to all pesantren-based SMEs in Indonesia. Furthermore, as this study employs a qualitative approach, it has not been able to quantitatively measure the extent of the green business model's influence on brand image.

Therefore, it is recommended that future research adopt a quantitative or mixed-methods approach with a broader sample of respondents and involve a variety of pesantren-based SMEs across different regions. Future research could also examine the relationship between the green business model, brand image, consumer loyalty and business performance, thereby providing a more comprehensive understanding of the contribution of sustainable business practices to the competitiveness of SMEs in the era of the green economy.

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