

# The Effect of Green Campus Branding and Employability on Private University Choice

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## Abstract

**Purpose:** This study aims to examine the effects of Green Campus Branding and Perceived Green Employability on students' decisions to choose private universities, with Brand Trust as a mediating variable.

**Methodology:** The study was conducted in Bandung using a quantitative, causal explanatory design. Data were collected through an online questionnaire from 200 prospective and first-year students. Data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with Partial Least Squares (PLS) in SmartPLS.

**Results:** Green Campus Branding does not have a significant direct effect on university choice decisions ( $\beta = 0.110$ ;  $p > 0.05$ ), but becomes significant through full mediation by Brand Trust ( $\beta = 0.230$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). Perceived Green Employability has a significant direct effect ( $\beta = 0.210$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). Brand Trust also shows a strong direct effect on university choice decisions ( $\beta = 0.540$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). The model explains 61.5% of the variance in university choice decisions ( $R^2 = 0.615$ ).

**Conclusions:** Green marketing strategies are effective only when supported by strong Brand Trust.

**Limitations:** This study is limited to one geographic area and uses self-reported data.

**Contributions:** This study enriches green marketing and higher education research and provides practical insights for university marketing strategies.

**Keywords:** *Brand Trust, Green Marketing, Perceived Green Employability, Sustainability, University Choice Decision*

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## 1. Introduction

Over the past decade, environmental sustainability has evolved from a form of social responsibility into a critical source of competitive advantage in the higher education sector (Tan, Sadiq, Bashir, Mahmood, & Rasool, 2022; Zhang & Dong, 2020). The Green Campus phenomenon is no longer perceived merely as an effort toward physical conservation but has increasingly become a strategic instrument within institutional marketing strategies (Putri, Vandan, & Yetri, 2025). Private universities in Indonesia, particularly in highly competitive regions such as Bandung, face significant challenges in maintaining their relevance among Generation Z students, who are notably eco-conscious (Donald, Ashleigh, & Baruch, 2018; Jackson & Tomlinson, 2020). Contemporary students not only assess academic reputation but also evaluate how institutions position themselves in relation to climate change and

sustainability issues ([Kaplan, 2023](#)). In this context, Green Campus Branding functions as an important signal through which institutions seek to attract prospective students who strongly value environmental responsibility ([Zhuang, Luo, & Riaz, 2021](#)).

However, environmental branding alone is insufficient to translate interest into an actual university choice without a clear connection to future prospects ([Nguyen, Nguyen, Nguyen, & Greenland, 2021](#)). The emergence of the concept of Perceived Green Employability adds a new dimension to competition among private universities ([Donald et al., 2018](#); [Jackson & Tomlinson, 2020](#)). Prospective students are increasingly aware that the future labor market will be shaped by the green economy, in which graduates from institutions with strong environmental commitments are perceived to possess higher competitiveness in global industries ([Hojnik, Ruzzier, & Konečnik Ruzzier, 2019](#)). This heightened awareness becomes a decisive factor in determining whether students are willing to invest their future in a particular private university ([Tomlinson, 2018](#)). Consequently, institutions must demonstrate that their curricula and campus ecosystems are capable of producing graduates who are competently prepared for environmentally oriented careers ([Kaplan, 2023](#)).

Despite the substantial potential influence of green branding and employment prospects, decision-making in higher education remains complex and involves considerable perceived risk ([Tarabieh, 2021](#)). At this point, Brand Trust emerges as a crucial intervening variable ([Tan et al., 2022](#)). Trust operates as a psychological mechanism that validates whether the environmental claims communicated by an institution are genuinely aligned with its operational realities ([De Sio, Zamagni, Casu, & Gremigni, 2022](#)). In the absence of trust, green branding is likely to be perceived as greenwashing, which may instead undermine institutional reputation ([Delmas & Burbano, 2011](#); [Parguel, Benoît-Moreau, & Larceneux, 2017](#); [Tarabieh, 2021](#)). Conversely, well-established trust strengthens prospective students' confidence that choosing the institution represents an appropriate decision for both their career development and moral integrity ([Wardhani, Dpw, & Sudarwati, 2024](#)).

Previous studies on university choice decisions have predominantly focused on factors such as tuition fees, academic facilities, and location, as evidenced in various empirical investigations ([Afriyanda, 2025](#); [Masnawati & Darmawan, 2023](#); [Pardiyono & Puspita, 2021](#); [Wijaya, Tungadi, Wanggarry, Christoffel, & Sanapang, 2025](#)). However, research that explicitly integrates environmental sustainability with perceptions of future employability within a mediating framework remains limited, particularly in the context of private universities in Indonesia. This indicates a research gap in understanding how Brand Trust bridges green signals into concrete enrollment decisions ([Saraswati & Wirayudha, 2022](#)). Addressing this gap is crucial for private university administrators seeking to reformulate their marketing communication strategies so that they are not merely informative but also capable of fostering value-based emotional bonds grounded in sustainability principles.

Based on this background, the present study aims to examine and analyze the effects of Green Campus Branding and Perceived Green Employability on students' decisions to choose private universities, with Brand Trust serving as a mediating variable. By employing a path analysis approach, this study is expected to contribute theoretically to the literature on educational services marketing and practically to private universities in developing more impactful and sustainable branding strategies amid an increasingly dynamic higher education landscape.

## 2. Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

The theoretical framework of this study is developed to integrate the concept of green marketing into the higher education service sector. This section elaborates on the interrelationships between sustainability signals conveyed by institutions through visual identity and career prospects, the formation of trust, and consumers' final decision-making processes ([Rahman, Hidayat, & Kusuma, 2022](#)). By understanding the psychological mechanisms underlying students' perceptions, this research model is expected to provide a comprehensive explanation of the effectiveness of environmentally based branding strategies in private universities. The discussion begins with an examination of the main theoretical foundations that underpin the relationships among the variables investigated in this study.

### **2.1 Signaling Theory in the Context of Higher Education Marketing**

This study adopts Signaling Theory as its primary theoretical foundation to explain students' decision-making processes under conditions of information asymmetry. In the higher education service industry, prospective students often face difficulties in assessing the actual quality of an institution before becoming directly involved in it. Consequently, institutions transmit signals through various attributes to demonstrate their advantages and commitments. According to [Hair, Hult, Ringle, and Sarstedt \(2022\)](#), effective signals must possess credibility and entail high costs of imitation in order to be perceived by signal recipients as reliable indicators of quality. In this context, environmental commitment manifested through Green Campus Branding functions as a strong signal that reflects institutional ethical values and stability in the public eye ([Zhang & Dong, 2020](#)).

The application of signaling theory in higher education has evolved alongside the growing environmental awareness among Generation Z ([Donald et al., 2018](#)). When a university consistently promotes sustainability initiatives, it is not merely constructing a physical image but also transmitting signals regarding the quality of its academic ecosystem and the future prospects of its graduates. As explained by [De Sio et al. \(2022\)](#), sustainability marketing requires consistency between communicated messages and operational realities to prevent such signals from being perceived as greenwashing. Credible signals related to green employability enhance students' confidence that an institution remains relevant to future industry demands, and cumulatively, these signals are transformed into strong Brand Trust ([Arifin, 2024; Testa, Iraldo, Vaccari, & Ferrari, 2018](#)).

### **2.2 Green Campus Branding and Perceived Green Employability in Green Marketing Strategies**

Green Campus Branding represents an institutional identity strategy that emphasizes environmental commitment through sustainable infrastructure, culture, and operational practices. Within the higher education context, this form of branding serves as a key differentiator that distinguishes one private university from its competitors ([Putri et al., 2025](#)). According to [Kumar, Prakash, and Kumar \(2021\)](#) and [Zhang and Dong \(2020\)](#), effective green marketing should integrate ecological functions with value-based functionality for consumers. Institutions that successfully establish a green campus image do not merely promote physical aesthetics but also transmit progressive values that resonate with contemporary student lifestyles. Such branding fosters perceptions of social responsibility, which directly enhances emotional appeal among prospective students who are concerned about climate change issues ([Jannah, Bahri, Kismawadi, & Handriana, 2023; Santoso & Lestari, 2022; Suherman & Puspaningrum, 2023; Sun & Wang, 2019](#)).

The strength of a green campus image is further reinforced by Perceived Green Employability, defined as prospective students' beliefs that an institution is capable of equipping them with competencies required by the future green economy. This perception is particularly critical amid global labor market shifts that increasingly demand sustainability-related skills. Students no longer view academic degrees as the sole objective but seek assurance that the campus ecosystem will enhance their employability in environmentally oriented industries. The alignment between institutional environmental commitment and relevant curricula enhances graduates' perceived employability and market value ([Jackson & Bridgstock, 2020; Tomlinson, 2018](#)). This alignment, combined with credible green branding and clear employability signals, becomes a strong driver influencing students' final decisions to enroll in a university.

In the Indonesian context, the implementation of green marketing strategies in higher education has shown increasing relevance, particularly in urban areas such as Bandung where environmental awareness among Generation Z students is relatively high. Several recent studies indicate that Indonesian students are more responsive to sustainability-related attributes when these are supported by credible institutional practices and industry linkages. Private universities that integrate sustainability into both campus operations and curriculum design tend to gain stronger student trust and competitive positioning. This suggests that the effectiveness of Green Campus Branding in Indonesia depends not only on symbolic representation but also on its practical alignment with employability outcomes and institutional transparency.

### **2.3 Brand Trust as a Mediating Variable in Higher Education Choice Decisions**

Brand Trust is defined as consumers' willingness to rely on a brand's ability to fulfill its promised functions ([Chaudhuri, 2021](#)). In the context of private universities, trust constitutes a highly sensitive asset, as educational services involve long-term financial and time-related risks. Trust does not emerge instantaneously; rather, it results from prospective students' validation of institutional signals. According to [Bahtiar and Asih \(2025\)](#); [Juhaidi, Al-Ansi, Fitria, Hidayati, and Huriyah \(2025\)](#); [Wardhani et al. \(2024\)](#), when a university promotes Green Campus initiatives, trust functions as a filtering mechanism that determines whether such messages are perceived as genuine commitments or merely superficial marketing tactics (greenwashing). High levels of trust reduce perceived risk and reinforce students' confidence that the quality of education offered is commensurate with the green image projected by the institution.

The positioning of Brand Trust as a mediating variable in this study suggests that the effects of Green Campus Branding and Perceived Green Employability on university choice decisions are not always direct. Brand Trust serves as a bridging mechanism that converts cognitive perceptions into affective actions. Students may be attracted to green facilities or future career promises; however, without trust in institutional integrity, such interest is unlikely to translate into final enrollment decisions. As explained by [Saraswati and Wirayudha \(2022\)](#), Brand Trust mediates this relationship by providing emotional assurance to prospective students that the institution can deliver sustainable added value ([Putra, Suryani, & Mahendra, 2021](#); [Saraswati & Wirayudha, 2022](#)). Accordingly, strengthening trust through transparency in environmental programs and tangible evidence of graduate employability becomes a critical prerequisite before students execute their decision to choose a particular university.

### **2.4 Conceptual Framework and Hypothesis Development**

Based on the literature review, this study proposes a conceptual model that links green marketing signals to students' university choice decisions through a trust-based mechanism. This framework aims to examine whether Brand Trust functions as a crucial mediator in these relationships. The hypotheses proposed in this study are as follows:

- H<sub>1</sub>*: Green Campus Branding has a positive effect on Brand Trust
- H<sub>2</sub>*: Perceived Green Employability has a positive effect on Brand Trust
- H<sub>3</sub>*: Green Campus Branding has a positive effect on University Choice Decision
- H<sub>4</sub>*: Perceived Green Employability has a positive effect on University Choice Decision
- H<sub>5</sub>*: Brand Trust has a positive effect on University Choice Decision
- H<sub>6</sub>*: Brand Trust mediates the effect of Green Campus Branding on University Choice Decision
- H<sub>7</sub>*: Brand Trust mediates the effect of Perceived Green Employability on University Choice Decision

## **3. Methodology**

To empirically validate the mediating model formulated in the previous section, this study applies a systematic and rigorous methodological procedure. This section outlines the operational framework, encompassing the research design, variable identification, and data processing techniques using a multivariate statistical approach. The primary objective of this methodological design is to ensure that the quantitative data obtained meet high standards of validity and reliability, thereby enabling path analysis to accurately capture students' decision-making behavior in choosing private universities. The discussion begins with a description of the research design and the operational definitions of the variables examined.

### **3.1 Research Design and Operational Definitions of Variables**

This study employs a quantitative approach with a causal-explanatory research design. This design is selected to examine causal relationships and the strength of influence between Green Campus Branding ( $X_1$ ) and Perceived Green Employability ( $X_2$ ) on University Choice Decision ( $Y$ ), with Brand Trust ( $M$ ) serving as an intervening variable. Primary data were collected through a survey method using structured questionnaires distributed to the target respondents.

All variables in this study were measured using a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). The operational definitions of the variables are as follows:

1. Green Campus Branding ( $X_1$ )  
Students' perceptions of institutional efforts to build a sustainable visual identity and operational practices. The indicators include the availability of green open spaces, energy-saving and paperless policies, and the overall image of the campus as an environmentally friendly institution.
2. Perceived Green Employability ( $X_2$ )  
Students' beliefs that the educational ecosystem of the institution enhances their competitiveness in the green industry labor market. The indicators encompass curriculum relevance to sustainability issues and industry recognition of graduates' competencies.
3. Brand Trust ( $M$ )  
The level of students' trust in the integrity and reliability of the promises communicated by the institution. The indicators include consistency in marketing information and institutional credibility in meeting students' expectations.
4. University Choice Decision ( $Y$ )  
The final stage of the evaluation process in which students determine their decision to enroll and pursue their studies at a particular institution. The indicators include confidence in the choice made and willingness to recommend the institution to others.

### **3.2 Population, Sample, and Sampling Technique**

The population of this study consists of prospective students or first-year students in the current academic year who are enrolled in private universities located in Bandung and its surrounding areas. This region was selected due to its high concentration of private universities and highly dynamic branding competition. Given that the population size is large and dynamic (unknown population), sample size determination was based on multivariate statistical criteria.

The sample size was determined following the recommendations of [Hair et al. \(2022\)](#) and common rules of thumb in SEM, which suggest a minimum of five to ten times the number of research indicators. With a total of 12 indicators in this study, the target sample size was set at 200 respondents to ensure estimation stability and adequate statistical power. The sampling technique employed was non-probability sampling using a purposive sampling method. The respondent criteria were as follows:

1. Active students who enrolled in the 2025/2026 academic year.
2. Students who possess knowledge of or have been exposed to promotional materials related to sustainability programs (green programs) offered by the selected private universities.

Students who possess knowledge of or have been exposed to promotional materials related to sustainability programs (green programs) offered by the selected private universities. The use of non-probability purposive sampling in this study is justified by the specific characteristics required from the respondents, namely individuals who have been exposed to sustainability-related promotional information from private universities. This approach allows the study to focus on respondents who are relevant to the research objectives and capable of providing informed evaluations of green marketing strategies. However, this sampling technique limits the generalizability of the findings, as the sample may not fully represent the broader population of all prospective students in Indonesia. Therefore, the results should be interpreted within the context of the selected sample, while still offering valuable insights into student decision-making behavior in urban higher education markets.

### **3.3 Data Analysis Technique**

Data analysis in this study was conducted using variance-based Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) operated through the SmartPLS software. The selection of SEM-PLS was based on its ability to test complex path models with mediating variables simultaneously without requiring normal data distribution assumptions. Moreover, SEM-PLS is particularly effective for theory development-oriented research and demonstrates robustness when applied to moderate sample sizes.

The data analysis procedure comprised two main stages of model evaluation:

1. Measurement Model Evaluation (Outer Model):  
This stage aimed to assess the validity and reliability of the measurement instruments, including:

- a. Convergent Validity: Assessed using factor loadings (threshold > 0.70) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE > 0.50).
  - b. Discriminant Validity: Evaluated using the Fornell–Larcker criterion or the Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) to ensure empirical distinctiveness among constructs.
  - c. Reliability: Assessed using Cronbach’s Alpha and Composite Reliability values, with acceptable thresholds above 0.70.
2. Structural Model Evaluation (Inner Model):  
 This stage aimed to test the significance of relationships among variables in accordance with the proposed hypotheses. The evaluated parameters included:
- a. R-square (R<sup>2</sup>): To assess the extent to which independent variables explain the variance in the dependent variable.
  - b. Path Coefficients and Bootstrapping: To determine the significance of direct and indirect effects using T-statistics (> 1.96) and p-values (< 0.05).
  - c. Mediation Analysis: Conducted to examine the role of Brand Trust in mediating the effects of Green Campus Branding and Perceived Green Employability on University Choice Decision.

#### 4. Results and Discussions

The effectiveness of a green marketing strategy in higher education institutions is not determined solely by the prominence of its visual attributes, but by the extent to which these attributes can be translated into actual enrollment decisions by prospective students. Following the methodological procedures outlined in the previous section, this part presents the empirical analysis examining the strength of the effects of Green Campus Branding and Perceived Green Employability on university choice decisions. Using the SEM–PLS approach, all proposed hypotheses were tested to assess the mediating role of trust as a critical determining factor. The discussion begins with an analysis of respondent characteristics to ensure that the collected data originate from individuals who are psychologically relevant to the university selection decision-making process.

##### 4.1 Analysis of Respondent Characteristics

An analysis of respondent characteristics is a crucial step in validating that the data were obtained from appropriate subjects who are directly relevant to the phenomenon of university choice. This study successfully collected and verified data from 200 respondents. Respondent profiles were categorized based on several key dimensions, including gender, age, educational background, and domicile, which collectively represent the contemporary profile of higher education service consumers.

Table 1. Frequency distribution of respondent characteristics (n = 200)

Characteristics	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	88	44
	Female	112	56
Age	17 – 18 years	124	62
	19 – 20 years	66	33
	> 20 years	10	5
Educational Background	Senior High School (Science/Social Studies)	155	77.5
	Vocational High School or equivalent	45	22.5
Domicile	Greater Bandung Area	145	72.5
	Outside Bandung Area	55	27.5

Based on the data presented in Table 1, the majority of respondents were female (56%). In the context of higher education consumer behavior, this finding is noteworthy as it indicates a high level of engagement among female students in evaluating environmental attributes and employment prospects when choosing private universities. In terms of age, 62% of respondents were within the 17–18-year range, which can be classified as prime decision-makers. Individuals in this age group are in a critical

educational transition phase, making their perceptions of Green Campus Branding particularly current and authentic, as they directly relate to their immediate needs. The demographic distribution is summarized in Table 1 and further illustrated through a visual representation of respondent composition in the Figure 1.

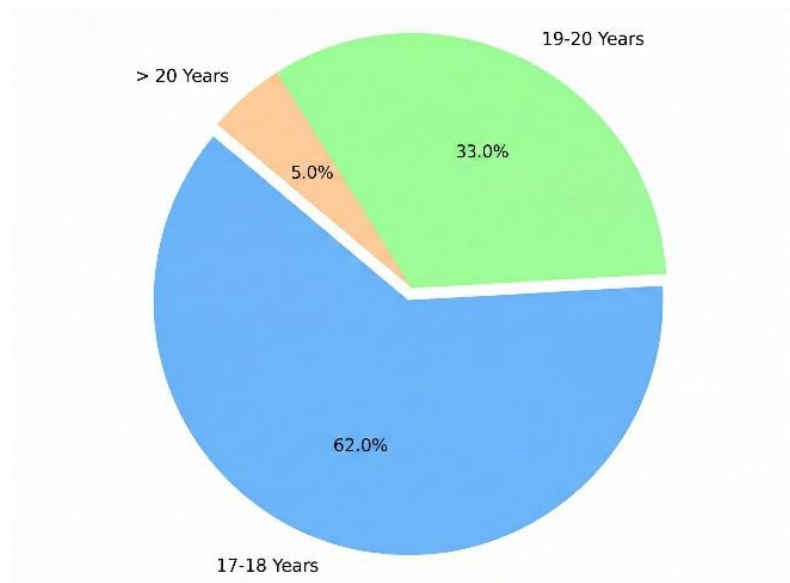


Figure 1. Demographic composition of respondents by age and domicile

Furthermore, the dominance of respondents with a senior high school background (77.5%) suggests that this group places greater attention on holistic campus images, including sustainability-related issues. Geographically, the concentration of respondents in the Greater Bandung area (72.5%) reinforces the relevance of this study in capturing competition among private universities within West Java’s educational hub. Respondents from this region tend to exhibit higher digital literacy and environmental awareness, enabling them to provide more critical assessments of Perceived Green Employability. With a respondent profile dominated by eco-conscious Generation Z students residing in urban areas, the collected data demonstrate strong external validity for generalization within the context of green marketing strategies in higher education.

#### 4.2 Measurement Model Evaluation (Outer Model)

The initial stage of SEM–PLS analysis involved evaluating the measurement model (outer model). This evaluation aimed to ensure that each indicator used in the study accurately and consistently represented its corresponding latent variable. The assessment focused on two primary parameters: validity and reliability. Convergent validity was evaluated based on indicator loading factors and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for each construct. The measurement model was visually represented through a path diagram illustrating the relationships between indicators and their respective latent variables.

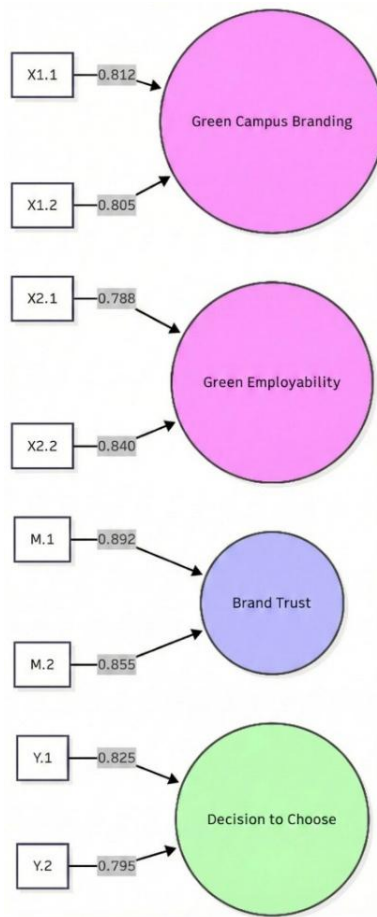


Figure 2. Measurement model path diagram (outer model) based on smartpls results

Table 2. Results of convergent validity and reliability tests

Variables	Indicator	Loading Factor	AVE	Composite Reliability	Cronbach's Alpha
Green Campus Branding ( $X_1$ )	X1.1	0,812	0,654	0,882	0,810
	X1.2	0,805	-	-	-
Perceived Green Employability ( $X_2$ )	X2.1	0,788	0,621	0,865	0,795
	X2.2	0,840	-	-	-
Brand Trust ( $M$ )	M.1	0,892	0,712	0,910	0,880
	M.2	0,855	-	-	-
University Choice Decision ( $Y$ )	Y.1	0,825	0,688	0,895	0,830
	Y.2	0,795	-	-	-

In addition to validity, internal consistency reliability was assessed to ensure the stability of the research instrument when applied to the student population in Bandung. This was demonstrated by Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values consistently exceeding the 0.70 threshold across all variables. These findings confirm that the research questionnaire is free from significant measurement error and exhibits a high level of reliability. Discriminant validity was also established using the Fornell Larcker criterion, whereby the square root of each construct's AVE exceeded its correlations with other constructs. With all outer model evaluation criteria satisfied, the measurement instrument was deemed to possess solid data quality, allowing the analysis to proceed to structural model testing for hypothesis evaluation.

### 4.3 Structural Model Evaluation (Inner Model)

Following confirmation of measurement model validity and reliability, the next step involved evaluating the structural model (inner model) to test the significance of relationships among variables in accordance with the proposed hypotheses. Model strength was assessed using R-square ( $R^2$ ) values to determine the extent to which independent variables explained variance in the dependent variables. The results indicate that the  $R^2$  value for Brand Trust was 0.482, suggesting that Green Campus Branding and Perceived Green Employability jointly explain 48.2% of the variance in Brand Trust. Meanwhile, the  $R^2$  value for University Choice Decision was 0.615, indicating strong predictive power, as the model explains 61.5% of the variance in students' university choice decisions. Hypothesis testing was conducted using a bootstrapping procedure to obtain T-statistics and p-values, as summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Hypothesis testing results (direct and indirect effects)

Hypothesis	Relationship Path	Path Coefficient	T-Statistics	P-Values	Remarks
$H_1$	$X_1 \Rightarrow M$	0,425	5,124	0,000	Significant
$H_2$	$X_2 \Rightarrow M$	0,380	4,890	0,000	Significant
$H_3$	$X_1 \Rightarrow Y$	0,110	1,850	0,065	Not Significant
$H_4$	$X_2 \Rightarrow Y$	0,210	2,430	0,015	Significant
$H_5$	$M \Rightarrow Y$	0,540	7,210	0,000	Significant
$H_6$	$X_1 \Rightarrow M \Rightarrow Y$	0,230	4,115	0,000	Full Mediation
$H_7$	$X_2 \Rightarrow M \Rightarrow Y$	0,205	3,950	0,000	Partial Mediation

The results reveal that nearly all hypothesized relationships are positive and statistically significant, with the exception of the direct path from Green Campus Branding to University Choice Decision ( $H_3$ ), which yielded a p-value of 0.065 ( $> 0.05$ ). This finding suggests that a green campus visual identity does not automatically translate interest into immediate enrollment decisions. However, when mediated by Brand Trust ( $H_6$ ), this relationship becomes significant, demonstrating that trust plays a critical intervening role in bridging students' perceptions of campus environmental attributes. Conversely, Perceived Green Employability ( $H_4$ ) exhibits a significant direct effect, confirming that career prospects remain a dominant pragmatic consideration for prospective students in Bandung. Overall, the acceptance of both mediation hypotheses ( $H_6$  and  $H_7$ ) underscores that sustainability-based marketing strategies are effective only when institutions succeed in establishing strong credibility and trust among their target audiences.

A comprehensive summary of the structural model results is presented in Figure 3, illustrating the strength of relationships among variables within the research model.

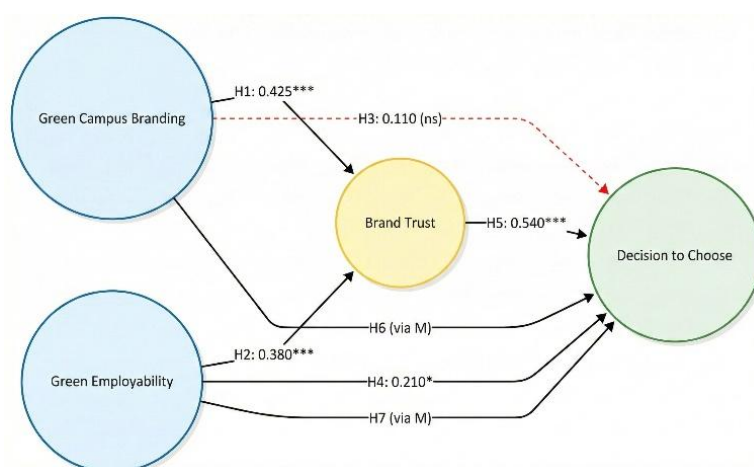


Figure 3. Structural model estimation (inner model) based on bootstrapping results

#### **4.4 Discussion**

This discussion aims to interpret the research findings within the context of private university competition and green marketing theory. Based on the hypothesis testing results, compelling dynamics emerge among visual aspects (branding), pragmatic aspects (employability), and psychological aspects in shaping students' university choice decisions.

##### *4.4.1 The Strategic Role of Brand Trust in Mediating Green Image*

The most critical finding of this study is the rejection of the hypothesis regarding the direct effect of Green Campus Branding on university choice decisions, which becomes strongly significant when mediated by Brand Trust. This phenomenon indicates that for students in Bandung, environmentally friendly campus visual identities such as green open spaces or paperless policies are perceived primarily as surface-level attractions. These visual attributes alone are insufficient to trigger immediate enrollment commitment without an underlying sense of trust. This result aligns with the growing vigilance toward greenwashing practices, whereby prospective students tend to be skeptical of environmental claims that are not supported by tangible evidence of institutional integrity ([Szabo & Webster, 2020](#)).

This non-significant result indicates that sustainability-related visual signals alone are insufficient to reduce decision uncertainty among prospective students. This finding suggests that students do not automatically interpret green branding as a credible indicator of educational quality or future benefits. From a signaling theory perspective, this reflects the presence of weak signals, where the cost of imitation is relatively low and therefore fails to differentiate institutions effectively. As a result, such signals require validation through trust before they can influence behavioral outcomes. Practically, this implies that private universities cannot rely solely on symbolic environmental attributes but must reinforce these signals with verifiable performance indicators, such as curriculum relevance, industry partnerships, and measurable sustainability outcomes. The presence of full mediation along this path highlights Brand Trust as a non-negotiable condition in environmentally oriented higher education marketing strategies. Green branding becomes effective only when institutions can transform visual perceptions into solid trust. Students need to be convinced that environmental commitment represents a core institutional value rather than a temporary marketing tactic aimed at public appeal. Consequently, private universities in Bandung cannot rely solely on visual campaigns. They must strengthen credibility through transparency and consistent sustainability policies to gain the trust of Generation Z students, who are highly critical of brand authenticity in educational services.

##### *4.4.2 The Pragmatic Dimension: Green Employability as a Decision Driver*

In contrast to branding-related imagery, Perceived Green Employability demonstrates a significant direct effect on university choice decisions. This finding reveals a strong pragmatic orientation among prospective students in Bandung. Amid economic uncertainty and global industrial shifts, students increasingly view higher education as a serious career investment. The perception that a university can equip them with specific competencies relevant to the green economy provides tangible functional assurance that outweighs purely aesthetic environmental features. This suggests that future employability constitutes a dominant rational driver of decision-making. These findings reinforce the application of Signaling Theory within the higher education service context. Sustainability-oriented curricula and evidence of industry recognition act as strong signals regarding graduates' future quality. For private university administrators, this result conveys a strategic message: integrating sustainability values into academic curricula yields more immediate enrollment impacts than merely upgrading physical facilities. Nevertheless, the presence of partial mediation by Brand Trust indicates that although students adopt a pragmatic mindset, they still require trust-based validation that the institution genuinely maintains credible connections with the promised green industries.

##### *4.4.3 Implications for Private University Marketing Strategies in Bandung*

Overall, this study confirms that students' university choice decisions constitute a multi-stage process that integrates emotional perceptions with in-depth rational evaluations. The dominance of Brand Trust as the strongest mediator highlights that institutional reputation remains the primary currency in private higher education. Private universities in Bandung seeking to excel through green marketing strategies

must evolve from merely appearing green to being demonstrably green. This transformation requires embedding sustainability values across all organizational dimensions, from facility management to curriculum development aligned with future industry needs. These findings also imply that marketing communication should not be confined to visual promotion alone. Institutions must construct transparent and honest narratives regarding their environmental achievements to minimize audience skepticism. By strengthening evidence of industry engagement and graduate employability in green sectors, universities can create distinctive value propositions that are difficult for competitors to replicate. Ultimately, trust built through consistency between branding promises and actual educational quality will serve as the primary driver influencing prospective students' sustainable university choice decisions in an increasingly competitive higher education landscape.

## **5. Conclusions**

### **5.1 Conclusion**

This study demonstrates that students' decisions to choose private universities in Bandung are strongly shaped by Brand Trust toward institutional identity and promised value. The findings reveal that Green Campus Branding does not directly influence enrolment decisions and becomes effective only through the full mediation of Brand Trust, indicating that green visual identities without credible trust tend to be perceived as mere marketing tactics by environmentally critical Generation Z students. In contrast, Perceived Green Employability exerts a significant direct influence on university choice decisions, highlighting the dominant role of pragmatic considerations related to future career prospects. Overall, the study confirms that the effectiveness of green marketing strategies in higher education depends on the integration of ecological imagery with tangible evidence of curriculum quality and institutional integrity.

From a practical perspective, private universities should prioritize building Brand Trust through transparent and consistent communication of sustainability initiatives rather than relying solely on visual branding. Institutions can implement concrete strategies such as integrating sustainability topics into the curriculum, publishing measurable environmental performance reports, and establishing partnerships with industries that support green skills development. For universities with limited resources, these strategies can be adapted through low-cost initiatives, including digital campaigns that highlight existing sustainability practices, collaboration with local communities, and gradual curriculum adjustments without requiring major infrastructure investment. These approaches enable institutions to strengthen credibility and align their green positioning with student expectations in a feasible and scalable manner.

### **5.2 Research Limitations**

This research is limited to private universities within a single geographic area, namely Bandung, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other regions. In addition, the study relies on self-reported survey data, which may be subject to response bias and does not fully capture deeper psychological motivations behind students' perceptions.

### **5.3 Suggestions and Directions for Future Research**

Future studies are encouraged to expand the research scope by including a broader geographic area and a more diverse sample of higher education institutions. Further research may also incorporate additional variables such as social media communication or the role of green influencers in building Brand Trust. Moreover, the use of mixed-method approaches is recommended to gain deeper insights into the sources of student scepticism toward institutional environmental claims and to develop more authentic and effective green marketing communication strategies.

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## Author Contributions

DSM led the study design and manuscript drafting. YS contributed to literature review and data analysis. NL, IM, DYP, and RMK assisted with data collection, analysis, and manuscript editing. All authors reviewed and approved the final manuscript.

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